

Geographies of Symbolism

Symbolist Geographies

St Anne's College, Oxford
21-22 October 2022



The first readers of the 'Manifesto of Symbolism' (1886) by an obscure French poet called Jean Moréas could hardly have imagined that the term *symbolism* would soon become internationally known as a literary and artistic label. Occurring on the heels of the industrial revolution and at the peak of European colonialism, the symbolist movement was deeply informed by issues of global mobility. New ways of communicating and travelling across borders contributed to redefining the dissemination of artistic movements. Symbolism can be understood as a network that connected the rapidly growing imperial capitals of Europe (Paris, London, Brussels, Berlin, Vienna...) to each other and to cultures and places beyond the European continent, creating the conditions for the global circulation of ideas and artistic forms. This process involved a double movement towards cosmopolitanism and cultural competition: the international dissemination of symbolist literature and art strongly relied on acts of cross-border collaboration, but it also forged or reinforced cultural hierarchies between different countries, cities and geographical spaces.

Symbolist works reflect this deep engagement with space. They are rooted in specific places when it comes to production and circulation, but their contents often

gesture towards a world consciousness and towards reimagining existing spatial taxonomies (national borders; North-South, East-West binaries; metropolitan vs. colonial; urban vs. rural, etc.).

The project 'Symbolism and Decadence as World Literature' (a partnership between Oxford University and the Université Libre de Bruxelles) will start with a workshop that explores the international network of Symbolism through the angle of geography, broadly conceived. We want to discuss how geography affects symbolism and how Symbolism reconfigures geography. The aim is to facilitate an open discussion about work in progress, current research trends and possible future directions in relation to symbolist geographies. The event will comprise short informal papers (10 minutes), a roundtable discussion of recent publications and the state of the field and a guided visit to the symbolist collections of the Ashmolean Museum (reserved for workshop speakers only).

PROGRAMME

21 October, St Anne's College

09:30-10:00: Welcome and Introduction of 'Symbolism and Decadence as World Literature'

10:00-11:00: Session 1: Connecting Spaces

Jennifer Yee (Christ Church, Oxford): Presentation of *French Decadence in a Global Context* (UP Liverpool, 2022)

Elisa Segnini (University of Glasgow): 'Symbolism and Multilingualism?'

Alex Murray (Queen's University Belfast): 'Rendering Symbolism: Around Launcelot Cranmer-Byng'

11:00-11:30: Coffee break

11:30-12:30: Session 2: Imagined Places

Matthew Creasy (University of Glasgow): 'Translating *Les Fleurs* - Scottish Cosmopolitanism and Belgian Symbolism at the Fin de Siècle'

Edward Lee-Six (Free University of Brussels, ULB): '"Thekla" by Jane Wilde and the Symbolist North'

Richard Hibbitt (University of Leeds): 'The Symbolist Novel as Transnational Capital'

13:00-14:00: Lunch

14:30-16:00: Session 3: Displacing Objects

Julien Schuh (University Paris Ouest Nanterre): 'Symbolism, Epiphenomenon of Colonialism? (Indochina, Oceania, Indonesia)'

Matthew Winterbottom (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford): 'Symbolist Object in Focus: Clément Massier'

Kirsten Shepherd-Barr (St Catherine's College, Oxford): 'Displacing the Human: Rethinking Symbolist Theatre in the 21st-Century'

María del Pilar Blanco (Trinity College, Oxford): 'Experiments in Incommensurability: Latin America and Symbolism'

16:00-16:30: Coffee break

16:30-18:00: Session 4: The Future of Symbolist Studies

19:00-19:30: Drink reception

19:30: Dinner

22 October, Ashmolean Museum

10:00-12:00: [reserved for workshop speakers only] Symbolist tour in the collections of the Ashmolean Museum (org. An Van Camp and Matthew Winterbottom)



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