

“Circulating Literary Works beyond Their Culture of Origin”: The IWL Summer School in
Lisbon, 2015

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Following Peking (2011), Istanbul (2012), Harvard (2013), and Hong Kong (2014), the Institute for World Literature (IWL) held its fifth summer school at the University of Lisbon from 22 June to 16 July 2015. Participating at the IWL Summer School gave us an excellent opportunity to gain valuable insights into the multifaceted, old and yet constantly evolving field of world literary studies. The seminars, panels, and lectures created a stimulating environment for constructive debates, lively discussions, and intellectual exchange. We were offered the chance to join a community of lecturers, graduate and undergraduate students from 33 different countries working in literary, cultural and translation studies, all of whom shared our passion for literature and its adaptation in the context of various theoretical discourses. Particularly the seminars created an important forum for animated conversations and a productive exchange of ideas and opinions. Taught by leading names in world literature, such as David Damrosch (Harvard) and Franco Moretti (Stanford), as well as by eminent scholars of neighboring disciplines, including Gisèle Sapiro (Sociology) and Lawrence Venuti (Translation Studies), the seminars provided challenging as well as highly rewarding opportunities for us to familiarize ourselves with the latest insights into world literature in a broader sense.

Our readings of literary texts in conjunction with literary and translation theory in Lisbon have proved to be an invaluable source of inspiration for our individual research projects. Thus, material gathered at the IWL provides an important foundation for our future scholarly work. In his lecture, “World Literature in the Internet Age,” David Damrosch defines the term

“world literature” as follows: “I take world literature to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language.”¹ This is not just a statement about the migration of literary texts beyond national borders, but also about a perspective. This perspective may be inherent in the analysed primary texts; alternatively, it may also be applied in their critical reading. The IWL Summer School makes a central contribution to promoting this new understanding of world literature. The main subjects of the different events were not just canonised works of western European literature. Apart from those, the IWL also circulated other literary texts, films and documents of various cultural origins and eras. The comparative reading of these documents led to fascinating and often unexpected insights, which were primarily due to the original combination of materials as well as innovative approaches to their discussion. Some seminars were thematically broader, while others had a more specific scholarly focus, such as Franco Moretti’s course about the digital humanities and Lawrence Venuti’s seminar on the theory and practice of translation.

On 16 July 2015 the IWL Summer School closed its gates in Lisbon. For us, however, it opened a new window for future research in the many-sided area of world literature. This is due not least to important contacts we were able to forge in Lisbon. We would like to heartily recommend participation in future gatherings of the IWL to anyone at the University of Innsbruck and beyond who might be interested. The next summer school is held from 20 June to 14 July 2016 in Harvard, the cradle of the IWL. Participants can look forward to a promising programme with major international researchers, such as Homi Bhabha (Harvard) and Rebecca Walkowitz (Rutgers). For further information, see <http://iwl.fas.harvard.edu/news/iwl-returns-harvard-2016>.

¹ This quotation also appears in David Damrosch *What Is World Literature?* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003, S. 4).