

## **Colloquium Group: “Politics, Poetics and World Literature 2,” 26 June–23 July 2021, Harvard University (online)**

Group Leader: Ph.D. Naghmeh Esmaeilpour, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany

---

The colloquium theme “**Politics, Poetics and World Literature 2**” brought together seventeen scholars from around the world from China, Turkey, Japan, and India to Germany, Canada, the US., and Australia. Our focus ranged on a diverse set of topics and genres from poetry and drama to paintings and film, centering on the ideologies of narrative, gender equality, place and orientation, modernism and postmodernism, to coloniality and post-coloniality with a bold emphasis on the ‘outskirts’ of world literature. I have divided the colloquium into two topics: Poetics and World literature and Politics and World literature. In the first two weeks we concentrated on the application of poetics in reading or in connection to world literature. In the last two weeks, we dealt with the politics of world literature, meaning the application of world literature and its presence in demonstrating and revealing another level of political, economic, and social meaning of literature.

### **July 2, 2021, First Week: Poetics and World Literature**

In the first week the dominant themes were extensively related to colonialism, west/east or center/periphery, locality/globality with a comparative perspective in their analyses.

Our colloquium began with Ece Büşra Türközü: “This is too much, Rassoul!”: A Comparison between Dostoevsky’s Raskolnikov and Rahimi’s Rassoul. Türközü focused on the differences between Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* and Rassoul in *A Curse on Dostoevsky* to reveal the set of conditions prior to conceptualize Raskolnikov’s actions and thoughts. Discussing the hesitation of being in between two lives, in Russia and Afghanistan, Türközü analyzed key notions such as “ordinary/extraordinary, crime, responsibility, agency, accountability, individuality” in Rassoul’s novels. She highlighted substantial contextual contrasts between Raskolnikov’s and Rassoul’s worlds while demonstrating that every concept or value carries its meaning and interpretation to another culture.

The second paper was by Wai Ying Chan, “Nobody’s Emily Dickenson: Lyric, Colonialism, and the East,” which she debated the idealization of Western poetry, lyric reading and writing as a mode of colonization, both politically and culturally, in the postcolonial and neocolonial age, as well as public and private sphere. She argued that Emily Dickinson’s encounters, both direct and indirect, with Asian cultural artifacts as well as her consumption of foreign commodities worked as a way to understand her poetic works as world literature circulating beyond their origin through translations. Her attempts to present that lyric reading simultaneously indicates the “continual act of colonization.”

Nicole Fischer presented a paper titled “Jenny Erpenbeck’s *Visitation*—A Century of German History Narrated by the House and the Gardner.” She deeply delved into German history from different human and non-human perspectives, especially the personification of nature. She argued how in this particular novel the historical events acted as the agent and people as recipients. Moreover, she discussed different relationships between house and human such as “house-nature, history-human, house-human, gardener-human.” Her focus was on “how Erpenbeck’s novel uniquely narrates World History and how

approaching World Literature from an ecocritical perspective can diversify and enrich one's findings," meaning "to combine the frameworks of World Literature and Ecocriticism."

Rajnandini Shaw presented the final paper in the first week, entitled "Masterpiece in World Literature." Her evocative presentation combined approaches to discuss the meaning and application of "masterpiece" in world literature. In her interpretation of masterpiece, the function of the term "has emerged, evolved, and shrunken in the West, especially the United States of America, having developed from the Goethean weltliteratur and the increasing inter- and trans-national exchange between and among the nation-States." Centering her argument on Damrosch's analysis of the classics and Goethe's world literature, Shaw discussed the rise and fall of masterpiece both as a literary term and an analytical approach in the West.

### **July 9, 2021, Second Week: Poetics and World Literature**

The discussion in the second week revolved around national/world literature, the concept of place-identity, and transformation from modernity to postmodernity, with a dominant focus on glocality in the concept of national/world literature.

