

## Group Report

### Pre-modern Literature Colloquium

The group members of the Pre-modern Literature Colloquium were: Tejas Aralere, Katherine Rose Churchill, Semina Shaukatali Halani, Hu Rui (Vivian), Su Siir Sezgin, Camila Seixas e Sousa, and myself, Chrissie Maroulli.

On July 2<sup>nd</sup>, we spent half of the session getting to know each other. We each took about five minutes to talk about our backgrounds and our research interests. Then, I proceeded to present my work, namely the chapter “‘She Cut Her Hair and Changed Her Name, From Fair Elinor to Sweet William:’ Constructions and Reconstructions of Female Identity in Early Modern Infanticide Ballads.” Halani, who was appointed to respond, talked about women in India. The discussion then expanded to womanhood and its place in different cultures. All participants offered substantial insights and told stories about women in their countries. The group also talked about hair and its symbolism, for example, long hair and its traditional association with virtuousness.

On July 9<sup>th</sup>, we started with Halani, who presented her paper “Oral traditions in the World Literature: Analyzing the Bhagavadgītā and the Gināns.” Amongst other things, she tackled the issue of defining world literature, culture, and place. She discussed the common themes in Bhagavadgītā and the Gināns, which are love, death, soul, salvation, rebirth, and devotion. Moreover, she talked about their performative aspects and concluded that they challenge the west-centric, written character of what we usually think of as world literature. Next, Hu Rui gave feedback. She posed a question on the performative aspect of the texts when they were written, and a discussion followed. Then, we talked about the language features of the texts and their translation. All participants offered valuable insights, and the conversation was casual but rich.

The second person to present was Churchill, whose paper was “Messengers, Bodies, Texts, and Travel in the Man of Law’s Tale.” Katherine examined the messenger as a pre-modern media, who gave messages fleshly bodies and voices and mentioned how intermediaries were often sidekicks and supporting characters. Moreover, she highlighted that messengers, as intermediaries, are risky mediums for conveying messages, and there is certain anxiety felt by other characters toward them because they can exercise their own wills and have weaknesses; also, their human form influences how messages are received. Churchill concluded that messengers, in the text under investigation and other medieval texts, are not transparent mediums for communication. Aralere responded to the presentation by posing questions on the corporeality of Christianity and the message of God being conveyed through a “sensual” female. Aralere also asked about possible gaps in literature when it comes to messengers and issues of multicultural, inter-lingual transfer of knowledge.

On July 16<sup>th</sup>, we started with Camila Seixas e Sousa’s presentation “The basilisk: from the Aberdeen Bestiary to the Orto do Esposo.” Seixas presented an analysis of the serpent basilisk in one English Bestiary — the Aberdeen Bestiary, from the 12th century, and the Portuguese manuscript Orto do Esposo, which belongs to the late 13th century or the early 14th century. She presented a study of the origin and evolution of the Bestiary is made, its structure and content, and an analysis of the serpent and its symbolic meaning. Lastly, a comparative reading of the basilisk was then made, based on our two sources. Sezgin, who was assigned to

respond to the presentation, asked about the serpent's medical properties, serpent gazes having the ability to kill, and the way the myth traveled through the centuries. Aralere talked about snakes and serpents in Ancient Greek mythology; he also mentioned allegory and transformation in terms of metamorphoses, the idea of geography, and environmental determinism. Churchill then asked about the circulation of the texts in the lower classes.

The second person to present was Hu Rui, who presented "A Probe into the Culture of Fetishism on Women's Feet and Shoes Reflected in *The Strange Tales from a Lonely Studio*." Hu Rui talked about *The Strange Tales from a Lonely Studio*, a collection of short stories written in classical Chinese language, in terms of its numerous references to women's feet and shoes. In dealing with this, the author, Pu Songling, showed a strong inclination of obsession on the one hand, but he also revealed 'phobia' on the other. As a writer of low social rank, Pu was influenced by two kinds of sub-cultures, foot fetishism and misogyny, both implanted in the national psychology. Hu showed how the study of the images of feet and shoes of female characters from a wide range of perspectives could reveal the rich connotation of sub-cultures in ancient China. The person assigned to respond was me. I posed several questions for discussion, for example, how the feet relate to what is female, what is their usage to man, which taboos related to feet are broken in these tales, the custom of foot binding, etc. Everyone was involved in constructive conversation, which led to a discussion about rape culture and the female body as a violence site.

On July 23<sup>rd</sup>, we started with Aralere's presentation "Making Sense of Melothesia in Ancient Rome and India." Tejas defined melothesia as a term that refers to the connection between the 12 zodiac signs and parts of the body and demonstrated a comparative analysis of Marcus Manilius' *Astronomica* and Sphujidhvaja's *Yavana Jataka*. The geographical connection between the two texts was examined, and Aralere made educated guesses about how they traveled on a map. He also showed that zodiac signs were connected with geographical regions (e.g., cancer governed Ethiopia). Churchill, who was assigned to respond to the presentation, asked about melothesia's popularity in the classical period and if it changes how we read references to body parts in literature. Aralere said that it does not necessarily change. Churchill also asked about the sexed body as a geographical region, as a metaphor for conquest, and if there are intersections between empire, the body, and gender, to which Aralere said that melothesia was more about race and ethnicity rather than gender and that there are no specific associations in that sense. Halani asked about naming people after asterisms, and Aralere said that this concept is much older and must have been in practice for a long time.

The second person to present was Sezigon, who presented "Walking the Roman Road: A Study of Antiquity as a Source of Victorian Anxieties in Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan*." Sezigon looked at the god Pan and his analysis in the Victorian era when he embodies chaos and is presented as a demon, a malignant disturbance of societal balance. His paganism is the ultimate source of anxiety in the Christian world and causes panic with his music. Sezigon demonstrated Pan references in Homer, where he is shown as a hedonistic deity that merges with Dionysus. The word panic derives from the god Pan, explained Sezigon. Machen was aware of Pan's antics in classical texts, as seen in his work, but constructed a romantic view rather than an ancient Greek/Roman one. He does not use any other new monster but chooses to use a known devilish god as his monster and makes specific references to the myth's roots in antiquity. Seixas was appointed to respond to the presentation; she mentioned that she would have liked to see a line that makes more sense in the flow of the presentation. She wondered what the scope of the

research was; she thought it was not very clear. Sezigon explained that this presentation was part of research that is still incomplete. Seixas suggested that Sezigon be strict on her scope. She also asked if there is any relation between Pan and fauns since they are both human and make music. For a final remark, Seixas suggested that the issue could be approached differently, but Sezigon said this was part of her process. Aralere asked about Machen's inspiration, and Sezigon said he was inspired by the Romantics and neoclassical tradition, and he mentions archeological digs he had visited.

We ended the last session with a group photograph and exchanged contact information. We befriended each other on social media as well. The experience was enriching and highly enjoyable for everyone.