

IWL - Copenhagen

Politics, Poetics & World Literature 2

Colloquium Group report

Our colloquium group included scholars ranging from undergraduate level to junior faculty positions. Coming from Canada, Colombia, Germany, Hong Kong, Portugal, the United States, and Spain, colloquium members held affiliations with universities from around the world, having previously had academic experiences in a variety of other countries. Sessions were organized so that those further on in their research would present it first.

We met for the first time on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, although we had been in contact via email for several weeks before. That groundwork was particularly helpful, since it allowed us to get quickly on with presentations and discussions once we were in Copenhagen.

We kicked off with my own presentation and suitably for the date, American Studies topics. My paper, titled "Fernando Pessoa's Detective Fiction", sought to present a little known body of work by Portugal's preeminent Modernist poet: his crime stories, featuring detective Abílio Quaresma. These texts, I sought to argue, belonged to a recognizable Anglo-American genre at the time of Pessoa's writing, and I was particularly interested in tracking how Pessoa would adapt it to a Portuguese context using several strategies: incorporation of Portuguese slang, historical and geographical references, and plot points involving the development of secret weapons in the context of the pre World War I arms race.

Marleen Knipping presented a paper titled "'Daily I sit / with the language / they've made // of our language:' World Literature Poetics in the Twenty-First Century", in which she focused on the literary scene in the Midwest. Her paper presented the result of field work that combined sociological approaches to the study of what Marleen dubbed the "ecosystem" of poetry writing, reading and publishing, especially in Minnesota. She was interested in how the poetry scene in the Midwest negotiated local interests with global preoccupations, particularly taking into consideration the changes in the flow and circulation of information in the digital age. One particular angle of her analysis focused on the role of government funding in shaping reading habits and tastes.

This was followed by Max Meinhardt's presentation, "Absorbing the Machine: Hart Crane's Technologic of Metaphor and Poetic Form". Max looked into Hart Crane's "The Bridge", tracing the use of metaphors that drew from the semantic field of machinery and contemporary technology in conveying new structures of meaning. To achieve this, Max drew on Crane's theoretical writings on the "logic of metaphor", complementing them with the author's interest for Alfred Stieglitz's photography. The result was the use of the term "techno-logic of metaphor", used by Max to describe both Crane's understanding of metaphor in more general terms, and his usage of it in "The Bridge".

These first presentations had in common an interest in technology: its representation in fiction; its direct impact in the production of texts; or its

influence in the structure of language. This is a concern that returned on the first presentation of our second colloquium session, held on the 11<sup>th</sup> of July. Paige Miller presented her paper, "Unreadability and World Literature: A Digital Perspective on *Finnegans Wake*", exploring the possibilities of applying to the Joycean text the resources that the digital humanities have made available to critics. Paige was particularly interested on the possibilities opened by digitally reading a text that was originally written to be "unreadable" by any traditional standards of what "reading" may be.

We concluded that day with Daniel Hernandez's paper "Post-human atonement: poetics and politics of pain and death in Fernando Vallejo's *El desbarrancadero*". Daniel introduced us to the work of Vallejo, a Colombian novelist noted for his espousal of polemical political views. The paper focused on how the novel in question moves from a taxonomy of living beings based on biology or language to one based on sensitivity to pain and being subject to death, effectively dislodging traditional understandings of humanity from the center of such cataloguing. The literary representation of animals was a privileged locus to study this process.

Both Paige and Daniel, with their respective focus on technology and animals launched our discussion into the contemporary debate on the meaning and limits of being human, adding another layer to the topics covered in the previous session.

On our third meeting, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of July, we started with Anna Lechintan's "Freedom and Ambiguity: "Musical Variety" in Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel". Anna combined Bakhtin's reading of Crime and Punishment with an interest in existentialist concerns with the theory and practice of personal freedom, both in its theistic (Buber) and atheistic (Beauvoir) strands. For Anna, in Dostoevsky's novel freedom emerges from the possibilities of dialogue and heteroglossia.

We moved then to Karl Gaudyn and his paper "Poet of Poland, Poet of Exile: Milosz in the Postwar Period", where we examined how Milosz's experience of exile in the United States had an impact on the reception of his work, running parallel to his canonization as national poet of Poland in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Karl's argument was that Milosz's poetry is simultaneously perceived as a standard bearer of a cosmopolitan, modernist tradition and as a paradigm of the post-war Polish experience, leading to the author's ambiguous status in contemporary academia: while heralded as a

The final presentation that day was Maria Anna Zazzarino's "The Unpolished Diamond: Édouard Glissant and the Utopian Imagination", which engaged with the tradition of utopian thinking and its focus on striving for a harmonized, static, ideal end, such as can be found in Plato, Augustine and More. As an alternative to that, Maria examined Glissant's dynamic utopianism, which takes as its metaphorical central image the Diamond Rock, a diamond shaped islet directly in front of his home village Martinique, which he recurrently compared to the Île de France, Paris metropolitan area, where he went on to live. Highlighting how utopias are frequently set in islands, Glissant seeks to question the supposed inherent good that classical tradition finds in a perfect society. L'île du Diamant becomes then, in his work, a symbol of potential and hope.

Poetics of exile and the construction of national and cosmopolitan identities were the subject of our ensuing discussion, tying it in with the topics that we were covering in our seminars.

On the 24th July we had our final meeting, in which Mariano Vallejos presented his ongoing masters research on the problem of evil in several twentieth century authors, with special attention being paid to a contemporary Spanish writer, Ricardo Menendez Salmón and the concepts of theodicy and catastrophe.

We concluded this final meeting by having a discussion on our colloquium sessions, both in terms of content and format. We all agreed that their strongest point was the possibility to share your work among peers, without the pressure of a standard academic conference. This led to an informality in our post-presentation debates that, we felt, was particularly conducive to an open exchange of views.

A second very positive aspect of the colloquium was the diversity of backgrounds of those attending it. Whilst we were all interested in literature, our work encompassed different regions, periods, languages and approaches. It was enriching to be able to know more about the research that is being carried in various points of the globe, to step outside our boxes and specialized fields.

During the rest of the IWL members of the group would meet socially and in the seminars. Contacts were exchanged and I have no doubt that they will be maintained for the future.

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