
All sessions are held in the Harpur College Dean’s Conference Room, LN 2200, Binghamton University

The Fernand Braudel Center for the Study of Economies, Historical Systems, and Civilizations colloquium, supported also by the Department of Comparative Literature, Binghamton University

**Co-Organizers:** Luiza Franco Moreira and Richard E. Lee
FRIDAY 8 APRIL 2016

9:00 A.M. Welcome: Richard E. Lee, Director, Fernand Braudel Center (Binghamton University)

Opening Remarks: Anne E. McCall, Dean, Harpur College of Arts and Sciences (Binghamton University)

9:30 – 11:00 A.M., Panel I
Moderator: Gisela Brinker-Gabler (Binghamton University)

David Damrosch (Harvard University)
The Politics of World Literature: Language, Form, and Audience

Writers in Europe’s colonies and former colonies have long struggled with the advantages and disadvantages of employing European languages and genres for their creative work, an issue that today reaches beyond the older imperial trade routes in the era of “global English.” Creative writers and artists in widely disparate locations are now using the novel and the resources of world cinema with what can be described as post-postcolonial strategies. This talk will discuss three contemporary examples of artists who mobilize world forms for local political purposes: the Tibetan postmodernist Jamyang Norbu, the Korean-American internet artists Young-hae Chang Heavy Industries, and the Taiwanese-American filmmaker Ang Lee.

Walter Cohen (University of Michigan)
Language, Literature, and Power: Here and There, Then and Now

This is a historical and conceptual account of language, literary language, and, occasionally, individual literary texts as forces of major change over time. Attention to the role of culture as an agent, rather than mere reflection, of history is venerable (Weber). The collapse of Communism has revived interest in the topic (radical Islam, Confucianism and economic development). Within literary and cultural studies, there has also been insistence on culture’s role (e.g. the Birmingham School) and even literature’s (the European novel as creator of bourgeois hegemony). The focus here is on language and literature as trans- or cross-cultural phenomena, and especially on three issues: 1) the largely unknown historical pattern, 2) the possible causes, and, 3) more tentatively, the possible consequences.
These concerns point to the growing role of the vernacular—the central phenomenon in world literature of the past 1500 years. The talk seeks to explain why people speak the languages they do, and why they read and write the languages they do. Attention is paid to the emergence of vernaculars in regions dominated by the transregional Old World cosmopolitan literary languages, mainly from 325 BCE to 1100 CE: first Greek; then Latin, Chinese, and Sanskrit; still later Arabic, Old Church Slavonic, and Persian. After a brief look at the linguistic dimension of Western European global expansion beginning in the fifteenth century, the presentation concludes by describing and explaining the unprecedented emergence of global English, before attempting to evaluate it in light of the preceding discussion.

11:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M., Panel II
Moderator: Luiza Franco Moreira (Binghamton University)

Gisèle Sapiro (CNRS/EHESS)
The Role of Publishers in the Making of World Literature

2:00 – 3:30 P.M., Panel III
Moderator: Sevinç Türkkan (Binghamton University)

Negar Mottahedeh (Duke University)
Residual Slick: The Discovery of “Modern Iran” in Anglo-American Oil Films

Long before the impact of the hostage crisis on the American imagination, Iran was “discovered” in American B-movies and Hollywood hits of the 1950s and 1960s, when American oil geologists and businessmen would mention their next trip to Tehran. Winston Churchill, who keenly designed two modern wars on Iranian oil, described it as “a prize from Fairyland far beyond our brightest dreams.” The crude extraction of oil in the twentieth century was thus intrinsically linked to leisure, to dreams, and fairylands. Intrinsically, then, linked to cinema.

It is undeniable that the looming political questions in the 1940s and 1950s in Iran were those of labor, of oil nationalization, of struggles against the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and importantly the CIA engineered coup d'etat in 1953, a coup that admittedly attempted to put an end to all of it. The film industry that emerged in the context of the upheavals of this era, was not only catalyzed by the aesthetics of oil slicks and fires, of land excavation and damage, of rural habitats and their coevalness with a thriving urban
modernity, but was also, with inevitable subtlety, conscious of an impending sea change, and attuned to social struggles, and nationalist revolts arising from the existential dilemmas that accompanied the pillage of Iran for crude oil. That such transfigurations are the stuff of a cinema built out of the protean extraction of oil and the consequent existential upheavals of a modern culture in its own right, is best characterized by Ana Lily Amirpour’s Iranian vampire Western, *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (2014). Here in Shahr-e Bad (Bad City) characters are either speechless or subjects of injustices in which their voices go unheard. It is here that a soulful figure lives eternally in her stripy T-shirt and a black veil in a vampire’s body to demand justice for Shahr-e Bad and the young boy who loves her, drives a fin-tailed 1950s Ford Thunderbird that is the only possession he has. This paper will discuss the American, British and Iranian oil films of the 1950s and 1960s and engage in a close reading of *A Girl*.

