

The 5th Institute for World Literature
University of Lisbon, 22 June – 17 July 2015

Affinity Group Report: World Literature and Circulation



Pictured: Diana Sanz Roig, Cecily Colleen Raynor, Pelin Kivrak, Jamie Helene Trnka, Vera Katharina Kostial, Ali Bereket, Daniel Behar

Not Pictured: Thirthankar Chakraborty, Wagner da Conceicao Trindade, Michal Ginsburg, Cesar Lima, Anastasiya Lyubas, Miranda McLeod, Nilay Kaya, Wenjun Zhu

Our affinity group included four faculty members, two postdoctoral fellows, and ten graduate students representing institutions from eight countries. We met eight times during the four-week institute, with seven sessions devoted to participant presentations and discussion and a final session to more general reflections on the utility of circulation as a critical term across widely divergent projects. All participants were asked to circulate papers at least a week in advance of the first session, presenting brief contextualizing remarks and articulating the paper with the topic of world literature and circulation rather than reading the paper itself. Participants also each took a turn serving as a formal respondent to a paper before a more general discussion. We were able to assign two papers per session on most days, and three papers on two other days, allowing ample time for discussion. Types of papers presented included seminar papers, draft conference papers, rough drafts of dissertation chapters, notes toward dissertation proposals, abridged lectures, published articles, and book proposals.

We approached the theme of circulation from a broad range of perspectives, including case studies of adaptation, reception, intertextuality, and influence; the sociology of translation and the place of digital media in new networks of circulation; multilingualism and movement across spaces physical and cultural; and the circulation of literary programs and literary historical figures. Papers were presented alphabetically and respondents assigned reverse alphabetically.

Several participants noted that they would have preferred respondents be assigned based on area of expertise; however, this would require that all participants comply with the request that papers be submitted well in advance of the institute for careful review by the group leader. One advantage of assigning respondents at random was a greater attention to the structure of arguments, to questions of method and terminology, and to how each paper related to the common theme of circulation.

Daniel Behar (Harvard University) traced the poetic career of Syrian poet Saleh Diab with attention to both broader shifts in literary production in twentieth-century Arabic literature's reception of world literatures and critical paradigms, and to more intimate instances of "the private circulation of thoughts, feelings and images of a poetic mind." Approaching Diab's poetry in dialogue with the poems of U.S. American poet Raymond Carver in French translation provided one example of poetic interaction and experimentation not easily captured by logics of imitation. **Ali Bereket** (Qafquaz University) presented an overview of his research on the role of British Orientalists in the study of Islamic culture, proposing to pursue an ambitious range of topics and nineteenth-century texts. Discussion focused on how to clarify the geographical area under analysis and how his specific linguistic competencies might allow him to advance alternate understandings of Orientalism that have emerged since Said's path breaking work. **Thirthankar Chakraborty** (University of Kent) pursued the remarkable inroads made by Samuel Beckett's work into Indian film and literatures across regions and linguistic traditions. His work explored Beckett's appeal to Indian writers working in a variety of genres in light of a post-independence and post-partition need for national cultural consolidation and recognition, and of Beckett's own "correlations with Indian culture, philosophy, and religion," through his specific references to India. **Zhu Wenjun** (Fudan University), too, demonstrated that Beckett's texts travel well in translation and adaptation, this time to mainland China. She shows that while Chinese reception of Beckett was relatively late, he has had a profound influence on recent Chinese theatre. Careful attention to adaptations' strategic changes of setting and their variety of innovative staging practices show that Beckett's texts offer a compelling material base for creative world literary encounters. Discussion identified potentially fruitful, regional comparative research into Beckett's reception in Taiwan and mainland China as a way of gauging the specific political and cultural valence of a theater of the absurd in these distinct national contexts. **Michal Ginsburg** (Northwestern University) shared an English-language version of "Madame Bovary in Jerusalem," an essay previously published in Hebrew. Her analysis of works by Amos Oz in dialogue with *Madame Bovary* reveals as much about Flaubert as about the Israeli author, allowing her to draw out their different understandings of otherness and the relation of each author to his female character. She thereby demonstrates the complexity of Oz's choice of literary interlocutor as he engages not only or even primarily with tropes, character constellations, or plot contours, but also with fundamental questions of authorship and subjectivity. **Cecily Colleen Raynor** (McGill University) offered a series of "distant readings" (Moretti) of two major digital publishing initiatives and their complex dialogues with print literature, posing questions about how the internet illuminates the changing relationship between authors and readers, and posing critical questions about the extent to which on-line spaces can in fact be considered transnational insofar as we continue to navigate them through the confines of national internet policy. Digital mapping tools, traffic patterns, and statistical analysis of word

