

Participant's Report

IX Institute for World Literature Harvard University, 1-25 July 2019

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This year's summer school, the 9th edition of the Institute for World Literature, took place at Harvard University from 1 to 25 July 2019. I was able to participate in the summer school thanks to the generous support of the Faculty of Languages and Literature and the International Relations Office of the University of Innsbruck, Austria.

I. Seminars

The core part of the IWL programme is formed by seminars that are led by internationally renowned researchers in literary, cultural, and social studies over a course of two weeks each. The seminars offered at the 9th edition of IWL covered questions revolving around the relationship between world literature and the Anthropocene or the spatial turn, key topics in world literature studies, such as translation/translatability, cosmopolitanism, or globalization, as well as the works of particular authors such as Jorge Luis Borges. For the first two weeks I attended the seminar "World Literature between Historical and New Materialism", led by Héctor Hoyos (Stanford). After an introduction to historical materialism and Marxist theory, the seminar examined new materialist approaches and ended by sketching a 'third' position between historical and new materialisms, which Hoyos terms 'transcultural materialism' in his current book. In the subsequent two weeks I took part in Verena Conley's (Harvard) seminar on "Environmental Humanities and New Materialisms", which also dealt with new materialisms while shifting the critical perspective towards ecological and ecocritical concerns.

The seminars enable participants to benefit from carefully collated readings, the expert input of established researchers, and to join an informed and lively discussion with early-career researchers from diverse disciplines and institutions across the globe. What I perceived to be especially rewarding was the fact that Prof. Hoyos shared insights into his current research project with us and offered up his own hypotheses for critical discussion. His seminar inspired thorough investigations of materialist approaches, which sparked ideas for my own research but also led to an ongoing discussion of 'flat ontologies' and 'material entanglements' among participants, which is currently still pulsating across digital communications channels.

II. Colloquium Groups

The second interactive platform of IWL consists of colloquia on broader themes related to world literature that bring together groups of approx. 15 early-career researchers to present and discuss their own research projects and receive some feedback. At the Harvard summer

school I took on the role of leading the colloquium group "Politics, Poetics and World Literature IV". Before the start of the summer school the colloquium leadership involved asking participants to circulate abstracts of their presentations, assigning respondents for each paper, and organizing a schedule for the sessions. During the summer school I was responsible for leading the sessions and moderating the discussions. I had grouped the proposed papers around four broader themes, each to be covered in one session. The first section, "Poetry & Metaphor", aimed at bringing together scholars whose work addresses historically and geographically distinct poetics and/or examines foundational metaphors. The second session revolved around genre: "World Literature and the Question(s) of Genre" conjoined projects that revise or adapt existing classifications or question the way in which generic categories are translated from dominant into more marginalized literary arenas (or vice versa). The third section, "Nineteenth-Century Contexts & Victorian 'Ingredients'", offered itself up almost naturally due to the participants' concentrated interest in diverse nineteenth-century literatures or correspondences. The final session was designed to proceed chronologically into the twentieth century and trace the (dis)continuities of philosophical and literary tendencies beyond 1945 as well as encompass more recent pop-cultural phenomena.

Our colloquium group brought together researchers from undergraduate to postdoc levels, whose projects span geographical contexts ranging from the United States via Europe, Turkey, Israel, Iran, India, Thailand, and China to Australia, from early modern treatises to novels published in the last few years. The real benefit of this format – and the larger merit of IWL, more generally – appeared to lie precisely in this eclecticism. As the critical conversations we normally engage in – be that within our faculties or at international conferences – tend to stay within the perimeters of a geographically and/or historically circumscribed field, our engagement with each other's work in the context of this colloquium group unearthed common concerns, contradictions, and shared contexts between literatures that are rarely considered in proximity. Working in and from diverse locales, our writing is nevertheless guided by strikingly similar considerations regarding adaptation, translation, translatability, ownership, originality, and the conceptual metaphors that we use and study.

III. Plenary Lectures and Panels

The third and fourth column of the programme is formed by plenary lectures and panels that bring together all IWL participants and faculty, and which take place on several afternoons over the four weeks. The opening speech at the 9th IWL was held by Director David Damrosch. In addition to plenary talks by the IWL faculty and panels on publishing or a library session, there was also a guest lecture by the distinguished postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha and a panel discussion with the writer Robert Coover.

The plenary lectures and panel sessions presented an excellent opportunity to gain insights into the research being carried out by members of the IWL faculty and to get together as a larger group on several days of the week. There was always a Q&A session after the talks, and the campus museum in which the sessions took place allowed for a stimulating atmosphere that facilitated conversations with IWL participants and course instructors outside the main programme.

IV. Further Aspects of the Programme

Beyond the scientific aspects of IWL, the team surrounding Assistant Director Delia Ungureanu also invited participants out on extra-curricular outings to Manchester by the Sea, to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, or on a traditional Bostonian dinner cruise. For the entire duration of IWL, participants were also given access to all Harvard libraries, which involved use of the reading rooms, the databases, as well as copy and scanning facilities. This enabled participants to pursue their own research projects and profit from the extensive holdings and electronic databases of the Harvard libraries.

The participation in the 9th Institute for World Literature and the research opportunities I was given at Harvard University have benefitted my own research immensely, and I have left Boston with a lasting impression of many inspiring dialogues and intriguing research questions. I would like to thank the Faculty of Languages and Literature and the International Relations Office of the University of Innsbruck, Austria, for their kind support, and the IWL board and faculty for promoting such a stimulating exchange across disciplinary and geographical borders.