

The Institute for World Literature
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Politics, Poetics, and World Literature (II)

Participants: Gao Chen, Costas Gisella, Formosa Deppman, Kaya Hunter, Francisco Marques Martins, Oluwapelumi Olufolajimi, Mathias Overgaard, Mona Rahimpour, Amândio Reis, Tarushi Sonthalia, Wendy (Xiaoxue) Sun, Anna Tabouratzidis, Chenghe Yao, Wei Yu

Colloquium leader: Dr. Anna Sophia Tabouratzidis, Justus-Liebig University Giessen



The colloquium “Politics, Poetics, and World Literature (II)” brought together 14 participants from China, Spain, Portugal, the US, Australia, Germany, and Denmark who each presented a current project. During the course of our four meetings which revolved around common themes, four to three participants presented their research in 15 minutes, followed by a five-minute response by a fellow participant. The discussion was then opened to the plenum and all participants were welcome to provide suggestions, further questions, and literature recommendations.

July 6: Speculative World Literatures

The first session's common themes were the speculative fictions the presenters explored, their hopeful (if not utopian) outlook, and the focus on natural environments. **Kaya Hunter** (Simon Fraser University) kicked us off with a presentation entitled "**Emerging 'Ecotopias': Optimistic Futures in Decolonial Speculative Fiction,**" outlining her research on solarpunk, its different currents, and her engagement with this emergent literary genre from an ecofeminist perspective which focuses strongly on human-food relationships. Similarly speculative are the contemporary literary texts **Mona Rahimpour** (University of Melbourne) dealt with. She read Ling Ma's debut novel *Severance* as exemplifying the aesthetics of doom as an "ordinary affect". Inspired by Lauren Berlant's conception of "crisis ordinariness" and Kathleen Stewart's "Ordinary affect", she conceptualized doom ordinary as an affect that registers one's implication in the constantly generating pressure of adapting to acute disruptions to the extent that living through the End almost feels like an ordinary experience of the present. **Gisella Costa's** (University of Santiago de Compostela) research on "**Ruin and Loss of the Natural World in two Poems by Rosalía de Castro**" tied in with the affective sense of doom previously addressed but redirected the discussion to modern Galician literature and the reciprocal relation between landscape and collective identity. Reading the image of the ruin as an allegory of the sociopolitical transitions under way at the end of the 19th century in the place-based poetry of de Castro, Costas argues that the destroyed forest becomes a space of negotiation of both the collective imagination and identity of Galicia. The forest was equally central to **Chenghe Yao's** (Beijing Normal University) discussion of the ecological (utopian) dream and Daoist philosophies in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Word for World is Forest*, which she framed in terms of a surge in science fiction publications and scholarship in China attuned to and critical of Western-dominated sustainability discourses.

July 14: Transformative Uncertainties

In her talk "**Lovely Uncertainties, Uncertain Loves: Love and Uncertainty in and through Popisho and Tomb of Sand,**" **Tarushi Sonthalia** (University of Virginia) invited us to think with her about forms of uncertainty, love, and relationality in Caribbean and Southeast Asian speculative fiction. She argues that epistemic and environmental uncertainty can lead to forms of relationality that resist the impulse to forcibly hierarchise and evaluate on the basis of social markers, and that love as imagined and represented in speculative narratives is both affective and uncertain, thus producing such alternative forms of relationality. Sticking with the question of environmental uncertainty, **Anna Tabouratzidis** (Justus-Liebig University) reflected on the