frequencies allowed her to identify and visualize a variety of patterns in author-reader interactions constitutive for the circulation of digital texts. **Vera Katharina Kostial** (Universität Göttingen) examined how Shakespeare's *Hamlet* circulated in and through Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, ultimately pointing to its "return" to Great Britain via Thomas Carlyle's translation of Goethe's novel. Specific attention to the relation of theatre to reality, the role of fate, coincidence, and the potential for human action, and the generic transformation of dramatic motifs into the artist's novel as a sub-genre of the *Bildungsroman* laid the ground for future work on German Romanticism. **Cesar Lima** (Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro) explored circulation on the highly localized terrain of Brazilian author correspondence. He argued that the epistolary dialogue of Carlos Drummond de Andrade and Mário de Andrade represents an important site for the constitution of national literary identities in critical opposition to a tradition of French literary influence during the early years of Brazilian Modernism in the 1920s. **Nilay Kaya** (Istanbul Bilgi University) presented an overview of her proposed dissertation on ekphrasis in Evliyâ Çelebi's ten-volume *Book of Travels*. The seventeenth-century Ottoman travel writer combined a number of narrative techniques, offering a unique Muslim perspective on the empire and an unusual example of prose writing at a moment still shaped by a taboo on descriptive writing and, consequently, dominated by poetry. In addition to his physical movement through the empire, Çelebi's writings themselves circulated extensively in translation after their discovery in the nineteenth century. **Anastasiya Lyubas** (Binghamton University) described and analyzed the transnational and polylingual poetics of Bruno Schulz and Yoko Tawada. Through her comparison of the strategies each author uses to make multilingualism visible and to trouble any conventional notion of "home" as they explore travel, myth, and bodily metamorphoses, she identifies key differences in the authors' respective linguistic, historical, and political contexts for writing and reception even as she identifies common commitments to narrate alternative and surreal experiences of capitalist modernity. **Miranda McLeod** (Rutgers University) shared a piece of her dissertation research on literatures of migration in the Americas, which aims to unite too-often separately conceived literatures of inter- and intranational migration. Her paper analyzed a historical antecedent to the contemporary texts she plans to explore, Hans Sloane's *A Voyage to [...] Jamaica*, a travel narrative and collection of medical case studies from the seventeenth century. **Pelin Kivrak** (Yale University) presented her work on the dual circulation of material from *The 1001 Nights* and the circulation of the book as an object in Borges' short story "El Sur." She concludes that "the fact that the materiality of the book as an object always precedes any allusions to its content manifests that Borges' Orient is mostly textual – an experience that is derived from his literary wanderings," thereby identifying the key role circulation plays in both creative and critical processes that underwrite our understandings of world literature over time, here in the eighteenth-century circulation of the tales that came to be referred to as *The Arabian Nights* and in twentieth-century meditations thereon. **Wagner Da Conceicao Trindade** (Universidade Federal Fluminense) traced the adoption of the Spanish *pícaro* figure in two novels by Jorge Amado. His character-centered readings posed questions about the relation of seeing, being, and transformation. Discussion focused on how the question of circulation could be radically expanded with more attention to antecedent traditions, notably the important influence on the Arabic *makama* on the picaresque, and even the relation of the urban Brazilian figure of the

