

Colloquium Group “Politics, Poetics, and World Literature 1”

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Under the heading of “Politics, Poetics, and World Literature,” our colloquium group brought together topics ranging widely in geographical focus, methodological approach, and time period.

Our first session focused on between literature and reality, specifically on how the former functions to transform or create the latter. During this initial session, Alexandra Effe and Solange Manche presented their research interests and current projects. In both the speakers’ research, a common interest for the porosity between the fictive world or the text and the social world or the real became apparent and formed a guiding thread for the discussion, not only in this first session, but also during the session of the second week. After having introduced her previous work on J.M. Coetzee considering the question of boundary between the self and the real in his novels, **Alexandra Effe**, under the title of “**World Literature and the Genre of Autobiography**,” discussed her current project, exploring metafictional reflections on autobiography, focusing on changes this genre undergoes together with changes in conceptions of truth, fact, and fiction. Her focus for her presentation in the colloquium was on metaautobiographical reflections by diasporic writers whose work reflects diverse cultural influences, such as Michael Ondaatje and Hanif Kureishi. **Solange Manche**, with a presentation titled “**Can We Imagine Different Economics? Representations of Value in *Max Havelaar* or the Hallmark of Dutch Pride**,” introduced us to her project of analyzing the representation of the value of work and money in Multatuli’s novel *Max Havelaar*. She firstly introduced the work *Economics of Good and Evil* by Tomáš Sedláček, which upholds that the way we think about economics today is largely based upon classical narratives and has been maintained throughout the ages in the form of quest stories. Hence, she claims that a dynamics between the fictional world and that of the organisation of collective life can be rightfully defended, which in turn means that fiction itself can change our perception of the more material aspects of society. Subsequently, departing from the claim that the image of Dutchness that is exported by the Netherlands in the global circulation of cultural goods amounts to the depiction of the neoliberal idea of the individual as the entrepreneur, she questioned whether *Max Havelaar* perpetuates, or has prematurely perpetuated, the dominant discourse on economics or whether it fundamentally defies it, as is generally claimed. The underlying question of her research being: can we image different economics?

The second meeting brought together the following three papers: **Chang Yao’s – “Bars and Restaurants as Social Spaces in Cities,” Sue Jean Joe’s “Yeats, the double, dualism, *A Vision*,”** and Linyi Li’s “**Yoshimi Takeuchi’s Revisiting of Lu Xun: The Possibility of Subjectivity.**” Chang investigated changes in restaurants from their emergence in the West to their contemporary function, which, as she showed, is more as a microcosm and a social space – about being seen and interacting with others – than about food and drink. Her aim is to look at restaurants through the lens of fiction and to engage in a comparative analysis of bars and restaurants in different cultures and geographies. In her presentation she focused on Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie*, Gavin Kramer’s *Shopping* and on the film *Lost in Translation*. Sue Jean explored the notion of the double and of dualism both in Yeats’ life and poetry. She focused on *A Vision* and also brought a close-reading of a poem to the seminar. We discussed oppositions both in the individual and in history, and considered also the concept of the nation, and Yeats’ relation to Ireland and England. Finally, Linyi took us to the works of the prominent cultural critic Yoshimi Takeuchi, and to his interpretation of Lu Xun during the postwar period. She compared these individuals’ anxieties about modernity and about the construction of subjectivity. Discussion focused on questions that were a thread throughout

our meetings, such as “What is the relation between literature and politics?” and Linyi also posed very specific questions, such as “Are there any alternative options that colonized countries could choose to deal with the relationships with the imperialist West, apart from following or negating?”

In our third session, **Erina Yamada** and **Carmen Musat** presented their current research projects. Erina is interested in definitions of plagiarism and in accusations made in the context of Paul Celan’s work. Her paper was titled “**Trans-Boundary: Paul Celan and Quotation.**” We discussed the relation of plagiarism and citation, with many interesting approaches to these two terms, especially in the context of world literature, which, as holds true for literature in general as well, is always in conversation with other writers, whether explicitly or implicitly, whether signaling this fact or not, and whether consciously or unconsciously. Carmen, under the title “**How Many Literatures Are There in a National Literature**”, made us think about how we classify an author such as Vladimir Nabokov, for example, as American or Russian, discussing what she describes as intersectional authors, who require a new approach to the relationship between national and world literature. She is interested in tracing linguistic patterns in these writers’ work. Examples we discussed were, amongst others, T.S. Eliot, Herta Müller, Milan Kundera, and Emil Cioran. Is it language, political context, cultural milieu, topic, or heritage that is decisive? Can one be global and local at the same time?

Our final colloquium session took us to Northern Mexico and the former Soviet Union. **Gerardo Cruz**, in his paper “**Yuri Herrera’s Mexican ‘North-Literature’ as World Literature,**” spoke about the relation between the regional and the global. He asked whether Herrera’s writing contains a desire to be cosmopolitan and in how far it is micro-regional. We also discussed the tension between homogenization and particularization, the term planetary as opposed to global, the role of migration and exile, and that of publishing houses. **Anna Bogomolova** spoke under the title “**The Project of ‘World Literature’ in Soviet Culture of the 20s-30s.**” She discussed a project of translation of a huge corpus of literature, initiated by the Soviet regime as a way to grant access for the USSR to European culture. She is interested in press and political discourse, specifically in the 20s and 30s. We discussed the benefits and perils of translation, its relation to appropriation, and the idea of absolute translatability. We ended on thoughts on the concept of world literature as it can be politically instrumentalized, and we discussed the implications of thinking about world literature in terms of a project also in how we engage with it today.