

Institute for World Literature, July 4-28, 2022
Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz
“Production, Circulation and World Literature” Colloquium



Colloquium leader: Dr. Maya Klein, Tel Aviv University

Our colloquium brought together a diverse group of twelve scholars from nine different countries in Europe, South America, the Middle East and the US. The group included scholars at different stages of their research, including PhD candidates, PhD students, and faculty. The atmosphere was warm and the discussions were lively as participants shared their research and insight in a spirit of generosity, curiosity and engagement. We met for four sessions, with each session devoted to different aspects of the production and circulation of world literature.

Our first session, “Rewriting Modernism and Mapping World Literature” was devoted to modernist literature in its various forms and to exploring questions of canonicity, Euro-centrism,

urban modernism, symbolism, and fictional genres. Dana Shahbary (American University of Beirut) opened with a paper titled, “Beyond Eurocentric Modernity: Recovering May Ziade in Comparative Contiguity with Virginia Woolf.” Shahbary’s study is in global modernism, examining modernism in a non-European context and engaging in a scholarly act of feminist recovery. Her case study is of May Ziade, (1886-1941), an Arab modernist activist and writer who in many ways resembles Virginia Woolf, the iconic western figure of modernity. Through the recovery of Ziade, Shahbary argues for re-spatializing the modernist movement and expanding the parameters of modernism beyond Eurocentric notions, as Ziade’s contributions are introduced into new modernist discussions. She offers a rich comparison between Ziade’s *Kalimāt au Ishārāt (Words and Signs)*, which was published in Arabic in 1922 and has not yet been translated into English, and Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1928). In doing so, Shahbary brings into dialogue these women writers, analyzing the mark they made on the literary landscape in relation to global modernism and feminism. Shahbary’s project thus offers a combination of global modernism, feminism, English and Arabic literatures, translation, and postcolonial studies.

Our second presentation was by Irene Beatriz Olalla-Ramírez (University of Granada), titled “The Dead City of Bruges: Urban Modernism in the First Symbolist Novel *Bruges-la-Morte* (1892) by Georges Rodenbach and its Literary, Cinematographic and Opera Rewritings.” Olalla-Ramírez explores symbolism in Rodenbach’s novel, its pioneering use of photography, and its adaptation into other art forms, taking an inter-artistic, intermedial and transmedial perspective. She argues that *Bruges-la-Morte* (1892) generates an “intermedial wealth” within the novel including a special attention to other arts such as theater, opera, photography and especially architecture. Olalla-Ramírez pays particular attention to the importance of the theme

of the dead city which *Bruges-la-Morte* exported to other literatures, and the manner it circulated in Francophone and Hispanic contexts. The city, she claims, acquires a full identity that symbolizes the evil of modernist times, replacing an idealistic past and transforming into an obsessive motif which begins at *Bruges-la-Morte*.

Our last presentation of this panel was by Victor Cobuz (Observator Cultural Foundation), titled “The Rise of Composite Fiction from Cosmopolitan Incentives: The Romanian Case.” Cobuz’s presentation examines composite fiction, and he describes the manner this genre circulates in literary cultures as foreign influences interact with local literary traditions. His case study draws from Romanian literature during the interwar period, examining two works in detail: Panait Istrati’s *Romanul lui Adrian Zografi* [The Novel of Adrian Zografi] and Mihail Sebastian’s *Femei* [Women]. Cobuz argues that the key element in the rise of Romanian composite fiction is the cosmopolitan character of these authors and their works and he attempts to trace the manner in which the transnational elements in these stories emphasize the formal characteristics of the genre and vice versa. Cobuz argues for Panait Istrati and Mihail Sebastian’s composite fiction as “world texts”, exploring the connection between cosmopolitanism and the genre of composite fiction.

In our second session, “Biofiction, Autofiction and Contemporary World Literature” we continued to explore questions of belonging and worldliness, this time examining them through the prism of travel and migration in the context of biofiction and autofiction in contemporary literature. The first presentation was by Martha Swift (Oxford University), titled “The Worldliness of Contemporary Autofiction: The ‘World Risk Society’ and Cosmopolitical Genre in Ruth Ozeki’s Autofictions.” Swift looks at the spatial and temporal interconnection of the

local and the global in the “world risk society”, as theorized by Ulrich Beck. Her case study draws on autofictional works by the contemporary American-Canadian author Ruth Ozeki *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013) and *My Year of Meats* (1998). Swift demonstrates that through the Turtle Gyre in *A Tale for the Time Being*, Ozeki links global flows of writing and risk to suggest a shared experience of crisis as the core of transpacific connection. At the same time, she also argues that the unconventional style and structure of both Ozeki’s autofictions efface rather than affirm authorial control and her literary strategy forges connections separate from the coerced communities imagined under the “world risk society”. Thus Swift sees Ozeki’s autofictional practices as a form of worlding literature, transforming an inescapable sense of global interconnectedness from a minoritizing, deterritorializing experience into an opportunity for lateral, cosmopolitical connection.

