

Companion to  
**Comparative Literature, World Literatures,  
and Comparative Cultural Studies**

Edited by

Steven TÖTÖSY de ZEPETNEK & Tutun MUKHERJEE



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# Introduction to the *Companion to Comparative Literature, World Literatures, and Comparative Cultural Studies*

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Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek and Tutun Mukherjee

To make connections both tangible and virtual is a powerful motivator in scholarship. A tensile filament stretches towards another filament to create the spoke for yet another filament until electronic communication and the world wide web has spread worldwide. This is the figurative environment of knowledge and the transmission of knowledge of our borderless world in the twenty-first century. Linking texts and contexts, cultural products, and the economies of their production, authors, audiences, languages and literacies, politics, and the circulation of power creates the complex texture of interrelated knowledge systems and human relationships that encompass the planet. As Rabindranath Tagore's song goes, "your net spans the world, how can one escape/I'm a half-captive already, the other half eagerly waits," being trapped within the fluid play of meaning-making, its construction and deconstruction, is the ideal location for negotiating the tangled semantic and cultural interdependence of our time because texts without texture would just be a group of isolated entities, diminished in themselves when unrelated to one another and the world at large. The negotiation of the network of relationships in the rapidly transforming "glocal" milieu requires more than appropriate pedagogies: importantly, it requires a major shift in cultural and aesthetic paradigms and attitudes and a re-orientation towards being more inclusive globally.

Contributors to the *Companion to Comparative Literature, World Literatures, and Comparative Cultural Studies* address the current state of affairs of scholarship in comparative humanities with focus on the discipline of comparative literature and the fields of world literature and comparative cultural studies. While the discipline of comparative literature in the West (i.e., in Anglophone North America and in most of Europe) appears to be losing ground in its institutional presence, in other parts of the world—including Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East—it is flourishing both in scholarship and in its institutional presence and pedagogical vitality. While in the West there is (often) a dividing line between comparative literature and cultural studies, in other places comparative literature



is being revived by making use of tenets of cultural studies including but not limited to the field of comparative cultural studies. Comparative cultural studies is a combination of tenets of comparative literature and cultural studies—minus the former’s Eurocentrism and the national approach—and including the ideological orientation of cultural studies. We note that the field of world literatures—a perspective also in comparative literature and comparative cultural studies—is gaining increasing interest in the U.S. and in some other places as an intellectual framework of “global reading” and in pedagogy, its institutional presence remains at present limited.

Scholarship presented in the volume provides innovative perspectives for understanding recent developments in comparative humanities and a distinct feature of the volume is that instead of work on the specifics of either comparative literature, world literatures, cultural studies, or comparative cultural studies—as many books in these fields of study are published and more often than not excluding scholarship in related fields—the volume presents new work covering all said areas of the study of literature and culture understood as comparative. Thus, the *Companion* is intended for a readership—students, faculty, and general readers—interested in the current state of affairs of comparative humanities. Articles in the volume are presented in four thematic parts: Part 1 concerns theories of comparative literature, world literatures, cultural studies, and comparative cultural studies; Part 2 concerns the histories and the current situation of comparative literature in various languages; Part 3 contains examples where tenets of approaches in comparative literature, world literatures, and comparative cultural studies are applied in diaspora, gender, genre, interart, language, (inter)media, etc., studies; and Part 4 is a multilingual bibliography of books in comparative literature, world literatures, and comparative cultural studies

Note that in-text in languages where the sequence of names is surname first name (e.g., Chinese, Hungarian, etc.), the Western sequence of first name surname is used; the index contains surnames only—and concepts—whereby surnames are indexed when referred to in-text, but not when referred to as authors as sources; there are no footnotes or endnotes in the articles in order to make the volume user friendly.

We thank the anonymous reviewers of the manuscript for their valuable comments and suggestions, as well as Deepa Chattopadhyay and her team, especially Anirban Dey, who took care of the process of the publication of the volume at Cambridge University Press India Pvt Ltd.

## **PART I**

Theories of Comparative Literature, World Literatures,  
and Comparative Cultural Studies



# The Contextual Study of Literature and Culture, Globalization, and Digital Humanities

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Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek and Louise O. Vasvári

**Abstract:** In their article “The Contextual Study of Literature and Culture, Globalization, and Digital Humanities” Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek and Louise O. Vasvári discuss the situation of the humanities with regard to the discipline of comparative literature and the fields of world literature, cultural studies, and comparative cultural studies. Their postulate is that in order to make the study of literature and culture a socially, politically, and economically relevant activity of scholarship today, humanities scholars ought to turn to contextual and evidence-based work. Further, they argue that comparative cultural studies—an approach that is inter- and multi-disciplinary and employs new media technology—would achieve global presence and social relevance for the humanities with in-depth scholarship.

## INTRODUCTION

The perspective of comparison in scholarship has been (and continues to be) widely employed in various disciplines. Among several compelling lines of argumentation put forward of recent are, for example, by Marcel Detienne in his *Comparing the Incomparable*, George M. Fredrickson in his *The Comparative Imagination*, or as Richard A. Peterson states, “comparison is one of the most powerful tools used in intellectual inquiry, since an observation made repeatedly is given more credence than is a single observation” (257). At the same time, in and about the discipline of comparative literature it remains a recurrent view that it is lacking definition, has no or only a partial framework of theory and/or methodology, and that for these reasons the discipline remains with a history and presence of insecurity (see, e.g., Grabovszki). These lacunae—acknowledged repeatedly in the discipline since its inception in the nineteenth century—are among others, a result of the discipline’s borrowing from other disciplines for the analysis of literature. Starting in the nineteenth century, comparative literature gained intellectual interest and institutional presence mostly in Europe and in the U.S. and in both regions it is, since the 1990s, undergoing a diminishing presence because of the interest in and adoption of literary theory in departments of English and because of comparative literature’s Eurocentrism (see, e.g., Ahmed; Gould;

Pireddu; Tötösy de Zepetnek, *Comparative Literature*, “The New Humanities”; Witt; see also Ascari; Mignolo). A further shortcoming of comparative literature remains its continued construction (theoretical and applied) based on national literatures at a time when the paradigm of the global has gained currency in many disciplines and approaches (with regard to recent discussions on this in English, see, e.g., Porter, “The Crisis”; Saussy, “Interplanetary”; Tötösy de Zepetnek, “The New Humanities”).

Haun Saussy makes the claim—with regard to the U.S.—that “Comparative Literature has, in a sense, won its battles. It has never been better received in the American university. ... Our conclusions have become other people’s assumptions” (“Exquisite Cadavers” 3; see also Finney; a corollary to the problematics in comparative literature and US-American-Eurocentrism, Saussy writes “America” while referring only to the U.S. and this is hegemonial appropriation of a continent: contrary to established public discourse this ought not to occur, at least in scholarly discourse: on the problem and practice of this appropriation, see, e.g., McClennen). While Saussy’s analysis that comparative literature’s aims and scope have gained currency in literary study is well argued and a welcome positive view, what is missing in his assessment is attention to the discipline’s institutional constriction both in the U.S. and Europe. *His positive* view of the new status quo represents a revision to such opinions as Susan Bassnett’s in her *Introduction to Comparative Literature* that the discipline is dead (3), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s similar suggestion with the title of her book *Death of a Discipline* (i.e., comparative literature), or the negative prognosis in the entry “Comparative Literature” in the *Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms* (GMH), etc. The two opposing views—that the idea of comparative literature “conquered” literary study and that the discipline is dead—refer to the U.S. and Europe and while both may be correct assessments depending on whether one considers the discipline’s intellectual content or its institutional status, they continue with a Euro-U.S.-American-centric view.

What is remarkable—and this is paid scant attention to in Anglophone comparative literature or world literatures scholarship—is that both the concept of the discipline, as well as its institutional presence are advancing in so-called “peripheral” languages and cultures including Iberian Spanish and Portuguese, Greek, etc., and this is the case also in Latin American languages, Chinese, Indian languages, in Arabic or Farsi (e.g., a new journal was founded in 2010—entitled *Comparative Literature Journal*—published by the Academy of Persian Language and Literature and several new departments of comparative literature were also inaugurated). Further, we submit that the advances of comparative literature in the “periphery” should not be viewed as “catching up”—i.e., the “period” view in literary history—similar to how, for example, modernity has first appeared in West Europe and then developed later in various parts of the world: current advances of comparative literature in “peripheral” regions are a result of the impact of globalization and thus a sophisticated construct with

both traditional and new ideas and approaches, as well as immanent relevance (see, e.g., Krishnaswamy; see also Caruth and Culler; Dagnino; Gould; Wang, “Confronting Globalization”).

## THE DISCIPLINE OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AND THE FIELD OF WORLD LITERATURES

We begin with the following definition of comparative literature:

The discipline of Comparative Literature is *in toto* a method in the study of literature in at least two ways. First, Comparative Literature means the knowledge of more than one national language and literature, and/or it means the knowledge and application of other disciplines in and for the study of literature and second, Comparative Literature has an ideology of inclusion of the Other, be that a marginal literature in its several meanings of marginality, a genre, various text types, etc. ... Comparative Literature has intrinsically a content and form, which facilitate the cross-cultural and interdisciplinary study of literature and it has a history that substantiated this content and form. Predicated on the borrowing of methods from other disciplines and on the application of the appropriated method to areas of study that single-language literary study more often than not tends to neglect, the discipline is difficult to define because thus it is fragmented and pluralistic. (Tötösy de Zepetnek, *Comparative Literature* 13)

Susan Stanford Friedman argues in “Why Not Compare?” that “comparison is an ever-expanding necessity in many fields, including literary studies, where the intensification of globalization has encouraged comparative analysis of literature and culture on a transnational, indeed, planetary scale” (753; see also Dimock; Radhakrishnan). And this brings us back to Goethe’s concept of *Weltliteratur* that, among other factors, is about the relevance and importance of translation and against the national conception of literature: thus a transnational and global enterprise (see also Kuhiwczak and Littau; Szabolcsi and Vajda). While Goethe’s proposal for *Weltliteratur* did not gain presence as a structure in institutional settings (i.e., in university departments of world literatures), his notion remained and remains a standard concept in comparative literature as an intellectual concept and pedagogical approach. However, in practice Goethe’s notion resulted in Eurocentrism and the nation approach. Similarly, in Hugó Meltzl de Lomnitz’s work and in his and Sámuel Brassai’s journal *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténeti Lapok* (1877–1878) (Papers in Comparative Literary History) and *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* (1878–1888)—while remaining important contributions to the discipline’s early years and similar to Goethe’s notion experiencing renewed interest today—the discipline remains with an essentialist European perspective (on Goethe, see, e.g., Birus; Pizer; Sturm-Trigonakis, *Comparative Cultural*, “Comparative Cultural,” *Global playing*; on Meltzl de Lomnitz, see, e.g., Berlina and Tötösy Zepetnek; Damrosch, “Hugo Meltzl”; Fassel; Marno; on the history of comparative literature in Africa, see

Ilo; in Arabic, see Abdel-Messih; in Chinese, see Wang and Liu; in French, see Tomiche; in German, see Lubrich; in Iberian Spanish and Portuguese, see Vilariño Picos and Abuíñ González; in Indian Languages, see Patil; in Italian, see Pala; in Latin America, see McClennen; in Russian, see Shaitanov; in Russian and Central and East Europe, see Berlina and Tötösy de Zepetnek; in the U.S., see Gillespie).

Perhaps against the said shortfalls of comparative literature—i.e., Eurocentrism, the loss of its locus of literary and culture theory, and its insistence on the nation-centric approach—the concept of world literature has gained renewed interest and since the 1980s but in particular since the 1990s, a good number of books and collected volumes have been published with the approach, albeit mostly in English (see, e.g., Aldridge; Carroll; Damrosch; Damrosch, Melas, Buthelezi; D’haen; D’haen, Damrosch, Kadir; D’haen, Domínguez, Thomsen Rosendahl; Foster; Gallagher; Hynes-Berry and Miller; Jullien; Klitgard; Lawall; Moriarty; Pizer; Prendergast, Christopher; Simonsen and Stougard-Nielsen; Sturm-Trigonakis; Thomsen Rosendahl; Wang; in other Western languages see, e.g., Benvenuti and Ceserani; Casanova; Gossens; Ivanov; Juvan; Lamping; Lamping and Frieling; Lamping and Zipfel; Pradeau and Samoyault; Sturm-Trigonakis; among the many articles on world literature, particularly interesting is Jing Tsu’s 2010 “Getting Ideas about World Literature in China”).

While courses in/on world literature(s) exist widely in the English-speaking world, as well as in Europe and Asia, few university departments or programs exist (on teaching world literatures see, e.g., Foster; Pizer). In the U.S. and Canada there is a limited development towards the establishing of departments and professorships specifically designated as “world literature” and it remains to be seen whether the concept will develop into degree granting departments, thus according it an institutional base. Of note is the recent founding of the Institute of World Literature at Harvard University (initiated and lead by David Damrosch under the designation of Peking University’s “World Literature Association”) with summer schools held in Beijing (2011), Istanbul (2012), Cambridge (2013) and further ones scheduled for 2014 in Hong Kong and for 2015 in Lisboa. While the undertaking is welcome and timely to further the concept and practice of world literature(s), a drawback of the summer schools is that participation is costly and thus few students and scholars from economically disadvantaged countries are able to attend. Of note is also that the Modern Language Association of America has been publishing a book series called “Approaches to Teaching World Literature” (to date with 100 volumes) and that in 2010 a new series of books has been started by the Association under the designation “World Literature Reimagined” (to date with three volumes published). In the U.S., departments or programs specifically in “world literature”—i.e., not in conjunction with “comparative literature” of which there are several or with “English” or some other combination—include the University of California Long Beach, the University of California Santa Cruz, Case Western Reserve University, College of the Holy Cross, Creighton University, Duquesne University, the University of Houston, the University of

Iowa, James Madison University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, North Carolina State University, the Ohio State University, Point Loma Nazarene University, in Canada the University of Ottawa and Simon Fraser University, in the United Kingdom the University of Sunderland, and in Australia the University of Queensland.

Damrosch's definition of world literature is as follows: "World literature is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is as applicable to individual works as to bodies of material, available for reading established classics and new discoveries alike" (*What Is 5*) and his concept of world literature with regard to literary production, publication, and circulation is similar to the micro-system approach in the study of literature (as a system or systems) as proposed by the initiators of the approach, namely Siegfried J. Schmidt and Itamar Even-Zohar: importantly—although often not referred to by authors to other's work, similar as they are—these approaches are related to Pierre Bourdieu's, Norman K. Denzin's, and Robert Estivals's works (see Tötösy de Zepetnek, *Comparative Literature*, "Systemic Approches"; see also Gupta; Sadowski; for a bibliography of work in the contextual and systemic approach see Tötösy de Zepetnek, "Bibliography").

An alternative view of "world literature" is expressed by Saussy as follows:

the concept of world literature that consists chiefly of a canon, a body of works and their presence as models of literary quality in the minds of scholars and writers. But the phrase "world literature" is not used exclusively in so normative a sense. Another sense, increasingly prominent in recent years, makes "world literature" be an equivalent of global literary history, a history of relations and influences that far exceeds the national canons into which academic departments routinely squeeze and package literature. (It is not surprising that academic departments nationalize literature: departments are an invention of the nineteenth-century university, a supranational medieval institution re-chartered by the monoglot nations of the industrial era.) An obvious improvement on the anachronism and petty chauvinism of national canons, this global literary history remains under-valued so long as it leaves untouched by analysis the rival accounts of global history that occupy economists, historians and geographers. So, for example, the world-literature proposals of Pascale Casanova and Franco Moretti, despite their differences, assume a framework of international exchange deriving from Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory: a sudden spreading of European influence across the globe starting around 1500 and carrying with it, not just colonialism, disease and firearms, but also the novel. Extra-European populations have, in their accounts, the opportunity to respond to the European form, but it is left vague how much of a difference their own narrative traditions make outside their home areas or whether they were not perhaps in advance of the European form in various ways. By subjecting this research program, currently being carried out in dozens of university world-literature programs, to a blunt and slightly unfair description, I mean to evoke the perspective of other global literary histories taking as their center different languages, different genres, different literary practices and their diffusion from different centers ... A



model of world literature that made room for the countless literary worlds would be relativistic, not deterministic. (“The Dimensionality” 291–93)

Similarly, Martin Puchner suggests that “world literature, or world creation literature, as I understand it, thrives on the relation between the two words of which this term is composed: world; and literature. It invites us to reconsider the dimension of reference, asking what world or worlds this literature refers to; the dimension of scale through which some type of totality is aimed at; and, by contrast, the decision to use the model as a way of making that totality manageable” (347) and Marshall Brown also suggests a relational concept: “world literature ... is writing that conveys the power and the conflicted nature of encounters with natural, or social, or metaphysical realms beyond our power to contain them” (362). Among others, these approaches are related to the thematic reading and study of literature (see, e.g., Bremond, Landy, Pavel; Elkhadem; Trousson), an approach in comparative literature but one that has not taken hold in a widespread manner. While these and similar definitions of the concept world literature do not conflict with definitions of comparative literature, in world literature focus is on how to read texts across the literatures of the world (in translation) and on how to teach literature, thus it is a program of practice. While this approach is of course relevant for an inclusive perspective of the globalization of culture and literature, there are scholars who express reservations about the program because of the resulting competition between comparative literature and world literature (see, e.g., Eoyang; Figueira; Mufti).

Of note is that in recent volumes on world literature and with regard to our discussion about cultural studies and comparative cultural studies below—Theo D’haen’s *The Routledge Concise History of World Literature* (2012) and the volumes edited by Theo D’haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir, *The Routledge Companion to World Literature* (2012), or Theo D’haen, César Domínguez, and Mads Thomsen Rosendahl, *World Literature: A Reader* (2012)—there is no reference to or discussion about cultural studies. This lacuna can also be observed with regard to books in comparative literature in which there are, as a rule, few if any references to cultural studies and, vice versa, in books in cultural studies there are few if any references to comparative literature, thus indicating a divide in humanities scholarship. We note here also that—likely because the framework originates in Central Europe’s east, thus a “periphery” (see above)—the notion of the “interliterary” as developed by Dionýz Ďurišin in Czecho(Slovak) has not gained interest in comparative literature except in a few cases (see, e.g., Domínguez; Gálik) despite the existence of the journal *Interlitteraria* (1995–) with the objective of promoting Ďurišin’s framework. Further, an ideological and political issue is the current discussion in the United States with regard to the designation of the field of “world literature” versus “world literatures” whereby the contention is that “world literature” remains Euro-U.S.-American centered while the designation of “world literatures” suggests a more global and decentered understanding of and approach to the study and reading of literature

(e.g., discussions at various panels at the 2013 *Annual Convention of the Modern Language Association of America*).

## ABOUT (TEXT)BOOKS IN COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AND WORLD LITERATURES

Based on a relatively complete list of books in comparative literature and world literature, an approximate statistical account suggests that the publication of books in the Western “center” where comparative literature or world literature is practiced (i.e., in English, French, German, Italian, and Russian) increased dramatically in the period of 1980–1999 and decreased somewhat in the period of 2000–2012. In Central and East Europe (here excluding German-language publications but including Russian), the situation is about the same—although in Russian the situation is different in that in the period 2000–2012—there has been a significant increase of publications (see the tables below). Different from Europe and Anglophone North America is the situation in Asia, where—in particular in Chinese and in various Indian languages (i.e., Hindi and Mahrati) in the period of 1980–2012 the number of book publications is remarkable. Interesting is that no books have been published in comparative or world literatures in African languages. Remarkable is the number of books in comparative literature in Arabic: gauged by the number of books, comparative literature in Arabic is second only to English and this is the more interesting because there are only two departments/programs of comparative literature in countries where Arabic is spoken and this means that the discipline has not gained institutional presence. A further observation is that gauged by the titles of books, “comparative literature” remains the preferred reference versus “world literature” in all languages, with the former six times to that of the latter (the statistics below are based on Tötösy de Zepetnek, “Multilingual”):

**Table 1:** *Books in comparative literature and world literature(s): nineteenth century to 2012*

language	19th century	1900–1919	1920–1939	1940–1959	1960–1979	1980–1999	2000–2012
Arabic				9	10	41	31
Bulgarian							2
Chinese						15	25
Czech/Slovak					1		
Dutch/Flemish				1	1	4	3
English	1	4	1	9	28	92	102
French	4	1	1	1	11	38	12
German	2	2	2	1	11	19	21

Hebrew						2	5
Hungarian					3	4	2
Indian langs.						3	4
Italian				2		7	1
Japanese			1	3	5	2	
Korean						2	2
Polish						2	4
Portuguese					1	3	
Romanian					4	1	4
Russian		1			5	4	13
Slovak					1	3	
Slovenian			1			1	2
Spanish						7	6
Turkish						1	2
Ukrainian							3

**Table 2:** “comparative literature” and “world literature” in titles of books: nineteenth century to 2012

<b>language</b>	<b>“comparative literature”</b>	<b>“world literature”</b>
Arabic	84	1
Bulgarian	2	
Chinese	21	
Czech	1	
Dutch/Flemish	2	3
English	88	33
French	27	4
German	19	10
Hungarian	2	2
Indian languages	17	
Italian	6	
Japanese	9	
Korean	3	
Polish	3	
Portuguese	4	
Romanian	4	
Russian	13	2

Slovenian	2	
Slovak	2	
Spanish	8	
Turkish	3	
Ukrainian	2	
total	322	55

## THE FIELD OF CULTURAL STUDIES

Cultural studies is practiced as a hybrid field of scholarship, that is, not located in a specific and established discipline but grounded in critical humanities and social sciences theories which, instead of any unifying disciplinary theory and methodology of its own, embraces a broad range of theoretical approaches and methodologies (in this, cultural studies is similar to the discipline of comparative literature and the field of comparative cultural studies with the difference that while in comparative literature an ideological orientation is not professed, in cultural studies and comparative cultural studies it is). In contrast to traditional disciplines, the strength of cultural studies resides precisely in its theoretical heterogeneity, richness, plurality, and the flexibility of its borders. It aims to reconfigure the boundaries of humanities and social sciences scholarship around new paradigms in theory and in application. Because of its diversity of methods, cultural studies can perhaps be best defined as a metadisciplinary idea across disciplines rather than as a unitary field of study. It can also be described as inter-, multi-, and even counter- or anti-disciplinary, taking its agenda and mode of analysis from shared concerns and methods, (re)combining numerous traditional and new disciplines to effect the critical study of cultural phenomena in various societies, always with an emphasis on the cultural and social context and with an aim of understanding the metamorphosis of the notion of culture itself. Rather than privileging canonical works reproducing established lines of authority, cultural studies aims to articulate the unsaid, the suppressed, and the concealed by dominant modes of knowing, not only of texts and signifying practices, but also of theories in traditional disciplines. At its best, cultural studies is a cultural critique that extols the virtues of eclecticism and embraces a holistic and democratic view of culture through a spectrum of theoretical approaches and methodologies, seeking to make explicit connections between various cultural forms and between culture and society and politics, with the aim not merely to be analytical but to promote change. Cultural studies is always potentially controversial, with at least in its origins claiming for itself a radical political commitment and a practice of social change. Thus, unlike traditional philological scholarship that strives to be “objective,” cultural studies is explicitly ideological (this particular approach is also a factor in comparative cultural studies, see below).

Although in some of its later versions cultural studies has become less avowedly political, it continues to represent a challenge both to the atrophied elitism of traditional academic disciplines and to hegemonic power structures more broadly. The term “culture” in cultural studies refers to a cultural, anthropological, sociological, historical, narrative, etc. conception to study ordinary features of life, while it aims simultaneously to dismantle the aesthetic-textual and hierarchical conception of “culture.” At the same time, this means also that cultural studies can be applied to the study of the traditional, the canonical, and the hegemonic. Cultural studies can produce more relevant knowledge than established scholarly discourses in its readiness to address everyday life, in, for example, the study of marginalized and popular cultures or in investigating culture and media interest in the creative role of its audience (see, e.g., Bathrick; Berubé; Cometa; Franco; Grossberg; Grossberg, Nelson, Treichler; Hall; McCarthy, Durham, Engel, Filmer, Giardina, Lalongreca; McNeil; Miller; Milner; Prow; Rojek; specifically on method in cultural studies, see, e.g., Couldry; Ferguson and Golding; Lee; Lee and Poynton; White and Schwoch).

Cultural studies can draw on and/or be worked into a large number of established disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, including literary studies in general and literary theory, the sociology of culture, social theory, media studies, communication studies, cultural anthropology, cultural history/geography, ethnography, sociolinguistics, translation studies, folklore, philosophy, law, cultural policy studies, pedagogy, history, museum studies, audience studies, art history and criticism, fashion theory and history, political science, gender studies, etc. In the area of thematics, too, cultural studies can be applied to such as gender and sexuality, nationhood and (post)national identities, colonialism and postcolonialism, race and ethnicity, popular culture, the formation of social subjectivities, consumer culture, science and ecology, subaltern studies, identity politics, border studies, area studies, the politics of aesthetics and disciplinarity, cultural institutions, discourse and textuality, (sub)culture(s) in various societies, popular culture and its audience, (global) culture in a postmodern age, the politics of aesthetics, culture and its institutions, language, cultural politics of the city, science, culture and the ecosystems, postcolonial studies, feminist, gender, and queer studies, ethnic studies, (im)migration studies, urban studies, metaprofessional concerns such as the job market, academic publishing, the processes of tenure, etc. Recent scholarship in cultural studies includes cognitive science, emotion, communication, new media, memory, etc. (see, e.g., Highmore; Nalbatian, Matthews, McClellan; Smith; Zunshine). Remarkable is that while in comparative literature attention is paid to the field of cultural studies, in cultural studies there is hardly ever a reference to work in comparative literature when in fact in many instances in comparative literature similar matter has been studied even before the arrival of cultural studies.

With regard to its background in thought and institutional presence, cultural studies began in Britain in the 1950s with Marxist-based critical analysis of culture

by Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, Edward P. Thompson, Stuart Hall, etc., in the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (see, e.g., Inglis; Seidl, Horak, Grossberg). The Centre issued a series of influential politically engaged studies, some later combined into books, on mass media and popular culture. The earliest publications questioned literary production of what had come to be canonized as “English literature,” the influence of the cultural industry on the masses, and proposed that popular and working class productions and their audience were worthy of study. British cultural studies underwent exportation by the move of expatriate Britons who—because of the Thatcher government’s policies of education—left the United Kingdom and obtained faculty positions in the U.S. and other Anglophone countries. The success of cultural studies occurred and occurs in the English-speaking world (see, e.g., Frow and Morris; Highmore; Prow; McNaughton and Newton; Turner). A parallel school of thought evolved in German-language scholarship with Marxist critical analysis at the Frankfurt School with the difference that while the Birmingham School studied popular culture, the Frankfurt School argued for the importance of high culture and against the impact of popular culture and based its approaches mostly in antipositivist sociology, psychology, and existential philosophy (e.g., Theodor W. Adorno, Jürgen Habermas, Max Horkheimer, Leo Löwenthal, Herbert Marcuse, etc.). A further framework for the study of culture is *Kulturwissenschaft*—a framework developed since the 1920s in Germany and in many aspects rooted in nineteenth-century epistemological thought—based in the fields of philosophy of culture (e.g., Georg Simmel and Ernst Cassirer), history of culture (e.g., Wilhelm Dilthey), historical and philosophical anthropology (e.g., Johann Friedrich Blumenbach), sociology (e.g., Max Weber), and the history of art (e.g., Aby Warburg). While since the 1980s practitioners of *Kulturwissenschaft* have adopted some aspects of U.S.-American and/or Birmingham cultural studies, it remains a specific field and discipline rooted in German-language historical and philosophical thought and in its history and current practice different from cultural studies (for an overview, see Crescenzi; see also Bachmann-Medick; Böhme and Scherpe; Böhme, Matussek, Müller; Glaser and Luserke; Kittler).

Cultural studies has continued to undergo fragmentation while at the same time scholarship is done in newer areas such as globalization, the critical analysis of race, ethnographic field work, and gender studies, among others. It should also be noted—see above—that many aspects and perspectives of cultural studies have been available and exist(ed) in the discipline of comparative literature where many of cultural studies’ themes and topics had been studied before the rise of cultural studies and continue to be studied today. In the U.S., in addition to the field’s prominence in departments of English, cultural studies has also been increasing in departments of history, sociology, anthropology, and other fields of the humanities and social sciences (even in medicine with regard to patient care and the diagnosis of illnesses). Cultural studies has also had influence in Southeast Asia, particularly in Taiwan and South Korea where many of its practitioners returned after having

studied in Anglophone countries. Chinese cultural studies disassociates itself from nationalistic and political implications, favoring “Chineseness” (including overseas Chinese) as a cultural rather than ethnic, national, or political point of reference, a kind of “Chinese culturalism” that attempts to transcend geopolitical borders (see Zhang; Chen; Cheng, Wang, Tötösy de Zepetnek). The influence of cultural studies worldwide is partly owing to the hegemony of English as the world’s *lingua franca*, but also to U.S.-American hegemony and the spread of popular culture, which, in turn, gave the initial impetus in the U.S. to develop the Birmingham School’s theoretical foci and apply them in and for the study of U.S.-American culture (which then developed further for the study of various aspects of culture altogether).

With regard to cultural studies in Europe, Paul Moore suggests that the critique of received cultural worth is hindered by Eurocentrism, the (nostalgic) belief that Europe is the repository of “high” culture, a conservative defense of which then becomes a critical value in European self-enunciation. Similarly, Roman Horak identifies the same prejudice against cultural studies and popular culture in Germany and Austria specifically, as well as the impact of the Frankfurt School, among other factors, along with the fear and disdain for the popular linked closely to a fear of U.S.-American culture and the threat of (U.S.-)“Americanization.” However, since the late 1990s a number of books have been published in cultural studies albeit mostly introductions to the field in its U.S.-American versions (see, e.g., Hepp; Horak, *Die Praxis*; Lindner; Lutter; Lutter and Reisenleitner; Marcant; Musner and Wunberg; Musner, Wunberg, and Lutter). At the same time, most publications in cultural studies appear in Anglophone countries even if about cultural studies in Spanish, German, French, Italian, or Russian whose authors begin with an introduction that sets out the breadth of the task involved in developing an identifiable cultural studies dimension within the established cultural histories and traditions in scholarship of the various countries (see, e.g., Burns; Denham, Kacandes, Petropoulos; Forbes and Kelly; Graham and Labanyi; Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas; Kelly and Shepherd; Kennedy; see also Le Hir and Strand; Reynolds and Kidd; Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári, “Synopsis”). Of interest is that in European scholarship it is in France—in addition to Central and East Europe (see Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári, “The Study of Hungarian”)—where cultural studies has acquired the least interest (see, e.g., Chalard-Fillaudeau; López-Varela Azcárate and Tötösy de Zepetnek, “*Comparative Cultural*”).

In the introduction to their collected volume *Cultural Studies in Question*, Marjorie Ferguson and Peter Golding criticize the failure to deal empirically with the structural changes in national and global political, economic, and media systems after the collapse of the Soviet empire, the consequences of globalization, and the process of democratization (this view is parallel to Tötösy de Zepetnek’s framework and methodology of the “contextual” and the “empirical” in his framework of comparative cultural studies, see below). In the same volume, John D.H. Downing proposes to examine the capacity of cultural studies to illuminate



the economic, political, and cultural transitions in Central and East Europe and in Russia and, conversely, to investigate the implications of those transitions as being a major test for scholars for the evaluation of the utility of cultural studies. He underlines the necessity for scholarship to integrate society and power, conflict and change into the analysis of communication and, in particular, to acknowledge the power of other agents than the elite ones, that is, the role that popular culture has played in bringing about internal pressure for political change. Downing also argues that South Africa, South Korea, Taiwan, and Latin America, as well as Southern Europe, which have undergone some analogous transitions, might offer terms of comparison.

In a volume entitled *Cultural Discourse in Taiwan*, the editors comment that Taiwan—owing to its colonial past and diversity of cultural heritage—“represents the dynamics of cultural processes where East and West meet in a specific and extraordinary locus” (Wang and Tötösy de Zepetnek 1). And with regard to South Korea, Myungkoo Kang examines in her article “East Asian Modernities” the situation of cultural studies and her analysis suggests parallels which would be applicable—similar to Taiwan cultural studies—to the study of Central and East European culture(s) (see also Kang’s “There is No South Korea”; on Central and East Europe, see, e.g., Konstantinović and Rinner; Tötösy de Zepetnek, “Comparative Cultural Studies and the Study of Central European”). Kang outlines how South Korea has adopted, appropriated, and utilized Western theories of cultural studies beginning in the 1980s and underlines the need for cultural studies in the twenty-first century. She also describes how in Taiwan, where cultural studies has begun to be institutionalized since 1993, it has provided the Taiwan democratic movement with a theoretical foundation to carry out significant research on identity politics, minority and gender issues, and on Japanese and U.S.-American colonization, as well as relations between Native Taiwanese and immigrants from Mainland China. With regard to the situation of cultural studies in other parts of the world, one particular example is worth noting: Latin American cultural studies—whose development has been consubstantial for the emancipation against the cultural hegemony of Europe and later of the United States—often focuses its agenda on issues similar to postcommunist Central and East Europe, such as the phenomenon of cultural penetration, censorship and self-censorship, and the symbolic manner in which popular resistance was expressed, definition of national cultures, and analyses of discourses of power (see, e.g., Jordan and Morgan-Tomasunas; McClennen and Fitz; McRobbie; Moreiras).

## THE FIELD OF COMPARATIVE CULTURAL STUDIES

Cultural studies, while innovative and an essential field in the humanities and social sciences, retains one drawback and this is its monolingual construction as it is a field developed and practiced primarily in the Anglophone world by scholars who, in general, work with two languages at best. Hence the notion that what has been a



trademark of comparative literature, namely working in multiple languages, ought, ideally, be carried over into “comparative cultural studies.” Developed since the late 1980s by Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, the conceptualization of comparative cultural studies is based on a “merger” of tenets of the discipline of comparative literature—minus the discipline’s Eurocentrism and nation orientation—with those of cultural studies, including the latter’s explicit and practiced ideological perspective (see, e.g., “From Comparative,” “The New Humanities”; although rarely a professed factor, there are signs that of recent the ideological dimension is paid attention to also in literary studies proper [see, e.g., Lecercle]). Additional tenets of comparative cultural studies include that attention is paid to the “how” of cultural processes, following radical constructivism (see, e.g., Riegler; Schmidt, “From Objects,” “Literary Studies,” *Kognitive Autonomie, Worlds*). Hence, the objective of study is often not a cultural product as such, but its processes within the micro- and/or macro-system(s) and that are relevant for the study of culture (on the macro-system see, e.g., Apter; Beecroft; Damrosch, *What Is*; Wallerstein; on the micro-system, see, e.g., Even-Zohar; Schmidt, *Foundations*, “Literary Studies,” *Worlds*; Tötösy de Zepetnek, “Systemic Approaches”; Villanueva, “Claudio Guillén,” “Possibilities”; on semiotics, comparative literature, and cinema, see, e.g., Paz Gago; on comparative literature and sociology, see, e.g., Keunen and Eeckhout).

