

## World Literature and Translation 1, Colloquium 9 – Report The Institute for World Literature, Copenhagen University, 2017



As in my previous participations in the IWL, this year, too, I was very glad to lead one of the two colloquia the program devoted to the relation between Translation and World Literature, a fact which in itself shows the conspicuous and stable interest of IWL participants in this field.

The colloquium participants were 12, and although many of them could not attend the whole program, because of overlapping research commitments, attendance was regular and rich. The colloquium met four times around the four “themes” I envisaged as profitable focuses of discussion while examining the abstracts that were sent in advance: **Translation as a Tool for Canon Formation** (July 6), **Translation & Aesthetics** (July 13), **Translation and Multilingualism** (July 20) and **“Intralingual” Translation** (July 25). As usual, several papers would actually touch upon many interrelated issues, which made the conversation an ongoing, involving, and stimulating activity.

We found our debate very often revolving around new interpretations of the concept of “language” itself, especially as it has been culturally and traditionally constructed; and around the actual effects of our, or someone else’s, translating practice, especially when the perspectives, in non-Western cultures, may end up being completely reversed. The most valuable result was the opening up of new ways of looking at and thinking about translation, which led to the spontaneous and very clear expression of the need for new, still un-thought of, praxis. Several participants presented projects that were

still ongoing, or even in their initial stage, which made the sharing and comparing of views even more fruitful. Questions were openly made as to how to proceed in one's research, and suggestions as generously and competently given in answer to them.

In the first session on "Translation as a Tool for Canon Formation," Hanne Jansen (University of Copenhagen) presented a project she has recently embarked on, concerning the translation flow between two "minor" languages, that is the translation of Italian literature into Danish, and the role of the translation agents involved in selecting which texts will be made available for the Danish readers. Firat Oruc (Georgetown University) examined the intersections of translation, national identity and humanist philology in the context of the making of world literature in Turkey. Through extensive archival research and survey of primary sources that appeared in the period between 1930 and 1960, he is investigating in particular the institution of a state-sponsored world literature program as part of national culture planning in the early republican Turkey, and interrogating the role of translation in the contested processes of nation-building in non-western societies.

In our second session, on "Translation & Aesthetics," Taymaz Pour Mohammad (Northwestern University) showed how Anglo-Welsh philologist William Jones, author of *A Grammar of the Persian Language* (1771) revisited the very Enlightenment premise of a taste for general learning, substituting it for general tasteful learning in his engagement with a ghazal by the 14<sup>th</sup> century Persian lyric poet, Hafez. Samantha Wallace chose to present a "pre-process" work she will be leading in collaboration with another English Literature PhD candidate at the University of Virginia, in which they aim to produce throughout the 2017-2018 academic year a podcast series on the topic "Circulating Spaces: Literary and Language Worlds in a Global Age." Guests will discuss the changing face of literature in it, and how we might as a collective of diverse perspectives address the value of literature and advocate for the humanities in a period of budget cuts, growing economic inequalities, and continued pressure to consider the humanities as a hobby and not as a career nor as a serious means to intervene politically. Finally, Thomas Wisniewski (Harvard University) addressed the question of translation and self-translation in the circulation of world literature through the case study of the early work of Karen Blixen, a Dane who first wrote in English for a global Anglophone audience, and secondly in Danish for a national audience. The issues Thomas raised were: What could the commercial and aesthetic reasons behind this choice have been, and how does the case deepen scholars' understanding of the circulation and reception of world literature?

In the session on "Translation and Multilingualism," Dima Ayoub (Middlebury College) unfolded all the consequences of translating an English novel in which English and Arabic cohabit, and that thematizes and enacts translation in multiple ways, Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* (1999), into a monolingual Arabic text, *Khāriṭat al-ḥubb* (2004). Milica Jelic Mariokov (University of Belgrade) described the multilingual nature of *A Novel about London*, the work of one of the most significant Serbian writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Milos Crnjanski. Priyanka Rachabattuni (University of Hyderabad)

closed the session assessing the politics of translation in “Ayoni,” a Telugu short story By Olga, one of the famous feminist writers of India.

Our last session, on “Intralingual’ Translation,” saw Ryoichi Imai (University of Tokyo) apply the tools of translation studies to the works of Kenji Nakagami (1946-92), one of the most important post-war Japanese writers. Although Nakagami wrote in his mother tongue Japanese, Ryoichi demonstrated that his “difficult” style comes close to a pseudo- or intralingual translation in the same way that Emily Apter discusses contemporary Scottish writers in *the Translation Zone* (2006). He also argued that writing in this style led Nakagami to question his national identity. Giancarlo Tursi (NYU) gave a paper entitled “Translation and Reparation,” in which he presented Giuseppe de Dominicis’s dialectal translation of Dante’s Canto XXXIII of the *Inferno* as a defense of the dignity and expressivity of a dialectal language and as the hope that a marginalized region (the South) might be translated and woven into the national linguistic and political fabric still in the making. Yura Kim (Princeton University) told us how *The Accusation* (Gobal), attributed to the North Korean writer Bandi, only became a South Korean bestseller in early 2017, when it was republished in coincidence with its English translation. She compared the novel, the editorial choices of its South Korean publisher, and its English translation (*Serpent’s Tail*, 2017), in order to imagine a future in “Korean literature” that may be linguistically decentered from Seoul and genealogically fragmented.

The Colloquium proved to be a fertile ground for reflection and exchange of ideas. It immediately witnessed a follow-up thanks to the initiative of two participants, Dima Ayoub and Giancarlo Tursi, who in the following month circulated a call for papers for a session on dialect and translation to be held at next ACLA meeting.

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