João Palaio Gabriel opened our second week with a presentation of his master thesis. His paper, "A Street Continually crossed by People": The Cosmopolitan Desires of Hart Crane and Álvaro de Campos," compared Hart Crane's poem "Possessions" and Álvaro de Campos's "Tabacaria" [Tobacco Shop] in search of "the relation each poem establishes between their speaker's sexualities, their identities, and their cosmopolitan contexts." Besides the existing debate about the poems, Gabriel centered his argument on "the particular aspects of urban geography of the city," and "its connection with non-normative sexual identities." By focusing on the city and the sex, Gabriel analyzed terms such as cruising, possessions, triumphant day, and sensationism.

The next presentation was by Naghmeh Esmaeilpour who discussed "Transformation of Values and Beliefs through Text-mediality and Text-mobility in Iran since the 1970s." Esmaeilpour's paper centered on the argument that "Iranian literature, built on both contemporary and historical national narrative of the nation, is historicizing the past, foreshadowing the present, and predicting the future." Focusing on the *Wandering Trilogy* by Simin Daneshvar, Esmaeilpour argued that "Iranians, like other third world countries, are trapped in the binary of either/or schemes—such as modernity/tradition, West/East, centre/periphery, Islam/Christianity or even rich/poor." Esmaeilpour attempted to discuss how these binaries are represented through literature as "an intergenerational medium of text-mediality and text-mobility," throughout different periods.

Jessica Masters with her paper, "Complicating the Decadent-Modernist Divide" introduced a new angle on reading and analyzing modernism. She made a contrast between the decadent and symbolism, arguing that symbolism became a neglected approach in modernism. She approached her comparison by studying Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* (1936) and Henry Green's *Party Going* (1939) as significant works of decadent modernism, which "articulate the present and anticipate postmodernity, but they also gesture to the past." Masters concluded that "the degeneration that preoccupies *Nightwood* is a biological haunting of the past, while the present in *Party Going* is threatened by an ominous future while holding the leftovers of the past."

We moved from the British-American modernism to the Bolivian author Edmundo Paz Soldán in Lima Torrico Gerson Gerardo's paper titled, "Strategies of Postnational Literature and Their Limitations in Edmundo Paz Sodán's "Ciclo de Río Fugitivo." Lima argued that Paz Soldán explores seemingly opposite interests such as "present and past local issues vs contemporary globalized economy and media", "literary genre fiction vs traditional literary fiction", and "political commitment as a guilty migrant vs political skepticism and conscience of individual privilege." Lima effectively problematized the tensions that existed between national vs. international presence, local vs. global, and center vs. periphery, which, in his view, referred to Paz Soldán's attempt "to show an alternative cultural homogeneity."

### **July 16, 2021, Third Week: Politics and World Literature**

We shifted to the politics and world literature in the third week with the focus on the presence of ideology in literature, such as imperialism, the American Dream, exile, as well as the clashes between tradition and modernity.

The third session began with Yuxin Ying's paper "On the "Elements" Of HaiZi's Long poetry." She turned our attention to mainland China and "the theory construction of HaiZi's poem" by investigating the movement of concepts such as "real" to "element", and from "entity" to "existence." She claimed that "the concept of 'entity' acted as "the subject" for HaiZi to address either "concrete things" or "mysterious and metaphysical" concepts. Therefore, HaiZi's movement in his poetry, Ying argued, was "from 'entity' to 'Element,' that means from material life to more essential existence, from substance to the conceptual level."

From Chinese literature we moved to classical Greek and its modern transformation to a black comedy by Macria Blumberg's paper titled "Re-visioning Sophocles' *Antigone*: Performing Janusz Glowacki's *Antigone in New York*." Blumberg discussed the relocation or mobility of the "a Classic Greek Tragedy from the 5th Century BCE Thebes to late 20th C Manhattan's Tompkins Square Park." Glowacki's play, as Blumberg argued, "creates vaudevillian riffs and metatheatrical moments" among the characters, "who are all exiles," and came to the US "in search of the American Dream." Blumberg's focus revolved around both the different concepts of intertextuality and "re-visioning" to emphasis on the application of different kind of exiles in her analysis of *Antigone in New York*.

