

Whole Worlds Panel IV Abstracts

Anastatia Curley, University of Virginia (PhD Candidate in English), ac9we@virginia.edu

Paper: *City of Bohane's* Narrative Cosmopolitanism

In attempting to define the contemporary global novel, much scholarship has stressed that in order for novels to circulate internationally they must be, to quote Rebecca Walkowitz, “born-translated”¹: that is, that the global literary market demands works that jettison idiolect in favor of an engagement with the practice of translation, or of simple language that can easily be rendered in other vernaculars. Certainly, this argument holds true for much of what we think of as contemporary global literature. But by spotlighting linguistic experimentation as the primary mode by which novels declare their local *bona fides*, we run the risk of obscuring the ways that generic and narrative conventions can be just as illegible across national borders. This paper takes Kevin Barry’s 2011 novel *City of Bohane* as an example of a novel that has found (and crucially, been pitched to) a global audience, despite the fact that its highly experimental idiolect clearly grows out of the Hiberno-English of Barry’s native Limerick. *City of Bohane* reaches audiences across a wider Anglophone context by predicating its legibility on its engagement with generic forms familiar to the American or British reader—the Western, the crime novel, and the newspaper—rather than on simple language. While importing various genres and media to aid this project, however, the novel remains critical of the ways that they are embedded and implicated in systems of global exchange. Reading *City of Bohane* forces us to consider narrative conventions and their relationship to national traditions, opening up new ways of thinking about how novels become global. I argue that this mode of becoming transnational has important implications for the form of the global novel, and for our understanding of the politics of genre.

Nami Shin, A Contingent Whole: Narrative Space as a Network of Intimacy in Aleksandar Hemon’s *Nowhere Man*

Migratory patterns have undergone vast changes during the last decade. The increased flows of capital and labor as well as the crises of nation-states such as civil wars have given rise to varied forms of migratory movements. Theories of globalization and transnationalism have been quick to map these changes in migratory patterns and pointed to new forms of community and belonging. This paper engages with recent discourse on emergent sociocultural worlds operating on transnational scales by attending to patterns of migration that involve serial migration. By focusing on the migrant’s increasingly contingent relations to place, it examines how emergent patterns of migration what I call “multi-local migration” have reshaped the novel’s social imagination.

In stark contrast to social worlds grounded in notions of shared nation, history, and culture, I suggest that the social landscape of *Nowhere Man* emerges out of a network of contingent affiliations. More specifically, this paper examines how the contingent nature of social ties is enacted by the novel’s fragmented form. *Nowhere Man* consists of eight loosely interconnected stories told by different narrators. Each story gives witness to the title character’s presence in a specific urban space such as Sarajevo, Kiev, and Chicago. In other words, the novel’s narrative as a whole brings together a disparate set of stories for depicting Pronek’s multi-local presence. Examining how Pronek’s life trajectory is invoked by a series of brief yet emotionally charged encounters with the novel’s narrators, this paper argues that Hemon’s narrative rests upon a network of contingent intimacy for its vision of a whole.

¹ Rebecca Walkowitz, “Comparison Literature,” *New Literary History* 40, no.3 (2009), 570.

Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan, *Is there a Call Center Literature? Tech-Support, Self-Help, and the Novel of the New India*

Since the early 2000s, the call center has been the primary spatial, social, and economic sign of global India. Social scientists and cultural producers have routinely turned to the call center as the key site through which to examine the (in)human vicissitudes of globalization and the formation of neoliberal subjectivities in a world made whole by global capital (or so one story goes). The discourse on the call center has been provocative, tacking between accusations of Indian civilizational debasement and America fears of developing world threat; from scenes of cyber-coolie-ism to those of agential possibility for Indian youth. This paper proposes that a “call center complex” also characterizes the novel of the “new” India. How, I ask, has the Indian English novel responded to the provocations of the call center, its staged encounter of Eastern and Western worlds, its structures of dependency, exploitation, fantasy, and mimicry?

I read the derivative fictions of Chetan Bhagat and the peripheral realisms of Aravind Adiga and Mohsin Hamid, showing how the novels in question use the form of self-help in order to narrate global India’s arrival through the journeys of disadvantaged subjects newly poised to maximize returns on caste, class, and nation. I propose a critical analogy between call center tech-support and literary self-help, arguing that the novels utilize the symbolic vocabulary of the call center in order to depict the socialized precarity and overdetermined aspiration that attend India’s movement out of “the waiting room” of history into a world of ambivalent globality. Finally, I show how the novels attempt to mask inequalities of subject position that nevertheless come to light: the subject progressing through the stages of self-help—who, like the India of the call center, seems to “get ahead”—inevitably fails to “stay ahead” in a world of instability, precarity, and unpredictability.