



2018 Institute for World Literature: Tokyo, Japan

World Literature students Chance Daldy, Dawson Campbell, and Amanda Rachmat attended this year's IWL at the University of Tokyo! Check out their recaps:

Tokyo Travel Log

By Chance Daldy

As I took off on a flight across the Pacific to spend a month at the University of Tokyo for the 2018 Institute for World Literature, many thoughts about Japan were going through my head. Thoughts such as wondering

what kind of culture shock I'd experience, what delicious food I would try, and what I would learn through the seminars of the IWL. Looking back, what ended up having the most profound effect on me was the magnificent history that seemed to constantly surround us.

The Institute for World Literature included many fantastic guest lectures and events off campus in addition to our main seminars and weekly colloquium group meetings. The two main events were a trip to a historical garden with a boat tour around Tokyo Harbour, and an outing to the Tokyo National Museum in Ueno. While I anticipated that I would enjoy the outing to the

Tokyo National Museum, I severely underestimated the awe I experienced walking around the exhibits.

The visit was organized so that we could stay at the museum for as long as we wanted to. I appreciated this as I easily spent three hours exploring the museum and could have stayed longer. Seeing hand written copies of the *Genji Monogatari* (Tale of Genji), original Noh masks and costumes, several of Hiroshige's prints from the One Hundred Famous Views of Edo, and swords crafted by legendary bladesmiths such as Masamune, Sadamune, and Nagamitsu was emotionally overwhelming. It's one thing to read about these pieces of

history in textbooks or online, but to see them in person was an unreal experience! Although the IWL itself was unforgettable, coming so close to so much history moved my moved my soul in ways I could never have anticipated. I am so grateful I had the opportunity to experience the IWL and Tokyo!



Photo by Amanda Rachmat

Tokyo, Déjà Vu

By Dawson F. Campbell

Simply put, Tokyo is a place unlike any in which I have ever sojourned. Yet, on multiple occasions while wandering the many streets, alleys, and gardens in my first two weeks there, I experienced the convulsive feeling of having previously lived some particular situations. Tokyo is, then, for me, coloured by *déjà vu*, *déjà vécu*—the feeling of the *unheimlich*.

The re-appearance of a skyline after being sundered by a passing train—I'd seen it before. Glancing down a Shinjuku street bursting with lights from the endless signs vying for attention—I'd been there before. Turning away from a 300-year-old pine to

face a crowd of my classmates awaiting entrance to the Hamarikyū Gardens—these were old friends I barely knew in a familiar setting to which I'd never been.

While it would be more exciting to attribute these seemingly consecutive instances of *déjà vu* to a glitch in the matrix, the merging of parallel universes, prescient dreams, or moments of prophetic intuition, there is a more plausible explanation. My early experiences of Tokyo were those of affected phenomenology. In Tokyo attention is fragmented by an overload of stimulus causing memory to associate that which was previously registered subconsciously, to what was now being consciously perceived in the present. This

anomaly in memory creates a phenomenon that is simultaneously remembered and novel—during *déjà vu*, as Henri Bergson suggests, perception and memory overlap.

Be it through the amalgamation of shining lights, flashy signs, and many bustling people or through the beauty that surrounds the lush gardens, the juxtaposing new and old architecture, and the entire prefecture in an alluring aura—Tokyo is an over-stimulating experience. It is constantly pulling you in from all sides, leaving memory to pick up the pieces of experience and place them where it will—in some cases haphazardly.

I hope that I may one day see it all again, again.

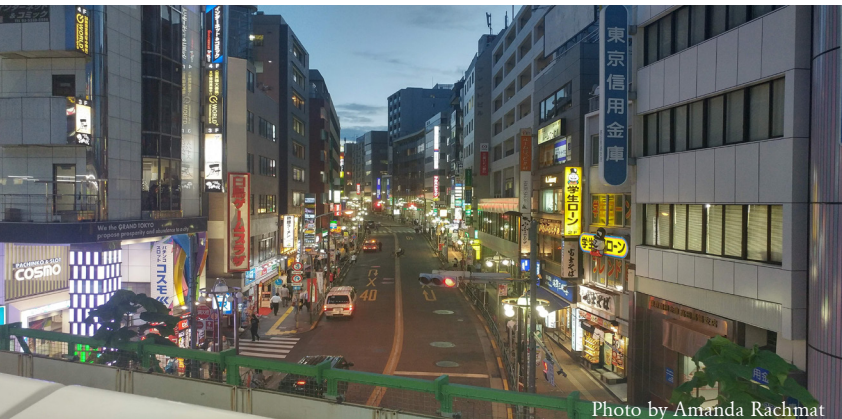


Photo by Amanda Rachmat

Food for Thought

By Amanda Rachmat

Cuisine, like literature, allows culture to move through the body and mind by way of shared experience. This was absolutely my encounter during my time spent in Tokyo. By engaging in discussion with fellow colleagues during IWL seminars and through enjoying one or many of the plethora of izakayas on any given Tokyo street, participating in the institute certainly satiated my hunger for knowledge and thirst for diverse flavours.

My fondest memories of the IWL are simply going out for a bite near campus and discussing my new colleagues' current research over a couple of Sapporo's and sharing traditional Japanese dishes. Connecting with likeminded academics from around the

world who are bringing in different experiences from their own lives and the literature that they are engaging with really inspired how I want to pursue literature in my future. Whether it was 'disaster literature', cross-sections between Russian and Chinese Sci-fi, or incorporating climate change into the discourse of World Literature, I was always floored at the endless possibilities of this field of study.

When it came to downtime, my main focus was food.

In my experience, the most satisfying culinary experiences in Tokyo are found by mistake. Even while stumbling over what little Japanese I had picked up and making horrific pronunciation errors, finding restaurants by happenchance (after getting lost) ended up being more rewarding than the planned visits to foodie hotspots. Much in the same way you allow a piece of literature to take you on an unexpected adventure, when visiting Tokyo simply go with the flow and follow your nose. Your senses know you better than Google does, regardless of how appallingly spot-on Google seems to be getting.

So, to leave with you with some advice: You can never have too much sushi in a week. You'll regret you didn't have more as soon as you leave.

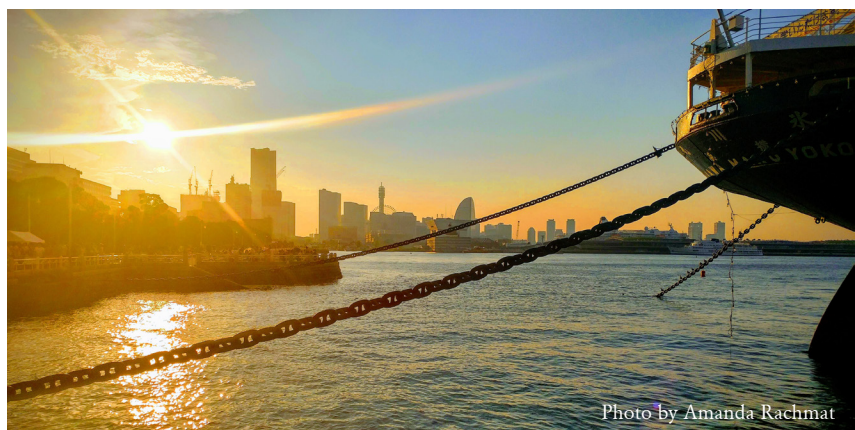


Photo by Amanda Rachmat