

World Literature and Cinema, Colloquium 12. IWL, Copenhagen, 2017

The group was made up of eleven participants attending institutions from eight different countries. Abstracts were circulated about a month prior to the program, so that participants would be, to a certain extent, familiar with one another's presentations. The colloquium met four times in total: once a week for two hours. During each session, three participants presented twenty-minute papers, which allowed for a full hour of discussion, in which different ways to think about these papers discretely and in conversation with one another were devised. Each session was organized either thematically or, more in the spirit of The Institute for World Literature and in line with the participants' vastly diverse areas of interest, formally.

The first session was titled "Found in Adaptation," and it featured papers that in some way or another dealt with the adaptation of a literary text into a cinematic or serial medium or into the stage. Is adaptation, as Linda Hutcheon states, repetition without replication? Rudrani Gangopadhyay (Rutgers University) presented a paper on Bollywood director Vishal Bhardwaj's complex adaptations of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet*. Bhardwaj's films, *Maqbool*, *Omkara*, and *Haider*, maintain little of its Shakespearean thematic source yet, like them, highlight a backdrop of violence. Rudrani's particular interest in the issue lay in exploring how Bhardwaj's adaptations made Shakespeare's texts relevant to an audience consuming the work in a radically different context, spatially and temporally. "What," in Rudrani's words, "are the ethnographic impulses behind these adaptations, and what does the post-millennium Indian appropriation of Shakespeare offers its audiences?" Also featured in this panel was Marina Milosevic's (University of Belgrade) discussion of Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* and its filmic adaptation. Marina's focus was on the book's heavy reliance on symbolism and its consequent polysemy as compared to the use of cinematic techniques to treat space and time, a book-to-novel transition that tied quite well with the third presentation, by Yanxia Shen (Hebei University), who discussed Maria Dueñas's novel *The Time in Between* and its serial adaptation. Yanxia's focus, however, was not on the formal aspects of adaptation, but rather on the level of characterization and the portrayal of the protagonist's *bildung* as presented in novel and series. Of course, these three presentations encouraged a discussion about the powers of representability of different mediums, and about what can be translated (and *how* it can be translated) not only into a different medium, but also into a radically different context. Keeping with the spirit of IWL, the issue of circulation was central to this colloquium, as evinced, for instance, in the fascinating fact that Bhardwaj was inspired for his *Macbeth* not principally by Shakespeare but by Kurosawa's adaptation.

The second session, named "Italian Spaces," was more thematically than formally cohesive. The organizational drive behind this panel was to bring together different approaches to the representation of space, in particular of Italy. Juxtaposition played an important role, both intra and extradiegetically. Nina Farizova (Yale University) started off the discussion with her presentation "Worlding Literature while Eating: British Romanticism in Michael Winterbottom's *The Trip to Italy*," the anthimeria of the title being particularly relevant to the colloquium's (and IWL's) general theme. In other words, how can a work of art in the modern day be, as it were, "worlded"; how, as Nina discussed in her paper, can the presence of two British men reciting

Romantic poetry in Italy world both the literature they present and the culture that surrounds them? “What is the meaning of tasting sophisticated pasta and drinking Italian wine along with reading and discussing British poets, not Dante or Boccaccio?” Nina writes. This intertextual play is at the center of the second presentation, by Peter Vorissis (University of Michigan), who presented research on the Italian cinematic subgenre of the *giallo* and its treatment of urban spaces. Peter began with what is arguably the first cinematic *giallo*, Mario Bava’s *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*, and went on to examine the film’s treatment of the urban space, as well as the generic tendency to interrogate notions of constraint. What is the function of the *giallo*’s constant aestheticization of the city? How restrictive are generic conventions and how can they be subverted? The third presenter, Victor Xavier Zarour Zarzar (The Graduate Center, CUNY), linked some of these issues to factors of gender in his discussion of Elena Ferrante’s *L’amore molesto*. Victor discussed the ways in which Ferrante subordinates the Neapolitan setting of her novels to the protagonist-and-narrator’s affects, or, rather, the way in which the latter inevitably inform the former. Thus, psychic and outer landscape become inextricably tangled, mediated by the overwhelming presence of language and (central to Ferrante) by the even more overwhelming absence of dialect. This panel was productive to think of ways in which a subject matter such as Italy, which has been used time and again in literary and filmic representations, can continue to be fruitful to this day.