**Jeroen Gerrits** (Binghamton University)

**Ethics of Skepticism: A Case Study in Contemporary World Cinema**

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**Saturday 9 April 2016**

**10:00 A.M. Welcome:** Luiza Franco Moreira (Binghamton University)

**Opening Remarks:** Zoja Pavlovskis-Petit (Binghamton University)

**10:30 A.M. – 12:00 P.M., Panel IV**

**Moderator:** Giovanna Montenegro (Binghamton University)

**Benjamin Liu** (University of California, Riverside)

**Lost in Transliteration: Morisco Travel Literature and the Coplas del hijante de Puey Monzón**

This essay examines a particular aspect of the literature of the Moriscos, as written in *aljamiado* (Spanish transliterated into Arabic script), that of travel, as a site both of translation, in which the world as experienced and recounted though the travel narrative is drawn closer to home, but also of transliteration, as it is relocated and re-inscribed as a sign of distinction. Expelled from Spain by royal edict between 1609 and 1615, the Moriscos would know too well the vagaries of migration, living in motion and in translation, as extant *aljamiado* itineraries or travel guides, as well as contemporary works of fiction amply demonstrate.
The *Coplas del hijante de Puey Monzón*, probably written shortly before the expulsion, is one of relatively few *aljamiado* works in verse. It relates the travels of an Aragonese crypto-Muslim pilgrim (*hichante*) to Mecca, and intersperses first-hand geographical lore with knowledge of the sacred places and rituals of Islam. Though the *Moriscos* considered themselves exempted, by virtue of necessity, from the obligation of the *hajj*, the anonymous poem celebrates the pilgrim’s journey as a feat of travel and of piety. My reading of the *Coplas* proposes that these dual movements of translation and transliteration, of familiarization and estrangement, articulate the precarious contingency of the *Moriscos*’ condition.

**Nizar Hermes** (University of Virginia)

**Nostalgia for al-Andalus in Early Modern Moroccan Voyages en Espagne: al-Ghassānī’s *Riḥlat al-wazīr fī iftikāk al-’asīr* (1690-1691) as a Case Study**

Much ink has been spilled on the nostalgic recollections of al-Andalus in pre-modern and modern Arabic and Islamic writings. Yet, very little has been written on the theme of nostalgia for al-Andalus in the rich corpus of early modern Moroccan *Voyages en Espagne*. By *Voyages en Espagne*, I refer specifically to travel/diplomatic accounts written by Moroccans who visited Spain in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; besides al-Ghassānī (d. 1707), this includes travelers such as al-Ghazzāl (d. 1777), al-Mīknāší (d. 1791), and al-Zayyānī (d. 1833). In my talk, drawing on modern theories of memory and nostalgia, I argue that al-Ghassānī’s *Riḥlat al-wazīr fī iftikāk al-’asīr* (*The Journey of the Minister to Ransom the Captive*) is infused with nostalgia for al-Andalus and this work of literature should be looked at as one of the foundational Post-Reconquista Arabic *Andalusiyyāt*. I do so by, firstly, exploring al-Ghassānī’s predilection for historical digression on the early Muslim conquest of al-Andalus. Secondly, I discuss the author’s nostalgic/elegiac representation of what he fascinatingly calls “*ʿāthār al-ḥaḍārah alqadīmah*” (the traces/ruins of the old civilization) in Andalusian towns. Finally, I explore al-Ghassānī’s poetic anthologization of Andalusian landscapes, flora, and fauna as well as his recurring juxtaposition of al-Andalus’ Islamic past with its Spanish-Christian present.
Patrick Dove (Indiana University, Bloomington)
“El secreto del mundo”: Bolaño with and against World Literature

This paper looks at Roberto Bolaño’s posthumous novel 2666 (2004) as a possible case study for thinking about how contemporary Latin American literary production might intervene in critical debates about “World Literature.” The novel offers a literary reflection on globalization and its ill effects in the Free Trade Zone along the US/Mexican border, focusing on the serial killing of working-class women in and around Ciudad Juárez. As one of Bolaño’s characters puts it, although most of us would prefer to remain in ignorance about what goes on in Juárez, these crimes in fact constitute “the secret of the world” today. In unpacking this poetic image and its importance for Bolaño’s project, I will ask how the current disciplinary conceptualization of “World Literature” could seek to come to terms with this thing that Bolaño calls the secret of the world.

Karim Mattar (University of Colorado, Boulder)
Towards a “Muslim” World Literature: Islam in the Anglophone and Translated Middle Eastern Novel

This paper takes its cue from Muhsin al-Musawi’s reassessment of pre-Nahḍah Arabic literature in terms of an “Islamic republic of letters”. If, as his argument goes, medieval literary production in the Middle East is characterized by vibrant intellectual and cultural exchange rather than by stagnation and decay, then what of such exchange under the aegis of contemporary anglophone globality? What vestige of a specifically Islamic literary network remains as Arabic and other literatures of the region have been channeled through a newly worlded republic of letters?

I approach these questions by considering the “Islamic theme” in anglophone and translated novels from the Middle East. Seeking to address issues of Islamophobia, minority, and cultural representation in the post-9/11 period, postcolonial scholars (Morey, Yaqin, Ahmed, Chambers, etc.) have constructed the “anglophone Muslim novel” around figures such as Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi, Mohsin Hamid, Nadeem Aslam, Kamila Shamsie, and so on. This critical trend, I argue, has the effect of domesticating the Islamic theme for Anglo-American culture, and thereby of rendering it
amenable for world literature. Against it, I call for renewed attention to the Middle Eastern novel in translation. Exploring Orhan Pamuk’s treatment of Sufism and Hurufism in *The Black Book* (1990; trans. 1994 and 2006), I suggest that when read in counterpoint to its anglophone variant, the Middle Eastern novel in translation offers us privileged insight into a more local dialectic of religion and modernity in the region. It thus re-inscribes the Islamic republic of letters in and for the world.

3:15 – 4:30 P.M., **Roundtable with Comparative Literature graduate students**