

**IWL 2022 – Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz, Germany**

**Colloquium 1: Politics, Poetics, and World Literature**



**Colloquium leader: Dr. Deniz Gündoğan İbrişim, Sabanci University**

The group included 13 scholars, mostly graduate students, an Assistant Professor, and a postdoctoral fellow. We came from many universities around the world such as Germany, India, Portugal, Turkey, Romania, Canada, and USA.

We had four two-hour sessions and there were three or four communications each session. Every participant had 18-20 minutes to present a paper that was followed by an intervention of five minutes made by a respondent who would point out some of the strongest ideas and set the field for the group's discussion. Presentations would conclude with the group's overall discussion.

The sessions were structured according to the main topics and themes introduced by the presentation proposals sent by every participant. The sessions were organized into four major

that reflected the common interest in the problematics of poetics and politics of world literature. The four sessions were divided into the following titles: **1)** otherness and identity; **2)** planetarity and diversity; **3)** poetics of estrangement and/or displacement; **4)** corporeality.

### **July 8th – Otherness and Identity**

In the first session the presentations focused on issues related to otherness and identity in world literature, in relation to postcolonial framework. The session focused on literary circulation in translation and on the production and reproduction dimension and its manifestations, namely the literary canon in a postcolonial framework.

Sania Irrum started our colloquium discussion with a presentation titled “Femininity in Memory Fiction of the Second World War: Comparative Study of German and British Fiction” where she examined the manifestations of feminine voices from the British and the German memory fiction of the war and its implications on the successive generations as post memory fiction in the world. The case was made for the contrastive nature of contemporary war fiction highlighting the complexity of post memory in the two countries.

Deepa Jani introduced us to the relevance of the bildungsroman in the light of Fanon with a presentation entitled “Tsitsi Dangarembga’s Nervous Conditions, Fanon, and the Bildung of a Native Woman.” As the title suggests this presentation focused on the circulation and appropriation of Arthur Miller’s work in the drama genre in China after the cultural revolution.

Andrew Young’s “Substance Governs Over Form’: Writing the Haitian National Epic” explored issues related to materiality, archive, form, and nation in the making of Haitian Literature. Young’s presentation focused on how Haitians perform the characteristics that had been attributed to (white, productive). The presentation focused on issues of legibility and readability of colonial memory and archive via two texts that retell the events

of the Haitian Revolution by self-consciously drawing on Homeric tropes to construct a national epic, in the style of Milton or Fénelon.

In “Worlding the Literary Mediterranean: al- Andalus and the Politics of Memory” Reem Taha examined the shifting Mediterranean frontier and its watershed moments for the Muslim and Morisco communities in Iberia. This presentation focused on the representation of the Morisco diaspora and its collective memory and identity through the travel narratives of Mohammed al-Wazīr al-Ghassānī al-Andalusī. Taha’s overall argument showed that how the Mediterranean Sea is transformed from a border to a connecting vessel that facilitates continuities between north and south and challenges binary oppositions that distinguish “Europe” from the “Islamic world.

### **July 15 - Planetary and Diversity**

The second part had as major guideline how the themes of planetary and diversity are manifested and problematized in the specific literary genres and geographies. Gender, queer, posthumanism, new materialism and their futures where some of the narrative perspectives enunciated in this section.

Lisa Brau-Weglinski presented a paper entitled “Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing* – A Transnational American Quest for Identity.” This paper focused on how Québécois, Anglo-Canadian, and US American identities are being constructed in fiction. Within the frameworks of Comparative Canadian Literature and Transnational American Studies as well as by focusing on Atwood’s *Surfacing*. Lisa Brau-Weglinski’s presentation examined the novel as a form of theory and identity construction.

In “Toward a Slow Witnessing in Contemporary Literature” Deniz Gundogan Ibrism introduced the concept of slow witnessing in contemporary American and Turkish literature, as a way to engage with alternate understanding of witnessing in the Anthropocene. This presentation focused on how the act of witnessing trauma (environmentally induced trauma) is extended into nonhuman worlds and nonhuman subjects, such as plants, animals,

landscapes, are reimagined in contemporary literature as a figure of the witness. “Slow witnessing” is introduced here as a wordling practice that expands the historical category of the human witness in world literature.