The third session, “Trans-National Identities,” revolved around constructions and deconstructions of the idea of nationhood and national identity. It was particularly timely now, when all around the world conceptions of globality are being countered by ever-growing nationalistic movements. The discussion was started by Nandi Chinni Kumar (University of Hyderabad) with a paper on Mehboob Khan’s classic epic drama film, *Mother India*. Nandi convincingly discussed the ways in which melodrama can be used to consolidate the process of nation-building through cinematic allegories depicting suffering. He argued that the inherent idealization of the melodramatic genre is central to the fiction of national integrity and elaborated on how *Mother India*’s use of POV victimizes Radha and turns her, as clearly indicated in the title, into a figure of the ravaged-yet-enduring India in the aftermath of independence. A nice foil to Khan’s nationalistic cinema was offered by Lucia Puebla (University of Barcelona), whose discussion of the refugee crisis was centered on Aki Kaurismäki’s transnational cinema and Warsan Shire’s poem “Home.” Relevant to Lucia’s paper was an exploration of Kaurismäki’s techniques—cobalt-blue and murky-green palettes, minimal visuals and dialogue, etc.—employed to convey a sense of nostalgia that clashes with the films’ “poignant absurdism and laconic mood.” The director attempts, as Lucia argued, to subvert much of Finland’s nationally oriented films by addressing a larger European audience and appealing to its sense of European transnational community, thus making viewers reflect on the current political situation. Lastly, Caroline Zhang (City University of Hong Kong), provided a different perspective on multiculturalism and immigration, dealing particularly with Turkish German identity. Caroline used the works of filmmaker Fatih Akin and writer Emine Sevgi Özdamar to reflect on disparate representations of multiculturalism and intergenerational struggles triggered by dissonant cultures. Caroline’s presentation also ventured into the intricate relationship between cultural identity and language, fostering a dynamic conversation that bridged this to the previous week’s panel (in particular to Victor’s presentation of dialect in *L’amore molesto*). Much was discussed in this session about how, in Caroline’s words, “traditional hegemonic models of

cultural hierarchy” are created and, as discussed in the last two papers, dismantled, as well as how cultural exchange is becoming more and more a reality nowadays.

The last panel was called “Subjectivity” and consisted of two presenters. Siting Jiang (Pennsylvania State University) delivered an intriguing reading of Francis Ponge’s poetics of object through the lens of female objectification. To illustrate this theoretical exercise, Siting discussed Michel Gondry’s 2008 film *Interior Design*, a filmic representation of the kind of objectification undergone by women, and borrowed from Robert Esposito in her critique of the subject-object binary opposition. The last presenter, of both this panel and the general colloquium, was Naghmeh Esmaeilpour (Humboldt University of Berlin), with a paper titled “Globalization and Global Media Culture,” in which she examined the tension characteristic to nations today between the hegemonic and the heterogeneous and its effect on “multiculturalism, pluralism, multimedia, and transpolitics.” Naghmeh’s paper was a very apt closing statement for the colloquium, as it dealt with some of the theoretical issues underpinning most of the cinematic works that were discussed in the four sessions. One of the main driving questions behind this paper was: How do certain authors negotiate global media culture to mediate a novel perspective of globalization? Naghmeh convincingly argued that film is currently a vital facilitator for the exchange of cultural material, which often occurs through the presentation of characters who undergo deep identity struggles (as was the case in most, if not all, works we discussed in the colloquium). Thus, Naghmeh allowed us to elegantly segue into a conversation about the larger issues at hand regarding the position of film as one of today’s most effective cultural vehicles. Participants ended this session and the colloquium with lively and thought-provoking reflections on the consumption of cinematic works of art, their translation from or into a different medium, and the implications of different modes of transmission.

All in all, the World Literature and Cinema was a great success in that it fostered deep and interesting discussions that brought together seemingly disparate media and themes. The great variety of areas covered by the papers helped participants think outside their normal area of expertise and find links in places little expected. The opportunities for intellectual and academic exchange in the classroom were invaluable, and the potential collaborations to come an exciting prospect.

Victor Xavier Zarour Zarzar
Doctoral Candidate.

Department of Comparative Literature at The Graduate Center, CUNY