To “compare” does not—and must not—imply hierarchy, that is, in the comparative and contextual perspective it is the method used rather than the studied matter that is of importance. Attention to other cultures is a basic and founding element and factor of the framework of comparative cultural studies. This principle encourages an inter- and transcultural and interdisciplinary dialogue, expressly ideological, and thus in this aspect similar to cultural studies, which, among other factors, includes the perspective of the intercultural that is inclusionary (and its corollaries of multiculturalism, transculturalism, crossculturalism, etc.). Dialogue is understood as inclusion, which extends to all Other, marginal, minority, and all that has been and often, still, is considered peripheral and thus an approach against all essentialism. Of note is that while up to the 2000s “comparative cultural studies”—although an obvious theoretical construction—has been a rare designation either in scholarship or institutional structures as in programs or departments, since the mid-2000s it has been appearing increasingly both in scholarship and as in professorships and programs/departments. It should be noted, however, that while comparative cultural studies appears as a field of study primarily in the humanities, parallel developments can be seen in sociology and cultural anthropology albeit with few, if any, explicit theoretical and/or methodological description and/or aims and scope (see, e.g., Pinxten; see also the University of British Columbia’s Canada Chair of Comparative Cultural Studies, *The Journal of Comparative Cultural Studies in Architecture*, or *Vergleichende Kulturwissenschaft* in ethnology, anthropology, and folklore studies [the field has several university departments and programs]).

In comparative cultural studies focus is on the study of culture both in parts (e.g., literature, film, popular culture, the visual and other arts [interart studies], television, media and communication studies and new media and also including aspects of such cultural production as architecture, etc.) and as a whole in relation to other forms of human expression and activity, as well as in relation to other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. Work in comparative cultural studies does not mean that the traditional study of literature including close-text study is relegated to lesser value; rather, both can and should occur in a parallel fashion. Thus, the approach enables thorough contextual cultural analysis. Ideally, comparative cultural studies utilizes English as the contemporary *lingua franca* of scholarship; however, the use of English in published scholarship, itself a subject of much theoretical discussion, does not mean U.S.-American centrality (see, e.g., Prendergast, Catherine; Ramanathan; Rubdy; Young). On the contrary, the broad use of English as the international language of scholarship allows scholars from outside the Anglophone world and continental Europe to present their works on an international forum and be understood by their colleagues in other countries. Importantly, in comparative cultural studies focus is on evidence-based research and analysis, for which “contextual” (i.e., the systemic and empirical) approaches present the most advantageous methodology (on this, see, e.g., Ferguson’s and Golding’s argumentation for the empirical).

Comparative cultural studies insists on a theoretical focus and methodology involving interdisciplinary study with three main types of methodological precision: intra-disciplinarity (analysis and research within the disciplines in the humanities), multi-disciplinarity (analysis and research by one scholar employing any other discipline), and pluri-disciplinarity (analysis and research by team-work with participants from several disciplines). Comparative cultural studies is an inclusive discipline of global humanities and, as such, acts against the paradox of and tension between the global versus the local. Further, similar to comparative literature and world literatures, comparative cultural studies includes translation studies, a still neglected field on the landscape of scholarship in general (see, e.g., Apter; Bassnett; Lefevere; Spivak, *Outside*; Tötösy de Zepetnek, “The Systemic and Empirical,” “Taxonomy,” “The Study of Translation”). While in the study of literature the field of translation studies has gained interest in the last several decades, what is lacking is theoretical work and its application (although with regard to the systemic approach—an integral part of comparative cultural studies—there have been seminal works, see, e.g., Hermans; Delabastita, D’hulst, Meylaerts; Lefevere). In particular, translation studies is in need of further development with regard to issues of gender (see, e.g., Flotow von; Lozano de la Pola; Simon; Vasvári), as well as in relation to issues of transnationality and the politics of globalization and translation (see Cronin; Pym). Yet a further area relevant in comparative cultural studies is the study of the “other arts”—in current terminology designated as “interart studies”—whereby earlier designations have been and remain an important field in comparative literature (see, e.g., Finger).

Comparative cultural studies attempts to reverse the intellectual and institutional decline of the humanities and their marginalization, thus arguing for the relevance of humanities and social sciences scholarship in a number of ways:

comparative cultural studies is the theoretical, as well as methodological postulate to move and dialogue between cultures, languages, literatures, and disciplines. This is a crucial aspect of the framework, the approach as a whole, and its methodology. In other words, attention to other cultures—that is, the comparative perspective—is a basic and founding element and factor of the framework. The claim of emotional and intellectual primacy and subsequent institutional power of national cultures is untenable in this perspective. In sum, the built-in notions of exclusion and self-referentiality of single-culture study, and their result of rigidly-defined disciplinary boundaries, are notions against which comparative cultural studies offers an alternative as well as a parallel field of study. This inclusion extends to all Other, all marginal, minority, border, and peripheral entities, and encompasses both form and substance. However, attention must be paid to the “how” of any inclusionary approach, attestation, methodology, and ideology so as not to repeat the mistakes of Eurocentrism and “universalization” from a “superior” Eurocentric point of view. Dialogue is the only solution. (Tötösy de Zepetnek, “From Comparative Literature” 259; see also Tötösy de Zepetnek, “The New Humanities”)

## COMPARATIVE CULTURAL STUDIES, INTERMEDIALITY STUDIES, AND DIGITAL HUMANITIES

The notion of intermediality—a concept of old, but with renewed perspectives and practices in the emerging field of digital humanities—raises a number of issues including social and cultural practices, pedagogy, aspects of globalization, the cultural industries, the publishing of scholarship online, knowledge transfer, etc. A paradox is that neither social theories concerning modernity, modern publicity or the media, nor humanities theories regarding different cultural forms, types of texts, or genres have paid adequate attention to the fact that “the past and present of contemporary culture and media are indeed part and parcel of multimodal and intermedial culture and media” (Lehtonen 71). The processing, production, and marketing of cultural products such as music, film, radio, television programs, books, journals, and newspapers determine that today almost all aspects of production and distribution are digitized. Culture today is multimodal as it makes use of technology, as well as symbolic forms (see Lehtonen). Hence the relevance of the study of intermediality and digitality in various humanities and social sciences disciplines and fields.

Intermediality is a phenomenon for the creation of new forms of artistic and critical innovation, among others to find ways for their distribution (i.e., open access to scholarship published on the world wide web), new scholarship about intermedial and interdisciplinary perspectives of old and new products of culture, the link(s) of cultural communities in cyberspace, and to be applied as a vehicle for

innovative educational practices. Today, discursive practices including visualities form a complex intermedial network of signifying practices which construct realities rather than simple representations of them. Socially constructed meaning or what we call and practice as “culture” takes place through processes of the negotiation of stories, images, and meanings; that is, through constructed and contextual agreements, power relations, and their authorization and legitimation of social positions and loci. Therefore, the ways intermedial discursive practices are produced, processed, and transmitted are relevant for research and practice and this occurs, increasingly, in digital humanities. Important is to take into account that individual and social identities are developed—at best—by and through dialogue. While new media do not replace prior technologies (the “death” of print books will not take place soon or ever), they create new configurations of social, artistic, and economic systems of culture including the production and practices of scholarship. The transmission and sharing of knowledge is what culture is all about and new media have the potential to be more than just distribution channels for established cultural industries and practices.

Caution towards new media and new media technology—whether in research, publishing, or pedagogy—by scholars in the humanities is surprising, as Geert Lovink writes (although published in 2002, the situation has not changed much since):

By and large, the humanities have been preoccupied with the impact of technology from a quasi-outsider’s perspective, as if society and technology can still be separated ... This resistance by humanities scholars appears in two characteristic reactions to the proposition that information technology constitutes a crucial cultural force. First, one encounters a tendency among many humanists contemplating the possibility that information technology influences culture to assume that before now, before computing, our intellectual culture existed in some pastoral non-technological realm. *Technology*, in the lexicon of many humanists, generally means “only that technology of which I am frightened.” I have frequently heard humanists use the word *technology* to mean “some intrusive, alien force like computing,” as if pencils, paper, typewriters, and printing presses were in some way *natural*. (*Dark Fiber* 13; emphases in the original)

While the humanities have a difficult stand with regard to funding and social relevance everywhere and historically so, since the arrival of new media and the internet and thus the development of the frequency and expansion of communication, new possibilities have emerged for scholarship and pedagogy. In many fields and disciplines intermediality and digital humanities is considered, increasingly, an important matter in theory, application, and practice and this is the case in cultural studies and comparative cultural studies. We posit that digital humanities must be supported in research and practice to a larger extent than is the case at present (for work about intermediality and digital humanities, see, e.g., Berry; Borgman; Finger; Gold; Grigorian, Baldwin, Rigaud-Drayton; Hansen; Evans and Rees; Hirsch; Inman; Jensen; Joret and Remael; Landow; Lehtonen;

Lisiak; López-Varela Azcárate and Tötösy de Zepetnek, “Towards Intermediality”; Lunenfeld; McCarty; Mottart, Soetaert, Bonamie; Mottart, Soetaert, Verdoodt; Porter, *Internet*; Ryan; Schreier; Schreibman, Siemens, Unsworth; Soetaert and Rutten; Soetaert, Verdoodt, Kronenburg; Van Dijck; Van Peer, Asimakopoulou, Bessis; Tötösy de Zepetnek, “Aspects of Scholarship,” *Digital Humanities*, “The New Humanities”; Tötösy de Zepetnek and López-Varela Azcárate, “Education”; Ursa; Wolf; for a bibliography of intermediality and digital humanities, see Vandermeersche, Vlieghe, Tötösy de Zepetnek).

Given that the economic and industrial situation of the rest of the world outside of the West represents a problem with regard to access and the use of the internet, one would hope that it is only a matter of time before the world altogether will have access to and will be able to use the internet and thereby participate in new media technology in scholarship, pedagogy, and publishing. As it happens, from its inception the internet has been and remains controlled to a large extent by the U.S. because of where new media technology was invented and developed and because of the situation of English as today’s *lingua franca* of scholarship and technology (see, e.g., Fieromonte). What is relevant to our discussion here is the internet’s corollary, namely knowledge transfer in the humanities and we submit that humanities scholarship ought to be accessible at no cost to readers and scholars globally. While there are developments in this direction, despite the widespread discussion and argumentation for open access to scholarly journals the issue remains unresolved except in few cases. One exception is the journal *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* <<http://docs.lib.purde.edu/clcweb>>, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access quarterly in the humanities and social sciences founded in 1999 at the University of Alberta and published since 2000 by Purdue University Press. To date it remains one of few journals that—in addition to peer review and open access—is indexed by Thomson Reuter’s ISI (among other indexing services). The consequence of the journal’s publication in open access is that its material including its *Library* has been downloaded 275,000 times in 2012: the figure is based on counter-compliant usage statistics with downloads of about 55% in North America (U.S. and Canada) and 45% elsewhere. This suggests that the open-access publication of humanities scholarship furthers and underlines knowledge transfer to the benefit of scholarship worldwide (see, e.g., Tötösy de Zepetnek, *Digital Humanities*, “New Media”).

## CONCLUSION

Along with overlapping and complementary aspects and perspectives, there are differences between the discipline of comparative literature and the fields of world literature, cultural studies, and comparative cultural studies: comparative literature is a discipline with a global history, intellectual relevance, and institutional presence, while world literature, cultural studies, and comparative cultural studies are fields of study and with intellectual relevance but with limited

institutional presence. The difference between comparative literature and world literature on the one hand, and cultural studies and comparative cultural studies on the other, is that in the former focus remains on literature while in the latter literature is one of several areas of study. The perception that in cultural studies and comparative cultural studies there is a relegation or even elimination of the study of literature *per se* (see, e.g., Error; Gillespie; Gumbrecht; Hillis Miller; Schmitz-Emans; Wang; an exception is Riffaterre) is mistaken because there is a significant corpus of scholarship in these fields where literature is studied as the principal subject matter. With regard to comparative cultural studies the situation is markedly different with mid-career (tenured associate professors) and junior scholars (non-tenured assistant professors and recent Ph.D.-s) in the U.S. and elsewhere and this is reason to assume that the field will continue to attract interest.

There are indications that comparative literature as a discipline is experiencing a revival in some parts of the world outside of Europe and Anglophone scholarship—e.g., in Chinese, Arabic, Indian languages, Latin American languages, etc.—and this is a significant and promising development not the least because of the appeal of the discipline in the so-called “periphery,” thus a corrective measure with regard to the historical Euro-U.S.-American hegemony of the discipline. Although the related concept of world literature(s) is experiencing a revival at this point—while in many ways a welcome development—because it is occurring mostly in Anglophone U.S.-American scholarship, the notion (and practice) of world literature(s) remains limited because it underlines U.S.-American cultural hegemony. One would hope that the current development towards the intellectual revival of the concept of world literature(s) will gain traction outside of U.S.-American scholarship and that within U.S.-American education, as well as elsewhere, the notion will translate itself to institutional presence. However, the latter argument in favor of world literature(s) remains problematic because it would not help if world literature(s) as an institutional presence diminishes (further) the presence of the discipline of comparative literature. Last but not least, despite comparative literature’s often proclaimed differentiation and in many instances objection to cultural studies, the latter is gaining scholarly interest globally, although at this point with U.S.-American—and to a lesser measure with Australian, Canadian, and British—scholarship. The drawback of cultural studies remains the field’s monolingual state of affairs with regard to theoretical precepts and here, too, is where comparative cultural studies enhances scholarship globally.

With regard to the larger context of the humanities, there has been much discussion about the “corporate university” (see, e.g., Donoghue; Garber; Ginsberg; Hacker and Dreifus; Menand; Nussbaum; Readings; Taylor). While the move towards the implementation of the corporate university has a number of negative aspects affecting humanities scholarship (e.g., in Europe and Asia the copying of “metrics”/“impact factor” from the sciences with regard

to publications and tenure, promotion, and the research of funding and the move towards private funding with the implication of conflict of interest [on “metrics”/“impact factor” see Tötösy de Zepetnek, “The ‘Impact Factor’”], humanities scholarship performed in comparative cultural studies could serve to counter some of the negative perceptions in the administrative and funding practices of the corporate university towards humanities scholarship. That is, if humanities scholars think, research, publish, and teach with and within the paradigm of the social relevance of humanities scholarship and pedagogy, a more equitable outcome could result than the habitual sidelining of the humanities. In connection with the tenure debate, in the West a continuous debate persists about tenure and its value and process and it is no secret that too many professors—once they have obtained tenure (we are referring to research universities where research and teaching are evaluated together and not to universities where only teaching is required for tenure)—reduce their work with regard to research and publications either because with tenure they are safe in their position and/or because of their administrative work load (see, e.g., Rubenstein and Clifton; the survey was conducted in the U.S. and Canada). We believe that to make the study of literature and culture a socially relevant activity of scholarship we ought to do contextual work parallel with regard to professional concerns such as the job market, the matter of academic publishing, and digital humanities and, put more broadly, with regard to the role of social, political, and economic aspects of humanities scholarship. Hence our proposal that with the comparative and contextual approach—practiced in interdisciplinarity and employing new media technology—comparative cultural studies could achieve in-depth scholarship and the social relevance of the humanities.

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# Comparative Literature and Ex-centricity

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Tutun Mukherjee

**Abstract:** In her article “Comparative Literature and Ex-centricity” Tutun Mukherjee argues for the discipline of comparative literature to locate itself globally. The journey of comparative literature from an idea to a discipline has been a long and arduous one from its inception in the nineteenth century. The hallmark of this journey—fraught with crisis and anxiety—is its bi-directionality. While on the one hand there has been a continuous churning within the discipline, on the other hand, there has been a travel outwards into time and space which meant grappling with and addressing new issues and realities in an attempt to re-invent itself. Mukherjee discusses aspects of the discipline’s self-examination that is marked by rumination and reflexivity, leading towards its resurgence. It also discusses the possible role comparative literature can play in new contexts and locations.

## INTRODUCTION

Time and space—or history and geography—inform our literary imagination: they shape our thoughts and direct our perception of the world around us. Over a decade into the new millennium, drastic temporal and spatial changes have so re-mapped the human social, geo-political and ecological habitat that questions regarding the nature and function of literature—what it is and/or what it should be—demand to be re-visited. Such re-assessment would also make evident the successive changes that have become manifest in the sphere of its production, consumption, and reception. Perhaps no other field of study has deliberated upon such questions as a regular disciplinary exercise and, in tandem with changing times, allowed those deliberations to impact curricula and syllabi in teaching programs as comparative literature. As the history of the discipline makes evident (see, e.g., Weisstein on the early years of the discipline; see also the articles in the present volume [Tötösy de Zepetnek and Mukherjee]), the journey of comparative literature from an idea born out of philologist and historicist compulsions that germinated gradually into a discipline has been a long and arduous one from its inception in the nineteenth century. It is noteworthy, however, that the hallmark of this journey fraught with crisis, marked by anxiety, and threatened by identity displacement has been its bi-directionality. While on the one hand, there is the evidence of a continuous churning within the discipline, on the other hand, the discipline has travelled outwards into time and space to grapple with and address new issues and realities confronting the notion of “knowledge” itself in an effort to re-invent itself for every generation. Whether prompted by pedagogical anxiety

or what is generally described as “a sense of crisis” regarding its future, we know that all discussions on comparative literature—whether book length studies, anthologies, or essays—manifest invariably the three interlinked tendencies of rumination, reflexivity, resurgence. In my view, these preoccupations have shaped and directed the growth and consolidation of comparative literature as a discipline and continue to inspire and resuscitate it.

## RUMINATION

To ruminate or recall early motivations towards a comparative orientation has been a sustaining framework for comparatists. The constant recollection of its vital beginnings in the late eighteenth century—of works such as Johann Gottfried Herder’s *Voices of the Peoples in Songs* (1778–1779) and the development through the nineteenth century inspired by Madame de Staël, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Hugó Meltzl de Lomnitz, and others referred to at times as the discipline’s “Euro-quity” (Ferris 81)—draw attention to the vigorous promotion of the principles of translation and polyglottism (see Berlina and Tötösy de Zepetnek; Damrosch, “Hugo Meltzl”; Marno) and of bridging national and ethnic differences as foundational to the discipline of comparative literature. This must serve as a reminder that as a discipline in the twenty-first century desirous of more global inclusiveness and orientation, especially of the Asian countries and the Global South, comparative literature must revisit the postulates of the past to nuance the developments of the future.

When comparative literature traveled to the U.S., the originary socio-political conditions of its inception—of internecine rivalry and the climate of mistrust and dissonance in nineteenth-century Europe driven by parochialism—seemed replicated in “the violent rending of the European cultures” (Jost xi) in the aftermath of World War I and later of World War II and the Cold War. For the U.S., the perceived need then was to cement social and cultural ties and build bridges of both intra-national understanding among its various multi-ethnic and multi-lingual immigrant communities, as well as strengthen international understanding between the U.S. and the peoples of the world. It therefore appears that the establishment of comparative literature programs at U.S.-American universities and their consolidation through the troubled 1960s and 1970s was an expedient political strategy to answer the country’s multicultural and foreign policy needs. This was helped by the fact that the post-World War II European exodus had brought many comparatists of repute to the U.S. The decades of the 1960s and 1970s of turbulent and intense social and cultural upheaval generated a sense of “crisis” since it was expected that all academic disciplines must address the issues that had been thrown up by the socio-political ferment and re-organize themselves to retain their social relevance. In his 1958 “The Crisis of Comparative Literature” René Wellek worries about the immediate need to re-define the subject matter and methodology of comparative literature and suggests



the widening of the ambit of comparative practice to encompass new directions of study such as folklore and oral traditions and the relationship of literature with the other arts. He also urges admitting tools of research from compatible disciplines including philosophy, history, sociology, performance studies and so on to augment comparative methodology which many bewailed was not adequate. In the U.S., where the discipline of comparative literature achieved the largest number of departments, the American Association of Comparative Literature (ACLA) was formed to discuss matters regarding the admission criteria and pedagogy for co-option by teaching departments (to be noted is that today it is in Mainland China that the discipline is largest as far as its institutional presence is concerned, see Wang and Liu). The ACLA decided that the exercise of re-visiting and re-viewing the “state of the discipline” would be a decennial event to ensure regular self-reflection. This practice has been followed assiduously and every report since 1963 has presented the “state of the discipline” and the “standards” to be maintained or re-formulated. For example, Charles Bernheimer notes in his Report published in *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* (1993) that the various shifts in the discipline’s focus since World War II can be viewed as “a series of attempts to cure, contain, or exploit the anxiety of comparison” (3).

From the 1980s, comparative literature has faced the threat of being sidelined by new and fashionable studies which aspire to interdisciplinarity by engaging in discourses that draw upon insights from sociology, politics, history, philosophy, cultural anthropology, etc., to deepen the understanding of literature. Bernheimer’s *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* drew attention to a few basic questions regarding the discipline’s persisting Eurocentric focus and paradigmatic bias vis-à-vis the multi- and inter-cultural present. Contributors to the volume also debate concerns expressed earlier regarding the desirability of reading and comparing literatures in their original languages and not in translation and revisited the debate on the role of theory in comparative literature between what might be called the “formalists” and the “contextualists” or, in institutional terms, literary studies versus cultural studies. The current ways of contextualizing the study of literature in the expanded fields of discourse, culture, ideology, race, and gender are different from the traditional models of literary study in terms of authors, nations, periods, and genres so much so that “the term ‘literature’ may no longer adequately describe our object of study” (Bernheimer, “Report” 42). Globalization, too, brought in its wake significant changes in perspective and pedagogy (see Saussy, “Exquisite Cadavers”). Hence, strategies of survival have been devised by comparatists to retain the relevance of the discipline and equip it theoretically to examine the displacements, disruptions, dissonances, and discontinuities of time and yet draw insight from them to make meaningful connections and comparisons. Therefore, it becomes imperative that comparative literature in the twenty-first century must deploy new pedagogical techniques and further extend the parameters of its disciplinary boundaries.

## REFLECTION

The element of reflection is thus built into what was referred to more as a movement (Bernheimer, "The Anxieties of Comparison" 2) rather than merely a discipline that was expected to be extra sensitive to the changing political, social, and academic climate of the country. The recalling of its antecedence or moorings to perpetuate the best of the past before mapping its movement forward emphasized the analogy on which comparative literature as a subject was first proposed, namely that the subject matter be organized in the shape of a genealogical tree on which the distal and the proximate events produce the "branchings." Reflection on comparative practice prompted the subsequent branchings which traveled along various paths from the Goethean concept of "conversation among national literatures" to the French method suggested by, for instance, Paul van Tieghem of letting analytical categories widen out as concentric circles or *domaines* to carry a text out of its national borders into other defining "contexts" or by such as Fernand Baldensperger, Ferdinand Brunetière, Paul Gustave Hazard, and others to concentrate on literary histories in a historical-positivist manner and emphasize influences, the *rappports* or co-relations among texts (see Weisstein; on Goethe's concept of *Weltliteratur*, see e.g., Birus; Pizer; Sturm-Trigonakis). By the mid-twentieth century, Welles's concept that shaped U.S.-American comparative literature curricula for two generations did not use the word "context" in the sense of the French School. In its transmuted sense it meant using critical history as the "framework" for reading texts to demarcate the "intrinsic" elements from the "extrinsic" (see Weisstein). Close text-based study of the interrelations among multilingual literatures was to be undertaken within the dialectical framework of critical history and foundational poetics. The rise of theory in the late 1960s brought a radical shift in the manner of writing and reading texts. Increasingly, literature was studied as discourse, as one among other discursive practices of the society or as Vincent Leitch put it, literary texts were regarded as "communal documents" with their "literariness" (ix). Thus, Welles's and Warren's "scheme of relationships" had evolved by the 1980s into a complex "web" of social relations and cultural practices which again brought back the "context" to define the "text." But the realm of the "text" was vast since, as Jacques Derrida put it, "there is nothing outside the text" ("il n'y a pas de hors-texte") (58). It is significant that comparatists such as René Etiemble and Michael Riffaterre sounded a note of alarm and expressed serious concerns about the displacement of the study of literature and literariness which they felt should be the focus of comparative literature following the impact of multiculturalist and cultural studies prioritization of non-literary texts.

In the face of the challenge posed by the newly born subjects flaunting their multi- and inter-disciplinarity, comparative literature seemed to wither when actually as its own history makes apparent, the foundational precept of comparative literature has always been multi-disciplinary in its study of relationships between



literatures and their social milieux and in the discourses both within and among nations and cultures. As Bernheimer asks “what is it?—activity, function, practice?—or all of these?” (2), perhaps the need of the time was to enlarge further its disciplinary boundaries and areas and shed prejudice regarding some subjects like translation as contributing to comparative literature. Susan Bassnett sounded the alarm in 1993 that “comparative literature in one sense is dead” (47). What followed were serious debates among comparatists including Charles Bernheimer’s edited volume *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* (1995), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s *Death of a Discipline* (2004), and Haun Saussy’s edited volume *Comparative Literature in the Age of Globalization* (2005), among others, which deliberate upon the issues concerning the future of the discipline. The major concern expressed by all is not whether the expansion of the field of comparative literature would eventually lead to the marginalization of literature and text-based studies but about the ways to accommodate “the pluralized and expanded contextualization of literary study” (Bernheimer, “The Anxieties” 11). Although it was felt that the traditional modes of comparative dialectics through historiography, thematology, genology, intertextuality, dialogism, interliterariness, notions of filiation-affiliation, theories of reception, etc., would remain useful, literature’s interaction with other discourses and other cultural contexts must not be restricted in any way. But the obvious anxiety about its survival could not be disregarded and it was expected that the discipline should re-invent itself to meet the pedagogical needs in the new millennium.

## TOWARDS A NEW ORDER OF THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

The acts of rumination and reflection have led every time to the resurgence, of being made anew. Comparatists have therefore urged in their practice what David Ferris describes as the spirit of “indiscipline” (78) or that which defies containment: breaches which transcend disciplinary borders. As Saussy explains, comparative literature’s potential lies in its seemingly endless capacity for revision and its desire to view itself with a critical eye (see Saussy, “Exquisite Cadavers”). In fact, this desire for death and re-birth, the ceaseless making of itself, is one of the most attractive features of comparative literature and the other being its nomadic nature. Ideally, comparative literature should have no home in any one nation or a language. Indeed, it possesses the quality of being “supra”—above and beyond—defying boundaries, limits, groupings, and the ability to break free of its own standards and disciplinary entrapping. This ability of comparative literature to defy boundaries is what I postulate in order to map the terrain of what I see as the “new literary order.”

The traces of the passing century which are carried forward often provide the initial impetus to shape the course of its history. The twenty-first century carries the traces of pervasive globalization, a complex and complicated enterprise, and more importantly, perhaps experienced as a sort of aftermath. In general terms,

globalization meant boundlessness and the lessening of impediments in trade and commerce and enhanced social and cultural inter-relations. It held out magnificent hopes of global progress and prosperity. In the realm of literature and culture and the study of them, it promised greater sharing and inter-change. But globalization also brought in its wake deep civilizational schisms, disturbing geo-political realignments, dangerous frictions in terms of religion and culture, ethnicity, and identity, ideology, and power play, regionalism, and localism with devastating effects and implications. If there were phenomenal technological advances and space-binding opportunities, there is also a digital divide and earth-threatening negligence. The economic hopes seemed also to splinter as recession became increasingly evident the world over. Yet, the millennial promise did not totally shatter. There were significant gains in the scholarship of literature and culture. Starting in 1990s, optimistic debates occurred on world literature recalling the ideal of Goethe's *Weltliteratur* and Tagore's *Viswasahitya* about the feasibility of promoting a new literary ambience by embracing all literatures within the framework of world literature(s) (see e.g., Damrosch, *What Is*"; Damrosch, Melas, Buthelezi; McInturf; Pizer; Sturm-Trigonakis; Trumpener; see also Tötösy and Vasvári). The optimistic spirit of the global bonding of literatures was also accompanied by Spivak's warning of the impending "death" of comparative literature unless the discipline re-vitalized itself with new collaborative efforts such as area studies. Spivak also proposed the broadening of critical and analytical methods and greater inclusiveness of non-canonical texts by becoming sensitive to "planetarity" or the sense of inhabiting the earth as lived space, sharing it, and celebrating difference among its people who have not unilateral and homogenous but interlinked histories (71–102). Instead of being preoccupied with the inanimate "globe," its movement into the "Global South" of the planet would lead comparative literature into the rich plurality of cultures, non-hegemonic languages, and idiom to stimulate its revival and rebirth. Spivak's suggestion of conjoining the energies of comparative literature and area studies seems to endorse what Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek has been proposing since the 1990s in the integration of comparative literature and cultural studies. New comparative literature must accommodate cultural studies to engage with the pluralities and mutivocities of the Global South.

In my view, the above arguments—themselves to certain extent palimpsestic—together provide the cartography of a "new literary order," but always with the proviso that none of these terms—"new" or "literary" or "order"—is regarded as frozen, because that would go against the boundary-and-definition-defying nomadic spirit of comparative literature. However, the words used to describe the contemporary dispensation must first be explained to frame the exposition: "new" in the phrase recalls Raymond Williams's use of the categories of residual, dominant, and emergent elements of culture in order to explain their dynamic interplay in the society as reflected as different phases in a text and the awareness of the shifting connotations beneath the surface. It also means being ever-innovative with regard to both content and method. As for "literary," one must admit that the

term “literature” has traveled a long way from the earliest forms of expression which encompassed large and varied domains of activities from orature, music, painting to poetry and prose to admit a disjuncture between the oral and the written, the scriptural and secular, and then diminishing in meaning to refer to the printed form, and then to indicate only the rational and reasonable of the Enlightenment paradigm by the end of the nineteenth century, thereby excluding, according to Henry Louis Gates Jr., the so-called “barbaric” and the “savage” cultures of the non-West. With the development of different kinds of cultural expression—born in the nineteenth century and flourishing in the twentieth including photography, print media, radio, cinema, and television—the understanding of “text” was further enlarged and the definitive notion of the “literary” began to crumble. By the end of the twentieth century, literature and cultural production had become interwoven discourses. The very nature of the “book” became unstable and underwent radical transformations through the intervention of the computer, internet, multimedia, and digitization. Literature indeed became de-centered and the literary could mean that “reading, writing, teaching, learning are all activities to introduce civilizations to each other” (Fuentes 12). The final descriptive word “order” in the phrase suggests classification, schema, and hierarchy, but a better way to understand “order” is to take it as an ever-slippery and kaleidoscopic condition that escapes the trap of hegemony and canon. Such an “order” enables migrations and border crossings towards new horizons of expectation. Thus, in the face of a new crisis (*krinein*) challenging its “identity”—and recalling that the etymological connotations of *krinein* means “to sift, separate, or judge” or in other words “a crucial or decisive point or situation”—each term in the phrase inevitably re-invents itself according to the demands of time and space, history and geography.

## EX-CENTRICITY

Ex-centricity means the perpetual moving away from the any kind of centrality in the choice of subject matter and/or manner of representation, perspective and positionality, theory and analysis.

It also contributes to the expanding discourse on the ‘politics of location’ which assumes significance in unraveling the relationships between the text-the context-the writer-the critic-the comparatist. To me, the idea offers immense possibilities of generating both productive and counter discourse. One may argue that “centrality” carries the tacit implication of the margin and it may happen that the “margin” could become the new “center.” However, basic to the concept remains the exploration of relationships between different symbolic modes in an ever-shifting diversity. Ex-centricity would mean moving away from the traditional, conventional, and canonical texts and breaching the binaries of power, privilege or the “hierarchies of hegemony” in the Gramscian sense. It would mean attempting representations from different perspectives, from within specific

contextual knowledge. The realms that would open up by the lateral movement away from the center are illimitable in scope and diversity. It would mean exploring discourses of “otherness,” “alterity,” “hybridity,” “displacement,” “alienation,” “marginality,” “ethnicity,” “identity,” “nationalism,” “regionalism,” “cultural and linguistic imperialism and monolinguality,” “processual colonialism,” and so excitingly on. In other words, this would mean not to think in absolutes but in specifics, not to efface differences but to develop sensitivity to them. To do justice to multiple social realities of the heterogeneous cultural multiplicities of the boundless world, the discussions could spread from small concentric circles of the local to encompass the planetary. Ex-centricity would necessarily demand that the discrete borders—of nationality, culture, language and such other categories—become porous or there be osmosis between the elements that appear separate to create a new compound, the synergy of which will surpass the sense of being merely the sum of all parts. Such knowledge will necessarily need new modes for analyses and understanding. This might initiate an examination of and an eventual move away from what Edward Said called “filiations” towards “affiliations.” For instance, a scholar may wish to juxtapose the writing of an Indian woman writer of a privileged political class with that of a middle class housewife, a maidservant, a tribal woman, and a sex worker. Another may like to explore literary texts by affiliating Native American and Indonesian writing or Indian *Adivasi* and Australian Aborigine writing. And what about the study of genres? Accepting the premise that every genre always already contains within itself the possibility of disruption of its generic expectations, what can a scholar hope to find by tracing, for instance the evolving form of the epic through *Gilgamesh*, *Ramayana*, *Iliad*, *Shah Nameh*, or *Omeros*? In what way would the “epic” traditions of the East (say e.g., *nama*, *charita*, or *raso*) compare with those of the West? And what about the subversive rock bands of Tehran, Berlin, or Kolkata? How would one go about reading “texts” like films, advertisements, comics, recipes, or photographs about the “Third World” and the changing cityscapes? Franco Moretti, for instance, defines ‘forms’ as “the abstract of social relationships” (54). Thus, according to Moretti, formal analysis in its own modest way would suggest the analysis of power. This is a fascinating subject because by studying the way forms vary, one discovers how symbolic power could vary from place to place. Such affiliations would exemplify cross-cultural dialogues—of one culture speaking with another and thereby creating a “politics of friendship,” as it were (Derrida 28)—which would help to examine how a genre, theme, or form can evolve, transform, mutate, or find variations in another culture. In the new world order, subjects can be plentiful and include emerging genres, themes, forms, movements, influences, reception, and interrelations of various kinds. The scope of such discussions would necessarily augur immense discursivity.

However, the point to ponder is that although these are fascinating subjects, it is not that simple to engage with them because each demands the knowledge of and the negotiation with history and geography, the specificities of time and space,

race and milieu. There is already the fear that cultural expansionism from centers to peripheries may result in cultural leveling, appropriation, homogenization or even ghettoization, which, in turn might lead to large-scale loss of meaning and forms. Most importantly, the involvement with the culture and tradition of the chosen subject may obligate the replacement of the theoretical paradigms and parameters of Western aesthetics. Goethe himself could not do this and despite sincere appreciation for Chinese and Persian literature returned to the Western classical axis as foundational to all critical reasoning. Contemporary comparatists such as Gerald Gillespie and Anna Balakian express reservations about the hasty rejection or dilution of the “Eurocentric” and “elite” values of comparative literature by allowing the discussion of literatures of the so-called “developing countries” into the discourse of the European great tradition. Susan Bassnett remarks that “for Spivak and southern hemisphere scholars, the crucial issues of comparative literature are indeed politicized. In contrast, however, I believe that the crucial issues for European scholars are as much aesthetic and political” (4–5). However, other comparatists including Mary Louise Pratt, Marjorie Perloff, or Lydia Liu do not see this as threat at all but as a promise of improved and desirable interaction and mediation among cultures and literatures.