malandro to regionally inflected *pícaros*. **Diana Sanz Roig** (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven) presented her book proposal, *Mapping Global Translation Flows: Literature across Boundaries*. Her work makes important contributions to the study of translation as a social practice, and explores a range of economic, cultural, political, and religious factors that shape the flow of translations across boundaries via specific case studies. The book will also stress the role of agents and agencies (national institutes, book fairs, and literary and translation prizes) and will offer an important contextualizing survey of past theoretical models for the study of literary translation circulation, placing them in dialogue with current approaches shaped by cultural and global studies. **Jamie Helene Trnka** (University of Scranton) presented her work on the relation of literary exile to world literary circulation, exploring the case of Carlos Cerda, who recasts canonical German literary texts in his post-exile Chile. She pursues critical questions about how exilic writing actively undertakes world literary pursuits of reading and thinking national literatures relationally, and how it engages in acts of deliberate translation and resemanticization to reconcile multiple lives in multiple locales, in this case Cerda's life in East German exile and in *concertación*-era Chile.

Our concluding discussion focused on a series of broad critical and methodological questions about circulation as it emerged in the various projects described above. These included: What is meant by circulation? What critical advantage does it offer over other terms or categories? How does it operate differently on different scales (e.g. spatial scales of world, region, language domain, or nation, and on a variety of temporal scales)?

In seeking to answer these questions, we explored how and why the term "influence" so frequently emerged in the projects presented, and what advantage circulation might offer. In large part, we believe that the prominence of influence as a term of analysis, despite its imprecision, is largely related to dominant literary historical paradigms that seek to chart genealogies of individual authors and works. These models tend to privilege a linear narrative of literary history as a succession of formal innovations, narratives which often fail to account for regionally distinct patterns of change over time. (Jean Franco's mid-century account of how Latin American literature does not conform to this European model served as one concrete touchstone in our discussion.) How, then, might projects concerned with circulation draw more effectively on developments in contemporary historiography and the social sciences in order to account for asynchronous practices of reception and translation? How might alternate concepts of periodization be conceived through more careful study of circulation?

In addition to the temporal dimensions at play in reconceiving influence in terms of dynamic networks of reception, questions of scale in world literary projects require further attention. We differentiated between a number of scales present in our own projects, each of which would require careful methodological differentiation from the others: the small scale of intimate circulation in the form of authorial correspondence (Lima) or the culture of literary cafés and clubs (Behar); the transatlantic movements of emigres and exiles (Trnka); the global scale of translation flows (Sanz Roig); and the scales that accompany the compressed space of digital communications among transnational language communities (Raynor) each require a different type of approach even as all of them are concerned with questions of circulation

broadly conceived. Nirvana Tanoukhi's 2008 essay on "The Scale of World Literature" and the potentially important contributions of geographers to our theorizations of the world provided an additional touchstone for this discussion.

Translation as a critical practice and as a mode of reading will also be crucial to our future work on the question of circulation. Several participants emphasized that more attention is necessary to the translation of criticism as well as of literary works.

We also discussed the challenges of translating "circulation" as a critical term, considering the possible differences implied by a range of translations into different European languages.

Participants expressed interest in proposing one or more ACLA panels, either on circulation or on some of the sub-constellations that emerged within the affinity group. We will continue to use the group spaces mailing list to organize and draft proposals. In addition to the mailing list, a number of participants expressed interest in developing a virtual workshop, perhaps using a google page and google hangouts to share and discuss on-going work related to world literature and circulation with engaged non-specialists from the group. Indeed, many participants remarked on the value of receiving feedback from colleagues in a broader range of fields than may be typical in their home departments or conferences organized along the lines of area studies or national literatures.

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Select Comments from participants:

"I tremendously enjoyed our affinity group on 'World Literature and Circulation.' The things that I found contributed to the success of the group were its structure, preparedness and commitment on the part of the participants and the group leader, and the work projects themselves as shared by my colleagues. I appreciated the diversity of the topics and papers (some were papers or articles, others conference talks or book projects), and their distribution in terms of presentations. [...] Many of my fellow affinity group participants were in the same seminars with me, and I must say it was a great experience to see them in a variety of settings, with different degrees of formality, and interact on multiple subjects. The affinity group provided a

chance to talk about my work in a less intimidating atmosphere, with colleagues who are both starting their PhD careers and the more experienced faculty.

