"Literature and Patterns of Power"
Summer School 2019 "The Politics of Literature – Literature and Politics"

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How is literature connected to processes of power? During four days of intensive discussion, the participants of the third annual international FSGS-Summer School came together in Berlin in order to explore questions about the relationship between literature and power with our seven keynote speakers: Sebastian Tränkle (Berlin), Robert Zwarg (Marbach), Gisèle Sapiro (Paris), Patrick Eiden-Offe (Berlin), Olumide Popoola (London), Martin Halliwell (Leicester), Tarek El-Ariss (Dartmouth) and the Summer School's Principal Investigator, Anne Eusterschulte.

The FSGS Summer School 2019 was held in cooperation with the Cluster of Excellence 2020 "Temporal Communities" and the German Literature Archive. In the week prior to the Summer School, Sebastian Tränkle, Robert Zwarg and Anne Eusterschulte had organized the reading group "Engagement" in Leipzig, at which Robert Kaufmann (Berkeley) delivered the key note speech. Some of the Summer School's participants had attended the reading group and brought their insights to the discussion.

The Summer School's original aim was to develop new approaches to questions concerning the relationship between literature and politics by rethinking the debate within current political contexts and reframing the theoretical modes of discussing it. Every panel was led by one of the keynote speakers and conducted as a talk, discussion, workshop or close reading session.

The Summer School opened with a discussion of the alleged opposition between "engaged" or "committed" art and "autonomous" art as set up in the 20th century European context by Jean-Paul Sartre and Theodor W. Adorno. Sebastian Tränkle showed us how this binary could be considered a false opposition, because art is always produced in a social context and cannot separate itself from social reality.

Robert Zwarg then drew a line between Adorno and Georg Lukács, pointing out differences between the terms of the individual, identity, and subject. His panel encouraged us to think about how the questions of aesthetics and commitment are related to questions of agency. Drawing on Bertolt Brecht's conviction that characters have no agency, he illustrated why some authors emphasize aesthetics: In some cases, artworks do not speak directly through their content. Rather, they communicate indirectly through their form.

We subsequently moved from the philosophical to the sociological by looking at political parties, international cultural organizations such as the UNESCO and literary authorities such as the Nobel Prize committee: in other words, a network that leads selected stories, languages and writers to be visible while others remain unknown. Gisèle Sapiro emphasized the necessity to think beyond the model of translation as a globalizing force since questions about which texts are translated into which languages are also structured by political and economic processes as well as by exclusions reflecting the hierarchies of imperial power systems and the global economic divide of North and South. If "world literature" is to truly live up to its name, an almost militant committed action plus networks of intermediaries (such as agents and publishers) is needed.

Continuing with this awareness about the realities of multiple stories and perspectives, we focused on the practice of writing and discussed the power writers can have in writing their own stories, but also those of others. Olumide Popoola, a writer and creative writing teacher, used theoretical arguments and practical examples to remind us of the need for respect, sensitivity and research as a writer. With reference to Chimanda Adichie's TED talk about "the danger of a single story," Kit de Waal's manifesto "Don't dip your pen in someone else's blood," and her own work for a PhD in creative writing, Olumide Popoola explained the way a text gains autonomy in the hands of the reader once the writer has completed it. By taking turns in being the writer of a spontaneous text and a listener to our neighbor's writing sample, we realized how much information on the gender and ethnicity of literary characters can be implicitly communicated and how, in many cases, the reader will interpret, if not specified by the writer, their own or the writer's characteristics (or what is considered as the "norm"), prompting a discussion about how an author's biography is considered when interpreting a work.

The central thought about the important relationship between universal themes and specific, individual details in writing was picked up again in the fourth panel when Patrick Eiden-Offe pointed out Friedrich Engels' criticism of Karl Beck and his judgment of storytelling. Put into conversation with the historical circumstances of the Vormärz and its alternative interpretation as the Biedermeier era, we discussed whether it is possible to detect certain patterns of pre-revolution. By the end of the discussion, it became clear that Vormärz could be considered a metaphor (used carefully!) for the liminal periods of simmering political action before a period of revolution. However, temporal classifications of pre-revolution and revolution remain ambiguous. For example, current narratives about the urgency of climate change could be considered the start of a revolution, but a revolution may even already be taking place. Patrick Eiden-Offe also encouraged us to discuss which roles class and socio-economic background play in how narratives of the revolution are discussed.

On the third day, participants were invited to present their thesis projects during three parallel presentation sessions in the afternoon. During the three thematically ordered sessions, participants attended the project presentations of other participants and discussed their respective doctoral projects in relation to the Summer School´s topic. These panels were divided into transcultural perspectives with research questions centered around gender, identity, and politics, finer inquiries of new approaches to the discussion of aesthetics and politics, and thinking about literature and resistance in a global context.