Goethe’s *sutra*-like statements on *Weltliteratur* in 1827 remain a point of departure: “nowadays, national literature doesn’t mean much: the age of world literature is beginning, and everybody should contribute to hasten its advent ... Such a world literature will soon come into being, as is inevitable given the ever-increasing rapidity of human interaction” (Strich 224). Goethean sentiments were echoed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848 when they wrote in their “Manifesto of the Communist Party” that “national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from national and local literatures, a world literature arises” (88). Nietzsche too believed that the archive of world literatures could reveal ways to integrate the society with art in times that favored science and rationalism over emotive expression and in fact returned to Greek tragedy himself to find resuscitation for modern art forms. In 1907, Rabindranath Tagore conceived of “universal literature” (*viswasahitya*) in the context of the Indian freedom struggle as the framework which could bring people from different lands, societies and culture—especially of Asia—closer to each other. Obviously, these philosophers thought of “world literature” as a binding force. It is also obvious that Goethe’s and Tagore’s conceptions were the result of the preoccupations and presuppositions of their epochs and were also constrained by them. Yet, their vision also contains within it possibilities of fruition in different forms and in different times, such as Etiemble’s *comparatisme planétaire*, or Itamar Even-Zohar’s polysystems theory, or Immanuel Wallerstein’s concept of socio-political world systems. Damrosch suggests that “world literature is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is as applicable to individual works as to bodies of material, available for reading established classics and new discoveries alike” and adds

that world literature encompasses “all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language” because “a work only has an effective life as world literature whenever, and wherever, it is actively present within a literary system beyond that of its original culture” (*What Is* 5–6). He explains further that “a work enters into world literature by a double process: first, by being read as literature; second, by circulating out into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin. A given work can enter into world literature and then fall out of it again if it shifts beyond a threshold point along axis, the literary or the worldly” (*What Is* 6). Reservations against translation have disappeared and the study of translation is now acknowledged by comparatists as essential to the entire endeavor of entering into the idiom of “global others” (see, e.g., Apter; Gupta). Such developments necessarily interweave the aesthetic and political aspects of the text and the context because every text can be seen as participating in a cultural discourse.

Spivak writes that “to be human is to be intended toward the other” (73): hence, the “self” must seek its fulfillment in relating with the “Other” as it never ceases to be haunted by the liminal. In its endeavor to channel its energies in the new world order, comparative literature must accredit the rigor of inclusive reading practices that new knowledge domains demand which would largely ensure “visibility” and “voice” of ex-centric subjects and subliminal subjectivities who are not objectified for the forensic “gaze,” but are understood through the metropolitan’s ethical responsiveness to alterity. Thus, the search of the “self” or the “singular text” finds completeness in plurality, in building relationships with other texts and contexts that the practice of comparative literature offers.

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# Possibilities and Limits of Comparative Literature Today

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Darío Villanueva

**Abstract:** In his article “Possibilities and Limits of Comparative Literature Today” Darío Villanueva discusses the itinerary of comparative literature and its problematics and queries the discipline’s adherence to literary history and its identification with the theory of literature. Villanueva’s discussion is with particular reference to Spanish-language works such as by Claudio Guillén’s systemic view of literature and the study of literature, as well as similar approaches to the study of literature such as by Siegfried J. Schmidt, Itamar Even-Zohar, and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek. Further, Villanueva discusses aspects of the field of (comparative) cultural studies he sees relevant and useful for the study of literature comparatively.

In an attempt to abandon the identification of genetic relationships to justify comparativist research, the last twenty-five or thirty years have seen the emergence of a new paradigm of comparative literature. A basic principle of the new paradigm is that whenever the same or a similar phenomenon appears in two separate literatures or in one literature and in another type of artistic expression, the comparative approach must include a fundamental theoretical element, that is to say, a possible or hypothetical point of departure. The immediate consequence of such an approach is comparative literature’s if not exclusive, then at least preferential link with literary theory (see Fokkema 3). Thus, since the 1970s, roughly, comparative literature developed with a theoretical component and that gave the discipline its innovative character. In consequence, comparativist literary theory is constructed with the help of elements that are both general and generalizing (see, e.g., Marino 92). Claudio Guillén proposed that the comparativist’s main task ought to be the discovery of analog and parallel processes of literary evolution and that could be attributed to historical and social laws of universal validity, and, as a last resort, to the basic principle of unity and regularity perceptible in the evolution of humanity in general (on Guillén, see, e.g., Villanueva, “Claudio Guillén”).

The above basic principle of theoretical grounding and attention to the global perspective of literature is what Earl Miner, for example, argues for: when we find in Chinese literature a type of lyric composition comparable to the medieval Romance, then, indeed, we can claim that this constitutes a literary “constant” beyond the contingency of the purely local and historical. It seems evident that we cannot construct a solid theory of literary genres based solely on a small number of works we identify from within European literature alone. In this vein is Florence

Goyet's work in which she discusses a literary corpus in five languages and literatures: French, English, Italian, Japanese, and Russian. I wanted to highlight the same point in the title of my *El polen de ideas*, a rubric taken from William Faulkner, a writer who was often asked to address the issue of his dependence on James Joyce, since his narrative technique appeared, point for point, inspired by the technique pioneered in *Ulysses* and honed in *Finnegan's Wake*. Faulkner tended to recognize the similarities between their respective novelistic techniques while maintaining that he himself had started writing and publishing novels before having read Joyce.

In *Valle-Inclán. Novelista del Modernismo* my objective was to show that the author of *Tirano Banderas* belonged to international modernism, that vast cosmopolitan movement which developed in the twentieth century and was at its height in the 1920s and 1930s between when Hispanic modernism was already in decline. With a historical, theoretical, and critical perspective, I applied comparativist principles to allow us to identify Valle-Inclán's literary achievements with those of other important figures of modernism such as Yeats, Gide, Romains, and Joyce, among others. I believe that the key to this type of comparative literature allows us to stop serving literary history in an exclusive and exclusionary way and, instead, to lend its services to the theory of literature. This, I argue, is because when comparativist literary theory cannot count on empirical contrast, the proposed approach becomes a sort of literary metaphysics in which the universal dominates and masks everything and when what really matters is the specific literary example—the more the better—in order to lay a solid foundation for a restructured comparativist poetics.

Adrian Marino spoke of a *nouveau paradigme* for comparative literature, of the urgent need for change, of a radical turn in the sense of theory of poetics beyond the exclusive study of *rapports de fait* between literatures as a luxury accessory for national literary historiographies (9). Further, Marino defended a conception of the discipline which transcends its strictly academic borders. Comparative literature is also a system of ideas with a broad view of literature, humanism, and history and Guillén wrote in this same frame of mind, where time and again he declared that the attitude of a comparativist must be sensitive to tensions between the local and the universal, between the specific and the general, thus making links between the two poles but without tending too much toward either one to the detriment of the other. This is always with the desire to overcome cultural nationalism: the use of literature for nationalist causes, narcissist instincts, and ideological purposes (*Entre lo uno* 14). Miner has developed a "comparative poetics" where different constellations and systems of literature, genres, and fundamental constants are expressed discursively by creators and thinkers throughout history, in the East as in the West. It is not a coincidence that Miner cites as his main sources of inspiration: René Etiemble and René Wellek, who fought so hard for a new, not Eurocentric but planetary comparativism and he dedicates his work to James J.Y. Liu, author of *Chinese Theories of Literature*.

We can see the usefulness of Miner's investigations in the fact that he came to the conclusion that the lyric-epic-dramatic generic trilogy is present in all literary systems, the only difference being that in the European-Aristotelian tradition, at first, the lyric is only implicit, while in the Chinese and Japanese traditions the exact opposite occurs, since the poetics of drama and narration derive from poetry in its purest sense.

The 2005 Spanish-language edition of Guillén's 1985 introduction to comparative literature — *Entre lo uno y lo diverso. Introducción a la Literatura Comparada (Ayer y hoy)* — includes, among other new ideas, an interesting prologue called "La Literatura comparada y la crisis de las humanidades" (2). Guillén characterizes the then current (i.e., in 2005) atmosphere of comparativism as generalized disorder, after a forty-year period of the discipline's "golden age" 1945–1985. Guillén continues to recognize the role of the driving centers of comparative literature—France, the United States, and Germany—but he shows his concern, which I also share, for certain phenomena which have appeared primarily in U.S.-American comparative literature. Above all, he is alarmed by the politicization of the humanities and notes the increased impact of cultural studies and postcolonial studies which have acquired prominence to the detriment of literary studies. Guillén points to a fundamental flaw in cultural studies which he sees as the blurring of distinction between the popular and the refined or between the high manifestations of human creativity and other expressions less illustrious on an aesthetic scale valued for millennia. He considers the direction of postcolonial studies richer and more fertile than that of cultural studies, for which reason he highlights in glowing terms the role of another great theoretician, Edward W. Said, whose contributions are guided by a sort of "contrapuntal thinking" which does service to peripheral or omitted literatures: "the imperial mentality is not just political; it is cultural, and ethically superior. We live in plural worlds and our great enemy is simplification. No vision has complete hegemony on the space it considers. No culture is monolithic. None of us are only one thing" ("La literatura comparada" 23). As far as Spain is concerned, neither of the two tendencies summarized above has overpowered the other, as has occurred in the United States. Nevertheless, Guillén fears that in Spain comparativism has been swallowed by theory and his observation is based on the merger of literary theory and comparative literature as a stand-alone discipline, an administrative arrangement in 1990 by the Ministry of Education.

As chair of the University of Santiago de Compostela Department of Literary Theory and Comparative Literature and as the rector of the University 1994–2002, I was able to follow the said administrative process closely and my experience was such that I do not share Guillén's pessimism. Far from constituting a danger to comparative literature, I believe that the result of this process has offered scholars and students the only possibility, at least at this time, of officially recognizing the discipline among the other fields of study in the Spanish university system. The ideal solution, that is to say, the establishment of comparative literature as its own

field of study, was not feasible at the time since the Ministry of Education and the Council of Universities were not willing to enlarge the list of recognized disciplines with new additions and of which there were proposals by the dozen. In this context, there was no other solution but to play by the rules of the administrative system of higher education and have “literary theory and comparative literature.” Since the success of achieving the objective on the administrative level—not without great difficulty—of establishing the discipline of “literary theory and comparative literature,” we have seen the creation of teaching positions, for instance the chair at the University of Barcelona or tenured positions at the University of Santiago de Compostela (the latter advertised with the specific profile of “comparative literature”), as well as similar positions at other universities in Spain.

Obviously, the environment that favors literary exchange and stimulates interest in finding a continuum between literatures belonging to different languages and cultures is the peacetime environment, if not a perpetual and lasting peace, then at least a relatively stable situation. The block politics and the Cold War that it produced were not favorable to comparativist projects either, especially insofar as they halted that impulse in some countries behind the Iron Curtain, such as Hungary or in the multilingual Soviet Union itself, which until then had been pioneers in the development of comparative literature (see, e.g., Berlina and Tötösy de Zepetnek). And it is thus that we may be justified in thinking that the historical events of the late 1980s and early 1990s give new hope to a Europe that witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall and finds itself embarking on the adventure of integration, not merely economic but political as well, for which it is essential to put all efforts into recognizing the common cultural roots of all the peoples of the continent. In this sense, aside from the political avatars that have appeared or that may appear in the future on this subject, I find some of the terms and statements in the *Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe*, signed in Rome on 29 October 2004 by the representatives of the 25 member states of the Union to be interesting and pertinent for comparative literature scholars. In the preamble to the *Treaty*, Europe is mentioned as “united in diversity,” a characterization repeated in Article 1–3 among the objectives of the Union, which “shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure that Europe’s cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced.” This notion of unity respectful of variety is like a common thread throughout the entire text of the Constitution. Part II, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Union, declares that the Union is responsible for “the preservation and [for] the development of these common values while respecting the diversity of the cultures and traditions of the peoples of Europe,” a point that is reiterated in Article II-82 and in Article III-280: “The Union shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore.” Guillén’s introduction to comparative literature, a work that has had considerable international influence with its translations to several languages, has the same motto in its title: *Entre lo uno y lo diverso*. Nonetheless, we know well that the

discipline must support an almost utopian goal, in accordance with which it must let go of Eurocentrism once and for all and aim for Goethe's *Weltliteratur*, a task for which we must recruit students and scholars from the various universities in Spain, as well as in all of Europe (on the recent development of *Weltliteratur* we can observe in particular in the U.S. and in works published in English, see, e.g., Damrosch; D'haen; D'haen, Damrosch, Kadir; D'haen, Domínguez, Thomsen Rosendahl; see also Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári).

Edward W. Said—the Jerusalem-born, educated in Lebanon and Egypt, and U.S.-trained theorist and comparatist—was concerned, as so many of us are, by a universalist conception of all world literatures and saw in it “the foundation of what was to become the field of comparative literature” (95). But as regards the current situation of Europe, we must ask ourselves what literature should be taught to young Europeans in the immediate future. Without in any way neglecting vernacular or national languages and literatures, or remaining ignorant of non-Western literary traditions, everything seems to indicate that there will be a disciplinary space for the study of literature and this is in keeping with the historical foundations of the common culture of Europe. As long as the educational system fails to produce the corresponding reference works, which will logically be international in scope, comparative literature studies as they exist now will be the appropriate and useful point of reference for new generations to identify literature with a plurilinguistic repertory of important texts and that are closely related to each other and share similar poetic approaches. Paradoxically, at the moment where in Spain comparative literature was established as a discipline in the university system, in other geographical areas where the situation appeared to be stable, it deteriorated significantly, to the point that Susan Bassnett, in her introduction to comparative literature published in 1993, claimed that “today, comparative literature in one sense is dead” (47). The symptoms to which she alluded to justify her pessimism are, for instance, the fact that in the U.S., the study of English literature has gained ground at the cost of theory—until then a domain of comparative literature—the impact of cultural studies, the decrease in professorships in comparative literature, and in general the generic damages caused by the anti-Eurocentrism of postcolonial and multicultural perspectives.

With all due respect to the thinking of Jacques Derrida and some of his English-speaking followers, or such scholars as J. Hillis Miller, I believe that the triumph of deconstruction was harmful to the situation in which the study of literature was established at U.S. universities within the model of liberal education employing language and literature as an essential instrument in the training of future professionals in various spheres: the ethical, the expressive and communicative spheres, and the esthetic spheres. It was thus believed that literature and the study of literature signified an essential function, that literature had canonical value in terms of artistic evaluation, and that it offered a wealth of information on important issues, which were pertinent to the human condition. Deconstruction came and suggested, in contrast, that literature could lack meaning, that it was

a sort of stir of echoes in which there were no real voices to the point that its meaning blurred completely. Such a position is also extreme. The book certainly means what the reader wants it to mean, but the hermeneutical relativism that phenomenology explains by the fact that a literary work is an outline whose gaps, or “places of indetermination” need to be “filled in” by the reader, is still a far cry from a “negative hermeneutics,” which denies literature’s ability to retransmit meaning. Unfortunately, this is what deconstruction theory has left in its wake and in my opinion it had immediate consequences on the internal scheme of universities. When it came time to distribute budgets in a way guaranteed to be profitable, the administrators said to themselves: how can we fund a discipline whose own professors maintain that it means nothing, that it models nothing, that it lends itself to superficial discussions and differe(a)nces? That was a terrible moment where, to some extent, departments of literature or even departments of humanities in general committed ritual suicide by embracing deconstruction theory so enthusiastically yet so recklessly. As a logical consequence, a void was created, a charred field where something had to be sown, for example, cultural studies. On the way, we lost literary tradition and with it philological tradition, finally to end up in the situation in which we now find ourselves.

The use of the first person plural in my paragraph above signifies an expression of solidarity on my part with U.S.-American colleagues, no small number of whom will likely second our diagnosis, severe as it may seem. For example, Said did in his last book. He was not ashamed to admit, with the credibility lent him by his privileged position of a scholar recognized globally that postcolonialism, cultural studies, and other similar fields ended up side-tracking “the humanities from its rightful concern with the critical investigation of values, history, and freedom, turning it, it would seem, into a whole factory of word-spinning and insouciant specialities, many of them identity-based, that in their jargon and special pleading address only like-minded people, acolytes, and other academics” (14). Additionally, he was convinced that “those varieties of deconstructive Derridean readings” end “in undecidability and uncertainty” (66). We should not be surprised, therefore, by the only solution Said proposes, namely “a return to a philological-interpretative model that is older and more widely based than the one that has prevailed in America since the introduction of humanistic study in the American university 150 years ago” (34; see also Holquist).

In contrast to the problematical U.S.-American scene, in “Old Europe” a solid theory had already started to spring up, based on the concept of literature as system and that had lent its name to an influential work by Guillén, published in 1971, precursor to one of the basic principles of Siegfried J. Schmidt’s *Empirische Literaturwissenschaft* developed in Germany in the 1970s and 1980s (see, e.g., Schmidt, *Foundations*, “Literary Studies,” *Worlds*; for a bibliography of Schmidt’s work see Lisiak and Tötösy de Zerpnek). In Schmidt’s *Empirische Literaturwissenschaft* literature is considered in the context of communicative and thus social actions which include the production of texts and their mediation



texts undergo in distribution and their reception by the reading public or theater or film audience without forgetting the final phase of what Götz Wienold called *Textverarbeitung*—which has been translated as “post-processing,” a term I consider less accurate than “re-creation” and lately it has also be spoken of as “transduction”—that is, the transformative reading that is carried out in the form of criticism and scholarship, interpretation, commentary, parody, summary, adaptation, paraphrase, film, theater or television versions, etc. Schmidt’s conception of the literary system constitutes a framework of conditioning factors in which each element, phase, or agent works with, depends on, and interacts in several processes. Thus the literary system has the following categories mediated in processes: 1) the producer is the agent whose action(s) result(s) in 2) the product, i.e., the artistic work which undergoes 3) mediation whereby mediators—including the producer, the publishing industry, etc.—transmit (“mediate”) the product of creative action to other agents including the product’s audience, and 4) in post-production the product, its mediation, and the producer undergo a process whereby other products are created and processed relative to the original product. Schmidt’s framework has affinities with other contextual frameworks such as Itamar Even-Zohar’s polysystem theory, Juri Lotman’s semiotics of culture, Pierre Bourdieu’s *champ littéraire*, Niklas Luhmann’s notion of social systems, Dionýz Ďurišin’s concept of the interliterary process with the distinction of the “empirical,” a concept that is not positivist or neo-positivist:

we tried to reach the following objectives: theoreticity, empiricity, and applicability. We held the view that literary studies should be performed on the basis of explicit theories, e.g., semantic theories, reception theories, theories of personality or identity, theories of text analysis, etc. The second objective, empiricity, was surely the most problematic one. Because of the concentration on more or less isolated texts, literary studies in the past had gathered nearly no experience in empirical research and, until the advent of ESL (Empirical Study of Literature), they had had no interest in empirical questions in the field of literature either. Consequently, one of the most difficult tasks of ESL was to raise the interest of literary scholars in empirical questions related to the research domain literary system which traditionally had been outsourced to literary sociology and psychology as a marginal aspect and apart from the core of literary studies, i.e., interpretation. A further task was to convince other literary scholars that empiricity had nothing to do with positivism or materialism. This task required a concept of empirical research centered on the notion of methodical constructions of facts (= *facta*, not data; and not positivism) which could be checked in an interdisciplinary way. We underlined again and again that empiricity should not be misread as search for objectivity or truth. Instead, the claim for empiricity signaled the intention to concentrate on social processes which resulted in literary phenomena through the activities of literary agents and to realize this concentration in an empirically intersubjective way. (Schmidt, “Literary Studies” 4–5)

Based on similar concepts of system, communication, society, and literature Even-Zohar presented a diagram different from but complementary to Schmidt’s.



Even-Zohar's framework of the literary system is based, among others, on what Roman Jakobson established for language in general and includes the following processes and actants: 1) producer: addresser, writer, 2) consumer: addressee, reader, spectator, 3) product: message, 4) market: contact/channel, 5) repertoire: code, and 6) institution: context (see Even-Zohar, *Polysystem Studies*, "Factors"). The third framework with specific attention to literature and similar to Schmidt's and Even-Zohar's frameworks is Đurišin's concept of interliterariness while Lotman's, Bourdieu's, and Luhmann's frameworks are designed with regard to culture and thus in a wider conceptualization: they are with less focus on literature per se although they are applied in the study of literature (on Đurišin's work, see, e.g., Domínguez).

For some time now, apocalyptic winds have been blowing among the sharpest of the seers interested in the concept of the literary system and this perception became especially virulent in the areas where deconstruction damaged the academic status of the study of literature after spreading the idea that creative writing, far from being "eminent" writing—full of "real presences" (Steiner), of meanings with operative scope for our society and our civilization—had been broken to pieces resulting in no more than disembodied echoes. Similar to Said, Harold Bloom and George Steiner shared this pessimism in U.S.-American scholarship—as did Northrop Frye years before them—and who express concern about the power of electronic media distorting the processes of education by offering a torrent of information and experiences with, at best, a remote possibility of fostering a genuine understanding of what should concern us all, that is, the very myths of the human condition which speak to our main preoccupations—primal urges from food to sex, even to freedom—as well as our ideological preoccupations. Hillis Miller also heralded, literally, the fact that "literary study's time is up," due firstly to deconstruction and secondly to the growing influence of cultural studies. Literature is a category that appears to have lost its specificity in the un-differentiated field of cultural "discourse," "textuality," and "information" or other technologies. Hillis Miller does not attempt to shield certain critical schools from taking their share of the blame for this debacle, in keeping with Steiner's sensible, although hyperbolic judgment on academic culture in which he notes the scandalous predominance of the secondary and the parasitic (7). His phraseology cracks like a whip: "it is the universities, the research institutes, the academic presses, which are our Byzantium" (30), "Our talk is about talk, and Polonius is master" (40), "Criticism, meta-criticism, dia-criticism, the criticism of criticism, pullulate" (48). Steiner only appears to admit, before any given work of art, "criticism put into action": Dalí's criticism on Ingres, Picasso's on Velázquez, Joyce's on Homer. Add to all this, in honor of cultural relativism and anti-Eurocentrism, the destruction of the canon, and the eradication of programs of study and of authors until now considered classic, against which Bloom—new knight errant versus the giants or the windmills of the so-called school of resentment—lifted an angry voice and pen. Of course, according to

Gerald Gillespie, the polysystem theory as conceived by Even-Zohar could well contribute to a non-Manichean approach to international literary relations and the neutralization of anti-Eurocentrism and the ritual of condemnation of the European contribution to human affairs that multiculturalists have been advocating. Opinions of this character have been spreading among Spanish comparatists too, convinced as I am that the study of literary polysystems is a meeting place and a space for interaction and indispensable between comparative literature and the best of cultural studies.

On the current landscape of literary studies in particular and the humanities in general, we must recover the sense of responsibility for the function of the critic and scholar, for which Terry Eagleton expressed nostalgia, when recalling the beginnings in eighteenth-century England. Instead of the obligatory implication of Addison and Steele in the configuration of the public sphere in society to which they belonged at the end of the twentieth century, literary criticism was either a purely academic affair, as Steiner scoffed, or—which is even worse—it belonged to the publicity division of the cultural industry of book production, thus contributing, despicably, to their confirmation as literary products that were in fact not this, but were mere shells of a writing that has rejected from the start that yearning described by the poet Antonio Machado, that is, the “essential word in the moment. It is likely that we will not recover the dignity and the responsibility of critical and scholarly exercise by the struggle against the bourgeois state, as Eagleton proposes, but by the restoration of esthetic value, the denunciation of the imposture of pseudoliterary writings and the inclusionary rehabilitation of this chain of obligatory artistic pinnacles made up of classics from all languages, where we find, implicitly, literary values worthy of the concept. In the same way, in his specific field of comparative literature, Said championed in the last years of his life a revitalization of the most militant aspects of the discipline, which beyond its purely academic outlines have always existed: convinced that scholarly humanism had to add a noticeable presence as an “ongoing practice” to its status as a “theoretical territory” (6), he proposed, namely that we comparatists insist on contributing to “a different kind of humanism that was cosmopolitan and text-and-language-bound in ways that absorbed the great lessons of the past” (11).

Next I address a proposal for comparative literature that Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek has been developing since the 1990s (and that he since then further developed as “comparative cultural studies”), in conjunction with the development of empirical and systemic literary theories formulated in Europe and Israel prior to that period. Tötösy de Zepetnek’s initiative bears the broad concept in theory and application of the “contextual (systemic and empirical). At the time when the *pensiero debole* of deconstruction was spreading being hailed, paradoxically, as the new a-systematic/systemic method that would redeem U.S.-American scholarship from the aftereffects of poststructuralism, in Europe the foundations of thinking about literature were being laid based in a broad theoretical tradition that included the Marxist sociology of literature, the Frankfurt School, as well as the semiology

of Tartu School, the Konstanz School, and the functionalism of the Prague School. Without detriment to critical pluralism and that includes integrating different methods and schools of thought, as well as combining the three perspectives for approaching works of literature that are necessary for a successful exegesis of the works—the author’s perspective, the text’s perspective, and the reader’s perspective—it is legitimate to pursue the integration of research practices into the broadest, most rigorous, and most coherent theoretical framework possible. This battle front might be the one that can harden that new comparative literature—and later comparative cultural studies—proposed by Tötösy de Zepetnek, who over the course of the many years has not only completed the general formulation of his objectives and outlines and presented in the form of a “manifesto,” but has also carried its application to several fields including the comparative study of Central European culture. We can see an evolution in Tötösy de Zepetnek’s perspective, which started off linked preferentially to comparative literature but which later moved closer and closer to comparative cultural studies.

The “manifesto” is comprised of ten general principles, which I summarize here. First, “what” is being studied is less important than “how” the study is carried out. The comparative—i.e., contextual—method is thus fundamental and the objects of comparison do not undergo a hierarchical appraisal: all are recognized as having the same value from the start. In the same way, the second principle of what for Tötösy de Zepetnek was “new comparative literature” in 1998 and “comparative cultural studies” in 2002 is the theoretical and methodological emphasis on connecting and opening dialogue between cultures, languages, literatures, and disciplines. Because, in essence, the aim is to study culture in each one of its component parts and as a unified whole, to relate, for example, literature and other forms of artistic expression such as visual arts, music, cinema, etc., to other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences such as history, anthropology, philosophy, sociology, or psychology. In the fifth principle of his “manifesto,” Tötösy de Zepetnek does not hesitate to declare that the new comparativism he proposes is best performed in publishing scholarship in English in order to reach the widest possible readership. He argues that this proposal should not be taken as “Euro-American-centricity.” To me, on the other hand, the sixth principle seems more convincing, since it links the development of the new comparativism to the contextual (empirical and systemic) framework and methodology as the supplier of analytical procedures based on evidence. Another field which is part of Tötösy de Zepetnek’s framework of comparative cultural studies is translation studies as based on Even-Zohar’s polysystem theory (see, e.g., “The Study of Translation,” “Taxonomy”). The study of literature and culture in this new paradigm would focus on the general consideration of culture and its development and performed in interdisciplinarity and even teamwork, toward which humanists have traditionally been little inclined. In the context of the debate provoked by globalization, this new comparative dimension of literature and cultures rejects any tendency toward becoming a globalizing discipline

(see Tötösy de Zepetnek, *Comparative Literature*, “The New Humanities”). Its practitioners will need to possess, along with theoretical and methodological rigor, a certain militant attitude focused now towards better understanding all that relates to Otherness and persistent in vindicating in the eyes of their technocratic or economic detractors the social relevance of studies in the humanities.

Some of the principles would have been endorsed by the such as Wellek and Étiemble; however, it is true that comparative literature was unable to respond satisfactorily to their suggestions. Perhaps now, with the help of the relevant theoretical foundations, Tötösy de Zepetnek’s project of renewal would arrive at fruition. And I subscribe to the project in accordance with regard to the philosophical, theoretical, and methodological disorientation of what Rodríguez Magda calls “transmodernity” and we might find a particularly recommendable option in the study not only of the “text in itself”: “text is defined here as any cultural product, but roles of action within the system(s) of culture, namely, the production, distribution, reception, and the processing of culture products” (Tötösy de Zepetnek, “Comparative Cultural Studies and the Study of Central European Culture” 7).

In conclusion, together with Tötösy de Zepetnek’s framework of comparative cultural studies I find the exhortations Said left us as his legacy to be valid. In his posthumous book Said dedicates an entire chapter to advocating “the return to philology” as a necessary route for the strengthening, in our turbulent century, of an “idea of humanistic culture as coexistence and sharing” (*Humanism* xvi; see also McGann). In order to achieve that objective, reading remains fundamental and it can be learned and taught; Reading obviously, in the sense of “reading for meaning” (70). This includes reading not only texts which are linguistically and culturally close, but also those that seem farther removed, for which, as Etiemble in his time was already claiming, translation as a cultural practice and even as an object of research for comparatists is essential. Next to catastrophic horizons like that suggested by Samuel Huntington’s concept of the clash of civilizations, Said reminds us that the word *Qur’an* means “reading” in Arabic and that the practice of *ijtihad*—personal and lingering reading, a sort of close reading—in the context of Islamic humanism shares the same goal as an unrenounceable humanist engagement to which comparative literature has much to contribute: teaching how to read well, which in our times means being a member of one’s own literary tradition while remaining an eager visitor to the culture of the Other.

**Note:** The above article is a revised version of Dario Villanueva, “Possibilities and Limits of Comparative Literature Today.” *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 13.5 (2011): 1–10. Copyright release to the author.

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# Comparative Cultural Studies and Pedagogy

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Ronald Soetaert and Kris Rutten

**Abstract:** In their article “Comparative Cultural Studies and Pedagogy” Ronald Soetaert and Kris Rutten combine the concept of education with culture and literacy. Soetaert and Rutten start by analyzing the concept of cultural literacy as it was developed in traditional back-to-basics rhetoric followed by the problematization of the concept of literacy as developed in the field of multiliteracies and the concept of the study of culture as developed in comparative cultural studies. As a result of their postulates, Soetaert and Rutten present the outline of a framework for pedagogy with comparative cultural studies as theory and practice for the relevance of the teaching of students for competent and non-exclusionary participation in democracy, as well as for the acquisition of knowledge in culture.

## INTRODUCTION

From the perspective of education, the concept of culture is often combined with literacy. The combination cultural literacy and pedagogy has become a field in the 1980s, inspired by the alleged lack of it (see, e.g., Levine). Meanwhile the at-risk trope has become widely spread: (Western) civilization, humanities, culture, universities, youth, etc. are all said to be at risk or in crisis. Many disciplines—from history to science, from literature to mathematics—have used the notion of cultural literacy to describe the fact that students lack the basic knowledge teachers assume they would have mastered as part of their general education. Thus, the back-to-basics movement came about as an answer to problems in education and society. The rhetorical perspective becomes clear if we agree that there is a crisis in literacy. E.D. Hirsch referred to cultural literacy to describe the level and breadth of knowledge citizens need to navigate in society. From this perspective, cultural literacy is described as “the oxygen of social intercourse” or—more practically—as the general information a person needs to understand, for example, a newspaper (Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy* 19).

The argument runs that cultural literacy is the basis to become better readers and writers, better learners and thus students would become more competent and motivated to participate in on-going conversation. Hirsch frames the discussion in such a way that cultural literacy becomes the corner stone of a democratic society. In his *A First Dictionary of Cultural Literacy: What Our Children Need to Know* Hirsch creates a provisional list intended to illustrate the kind and range

of knowledge literate U.S.-Americans tend to share. This list is part of a project to help education with a guide for a new curricular development. Although the focus is on what every U.S.-American needs to know, it is clear that these ideas can be translated to other nations and cultures. The idea of a list as a pedagogic tool can be described as a genre invented as part of print culture. Such a list of “what everyone should know” is also a tool that helps to construct cultural identity. This cultural conservatism is based on a “shared” cultural heritage that is defined by national boundaries, language boundaries or—broader—cultural boundaries (for example, in the West this refers to past ideals in Greek and Latin and Judeo-Christian culture). Inevitably, such a list creates a dichotomy between what is and what is not listed. This debate resembles the on-going discussion—which started at the same time—about the status of the literary canon (see, e.g., Guillory). Bloom and Hirsch and many others maintain that there is an intrinsic U.S.-American (or, in a broader context Western) culture that can be listed, codified, essentialized, and curricularized so that it can be taught to and learned by all members of society. From an educational perspective another dichotomy is created, namely content versus skills, the “what” versus the “how.” Eugene Provenzo, in his *Cultural Literacy*, describes the educational model of Hirsch as a banking or transmission model: the transfer of knowledge from teachers into student’s heads. Hirsch criticizes the failures of public schooling under the influence of John Dewey’s ideas and objects to multiculturalist agendas and curricula. He argues that while comparative perspectives in education are in themselves valuable, they should not be allowed to replace what education is about, namely to ensure student’s mastery of U.S.-American literary culture (see Hirsch 18). Hirsch’s attack on progressive education is also related to his objection to cultural relativism and the issue of fragmentation of modern society. Bloom shares these ideas but even goes a step further by attacking all perspectives that are not traditional.

The obsession with lists applies to both those who defend the traditional canon to those who attack a traditional canon because it excludes particular groups such as women, ethnic groups, the working class, etc. John Guillory calls attention to the “the list itself,” as a discursive form that belongs to the “pedagogic imagery” (175). Making lists seems entrenched in all cultures: “the list which defines a common culture of the ‘culturally literate’ ... is itself an exemplary artefact of mass culture, with its lists of ten best everything” (Guillory 175). All cultures and disciplines in scholarship seem to be based on lists, canons, key words, key authors etc. Lists create counter lists and they privilege certain knowledges over others (see Herrnstein Smith). The canon—or any list—“organizes the discursive and institutional life of teachers in excess of the simple function of disseminating knowledge” (Guillory 174). Pedagogy in general and the curriculum in particular exist constituting a predetermined body of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Robert Scholes argues that the success of lists and canons is based on the fact that a serious problem was described for which “a simple, easy, and inexpensive solution”—making a list—was offered (328). Further, when Hirsch published

his *Cultural Literacy*, in other corpora of scholarship literacy was approached from a different angle by describing it as social practice embedded in the specific context of the language user(s). This research came from different disciplines such as psychology (see, e.g., Scribner and Cole), history (see, e.g., Graff), social anthropology (see, e.g., Heath; Street), linguistics (see, e.g., Stubbs), and sociolinguistics (see, e.g., Gee, *Social Linguistics*). For example, Shirley Brice Heath postulated that the meaning of literacy in specific societies varies depending on the importance attached to literacy by a society or a group within that society. From this perspective, the definition of what literacy is would differ geographically and through time. This is related to Harvey Graff's work, who has reconstructed the Western history of literacy and has tackled the myths associated with it. And Peter Eldred and Janet Mortensen argued that the myth of literacy is based on the unfounded assumption that "better literacy necessarily leads to economic development, cultural progress, and individual improvement" (512). Thus the myth of literacy problematizes the assumption that literacy itself is beneficial and unproblematic.