The presentation “Planetary Grammars” given by Sonji Shah showed how the concept of plenarity is fruitful for rethinking the perceived limits of globalization and environmentalism in contemporary literature. The focus of this presentation was on the poetics and politics of planetary grammars that challenges the homogenizing cultural studies approach to reading literature.

### **July 22 – Poetics of Estrangement and/or Displacement**

The part was dedicated to the themes of displacement, exile, estrangement in its poetical and political dimension. There was a focus on how the literary renders visibility to political tensions in postcolonial migrancies and diasporas and its ability to problematize issues related to national identity and boundaries.

In this session, Bethany Jonsen presented a paper entitled “Formal Exchange: *Alf wayla wa Layla* and Its Global Intertexts.” This presentation examined how *The Arabian Nights*, a cornerstone in the transmission of “Oriental” ideas and ideals into “Western” culture impacted the European literary tradition since their translation by Antoine Galland in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Jonsen’s paper made the case for an entangled, generic and narratological impacts of this text on (early) English novels.

Maria Elena Higuieruelo’s focus was on Anne Carson’s poetry. This presentation explored how Carson pictures poetry as a semiotic experience where subject must process errors and agrammaticalities. This presentation argued that such portrayal is embedded in epistemological, aesthetic, and moral value. It showed how the involvement of body in epistemological and spiritual quests paved the way for a novel understanding of Carson’s

poetry in relation to figures of otherness, such as neurodivergent subjects, penitents, and women.

We closed our session with Aliya Ram's presentation entitled "Qui et Quels Nous Sommes?: Lyric and Collectivity in 20th Century Anti-colonial Literature." The focus was on the methods used by racialized writers and thus new subjects, in the context of decolonization in the twentieth century. Through readings of Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* and Edward Kamau Brathwaite's *The Arrivants*, this presentation proposed that racialized writers turn repeatedly to lyrical techniques, song and the voice to summon subjectivity through the group.

### **26 July – Corporeality**

Our last week focused on theme of corporeality and the overall discussion of the main problematics raised throughout our colloquium.

We started our session with Diana-Alexandra Ciobanu's paper entitled "Hannah Arendt on Taste as Political Judgement." This paper focused on the intersection between political and aesthetic judgement. By following Arendt's reading of Kant's critique of aesthetic judgement Diana-Alexandra Ciobanu discussed the faculty of body and taste as belonging to the realm of politics. This presentation proved a dialogue between Kant and Arendt and helped us rethink the boundaries between political and aesthetic judgements with regards to the presentation's main argument.

Nobuto Sato's paper entitled "Hearing, Vibrating, and Stuttering Bodies: Miyazawa Kenji's Textual Resistance to Japanese Monolingualism" raised several important questions regarding the depictions of aurality such as sound, voice, and music in Miyazawa Kenji's writings. This presentation focused on the defamiliarization to show how the modern concept of corporality and human interiority as a closed space is isolated from the external world, and

how Miyazawa resituated the human body in a network where humans, animals, and inorganic objects interact without eliminating each other's alterity.

In "Can grief be just a literary theme? Considerations on a theoretical controversy" Despina Jderu discussed the grieving subject, who is enslaved permanently to the autobiographical dependence of the text, in contemporary French literature. Jderu's paper surveyed the story of mourning and how it decreased the distance between the subject and his future within the text as well as his relationship to writing and to his posture. This presentation showed development of the mourning subject in French literature, opening up a whole series of questions related to the powers of literature, the status of the author, and the ethics of such writing.

We closed our colloquium with the general impression was that of an emphasis on questions (on poetics, politics, and ethics) related to the critical commitment of this field of studies. We also talked about the negotiation between intellectual interests, academic career opportunities and department expectations for scholars in world literature studies. There was a shared feeling that there is a serious need to approach theory in transdisciplinary and entangled ways avoiding binary thinking, reductionisms and the exoticism that reinforce the very same stereotypes and problematics that world literary studies aim to question and criticize.

I very much hope that future collaborations will emerge from this space of engaging and inspiring discussion, and I am sure that our paths will cross again in the future.

**Dr. Deniz Gündoğan İbrişim**