**Comparative Histories of European Language Literatures: Global Perspectives Past and Future (University of St Andrews, Parliament Hall, June 2, 2017)**

**Abstracts for Keynote Speakers**

**Zhang Longxi** (President of the *International Comparative Literature Association*; Prof. of Comparative Literature and Translation, City University of Hong Kong)

**The Challenge of World Literary History**

The writing of history has encountered many challenges in theoretical discussions, and literary history in particular has been questioned and met with proposals of revisions and alternatives. An additional question arises when we move beyond national literary history to world literary history with comparative interest in patterns, themes, literary modes or systems. This paper tries to make sense of some of the major concepts and theoretical positions involved in these discussions and propose a way to write literary history that will contribute to our understanding of literature from a global perspective.

**Rebecca Walkowitz** (Professor and Director of Graduate Program, Dept. of English, Rutgers University)

**Reading Both: Contemporary Literature and Literary History**  
In the future, we will need to read both. We will need to read comparatively in a number of ways, which will involve reading literary works locally and globally, reading across editions and formats, and reading within and across languages.  Since the turn of the last century, we have been asked to exchange national models of literary history for linguistic models: British literature for anglophone literature, French literature for literature in French.  But what comes after the monolingual model, and how can works of contemporary literature, concerned visually and verbally with their embeddedness in languages, help us read more and read differently?

**Margaret Higonnet** (Professor Emerita, Dept. of English, Univ. of Connecticut; former President of CHLEL)

**Some Challenges to Comparative Literary Histories: the case of World War I**

This presentation will set the question of a “world” literary history in two contexts: first, the work of the ICLA publications committee for the Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages, or CHLEL, and second, my own work on a “world” topic, the literature and arts of World War I.  Obviously, one factor in a comparative literary history is the archive: its creation, retention and revision as critical values shift. A second factor is the complex temporality of such a literary history, which must engage with periodization while acknowledging the preceding historical, cultural context (such as Futurism) from which this body of work emerges, and also accommodating the belatedness of texts due to the deaths of authors in combat, the slow re-emergence of memories from trauma, and the silencing of certain voices.  A third factor is the concept of the “world”: I argue that the war became a world event, through its intensely networked systems of communication and movement of both men and women across the empires and dominions of European nations.

**James English** (Professor of English and Director of the Penn Humanities Forum, University of Pennsylvania)

**Literary Reception Studies at Global Scale: Mining Goodreads**

Literary reception studies is a broad and well-established field involving conversation across several major disciplines (history, literary studies, sociology), and research into a wide range of national literatures with distinctive publishing industries, library systems, and patterns of consumption. And it has deployed various more or less abstract theories of the reader, from the “ideal” or “implied” reader to the “ordinary,” “middlebrow” or “elite” reader. When it comes to actual readers and the values that motivate their reading, however, scholars have had to rely on very small and arguably unrepresentative samples, using ethnography, individual or small-group case studies, and other qualitative approaches. With the recent rise of online consumer reviews, social reading sites, and new platforms of fandom devoted to particular authors, series, or genres, there is suddenly a great deal of quantitative data about readers’ tastes, values, and habits, making possible much larger scale studies and creating opportunities for quantitative disciplines such as computer science and natural language processing to play an important role in the field. In this paper, Jim English will describe some of his team’s recent work on Goodreads, the largest and most international site of online literary reception, curation, and communication.