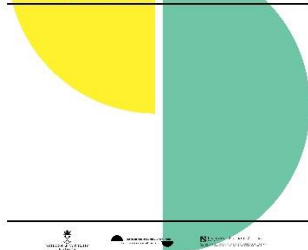


**(UN)ACCIDENTAL
TOURISTS:
POLISH LITERATURE
AND VISUAL CULTURE
IN SOUTH AFRICA IN
THE 20TH AND 21ST
CENTURIES**



Call for papers

TRANSNATIONAL COMRADESHIP: SOUTH AFRICA AND CENTRAL EUROPE

Research seminar

19–20 October 2023

Centre for Transnational Literary Studies, Jagiellonian University in Krakow

Research seminar organised within the framework of the research project
“(Un)accidental Tourists: Polish Literature and Visual Culture in South Africa in the 20th
and 21st Centuries” funded by the National Science Centre

According to the speaker in Lionel Abrahams’ poem “Place,” in the summer of 1969 a group of South Africans held an outdoor poetry reading on a mining estate outside Johannesburg. While the speaker cannot recall which works the participants read (questioning whether they were “[their] own? Mtshali’s? Plath’s?”), s/he clearly remembers the poems by two “scientist-poets” straight from the European core: Zbigniew Herbert and Miroslav Holub, whose verses – when read out in the Rand – the audience found “strangely” familiar.

How to understand this sudden appearance of two Central European poets near a South African mine dump in the late 1960s? How did their lines migrate from behind the Iron Curtain to South Africa, and why were they declared more memorable than those by Abrahams’ fellow poets, such as Mbuyiseni Oswald Mtshali? What is the possible meaning behind this unexpected Central European presence? Is it a manifestation of some kind of transnational solidarity, kinship, or affinity – especially between those living under oppressive regimes? Does it testify to the existence of a new “axis of filiation” (Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities*) which not only cuts across the North–South divide but also dismantles the seemingly stable notion of the North? Or does it perhaps suggest a sense of “comradeship” between South Africans and Central Europeans – one which, as Jodie Dean claims, is not “substantialize[d] [...] via race, ethnicity, nationality” but by being “on the same side of the division” (Jodie Dean, *Comrade*)?

The aim of this research seminar is to investigate South Africa’s multifaceted engagement and dialogue with Central Europe – its history, culture, literary production, and heritage. How have South Africans understood, perceived, and conceptualised Central Europe over the decades? Has its singular status, famously theorised by the likes Milan Kundera, Claudio Magris, or Maria Todorova, been sufficiently acknowledged in South Africa? Or, alternatively, has Central Europe suffered from being considered part of the so-called “East,” a mere supplement to the study of Russian/Soviet influences on South Africa? What kind of role has it played in South African cultural production and how to explain Central Europe’s appeal to a number of iconic South African writers and artists such as J.M. Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer, or William Kentridge? Was the creative conversation with Central Europe a way to de-provincialise one’s own oeuvre? Should it be understood as an attempt to seek alternative alliances and genealogies, as the search for phantasmagorical home? What are the possible parallels between South Africa and Central Europe (e.g. their hinternationalism; being subjected to repeated acts of colonisation; subversive “provincialism” and “peripherality”)? Finally, has the South African–Central European comradeship been a reciprocal relationship?

We invite proposals that will attempt to answer the above questions and address the issue of the transnational comradeship between South Africa and Central Europe. Suggested themes include but are not limited to:

- representation of Central Europe in South African literature and visual culture (e.g. Dan Jacobson, Gillian Slovo, Rose Zwi)
- Central Europe and the South African imaginary
- transgenerational memory of Central Europe in South Africa
- South Africa as a site of nostalgia, nostomania, and nostophobia
- South African literature in Central Europe (translation, publishing, critical reception; e.g. Breyten Breytenbach, André Brink, J.M. Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer, Damon Galgut, Antjie Krog)
- cultural transfers between Central Europe and South Africa in the 20th and 21st centuries
- reception of Central European literature and visual culture in South Africa (e.g. Aharon Appelfeld, Elias Canetti, Zbigniew Herbert, Miroslav Holub, Bohumil Hrabal, Franz Kafka, Tadeusz Kantor, Milan Kundera, Sándor Márai, Czesław Miłosz, Wisława Szymborska, Olga Tokarczuk, Joseph Roth, and Josef Škvorecký)
- South Africa and the Second World
- Central European migration to South Africa in the 20th century
- Litvak heritage in South Africa
- transnational affinities and solidarities
- South African and Central European “comradeship”
- South African and Central European “implicated subjects”
- South Africans in Central Europe / Central Europeans in South Africa.

Proposals for 20-minute presentations, consisting of a brief biographical note (including academic title and institutional affiliation) and a 150-word abstract, should be sent to robert.kusek@uj.edu.pl by 23 July 2023. Notifications of acceptance will be sent by 7 August 2023. The research seminar will be held on 19–20 October 2023 at the Institute of English Studies, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland.

Organisers:

Dr. Karina Jarzyńska
 Prof. Robert Kusek
 Dr. Jakub Muchowski
 Dr. Kinga Siewior
 Dr. Wojciech Szymański

Anna Klimek, M.A.
 Krystian Piotrowski, M.A.



Upcoming research seminars:

2024 Towards Horizontal Art History: Polish/Central European Visual Culture and South African Arts

2025 (Un)Accidental Tourists: South African Writers and *los polacos*