## MULTILITERACIES

During a conference in London in 1994, a group of scholars developed ideas and published in a manifesto under the umbrella of the new concept "multiliteracies": "a word we chose to describe two important arguments we might have with the emerging cultural, institutional, and global order: the multiplicity of communication channels and media, and the increasing salience of cultural and linguistic diversity" (New London Group 63). These ideas were based on linguistic perspectives, mainly on critical discourse analysis. Literacy is no longer described as a neutral and individual cognitive or technical skill, but rather as a socially situated practice: "each Discourse involves ways of talking, acting, interacting, valuing, and believing, as well as the spaces and material 'props' the group uses to carry out its social practices. Discourses integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions and clothes" (Gee, *Social Linguistics* 127). Literacy is described as an "identity kit." Depending on the situation or the network in which one finds oneself, we make use of that "kit," a tool to acquire new knowledge. From this perspective, literacy has to do with mastering a specific kind of discourse, a skill that allows us to communicate successfully. The basic skills of reading and writing no longer suffice to be qualified as "literate": one can be literate in one discourse, and illiterate in another (on this, see, e.g., Barton). The list of domains where literacy as a concept is applied is nearly endless: media literacy, visual literacy, environmental literacy, digital literacy, multicultural literacy, etc.

Multiliteracies tries to answer what is happening in our networked society: globalization and digitization. As far as globalization is concerned, the concept of multiliteracies focuses on the "realities of increasing local diversity and global

connectedness” (New London Group 64). As far as digitization is concerned, through the integration of new media and the internet some new literacies create qualitative new steps in human communication. This also implies a revision of the concept of cultural literacy, which is about more than books and the literary canon, but also “images, symbols, graphs, diagrams, artefacts, and many other visual symbols” become part of the repertoire of cultural literacy (Gee, *What Video Games* 17). Literacy has exploded into different (multi)literacies and such a perspective creates a different kind of pedagogy, “one in which language and other modes of meaning are dynamic representational resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve their various cultural purposes” (New London Group 60). Thus, cultural literacy as an objective in pedagogy has been replaced by critical literacy. In “What Is Critical Literacy?” Ira Shor states that “no pedagogy is neutral, no learning process is value-free, no curriculum avoids ideology and power relations” (2). The main objective of critical literacy is to ask students to take critical postures towards their uses of personal language and the discourses and genres dominating society and media in general and schools in particular. As far as the importance of content is concerned, James Paul Gee argues that schools are often built around the fetish of content: “the idea that an academic area like biology or social science is constituted by some definitive list of facts or body of information that can be tested in a standardized way” (*What Video Games* 33). Gee argues that academic areas are not a list of facts but first and foremost “ways of knowing through which such facts are generated, defined and modified” (*What Video Games* 32).

## CULTURAL STUDIES

For understanding what is happening with cultural literacy and literacies, we begin with locating critical perspectives in cultural studies. There is no single object of study, no unified body of theory, no one-and-only methodology that defines cultural studies completely: “cultural studies has many multiple discourses; it has a number of different histories... It includes many different kinds of work” (Hall 278; see also Giroux). However, our contention is that while cultural studies has proven itself of major intellectual and institutional impact (i.e., first via the Birmingham School and then via U.S.-American cultural studies), there is a strong need for a more global and comparative perspective as indeed some cultural studies scholars suggest (see, e.g., Tomaselli; Wright). Thus we opt, instead, for the decidedly “global” and inclusive approach of “comparative cultural studies” as argued below. In principle, cultural studies has been described as inter-, multi-, and even counter- or anti-disciplinary. Perspectives from cultural studies are embedded in several other disciplines: from literary theory to media and communication studies, from art criticism and theory to the sociology of culture, from philosophy to cultural anthropology to ethnography. Cultural studies seems to question “at every turn the ways disciplinary boundaries are drawn” (Huddleston

2). The major focus of cultural studies can also be described as thematic: for example from nationhood to globalism, from gender/sexuality to aesthetics, from the politics of science to eco-politics, from audience/consumer perspectives to academic issues, from culture to pedagogy (see Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári).

If culture can be conceptualized variously as “a way of life,” as cultivation of the mind or as learnt behavior, it also becomes clear that culture and education share perspectives. Scholars in cultural studies argue that (corporate) media culture is shaping our life in general and life styles in particular. It is argued that traditional cultural institutions as schools, libraries and museums need to broaden their concept of culture as “ordinary” (see Williams), a whole way of life or at least open up a static definition of culture creating new possibilities for cultural analysis and understanding. Henri Giroux argues for a political critique of cultural texts based on the idea that we should take culture seriously as a site of pedagogy: “the site where young people and others imagine their relationship to the world; it produces the narratives, metaphors, and images for constructing and exercising a powerful pedagogical force over how people think of themselves and their relationship to Others” (Giroux qtd. in Kellner 233). Hence, culture is intrinsically pedagogical. Culture is both the sphere in which adults exercise control over children and a site where children and youth can resist the adult world and create their own cultures and identities. Culture is the ground of socialization, of accommodation and contestation, of identification and difference. Cultural studies is, by definition, situated in-between the humanities and the social sciences; however, there are other borders that are blurred, dichotomies that are problematized such as, for example, between high and low culture, between life styles, cultures, and literacies. As far as high and low culture is concerned, cultural studies started off by challenging the cultural content of traditional education, focusing on “the best that has been thought and said” (Arnold 27) and this elitist definition was problematized and confronted with a more pluralistic, democratic definition of culture starting with the work at the Birmingham School in the late 1950s to the 1970s followed by the adaptation and development of ideas in the U.S.

The attack on elitism by cultural studies was combined with a challenge to traditional academic disciplines and hegemonic power structures related to the traditional curriculum. The argument that the curriculum needs “merely” to teach the facts of a culture or a discipline was thus changed to “not only a site in which signs that are produced in other places circulate, but also a place of production of signs in its own right” (da Silva 7). Tomas da Silva argues that describing the curriculum as a representation implies that we are also confronted with a postmodern crisis of representation and interpretation. In other words, the curriculum as part of postmodern culture has become a site of struggle around representation. Cultural studies is based on a resistance of the status quo, criticizing the “politics of literacy,” inviting teachers to become public intellectuals, and urging education to create a border pedagogy in which cultural

studies can play a central role to transform political and educational knowledge (see, e.g., Aronowitz and Giroux). While some cultural studies practitioners state the political and ideological mission of their work explicitly, others argue that cultural studies should be restricted to intellectual clarification and legitimization. For example, Chris Barker describes cultural studies as “a symbolic guide or map of meaning and significance” (5). From this perspective, cultural studies can be seen as a potential tool for intervention in the social world, but it is not a form of direct political activity or activism (see, e.g., Soetaert, Mottart, Verdoodt; Soetaert, Verdoodt, Mottart). The question arises about what the difference would be between traditional cultural literacy perspectives and the more progressive perspectives of cultural studies. Apart from a political agenda, there is also an educational and epistemological point of view: “the realist concept of knowledge and curriculum suppresses, thus, any notion of politics. The static world of things and fixed signifiers is a world without dispute, without contestation. It is simply there: it is a given” (da Silva 29).

In our view, cultural studies and the notion of multiliteracies make a plea for the fact that education ought to reflect the pluralistic nature of culture and society. In pedagogy, ideology with regard to what should be on the curriculum or should be taught, can be represented as a series of interaction between diverse cultures and through a series of “border contacts” between, for example Western and non-Western culture, elitist (“high”) and popular (“low”) culture, textual and audio-visual culture, etc.

## PEDAGOGY AND COMPARATIVE CULTURAL STUDIES

Two major developments in contemporary globalized culture confront us resulting in the need for a contextual and interdisciplinary perspective: globalization (we live in a network of cultures) and digitization (a network of media). The “comparative” perspective is thus, in our view, a basic principle in the field of cultural literacy (i.e., multiliteracies) and pedagogy. Rita Felski asks about epistemology, aesthetics, politics, and disciplinary histories of comparison with a question as to “what extent do all modes of thought rely on implicit, if not explicit, forms of comparison?” (2). On the one hand, comparing seems inescapable, on the other hand the adjective comparative is frequently “spurned as old-fashioned at best, retrograde at worst” (Felski 2). Comparison, indeed, is never neutral, it inevitably creates a hierarchy. Thus, comparison can be homogenizing and hegemonizing, while it can also be counter-hegemonic: “a mode of thinking, an analogical form of human cognition, that is indispensable to understanding and creativity and that depends upon principles of relation and differentiation” (Felski 2). And Wayne Booth links the comparative perspective with a plea for the importance of critical pluralism: “let the voices multiply, the more voices we have, the more truth will finally emerge” (4). Such a statement can be linked to the plea for encouraging intercultural and interdisciplinary dialogue based on

comparative cultural studies and this perspective changes our perception of the curriculum (on dialogue in the classroom, see, e.g., Tannen).

In Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek's framework of comparative cultural studies hierarchy in comparison is rejected (see, e.g., "From Comparative," "The New Humanities"). We concur with his postulate that the contextual and comparative ought to be a basic paradigm in the humanities and social sciences and thus including the field of education. Further, the issue of globalization and digitality (i.e., in the Western world with regard to the latter) the said paradigm proves more important than ever (on this, see, e.g., Tötösy de Zepetnek, *Digital Humanities*; Tötösy de Zepetnek and López-Varela Azcárate; Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári). In *Contact Zone* Mary-Louise Pratt problematizes the traditional notions of community on which conservative conceptualizations of literacy and education are based. She refers to the work of Benedict Anderson who described nations as "imagined communities" where its members will never meet and yet they feel connected, as "in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6). Classrooms are a major scene for constructing such identities (see, e.g., a case study on the construction of the nation in Rutten, Mottart, Soetaert; see also Seyfried). Classrooms and schools are social worlds or communities, but often they are not homogenous: they are sites in which multiple literacies and cultures are confronted. Pratt introduces the concept of "contact zones" to refer to "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today ... [a] community that many of us rely on in teaching and theorizing" (4). The pedagogical implications of this postulate represent a shift from elitist culture to culture as a way of life, from theory to narratives, from a "master narrative" to multiple narratives, from a single literacy to multiliteracies, from stability to change, from product to process.

In a contact zone the dominant literacy culture is challenged by contact with other perspectives, with the Other. This ongoing reconceptualization involves bringing texts and perspectives together to organize a productive dialogue (see Bizzell, "Contact Zones" 165). In our own work we have introduced the contact zone in teaching literature (see Rutten, Mottart, Soetaert), in teaching about institutions as museums (see Rutten and Soetaert), in teaching about the nation in teacher education (see Mottart, Soetaert, Verdoodt; Rutten, Mottart, Soetaert), and in teaching about thematic issues as the debate about the environment etc. (see Soetaert and Mottart). This kind of teaching and curricula also involves new perspectives on the identity of the teacher. Teachers have to test everything they more or less take for granted, namely their discipline, their subject content, their role as a teacher, and last but not least their own identity. Teachers should be willing to reconstruct discourses and to revise vocabularies. In an educational environment based in comparative cultural studies the teacher should be a cultural anthropologist (see, e.g., Pinxten; Rutten and Soetaert; Soetaert, Bourgonjon,



Rutten). This perspective is close to Richard Rorty's idea that if the world and our identity are not constant, we are obliged to "redescribe" it constantly (*Contingency* xvi). For Rorty, narratives in general and literature in particular can play an inspirational role: "literature began to set itself up as a rival to philosophy when people like Cervantes and Shakespeare began to suspect that human beings were, and ought to be, so diverse that there is no point in pretending that they all carry a single truth deep in their bosoms" ("From Religion" 79).

Developed from Pratt, Patricia Bizzell's concept of the contact zone in the teaching of literature means that "studying texts as they respond to contact zone conditions is studying them rhetorically, studying them as efforts of rhetoric" ("Contact Zones" 168). We agree that rhetoric can be an important tool in the contextual and comparative perspective in order to organize communication and learning in a productive dialogue. Our argumentation for the importance of a "rhetorical turn" is based on the idea that we all have become a kind of *homo rhetoricus*, that is, becoming self-conscious about how language constructs reality (see, e.g., Rutten). Such a perspective implies a particular meta-perspective synthesized by Kenneth Burke as "a way of seeing is also a way of not seeing" (49) and rhetoricians have made us aware that ways of seeing the world can be considered as rationalizations. All human actions are driven by rhetoric and the use of symbols for purposes of cooperation and competition (see, e.g., Fleming) or identification and division (Burke). A doubled-edged rhetoric, which is both critical and constructive, could be inspiring (see, e.g., Richards) and thus in tune with the tenets of comparative cultural studies. On the one hand we agree with Tötösy de Zepetnek's notion of the comparative in his principles of comparative cultural studies that "to compare ... does not—and must not—imply a hierarchy: in the comparative mode of investigation and analysis a matter studies is not 'better' than another. This means ... that it is method that is of crucial importance in comparative cultural studies in particular and, consequently, in the study of literature and culture as a whole" ("From Comparative" 259) while on the other hand we also realize that human beings are obsessed by hierarchies. For Burke we are symbol-using and misusing animals. The invention of the negative is the means through which hierarchies are constructed, in Burke's words: human beings are "rotten with perfection" (*Language* 16).

## CONCLUSION

With regard to our postulates about the dichotomy between focus on the product and its processes relates to the (radical) constructivist notion and its surrounding debate about the "what" versus the "how" (see, e.g., Schmidt and [radical] constructivism). With regard to construction and rhetoric, Bizzell suggests that studying content as "efforts of rhetoric ... we are still nostalgically evoking the search for truth, only to announce that truth cannot be found. We spend our time exposing truth claims as historically, ideologically, rhetorically constructed; in

other words, we spend our time in the activity called deconstruction” (“Beyond Antifoundationalism” 375). Thus, we propose that we need what Burke calls “symbol wisdom” or what Booth described as “listening rhetoric.” Such a perspective could teach us that the debate between the what and the how, between pleading for the importance of “shared knowledge” for community building and mediating the concept of community by constructing shared values as a more complex structure. Indeed, we need a “shared discourse” and “shared knowledge” to communicate. Such a shared discourse creates discourse communities on the level of scholarship and via pedagogy on the level of community. We should realize that our ways of life “depend upon shared meanings and shared concepts and depend as well upon shared modes of discourse for negotiating differences in meaning and interpretation” (Bruner, *Acts* 25). Thus, the what and the how are closer than the way we construct them rhetorically in binaries of the Other. This should not imply relativism or conservatism; instead, our suggestion is to introduce perspectives on perspectives in the curriculum, a site where theory and practice intersect and where different discourses, disciplines, and ideologies are mediated. And this process should be seen in the light of the crisis of representation and interpretation where “an uncertainty in the very centre of the epistemologies that once governed with such confidence the modern project of domination: of nature, of the world, of society” (da Silva 7). Indeed, as Jerome Bruner and James S. Mullican suggest, the process of bringing students to higher grounds of awareness and learning is problematized by the question of whose higher grounds? (Bruner, *Actual* 142). Teaching on all levels involves mediation and dialogue and thus we argue that a comparative cultural studies perspective combined with rhetorical awareness represent a framework and practice for both scholarship and pedagogy because it changes the perspective of single culture and literacy into plural cultures and multiliteracies.

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# Teaching World Literatures

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John D. Pizer

**Abstract:** In his article “Teaching World Literatures” John D. Pizer argues that “world literature” is a notoriously vague term. It not only lacks disciplinary specificity because it suggests all literature at all times from all places, but also oscillates between signifying a pedagogical domain on the one hand and articulating a heuristic concept indicating how literature circulates in the world on the other. Pizer suggests that contemporary world literature instructors share the goal of teaching their students to comprehend both what is universal in world literature, what is culturally specific, what is familiar, and what is alienating in the texts they read. He outlines a means for achieving this goal by using a meta-theoretical approach of contextual dialectics. Further, Pizer discusses his strategy of teaching otherness by reducing and enhancing student familiarity with syllabus texts by drawing on the Russian Formalist concept of *ostranenie*.

When a student at university enrolls in an introductory class to almost any subject—be it physics, biology, psychology, history of English literature, etc.—he/she can expect in the initial part of the course to learn how the discipline is defined, what its boundaries are, and what content and techniques are included and/or excluded from its purview. According to some who work in systems theory in the study of literature and culture, disciplinary discourses are governed by an immanent stability threatened when its discursive borders are contaminated by foreign modalities (on the macro-system in the study of literature and culture, see, e.g., Apter; on the micro-system approach, see, e.g., Even-Zohar; Schmidt; Tötösy de Zepetnek, “Systemic Approaches,” “Bibliography”). With introductory courses to national literatures, or even those devoted to a transnational examination of the literature composed in one language or devoted to one genre or theme, content may vary but pedagogical goals are somewhat stabilized by what such courses exclude. This is not the case with introductory world literature courses; any text might be considered worthy of inclusion and the broad goal of cross-cultural knowledge theoretically to be imparted by all such courses can be so vague and indefinite as to be rather worthless by itself. From a systems theory perspective, which underscores the principle of closed systems and can be applied to poetics, introductory world literature courses are inherently unstable and, with respect to disciplinary boundaries, undefined.

World literature courses taught in the U.S. in the early years of the discipline ranged from an exclusion of all English-language literature with the goal of exposing the student to only that part of the globe’s culture exterior to the English-

language world, as is the case with the world literature anthologies of Philo Buck, who taught the first world literature courses in the United States (Buck xi-xv) to approaches which presuppose the centrality of an English-language point of view (Moulton 13), to courses where scholars of English and U.S.-American literature, upon whom the teaching of such introductory world literature courses in the 1950s was often forced, taught foreign language texts in a manner that can only be described as tokenism: the English-language works they featured in their classes continued to have pride of place in their world literature classes (Brown 10–14). And this remains the case despite the recent expansion of world literature pedagogy exemplified by more recent volumes about “world literature” (see, e.g., Carroll; Damrosch; D’haen; D’haen, Damrosch, Kadir; Jullien; Lawall; Pizer) would effect a change in world literature syllabi and pedagogical practices.

To be sure, the concept of how to teach world literature in context has been formulated previously. For example, Vilashini Cooppan defines world literature as a particular epistemology, a way to read “that regularly places its readers in the unnerving moment in which a strange text is made at least partly familiar and the familiar canonical is made at least partly strange” (29). I propose a methodology to attain this goal in the teaching of world literature in the U.S.-American university—and I believe my framework and methodology would be applicable in other parts of the world—by reading one culturally familiar and one culturally unfamiliar text through the filter of dialectics. Here it is worth pointing out the appropriateness of Cooppan’s approach to world literature(s): the Romantic “uncanny” (*unheimlich*) operates at the threshold of the familiar and the unsettling, the domestic and the estranged. Damrosch formulates a similar *telos* in his argument that Johann Wolfgang von Goethe sought in his articulations about the paradigm of world literature, to discover “in the foreign text a middle quality, a distinctive novelty that is like-but-unlike practice at home” (*What is World Literature* 11). Claudio Guillén varies this view of Goethe’s world literature dialectic when he notes that the paradigm suggests “a dialogue between the local and the universal, between the one and the many” (40). Gary Harrison also believes that the world literature classroom is a place to explore the “similarities and differences obtained in the material and intellectual conditions that gave rise to these works” (212). This is part of his general strategy of defamiliarizing canonic texts but concomitantly becoming at home with them by grounding these works in their social, historical, cultural, and economic contexts. In all these formulations of the goal of reading and teaching world literature, a dialectic of alterity and sameness is inherent. This confluence allows us to glimpse an emerging consensus in world literature pedagogy, even if the formulations are “like but unlike” and if, as Anuradha Dingwaney Needham argues, the very notion of difference itself is unstable and frequently problematic. Discussing the 1980s dispute between Fredric Jameson and Aijaz Ahmad on the issue of the relationship between alterity and national consciousness in postcolonial “third world” literatures, Needham argues that the critical elucidation of sameness and difference—as well as the articulation of



discrete cultural and political spaces in world literatures—always depend on the positionality of the observer. Her essay might inspire the world literature teacher to regard as necessary the inculcation of an awareness of one’s personal limitation in students, who should be encouraged to engage in the sort of world literature debate exemplified (at an obviously higher degree of sophistication than is to be expected in the classroom) by the Jameson-Ahmad dispute (73–85).

Even if we are to embrace, in its broadest contours, the highlighting of the local-universal and sameness-otherness dialectics in the world literature classroom advocated by world literature theorists such as Guillén, Damrosch, Harrison, and Cooppan, and leaven our approach through highlighting the limitations of this methodology by inculcating the insights provided by Needham, world literature as a discipline is still threatened by the instability revealed through a consideration of the undefined boundaries constituting its place as an academic domain. For “world literature(s)” is not only problematic by virtue of its vague semantic signification, its suggestion, when left untheorized, of a domain devoted to all the globe’s literature, from all times and places, but also by the circumstance that it has mostly functioned since Goethe as a discursive concept entirely unrelated to pedagogy. To be more precise, “world literature” has existed as a heuristic mode of discourse among literary scholars and critics, as a way of looking at how literature achieves international stature through boundary crossing modes of circulation via translation, adaptation in diverse countries, and the reception of works by authors working in different tongues of each other’s work, but this has seldom been the case in the United States among world literature teachers, for whom world literature’s status as a mode of critical discourse is rarely the object of consideration. This is not to say that most world literature teachers are unaware of its provenance as a critical heuristic paradigm subsequent to its coinage by Goethe in the 1820s. In his introduction to *No Small World* Carroll makes a passing reference to Goethe’s employment of the term (vii–viii). However, while those who teach introductory world literature courses may reflect occasionally on this domain in their pedagogical preparation, it is safe to say that few if any have their beginning students read texts devoted either to world literature as a heuristic discursive paradigm or as a pedagogical domain. At the outset of my own “Introduction to Modern World Literature” courses, I have students read a packet of materials drawn from these discrete but interconnected fields. Thus, before they begin to read and analyze anthologized texts drawn from the entire globe’s post-1650s corpus, this metatheoretical approach allows them to gain an epistemological purchase on world literature as a complex, indeed overdetermined signifier. Not only does this method allow the students to achieve the goal of learning how world literature has been variously defined, and how they as readers and students might seek to define it, but also enhances their ability to grasp the sameness/otherness, local/universal dialectic many of us wish to inculcate in our world literature courses. Through this metatheoretical approach, students learn to read the literature of the world through the filter of “world literature.”

Prior to having students engage in any reading of texts, I devote a session to exploring how they would define world literature. I do not attempt to lead them in any particular direction; instead, they are divided into discussion groups. The resulting *tabula rasa* efforts of these clusters to arrive at a definition tend, not surprisingly, to revolve around the related principles of canonicity and transnational influence. Often, students cite the Bible and the Koran as examples of literature or as religious texts inspirational for imaginative literature with a global impact. More recently, non-sacred texts with limited but yet border crossing effect mentioned by students at the outset of a number of semesters included Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), with a recognition that these works made a greater impression in the political domain than on other national literatures. Homer and Shakespeare were the most frequently mentioned canonic writers whose work attained lasting, global influence on literature itself. I also ask students what criteria should govern the selection of imaginative texts for inclusion in a world literatures syllabus or even anthology and in congruence with the views of most present-day world literature instructors, including myself, the responses indicate they feel geographic, linguistic, and temporal diversity are equally or more important than canonicity.

Next, we begin our examination of works focused on the theory and practice of world literatures with a consideration of Goethe's groundbreaking, albeit scattered and inconclusive remarks on the paradigm of *Weltliteratur*. These diverse utterances are available in translation in a number of books and I use the selection of passages available in Hans-Joachim Schulz and Phillip H. Rhein, eds., *Comparative Literature: The Early Years* anthology because of the valuable prefatory remarks by the editors. Schulz and Rhein emphasize that Goethe saw *Weltliteratur* as encompassing "all forms of mediation" among the diverse national literatures as a way to achieve border crossing understanding among the diverse peoples, and as a manifestation of how the reception of one's own work through translation, criticism, and adaptation (Goethe's initial discussion of the term was inspired by reviews of French reworkings of his play *Torquato Tasso* 1790) shapes literary discourse. Schulz and Rhein also underscore how Goethe's term refers to "the marketplace of international literary traffic" ("Some Passages" 3). Particularly the emphasis on cultural mediation is valuable in these prefatory remarks and in the actual translated passages from Goethe's various utterances on world literature, because—as one should take pains to make clear in the world literature classroom—students themselves engage in such cultural mediation as they read and analyze works from lands foreign to their linguistic, temporal, social, and even gender-based experience.

The personal enrichment and broadening of one's own horizons and awareness of global reach, the sense Goethe's definition of world literature inculcates "that," as he puts it in one of his remarks, "poetry is the common property of all mankind and that it is manifest everywhere and in all ages in hundreds and

hundreds of people” (“I: I report” 6) enables students a perception that they will be participating in a global dialogue grounded in a self-other dialectic when they begin to read, discuss, and debate the globe’s literature after the formally theoretical portion of the course is concluded. Because the students are reading foreign-language texts in translation and because translation issues are central to world literature as both a pedagogical domain and a heuristic paradigm, they read Goethe’s musings on translation—excerpted from the notes to his poetry cycle *West-Eastern Divan* (1819)—subsequent to the discussion of his passages on world literature. Goethe advances the notion that there are three levels of translation: a plain prose rendering, a parodistic mode in which the source language is adapted to the stylistic and syntactic predilections of the target language and even the peccadilloes of the translator himself, and a third level which calls for the mother tongue to be adjusted to the nuances of the original. Goethe realized that this foreignizing mode of translation would alienate, indeed estrange, many readers, but in the long run may enrich the suppleness, expressive range and architectonic registers of the target language (Goethe, “Translations” 60–63; on Goethe’s concept of *Weltliteratur*, see, e.g., Birus). It is worth emphasizing in the theoretically informed world literature classroom that students themselves may feel alienated at first by works radically at variance with their own cultural and linguistic experience, but that, ideally, such texts will enhance and expand their cognitive abilities to comprehend and interact with spatial and temporal realms beyond their own personal and national boundaries.

In elucidating Goethe’s views on world literature and translation, I emphasize the historical context that gave rise to his musings late in life. Not only had improvements in transportation and communication infrastructures—as well as expanded translation activity leading to cross-border marketing of literature—brought about enhanced transnational interchange, but nascent nationalism in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars had been effectively crushed by the Congress of Vienna, a suppression which helped enable at the time a cosmopolitan spirit in West Europe to emerge. There are parallels between globalism then and now: in both cases it was made possible through new technologies and increased translation activities. However, students should also realize that Goethe viewed world literature as being largely confined to Europe, a continent still only connected tenuously at that time to the world beyond, whereas today world literature is a global phenomenon. We also discuss the remarks of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels on world literature in their *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), which goes well beyond Goethe’s cosmopolitanism in predicting the end of all national literature. The communist revolution, they predict, will render the literature of the world common property on a global scale. For Goethe, Marx, and Engels, world literature was a modern phenomenon poised between the present and the future. Indeed, when Marx and Engels proclaim that “national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature”

(488), they are echoing almost verbatim Goethe's pronouncement asserting, in conjunction with the emergence of world literature, that "national literature means little now" ("I. I report" 6). By way of showing students that world literature is not a univocally constituted domain, but is informed by perspectives antithetical to those of Goethe, Marx, and Engels, I cite the work of Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett, who in his *Comparative Literature* (1886) argues that world literature is the product of great transnational empires existing in antiquity and near antiquity, evident in the ancient Greek (Alexandrian), Roman, Hebrew, Arab, and Chinese civilizations. He defines world literature's chief characteristic as "the severance of literature from defined social groups," when the dominant literary critical spirit was rooted in both subnational ("many narrow channels") and transnational, often imperial, orientations (236). Posnett was writing in an age far more nationalistic than that of Goethe in the 1820s and Marx and Engels in 1848 and students need to recognize that their disparate definitions of world literature are rooted in discrete historical contexts. Carefully formulated discussion questions emailed to students prior to sessions devoted to Goethe, Marx and Engels, and Posnett (and, for that matter, all the other writers covered in the course) are designed to bring them on their own to an awareness of these antitheses grounded in disparate temporal and geographic circumstances.

The remaining texts assigned during the metatheoretical introduction phase of my world literature courses are pedagogically oriented. I discuss Thomas Wentworth Higginson's "A World-Literature" as a missing (or at least ignored) link between world literature as a heuristic critical paradigm and as an academic curricular offering in the United States. Higginson wrote a critical biography of Margaret Fuller entitled *Margaret Fuller Ossoli* (1890). Fuller was the celebrated New England Transcendentalist who popularized Goethe among this group, in part through her translation of Johann Peter Eckermann's *Gespräche mit Goethe* (1836). This work, which Fuller rendered into English in 1839 under the title *Conversations with Goethe in the Last Years of his Life*, contains some of Goethe's most significant pronouncements on world literature. Higginson proclaimed in his biography of Fuller that the translation of the *Gespräche* was more significant than any other in inculcating his great esteem for Goethe (*Margaret Fuller Ossoli* 189). In "A World-Literature," also published in 1890, the opening paragraph concurs with Goethe's announcement in the *Gespräche* that the era of discrete national literatures was now in the past by citing contemporary examples of border crossing influences such as how French-language literature is impacted by Jane Austen and Bret Harte and by pointing out that Mark Twain is more widely read in Sweden than the country's own celebrated author Fredrika Bremer, etc. (922). However, Higginson soon thereafter switches to a consideration of how an emerging world literature still has no place in the U.S.-American university curriculum, a curriculum that he finds to be overspecialized. He argues for the introduction of world literature as a pedagogical offering, even proclaiming that if Goethe's perspective is accurate, "then no one is fitted to give the higher literary

training in our colleges who has not had some training in world-literature for himself" ("A World-Literature" 923). To the best of my knowledge, Higginson was the first scholar to argue for the introduction of world literature courses in the United States. Subsequent to the discussion of Higginson's brief essay, students read a chapter of Richard Moulton's book on world literature and I underscore the concurrence of Higginson and Moulton that such world literature courses must be taught from a generalist rather than specialist framework. While world literature courses were not widely taught until the 1950s, the perspectives of Higginson and Moulton have been reflected on frequently in much world literature pedagogy, although they are not generally cited as having exerted a direct influence. Further, Moulton's endorsement of the idea of world literature from an Anglocentric perspective has generally fallen out of favor today. The theoretical portion of such a world literature course concludes with a consideration of Guillén's analysis of Goethe's paradigm. Guillén notes that, in reading world literatures, "we encounter not only the possibility of differences but also a confirmation of common values and questions" (44). At this point, students should be ready for the challenge of discovering both the differences and the common values in the works they are about to read. In other words, they are in a better position than before to read literature from diverse places and times, composed around the globe, under the sign of world literature's sameness/otherness, identity/difference, and universal/particular dialectics.

To be sure, students still need guidance to engage in such dialectical reading. They are likely to assume that they can comprehend accurately and contextually literary works written proximate to their own age, in their own tongue, composed in or at least concerning their own region. On the other hand, they are most likely to be estranged and baffled by literature written in more distant times, in a foreign tongue, and composed in or concerning an alien place. To counteract these tendencies, the world literature instructor must call into question both the familiarity of the familiar and mitigate the strangeness of the foreign. In order to facilitate this dual and intertwined process, I draw upon the writings of Russian Formalism, introducing its adherents' principles in the classroom without requiring the students to consult this movement's complex texts. The Russian Formalist concept of *ostranenie*, usually translated as "defamiliarization," is among the most compelling heuristic devices for explaining the unique character of poetic language. In two programmatic essays that elucidate defamiliarization, "Art as Technique" (1917) and "Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*: Stylistic Commentary" (1921), Victor Shlovsky demonstrates how various literary techniques—irony, puns, unconventional narrative voices, etc.—render everyday experiences as alienating and strange, forcing the reader to consider life from unaccustomed angles: "art removes objects from the automatism of perception," as when Tolstoy depicts flogging in the story *Shame* in brutal prose unadorned by conventional homiletic moralism, forcing the reader to question the efficacy and ethics of such punishment ("Art as Technique" 13). Defamiliarization involves more a slight adjustment of the

cognitive faculties rather than a complete epistemological bouleversement; hence Shlovsky's emphasis that *ostranenie* calls forth "the perception of disharmony in a harmonious context" ("Art as Technique" 21). Or, as another Russian Formalist, Boris Tomashevsky puts it: "the old and habitual must be spoken of as if it were new and unusual" (85). Thus, defamiliarization can take place only when the reader does not perceive the context of a literary work as utterly alien to his/her own. In their introduction to essays by seminal Russian Formalists, including the above-cited works, Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis emphasize the proximity of this movement—at least in its early, pre-Marxist phase—to U.S.-American New Criticism (ix–xi). Both of these critical schools eschew the social and historical contexts of poetic works in favor of a focus on immanent technique. Shlovsky's essay on *Tristram Shandy*, for example, is almost entirely concerned with this novel's unique stylistic devices. Cosmopolitan intellectuals such as Shlovsky and Tomashevsky perhaps took it for granted that their (largely academic) audience was familiar with the historical, social, and even linguistic ambience informing the worlds of authors as diverse as Tolstoy and Sterne. Thus, they could assume there was no danger of extreme hermeneutic alienation on the part of their readers. That is to say, using Tomashevsky's translated terms, that the life world of an author like Sterne was "habitual" enough to readers familiar with Formalist theory that they could appreciate what was "new and unusual" in *Tristram Shandy* without dismissing the novel in its entirety as bizarre and incomprehensible.

My approach to teaching otherness in the world literature classroom by reducing and enhancing familiarity begins with two different assumptions. The first is that twenty-first-century U.S.-American students in the beginning world literature classroom lack the historical knowledge, cosmopolitan background, and multilingual sophistication that would enable *ostranenie* to take place in their engagements with works of a non-contemporary, non-English language provenance without the introduction of some cultural and historical background of these texts. Secondly, in an age when U.S.-American popular culture dominates the globe, many U.S.-American students will regard their own cultural background as normative and might therefore be relatively unaware of what is "new and unusual" in works of twentieth- and twenty-first-century fiction. Thus, while I value *ostranenie* as an optative principle of sophisticated reading, a different approach is needed, one that is attuned to the external dimensions of imaginative texts and that enhances the familiarity of non-English language works, especially from periods relatively distant in time, and that reduces the surface familiarity of relatively recent U.S.-American fiction.

Using the universal-particular, the contextual dialectic of world literature discussed above, I now turn to discuss two works as examples: Ludwig Tieck's "Fair-haired Eckbert" (1797) and William Faulkner's "Barn Burning" (1939) and I attempt to show how the emphasis on a balanced presentation of universal themes and historical-cultural particularities steers students between the extremes of homogenization and exoticism in their interpretive encounters with these



exemplary texts. In the case of Faulkner, I focus on how an emphasis on nuances particular to the author and his period can defamiliarize the work, albeit not in a manner consistent with the formal immanence of *ostranenie*. This causes students to consider how this twentieth-century English-language U.S.-American Southern writer presents as much of a hermeneutic challenge to contemporary Southern students as do non-English language authors from earlier periods and other geographic sites. With Tieck, I draw on the theory of the fairy tale to de-exoticize an author who may otherwise appear all too strange and opaque to contemporary students, thus facilitating their ability to see universal elements in the tale so that their initial estrangement will not overwhelm their willingness to interpretively engage with the text.

