

2015 Politics, Poetics & World Literature Affinity Group 1

The Politics, Poetics and World Literature Group No. 1 comprised scholars from Nigeria, Australia, Israel, Germany, the United States, China, Chile, Spain, Italy, Russia, Sweden and England. Participants held affiliations as faculty and postdocs, and Ph.D. and master's students from universities across the world. Each member of the affinity group made a 30- to 45-minute presentation that was followed by one or two formal responses and a group discussion. The global discourse began with an open question about the nature of our grouping under the title, "politics, poetics & world literature." The responses reflected an array of interpretations and interests that included distinguishing among the political, social and philosophical, and how to assess when they collapse into an artistic frame; gauging the political in the utopian and cosmopolitan; understanding the potential political hegemony of world literature when it comes to translation, recognizable-ability, and international distribution; how to retain political radical status of a certain poetic figure who passes through world literature; poetic performance of politics and the expression of sub-alternity in world literature; and the place of the political in post-human studies and at the intersections of science and literature. These initial ideas only became more complex as the seminar progressed. The slate of presentations began with an intriguing reading from a novel-in-progress (Andrew Peter McLeod's *The True Geography of Solitary Stars*) set in Brazil followed by a robust collection of literary investigations that critically pressured and challenged the bounds of the category of the political. Li Manhua unpacked her concern with Heidegger and the politico-philosophical in a presentation titled, "The Bodily Nature of Dasein." Drawing upon "literature of place" theory, Chen Bar Itzhak, in a paper titled, "The Dissolution of Utopia: Literary Representations of the City of Haifa, between Herzl's *Altneuland* and Later Israeli Writing," argued for Haifa as a site of encounter, collaboration and exchange among the diversity of identities in Israel. The presentation was part of her larger project on comparative multicultural representations of Haifa in Hebrew and Arabic literatures. Shirl Alon's paper, "Fighting the Fight of Infinite Possibilities: Neoliberal Precarity and Precaution in Orly Castel-Bloom's *Dolly City*," posited ways in which the literary and aesthetic can interrogate the neo-liberal, what Alon deemed a "categorical framework to explain unequal global conditions of the present."

The fourth session of the "Politics, Poetics & World Literature 1" affinity group began with an interesting discussion of the literary criticism of the writer Zadie Smith. Gabriele Lazzari applied her ideas to contemporary fiction in a paper titled, "A third path for the novel: Ben Lerner's *Leaving the Atocha Station*." Does the postmodern break in fiction create a false dichotomy that negates the possibility of literary third spaces? Part of the group response to Lazzari's paper centered on whether or not his analysis required Smith's intervention. Dr. Javier Mocarquer introduced the intellectual production of Nobel Literature Laureate Gabriela Mistral to the conversation, which subsequently led to a discussion of the differences among modernismo, modernism (in Latin American) and modernism in the United States and Europe. His paper,



“Gabriela Mistral, Victoria Ocampo, and Cecília Meireles in the Public and Private Spheres,” looked at letters exchanged among Mistral, Ocampo and Meireles. Whereas the relationship between the literary and political in Latin America is the subject of great critical attention in male writing, less work has been done on the intellectual contributions of Latin America’s important female writers. Mocarquer’s presentation looked to fill this void by opening “a space for women in the Latin American intelligentsia” through focus on the work of Mistral, Ocampo and Meireles. Alba Cid

Two papers in our affinity group applied the scholarship of Linda Hutcheon to their respective projects. Alba Cid, in a paper titled, “Analysing ‘historiographic metafiction’ in contemporary Galician poetry,” raised questions about the political in the writing of poet and activist Chus Pato. Cid aimed to investigate whether Pato’s poetry could open new routes and methodologies for historiography and historiographic metafiction. The group discussion turned to incommunicability as an act of resistance and questions of, “What happens when we cannot recognize cultural references?” Cid argued that Pato politicized the universal and that the “universal part of her work is the mixing, postmodern mixing, being really linked to her own culture, her own genealogy.” Dr. Diana Hitzke connected Hutcheon’s *Theory of Adaptation* (2013) to her presentation titled, “Copying, Adaptation and Repetition: Textual Arrangements between the Arts from Slavic Perspectives.” Among her primary texts was Barbi Marković’s *Graz, Alexanderplatz* (2011), a novel that signifies on Alfred Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929). War, representation and performativity converged in Dr. Alla Ivanchikova’s “That Poor Ruined Hand: Globalizing Afghanistan in Tony Kushner’s *Homebody/Kabul*.” Ivanchikova explored “the way Kushner tries to write Afghanistan into global history, not just as a pile of rubble, but as a valuable ruin.” For her, Kushner “positions Afghanistan as a global place,” a process that must beware the danger of Eurocentrism and ascribing value from a European point of view. Among her concerns was the ontological necessity of streaming trauma in Afghanistan through European discourses and metaphors: “how do you valorize a place that has nothing to offer Europeans?” Jennifer J. Flaherty’s “Split Selves and Significant Others: The Role of the Peasant in *Anna Karenina*” asked our affinity group to rethink the category of the “peasant” in literature. For Flaherty, the “novel needs peasants.” She sees “peasant scenes as instances of otherness on social, philosophical and narrative levels.” Peasants “act like mirrors to reflect the epochal concerns of the isolated self – a central, even characteristic, concern of the novel.” Her work brings greater attention and agency to a less studied aspect of Tolstoy’s work.

The seventh meeting of the “Politics, Poetics & World Literature Affinity Group 1” began with a turn to questions of the posthuman. Marinela Freitas discussed her project, “Queering the Posthuman: Notes towards a Posthuman Politics.” By “queer,” Freitas, meant to devise a critical tool that resists categorization; as a case study she discussed *Testo Junkie: sex, drugs, and biopolitics in the pharmacopornographic era*, a book by Beatriz Preciado, who, between the time of Freitas’ presentation and now, has become Paul Preciado. Denijal Jegic opened his presentation, “Between Palestinian and Black: Transnational Subalternity in the Work of Suheir Hammad,” with a video showing Hammad, a Palestinian-American woman who grew up in an African-American environment in Brooklyn, read from her poetry. Jegic acknowledged the difficulty of discussing a Palestinian poet at his home university in Germany (“I get attacked by a professor even if I start doing the presentation,” he said) and took the occasion of the affinity group to work through some of the tensions and challenges he has encountered. He ultimately aimed to deal with issues of sub-alternity Palestinian and African-American experience and ask the question, “How is it related in poetry?” In her presentation, Jessica Copley discussed, “The

Problem of Comparing ‘Japan’ and ‘the West’ in the Post-War: Some Methodological Challenges.” She asked the affinity group to help think through comparative possibilities for a project that analyzed Japan, France and the United States, as “not many have put these three together.” Maria Elevant sought help from the affinity group as she prepared to apply for PhD programs. She intends to pursue a PhD project related to her presentation topic titled, “Exploring interspecies relationships on the farm in literature for young readers.” Focusing on “utility” and the “human as the one who organizes, sets up borders and fences,” Elevant is interested in investigating “what kind of border crossings actually occur.” She sees herself as “applying what has been done in adult literature to children’s literature.” To this diversity of literary analyses, I added my own presentation on “Human Rights & Literature: Politics and Narrative at the International Criminal Court in The Hague.”

We ended our time together by having lunch as a group in the university canteen. It is clear that bonds and relationships formed during the affinity group. Members exchanged contact information, became Facebook friends, and discussed ways in which they could work together in the future.

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