

## IWL 2020 – Belgrade (Online)

As part of my MA programme I was able to attend the Institute for World Literature's Summer School which was supposed to take place in Belgrade in 2020. Due to the Covid-19-pandemic, the events and seminars were moved online, so that everyone got the chance to attend from their respective home countries. The organizers of the summer school were helpful and supportive throughout the whole event to help with any questions or problems that might arise. I attended two seminars, each of which was taught for eight days over the course of two weeks. Each Friday of the four weeks of summer school, I attended a colloquium and on Mondays I had additional readings by authors or panels during which theory of world literature was discussed.

The first seminar I attended, *Exiles, Migrants, and Refugees: Borderlines of World Literatures and Global Histories*, was taught by Venkat Mani. All the participants were from different academic backgrounds and in different stages of their academic career and were studying at universities from all over the world. Some of the other students in the seminar had focused on the topic throughout their studies or had even written a thesis about migration or border studies. For other students like myself, the study of exiles or migration with regard to literature studies had not been a focus during my previous seminars. As a preparation for the class I had read three novels and several theoretical texts, which were used as a basis for the discussion in class. We were encouraged to talk, share our experiences and ask questions. The seminar consisted mostly of discussions. Through the discussions and presentations, I learned a lot about literary traditions I had not come into contact with because the other participants were sharing their expertise from their respective fields such as Egyptian, Korean, Japanese, Israeli or Ecuadorian literatures. On a theoretical level I gained some insight into trauma studies and forced migration studies, new theoretical approaches I had not come across but was able to connect to other fields and theories of my previous studies.

The second seminar I took was called *Globalization and its Discontents* which was taught by David Damrosch. During the first week of the seminar we focused on the discussion of theories of world literature, ranging from Goethe over Auerbach, Emily Apter, Franco Moretti and Pascale Casanova, which we then connected to a discussion of excerpts from novels, short stories, poems and a movie. Even though I had come across most of the theories during the course of my previous studies in Göttingen, these debates in class helped me strengthen and renew my understanding of them. The insights from other students in connection to examples from their academic focus field helped me in looking at the theories from a different point of view and broaden my perspective on them. I think that both these seminars helped me gain a deeper understanding of the study of comparative literatures as a discipline itself. Throughout my studies so far I had focused mostly on novels or poems so analysing a movie in connection with the short story it is based upon was also an insight I am grateful for.

Each Friday instead of another session of a seminar, I attended a colloquium. During the colloquium we were asked to share a project we are currently working on or planning on working on and give a short presentation about it. Another participant would then give a short response to the presentation, pointing out strengths and weaknesses of the presentation, the argument or the analysis. Afterwards, all the other participants were asked to share their thoughts on the presentation and the project. Everyone was very passionate about their individual project. Some of the participants who were already in their later stages of their thesis or paper were able to talk in depth about their research. Others, like me, were just starting out in finding which texts and theories to analyse or apply in their thesis. The mix of these people coming together to discuss their projects at their respective different stages, turned out to be one of the most helpful and

fruitful events for my own upcoming thesis research and writing. The group and everyone was very supportive and everyone was interested in each other's' research. After each presentation, we shared further information or literature, possible theoretical or general approaches to the project and encouraged each person in their individual project. I was also asked to give a response to another participant's project, which I had never done before but which helped me a lot in diving deeper into another topic and thinking about the weaknesses, strengths and possible improvements or additional approaches that could be pursued or looked into for the individual project. Even though we were sadly not able to meet in class and spend time together in Belgrade, it felt like we got to know each other through our research topics. All the colloquium participants in my group gave a short presentation of the work they had done so far but then also shared the insecurities, questions and problems regarding their individual project and I think that was something very encouraging. The atmosphere of being able to come together as a group and not having to present a well-rounded project and argument but instead sharing the problems, struggles and insecurities of the current research was encouraging also in regard to my own struggles in figuring out what it is I want to write about exactly. The colloquium meetings and advice from the other, more advanced participants helped me in steering my upcoming thesis project in a more focused direction. Overall this has been an inspiring experience during which I got to discuss my projects and ideas with other people and receive their feedback. These discussions helped me on my way to my final thesis project, not only on the level of what I want to write about, which theories to apply or which primary texts to focus on but also regarding the way I can approach the bulk of literature and how to form my own research question.

During the panels and Monday afternoon meetings we met with all the other students and participants who were all working in their own seminars during the previous weeks of the summer school. We were able to talk to authors such as Orhan Pamuk and Dubravka Ugresic, hear about their work and their perspective on world literature. Especially during these meetings I became aware of the meetings taking place online and the resulting lack of direct communication and interaction. Even though we were able to ask questions via the chat function, which the panellists and authors then answered, the direct interaction was something I really missed here. Even though everyone tried to interact and react to the statements via the chat function, it was not the experience it could have been, had we been able to see each other's faces and immediate reactions.

On the final panel, all the teachers, colloquium leaders and organizers came together to give a short recap of their seminars and experience with the online teaching in general and a short insight into the contents of their seminars specifically. The organizers and Delia Ungureanu also gave short insights into their work and encouraged us to keep in touch with each other, build up on the resources they provided for us, such as google-classrooms or shared files. Delia Ungureanu told us that we would have enjoyed this last day together with a boat tour on the Danube with the night lights across the city, Serbian wine and a final dinner to talk about the summer school and our future projects. And in that moment I wished I could have seen the other participants face to face for just that moment to reflect on our shared experience. All in all, the entire summer school was an amazing and very enriching experience for me. I have learned a lot: I was able to repeat and dive into some theories I had studied before, connect them with new insights and perspectives I encountered during the summer school and talks with the other participants and seminar leaders. I am very happy and feel privileged that I got to take part in this summer school which gave me a new perspective and new insights into the study of comparative literature, especially by meeting so many people who were all passionate about world and comparative literatures.