Our second presentation was from Gabriela Adamo (University de San Andres), who continued to probe the connection between movement and literature, taking up nomadic subjects and contemporary fiction in her paper, titled “Nomadic Subjects In Three Contemporary Writers From the Southern Cone: Maria Negroni, Lina Meruane and Fernanda Trias.” Adamo examines the characters in the latest novels by Negroni (Argentina), Meruane (Chile) and Trías (Uruguay), who are continuously moving through neighborhoods, cities, and countries. Adamo argues that the nomadic figures –which can sometimes be read as the writers alter egos– do not embody the classic figure of the modernist traveler; they are neither exiles in a Saidian sense nor contemporary migrants depicted in a realistic style. Rather, they are ambiguous and vaguely defined wandering figures that move without having a point of departure or arrival and whose contours are fluid, blurred and permeable. The specific forms in which these subjects traverse territories, navigate diverse temporalities, combine affective with political realities and move

between different languages call into question the way in which we perceive and inhabit the world. The three authors also share a particular point of view which, although fluctuant, is nevertheless defined by a concrete geographical region, the Southern tip of South America. This region has traditionally been perceived as “far from everything” and almost “falling off the map”. Adamo draws from philosophy and literary theory –both global and Latin American– offering a reading of these texts as a challenge to current conceptions of the world and opening up other possibilities for inhabiting it.

Our third presentation was by Sara Kišević (University of Bern), titled “Display of the Concept of Unbelonging in Contemporary Literature: Cosmopolitan Imagery.” Kišević takes a work by contemporary author Gayatri Sethi titled *Unbelonging* (2021) as her case study. In this mixed-genre work, Sethi explores the human need to belong, how unbelonging manifests itself, the spheres of life it influences, and, as Kišević argues, also imagines new possibilities for being and (un)belonging. The author is interested in the connections with other humans that form us, that affect our perceptions of ourselves, our roots, ancestry, and our home, as well as the categorizations we experience and how they differ from our own individual sense of being and belonging. Kišević’s study aims to contribute to a better understanding of unbelonging through an analysis of its occurrences and examples in contemporary literature. In particular, Kišević focuses on unbelonging in relation to cosmopolitan imagery. In order to question cosmopolitan discourses, Sethi’s blend of poetry and prose will be intertwined with models and concepts that try to capture globalizing people, communities, pathways, construction and circulation of different subjectivities, with a special focus on those who stand outside the situated boundaries.

Our third meeting, titled Production, Translation and “the Event” of World Literature” was diverse in terms of subject matter and the research methodologies employed by each speaker, however, the presentations related to the production of literature, whether by examining a physical archive, the role of the internet, or the staging of an “event” of a minor literature. The first presentation was by Frank Newton (Johannes Gutenberg University), titled “Native American Newspapers and Magazines, 1887-1934”. Newton’s project focuses on archival recovery, and aims to provide a representative overview of Native American periodicals in a time period in which Indigenous peoples, despite the repressive U.S. settler-colonial politics, established modern modes of editorship, print, and journalistic entrepreneurship that “modernized Indianness” and helped facilitate Indigenous notions of being-in-time and becoming. Newton sees Native American periodicals as a crucial part of North American Indigenous print culture and modern media. He examines both well-known and under-researched Native American periodicals and related documents in order to highlight the periodical as the subject matter. His approach views periodicals as non-fiction literature, and aims to show how Indigenous populations made use of modernized forms of serialized media in order to participate on a local, regional, and global stage.

The second presentation was by Maya Klein (Tel Aviv University) titled, “My Daughter Éva”: A Story of Translation, Paratext and Digital Communication.” Klein’s case study is the Holocaust diary of a young Hungarian-Jewish girl, Éva Heyman, originally published in Hungarian titled *Éva Lanyom* (My daughter Éva) in 1947. The subsequent publication of the diary in translation involves a highly divergent paratextual framing, changing both author name and title. As argued, this profound change was greatly influenced by the success of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, a work with which it is often compared, but whose effect has been overlooked. In

2019, the diary was adapted to “Eva.Stories,” an Instagram project designed to commemorate the Holocaust, an intersemiotic (visual) adaptation to the digital humanities that participates in what Marianne Hirsch has termed postmemory’s “archival turn,” and raises issues particular to online commemoration of the Holocaust. Klein explores the diary’s adaptation to visual form and its reissuing in translation, navigating thorny issues of authenticity, ethics and voice in Holocaust commemoration. Her aim is to examine not only the key role that translation has had in shaping cultural memory and Holocaust representation, but also vice versa—the manner in which familiar Holocaust narratives can impact translation and effect paratextual changes to the extent that they alter the understanding and reception of a Holocaust diary. This case study invites further inquiry into the production and circulation of memory narratives in the digital sphere and the inevitable ethical issues they raise such as authenticity, commodification and the ethics of representation.