“Barn Burning” is the tale of a man so consumed by hatred for the wealthy plantation owners for whom he works that he lashes out against them, gets fired, and, as the title suggests, burns their barns. The man’s loyal family is also tyrannized by his violent outbursts, but his son, Colonel Sartoris Snopes, rebels at the end by warning a plantation owner of his father’s arsonist designs against his property; although he is too late to save the plantation owner’s barn, the final paragraph shows Sartoris has broken free of his family. I point out to the students that Faulkner’s strong sense of place creates both a familiar and an unfamiliar picture of the South. His vivid description of the fauna—oak groves and beeches, honeysuckle, etc.—would be familiar. The use of a footnote in *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* to explain that when the father spent “four years in the woods hiding from all men, blue or gray,” he was avoiding both Union and Confederate troops during the Civil War (“Barn Burning” 1893), a war from which he profited as a plunderer, is superfluous for my native Southern students, who, unlike many Northern students, are raised with some familiarity regarding the “War Between the States” and are familiar with the color of the combatants’ uniforms. Likely unfamiliar to students, however, is the story’s motif of intraracial racial class conflict. I am careful not to politicize the classroom, but it is simply a fact that in a region with weak labor unions and a conservative political outlook, the conservative accusations, beginning in the 1990s, that those who point out radical income discrepancies are guilty of “class warfare” was more successful in suppressing the conflict between lower and upper income class Whites in this region than was the case with the more heavily unionized North. Thus, the bitter confrontation between White sharecropper and White plantation owner in the story is an aspect of its temporal particularity, unfamiliar to the contemporary U.S.-American South. To be sure, this discrete dimension of the tale, what I term a part of its “local” aspect, the conflict between the sharecropper and the landowner, only serves as a vehicle by which Faulkner explored a universal theme, namely, the dilemma facing those such as young Snopes who must choose between family loyalty and legal, truth-oriented behavior. I do not ignore the sort of formal elements enhancing this dilemma which would have been underscored by Shlovsky and Tomashevsky, such as Faulkner’s consistent use of the term



“blood” as a metonym for the almost instinctive pull of family ties within the young Sartoris and the interior monologue used to give an articulate voice to his inchoate sentiments. However, in teaching *Barn Burning*, I highlight those socio-historical elements that bring students to the realization that Faulkner’s South is not theirs, that they must regard his Yoknapatawpha as not a great deal less foreign to their life world than, for example, Tieck’s Germany.

Most of “Fair-haired Eckbert” is constituted by a tale framed within a vaguely medieval present somewhere in the Harz Mountains in East Germany. Bertha, wife of the eponymous knight, relates the story of her youth to her husband and their friend Philip Walther. She had fled her abusive parents and was adopted by a kind woman who possesses a dog whose name Bertha cannot recall and a bird who lays eggs containing a pearl or other gem. Despite the woman’s good-hearted treatment of her, Bertha runs away with the bird while the stepmother is away, leaving the dog to starve. She later kills the bird when she feels threatened by its singing, and marries Eckbert. At the end of her tale Walther remarks: “Many thanks, noble lady; I can well imagine you beside your strange bird, and how you fed poor little *Strohman*” (452; emphasis in the original). The shock of hearing the dog’s name, a name the recollection of which she had obviously repressed, causes Bertha to sicken and die. Eckbert becomes suspicious of Walther and kills him, as he does another knight, Hugo, whom he perceives as malevolent. At the conclusion of “Fair-haired Eckbert,” Eckbert comes across an old woman who reveals her triple identity: she is Bertha’s abandoned stepmother, Walther, and Hugo. She also tells Eckbert that Bertha was his sister. As with Bertha, the stunning disclosure brings about Eckbert’s death.

“Fair-haired Eckbert” contains a number of structural devices and plot elements likely to create a sense of unfamiliarity and confusion among the students: onomastics, the motif of the *Doppelgänger*, a somewhat indeterminate spatial and temporal setting, and the use of lyric poetry within the prose tale as a plot device. These elements help create the ambience of the Romantic uncanny. Through the Romantic uncanny in Tieck’s tale, the boundaries between natural and supernatural realms, the real and the marvelous, become permeable. In order to reduce this alienating defamiliarity, I ask students to consider the revealing alliteration in the couple’s names—BERTha and EckBERT—and how Tieck draws upon this device, as well as their childlessness (a hint at a sinful relationship in that German medieval tradition to which Tieck and other German Romantics had frequent recourse) to prefigure the motif of incest. The bird sings the poem “Waldeinsamkeit” (literally “forest solitude” but translated in the standard English version by Thomas Carlyle as “alone in the wood so gay,” which brings out its positive valence) three times with slight variations (“Fair-haired Eckbert” 449, 452, 455). The bird is first heard as Bertha approaches the home of the woman who will adopt her and his verse expresses complete contentment at being at home in nature, second when he is lonely in the city, alienated as Bertha’s captive, and third seemingly from beyond the grave: Eckbert hears the bird in the reverie

that begins his death throes, suggesting the bird is safe and immortal in the realm the sinner Eckbert is just entering. The song in its variations is the most uniquely German Romantic aspect of the tale, and I find students appreciate a comparison with the original German verses and an explanation of the Romantic ideal of mixing generic registers, as well as how the song creates the uncanniness of the tale: a bird's song is natural, but not in eloquently varied verse, and not from beyond the grave. These are elements connected to the tale's particular dimension and I find they require some direct explication in order to enhance student comprehension and appreciation. The most demonstrably universal aspects of the story are tied to its genre, the fairy tale. The lack of temporal specificity of the tale is rooted in that "once upon a time" ambience with which students would be familiar from childhood and from recent adaptations of the genre of the fairy tale in films such as *Shrek* and its sequels. The power over life and death derived through the ability to name is also a universal feature: Walther's capacity to bring about a Freudian "return of the repressed" consciousness in Bertha by mentioning the name of the dog, triggering her fatal illness, suggests the name giving potency evident as far back as the Bible's book of *Genesis* but also in fairy tales such as *Rumpelstilzchen*, where the ability of a miller's daughter to name her tormentor brings about his suicide and her liberation.

In conclusion, the concept of *ostranenie* and the idea of enhancing or decreasing a sense of familiarity with texts in the world literature classroom are related. Both are focused on the principle that encounters with poetic literature expand one's horizons, causing the reader to see the world through a novel, unaccustomed filter. However, the Russian Formalist approach of highlighting the immanent defamiliarizing linguistic and structural devices of a work presupposes a certain cultural cosmopolitanism, the ability to grasp the unique socio-historical framework of an author that informs a work of literature. I cannot presuppose such awareness by twenty-first century U.S.-American world literature students (an awareness likely greater in some other countries and regions) and that is why I stress what is familiar in foreign texts and what is unfamiliar in works temporally, spatially, and linguistically "close to home" as a feature of the universal-particular dialectic I employ in the world literature classroom. I find this to be a necessary first step in cultivating an awareness and appreciation of otherness in students of world literatures. Only when this threshold is crossed can *ostranenie* take place.

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# Comparative Literature and the History of Literature

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Slobodan Sucur

**Abstract:** In his article “Comparative Literature and the History of Literature” Slobodan Sucur argues that the origins of comparative literature are tied to debates concerning the renewal of the notion of literature in the nineteenth century. Further, Sucur discusses literary periodization in the history of literature and concepts including transculturalism, based on past and recent work in the field. Following his discussion, he proposes a framework based on geometrical modeling as a possible solution that would bring together literary theory and comparative literature via the representation of a conceptual-stylistic-figural continuum through the dimensionality of geometrical models.

## INTRODUCTION

The Pandora’s Box of literary theory, with its many antagonisms and confusion, and with its potential to destabilize and threaten the presence of disciplines such as comparative literature, seems to have its origin in Romanticism, including Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s notion of *Weltliteratur* (on Goethe, see, e.g., Birus; Pizer; Sturm-Trigonakis). The theorizing of the early Romantic phase contains inconsistencies, and this discord may indeed have filtered down into modern debates about literary theory. Miroslav John Hanak focuses in his discussion of idealism and theory in early Romanticism on the discord and development present in Schelling’s and Hegel’s reactions to their respective philosophies and their reaction to Kant’s and Schlegel’s attempts to reconcile these contradictions. While Schelling’s *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (1797), *On the World Soul* (1798), and *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) may overlap with certain Hegelian concepts through the use of phrases like “movement of nature,” “ultimate truth,” and “universal mind,” Hanak is quick to point out that there is a subtle difference between Schelling’s work and Hegel’s. In Hanak’s view, for Hegel the point of departure is “spiritual-rationalist” while for Schelling the starting point is “aesthetical-naturalist,” but this is all a “matter of emphasis” (on aestheticism and literary history, see, e.g., Martindale). For both, the “ground of being” is unconscious and universal, only for Schelling it is the absolute as nature and for Hegel the absolute as spirit; both agree that the “real evolves through a process of reason” (19–21). The main difference between Hegel and Schelling is that in Hegel’s *Phenomenology* “the Kantian dualism between phenomena and

*noumena* is *aufgehoben*, overcome in the broadest sense of the word” (23). In this way, while Schelling may anticipate Hegel’s work, it is only Hegel who fully breaks away from Kantian discourse. Hanak’s argument is significant particularly for the way in which he sets up these philosophers as offering polemic or non-polemic answers to Kant. He emphasizes the main point which Frederick C. Beiser is making in “Early Romanticism and the *Aufklärung*.” Beiser argues that our difficulty in understanding this phase of early Romanticism stems from the fact that representatives of the movement were “neither revolutionaries nor reactionaries. Rather, they were simply reformers, moderates in the classical tradition” (321). Beiser even looks upon the representatives as “nothing less than the *Aufklärer* of the 1790s. They seem to differ from the earlier generation of *Aufklärer* only in their disillusionment with enlightened absolutism and in their readiness to embrace republican ideals” (322). The main problem which the early Romantics had with the Enlightenment was that “two of its most basic ideals—radical criticism [which the early Romantics rejected] and *Bildung* [which they approved of]—were in conflict with one another. For if criticism ends in complete skepticism, then according to what moral, political, and religious principles should we educate the people?” (324). Beiser’s question is the same now raised when one looks at the rivalry and fragmentation which contemporary theory instigates in relation to earlier, structuralist and pre-structuralist theories (e.g., Russian Formalism). The question early Romanticism raises about inconsistencies of the Enlightenment is the same question that may be raised about inconsistencies in Jacques Derrida’s or Paul de Man’s work (and more generally, about the end result of deconstruction). As Beiser suggests, the early Romantics did not solve the question through their program of “pure aesthetics,” a program through which the Enlightenment was ironically “consumed by its own flames,” much like early Romanticism (326). Schlegel came closest, Hanak argues, to solving contradictions inherent in the Enlightenment. Schlegel’s speculations parallel closely the Hegelian system but in the case of Hegel the final synthesis is expected to reveal itself as the “Absolute Spirit or Knowledge,” while in Schlegel’s case the solution will come through “progressive universal poetry” (Schlegel qtd. in Hanak 35). Needless to say, even Schlegel’s metaphysical sweeps did not solve the contradictions inherent in the Enlightenment and that extend into the current rift between theory (with its discord) and discipline (which requires consensus).

## PERIOD, BELATEDNESS, AND COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

Why does comparative literature as a discipline seem to be a product of the same Romanticism that gave birth to high theorizing but simultaneously seems to be divided and at odds with this “other,” theoretical product? Romanticism as a movement is usually, broadly defined as extending from about 1797 to about the 1840s when it is overtaken by the realist paradigm. In English-language scholarship it is thought that Romanticism begins around the time of the French

Revolution (1789) and extends to about Byron's death (1824). Examples can be given of other national literatures as well. However, it is precisely this over-generalization in period styles and literary movements which leads to ambiguities. A shift in outlook seems to occur sometime within the period broadly defined as Romanticism. For example, M.H. Abrams speaks of how the Romantic poet of the 1790s, in dealing with current affairs, sets up a procedure which is often panoramic, where his/her stage is cosmic, "his agents quasi-mythological, and his logic of events apocalyptic. Typically this mode of Romantic vision fuses history, politics, philosophy, and religion into one grand design, by asserting Providence—or some form of natural teleology" (45–46). Northrop Frye writes of how in "Romanticism proper a prominent place in sense experience is given to the ear, an excellent receiver of oracles but poor in locating things accurately in space ... In later poetry, beginning with *symbolisme* in France ... more emphasis is thrown on vision. In Rimbaud ... the illuminations are thought of pictorially; even the vowels must be visually colored ... Such an emphasis leads to a technique of fragmentation. Poe's attack on the long poem is not a Romantic but an anti-Romantic manifesto, as the direction of its influence indicates" (23–24).

Ali Behdad writes of how a "belated reading is not an orthodox reiteration or a reapplication of a previous theory; rather, it is an interventionary articulation of a new problematic through the detour—or, perhaps more accurately, *retour*—of an earlier practice" (3). He develops the concept of belatedness and of belated readings in order to account for the late "Orientalism of travelers such as Nerval, Flaubert, Loti, and Eberhardt [which] vacillates between an insatiable search for a counter experience in the Orient and the melancholic discovery of its impossibility" (15). Regarding Flaubert's *Notes de voyages* (1849–50), Behdad says that "Flaubert abandoned the idea of writing an organized travelogue like those of his Orientalist precursors," that his work was "never intended" for publishing, and that the "belated Orientalist's discourse [like Flaubert's] is thus an anti-narrative, a discursive constellation without a shape, an ideological practice without a doctrine" (54). While Flaubert's belated Orientalist discourse is considered by Behdad a "constellation without a shape" and an "ideological practice without a doctrine," comparative literature as a discipline, and in order to remain a discipline, requires both shape and doctrine. However, if certain assumptions of belated Orientalism as formulated by Behdad are exempted from this discussion, the concept of "belatedness" can be applied to comparative literature. Thus, an explanation is created for why comparative literature seems antagonistic to the theoretical discord of Romanticism, but also seems a product of that self-same Romanticism as a movement or broad period. Put simply, comparative literature, together with the concept of national literatures and "specialization," came late in the game, late in the period known as Romanticism, and as such it always seems a "step removed" from the high theorizing of the period and, consequently, it appears threatened by the conflicts of modern theoretical discourse. Robert



J. Clements provides an outline of the modern origins of comparative literature and anticipates Behdad's concept of "belatedness":

Fortunately in 1832, well after the fall of the Ancien Régime, Jean-Jacques Ampère condemned chauvinism as incompatible with literary cosmopolitanism, although it remained a hydra difficult to dispatch, as French historians of comparative literature acknowledge ... Between 1828 and 1840 the Sorbonne professor Abel-François Villemain not only employed the term "comparative literature" in his writings, but led the pack by offering course work in this discipline. The influential Sainte-Beuve legitimized the term in the *Revue des deux mondes* (itself a comparative title) and his *Nouveaux lundis*, to be followed by an international company including Louis Betz, Max Koch, Joseph Texte, Longfellow, Georg Brandes, and others. In Italy Mazzini's *Scritti* (1865–67) declared that no literature could be nurtured by itself or could escape the influence of alien literatures ... the first occurrence of the coinage "vergleichende Literaturgeschichte" was in Moriz Carrière's book of 1854, *Das Wesen und die Formen der Poesie*. (3–4)

The approximate dates for the origin of comparative literature, which Clements cites, become more significant when read in relation to Virgil Nemoianu's *The Taming of Romanticism*, a work in which Nemoianu elaborates on the concept of a period called Biedermeier, which lasted from approximately 1815 to 1848. It is within the framework of a Biedermeier, or more specifically *Biedermeierzeit* paradigm, to use Friedrich Sengle's term (qtd. in Nemoianu 6), that the origins of comparative literature can be placed, considering the dates which Clements gives for the beginning of the discipline. Behdad's concept of "belatedness" can in this way be seen as an explanation of how the Biedermeier arose in relation to Romanticism proper. The period of the Biedermeier, together with its products (i.e., *Weltliteratur*, specializations, national literatures), was not an orthodox reiteration or reapplication of a previous theory but rather an interventionary articulation of a new problematic through the detour or, perhaps more accurately, retour, of an earlier practice. Comparative literature, as a belated product could not, at the moment of its inception, catch up with the discursive, theoretical components of Romanticism proper. As such, comparative literature, because it is a discipline, and more generally the nature of disciplines per se as Biedermeier products, would always be naturally and historically threatened by theory and the destabilizing character of such discourse which, owing to the fact that the Jena-Berlin school preceded the Biedermeier by nearly a quarter-century, itself precedes the inception of disciplines. Thus, discipline follows theory, and while it is not necessarily Behdad's interventionary articulation of a new problematic, it is certainly Behdad's detour/retour around an earlier practice. With this notion in mind, that disciplines are created after theory and "detour" around earlier events, it can be seen how comparative literature absorbs, for better or worse, destabilizing elements that come before its inception (i.e., theory), but simultaneously it is slightly removed from those destabilizations.

Nemoianu seems well aware of this contamination that in part defines the Biedermeier for when he defines its nature, the Biedermeier can be seen as absorbing certain Romantic tendencies but also as struggling to define itself as an autonomous entity in relation to its “loftier” predecessor. The disciples of Schiller, after 1815, as Nemoianu argues, are “rare birds: few were inclined to accept play and aesthetic creation as privileged areas of humaneness” (6–7). The aesthetician J.F. Herbart was typical of the Biedermeier because he was anti-Kantian and anti-Hegelian, a pragmatic idealist who believed that art has some autonomy but that it should not be regarded as a salvation and should be adapted to reality to “provide service” (Nemoianu 7). Such utilitarian tendencies are represented by the first modern network of “popularization” as well, as Nemoianu calls it (7). In the 1820s to the 1840s there were massive extensions of publishing houses, collections, libraries, and newspapers. For example, Emile Girardin’s *La Presse* (1836) is considered the first modern newspaper (see Nemoianu 7). The Biedermeier was also an age of caricature and ironic art, like that of the post-Hogarthians (George Cruikshank, Thomas Rowlandson, James Gillray, etc.) (Nemoianu 10). Nemoianu’s description of the Biedermeier age takes into account the characteristics that were fruitful for the rise of comparative literature as a discipline, because of the age’s need for compartmentalization, orderliness, and concretization as exemplified via the publishing of anthologies of literature, the proliferation of dictionaries and encyclopedias, the creation of museums, and more generally, the need for stability. This process can in itself be taken as a definition of the nature of disciplines and of their common features, features which distinguish disciplinary endeavors from purely theoretical ones and that appear to gravitate toward meta-syntheses, panoramic Schlegelian sweeps, and ideal Platonic models. When Romanticism is discussed in broad terms, comparative literature is then viewed as some sort of “paradoxical” product of the self-same Romanticism that also gave birth to modern theoretical debates which threaten to destabilize the concept of disciplinary studies in general.

Behdad’s concept of “belatedness,” when coupled with Nemoianu’s argument for a Biedermeier milieu situated after early and high romanticism but before the later turbulence of a post-1850 realism, becomes an elaborate but still satisfactory explanation for why comparative literature is not a parallel product of theorizing on literature, aesthetics, and the contradictions of Enlightenment discourse (radical criticism versus *Bildung*). Rather, it is a belated product of the concerns and problems which marked this earlier, more idealistic and philosophical phase of Romanticism. When thought of in terms of a bi-part model, where Romanticism is followed by a Biedermeier phase that attempts to put thought and idea into a practical and serviceable context, one comes to the realization that comparative literature is not tied to the potentially destabilizing discourse of Hegelian and Schlegelian sweeps, and more recently Derridean discursiveness, but that it maintains the potential for reconciliation between theory and discipline.

## THE HISTORY OF LITERATURE AND QUESTIONS OF PERIOD

The idea that literary history is the meta-endeavor through which antagonisms between theory and discipline can be subsumed, a realm wherein theoretical destabilizations and disciplinary cohesions come together, is problematic. David Perkins in *Is Literary History Possible?* voices reservations about the possibility and accuracy of literary history to do anything. Literary history of the narrative type was popular during the first three quarters of the nineteenth century and was guided by three main assumptions: 1) that literary works are formed by their historical context, 2) that change in literature takes place developmentally, and 3) that this change is the unfolding of an idea, principle, or suprapersonal entity (1–2). The assault on literary history was already evident by the end of the nineteenth century with its *fin de siècle* aestheticism because such critics as Edmond Scherer and Emile Faguet pointed out that historical contextualism can explain everything except what one most wants to explain, literary “genius” (Perkins 7). Russian Formalism did not question the possibility of writing literary history but argued that historical contextualism was ineffective and that traces of development were to be found in the text itself (Perkins 8). New Criticism rejected literary history by exposing the aporias of periods, movements, genres, and classifications, and made it difficult to generalize texts and frame them within meta-historical discussions (Perkins 8–9). Perkins remains unconvinced that literary history can be written because future criteria will demand different literary histories, but he still believes that it is a necessary endeavor (17). He remains unimpressed by the obvious artificiality of literary history; the chosen starting point of discussion in literary history has a strong impact on the way the past is represented so that often a phase of synthesis and homogeneity is said to precede the period which is the subject of the book. Marshall Brown argues that the eighteenth century was “more unified” than Romanticism; in the work of Ian Watt the divisions of the eighteenth century are juxtaposed to the homogenous Renaissance and the seventeenth century. Victorian specialists speak of Romanticism as the lost age of “universals” (Perkins 36–37). Leonard Orr suggests that boundaries between Victorianism and modernism, and modernism and postmodernism, are equally problematic. Perkins argues that the ending of a literary history is just as artificial, set up for reasons of climax as in Wilhelm Scherer’s *History of German Literature* from 1883, which concludes with Goethe, saying that the last fifty years will not be dealt with since they will “spoil the study” (37). Perkins argues that the ending of a literary history is just as artificial, set up for reasons of climax as in Wilhelm Scherer’s *History of German Literature* from 1883, which concludes with Goethe, saying that the last fifty years will not be dealt with since they will “spoil the study” (37).

As far as the postmodern, “encyclopedic” history of literature is concerned—examples of which are the 1987 *Columbia Literary History of the United States* or the 1989 *A New History of French Literature*—Perkins dismisses such as not being literary history per se because it establishes diversity and contradiction as

structural principles, foregoes closure and consensus, and does not organize the past into an entity (56–60). His conclusion is that a history of literature is by nature difficult to set up because both methodological frameworks and theoretical assumptions have to be taken into account and the problems are likely multiplied if a comparative, instead of a national literary history, is being produced. Mario J. Valdés, sharing Perkins's views, looks upon literary history as a “necessary failure” that is paradoxically dismissed by literary critics while accepted as literary criticism by historians (Valdés qtd. in Ljung 34), and it is its possibly unstable position that asks for relativized treatment of its subject matter.

## TRANSCULTURALISM AND THE HISTORY OF LITERATURE

Regarding the emergence of the term “transcultural” in comparative or world literary histories, Harish Trivedi writes that while the word is “not yet contaminated by the connotations of international political exigency” which color terms like “multicultural” and “intercultural,” “transcultural” has its own load to carry and he asks if the word simply marks an emphasis on the “cultural turn” in the humanities or if the consequences will be more ambiguous (e.g., will “trans-” mean a look across, beyond, or above cultures in some “transcendental” endeavor) (28). Vera Nünning seems more certain of the implications of the term, suggesting that the “endeavor of doing transcultural literary history” will reside in a space between two positions: one that ignores differences between cultures by maintaining a western-style categorization by periods, concepts, etc., and the other that is “culture-sensitive” and tries to present the “diversity” of various literatures as best possible (43). However, the act of writing such a literary history would be “complex” since the “question of how to conceptualise the relation between literature and culture” would have to be investigated more thoroughly, there still being no “universally accepted” answer to the question, with scholars employing metaphors, New Historicist terms, and so on, in an attempt to explain such relations (Nünning 46). Other important questions in a culture-sensitive literary history would be “how to integrate the cultural history of the literary system” (e.g., processes of production and distribution), “how to deal with literary change” without resorting to generic terms like “modernization” or “enlightenment” (Nünning 47), and how to approach literary periodization itself since it “poses one of the most intricate problems of a global endeavor” (48). Nünning writes that most of these problems can be overcome if global literatures are placed against a “background of common concerns” wherein “links and points of contact” can be analyzed (50; on this, see also the postulates of Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek's framework of comparative cultural studies).

Anders Pettersson explains the emergence of the term “transcultural” as a logical product of the issues colonial/postcolonial studies have been addressing in “globalization and its effects in the literary field” for the past couple of decades already, with there now being natural room for many transcultural literary studies

to be written that are not necessarily postcolonial in concern but are aware of the power dynamics involved in “cultural encounters” and of how literature both disseminates and undermines “ideologies” (1–2). Further, Pettersson establishes a link between new “transcultural” literary history and traditional “world” literary history, suggesting that much of the foundation for transcultural analysis has already been set “from the 1830s onwards” (see my previous thought on the Biedermeier period and the origins of comparative literature) with such work as Karl Rosenkranz’s three-volume *Handbuch einer allgemeinen Geschichte der Poesie* (1832–33) (2–3). According to Pettersson, what transcultural literary history needs to do is improve upon four weak areas in such world literary histories: 1) more space needs to be devoted to non-western literature (at least 50%), 2) interconnections between different cultures need to be investigated more fully, 3) a consistent viewpoint and terminology have to be applied across works and cultures, and 4) the “concept of literature,” fundamental to such work, needs to be explained (4). Perhaps most importantly, in order that a transcultural literary history not degenerate into an extension of postmodern relativism, the transcultural literary historian must be able “to formulate a worthwhile investigative aim and to design one’s concept of literature in a way that ensures it supports that aim” (34).

Setting up a comparative transcultural history of literature that would present its own theoretical limitations and fallacies but would simultaneously offer an effective and understandable assessment of the topic at hand (literary influence, period styles, revolutionary trends, global currents and convergencies, etc.), and thereby would reconcile the dangerous and cautionary aspects of theory with the need to maintain a disciplinary endeavor (the writing of a literary history, no matter how it is defined, be it in national, comparative, or global terms) presents a task that is both daunting and fraught with pitfalls. Perkins’s grudges and Trivedi’s, Nünning’s, and Pettersson’s speculations on “transculturalism” are examples of the difficulty of such a task. Earl Miner, in *Comparative Poetics: An Intercultural Essay on Theories of Literature*, almost seems to be apologizing for writing his work when he concludes the first chapter with the following words: “Nothing in the preceding, nothing in what follows, is meant to argue for a single conception of comparative poetics. All that is argued, and it is quite enough, is that comparative poetics requires two things: a satisfactory conception and practice of comparison along with an attention to poetics (conceptions of literature) that rest on historically sound evidence” (32).

Poststructuralism would of course ask the question: What is “historically sound evidence”? In this way, Miner’s comment itself falls apart, once again undermining the purpose behind literary history. Comparative literary history may reconcile theory and discipline, but only through a cautionary and modest approach. One proposal for success would be that conceptual literary history be written as a sub-branch of narrative literary history because it would organize and interconnect events, exhibiting the interrelation of events as the logical relations of ideas. A possible example would be to view only a “section” of the eighteenth

century as the “Age of Reason” and then to display certain texts as being not completely representative, but somewhat representative of particular “sides” of the idea in question (Perkins 49). One matter that would have to be kept in mind while writing a conceptual comparative literary history is with regard to Dilthey, namely that while he cannot accept the teleological/mystical ideas of Hegel in unmodified form, he is willing to accept that because of complex and specific circumstances an idea may indeed have an historical moment of prevalence (see Perkins 134).

## TOWARDS A GEOMETRICAL MODEL OF THE HISTORY OF LITERATURE

One way to attempt reconciling theory and (comparative) literature is through the use of geometrical models of discourse suggested by de Man: “seventeenth-century epistemology, for instance, at the moment when the relationship between philosophy and mathematics is particularly close, holds up the language of what it calls geometry (*mos geometricus*), and which in fact includes the homogenous concatenation between space, time and number, as the sole model of coherence and economy. Reasoning *more geometrico* is said to be ‘almost the only mode of reasoning that is infallible, because it is the only one to adhere to the true method, whereas all other ones are by natural necessity in a degree of confusion of which only geometrical minds can be aware’ (364–65).

Geometrical models, precisely because of their three dimensional nature of representation, whether they be on paper or contemplated in the mind, allow for a spatial analogy with the external world outside of the “subject” and thereby such models allow for bonding between theoretical concepts, literary/aesthetic styles, genre, etc. This may be a possible solution that brings together theory and comparative literature via the representation of a conceptual-stylistic-figural continuum through the dimensionality of geometrical models. However, while these geometrical models do evoke and should evoke spatial constructs (architecture, etc.), they are nonetheless and necessarily toned-down by being only models; as such they are subtle and fluid enough to function within a discipline, such as ours, that deals with discourse, text, and the very notion of medium. These geometrical models of discourse would best work within a conceptual comparative literary history because they themselves, through their spatial analogy with the world, stand as comparative concepts/constructs. The models would probably emerge from a subtle and historically self-conscious analysis that may deal with literature per se, certain textual features, or even the notion and nature of medium and communication. The models might emerge initially within the context of a rather limited discussion that may deal only with a few writers or theoreticians but would eventually and cautiously be verified or disproved within larger contexts (literary histories, new historical readings, political-ideological discussions, etc.).

It may be the case that a certain number of the proposed models of discourse would be rejected as inaccurate, but that a few would be found to be rather



effective in their potential for explanation within comparative studies. I began thinking about the conceptualization of these geometrical models through my reading of the Lacan-Derrida-Johnson-Irwin debate on Poe's "The Purloined Letter," which is a rather focused topic, but gradually, after becoming acquainted with hermeneutics, I was able to develop my views on geometrical models and their potential to reconcile antagonisms by looking at Hans-Georg Gadamer's disapproval of Cartesian and Hegelian models of subjectivity and his preference for Aristotle, who unlike Plato does not separate theory from praxis (see Hoy). Such geometrical models might crop up anywhere but would probably be used as tools for building a conceptual comparative literary history as a possible solution to avoid discord and fragmentation.

A model attempting to suggest and explain such geometrical (and numerical) models would have to be created and in which there would be various models associated with certain types of discourse and period styles. For example, in the case of a Rococo model one side of a rectangle would have to be left open to emphasize that the Rococo was a "play of surfaces" via *chinoiserie* and other features and not a closed system like Romanticism (which Frye compares to Greek architecture and says, citing Melville, that both showed "reverence for the archetype" [25]). In the case of the Hegelian dialectic, the model would have to double the Aristotelian dialectic (which Gadamer prefers for its emphasis on *phronesis*; i.e., practical wisdom, the recognition of humanity's finitude and historicity [Gadamer qtd. in Hoy 60]). In this way, the model for the Hegelian dialectic would accommodate for Romantic reflexivity and for the Hegelian idea of "coming-to-self-consciousness," which translates historical experience into a false absolute, giving the individual a sense of "being in a center." The Derridean model might perhaps be set up as framing the Hegelian model for reflexivity because while Derrida argues against "logocentrism" he is still forced to use the language he disdains. A Poe-Borges model might also be illustrated that frames the Platonic notion of an "ideal truth beyond reality" in order to account for the "dream within a dream" quality found in the work of these two writers. Models not yet attained in discourse, speculation on "future models" that might crop up in future literary historical periods, might also be attempted. Such models would require further elaboration, more discussion as to why particular geometrical shapes were chosen and how exactly such shapes would be used as disciplinary tools. However, it would be evident in these models, even at a primarily visual level, that some faint reconciliation between literary theory and comparative literature had taken place. The models would be simultaneously referential toward the Biedermeier smugness of disciplines and caricatural of the high Romantic endeavors of literary theory, particularly in its modern form.

Note: The above article is a revised version of Slobodan Sucur, "Theory, Period Styles, and Comparative Literature as Discipline." *Comparative Literature and Comparative Cultural Studies*. Ed. Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek. West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2003. 152–82. Copyright release to the author.



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# Meltzl de Lomnitz, Comparative Literature, and Philosophy

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David Marno

**Abstract:** In his article “Meltzl de Lomnitz, Comparative Literature, and Philosophy” David Marno discusses the importance of Hugó Meltzl de Lomnitz’s work. Meltzl de Lomnitz (1846–1908), neglected until recently, has reappeared in discussions of the state of comparative literature at the beginning of the new millennium. The reason behind this new interest in the scholar and editor of the first comparative literature journal in Europe is that his work stands symbolic for a past that the discipline of comparative literature is thought to be able to reclaim. Marno examines both this new interest in Meltzl de Lomnitz and his agenda to suggest that there is a discrepancy between them. Further, Marno argues that what the discipline of comparative literature needs to face is not simply the challenge of its own history, but the aborted project of philosophy of history.

## INTRODUCTION

In order to initiate a dialogue about the underside of multiculturalism the 2006 report on the situation of the discipline of comparative literature in the U.S., *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization* (Saussy), concentrates on globalization. The previous report—published in 1995 under the title *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* (Bernheimer)—promoted a future comparative literature as (multi-)cultural studies and to make this point it tended to criticize comparative literature as a historically non-multicultural or not sufficiently multicultural tradition. The 2006 report, by contrast, calls attention to the problems inherent to the idea of comparative literature as (multi-)cultural studies, and looks to comparative literature’s past for alternatives. In doing so, the volume draws a substantially different picture of the history of comparative literature. A major change is that the scholars usually named as forerunners of the discipline—the majority of whom immigrated to the United States around or after World War II—are almost entirely neglected by the report in favor of one scholar, Hugó Meltzl de Lomnitz, founder and editor—with Sámuel Brassai—of *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténeti Lapok* (1877–1878) (Papers in Comparative Literary History) and *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* (1878–1888).