politics and aesthetics of petrofictions as world(ly) texts which render petroleum culturally visible. Taking a world systemic approach, her paper explored the dependence of world systems on finite resources and (neo)colonial practices aiming to trouble our, at times willing, blind- and deafness as consumers to our own implication in these very systems. Uncertainty also played a role for **Pelumi Folajimi** (Louisiana State University), whose talk “**Shakespeare and Soyinka: A Fight Against the Rotten**” dealt with deceptive appearances in Wole Soyinka’s drama *The Beatification of Area Boy: A Lagosian Kaleidoscope*, a play whose eclecticism celebrates the significance of Shakespearean drama and renders a dissident Nigerian Hamlet who fights against the rotten – the corrupt and totalitarian military regime. Folajimi thus worked out the cross-cultural connections to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and the intercultural dramatic aesthetics. Providing a conceptual reading of archipelagos as models and geosocial locations of knowledge production, **Francisco Marques** (University of Lisbon) in “**Archipelagoes and Anthologies: Senses for an Archipelagraphy in Portuguese**” conceptualised a combination of wide and close reading of island-themed anthologies from Lusophone Macaronesia as a panoramic view of relationality. Attempting to shift focus to archipelagic dynamism and in-betweenness, Marques argued for archipelography as an anti-colonial practice which foregrounds variation, multiplicity, and the dialogicity of epistemic practices and geosocial spaces.

July 21: Tellability and the Limits of Language

In her presentation “**Feminist World Literature: ‘Trimming and Assembling Margins’ in the Sinophone and the Italoophone,**” **Formosa Deppman** (UCLA) compared the politics of feminist worlding in Elena Ferrante’s *The Neapolitan Novels* and in Rimuy Aki’s *Huaihsiang* 懷鄉 and made a case for the social performative function of literature both in the texts and beyond. At the centre of her analysis stood the cutting, dissolution, and (re)construction of boundaries into transtemporal, -spatial, and -lingual assemblages which afford a forging of (female) solidarity and collectivity. In bridging Chinese and Holocaust studies, **Wendy Sun** (Grinnell College) examined Jewish exile in Shanghai, the Hongkou Ghetto, and their memorialisation in light of Chinese memory politics from a comparative angle in a presentation titled “**Garden of Memories: Physical sites of Memorials and Cultural Preservations in the Shanghai Jewish Refugee Museum.**” In a critical engagement with the Shanghai Jewish Refugee Museum and its shortcomings in terms of bi-lingual communication, Sun sought to shed light on the (re)construction of a collective – if not global – memory through the museum as a vessel or agent in memory politics. The common theme of language which all three

presentations of this session shared became most prominent in Gao Chen's talk "Respecting Han Fu Style from the Perspective of Classical Construction" in which she examined both literary and non-literary factors formative in the process of establishing a particular literary style. Critically reflecting on the construction of the value of writing styles, Chen identifies different stages in this process such as "Zong Jing" which refers to the decisive role intertextuality plays in elevating a particular style and further consolidating the value of classics.

July 24: Revisions and Contestations

Guided by the question whether the short story can tell its own history of literary realism, **Amândio Reis** (University of Lisbon) in "**Painting (and) the Invisible in the Realist Short Story: Henry James and Machado de Assis**" compared two realist short stories which revolve around artists and their (lack of) genius. Arguing against a simplification of realism, Reis made a case for realism as a convention and idealisation which the selected short stories both uphold and subvert in their grappling with the creation of art as no mere photograph but a particular illusion of reality. Art and its social function comprised the core of **Mathias Overgaard's** (University of Copenhagen) talk on "**Realization through Abstraction. Literature as Reflection on Collective Practices**" in which he reconsidered Hegel's notion of art from a ritual studies perspective. Overgaard argued for an approach to literature as engaging in a reflective process through which the abstract is realised, forming a temporary anti-structure which acts as the basis for ritualistic practices of collective self-affirmation. Last but not least **Wei Yu** (Beijing Normal University) presented us with "**A Study of the Spatial Politics in Colson Whitehead's Novels,**" combining the colloquium's leading questions of politics and poetics. She examined the acts of scramble for space, space flipping and transgression in two representative texts and argued that by refraining from resolving struggles over space, Whitehead highlights the continued racialisation and contestation of space.

The group ended its presentations and discussions by posing further questions to the study of the politics, poetics, and world literature: How do we address canonical preferences and biases such as the hegemonic stance of realist fiction in world literary studies? What is to be gained from a continued and thorough discussion of alternative modes of discourse, such as solarpunk, speculative fiction, and other media, in the comparative study of world literatures?

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