Our last presentation in this session was by Jaeyeon Jeon (UCSB), titled “Korea in World Literature: A French Man Under the Sky of Seoul.” His case study is French writer and Nobel Laureate Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio’s novel *Bitna: Under the Sky of Seoul* (2017), which was commissioned by the city of Seoul. *Bitna* claims Jeon, is a well-calculated governmental strategy that reflects the contemporary center/periphery paradigm in World literature. Jeon employs this literary “event” as a method to gauge Korea’s particular situatedness within World Literature. He traces the novel’s genealogy in the French travelog tradition, which recalls Edward Said’s critique of Orientalism on one hand, but the fact that Le Clézio was commissioned by Korea also complicates Said’s critique, claims Jeon. The Orientalist’s “power to observe” was facilitated by the Orient, therefore the Orient’s inherent passivity assumed by the West for the West is put into question. Rather, understanding the novel as the Orient’s clever

rendition of the center/periphery paradigm in World Literature, Jeon's presentation questions the extent that "latent Orientalism" (Sabry Hafez) or "Anglicism-Orientalism" (Aamir Mufti), which Saidian scholars argue influence today's World Literature, can be applied to understanding Korea's status as "minor literature." Jeon also discusses how Korea as the "Other" engages differently in breaching Eurocentrism when not sharing European colonial history, and given that Saidian ethics discourage complete rejection, he demonstrates what *Bitna* can offer, inversely, to the Saidian scholars' undoing of Orientalism in World Literature.

Our final panel, titled "Comparative Accounts of Early World Literature and Beyond" focused on comparative accounts, opening with explorations of 12th and 14th century manuscripts, continued with rewritings of an ancient Greek novel, and closed with an account of a recurring sound (the cicada) within world literature. The first presentation was by Camilla Sousa (University of Lisbon), titled "The Panther: From the Aberdeen Bestiary to the Orto do Esposo." Sousa analyzes representations of the figure of the panther as they appear in selected medieval works. She draws from the 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 conducts her analysis by undertaking a brief study of the origin and evolution of the Bestiary, analyzing its structure and content as well. A summary of the books that form the Orto do Esposo is followed by an analysis of the panther and its symbolic meaning. Sousa contextualizes the corpus by noting the role of knowledge about animals at a time when the world was conceived as a book written by God, a world in which creatures (including animals) manifest themselves as divine Creation, will be fundamental to contextualize the corpus. Lastly, Sousa presents a comparative reading of the panther, based on the two sources.

The second presentation was by Maria Dabija (Harvard University), titled “World Literature as a Map of Misreading- Case Study: The Variations of *Daphnis and Chloe* by Longus”. Dabija analyses several rewritings of the ancient Greek novel *Daphnis and Chloe* that span over half a century, while also considering Longus’s sources of inspiration, which can be traced to the Bible. She brings into dialogue Boris Vian’s *L’Écume des jours*, Yukio Mishima’s *The Sound of Waves*, Gheorghe Crăciun’s *Compunere cu paralele inegale* (Composition on Unequal Parallels), and Mikhail Shishkin’s *Венерин Волос* (Maidenhair). Dabija’s comparative analysis is aimed to both study the cross-cultural adaptations of Longus’s novel in the modern context and highlight a range of theoretical takes on the concept of rewriting. She builds on the works of Richard Dawkins, Linda Hutcheon, Didier Coste, Matei Călinescu, André Lefevere, and Harold Bloom, from whose seminal book *A Map of Misreading* she took the title of her presentation. She argues for the centrality of rewriting as one of the most important mechanisms in the production and circulation of world literature.

Our final presentation of the panel, which also concluded the colloquium, was by John Schranck (UCSB), titled “Hearing the Cicada: an Eco-acoustic Approach to World Literature.” Schrank’s study examines the literary significance of the cicada insect, treating it as a phenomenon of world literature. Schranck traces the responses to the cicada within a wide range of literary traditions, as poets, philosophers and artists have written about its call, from Plato’s Greece to Boccaccio’s Italy, Aïcard’s Provence, Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha, from the poetry of the Han and Tang Dynasties in China to Shikibu’s *The Tale of Genji* in Japan. Schranck’s comparative analysis includes instances of direct intertextual influence between cicada accounts in various literatures while also considering cases where no such influence is evident. Within both categories, he finds that on the one hand that the sound of the cicada is inflected by the

culture that hears it, while on the other, there nevertheless emerge transcultural, diachronic commonalities in how the cicada is recorded and mythologized. Its piercing trill, its seasonal and generational (re)appearances and its beguiling physiology produce a range of similar “disquieting” effects. His methodology entails taking an eco-acoustic slant to world literature via the cicada suggesting one approach to world literature. At the same time, by comparing the configurations of this “insect singer” Schranck’s project aims to show how world literature can offer a phenomenology of eco-acoustics that has implications beyond the literary.

Concluding Remarks:

During our four meetings, the colloquium covered a wide range of topics surrounding the production and circulation of literature. The archive, genre, visual elements of literary works, migration, globalization as well as the aural aspect of world literature were just some of the issues we discussed, as we shared our different methodologies and approaches to the chosen corpus. On a personal note, it was a pleasure to coordinate this colloquium and benefit from the comments and discussions that took place in our meetings.