How could a late nineteenth century Central East European scholar of *Germanistik* displace such luminaries as Erich Auerbach and others who used to epitomize the history of comparative literature? The little that is available from

Meltzl de Lomnitz's work in English makes this question even more puzzling. Among other things, Meltzl de Lomnitz promoted a notion of "decaglottism," that is, the suggestion that since comparative literature cannot cover every language of the globe, it should start off with the ten "most important" European languages: German, English, French, Spanish, Italian, Dutch, Icelandic, Swedish, Portuguese, and Hungarian. Haun Saussy and other contributors to *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization* seem to forgive Meltzl de Lomnitz for omitting Asian languages, Russian, and Romanian and one may have the impression that they do so partly because they find Meltzl de Lomnitz's provincialism exotic. Saussy argues that "such a list of prerequisites could perhaps only have been imagined by a nineteenth-century Central European nobleman; both admirably cosmopolitan and geographically restricted, it exhibits a certain Habsburg cut" (8), although he is less forgiving when it comes to Romanian and Russian: "Romanian, the language of Meltzl's immediate surrounding, is excluded, presumably and unfairly as an idiom that had created nothing more than folklore; the omission of Russian is more serious and makes the list look more politically parochial" (8). Still, the mistake of leaving out Romanian and Russian is not as significant as the feat of including Hungarian: "the inclusion of Hungarian in an otherwise unremarkable list opens comparative literature to being something other than a science of origins" (8). Saussy later drives this home even more emphatically: "the inclusion, through Hungarian, of an irreducible philological exception, and all the exceptions to the definition of literature and literary history that were to come, had the effect of impeding comparative literature's dissolution into one or another existing branch of historical sciences" (9). Hungarian is comparable to the other languages on this list but the basis of comparison cannot be historical because unlike them Hungarian is not an Indo-European language. In Saussy's reading, Meltzl de Lomnitz's gesture of including Hungarian is a sign of his refusal to be complicit with the general trend of national(ist)-historicist sciences in the nineteenth century. Some go even further in emphasizing the emblematic value of Meltzl de Lomnitz's work for today's comparative literature. David Ferris cites Meltzl de Lomnitz as one of the first representatives of comparative literature as an "impossible discipline": "what is comparative literature . . . if not a discipline transfixed with, and distracted by, the totality of its impossibility as well as the infinite task of translating and transforming this impossibility, a discipline only able to survive in the failure of its own inmost tendency?" (93). How, in other words, is comparative literature to proceed in a world that accuses it of attempting to cancel out the difference between the different, an accusation that reveals the core that comparative literature has always been confined to: the desire to translate the untranslatable, the desire to translate "the purely national of all nations?" (Meltzl de Lomnitz 60). David Damrosch not only recognizes the problem that current comparatists are preoccupied with but finds hints of a solution in Meltzl de Lomnitz's work. The concern, Damrosch writes, is that "the older great-power perspective often found in comparative studies not be continued

in another guise under the rubric of a cosmopolitan multiculturalism” (99) and after praising Meltzl de Lomnitz’s work for its “polyglot antic cosmopolitanism,” Damrosch adds that “Meltzl’s *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* ... can help guide us in the rebirth of a discipline of genuinely global scope and impact” (99).

## LEFTOVER IDEOLOGY AND MELTZL DE LOMNITZ’S ANTI-COSMOPOLITANISM

Along with the co-editor of *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténeti Lapok* and *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, Sámuel Brassai (his colleague at the University of Kolozsvár, today the University of Cluj-Napoca), Meltzl de Lomnitz belonged to the German Saxon population of Transylvania. That Transylvania which, after being the victim and the site of unabashed political and military competition for centuries, in the nineteenth century became the battlefield of linguistic and historical arguments over whether Romanians or Hungarians had inhabited it first. Meltzl de Lomnitz became renowned in Hungary when, upon appointed to hold the chair of *Germanistik* at the University of Kolozsvár, he gave his inaugural lecture in Magyar (Hungarian) against what he considered to be Georg Gottfried Gervinus’s nationalistic misinterpretation of Goethe’s concept of *Weltliteratur* (on Meltzl de Lomnitz, see, e.g., Berczik; Berlina and Tötösy de Zepetnek; Damrosch). Meltzl de Lomnitz was also an enthusiastic supporter of the poet Sándor Petőfi, whose work he translated and advocated. While Meltzl de Lomnitz considered Petőfi as a representative of *Universalpoesie* alongside Goethe, Petőfi was also the poet of the Hungarian revolution against Habsburg rule in 1848–1849 and has been portrayed since then as one of the main proponents of Hungarian national identity. Like Meltzl de Lomnitz’s friend and colleague Brassai, Petőfi fought in the war against the Austrian and Russian empires for Hungarian independence; Petőfi was probably killed on the battlefield by a Cossack, a member of the tsarist Russian troops who assisted the Habsburg forces to defeat the Hungarian revolution. Theories about Petőfi’s death, as well as the location of his buried corpse also appeared on the pages of the journal. It is possible that Meltzl de Lomnitz’s inclusion of Hungarian in his decaglottist list and thus the inclusion of Petőfi and his work as *Weltliteratur*, and accordingly, Meltzl de Lomnitz’s disregard of Russian as an omission of the language of those who killed Petőfi.

Meltzl de Lomnitz was critical of nationalism both in its old unapologetic kind and newly emerging forms, which, he argued, are simply versions of the same old nationalism in the guise of cosmopolitanism: “for today every nation demands its own ‘world literature’ without quite knowing what is meant by it. By now, every nation considers itself, for one good reason or another, superior to all other nations” (Meltzl 46). What he suggests instead borders on the impossible: since comparative literature should both translate and keep intact the national literature of a people, the ultimate but unattainable ideal is *Weltliteratur*, which

for Meltzl de Lomnitz is identical with comparative literature. But it would be anachronistic to ascribe Meltzl de Lomnitz's anti-cosmopolitanism to any broader concern about cosmopolitanism's potential collateral damage. It is, rather, a position that has transparent political motives. It is a last position accessible to someone who wants to advocate the literature of a nation that had lost its war for national independence just two decades earlier, but also the literature of a country that around this time, in the aftermath of the 1867 Compromise between Austria and Hungary, is becoming more powerful than it had been in more than three-hundred years. At the same time, this new political power was emerging as part of an empire in which the price of Austrian and Hungarian dominance was being paid by the other ethnicities living in the monarchy's realm—Czech, German, Croatian, Serbian, Slovak, Slovene, Roma, Romanian, etc.—many of which is included in Meltzl de Lomnitz's list. In order to become part of an empire, and indeed a dominant part of it, Hungary had to abandon its dreams of national autonomy and this is the particular context that shapes Meltzl de Lomnitz's position on literature, nationalism, and cosmopolitanism. Both the nationalist and the cosmopolitan arguments had already been taken by other countries to justify their national literatures. Meltzl de Lomnitz's perspective was but the last one left for an advocate of a smaller literature under the new conditions of the European literary and cultural scene.

## U.S.-AMERICAN COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AFTER HISTORY AND BEFORE PHILOSOPHY

The Saussy report is of course a report on U.S.-American comparative literature and Meltzl de Lomnitz's role in the report is likely to tell us more about the state of comparative literature in the United States today than about Meltzl de Lomnitz's project in the nineteenth century. Accordingly, recent claims about Meltzl de Lomnitz must be seen in the context of the history of U.S.-American comparative literature (on U.S.-American comparative literature, see Gillespie; Mourão), which itself goes back to precedents in nineteenth-century Europe. Just as Meltzl de Lomnitz's ostensibly anti-nationalist journal was really an attempt for Hungary to demand its own *Weltliteratur*, the later history of comparative literature was dominated similarly by a series of attempts to negotiate the particular through the universal, the national through the cosmopolitan. The study of national literatures emerged in the early nineteenth century and marched on gloriously, enjoying the full support of the new nation states. When its position became problematic, toward the turn of the century, the major reason was simply its success: the study of literature fulfilled its role of contributing to the creation of national identities (on this, see, e.g., Gumbrecht and Moser). The fact that literary studies survived their role was partly owing to comparative literature which, although roughly contemporaneous with the national literature disciplines, became prominent only

toward the end of the century, when it hastened to save them in the name of supranational bonds and/or anthropological theories about literature.

If all this is not entirely clear from Meltzl de Lomnitz's and Brassai's journal, it should be more evident from other proponents of the new discipline. The May 1886 issue of *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* announced the arrival of a rival journal, *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Litteraturgeschichte*—edited by Max Koch 1887–1910—and that became more prestigious and widely read than Meltzl de Lomnitz's and Brassai's journal. In Koch's journal, the new comparative approach proved that it was but a way of camouflaging the very same national or even nationalistic ambitions that triggered the study of national literatures. Certainly, there were also genuine attempts to cross the national boundaries. Around World War II and even more so afterwards, these attempts were often motivated by anti-fascistic ideas and had their own metahistorical agendas. Auerbach's *Mimesis*, for instance, was informed not simply by a general Hegelian sense of history as a gradual coming to self-consciousness of humankind, but also by the Kantian idea of perpetual (and cosmopolitan) peace. As the crimes of the war were gradually disclosed, this Kantian project began to sound increasingly utopian, and the cultural conservatism based on it came to be regarded by many as cultural elitism. Thus comparative literature, like many of the other disciplines, immigrated to the country in which the war had had an entirely different impact on historical consciousness. While in Europe the war and the Shoah in particular called into question not only all former *Heilsgeschichten* (salvation histories) but the possibility of metaphysics as such, in the United States the victory of the allied forces on the continent reinforced both a teleological view of history and the belief that the United States had a distinct role in this process.

The first comparatists in the United States were either from or closely associated with the historicist, conservative-liberal tradition that, from Burckhardt to Auerbach, represented an old, cultural elitist and to some extent anachronistic worldview whose uttermost value was culture in history but also against or despite history—and of course both culture and history meant Western culture and history. But when, a few decades later, post-war French philosophy arrived in the United States, comparative literature fell under the sway of novel ways of thinking. In the seventeenth century, the U.S. had begun to see itself as a community that was potentially outside of the history of other nations. It must have been exciting to see, then, that the post-war, a-historicist and often anti-historicist aesthetic thinking that structuralism and certain versions of poststructuralism embraced was grounded not in a position outside history, but a position after history. Unlike a variety of former generations of immigrants from the puritans to Auerbach, all of whom had fled from within history, French philosophy claimed to be coming from a Europe that had outlived its history (the fascination was probably mutual: Derrida, for instance, took considerable interest in what he considered the apocalypticism of the U.S., and which he addressed in works on nuclear politics and apocalyptic rhetoric [see Derrida; Derrida, Porter, Lewis]).



The so-called French storm marked the arrival of *post-histoire* in the country that had traditionally regarded itself outside of European history—the perfect match, one might say. The consequences soon became visible in almost all humanities and social sciences disciplines and particularly in comparative literature, the latter of which was becoming associated increasingly with so-called “continental” philosophy. Ironically, the main impact of French philosophy was not philosophical; instead, it was partly methodological and partly ideological. Armed with its new aspirations, comparative literature hastened to join the grand post-war project of transforming academia in the United States. Initially successful, this project led eventually to questions about its own stakes and the price that the academia seemed to have to pay for its success: an increasing alienation from the public so that by the early 1990s the university had come to be seen by many outside its walls as an asylum for the extreme left, while many within its walls saw it as quarantine separating them from the public. Meanwhile, “interdisciplinarity” became the new catch-word of the humanities, particularly visible in comparative literature’s consistent reliance on theories that originated in other disciplines: most eminently in philosophy and in particular hermeneutics and phenomenology, structuralism, poststructuralism, deconstruction, and to a certain extent even analytical and post-analytical philosophies of language. But, as Richard Rorty argued, this interdisciplinarity usually had the effect that philosophies, upon their arrival in the territory of comparative literature, underwent an uncanny metamorphosis: what was originally philosophy now became “theory” (63–66). Philosophies, that is, complex and self-containing cosmogonies and cosmologies, were distilled into methodological tools to deal with literature and eventually with themselves.

The 1995 Bernheimer report grew out of this situation, and, still displaying some of the enthusiasm of the 1960s and 1970s, promoted a “new” comparative literature, one that appeared as the representative of multiculturalism, both in its ideology and methodology. The report defined itself in sharp contrast to both the 1965 Levin and the 1975 Greene reports of the American Comparative Literature Association, both of which were characterized in the report as representatives of a Eurocentric, aesthetic cosmopolitanism. The 1995 report had a vision about literature that it sought to justify by taking a critical stance towards the history of the discipline, just like *post-histoire* was a defining element of deconstruction. The Saussy report, by contrast, is redolent with disappointment over the project of multiculturalism. Not surprisingly, then, the report is characterized by a sometimes more, sometimes less explicit ambition to re-anchor comparative literature in the past and to return from the post-historical, alienated position to the materiality of history. Meltzl de Lomnitz becomes an emblem of this return, albeit in different ways, appearing at times as a charming if old fashioned literate of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, and at times as a prophetic critic of globalization. The ultimate irony of the recent evaluations of Meltzl de Lomnitz’s work is that this reevaluation has taken place precisely at a time when both internal and external

challenges to U.S.-American sovereignty, nationhood, and imperial past and present have been mounting to the point of raising questions about the identity of the U.S. With this, the back and forth movement between history and philosophy, a movement whose abstract generality always yields willingly to the particular political and ideological circumstances of the day, seems to continue into our own times.

## PHILOSOPHY AND COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

To illustrate my last point and to turn from Meltzl de Lomnitz's work to the case of comparative literature in general, I now address the case of a half-forgotten discipline, philosophy of history. Philosophy of history played a not atypical role in the post-war history of comparative literature. Throughout its development from Christian *Heilsgeschichte* to Voltaire, to German idealism and even beyond, until its subsequent decline, this tradition—which would later be called “substantive philosophy of history”—marked an unprecedented attempt to come to terms with the temporal dimension of life without relying on religion, or at least without explicitly relying on it.

In the second half of the twentieth century, a discipline emerged that again claimed the name “philosophy of history” for itself. Initially, this new philosophy of history was a subdiscipline of the philosophy of science, and as such it aimed at understanding and describing “historical explanation” as a particular case of what the neo-positivists called “scientific explanation.” When this ambitious goal was frustrated, it gave way to a post-Wittgensteinian attempt to analyze, instead, the historian's language. Although this latter trend still evolved in that same spirit of neo-positivism, it also contributed to the rise of another take on history, one motivated by different concerns. The new philosophy of history placed a growing emphasis on the imaginative language of the historian and history was increasingly understood not so much as a science governed by logical rules, but rather as a text that was organized along rhetorical and dialectical lines and that followed principles of representation and persuasion. As a consequence, in disciplinary terms, the philosophy of history, or what survived of it, was often subsumed by comparative literature. This seemingly accidental occurrence provided comparative literature with the possibility of escaping the limbo between philosophy and history, between formalism and social critique, between deconstruction and new historicism. Admittedly, comparative literature has not yet capitalized on this possibility; on the contrary, just like philosophy in general, philosophy of history itself has come to be regarded as some kind of vague methodological awareness, an associate of interdisciplinarity.

My suggestion is that acknowledging the problem of the alienation of literary studies while rejecting interdisciplinarity as a viable solution to that problem, literary studies, and especially comparative literature, could still work to internalize the philosophy of history in a more consequential way. The study of

literature could then reclaim literature as its subject, not necessarily as a subject of literary analysis—which usually serves as a code name for some specific and usually sectarian methodology,—but as a field open to any possible approach within the a-disciplinary borders of literary studies (see, e.g., Wolf). Such a shift could establish comparative literature not as a thematically or methodologically distinct or novel enterprise within the humanities, but as an attempt to re-unify the knowledge now dispersed among the various disciplines of the humanities and the social sciences. This re-unification of dispersed knowledge, the maintenance of the comprehensive unity of knowledge in the face of disciplinary specialization, was traditionally one of philosophy’s functions. But not only is the hierarchical understanding of knowledge lurking behind this notion of philosophy no longer acceptable, philosophy itself, with the rise and success of logical positivism, has finally cast off the burden of being general and a-disciplinary. This success was largely owing to the neo-positivist war against pseudo-scientific knowledge. But it is important to remember that behind this program of developing demarcation criteria there was another, more concrete target, as it became quite manifest in the more explicitly political work of Karl Popper: the real enemy was philosophy of history. Popper’s critique was not new. A few decades before the logical positivists, philosophy of history already appeared to Jacob Burckhardt, this untimely Stoic of the nineteenth century, as a centaur, a contradiction in terms “for history co-ordinates, and hence is unphilosophical, while philosophy subordinates, and hence is unhistorical” (32.) His critique contained everything that critics of philosophy of history, from the logical positivists to Hannah Arendt would later say: the monstrous enterprise was criticized for its logical impossibility and its political dangerousness: its dismissal led to the unseen triumph of a philosophical program.

Hegel would have been surprised to hear that these critics rallied against him by using an argument that he himself addressed at the very beginning of the *Phenomenology*: “in this science it would seem as if Thought must be subordinate to what is given, to the realities of fact; that this is its basis and guide: while Philosophy dwells in the region of self-produced ideas, without reference to actuality. ... But as it is the business of history simply to adopt into its records what is and has been—actual occurrences and transactions; and since it remains true to its character in proportion as it strictly adheres to its data, we seem to have in Philosophy, a process diametrically opposed to that of the historiographer. This contradiction, and the charge consequently brought against speculation, shall be explained and confuted” (22). There is one particular criticism, however, that calls for discussion in this context. From Popper to Arthur C. Danto, logically-minded critics raised the same objection against Hegel—the objection that, in Danto’s work, is called the argument of the ideal chronicler, a chronicler who is omnipresent in history and takes notes of whatever happens and who is privy to what seems to be the totality of history. But historical meaning, Danto argued, is narrative meaning; it is based on co-ordination, not subordination. The

total meaning of a narrative can only be defined, theoretically, if the narrative is concluded. This might be the case in a novel, Danto said, but in the case of history, what the historian is trying to describe is a *per definitionem* unfinished continuum whose absolute meaning therefore cannot be determined. Or at least it cannot be determined without recourse to prophesy, which was in fact the model of the precursor of philosophy of history, *Heilsgeschichte* (salvation history). The name is unfair, as it suggests that there is a commonality between, say, Gioacchino de Fiore's work or Walter Raleigh's *History of the World*, while the reality is that these differ from each other just as much as either of them would differ from a nineteenth-century historical work. Yet this difference, Danto and Popper would suggest, is only a superficial one. In their view, Hegel fell back into *Heilsgeschichte* in that he tried to bridge the gap between philosophy and history using prophesy—at least in the structural sense of including the future in his theory of history.

Calculated or accidental, this is a bold misreading of Hegel. Even if one does not consider the entire theory of teleology that is behind his philosophy of history, it is obvious that Hegel consistently refrains from saying anything about the future. On the rare occasions that he does say something concerning the future, he makes it clear that the epistemological status of his statement is entirely different from the rest of the work; it is neither historical, not philosophical. In fact, the entire philosophy of history is based on the insight that neither beginnings nor the future can be the subject of the historian's inquiry; the only history that can be the subject of history or philosophy of history is the history that is always already past; it is a complete history precisely because it is disconnected, epistemologically and, therefore, also ontologically, from the future. But this is precisely the point where comparative literature could redeem the potential of philosophy of history, not by returning to Hegel but by diverging from his epistemology. Burckhardt's centaur may or may not be a fair figure for philosophy of history, but it is surely one applicable to literature itself. Literature is precisely at the intersection of philosophy and history, or to be more concrete, literature is this very intersection. There is, surely, an "ontological gap" between the historical circumstances of the birth of a literary work and the work itself. But even more important is the way the work itself bridges this ontological gap; time and again, a given literary work reconnects with history. This dialectic of disengaging and reconnecting is, in terms of the structure of the process, always coincidental: the way in which the abstract universality of language regains referentiality is a matter of coincidence. But coincidence does not equal blind chance; in between the two, there is literature's own periphery, the periphery of meaning where the abstract universality of language reconfigures in ways that make the ontological structure of language accessible. This peripheral reconfiguration is the basis of literature's coincidental reconnecting with historical referentiality. The future is the periphery of the present; it appears on the margins of the literary work in undecipherable forms, ready to take up a particular meaning in the actual time that follows.

## CONCLUSION

The question is, if literature really is Burckhardt's centaur, how is one to engage with such a monstrous creature in a scholarly fashion, that is, how can comparative literature redeem the aborted project of philosophy of history in its analyses of literature. I think this is a much easier question than it may seem at first sight: coordination and subordination, history and philosophy, or history and aesthetics are indeed impossible to practice, that is, if one wants to practice all of them at the same time. Instead, however, they can be played out against each other. Philosophy and aesthetics can and should be practiced autonomously; but when they would seem to be stuck in their own pathos, history can be invoked to help find a path out of the muddy ground of concepts and introduce co-ordination, examples, things. And vice versa: as soon as the material of history pushes the project to the precipice of meaningless relativism, philosophy and aesthetics might help, hence the recent interest in Meltzl de Lomnitz's project. This movement of systole/diastole can cut across the borders not just of disciplines but ideologies and ontologies as well and can thus inform a comparative literature that, rather than relying on either interpretation or deconstruction, operates by constellation by placing works and their aesthetics or history side by side, repeating the same oscillating movement from one to another over and over again, until the coincidental structures of the works analyzed reconstitute themselves in the analysis. Such an a-disciplinary model based on a philosophy of history could point toward a comparative approach to literature that is able to ask questions in which history, ontology, and aesthetics are not mutually exclusive but, rather, mutually supportive notions. Leaving behind disciplinary axioms ("historical reality as such," "fiction as such," etc.), a more comprehensive approach could evolve, similar to the contextual approach advocated by Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek with the framework of "comparative cultural studies" (see also Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári). This practice of comparative literature could achieve a different kind of self-awareness without actually spending too much time on dealing with itself and its history.

**Note:** The above article is a revised version of David Marno, "The Monstrosity of Literature: Hugo Meltzl's World Literature and Its Legacies," *World Literature World Culture: History, Theory, Analysis*. Ed. Karen-Margarethe Simonsen and Jakob Stougard-Nielsen. Aarhus: Aarhus UP, 2008. 37–50. Copyright release to the author.

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# Comparative Cultural Studies and Cultural Anthropology

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Rik Pinxten

**Abstract:** In his article “Comparative Cultural Studies and Cultural Anthropology” Rik Pinxten postulates that the fields of anthropology and comparative cultural studies represent an advantageous approach to knowledge about social and cultural processes. Further, Pinxten argues that cultural anthropologists have been growing less exclusionary about the methods and the objectives of comparison and suggests that this development resulted in new epistemologies of scholarship about the “other” towards an emic-etic approach to linguistic and cultural phenomena. Pinxten postulates that cultural anthropology complements (comparative) cultural studies in a way similar to the latter’s complement to the study of literature. Thus, comparative cultural studies adds a critical approach by contextualizing literature, as well as other productions of culture.

## INTRODUCTION

Cultural anthropology has a long history in comparative studies. Since anthropologists are dealing with cultures from a vast variety of origins and since they do labour-intensive fieldwork most of the time, ethnography has yielded a disparate set of data about humans and their cultures (on cultural studies and ethnography, see, e.g., Marcus). The risk for discipline, however, can result in idiosyncratic knowledge: particular data about an endless variety of behaviours, thoughts, customs, and rituals. In terms of description, this occasioned a treasure of data on humankind and in terms of science this is problematic. Science strives for universal knowledge, for invariance, and generalized propositions. In order to produce this type of knowledge in cultural anthropology the task is to do so with the comparative approach.

In the history of cultural anthropology a series of particular approaches have been worked out. In the nineteenth century scholars compared cultural artefacts within the confines of their own frame of reference. Today, such scholarship works falls under the criticism of, for example, Orientalism (see, e.g., Said). Scholars took the categories of their own (Western) culture to be scientifically valid categories and used them to describe and compare other traditions, thus falling prey to a colonial attitude. Claude Lévi-Strauss’s grand theory of comparison was a major attempt to do better while staying within a general positivist concept of scientific research. Lévi-Strauss expanded structuralist views from linguistics

(as by, e.g., Jakobson), which became also popular in the study of literature in the field of semiotics (e.g., Propp) in order to cover the whole territory of culture and society. The basic idea was that empirical structures which are lived and eventually consciously learned by bearers of culture must be regarded as only epiphenomena of deeper, unconscious structures. The latter are believed to be inborn and universal by nature (see, e.g., Hymes). In Lévi-Strauss's theory they are binary structures (working in contrast pairs), much like those in a computer. By using these structures as the hidden, unknown (to the user) but universal structures of reasoning, story telling, and art, Lévi-Strauss claimed to have produced a comparative paradigm and a universal one at that. After the 1970s criticism started emerging towards this approach claiming that it was basically a master discourse of a Westerner and that denied time and intellectual status to other traditions (see, e.g., Fabian). With postmodernism, the success of structuralism waned.

In the present era I see two paradigms which promise to serve as a solid basis for comparative research when used in combination with each other: reflective and contextualized "comparative consciousness" on the one hand, and emic-etic analysis on the other.

## REFLECTIVE ANTHROPOLOGY AND COMPARATIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

The position that cultural anthropology, as well as other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences became aware over the years of the need to shed what is called the "colonial attitude" (see, e.g., Pinxten and Orye). That is, the local attitude which consists of studying any habit, behaviour, or statement or any individual or group from a different cultural tradition by means of terms and concepts and that are vested solely in the researcher's culture. The attitude then reads that "we are the ones who developed a scientific approach (and they are not)," which dismisses insights from other traditions as unscientific and hence are not to be bothered with in the construction of a scientific framework or methodology. In practice, this excuses researchers to take a subject's point of view seriously.

With scholarship of postmodernism, this superiority of "us" over "them" received criticism and triggered what was later called a line of "reflective" cultural anthropology. Thus, scholars in the field became conscious of their own tradition, of their dependence on contextual constraints, and of their incapacity to escape from their own cultural framework. Especially the work of Pierre Bourdieu started this turn within many disciplines. Bourdieu presented an epistemological analysis of the social sciences by pointing out that the nature of their "object" of study has been misguided and argued that the positivist claim to be able to study culture objectively the same way as that of matter in the natural sciences is mistaken (Michel Foucault came to the same conclusion with regard to the humanities). Bourdieu's and Foucault's argumentation rests on the recognition that humans lie, deceive, refuse to collaborate, and trust or distrust other humans

(in this case the researcher). Phenomenologists, on the other hand, claim that with *Einfühlung* in participant observation they could become the other subject and then study his/her culture or beliefs as if from the inside. A minimal self-critical or reflective attitude would have taught scholars in both schools that they had it all wrong. To the positivist one should say: a subject is not equal to an object and to the phenomenologist one should say that a subject is raised as an individual, which is equally the case for the researcher as subject. It is false to believe that one can become another subject. As a human being, the scholar cannot shed his/her personality in order to become a blank and be “educated a second time” in the culture under study.

Further, Bourdieu points out that scholarship in the social sciences and humanities ought to be seen as deep forms of interaction with people/subjects. It is not a one-way objective, neither a one-way subjective study of the other subject: the study of culture in whatever discipline or field is possible only in and through interactions with the other subject(s). It then becomes essential to focus on the quality of these interactions and on the ways to enhance that quality and that it is through interaction that knowledge is built. The scholar is dependent on the subject under study at any moment in the process, next to his/her being influenced by contextual constraints. This calls for a very different type of methodologies than the ones drawn from the natural and basic sciences. Bourdieu suggests that we ought to develop a method and process of dialectics and that in and through interaction we ought to develop an attitude of openness and empathy by interiorizing the ways of thinking, acting, and feeling of the subject under study as much as possible. And he suggests that this would be possible only if we are able to build a genuine relationship of mutual trust. On the other hand, and linked to this first step, we have to exteriorize immediately what we think we heard, understood, or observed about the subjects of study and present it to them. By doing that we expose our selection and interpretation in observation and understanding to the scrutiny and the critique of the subjects. Moreover, with this step the scholar makes them partners in the process of research. As a consequence, I think scholars should even make (some of) the subjects of the study co-authors, although I grant that this is not an easy point in the academic publishing (see Pinxten, Van Dooren, Harvey). Regardless of this last point, Bourdieu gave the impetus for a reconsideration of sociological and cultural anthropological research after structuralism. His thought can be appreciated that by focusing on the interactive nature of research, comparison is located in the centre and thus description becomes intrinsically comparative.

An approach related to Bourdieu’s and my understanding of his thought is that of Laura Nader who studies traditions of litigation and dispute settlement in different cultures. From that research and from her keen understanding of the status of social research in the post-1968 era, Nader calls for the development of a “comparative consciousness” in researchers. That is to say, no phenomenon and no subject can reasonably be studied in isolation, as if it were a thing or an “object”

unto itself. For example, the “drunken Indian” is not a valid subject of research in itself. Or, in the European context I came to know intimately, the government proposal for research on “criminality in immigrant groups in Europe” is not a decent or valid proposal. Nader points out rightly that “the American Indian” (or in the European case “the Moroccan adolescent immigrant”) is a biased and a one-sided framing in the object of research: neither do Indians live in an isolated and self-sufficient cocoon world with its own values and habits nor can the physical or social and legal presence of a dominant white society being abstracted from when trying to understand what an Apache or Cherokee Indian in the U.S. today would look like. The history of colonization cannot be abstracted away, because it is present in the health conditions, the schooling and work perspectives, and, indeed, in the respect for you (or lack thereof) as a human being in a cultural context of white and Christian values emanating from a world power position of white supremacy in a many-colored world. The fact that life expectancy of Native U.S.-American groups lies around forty-seven years of age, with a mean of age of approximately eighty in the U.S. tells the story. The further given that humiliation and even annihilation against Native U.S.-Americans has been going on for over two centuries now, has its effect on the mindset of the descendants today and hence should be seen as part of the context of “Indianhood.” Nader pleads for comparative consciousness in this respect: the researcher should study any phenomenon, individual, or community within a hierarchy of ever wider contexts and their impact on the actual opportunities and constraints inherent in these contexts. It is clear that the criteria for description, object construction, and interpretation cannot be solely the privilege of the researcher (or of the sponsor or funding agency who commissions the research). All of these matters need to involve the subjects as well and the researcher is herself/himself a part of several contexts with differential impact on the subjects.

One further and historically separate step in the gradual shift towards a new comparative view was taken by the influential work of Clifford Geertz. Coming from literary studies but working throughout in anthropology, Geertz’s work has become important in several of disciplines of the social sciences and the humanities (for an early view on literature and anthropology, see Muller; see also, e.g., Bachmann-Medick; Tatlow). Geertz’s work is known for the attempt to combine standards from the natural sciences (starting out with evolutionary theory and the study of environmental factors) on the one hand, and adding hermeneutics as an important methodological help along the way, on the other. This considerable broadening of scope happened in the same era when criticism on structuralism and hence on positivism as the sole avenue for “scientific” anthropology started in the post-1968 era. In *The Interpretation of Culture* (1973) he announced the “hermeneutic turn” and pleaded for the adoption of methods and of a consciousness stemming from the history of the interpretation of texts, because a culture can be seen as more alike to a text than to an organism. Of course, for scholars of literature this sounds familiar. However, Geertz does not

stop there. His most elaborate field work is with Islamic cultures, in the plural. He did very long and involved studies on Java, Indonesia, and started a second field work later focusing on Islam in Morocco. This double focus made him keenly aware of the need for and of the intricacies of comparison and that there is no “scientific” anthropology without comparison. Even with a phenomenon such as Islam, divergences and differences are rampant, and the need for a solid and tenable approach to comparative anthropology is essential (see Geertz, *Islam Compared, After the Fact*). It is in his 1983 *Local Knowledge* that another view on anthropological comparison is worked out. Here, Geertz investigates how notions of justice and of practical implementation of just and durable good relationships between members of a community are voiced differentially and articulated and formatted in three different cultural traditions. It is clear that all three societies have juridical rules and procedures and that they about them because civil society and indeed solidarity, safety, etc., depend upon them. At the same time, there is no straightforward, point-to-point comparison that can be set up between them because at every step of the organization, the interpretation, the particular traditional choices for values and for formulas, as well as with each integration of a habit, a social role or a strong point of reference, differences, and particularities abound and the general concept of “justice” seems to disappear in the background. The Moroccan view on justice and court practice and the British common law or the old Javanese customs all construct “justice” but differ widely in almost any observable and tangible feature one can imagine. Geertz’s proposal then, is to describe all three of such instantiations of “justice” in their particularistic detail by focusing especially on the ways all three are specifications of the underlying, but never explicitly potent notion of customs and ideas of justice, which is essential to allow for a durable coexistence in each of the particular cases. Thus, the very notion of “justice” is not a deep structure from which the actually observable customs and rules can be “produced” (as in the structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss or Noam Chomsky). Rather, it is a domain of cultural life, which is only known and is manifested in its particular format or phrasing. And the latter differs widely, to a level where the common ground of the three forms is not recognizable anymore. A similar, but deeply philosophical argument can be found in Amartya Sen’s answer to the influential “Western and transcendental” view of justice as John Rawls understands it.

## EMIC-ETIC DESCRIPTION AND COMPARISON

The concepts of emic-etic description and comparison come from linguistics. In phonology and phonetics (starting with Russian Formalists including Nicolay Troubetzkoy and Roman Jakobson) one finds the basis of the coupling of the notions: phonetics is a physical/physiological theory of sound, describing in one “external” and natural scientific frame each and every sound humans can produce. But phonologists found that any particular language uses and produces

only a subset of such sounds. Moreover, the sounds are used and reproduced in particular structures, which are specific to the language under study. For example, English does not use the glottal stop; Dutch does use it between two identical vowels (“ii,” “aä,” “eë,” etc.); Navajo language uses the glottal stop in a number of structural relationships between vowels and consonants at the beginning of a word in front of a consonant (e.g., “tl’iish”). To recognize the structure of sounds within one particular language (i.e., “internally”), the formalist school developed an approach which maps them in a structural system on the basis of a relationship of contrast: glottal stop is used or not, the soft guttural “g” is used or not, and so on. Combining values of contrast from a limited list of pairs of contrast they were able to describe the phonological or phonemic structure of a language. Thus, what we have here is a theory of comparison: the physical basis of phonetics is the frame of reference with a universal nature on the basis of which the local or language-specific manifestation of sounds and sound patterns can be described in phonemics. In the cognitive anthropological research of the 1970s to the 2000s this insight was generalized and applied in studies on culture. And thus we speak of the “emic-etic” approach in analogy with the phonetics-phonemics coupling. Over time, this simple dichotomy has become sophisticated: for most culturally relevant phenomena (e.g., religious, cognitive, symbolic features) a physicalist universal basis (such as laid down in phonetics for sounds) is not feasible. For example, my own work with spatial notions has physical, geometrical, geographical, psychological, and socio-anthropological dimensions of experiencing and using spatial notions over different cultures (see Pinxten, Van Dooren, Harvey). Or, the comparative study of kinship draws on biological, sociological, anthropological, and psychological material around the world (see, e.g., Ember, Ember, Peregrine; Ember and Ember). Another example comes from color studies: ever since Brent Berlin and Paul Kay, we tend to see color as a physical phenomenon captured in an infinite set of differentiations in optics, but known to human beings first of all through finite set of discontinuous distinctions as laid down in Alfred Munsell’s cards of 400+ color patches. Both the optical and the physiological definitions of color are universal. The latter is the result of the working of the human eye, which “groups” color shades in discontinuous patches. At the semantic or cultural level, however, Berlin and Kay found a range of variation in color labelling, which goes from two to maximally eleven basic terms of color. Thus, the optical and also the physiological color systems at best define a dual frame of constraints, but offer no constituent elements to describe or model the semantic-cultural structuring of speaking about or actively using colour distinctions.