During the public evening discussion "Literature! And the Political?" at Lettrétage, we focused on the creator side of the discussion and engaged with writers and publishers. Three differing positions were part of the fishbowl discussion chaired by Iulia Dondorici (FSGS-Alumna): Daniela Seel (writer/translator/publisher at kookbooks) questioned whether she does enough political activism, Clementine Ewokolo Burnley (writer/community organizer) stated that her life is politically engaged, and therefore her work is as well, and Dirk Laucke (playwright/writer/director) claimed that literature cannot effect change, because as he sees it, the world is not made of ideas. Yet he, like the other two, could be considered a politically engaged writer pushing for social and political change and awareness in their work. All three authors were aware of boundaries for writers, be they official censorship or social expectations and demands as well as economic realities. However, as the discussion showed, ultimately, the author has a certain power (and responsibility) to hold politicians to account, challenge the status quo, and bring to the fore individual and collective experiences that are otherwise not visible. During the discussion with the audience, it became apparent that our academic interests and approaches as literary scholars do

not always line up with those of writers and publishers, which reinforced the impulse to seek out this kind of exchange.

On our last day, we focused on the role of visual media, culture and songs, particularly looking at the aesthetics of protest. Martin Halliwell referred to visual media, such as the Doors' music video for "The Unknown Soldier" and Peter Whitehead's three-part movie: *The Word and Image* to think about the relationship between literature as reflection and literature as provocation. According to the thoughts resulting from this approach, literature can, of course, simultaneously be reflection and provocation. Just as the Vormärz could be considered a metaphor for other pre-revolutionary periods, 1968 could be considered a signifier for thinking about the relationship between arts and politics. The anesthetization of political action remained a key thought throughout the panel and made us talk about the relationship between protest and ritual.

In a final eclecticizing panel, we had in Tarek El-Ariss a strong proponent for the role of literary scholars in political discussion as well as continuing the trend of discussing the political in other media besides printed literary texts. Looking at specific examples of the blogger as a "leaking subject" who changes the concept of power from a monolithic agent to a multiple network of information, it became clear that we can no longer divide a "good side" from a "bad side". Drawing on examples from Lebanon and Egypt, El-Ariss connected the legacy of the so-called Arab renaissance or Nahda period from the 19th and 20th centuries with the virtual story-teller. Fiction and reality, as these examples suggested, are even less easily divisible than we had discussed with Lukács' concept of realism. In order to respond to a changed relationship between the text, the image, the scene and information as such, we learned that academics need to look across disciplines (such as media and political studies) to develop new ways of talking about the concepts of power, subjects and the nature of literary texts.

By the end, the various discussions in and outside the seminar room illuminated many parallels between the different aspects and historical periods that were covered during the Summer School. Every time period across various geographic situations, it seems, had its revolutionary moments which radically changed the way of perceiving the relationship between literature and the political. Comparing the Vormärz with the protest movements of 1968 as well as the Arabic Nahda with contemporary uprisings and leaking acts proved to be a productive way of engaging with a widely-discussed topic with a specific focus. A variety of perspectives also proved helpful regarding the roles of the writer, reader and publisher just as it did through varying genres - from the historical and realist novel, to Brecht´s theatre, the poetry of protest and online literature. In many instances, the discussion made us realize that some of the questions discussed seem to be even more relevant and urgent today in light of current movements for continuing feminism, responding to climate change, and fighting xenophobia.

We succeeded in our aim to move beyond classical theories of thinking the relationship between literature and political power processes by including scholars with different geographic focuses and experiences. Yet, we agreed that we could still take one step further by setting up the order of our panels differently, challenging whether to start with Theodor W. Adorno, or by including a larger number of non-Eurocentric theories.

Questions that remain to be discussed further are, among others:

Which role do literary scholars play in the processes of power related to the literary sphere?

What kinds of actions can we take and what do we hope to achieve with our involvement in processes of power?

How has the perception and study of text in relation to its political context changed throughout the centuries? For example, how has the discourse about the relationship between literature and political processes changed within today's political context?

How can the intellectual be described? As a critic, as an activist, or as both?

Finally, we would like to thank Professor Anne Eusterschulte for her strong presence in organizing this Summer School, just as we would like to express our sincere thanks to all keynote speakers and moderators, some of whom attended not only their own panels, but engaged in other panels and the participants' project presentations throughout the week. We hope that all participants perceived the Summer School as energetic and enriching as we did.