The next paper was a journey to Africa and Oluwapelumi Olufolajimi familiarized us with the African authors from Congo in "The Cosmopolitan Challenge: Imperial Disruption, Socio-Economic and Political Disorder." Olufolajimi examined Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi: An Historical Tragedy in English* and Aime Cesaire's *A Season in the Congo* to present socio-political and economic disorder, in the old Benin Kingdom and the Congo. He discussed the effects of British Imperialism, the concept of independency and economic dependency, the concepts of postcoloniality and coloniality and their influences on local identity. Olufolajimi argued that "the 'human' essence of the colonized and the conquered is neither respected nor protected by the imperialist and colonizer."

The last stop of our world tour in the third session was in Turkey, where Simla Ayşe Doğangün wanted to present us, her paper titled, "Kenize Mourad's Fiction in the World Republic of Letters." In her paper (which was presented in absentia), she tackled the binary of center/periphery and western/eastern

perspectives on modernization. She referred to the importance of fictionalized biography in Mourad's fiction, which mixed the reality and fictionality in life of Selma Hanimsultan (1914–1941), the granddaughter of Sultan Murad V. Interestingly, Doğangün also addressed exiled with a different angle by focusing on the role of religion and religious breeds in historical figures.

### **July 23, 2021, Fourth Week: Politics and World Literature**

Our final week had four speakers all of whom talked about reading national literature through a global (or world literature) perspective. Migration, social inferiority and social dependency, gender equality, and subjectivity stood at the center of their analysis.

Yaiza Berrocal opened our last session with a paper entitled “Stimmung in Variable cloud and *To The Lighthouse*: Fragmentary Mimesis and Ironic Melancholy.” In her study, Berrocal attempted to address the question of “melancholy representation and historical atmosphere” based on “the mimetic particularities and the economy of affects” comparatively in Carmen Martín Gaité's *Nubosidad variable* (Spain, 1991) and Virginia Woolf's *To The lighthouse* (UK, 1927). Berrocal centered her analysis on “Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's definition of Stimmung” and she especially demonstrated the affinities between both authors and how they addressed issues such as melancholy, suffering, and trauma with employing different styles and forms yet sharing similar historical backgrounds.

Then we had another visit to Turkey by Elif Su Isik's paper titled, “Turkish Romance Fiction and World Literature Through the Case of Nihal Yeginobali.” Investigating the influences of western Romance novel in Turkish literature, Isik argued that Nihal Yeginobali's works dealt with “desires, anxieties and fantasies of the society of its time.” In Isik's study, Yeginobali's novels “transformed and changed nationalities” while they “revealed shifts in notions of womanhood, social responsibility and sexuality throughout 20th century Turkey.” Isik attempted to demonstrate “Turkey's changing views on translation, original writing and authorship” during the 1950s and 1960s.

Ruiyi Xu presented the next paper with the title, “Filius Fortunae? The Horatian Poetics of Roman Patronage.” Xu explored how Horace represented and understood “the relationship in the historical and ideological context of Late Republic,” as he aimed “to propose an alternative to both egalitarian amicitia and asymmetrical artistic patronage.” Xu addressed the shared values, and spirituality, mutual affection or shared artistic interest, as well as the language of patronage and the patronage of art.

The final paper in our colloquium group was contributed by Mehraneh Ebrahimi: “Migrant Dreams Build Nations; Shirin Neshat's Reverent Gaze in Land of Dreams Endows Subjects with Human Rights” (which was presented in absentia). Ebrahimi introduced Shirin Neshat's works as an example of dealing with migrant dreams, exile, subjectivity in transit, vulnerability and politics of human rights. Ebrahimi centered her analysis on the idea of “symbolic force” of nationalism (Homi Bhabha) to present how “Shirin Neshat has become the dram catcher of exile.”

## Concluding Comments

Our colloquium group brought together researchers from the graduate level to postdocs and associate professors, whose projects spanned geographical contexts ranging from the United States via Europe, Turkey, Iran, Sydney, and China, from early modern treatises to contemporary novels. An interesting point about our colloquium was that the presentations and their correspondents were mostly in the same line regarding the thematic and methodological relevance. I find IWL's colloquia an efficient and engaging part of the summer school because it let scholars discuss and exchange their perspectives over the dominant notions among social science, connections between literature, films and cultures, and the roles of authors and artists in the current mediatized (virtualized) society. We began our journey with poetry and poetics and ended with politics of neoliberal globalism in literature.