Further, the dichotomy of emic-etic as such is inadequate. The example of color studies already indicated the problem here: is the optical or the biological theory of color the basis of the etic for comparison? And how would we then “translate” semantic-cultural color categories of language X or Y as emic specifications on the basis of the etic? In fact, what we need is a frame of reference, on the basis of which

we can make descriptions and comparisons. Etic models are developed more and more comparative research, but then in a way of “the boat which is continuously and profoundly rebuilt while at high sea” (Neurath 92). That is to say, in the interactive mode stressed by Pierre Bourdieu with his praxiological approach, the researcher goes back and forth all the time in ethnographic descriptive work (building an emic picture) and in comparative modelling (building an etic model) of the subject under study. This implies that with each separate empirical study—and, in fact, with each moment of progress of the research as a whole—the etic model is reshuffled, fine tuned, or turned upside down. That is why a *tertium comparationis* is a better representation of what is happening in research: we start from an etic model with provisional status on the basis of which we engage in empirical and descriptive work. For example, I make a Universal Frame of Reference for spatial notions which gives me a set of concepts and relations with spatial relevance which I could use as a basis for questions and distinctions: “line” is an etic notion of which correlates can be sought in Navajo, Chinese, Dutch, and any other language; “horizontality,” “volumeness,” and “cardinal directions” are similar notions. However, when discussing these etic starting points in Navajo for instance, it proves that their constituents and their interrelatedness is different in Navajo, in English, or in Turkish. Notions of the emic correlations, then, are not only the “translations” of notions of the etic, but of the complex semantic network in which they are embedded in particular languages and cultures. Also, some notions of the etic are not recognized or found in the particular language or culture under investigation. For example, in Navajo movement is a basic constitutive marker of all spatial notions, and the category “to be” is absent. Also, the omnipresent notions of “part” and “whole” in the Western world view do not work in Navajo. Hence, a point, a line, or an angle are recognized but phrased in terms of different (aspects of) actions. All this necessitates thinking about a third moment in the process of research in order to be aware that the frame of the etic has to be made more general, less content-laden than imagined. It had to become a sort of source of semantic or cognitive inspiration, as it were, which triggers ethnographic specifications of any kind in particular language and culture, but not really as building blocks of meaning. When looking at what is “generic” or shared across languages and cultures, it is not the original frame of the etic, but a new product of the research process. The latter is sometimes referred to as “derived etic” (see, e.g., Berry): it contains common functions, the shared relationships between notions or domains and the like, but hardly any particular point-to-point comparative details. In notions about space a dimension in Western (and in scientific, etic) understanding this means a line formation, which extends in one of the cardinal directions in the Cartesian axial system. However, in the Navajo case each dimension is constituted by a particular way of moving and acting with the body (see, e.g., Pinxten, “Comparing Time”). There is a subjacent similar spatial phenomenon in both, but once one would like to make this explicit, one moves away from the other cultural phrasing and from the physical-biological



etic definition. Therefore, the “common aspect” is more a relationship or a way of relating to the same of a similar spatial phenomenon and not a set of semantic features shared in both traditions. Thus, it is the common aspect what can be identified as the “derived etic.”

## CATCHING COMPARISON IN A METAPHOR

In cultural anthropology scholarship started out claiming the relevant categories in a naïve way: we went to other parts of the world and “saw with our own eyes” how people behaved, what their customs were, and so on. The fact that we moved to their place and not the other way around made us believe that our way of looking must be superior in one way or another. This one-way thinking (i.e., the colonial attitude) then hardened by making one of two claims: the soft claim (stemming from the humanities) held that we could understand the Other because we could become like him/her. The tough claim was that the categories of research were thus defined, because scholars defined and understood themselves as scientific researchers, taking wisdom from the “hard” sciences. Both of these claims proved false or untenable, but they lasted for over a century. This was followed in cultural anthropology by some humility and it was admitted that we were subjects of colonial powers and were influenced by this context and we granted that we were dependent on the quality of the relationship we were able to build with the informants we work with.

The metaphor which best describes the present understanding of comparison in cultural anthropology, to my mind, is the following: humanity is the sum of all inhabitants of a large building with many rooms, patios, corridors, and stairs. Humanity is divided in groups with stable internal networks of communication and contact and with limited and varied interactions and communications with other groups and individual non-members. Each group occupies a space within the house, and organizes that in its own particular way. Thus members of each group know primarily each other and their particular space, and might come to believe that their ways are the best ways, and even sometimes the only ways. But members of a group meet members of other groups, because they wander in the corridors and in the staircases, or come upon a patio. They all learn gradually about adjacent rooms, corridors and so on, and develop eventually a variety of ideas about the encompassing whole, which is the house. Comparison then, is the gradual and never stopping lore and story telling about one’s own room with more or less consciousness about other rooms and about corridors and other spaces. Size, shape, function, color, and so on of each of the spaces will differ, but they seem to serve a limited amount of functions and have a small set of meanings in common. Now imagine the rooms to be alive, growing, and changing and keep with the metaphor. Then, comparison is never about the same room or fixed measures or functions, but about ways of attaching meaning, (re)defining function, and use in this different and semi-stable existence. It then deals with

similarity (or not) in the relationships between humans or between them and the environment or between them and next door or even the universe of the house.

## THE STUDY OF LITERATURE AND CULTURE AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

“There are buffalo to the North and to the South” the man said to the people, because now he could see them. “And there are Buffalo to the West and to the East,” the woman said, because now she too could see them. The people all became excited, because suddenly they too could see the Buffalo. “Let us hunt them in the North” some of the people said. “No” others quickly shouted. “The Buffalo are much fatter in the South.” “No, no!” still others argued. “They are bigger in the West.” “No, no!” the rest of the people said angrily. “The best ones of all are to the East.” “Please, please! Do not fight among yourselves,” the man, woman, little boy and little girl pleaded. “You are only tricking yourselves. Put on the coyote robes and you will understand.” But the people were very angry, and they would not come together in a circle to counsel. (Storm 16)

The story goes on for many more verses until it comes to a symbolic end: “They put their arms around each other and began to dance toward the Flowering Tree together in a great circle. The people were happy” (Storm 16). Heymathoh Storm’s book relates stories from the Plains Indian People and offers an explanation of how story telling and knowledge, religion, and ritual performance can be seen and lived in the symbolic unity of the Medicine Wheel. The one symbol-artefaction form, which binds phenomena together and that makes the universe whole. Storm attempts to render intelligible through literary examples and analysis what manifestly should be experienced in action. Throughout the book it becomes clear that Storm writes for White people and tries to explain the “ways” of the Native U.S.-American by drawing the Western reader into it. This is done by bringing a story, and then invite the reader to “enter” into it and participate with the characters. The structure of the tales is typical: the cardinal directions offer the general frame for all beings and the repetition of movements and observations (“seeing”) for each hero in the story induces the experience of order in nature of which the participant in the story telling event is to partake. A story thus becomes an event rather than a text or linguistic phenomenon. It is an experience or a way of life and not a detached cognitive, let alone rational approach to themes of a text. In that sense Storm’s book is unique and at the very least an early attempt at bridging the cultural gap between Native oral literature and Western textual literature: the book establishes a sort of inter- or multi-literate work of art. Also, Storm thus points to the difference between “ways” and to the necessity of what Nader later calls “comparative consciousness”: the story teller and hearer/reader are present in the interaction with their particular mindsets and their consciousness of contexts and of self. In my interpretation, through such work it becomes clear how story telling works differently from textuality. The story invites all to be

involved in the action of the protagonists, because we as readers are also “the people.” The effect is that we experience together what happens when the heroes of the story fight, collaborate, or see or are unable to cope because their life is exemplary to our lives.

Literature is varied: ethno poetics rather than the Western history of literature may be the horizon we have to start from. People around the world have been telling stories for ages and engaging in an intricate and varied interaction between listeners and the story teller (see, e.g., Hymes). Myths and other types of stories have been invented, for pleasure, to scare others away, to attract others, to set people wondering and invite them to speculate and use their fantasy. Then some thirty cultures developed script and a few used it to fixate their religious lore. Whatever else, this last group started using text as a format and as a means of power and began looking at all other traditions through the lenses of the text. Scholars such as Dell Hymes or the poet Jerome Rothenberg object to this move, saying that this is at the very least a *pars pro toto* reasoning: the vast arena of variation in telling and communicating—two forms of interaction between people—is thus reduced to a special case of text production and text transfer (a rather restricted form of interaction with an active and a passive party). It looks sound to turn this upside down: textual literary activity is but a particular case of the more generic story telling phenomena and hence the concepts and models are likely to be more general. So, we might follow Rothenberg and plea for a model of multimedia performance as one basis for the study of literature and culture (see Tötösy de Zepetnek; Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári; Wolf).

In conclusion, I postulate that comparative cultural anthropology may be regarded to complement (comparative) cultural studies in a way similar to the latter’s complement to the study of literature. In particular comparative cultural studies adds a critical approach by contextualizing literature, as well as other productions of culture: with the anthropological approach added, this means an expansion of the field by bringing in another relevant aspect and perspective in and of scholarship. Thus, by emphasizing the comparative approach as reflective thinking and practice, comparative and contextual scholarship of the study of literature and culture locates itself in a world context of many cultures.

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# Comparative Literature and Interart Studies

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Anke Finger

**Abstract:** In her article “Comparative Literature and Interart Studies” Anke Finger discusses the field of the study of literature and the other arts by 1) tracing the international trajectory of concepts and philosophies on how the arts interconnect and compare internationally; 2) analyzing forms of dialogue and communication between the arts that inform and shape artistic products or aesthetic approaches practiced by different groups or movements; and 3) exploring selected examples of dialogue between the arts by embarking on interart “translations” (*ekphrasis*), including visualizations and the scoring of literature.

## INTRODUCTION

The discipline of comparative literature is undergoing challenges: not only is literature across the world to be studied, that is, cultural traditions and productions in comparison with each other instead of a nation-based approach, but the added task presents itself in the search for a comparative history of the arts, within which literature is one. In 1949 René Wellek proposed the following: “It might sound distressingly vague and abstract, if I should suggest that the approximation among the arts which would lead to concrete possibilities of comparison might be sought in an attempt to reduce all the arts to branches of semiology, or to so many systems of signs. These systems of signs might be conceived as enforcing certain systems of norms which imply groups of values. In such terms as signs, norms, and values I would look for a description of the common basis of the arts” (65). Wellek’s guarded intimation that the complex endeavor of composing a history of the interrelationships of literature with other arts within comparative parameters necessitates some kind of method points to arduous work in order to determine a meta-lexicon or, indeed, a semiology for all the arts. Over the following decades and into the twenty-first century, scholars and artists took up his suggestion, within and beyond semiotics.

In “Painting into Poetry” Claus Clüver discusses *ekphrasis* in the work of Rainer Maria Rilke, John Keats, Anne Sexton, X.J. Kennedy, Stéphane Mallarmé, Gertrude Stein, and Haroldo de Campos in order to reveal their divergent texts’ illumination of painting and poetry. In “On Intersemiotic Transposition” Clüver explicates his application of semiotic principles. By relying on Roman Jakobson and by invoking Nelson Goodman’s and Wendy Steiner’s work, he postulates the

following: “Literature as a semiotic system is as weakly or strongly determined as painting, and as subject to fluctuations. The meaning of a poem is no more self-evident and unambiguous than that of a pictorial text ... If we accept the idea that an English poem can be re-created as a Spanish poem, then we should also be able to accept that a painting can be translated into a poem. Finding equivalents in a different semiotic system may be more difficult, and the sacrifices must be greater (and sometimes the gains more spectacular), but a successful intersemiotic transposition should not be considered less possible than a successful interlingual translation of a poem” (61–62). Arguing from a theoretical position informed by new criticism, structuralism, and semiotics, Clüver is among the voices that offer the kind of theoretical glossary or interpretive system within which comparative literature scholars are able to approach creative works that travel between the arts (on recent work about the other arts and literature, see, e.g., Grigorian, Baldwin, Rigaud-Drayton; Joret and Remael; see also the bibliography by Vandermeersche, Vlieghe, Tötösy de Zepetnek).

In the twentieth century a great number of studies were published about the interpretation of literature and with that of other arts, acknowledging the fact that the practice of translation or transposition and of comparison began in antiquity (see, e.g., Barricelli, Gibaldi, Lauter; Egri; Langer; Tymieniecka and Kronegger; Weisstein; on visual poetry specifically see, e.g., Bohn), but that the critical analysis of same is fairly new. While the Renaissance did point to convergences between disciplines, not until the eighteenth century—with the beginning of the study of aesthetics representing the numerous debates during the Enlightenment and after on the comparability of the arts and their significance for human experience and expression—did theoretical discussions emerge from examining interart creations. This systematization of the arts ran parallel to their increasing hierarchization and the following centuries are marked by competing views of pro- or against the unification of the arts and the individual arts’ relative merits or ranking. For the comparative literature scholar, the debates—in conjunction with the object(s) of their study—offer a range of (inter)disciplinary approaches to principles of aesthetics, philosophy of perception, or the psychology of synesthesia. Overall, the area of literature and other arts within comparative literary and cultural studies appears to be experiencing a shift from traditional viewpoints to interdisciplinary approaches which include parameters from (inter)mediality studies, postcolonial theory, and cognitive studies, to name but a few.

In 1993, Claudio Guillén posed two questions that seem relevant still today: “does interartistic investigation lead to criticism and to the history of literature as well? To put it another way, does the study of relations between literature and the other arts lead to and become integrated with literary comparativism proper ... Does the comparison of the arts or of works of art with one another constitute a field of special investigation?” (98). In answering his first question, Guillén points to the polygeneity of the arts that appears to de-center literature and places the other arts with equal aesthetic rights and responsibilities. I would



argue, too, that the cornucopia of literary theories has led other disciplines to adopt the critical languages of literary studies, resulting in art or music historians to learn and adopt the vernacular of poststructuralism or semiotics. Many art disciplines hence “speak” the language of literary criticism, leaving literary critics wondering whether to embark on the search for a fresh taxonomy and new theoretical frameworks for dialogue and discourse. Guillén’s second question, of course, is an existential one, and points to aesthetics as a possible answer, namely that a great deal of scholarship in aesthetics concentrates on interart studies and on analyzing parallels or convergences in the arts. As the study of aesthetics appears to be making a comeback in the humanities, this facilitates the study of literature with the other arts and thus produces work in the contextual study of literature (see Tötösy de Zepetnek). This does not mean a revival of “universalism”; however I consider it essential that comparative literature and comparative cultural studies need to (re)integrate the study of aesthetics and aisthesis with a specific focus on interart studies, and this in a global context.

## THE DIALOGIC PRINCIPLE IN THE STUDY OF LITERATURE AND THE OTHER ARTS

The dialogic principle invokes Mikhail Bakhtin’s heteroglossic approach to literature and philosophy, specifically his theory of the novel. It hints at Martin Buber’s 1922 *Ich und Du* (*I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith, 1937) and is echoed in Bakhtin’s early essay entitled “Art and Answerability.” According to Eduardo Kac, in the visual arts, dialogism it refers to “interrelationship and connectivity”: “The dialogic principle changes our conception of art; it offers a new way of thinking that requires the use of bidirectional or multidirectional media and the creation of situations that can actually promote intersubjective experiences that engage two or more individuals in real dialogic exchanges . . . that I call ‘multilogic interactions’” (205; on visual culture studies, see, e.g., Mirzoeff). The ubiquity of the term and its approximate equivalents—dialogicity, polyphony, intersubjectivity, connectivity—signify a shift in Western aesthetic, philosophical, sociopolitical, and ethical stances that helped bring about new fields, including postcolonialism. As Jeffrey T. Nealon points out, “dialogic intersubjectivity, understood in terms of an impassioned play of voices, has displaced the dominant modernist and existentialist metaphor of the monadic subject and its plaintive demand for social recognition and submission from the other” (33). This play of voices comes to bear on the critiques and discussions in interart studies because as a dialogic entity it inevitably invites dialogue and exchange.

By suggesting the model of dialogicity or dialogic intersubjectivity for this consideration of interart studies, my aim is to further liberate interart studies from a reading following structuralist thinking. Most twentieth-century artists—in collaboration or as single “authors”—invested in the translation of art and chose to consider individual arts in interaction, building relationships of varying

forms, and with diverse contents. I prefer a reading of interart works or objects as an intersubjective project, one that invites Kac's "multilogic interactions." In the dialogic artwork, the arts build relationships and interact and they fuse and separate without adhering to a particular or solidified formation. They correspond, they dialogue, they network in ways that may be bidirectional or multidirectional. Furthermore, the dialogic work is reflected in the fluid and unfinalizable reception within its audience or readership (see also Mitchell on Blake and "the infinity of globalization"). The dialogue within the work, in whatever way it constitutes itself, may find its resonance among the spectators. At the same time, each member of the audience or readership may piece together the fragments, impressions, and sensory experience derived from the artwork individually, thereby dialoguing with the artwork through channels all on her/his own while not cutting herself/himself off entirely from a communal conversation or interpretation.

Bakhtinian dialogism as defined by Michael Holquist gains in importance at this point of the discussion since the center (of the artist, of the self, of the artwork, of the community) loses prominence: "in dialogism consciousness is otherness. More accurately, it is the differential relation between a center and all that is not the center" (18). The monadic subject finds its end, things fall apart, the center loses itself. Is all relative? Not precisely, since both phenomenology and Bakhtin's philosophy teach us to take the "object" as something "other" to which we, too, are "other" and with which we engage mutually. "Authority" as a paradigm for either artist or artwork has vanished. One dialogue—and I am merely suggesting that it is an example of "multilogic interaction"—is played out in a fable authored by philosopher Vilém Flusser and artist and self-described zoosystematician Louis Bec. *Vampyrotheutis Infernalis* ("vampire squid from hell"), a (theoretical) fable published by Flusser and Bec in 1987, juxtaposes humans and a type of octopus in order to answer some fundamental questions about dialogic intersubjectivity in light of humans' anthropocentric positionality. Flusser's and Bec's guiding question, as related in a 1988 interview with Florian Rötzer, focuses on the issue of otherness: "would it be possible to position oneself as an animal vis-à-vis humans and to remain within that position, that is, to see us with the eyes of an animal?" (Flusser, "Zwiesgespräche" 42). Flusser chose the octopus because the cephalopod has a nervous system that is proximate to that of humans, among other similarities, and he collaborated with Bec on a synthesis of "languaging" and imaging this animal, which, despite its verisimilitude to nature, suggests a literary and visual projection for both. According to Flusser, their bridging words and images yielded stunning results that went against the negative dialectics of the mutual exclusion or erasure of the two art forms, the literary and the visual: "In this collaboration with Louis Bec we created an unexpected synthesis because my texts do not explain Bec's images and his images do not illustrate my texts, but, rather, the brute, the octopus, indeed only came into being as a result of this synthesis of Bec's images and my texts. . . . This is a new way to philosophize. The new thing is not the brute, and neither is it the method; it is the

experience of a possible collaboration between discursive and imaginary reason, from which emerges something new (“Zwiegespräche” 45; for examples of Bec’s images see *flusserstudies.net*).

Intersubjective dialogue and “multilogic interaction” takes place on two levels: 1) within the book where *Vampyrotheutis infernalis* is positioned as an othering of humans and 2) without the book between two collaborators who move beyond their individual arts, the textual and the visual, but not to describe the images via language or to undermine the text by covering it or expressing it with an image; rather, the two artistic modes complement each other to such a degree that that which is to be presented can only find creation through both arts together. This constitutes either a process of birthing or the aesthetic expression of a Hegelian synthesis: Bec has created a plethora of images of types of octopus that also turn up in different media: the images shown at *flusserstudies.net* are digital and in 2007, in a retrospective of Bec’s work in Prague, show fictitious genealogies of cephalopods and their various imagined biological data on the kind of hanging maps formerly in use in chemistry, physics, and biology classes (see Bec). They are worked in relief, with elements hanging down and sticking out, hinting at unfinished three-dimensionality. The exhibition served, for Bec, as a means of continuing “our interrupted dialogue,” broken off by Flusser’s untimely death in 1991 (see Bec 1). In this sense, the fictitious world of the animal—brought about by conjoining two artistic expressions and different media to confront the fictitiousness of humans’ spatiality and virtuality, or as Bec puts it, their parallel zoologies—is complemented by the unfinalizability of the artists’ dialogue with each other, with their creature, and with their audiences (on the philosophy of the animal, see Calarco).

Another example emerges from conceptual art and precedes Dick Higgins’s 1969 concept of intermedia based on La Monte Young’s 1963 edited volume *An Anthology* (the volume is without page numbers). Young, as a Cage and Stockhausen influenced minimalist composer interested in conceptualism, assembled in this art book (published several years before the official onset of the conceptual art movement) pieces that, like Henry Flynt’s influential essay on concept art that was published in it, simultaneously called attention to conceptualism while including elements of dialogism and unfinalizability. Indeed, according to David Farneth, the anthology ranges “among the most influential collections of music and performance art of the 1960s ... represent[ing] an unprecedented breaking down of barriers between artistic media” (Farneth qtd. in Potter 56).

Given the numerous attempts to break down barriers between the arts, one ought to challenge Farneth on the assessment of “unprecedented.” And yet, as an “anthology,” it moves beyond Dadaist or futurist or any other kind of pre-World War II avant-garde interest in artistic intermixing by coming together not on the stage or in a workshop but simply, and unassumingly, as a book full of ideas. Curiously, the anthology has failed to attract in-depth studies, and this short discussion, too, will hardly give the contents and the book’s significance its

due (see Kotz, “Post-Cagean” 60). It is to be stressed, nonetheless, that interart translation and conceptualism intersect dynamically in this slim volume and that the design by Fluxus artist George Maciunas mirrors the simultaneous diversity and unity of the artists and their “products” therein. The front and back covers, in red, feature five rows each of the title, *An Anthology*, printed thirty-six times from top to bottom in a simple black print, creating a dizzying effect of wallpaper or wrapping. The following pages repeat the title in a different and much larger font and in black and blue, and eventually one comes to a complete list of the contents of the collection: “an anthology of chance operations concept art meaningless work natural disasters indeterminacy anti-art plans of action improvisation stories diagrams poetry essays dance constructions compositions mathematics music.” Listed thereafter are Young’s colleagues, friends, and collaborators, and stringent copyright restrictions. The volume opens with a performance instruction piece by George Brecht, “Motor Vehicle Sundown (Event)” dedicated to John Cage, in which “any number of motor vehicles are arranged outdoors” and form and enact a complex canon with respective lights, radios, horns, opening and closing hoods/windows/doors, triggered by instruction cards and engines running. Two more card pieces follow. Claus Bremer’s concrete (erotic) poetry in German follows the card pieces. Next are Earle Brown’s “Music Essays,” instructions for a piece for multiple pianos with multiple possible ways of executing it. Joseph Byrd then contributes “Music Poetry” which includes a short reflection on Nam June Paik, time, and Gertrude Stein, a “Ballet for Woodwinds,” and instructions for a poem “Homage to Jackson Mac Low” (who helped edit the volume). Inserted is a loose sheet of music. John Cage’s “Excerpt from 45’ FOR A SPEAKER”—Young was introduced to Cage via Stockhausen in Darmstadt—precedes Walter De Maria’s “compositions essays meaningless work natural disasters” which features a call for an “art yard” (a big hole, together with “sounds, words, music, poetry”) and “meaningless work” (cannot be sold or exhibited), among other conceptions of (artistic) action. Subsequently, Flynt elaborates on “concept art” (“since “concepts” are closely bound up with language, concept art is a kind of art of which the material is language”), and Yoko Ono, in whose studio Young initiated the New York loft concert series, pursues a “small bright light” in her poetry “INPPERSEEQS DIAGRAM.” Higgins, with his “dance mathematics compositions” leaves inversely printed instructions for “five performers” and for “Telephone Music” and Toshi Ichiyanagi (Yoko Ono’s husband at the time) explains the differences between the painted curves that indicate “Music-for-electric-metronome.”

Next are Terry Jennings with “Music” for piano and string quartet (instructed), Dennis Johnson with the copy of a letter and an envelope glued into the book itself containing a letter covered with blue script (questions, sayings, haphazard thoughts), and more “music” in the form of two words arranged exactly like the title of the anthology on the covers: “ding dong.” More poetry follows, this time by Ray Johnson and James Waring, consisting of repeated “ha’s” (a so-called

laughter poem), and Jackson Mac Low provides a lengthy text called “A Greater Sorrow,” as well as “Methods for Reading and Performing Asymmetries.” Finally, Low proposes a text for use in “solo or group readings, musical or dramatic performances, looking, smelling, anything else &/or nothing at all.” The text depicts a chaos of letters and signs on a piece of paper randomly and inconsistently covered with letters from a typewriter. Concluding the volume are Richard Maxfield’s “a simultaneity for people,” instructions for a conceptualist, Dada-infused simultaneous poem, and his essays, Paik’s reminiscences of an encounter with Stockhausen and thoughts on unfixed form, Terry Riley’s “Music” including instructions for Young to crawl inside a grand piano, roll around in it, and kick it, Diter Rot’s “white page with holes” (literally a loose white page with holes of varying sizes), Emmet Williams’s “poetry” including his “Cellar Song for Five Voices,” Christian Wolff’s “Duet I (Piano four Hands, I is at right, II left),” and last Young’s famous *Composition 1960*.

The art book expresses and compiles ideas. It does not contain—as it might today—materials for your iPad such as performances enacted and recorded, music practiced and performed, poems read or sung, chance operations teased out, or dances danced. Other than the varied usage of fonts, colors, paper types, doodling, music notes, and drawings, the collection does not contain any imagery or any ancillary auditory material whatsoever. The contents consist of code, that is, language, notes, and drawing. Plans of action remain instructed rather than taken: they hover over the page, uninitiated, as constructs of/for the mind only. The art, for now, stays fragmentary and on paper only. And yet it already emerges, potentially whole and complete, in the mind, in whichever form, depending on impulses, individuals, time and whether or not any of it ever finds a beginning. All the while, however, the ideas, the arts, and their products imagined intersect and they come together in this imagined form in the book. As a collection they interact, they dialogue, and they bring effectively the reader—to the extent that the act of decoding the disparate elements of the book can be called “reading”—into the realm, into the spatiality of all this music, poetry, performance, literature, and art imagined. Young himself puts the arts into dialogue in his works in that he cannot, or will not, place them within one discipline and remains deliberately unsure whether he makes music or theater, whether his music is vision or vision is music. Talking about *Compositions 1960*, of which numbers 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 9 are contained in the anthology, he stresses that both categories of theater and music apply: “I divide my works into music pieces, and musical-theatrical pieces. All my pieces, I feel, deal with music, even the butterflies [#5] and the fire [#2]” (Young qtd. in Kostelanetz 194). These pieces, in particular, depend on how their enactment dialogues with the audience, making music, just like theater or drama, part of a physical and communal experience in which the outcome depends on those who take action.

Young’s anthology, then, brings into play, literally, that which, prior to conceptualism, was marked by a certain necessity for materiality. “Dialogic

intersubjectivity” and “multilogic interactions,” too, at least in their attempts to intersect with and face the “other” art(s), remain tied to rhythms and readings which urge certain forms of tactility, something one can (be)hold, grasp, take in, interfere with, make (finalized) meaning. An anthology lacks physicality, not as a book, but as a plethora of “performances” unfinalized, unreal, and unbound (on the notion of interference in the arts, see Caws). These are new parameters for interart studies, and the art book, for example, very much alive in the twenty-first century, is a genre that embraces many new media forms and presents merely one object of study (see, e.g., Drucker).

## INTERART STUDIES AND INTERMEDIALITY

While comparative literary studies have been engaged with examining literature in connection with other arts for decades, interart studies seeks to redefine this area by including multi-media and new technologies and questioning disciplinary or traditional boundaries. An example of the definition of interart studies is as follows:

During the last decades, in the art scene, two tendencies are to be observed: on the one hand a still growing tendency towards an annulment, a dissolution of the boundaries between different art forms, as brought about by performativity, hybridization, multimedia; on the other hand, we have observed an aesthetization and theatricalization of other cultural fields, including politics, economy, the media, sports, everyday life, that tends to abolish the boundary between art and non-art. Both tendencies are a challenge to the arts disciplines. For those have preferred a kind of monadic existence for a long time. Art history, theatre studies, musicology, film studies, comparative literature or national literature studies, each arts discipline has understood itself as defined and clearly delimited from the others by its very specific objects, as well as by a methodology and theoretical approaches that referred expressly to them alone. The new situation that has emerged over approximately the last fifty years, radically questions this self-understanding. It disorients the arts disciplines in terms of their special objects, i.e. in terms of just that momentum that seemed to guarantee the self-definition and delineation of the other arts disciplines in each case and, as a result, in terms of their methodologies and theoretical approaches. (“Conception,” *europdocsem.net*)

One such boundary presents itself when considering the study of electronic/digital literature (net literature or electronic literature). Flusser’s and Bec’s philosophizing in a dialog, that is, “(inter)mediality,” is a field of study now widely accepted in media, literary, and cultural studies (see, e.g., Golumbia; Manovich; Schmidt and Valk; Tinckom; Wolf), and it is a constituent part of comparative cultural studies (see Tötösy de Zepetnek, *Digital Humanities*). An example of the definition of intermediality is as follows:

Intermediality refers to the interconnectedness of modern media of communication. As means of expression and exchange, the different media depend on and refer to

each other, both explicitly and implicitly; they interact as elements of particular communicative strategies; and they are constituents of a wider cultural environment. Three conceptions of intermediality may be identified in communication research, deriving from three notions of what is a medium (→ Media). First, intermediality is the combination and adaptation of separate material vehicles of representation and reproduction, sometimes called multimedia. Second, the term denotes communication through several sensory modalities at once, for instance, music and moving images. Third, intermediality concerns the interrelations between media as institutions in society, as addressed in technological and economic terms such as convergence and conglomeration. As a term and an explicit theoretical concept, intermediality has perhaps been most widely used in reference to multiple modalities of experience (→ Modality and Multimodality), as examined in aesthetic and other humanistic traditions of communication research (→ Aesthetics) (Jensen 2385).

What kind of fiction would *Vampyroteuthis Infernalis* be had it been conceived in the electronic realm? Following Katherine N. Hayles, *Vampyroteuthis Infernalis* in the digital realm could be delivered in a number of genres and formats: it could be written in *Storyspace* <<http://www.eastgate.com/storyspace/>>, a hypertext authoring program that favors linked structures; it could use the multimodality of the world wide web with “a wide variety of navigation schemes and interface metaphors” including “sound, spoken text, animated text, graphics, and other functionalities in a networked linking structure” written as interactive fiction with “game elements” (7–8), engaging the user/reader by requiring her/his input and, in turn, requiring from the critic or scholar an entirely new take on reader-response criticism. It could also appear within space as a type of electronic literature moving “from the screen to immersion in actual three-dimensional spaces” (Hayles 11), that is, onto cell phones, GPS technology (“locative narratives”) to combine real-world locations with imagined narratives, characters, and plots. In essence, if rendered digitally, would *Vampyroteuthis Infernalis* be a game, a website, a hypertext, digital art or video, or an interactive drama? (see also Heibach; Simanowski). The actual writing, as in writing for programs, differs greatly from the latest expressions of literature in electronic form, as evidenced by works in ASCII code in contrast to what verges on what one might refer to as literary video. One representative example for experimental writing presented in code is the following poem by Alan Sondheim from the mid-1990s:

```
vi~
vi~
vi~
vi~
vi~sor
vi~
vi~the cursor pauses (cursor moves here) cursor makes a path (cursor says
vi~i'm here) cursor wanders makes a path (cursor says this is my field)
vi~cursor says this is my forest (my mountain crag) my rocky stream (cur-
vi~sor meanders makes a path) cursor was here (cursor paused here) cursor
```



vi~was lost here (here the words were saved) here they moved again (cursor  
 vi~left and returned) cursor left and paused (here cursor left) here cur-  
 vi~sor paused (mounty crags) (rocky streams) (twisty paths) cursor pauses  
 vi~here  
 vi~  
 vi~  
 vi~  
 vi~  
 vi~ (Sondheim qtd. in Cramer 115)

Sondheim not only “elevates” a programming code to the level of literary experiment but captures a thoroughly autopoietic moment in that the cursor becomes self-referential: “an autopoietic system is, like a wave or a whirlpool, a self-sustaining pattern, but it does more than merely use what is already present; it actually produces its own components” (Livingston 79). The programming language, ASCII, stages the cursor, the symbol blinking (alive!) on the screen, begging for more input; the rhythmic pumping of the cursor on the screen (visible, invisible, visible, invisible) inspires the breathless cursor in the text/poem as it appears to run in spurts, occasionally taking a break only to move on to the next segment in short intervals. Simultaneously, the cursor becomes the character in a poem that refers back to the visual landscape of the “screen” in that the code IS the poetic language and functions as such, as both code and *poiesis* (on this kind of “codework,” see Raley). So is the creation—a text that doubles as a poem, written with a cursor to stage the cursor itself as a character in the literary text—a text or an image or digital theater?

To cite another example, how are we to “read” and interpret Steve Tomasula’s “multi-media novel” *TOC* (2009)? Sold as a DVD, the “book” loads as a computer program via the DVD or disk drive; it is not a film as such as it needs to be installed prior to viewing. Once ready to be launched, the novel begins with a myth of creation related to two sons who refer to time and space. The “reader,” from the beginning engaged by exceedingly well-designed imagery, may click through the various possibilities of creating the story according to the hypertextual—or hypervisual—possibilities provided. The pamphlet or user’s guide accompanying the novel (digitally, not in print), points out that the novel, once “read” on all levels possible (there are a great many), can be read again. Whenever it is read, however, it will not present itself as the same story, but it can be recreated or recycled repeatedly. This most certainly surpasses film in its two-dimensional teleology, and *TOC* has been celebrated as a literary feat of storytelling that is not a computer game, but an entirely new paradigm for engaging the (literary) imagination. Yet, this is precisely where the critic or scholar becomes flummoxed: can the reader rely on the official designation of *TOC* as a novel that explodes all categories of the genre? Or should it be read as a filmic hypertext, signifying a rhizomatic pattern that is guided by its visual and aural cues?

Unfortunately, these juxtapositions or definitional confusions do not answer the following questions. What, in the realm of the digital, is writing? What is the

word? What makes a text a text? And how many layers of writing enable these forms of literature which are not bound to the letter or the page, which need no imprint and are in many ways post-textual and post-literary? I am referring here as well to the inherent criticism voiced by Florian Cramer in 2001 who warned that the computer and the internet as facilitating machines will easily disappear into the background (123). According to Cramer, writers and programmers actually using the code to write literature “appropriate the idiosyncrasy of digital data to be doubly legible—as code and as a formatted representation—in that it cross-contaminates these two signifying layers” (118; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine). With literature like *TOC*, the two or more signifying layers are no longer visible as the image eclipses the code. So are such literary productions the ultimate expressions of writing intermedially, a simultaneous writing of both the text and the image, for both to be visible and put to music? I submit that they emerge as the new objects of study for comparatists in order to engage the new worlds of interarts relations. They present new territories of aesthetics and *poesis* in world literatures which contribute to a broadening of interart studies and the revivification of the focus on literature and the other arts in comparative literary and cultural studies.

**Note:** The above article is a revised version of Anke Finger, “Idea/Imagination/ Dialogue: The Total Artwork and Conceptual Art.” *The Aesthetics of the Total Artwork: On Borders and Fragments*. Ed. Anke Finger and Danielle Follett. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2011. 110–27. Copyright release to the author.

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# Gender and Genre in Comparative Literature and (Comparative) Cultural Studies

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Ana Lozano de la Pola

**Abstract:** In her article “Gender and Genre in Comparative Literature and (Comparative) Cultural Studies” Ana Lozano de la Pola argues that although the discipline of comparative literature and the fields of cultural studies and comparative cultural studies remain heterogeneous fields of literary study, they are also likely places for crossovers between different theories and methodologies. Lozano de la Pola discusses how diverse feminist positions and theories have affected comparative literature and cultural studies over the last few decades, what kind of reception they have had, and what proposals for change have come out of them. Following a brief overview of debates, she discusses one of the aspects she considers productive and socially relevant within feminist comparative literature and culture, namely theories of gender and genre put forward by Judith Butler and Jean-Marie Schaeffer. The two authors’ attempts to understand both categories in a complex way and avoiding misleading essentialisms enables us to reach a methodological point of departure from which to begin thinking about building self-defining and literary codes as a complex and inter-related issue.

