

Teaching Literature Book Award Winner 2015
Press Release

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Contact: Jessica Winston, Director of Graduate Studies, ISU Department of English and Philosophy, 208-282-2895 or winsjess@isu.edu; or Jennifer Attebery, Professor and Chair, ISU Department of English and Philosophy, attejenn@isu.edu

ISU Department of English and Philosophy Announces Inaugural Winner of Teaching Literature Book Award

POCATELLO – The Idaho State University Department of English and Philosophy announced the inaugural 2015 winner of its Teaching Literature Book Award, an international prize for the best book-length work on teaching literature at the college level.

Written by a team of distinguished scholars from around the globe, the winning book is the edited collection, “From Abortion to Pederasty: Addressing Difficult Topics in the Classics Classroom,” published in 2014 by The Ohio State University Press. The collection is edited by Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, professor of comparative literature, Hamilton College, New York, and Fiona McHardy, principal lecturer in classical civilization, University of Roehampton, United Kingdom.

Jessica Winston, ISU professor of English and chair of the award committee, explained that the aim of the edited collection is to assist instructors in classical studies to address possibly disturbing subject matter.

“Great works of literature explore the complexities of cultures past and present, raising important issues that speak directly to readers,” Winston said.

“Many of our most enduring works,” she continued, “also present violent episodes and unfamiliar practices that in their brutality or alien values can unsettle students. This unsettling potential in literature creates challenges for teaching.”

The winning book focuses on the classical world and “demonstrates the clear benefits of grappling with the disturbing content of so many ancient texts.”

“The book prepares instructors to teach a range of topics related to ancient Greece and Rome, providing advice on how to deal with topics students can find troubling—topics such as rape, death, disability and homosexuality in classical times,” she said.

In its commendation, members of the award committee praised the book for presenting a range of strategies teachers might use when raising difficult subjects, such as death and dying or sexual violence. The commendation states: “Teachers sometimes avoid teaching topics because of their potentially unsettling nature, but these are precisely the areas where students need the most help in

order to come to terms with disturbing subject matter in a rigorous yet supportive context.”

The award committee also lauded the book for its “clear, jargon-free prose,” and for the contributors’ expert combination of “up-to-date Classics research with pedagogical practice.” The authors demonstrate “exemplary command of subject matter alongside admirable openness about their own classroom experiences, describing successful strategies as well as lingering questions and uncertainties.”

Finally, the committee praised the wide relevance and potential reach of the book, since “The essays present strategies that will help teachers of literature as well as other subjects rethink their approaches to a wide range of topics and texts.”

The commendation concludes: “The volume also discusses a broad range of institutions—spanning the US, UK, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa—so that instructors should be able to find one similar to their own.”

“We are pleased that such a timely and widely relevant book is the winner of our inaugural award,” Winston said. “In light of recent articles in *The Atlantic* and elsewhere dealing with trigger warnings and macroaggressions, instructors are increasingly in need of resources that will help them to address complex, and potentially upsetting, subject matter.”

In this way, she said “*Addressing Difficult Topics in the Classics Classroom*” is a welcome book that college-level instructors in any area of literary studies and in a wide range of other fields will find pertinent to their work with students at all levels.

The Teaching Literature Book Award is a juried prize, presented biennially by the faculty in the Ph.D. Program in English and the Teaching of English at Idaho State University. The award honors a book that excels in blending current research with curricular planning and classroom methods. The aim of the prize is to encourage excellence in the teaching of literature by recognizing a book-length work on literature pedagogy at the post-secondary or graduate level.

The committee received nominations from publishers in the United States, Canada, and United Kingdom. The winner was chosen by a committee of national referees: Tanya Agathocleous, associate professor of English, Hunter College, City University of New York; Jennifer Holberg, professor of English, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan, and founding coeditor of the journal *Pedagogy*; and Steven Lynn, professor of English and dean of the South Carolina Honors College, University of South Carolina. Curtis Whitaker, ISU English professor, also served on the committee.

For the full commendation, please see www.isu.edu/english/.

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