

# Harvard Summer School of the Institute for World Literature

3<sup>rd</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> of July 2017, Copenhagen

## **A field report by Miriam Strieder (German Department) and Stella Lange (Romance Studies)**

The Summer School organized by the *Institute for World Literature* (Harvard University) has been established in 2011 and takes place every year. By now, 54 universities all over the world belong to the affiliate members, among them the University of Innsbruck. The programme is hosted in a different city every year; every three years it returns to its founding place, Boston. This year the summer school took place in Copenhagen, Denmark. The schedule from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 26<sup>th</sup> of July was supported by the University of Aarhus. 131 participants from 34 nations, stemming from Bachelor and Master degree courses, Postdocs and assistant professors but mainly PhD students met for lively and committed discussions – some of them not for the first time. Thanks to the generous support of the dean's office and the international relations office, which covered travel expenses and the tuition fees, Miriam Strieder, PhD student at the German Department, and Stella Lange, Postdoc at the Institute for Romance Studies, were able to participate in the summer school.

## **IWL: New research perspectives and networking around the globe**



During four weeks, we could choose two seminars from a dozen offers. One important message was evident: World Literature becomes more and more important in times when boundaries, walls and national discourses become more prominent again. The discipline serves as a cultural and partly political corrective that allows us to get a different view on debates centring on global politics. In seminars and evening lectures, we were engaged with questions about cosmopolitanism and nationality, migration and exclusion, integration and assimilation, problems of translatability, inevitable hierarchies, comparability and evaluations.

During the first two weeks we could choose from the following seminars: *Globalization and Its Discontents* by David Damrosch (Harvard, founder of the IWL) dealing with, e.g., questions and problems regarding the reception of so-called World Literature, or the role of English as a universal language. In the meantime, Dominique Jullien (U of California, Santa Barbara) was discussing with her participants *Jorge Luis Borges and as/World Literature* while Stefan Helgesson (Stockholm University) tackled *Literary Form and the Global South* and Galin Tihanov (Queen Mary, University of London) was

looking into *Exilic Writing and the Making of World Literature*. In Reine Meylaerts' (KU Leuven) seminar *Multilingualism, Translation, and World Literature*, chosen by Stella Lange, the relevance of the concept of "translation" and the function of the often invisible translators for the approach to world literature was highlighted from a broad interdisciplinary perspective. Miriam Strieder took part in



Alexander Beecroft's (University of South Carolina) *Literary Worlds Outside the Modern*, which was concerned with effects, means of distribution and conditions of premodern world literature.

The choices offered for the second cycle were also not an easy one to make: Mads Rosendahl Thomsen (Aarhus University) offered insights into the literary genre of migrant writing that has grown more and more important in recent years in the seminar *Between Nations: Migrant Writing and the Cultural Meeting in the Text*. Francesca Orsini (SOAS University of London),

on the other hand, explored with the participants of her seminar the topic of *Colonialism – a Multilingual Local and Its Significant*. Susan Stanford Friedman (Wisconsin-Madison University) dedicated her seminar to the phenomenon of modernity in *Planetary Modernism* while Hendrik Birus (Jacobs University Bremen) focussed on the canon of world literature and transnational queries in *Debating World Literature*. Miriam Strieder chose Christian Dahl's (University of Copenhagen) seminar *The Globalization of Greek Tragedy* and got to know fascinating plays from India, South Africa and Nigeria, which opened up new texts from the canon of world literature for her. Stella Lange participated in Thomas Claviez's (University of Bern) seminar *Conceptualizing Cosmopolitanism and World Literature: A Critical Survey* where the history and the latest theories about cosmopolitanism and community were analysed and compared to each other. The dedication of all the seminar leaders was also evident in the offer of weekly office hours in which questions concerning the seminars and own research projects could be discussed.

### **More scholarly and cultural activities at the IWL**

Adding to the seminars were five evening lectures that were held by David Damrosch, Mads Rosendahl Thomsen and Susan Stanford Friedman and two guest lecturers, Madame Nielsen, a Danish performance artist and author, and Sara Danius, the permanent secretary of the Swedish Academy of the Nobel Prize for Literature. Two panels about collaborative projects and publishing as well as weekly colloquia, in which all of us were able to present and discuss our current projects, completed the scholarly activities. "The colloquia were characterised by a pleasant working atmosphere and genuine interest in the projects presented", Miriam Strieder says who talked about her PhD project. "Discussing with participants from many cultural backgrounds and tackling as diverse subjects as Japanese Studies or Medieval Studies on a scholarly level within a very short timeframe – that was an experience both

challenging and immensely enriching”, Stella Lange commented who herself was a leader of one of the colloquia.



Relaxing times, however, awaited us with the cultural activities: Two excursions, which brought us to the canals of Copenhagen and to Hamlet’s castle in Helsingør, were very well planned and interesting trips. Apart from that, the city of Hans Christian Andersen awaited us with museums, libraries like *The Black Diamond*, castles and gardens. Some of the participants also organized trips to Sweden or Roskilde. The Jazz Festival that was hosted in Copenhagen allowed for relaxing evenings in the beautiful city.

### **The IWL-Experience in hindsight**

All in all the IWL Summer School was a very inspiring experience. The four weeks spent in Copenhagen enhanced our scholarly horizon and brought us in contact with open and friendly people, happy to discuss academic and non-academic issues. We hope that we will meet many of those again someday. New ideas and impulses were the results we took from Copenhagen to our offices in Innsbruck.

We would like to say a heartfelt “Thank you” to all the seminar leaders, especially David Damrosch and Delia Ungureanu for their immense dedication! Thank you also to the professors of Copenhagen University, Christian Dahl, and Aarhus University, Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, the assistants who took over the organisation, especially Maja Höhn, and all the participants for a great time! Without the financial and organisational support of the University of Innsbruck it would not have been possible for us to participate in the Summer School – so a special thank goes to Dean Donat and Dr Schennach from the International Relations Office!

Next year, the IWL Summer School will be hosted in Tokyo and in 2019, it will return to Harvard. Again, fascinating topics, lively discussions and critical reflections are on offer for international scholars with many-sided interests in literary studies.