

Workshop The Work of World Literature

What is the relation between literary theory and world literature? Literary studies today tries to reckon with and transcend the parochialism and Eurocentrism of its tradition by adopting transnational, transhistorical, transcultural, translocal perspectives and by exploring the potential of the term 'world literature'. This large-scale shift of the discipline has been accompanied by a 'global turn' within literary theory, resulting in a renewed interrogation of the relation of literature to the world at large and of the ethics and politics of literature in a globalizing world. These developments – the turn to world literature and the global turn in literary theory – are understood sometimes as antagonistic, sometimes as complimentary to one another. While world literature is often presented as an antidote to theory, it is also clearly constituted by a very specific theorizing of literature and as such invites further theoretical challenges and reflections.

The work of Derek Attridge demonstrates the critical and theoretical potential of the encounter between world literature and literary theory. In *The Singularity of Literature* (2004), Attridge insists that the book is complemented by his work in literary criticism on to the South African writer J. M. Coetzee, published the same year, *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*. It is as if the theory of literature – of literature in general – emerges out of a particular literary encounter, in this instance with a postcolonial writer pre-occupied with geopolitical, historical, and ethical limits – not least the limits of literature itself. And it is no coincidence that, while Attridge is critical of an oversimplified mapping of politics onto literature, his theory of literature involves politically charged terms such as singularity, otherness, exclusion, response, responsibility, as well as justice and hospitality.

Responding to Attridge's recent *The Work of Literature* (2015), a group of scholars will reflect on the correspondences between world literature, literary theory, and the world writ large. The symposium sets out to explore the limits but also the liminality of literary theory and the historical, geopolitical and theoretical frameworks that inform and perhaps also tacitly delimit world literature.

with

Derek Attridge (UNIVERSITY OF YORK)

Refqa Abu-Remaileh (FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN)

Lorna Margaret Burns (UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS)

Francesco Giusti (ICI BERLIN)

Benjamin Lewis Robinson (UNIVERSITY OF VIENNA)

Rashmi Varma (UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK)

Dirk Wiemann (UNIVERSITY OF POTSDAM)

Jarad Zimble (UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM)

ICI Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry
Christinenstr. 18/19, Haus 8
D-10119 Berlin
Tel: +49 30 473 72 91 10
www.ici-berlin.org
U-Bhf Senefelder Platz (U2)

ici
BERLIN KULTURLABOR
INSTITUTE FOR CULTURAL INQUIRY

Symposium

20–21 June 2019, in English



with
Derek Attridge

The Work of World Literature

Organized by
Francesco Giusti and
Benjamin Lewis Robinson

Programme

Thursday, 20 June 2019

19:30 Keynote

Derek Attridge

Untranslatability and the Challenge of World Literature: A South African Example

There are strong arguments for considering the world's speech practices as a continuum rather than as a series of discrete languages, the establishment of the latter very often being a political as much as a linguistic process. This talk will consider the implications of such a view of language for the question of translation and for the concept of 'world literature'. As an example, the history of Afrikaans in South Africa will be considered, focusing on a poem in 'Kaaps' – a language traditionally viewed as a dialect of Afrikaans which incorporates vocabulary from English, but which is spoken by more people than the 'pure' form of Afrikaans that was consolidated and policed in the early twentieth century.

Derek Attridge is the author of books on South African literature, James Joyce, poetic form, and literary theory; his most recent publication is *The Experience of Poetry: From Homer's Listeners to Shakespeare's Readers* (Oxford University Press, 2019). He has taught in the UK and the United States and held visiting professorships in South Africa, France, Italy, Egypt, and Australia. He is Emeritus Professor of English and Related Literature at the University of York, UK, and a Fellow of the British Academy.

Friday, 21 June 2019

Workshop

10:30 Morning coffee

10:45 Welcome and Introduction by Francesco Giusti and Benjamin Lewis Robinson

11:00–13:00 PANEL I – CONTEXTS/WORLDS

Lorna Margaret Burns

World Literature and the Problem of Postcolonialism: Aesthetics and Dissent

Francesco Giusti

Transcontextual Gestures: A Lyric Approach to the World of Literature

Jarad Zimble

Working Conditions: The Contexts of A. K. Mehrotra

13:00–14:30 Lunch break

14:30–16.30 PANEL II – RESPONSIBILITIES

Benjamin Lewis Robinson

The World after Fiction in J. M. Coetzee's Jesus Books

Dirk Wiemann

Learning 'something world-size': The Unaccountable Time of 'The Detainee's Tale as Told to Ali Smith'

Rashmi Varma

Extracting Value: Indigeneity as Politics of Form

16.30–17.00 Coffee break

17.00–18.30 Response by **Derek Attridge**
followed by an open discussion, moderated by Refqa Abu-Remaileh