

Mini-Workshop

„The Present, Concepts of the Present and Literature – a 'Western' Discourse?"

July 12, 2024, Genscherallee 3, 53113 Bonn, R. 2.009

Content

The semantics of modernity, with its conceptual dualisms of progress vs. regression, innovation vs. preservation of tradition, center vs. periphery, as well as its temporal thinking modeled on linear development from past through present to future and on the spatial model of the 'simultaneity of the non-simultaneous,' emerged around 1800 in Europe and North America. These dualisms reflect, not least, the profound changes brought about by the American and French Revolutions. In this context, the notions that literature refers to its own temporal present and that it should be understood as an expression of its own present also emerge. The terms 'contemporary literature' or 'Gegenwartsliteratur' are thus normatively charged in this sense. However, how can the relationship between the present and literature be described outside the mentioned historical and cultural contexts? What possibly alternative concepts of time does the semantics of modernity encounter in the process of globalization and the accompanying transcultural entanglements? What reflections on time and time concepts underlie discourses on literature under these conditions? Can the question of the relationship between the present and literature even be posed in this form in postcolonial contexts? These questions will be exemplarily discussed in the workshop with a focus on Cameroon, India, and Iran/Iraq.

Inhalt

Die Semantik der Moderne mit ihren begrifflichen Dualismen von Fortschritt vs. Rückschritt, Innovation vs. Traditionsbewahrung, Zentrum vs. Peripherie, aber auch ihr Zeitdenken nach dem linearen Modell der Entwicklung von Vergangenheit über Gegenwart zu Zukunft und nach dem räumlichen Modell der ‚Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen‘ entstehen um 1800 in Europa bzw. Nordamerika. Sie verweisen nicht zuletzt auf die tiefgreifenden Veränderungen durch die Amerikanische und die Französische Revolution.

In diesem Kontext entstehen auch die Vorstellungen, dass Literatur auf ihre eigene zeitliche Gegenwart referieren und dass sie als Ausdruck ihrer eigenen Gegenwart verstanden werden soll. Die Begriffe ‚Gegenwartsliteratur‘ oder ‚contemporary literature‘ sind in diesem Sinn normativ aufgeladen.

Wie aber lässt sich das Verhältnis von Gegenwart und Literatur außerhalb der genannten historischen und kulturellen Zusammenhänge beschreiben? Auf welche möglicherweise alternativen Zeitvorstellungen trifft jene Semantik der Moderne im Prozess der Globalisierung und der damit einhergehenden transkulturellen Verflechtungen? Welche Reflexionen über Zeit und Zeitkonzepte liegen unter diesen Bedingungen Diskursen über Literatur jeweils zugrunde? Lässt sich die Frage nach dem Verhältnis von Gegenwart und Literatur in postkolonialen Kontexten in dieser Form überhaupt stellen? Diese Fragen sollen im Workshop exemplarisch im Hinblick auf Kamerun, Indien und Iran/Irak diskutiert werden.

Program

- 09:30 **Welcome by Johannes Lehmann (spokesperson of our Research Training Group)**
- 09:40-10:40 **Suman Gupta (The Open University, UK):** ‚Amrit Kaal‘. The Present as Aporia
Moderated by Johann Haberlab
- 10:40-11:00 **Coffee break**
- 11:00-12:00 **Goulia Ghardashkhani-Otter (Bamberg):** Writing Recovery: Self and Narrativity in Goli Taraqqi’s Short Stories
Moderated by Peri Sipahi
- 12:00-12:15 **Coffee break**
- 12:15-13:15 **David Simo (Yaoundé, Kamerun):** Intercultural and transnational writing and rewriting of literary history. Postcolonial perspectives.
Moderated by Sophie Modert
- 13:15-14:00 **Final discussion**
Moderated by Sonia McCall-Labelle
- Ab 14:30 **Lunch at Plaza Toro**

Abstracts

Suman Gupta (Open University, UK): ‚Amrit Kaal‘. The Present as Aporia

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has popularised the phrase ‘amrit kaal’ to describe the unfolding position of India as a nation. The phrase may loosely be translated as ‘the nectar period’ – in fact, it has no standard translation and is generally used as such in English texts. It has been called upon to name a series of governmental initiatives (including the Union Budget 2023-2024), taken up enthusiastically by the commercial sector, and is much discussed in Indian news media. In many ways, the phrase structures governmental apprehensions of the national present.

Modi has defined the phrase and laid down its scope in his Independence Day speeches since 2021 (the official [English translation of the 2023 speech](#) is worth skimming through before this presentation). These Independence Day speeches are the literary texts in focus here. Their generic features are considered accordingly, before dwelling upon the construction of and simultaneous elision of the national present to perform the dominant nationalist imaginary of the present.

Goulia Ghardashkhani-Otter (Bamberg): Writing Recovery: Self and Narrativity in Goli Taraqqi’s Short Stories

In her post-emigration short stories, Goli Taraqqi (1939-), a contemporary Iranian writer (living in France and publishing in Iran) taps into her own biography to juxtapose her childhood memories of a safe and cozy past to the displaced sense of her present self in a foreign country.

Taraqqi's fourth collection of short stories, *Do donyā* (2002), includes a frame narrative comprised of two stories. Built upon a troubled perception of time and space, these stories recount the autodiegetic narrator's entrance into and discharge from a mental clinic in the suburbs of Paris. While the very act of writing in this frame narrative is celebrated as an essential therapeutic practice on the way to recovery, the narrator's comments on the process of writing add a metafictional layer to the author's entire autobiographical oeuvre. Using Galen Strawson's controversial essay "Against Narrativity" as a point of departure, this paper explores how and under what circumstances the fragmented, obsessive narrative—the constant oscillation between past (homeland) and present (exile)—of a traumatized self comes to a satisfactory end.

David Simo (Yaoundé, Kamerun): Intercultural and transnational writing and rewriting of literary history. Postcolonial perspectives.

Postcolonial rereading of Literary texts and rewriting of the history of literature aims at establishing all their inter-discursive relations and demonstrate their contribution to the intellectual management of management of spatial interconnections under the sign of colonial and post-colonial relations. In so doing, it found a new approach to literature on a transnational and intercultural basis, on which the national is placed in relation to its colonial excrescences. The local thus takes it on meaning from its relation with the global. In this way, literature become one of the places where identity is constructed in a complex interplay of relations between side by side, near and far, and in a game of power relations between individuals and groups whose geographical prove decisive. The history of Literature is thus interwoven with the history of domination, resistance, the construction of identity and otherness, the circulation of ideas and forms, interconnections, the stabilization asymmetrical relationship, the desire for emancipation, migration, mobility, appropriation and rejection, cooperation and conflicts, - in short constantly renegotiated relationships between different spaces.