

The Institute for World Literature
Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz
July 4-28, 2022

“Sociology and World Literature” Colloquium

Participants: Alshawi Ali Jebal Shukheimet, Carolin Jesussek, Ayse Irem Karabag, Hannah Klaubert, Ioana Moroşan, Snejana Ung, Xingming Wang.

Colloquium leader: Dr. Snejana Ung, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu



The colloquium “Sociology and World Literature” brought together seven PhD students from different universities around the world. Due to the diversity of proposals, each of the four meetings aimed to revolve around a common topic, such as environmental humanities, queer writing, sociology of literature. Each panel consisted of two speakers, who had to present their research in 20 minutes, followed by a five-minute comment by the assigned respondent, after which the floor was opened to discussions. Having fewer speakers per panel led to fruitful discussions. Each participant had the chance to involve actively in the colloquium by asking questions, bringing comments and recommend theoretical works.

July 8: Environmental Humanities and World Literature

Our first session revolved around the topic of environmental crises. The two crises addressed in this session were the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Hannah Klaubert (Stockholm University & Graduate Center for the Study of Culture, Gießen) started the first session with a presentation titled **“Beyond an Environmental Hermeneutics of Suspicion: The ‘Babushkas of Chernobyl’ as Ambiguous Carriers of Hazardous Hope”**, a presentation well anchored in the debates about the “hopeful turn” in environmental humanities. The Zone of Exclusion was the core contaminated environment scrutinized here. By focusing on different narratives – the documentary *The Babushkas of Chernobyl*, Alina Brodsky’s book *Baba Dunja letze Liebe* and a photo project – Klaubert addressed the issue of hazardous hope. Another issue addressed in this presentation was Babushkas’ ‘spinsterliness’ and how their depiction allows for a future-oriented rhetoric of environmental humanities. Some of the questions asked by the participants focused on the way in which the Babushkas are represented in the documentary.

Xingming Wang (Rutgers University) discussed Fang Fang’s *Wuhan Diary* in a presentation titled **“Wuhan Diary and Risk Communication: World Literature in Pandemic”**. Wang’s presentation focused on the diary as a polyphonic field of communication and insisted on several issues that such a work can raise to world literature studies in a pandemic context. These issues span from reading and reception, censorship and circulation, publication and translation. As stated in the title, risk communication was one of the main concepts discussed during the presentation. Wang showed that risk communication and its controversial nature regards both the work and its later circulation. Two of the questions addressed during the discussions regarded the issue of human vulnerability in the face of non-human threats and the role of social media in the production and circulation of literature, especially in a digital age and/or a pandemic context.

July 15: Production, Circulation, and the Role of Literary Agents

The second session included only one presentation. **Snejana Ung** (Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu) talked about the circulation of a specific corpus of texts in her presentation titled **“Translating Literature about Former Yugoslavia into Romanian: The Role of Literary Prizes and Festivals”**. Following a brief presentation of the quantitative data (how much was translated, from what languages etc.), Ung discussed literary prizes and festivals as two ways to access the Romanian book market. As shown in her presentation, starting from 2008, literary festivals have played a significant role in the translation of such texts while literary prizes have had a rather declining influence. Most of the questions asked by the participants revolved around the contextual background (i.e., Romanian book market and culture).

July 22: Expansive Representation in Queer Writing

The nodal point of our third session was represented by queer writing. The two presentations diverged into two sub-topics: the unspeakable in the queer relationships and the immigration issue.

Carolin Jesussek (Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz) presented a paper titled “**‘You’re Not Allowed to Write about this’: Carmen Maria Machado’s *In the Dream House* (2019) and its Place in the Archive of the Unspeakable**”, in which she examined multiple examples of the unspeakable and silencing. Jesussek’s focus was on the queer abusive relationship as it is represented in Machado’s memoir. The analysis inscribed the memoir in the framework of the Gothic by making use of the haunted house as a tool to examine this abusive relationship. The discussions focused on various issues, ranging from the contextualization of the story within a wider archive of works both literary and theoretical to the literary circulation and appropriation of the Gothic.

Ayse Irem Karabag (York University) presented a paper titled “**Establishing Queer Belonging Transnationally in Nicole Dennis Benn’s *Patsy* (2019) and Samra Habib’s *We Have Always Been Here* (2019)**”, in which she tackled the issue of queer migration. Karabag brought to the fore and challenged the hetero-patriarchal gender roles that have been reproduced by the immigration control system. After the dissociation of these queer migration experiences from the heteronormative citizenship, Karabag identified and discussed multiple possible homing practices of queer immigrants. The discussions addressed the notion of comparability and the relation between queer immigrant and world literature, especially the geographical discrepancies of these migration experiences.

July 26: Writing and Writers: Historical, Literary and Sociological Encounters

In the last week we shifted to two rather different presentations: one concerned with the professionalization of Romanian women writers during the first half of the twentieth century, the other with post-9/11 literature.

Ioana Moroşan (University of Bucharest) presented a paper on “**Romanian Women Writers and the Literary Profession During the First Half of the 20th Century: Exclusion, Feminisation and the Professionalisation of Writing**”. Moroşan followed the evolution of the writing profession in the case of Romanian women writers. Her analysis was based on three inter-related methodological frameworks, namely the sociology of profession, sociology of gender and Pierre Bourdieu’s field

theory. She emphasized the struggle of women writers in a field dominated by male writers. Several questions represented the beginning of a fruitful discussion: What strategies did women writers find to overcome this power dynamics? How did the war affect their struggle?

Alshawi Ali Jebal Shukheimet (Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz) was the last presenter in our colloquium. The title of his presentation was “**The Image of Arab/Muslim Character as a Terrorist**” and it was focused on the way in which the terrorist is represented in three novels: Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man*, John Updike’s *Terrorist* and Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. One main focus of his presentation was the importance of the context of the stories. The discussions revolved around the theoretical and methodological frameworks that can be deployed in this research project.

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