“I believe that as a group we were doing well on readings and in terms of involvement in discussion. I think contributions showed a level of commitment and care. This was also due to the commitment and care shown by our group leader who was a very professional and effective moderator, organizer and an excellent conversant on the subject. We reflected on topics of national literary traditions, polysystems, translations vs. original works, sociology of translation, cultural and intellectual histories, literary influences and chance encounters, and thinking world literature in circulation in many other ways. The format of two papers per affinity group allowed thorough discussion of the papers themselves as well as implications for broader disciplinary and interdisciplinary frameworks where the works fit.”

--Anastasiya Lyubas (Ph.D. student, Binghamton University)

“Our affinity group worked very well, with some people who were very engaged in the discussion and who made critical comments on everyone's research. I liked very much the way [the leader] conducted the whole discussion and established the dynamic of the affinity group. [She] also contributed a lot with comments and suggestions, in most cases helping to introduce broader issues.

“I liked that the affinity group had an outcome, in the form of a panel for the ACLA or other projects we mentioned. I really hope to be in touch and to share more interesting discussions in the following months.”

--Diana Sanz Roig (Postdoctoral Fellow, KU Leuven)

“I saw the group meetings as a great supplement to the seminars as the overall topic was much less specific than the seminars' topics and therefore one got insights into projects of all different kinds. [...] Organizing the presenters and respondents into pairs was a really fruitful and efficient way of doing it. For my own paper I got very helpful feedback, which will definitely be included in further work on it.”

---Vera Katharina Kostial (M.A. student, University of Göttingen)

“It's hard to think of something that would have improved the sessions of our affinity group. The key thing that made it work, I think, is the insistence that people not read their texts but pre-circulate and then talk in a loose way. That worked really well and I think all affinity groups should do this.”

--Daniel Behar (Ph.D. student, Harvard University)

“Our affinity group on Circulation and World Literature addressed various intriguing topics ranging from literary translation to travel writing and from theories of adaptation to analysis of digital circulation. While we mostly discussed articles and speech drafts we also looked at

different types of academic writing done by seminar participants such as book proposals, data analysis and archival research papers. Our affinity group would not be as successful as it was without our discussion leader's contributions. In addition to encouraging each participant to respond to another's academic work, Jamie also commented on each and every paper presented in our group and her responses were always very helpful and constructive. She also did a terrific job with the organization and time management, leaving us a final meeting slot to discuss possible further projects that could come out of this group."

--Pelin Kivrak (Ph.D. student, Yale University)

"The 'World Literature and Circulation' affinity group was a great success in terms of active participation and the range of ongoing researches presented from several countries around the world. We had a wide variety of topics ranging from different languages and time periods, and we shared several approaches to literature as part of our discussion; for instance, close-reading, cultural, sociological, translation studies, digital humanities, questions of genre, and more. Our responses to the papers were equally varied and often added the valuable input from a non-specialist's point of view, which often lent to the projects' argument, scope and outcome. All these put together made the meetings increasingly multifaceted and highly informative and enjoyable, while simultaneously held together by the concept of circulation in the world of literature."

- Thirthankar Chakraborty (Ph.D. Student, University of Kent)

"Participation in our Affinity Group on Literary Circulation was one of the most enriching components of the IWL 2015 session for me as a junior faculty member. The group's format, meeting biweekly and including presentations with corresponding respondents, was highly effective. The diversity of our research was an asset in this group rather than an obstacle, as we were able to engage the topic of circulation from many different angles. Our group's leadership by Professor Trnka was fundamental to this task, as she consistently returned us to the core themes on circulation, helping to synthesize and form connections on topics that spanned the literary globe. In future Affinity Groups at the IWL, I would suggest a format of presenter and respondent, as the pre-circulation of the group's texts and formal feedback was critical to our success."

-- Cecily Colleen Raynor (Asst. Prof., McGill University)