## INTRODUCTION

In the discipline of comparative literature and in the fields of cultural studies and comparative cultural studies, the view that feminist criticism—while not yet integrated in pedagogy or in institutional presence (see, e.g., Stabile)—is an integral part of scholarship there is ample evidence of the support of the notion and this is also evident in research and publications. In 1986 Anette Kolodny stresses the positive fact that feminist literary criticism cannot be pigeonholed into one coherent and single category and that this is why it is impossible to talk about feminism in the singular, but, rather, as different stances connected by shared objectives: “under this wide umbrella, everything has been thrown into question: our established canons, our aesthetic criteria, our interpretative strategies, our reading habits, and most of all, ourselves as critics and as teachers” (145). Kolodny tries to define how feminism has been received within the wider context of the various critical schools emerging in the 1980s in the academe. However, after reviewing the different aspects of feminist criticism and literary theory—from the formation of new canons, the re-interpretations of the old ones,

relationships between language and power, overhauling the concept of literary history, examining aesthetic patterns, etc.—Kolodny makes a surprising diagnosis: “to have attempted so many difficult questions and to have accomplished so much ... in so short a time, should certainly have secured feminist literary criticism an honoured berth on that ongoing intellectual journey which we loosely term in academia ‘critical analysis.’ Instead of being welcomed onto the train, we have been forced to negotiate a minefield. The very energy and diversity of our enterprise have rendered us vulnerable to attack on the grounds that we lack both definition and coherence” (149). While since the 1990s feminist criticism has come of age, it is still not fully integrated in either literary studies in general, in cultural studies or in comparative literature (in comparative cultural studies feminist and gender studies scholarship are integral, see, e.g., Arens; Tötösy de Zepetnek, “The New Humanities”).

With regard to the discipline of comparative literature Margaret Higonnet’s collected volume *Borderwork: Feminist Engagements with Comparative Literature* (1994) is a seminal text to start with an exploration of how feminist criticism developed since Kolodny’s view of the field. In the introduction Higonnet postulates that “feminist comparativism ... the idea that feminist theories can renovate not only literary study at large ... but comparative literature specifically” (“Introduction” 4). The title of the book itself outlines the scholarly and ideological bases of the postulate: *Borderwork* refers to how feminist comparative literature is devoted to the study of disciplinary boundaries, as well as to linguistic, geographical, and identity borders. Higonnet’s proposal of feminist comparative literature is meant to break with both the conception of a unidirectional and monolithic theory of the feminist approach and the “master theory” of comparative literature.

As Cary Nelson points out, the process of theory building coincides with a wider trend in theories of literary and culture study from “how to interpret literature,” that is, from the thematic and aesthetic approach to literary phenomena in traditional approaches to analyzing “how the discipline of literary studies is constituted and what its social effects are” (21). Thus, one of the main objectives of comparatist feminist literary theory and its application lies in making the study of literature and culture socially relevant, as well as maintaining scholarly rigor.

## FEMINIST SCHOLARSHIP IN THE HUMANITIES AND COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

A precursor of Higonnet’s volume with regard to feminist scholarship in the humanities, Teresa De Lauretis’s collected volume *Feminist Studies / Critical Studies* (1986) remains a seminal text summarizing the plural way of understanding feminist discourse of non-homogeneous voices. De Lauretis’s point of departure is explicit: the definition of feminism “is certainly not a point of consensus” (“Feminist Studies” 4) and she lists the main debates which were raging in the 1980s

with disagreements between cultural and biologist stances, the integration of new positions of identity politics in relation to race, class, sexual orientation, etc., and the tensions and oppositions between feminist theory developed in scholarship and practice in women's movements: "These debates make us uncomfortable because they give incontrovertible evidence that sisterhood is powerful but difficult, and not achieved; that feminism itself, the most original of what we can call 'our own creations' is not a secure or stable ground, but a highly permeable terrain infiltrated by subterranean waterways that cause it to shift under our feet and sometimes to turn into a swamp ... they sustain and nourish the practice of self-criticism, or better, perhaps, self-consciousness ... what in the United States we used to call 'consciousness rising'" ("Feminist Studies" 7–8). This self-criticism is not understood as an inbuilt feature of the movement, but, rather, of the method by which it operates: "the practice of self-consciousness ... is the 'critical method' of feminism, its specific mode of knowledge as political apprehension of self in reality, continues to be essential to feminism ... Consciousness is not the result but the term of a process ... Consciousness, therefore, is never fixed" ("Feminist Studies" 8). In turn, Higonnet's point of departure with regard to the discipline of comparative literature is that it is "precisely the indeterminacy of comparative literature as a discipline has fostered its continuous retheorizing of interpretative models and their consequences" ("Introduction" 2).

This why when working in comparative literature or in (comparative) cultural studies it is impossible to define the discipline through some sort of shared essential feature and neither can the various feminist stances be reduced to a common universal principle: "What this amounts to saying, in effect, is that an all-purpose feminist frame of reference does not exist, nor should it ever come prepackaged and ready-made" (De Lauretis, "Feminist Studies" 14). The instability resulting from this practice of continuous self-criticism, acknowledging that it is impossible to reach final conclusions acceptable to everyone, is one of the areas of shared ground that would make the development of comparative and feminist theory run along parallel lines. However, as Higonnet remarks, we "cannot yet celebrate a happy marriage between comparative literature as a discipline and feminist forms of critical practice" ("Comparative Literature" 157). In my view, one of the causes why feminist scholarship remains difficult to integrate in comparative literature is that the discipline is tied to the traditional philological standard that "ideology" or "political orientation" have no place in scholarship. And here is where the field of (comparative) cultural studies offers a theoretical framework whose application not only allows but demands an ideological dimension (see, e.g., Tötösy de Zepetnek, "The New Humanities"). Another reason of the problem of feminist scholarship in comparative literature is the problem of canonization and its history, that is, the long-standing exclusion of women writers from "masterpieces of universal literature" (see, e.g., Blain, Grundy, Clements; see also Castillo). Susan Sniader Lanser adds a further reason: she argues that the said integration would not occur until comparative literature ceases to have linguistic



difference as its preferred field of research. Lanser's postulate is that "feminist criticism has tended to be as insufficiently comparatist as comparative literature has been insufficiently feminist" (282).

Drawing together what has been discussed up to this point, on the one hand we find a series of authors who speak about feminism as one of the clearly established and consolidated lines in comparative literature (see, e.g., Apter; Bernheimer) and, on the other hand, there are some who complain precisely about the opposite (see, e.g., Higonnet; Lanser). We can also find scholars who move between the two extreme positions. For example, Sarah W. Goodwin argues in favour of striking a balance between excessive pessimism or optimism which, in the end, would lead to paralysis:

Depte the practical difficulties of doing comparatist historical research and the danger of slipping into facile generalizations, there is a tremendous potential here for new energy in comparative literature studies. One place to begin rewriting the disciplinary borders might well be with questions: What are the relations between nations as constructs and cultural models of gender? Are nations exclusively part of a male-centered political world? How do literary texts compare to other cultural documents in the ways they reinforce or undermine national boundaries? How do women and men place themselves with reference to those processes, and what role do gender constructs play? This is only one set of questions on the table, but it may be one that comparatists in particular should address. (266)

In my construction of a framework for comparative feminist scholarship Goodwin's thought is a point of departure. However, it is important to keep in mind that theory construction is always be related to, mixed with, contaminated by, interrupted by, overlapped with, etc. other theories and methodologies in comparative literature and comparative cultural studies (see, e.g., Tötösy de Zepetnek, *Comparative Literature*, "The New Humanities"). Any attempt to compartmentalize a comparatist framework is destined to fail, because if anything determines it, it is the rejection of all definition that means a simplification of their heterogeneous principles and multiple sources. Thus, to cross borders (linguistic, national, disciplinary, methodological, etc.) and to borrow tools from various disciplines and schools of thought is a feature of comparative and feminist scholarship.

## GENDER AND GENRE AND COMPARATIVE FEMINIST SCHOLARSHIP

According to Higonnet gender and genre studies are one of the possibilities of comparatist and feminist scholarship when addressing women writers' issues (see "Feminist Criticism") and Elaine Showalter points out that feminist scholarship includes the "history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women" (248). However, this definition seems to me too restrictive. In light of the gradual transformation of feminist theories to gender studies, the relationship between women writers and literary genres can no longer be the only field of study from

this point of view. Although Showalter's legacy is evident in many studies of this kind, thanks to developments in various critical trends within feminism such as homosexual studies, queer theory, and work on masculinity, etc., research that makes connections between literary and identity codes is fortunately not confined to the study of works written by women. I argue that scholarship dealing with the relationship between gender constructions (masculine and feminine) on the one hand, and literary genres on the other, are located in gender and genre studies (on the theory of genre per se, see, e.g., Hoorn). Moreover, this is not a matter of content and neither is it the analysis of a specific text of how characters, narrative voice, etc., represent a certain code; rather, it is a matter of understanding that gender is involved in language and therefore in its narrative structures. The point, then, is to unravel "the unwritten gender codes of genre" (Friedman 203; see also Vasvári).

It may be argued that gender and genre studies have been already regarded as a field of research in their own right within literary studies. From Mary Eagleton's point of view there are three lines of work in gender and genre studies. First, research devoted to searching for the presence or absence of women writers in the so-called "major genres" (novel, poetry, drama, etc.). Second, research devoted to the identification of strategies used by women writers—i.e., making use of their traditional outsider position—in order to subvert the rules of canonical literary genres. And third, research devoted to examining how the history of literature has privileged some literary genres, what Eagleton holds to be "male dominated genres" rather than "female dominated genres." It is precisely this difference between masculine and feminine genres that is the weakest point of Eagleton's view. The schematic conception of genre and gender put forward by many scholars leads to an oversimplification of the relationships between them and is the cause of misunderstanding (see, e.g., Eagleton; Friedman). In view of this simplification, the best option is to understand the connection between gender and genre as a two-way relationship. The gender codes of each period, that is, the rules and the social and economic conditions they depend on may explain why women choose a specific genre while men choose another. However, at the same time this genre may be reinforcing the construction of a specific idea of femininity and masculinity.

When we address the relationship between gender and genre, we come across a difficulty, namely the great quantity of literature devoted to both concepts individually. As Marina Lops points out, both are problematic concepts that have been undergoing a continuous process of revision and redefinition during the last few years (77). To arrive at a framework and methodology to understand both phenomena in a complex and interconnected way, I discuss work by Judith Butler and Jean-Marie Schaeffer. The former's articulation of "gender performativity" together with the latter's formulation of literary "genericity" form the basis of my argument. The first step is to see what we mean when we talk about Butler's performativity theory, comprehensively discussed in her work *Gender Trouble*:

*Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). Butler sets out from the idea that any feminist theory that restricts the meaning of gender—that is, that attempts to give a fixed definition of the term—will inevitably establish exclusive gender norms. For this reason, the intention behind her research is, from the outset, to carry out a critical review of the categories of “sex” and “gender” understood as being the basis of the subject. According to Butler, we can only understand this pair if we link it with a third element that always accompanies them: that of “sexuality.” Thus, sex, gender and sexuality make up a system of causalities and continuities by which society is governed, what authors such as Meri Torras calls a “triple confusion”: “I am talking about the supposed evidence that bodies are naturally marked by a biological sex (male/female), a gender (masculine/feminine) and sexuality based on the compulsive and compulsory heterosexual practice. Man and woman are categories which arise from the psychological and social articulation of a particular combination of these elements (sex, gender, sexuality) or, in other words, from a certain economy and legislation of bodies” (1; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine). Echoes of authors such as Monique Wittig and Michel Foucault are behind Butler’s argument that the association of a “natural sex” with a “gender” and with an “attraction to the opposite sex” is in fact connected with the reproductive and regulatory interests of societies. This would mean, therefore, that sex / gender / heterosexuality cannot be understood as being other than “historical products” (Butler, “Performative Acts” 525) as a triad that also acts by excluding from the system all those whose experiences and practices do not fit the model. It is not surprising, then, that it is easier to refer to what, in Butler’s view, gender is not a “stable identity” nor a “fact” (“Performative Acts” 522) or that “it is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes” (*Gender Trouble* 33). That is, gender is not the result of any essence or substance expressed by bodies. The problem we face when we try to explain Butler’s argumentation arises, to a great extent, from the linguistic structure we use for these definitions as it would be difficult to explain it by using a formula such as “gender is X.” According to Butler, gender should be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and all kinds of rules make up the illusion of a permanently gendered self. Gender is not, therefore, a substance, although it has the appearance of substance and it is not an identity apparently in one piece, but, rather, a repetition of acts over time (“Performative Acts” 520): “Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed... There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (*Gender Trouble* 24–25).

What feminist theorists had hitherto referred to as gender, using a noun that seems to indicate an essence or a substance, in Butler’s view should be understood as the repetition of certain gestures, movements, rules, behaviours:

it is the repetition of the “acts” that is responsible for creating the idea of gender. The problem is that gender is a construction that regularly conceals its genesis, that is, it makes us believe that it is based on a substance (which could be sex). This is why I argue that the linguistic formula with which we want to define it is unsatisfactory, since the verb “to be” adds to this confusion, to presupposing and anticipating this substance. This is the reason why Butler prefers to talk about “gender performativity”: it is difficult to say precisely what performativity is not only because my own views on what “performativity” might mean have changed over time, most often in response to excellent criticisms, but because so many others have taken it up and given it their own formulations. I originally took my clue on how to read the performativity of gender from Jacques Derrida’s reading of Franz Kafka’s “Before the Law.” There the one who waits for the law, sits before the door of the law, attributes a certain force to the law for which one waits. The anticipation of an authoritative disclosure of meaning is the means by which that authority is attributed and installed: the anticipation conjures its object. I wondered whether we do not labour under a similar expectation concerning gender, that it operates as an interior essence that might be disclosed, an expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates. In the first instance, then, the performativity of gender revolves around this *metalepsis*, the way in which the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself. Secondly, performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration (*Gender Trouble* xiv).

Gender for Butler, therefore, is a *metalepsis*, an illusion sustained by what she calls “gender acts” that, far from being chosen, is regulated by a series of laws and whose main function consists of forcing gender coherence, that is, the causality and continuity established between the entities of sex / gender / sexuality. For Butler, the listing of a set of rules and not the expression of an essence would shape gender, because the fact that gender is performative means that it is real only to the extent it is performed (“Performative Acts” 527). Precisely for this reason Butler does not speak of “gender” but of “gendering,” using the gerund that seems to better encompass this idea of “doing,” “dramatizing,” “reproducing” gender by its own repetition (“Performative Acts” 521).

With regard to genre, Schaeffer discusses to what extent they might find a fit with Butler’s notion of gender performativity. Schaeffer warns that we would fall into a trap if we try to answer the question of “what is a literary genre?” (see *Qu’est-ce qu’un genre littéraire?*). The verb “to be,” as Butler points out, hinders rather than clarifies any argument in this respect. A simple sentence, such as “X is a novel” in fact anticipates the existence of an essence—a substance—that scholars of literature should pay attention to: immediately following its enunciation, complicated questions could arise, such as “what is a novel?” or, as Claudio Guillén asks, “what is literature?” (137). Hence I focus on Schaeffer’s notion of “genericity,” a complex notion in the search for a notion of literary

genres that does not base itself on a simple essentialism. According to Schaeffer, theories that have attempted to define and systematize literary genres in the twentieth century have fallen into the trap of trying to answer this question and this is why he regards them as ontological discourses based on two fundamental premises: the reification of the text, that is, its consideration as physical object and the concept of genre as a transcendent term, as something external to texts. What is tricky about this is that they hide theories of knowledge that stretch beyond literature and that they attempt to find the answer to a complex question: how concepts (in this case genres) and empirical phenomena (texts) relate to each other. This is why Schaeffer employs the notion of “two-headed theories,” one head being the text and the other the genre. They are also “magic theories” from the moment at which they create what they think they have discovered: “The way in which literary studies have used the notion ‘literary genre’ since the nineteenth century is closer to magic thought than to rational investigation. In magic thought the word creates the thing. That is exactly what has happened with the notion of ‘literary genre’; the very fact of using the term has led us to think we ought to find a corresponding entity which would be added to the texts and would be the cause of their relationship” (“Literary Genres” 167–68). This misunderstanding causes all these theories to commit the same error, a “paralogism” (fallacious argument), since if the possession of certain features is a justification for placing a particular work within a specific category, in that case the category cannot be the cause of the existence of the work in question (see Ducrot, Schaeffer, Abrioux, Tordesillas 577). The only alternative we have so as not to fall for paralogism is to move the question of genre as far as possible away from the ontological debate and center it in textual debate at the empirical level. What Schaeffer is proposing is a transtextual concept of literary genres he calls “genericity”: “But if we stay at the level of empirical phenomenology, gender theory is merely intended to reflect a series of textual similarities, formal and, especially, thematic: however, these similarities can be perfectly explained if we define genericity as a textual component and genre relations as a set of reinvestments (more or less transforming) for the same textual component. In literature, which is institutional by definition, genericity can be perfectly explained as a set of repetition, imitation, borrowing of a text with regard to the others” (Schaeffer, “Du texte au genre” 186). In consequence, it is possible to stop thinking that literary genres are a standardized classes of texts susceptible to being grouped by using a classification based on observation. On the contrary: “a genre is far from forming a univocal class; it is formed of several networks of partial resemblances that, through a process of overlapping, form the literary genre in its historical variability” (Schaeffer, “Literary Genres” 175). This idea of genericity has, therefore, the virtue of not neutralizing the variability inherent in all genres and their historical development.

What is problematic about an apparently simple sentence like “X is a novel” is also stressed by Schaeffer. The non-essential nature from which he understands genres are made is inadequate: if we say “X is a novel,” it seems as if we are

always presupposing that it belongs to a particular stable class of texts. According to Schaeffer, the structure of the sentence must therefore be changed for it to be understandable, becoming something like: “a novel, such as X, for example.” Genericity is understood, then, in a similar way to Butler’s “gendering,” as a performed “modelling function” (Schaeffer, “Literary Genres” 182), that is, as a possible textual relationship. A non-compulsory relationship, but one that is governed by certain rules and that would bear ultimate responsibility for certain texts being part of the canons we deal with, while others would not: “by textual genericity I mean the set of the elements of a text that are referable to a modeling function performed (directly or through the intermediary of explicit norms) by other texts” (Schaeffer, “Literary Genres” 182).

Another of the fundamental advantages offered by Schaeffer’s notion is that it deals with the dynamic and variable nature of this genericity. To do so, Schaeffer argues that two regimes can be found within it, which are in fact two sides of the same textual function: that of reduplication and that of generic transformation. While the former is not usually of interest as it deals only with texts joined by ties of reduplication at various textual levels (modal, formal, and thematic at the same time), the latter is the best study ground for genericity because, owing to transformation and to the diversion obtained by comparing one text with its literary context, the *filigrane* becomes apparent as a kind of “weave that links the textual class and the text in question is written according to it” (Schaeffer, “Du texte au genre” 204). Texts that belong to this kind of textual regime are normally those that, over the course of history, have played havoc with generic categories and have either been regarded by some as non-generic or understood as being initiators of new genres. However, this dynamism can also be understood at a higher level: if genericity can only be thought of as a textual function, at the same time each text will have the ability to transform and modify this genericity through each particular repetition.

## CONCLUSION

My proposed framework of comparative feminist studies in comparative cultural studies with regard to gender and genre consists of understanding gender as a constant “work in progress,” such as the repetition of gestures, movements, and behaviours regulated by a set of rules and in understanding genericity as a function of textual modelling and performed by the iteration or by the citing of particular rules. The repetition by which both gender and genre are configured contains the seed of its subversion within itself. As Schaeffer notes, only by looking at the dynamics that exist between generic levels—that of reduplication and that of transformation—can we understand both the phenomenon of continuity and that of rupture, both observance and subversion.

Note: The above article is a revised and translated excerpt from Ana Lozano de la Pola, *Literatura comparada feminista y estudios Gender and Genre. Recorriendo*



*las fronteras de lo fantástico a través de algunos cuentos escritos por mujeres.*  
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# Comparative Cultural Studies and Translation Studies

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Paolo Bartoloni

**Abstract:** In his article “Comparative Cultural Studies and Translation Studies” Paolo Bartoloni discusses the interstitial space of translation by drawing on literary and philosophical preoccupations, especially Giorgio Agamben’s notion of “potentiality.” Bartoloni proposes that the definition and discussion of “potentiality” and the significance it represents ought to pass through a rethinking of translation studies, and asks what would happen if the focus of translation shifts from the final product—or from the relation between the source text and the translation—to the process of translating where distinct languages and cultures meet without superimposing own values onto the other. Bartoloni postulates that this process achieves relevance when located within a cultural dialogue from which a new reflection on translation, as well as literature and subjectivity can commence.

## INTRODUCTION

Interpreting Aristotle’s *Book Theta* of the *Metaphysics*, Giorgio Agamben remarks that “in its originary structure, dynamis, potentiality, maintains itself in relation to its own privation, its own steresis, its own non-Being. This relation constitutes the essence of potentiality. To be potential means: to be one’s own lack, to be in relation to one’s own incapacity. Beings that exist in the mode of potentiality are capable of their own impotentiality; and only in this way do they become potential. They can be because they are in relation to their own non-Being. In potentiality, sensation is in relation to anesthesia, knowledge to ignorance, vision to darkness” (*Potentialities* 182; further on Agamben and translation, see Bartoloni). Truth to untruth, we could add, originality and uniqueness to non-originality and translation. This understanding and articulation of “potentiality” has enabled Agamben to enter a sustained reappraisal of knowledge, selfhood, language, and narrative in books such as *Potentialities*, *The End of the Poem*, and *The Coming Community*. Agamben has not written directly or specifically about translation, yet his philosophical discourse and his implicit and explicit dialogue with Aristotle, Benjamin, Blanchot, Deleuze, Heidegger, and Levinas, amongst others, is, as I see it, of particular importance for a review of translation theory at a time when the traditional juxtaposition of original and translation and its attendant comparative theoretical framework appear increasingly limiting and inadequate to explain current phenomena of cross-cultural encounters and exchange. Besides, I do not

see the reason to cling to such clear and unproblematic opposition in the field of translation studies when just about everywhere else in the field of the humanities and social sciences the notions of original and originality have undergone such drastic and dramatic a reappraisal. As Umberto Eco and Tim Parks show, the comparative analysis still holds currency, especially in the domain of commercial publishing and practical translation (with regard to the field of comparative cultural studies, see Tötösy de Zepetnek, “The New Humanities”). It would be naive to argue that interlingual translation ought to move away from grammatical, syntactic, and stylistic considerations and embrace a free-for-all approach. The point is that these considerations might well be founded on other and different sets of methodological and theoretical frameworks to those revolving around the static, and for the original unchangeable idea of finite and final products. This in turn means that a reconsideration and perhaps a reformulation of translation theory along the axis of contemporary philosophical and (comparative) cultural discourse should not limit itself to the domain of theory, but ought to influence the thinking and culture of commercial publishing, too.

The definition of potentiality as expounded by Agamben finds its origin in Aristotle but it is also connected to the Heideggerian notion of *Dasein*: “We have learned from Heidegger that existence is possibility in general and therefore it is unrealizable in particular, or it is impossible in particular. Existence as the generality of the possible is precisely the impossible: the uncanny impossibility of Da-sein—the being I myself am at my ownmost. That is to say, before I take on the particularity of a person, I am—and am not—an extreme possibility. To say it even better, I am a potential possibility: the null event of an inactuality” (Wall 2). Heidegger’s thought on *Dasein* are thus: “*Dasein* is not something present-at-hand which possesses its competence for something by way of an extra; it is primarily Being-possible” (183). In other words, the essence of *Dasein* is only potential and cannot be seen and understood other than “Being” in that—as an individual sign with its unshared language—it does not make sense; it does not have a meaning. Its “Being” comes to fruition when *Dasein* chooses to enter the “game” of the community and to be part of a set of linguistic and cultural trajectories and vectors amongst which its own trajectory and vector become opaque. Agamben’s merit, his important contribution to contemporary philosophical discourse, and transversally to translation is, as I understand it, to have emphasized the notion of potentiality as presence, livable experience. For Agamben potentiality is the zone of a presence which by necessity implicates its simultaneous absence. And the “hardest thing,” writes Agamben, “is not the Nothing or its darkness, in which many nevertheless remain imprisoned; the hardest thing is being capable of annihilating this Nothing and letting something, from nothing, be” (*Potentialities* 253). Clearly, Heidegger’s writing on *Dasein* is more problematic and complex than I make it appear through the convenient label of opaqueness. Starting from a close reading of Heidegger, Levinas, and Blanchot, for instance, recuperate the possible actuality of *Dasein* by writing it within the

experience of dying and of a temporal experience which Emmanuel Levinas calls *l'entretemps*, the “meanwhile.” Incidentally, the notion of the “meanwhile” is of primary importance in the understanding of the process of translation. Yet it is not in the possibility of dying, but of existing in-between actuality and inactuality, in the interstitial space between being and non-being that translation is naturally located.

Selfhood, subjectivity, language, and cultural values are linked to the extent that, at least in Western culture, the notion of identity and belonging, of being at home, are strictly correlated with a homogeneity of linguistic and cultural values whose safety appears to be guaranteed by enclosing them, by sealing and protecting them from the influence of what lies outside. It is by constructing linguistic and cultural enclosures that the ideas of authenticity and inauthenticity, original and copy become possible, indeed accepted as natural and necessary. This framework has had a historical, political and social value, a necessity whose traits continue to persist and hold sway even at a time when they appear to be undermined if not altogether outmoded by the process of globalization and international mobility. And yet, regardless of the paradigm shift and the attendant discourse of cross-fertilization and hybridization we still cling to the imperative of authenticity and originality, of purity based on a set of implicitly or explicitly protected linguistic and cultural values. My argument here, mind you, is not in favor of globalize identity as opposed to national identity, both of which in their own particular way could be defined as authentic. Rather, it is interested in opening up a series of challenges in order for a further zone to emerge in-between authenticity and inauthenticity. What I am referring to is the process which perhaps, but not necessarily, gives rise to so-called authentic spaces. In other words, a process, a linguistic and cultural habitat, in which authenticity and inauthenticity are themselves negative and absent, only potential amidst an unqualified and unqualifiedly, apparently incomplete, landscape.

In *The Coming Community* Agamben proposes a new perspective on subjectivity which, although not having direct bearing on translation, can be helpful in the context I discuss:

The Whatever in question here relates to singularity not in its indifference with respect to a common property (to a concept, for example: being red, being French, being Muslim), but only in its being such as it is. Singularity is thus freed from the false dilemma that obliges knowledge to choose between the ineffability of the individual and the intelligibility of the universal. The intelligible, according to a beautiful expression of Levi ben Gershon (Gersonides) is neither a universal nor an individual included in a series, but rather ‘singularity insofar as it is whatever singularity. In this conception, such-and-such being is reclaimed from its having this or that property, which identifies it as belonging to this or that set, to this or that class (the French, the Muslims)—and it is reclaimed not for another class nor for the simple generic absence of any belonging, but for its being-such, for belonging itself. Thus being-such, which remains constantly hidden in the condition of belonging, and which is in no way a real predicate, comes to light itself. (1–2)

Agamben's intention is that of rearticulating singularity and subjectivity away from the traditional hermeneutic perspective and into a domain in which "suchness" acquires its own possible actuality; an actuality which is obviously incommensurable with the universalizing concepts of authenticity and inauthenticity. In another passage of *The Coming Community* Agamben speaks of ethics and the attendant discourse of good and false, authentic and inauthentic: "the meaning of ethics becomes clear only when one understands that the good is not, and cannot be, a good thing or possibility beside or above every bad thing or possibility, that the authentic and the true are not real predicates of an object perfectly analogous (even if opposed) to the false and the inauthentic. Ethics begins only when the good is revealed to consist in nothing other than a grasping of evil and when the authentic and the proper have no other content than the inauthentic and the improper" (12). What Agamben alludes to is an experience of confusion, encounter, and mingling whose outcome is not chaos and madness but rather a clarity and brightness made of openness, what I am tempted to call "incompleteness" in the sense of something unstructured by universalizing values. "Suchness," according to Agamben, is that which "presents itself as such, that shows its singularity" (*The Coming Community* 9). But exactly what is this singularity Agamben speaks of and how can it be reconnected with the experience of translation? The answer is to be found in language: "The antinomy of the individual and the universal has its origin in language" (*The Coming Community* 8). Agamben's work is intent on rewriting this antinomy and in the process he points to a further hermeneutic space and language which, to my view, casts startling insights into translation.

Any space is marked by a topography and the temporal and spatial dynamics correlating it with other spaces. For many years translation was not interpreted as a space or a zone and when it was, it was merely seen as a geography whose only importance and value lay in its resemblance and faithfulness to the geography of the original. If time and space were ever considered in relation to translation, they were interpreted as strange movements whose paradoxical outcome is a declaration of sameness and the obfuscation of its occurrence. It is this oxymoronic reading of movement, which in effect pretends to negate the occurrence of any movement, which is so staunchly and intrinsically opposed to a sense of passage and transition, both temporal and spatial, that has for so many years impeded theoreticians and translators from focusing on what happens in-between the original and the translation. In order for this interstitial zone to emerge one needs to reconceptualized the idea of movement by denucleating it from the tension towards something other than itself, from a movement interested in erasing and deleting itself as it proceeds towards a preconceived and authentic "home," from a subjectivity that denies itself from belonging to the community of language and culture. The very existence of the interstitial zone of translation, and its process of bringing together two cultures and languages away from the discourse of authenticity and inauthenticity, is predicated upon a movement that

does not go anywhere outside but that keeps on moving within the inherently dynamic borders of the interstices. It is from within the time of the “meanwhile” and the space of the “in-betweenness” that I believe a new theory of translation and cross-cultural encounters and exchange can commence. This is also the shift from the must—the will—to the could—the potential—and from a literature of perfect tenses to a literature of the conditional.

“The movement Plato describes as erotic anamnesis,” writes Agamben in *The Coming Community*, “is the movement that transports the object not toward another thing or another place, but toward its own taking-place” (*The Coming Community* 2). It is in this “own taking-place” that, according to Agamben, “humankind’s original home” can be found. In the article “The Carcass of Time,” Brian Dillon reads this “original home” not as “a process [genesis] or a movement [kinesis]” and he adds that this zone is not correlated with a measurable space of time: “The time of pleasurable plenitude which Agamben discovers in Aristotle is decidedly not, however, that extra-temporal realm which enables Augustine, in the *Confessions*, to step outside of the abstract flow of time: it is not, in other words, the eternal” (142). This time is rather the pure “now,” the interim, the atemporal *cairos* Aristotle speaks of. It is ultimately pleasure. Pleasure, as Aristotle defines it in Book X of the *Ethics*, is not a process, “that is, it does not acquire meaning or value in terms of its completeness, but is a certain experience of the present: it is not dependent upon a projected future point at which it will become whole” (Dillon 142). Aristotle writes thus: “The act of seeing is regarded as complete at any moment of its duration, because it does not lack anything that, realized later, will perfect its specific quality. Now pleasure also seems to be of this nature, because it is a sort of whole, i.e., at no moment in time can one fasten upon a pleasure the prolongation of which will enable its specific quality to be perfected. For this reason pleasure is not a process because every process is in time, and has an end (e.g. the process of building), and is complete when it has accomplished its object. Thus it is complete either in the whole of the time that it takes or at the instant of reaching its end” (*Ethics* 318). Is it possible for humankind to regain this unlinear and unchronological, uncalendrical time? In other words, is it possible to inhabit a space as if it were a place, a home, a habitus in which the notion of process is absent and where the movement is not towards something but simply in itself? More specifically, is it possible for translation to be the pure pleasure of in-betweenness, where its potentiality of not-being is celebrated, where “possibility and reality, potentiality and actuality,” authenticity and inauthenticity, “become indistinguishable”? (*The Coming Community* 55). Literature, at least certain contemporary literature, has attempted to be precisely that. As Thomas Carl Wall argues: “the Neuter is the space of literature (an imaginary space *en delà du temps*), which is interminable, incessant, and perpetually noncontemporary” (115).

This is the space of Blanchot’s literature, but also of Pound’s and many other twentieth-century authors amongst whom I would like to place Giorgio Caproni.

They all inhabit the interim, the interzone of the “meanwhile” where action and process are rejected in favor of what I like to call the “waiting”; that is the interstitial time in which, and this is essential, the notion of what-one-is-waiting-for is all of a sudden unimportant and irrelevant. The “waiting” is that zone in-between concrete and tangible homes, in which literature investigates the meaning of an absence, of that which should have come, or should come or will come but is not here yet. “To write,” states Blanchot, “is to surrender to the fascination of time’s absence ... Time’s absence is not a purely negative mode. It is the time when nothing begins, when initiative is not possible ... Rather than a purely negative mode, it is, on the contrary, a time without negation, without decision, when here is nowhere as well ... The time of time’s absence has no present, no presence” (30). This time without time—Blanchot calls it “dead time”—is that space in-between actions where actual life is suspended and where temporality, but also spatiality, becomes supple, porous, ultimately open. This suspended zone does not pertain to a dimension beyond life. On the contrary, it coexists and intersects with actuality in an osmotic interchange. But the space of this interchange, the space in which “empty, dead time is a real time in which death is present—in which death happens but doesn’t stop happening” (Blanchot 31), has belonged hitherto to the space of literature in which the suspension of the waiting, its inherent interstitiality, is celebrated and fully experienced. A dimension devoid of a tension towards something ahead of itself and of a linear understanding of time in which the process towards the future is natural if not altogether expected and demanded, must have a different grammar and language. In his unfinished novel, *Further Confessions of Zeno* (1969), Italo Svevo thought of a “mixed tense” and a different grammar to narrate a story that takes place in-between authenticity and inauthenticity, or, more conveniently, fiction and reality. But there are other examples of a language of the “waiting,” perhaps even more pertinent to a piece on translation owing to its inherent in-betweenness, that is bilingualism.

In 1499 an anonymous incunabulum was printed in Venice with the title of *Hipnerotomachia Poliphili* (*Polifilo’s Dream*). As Agamben remarks, “The effect of estrangement that its language produces so disorients the reader that he literally does not know what language he is reading, whether it is Latin, the vernacular, or a third idiom ... It is not simply a matter of the intrusion of purely Latin (and at times Greek) words into the vernacular lexicon, according to a process of growth that certainly characterized the history of the vernacular in the fifteenth century. Rather, here innumerable new linguistic formations are made through the separate transposition of Latin roots and suffixes, which lend life to words that are grammatically possible but that in reality never existed” (*The End of the Poem* 44–45). This is an intriguing example of a meeting of two languages in the interzone of the “waiting” where there is no attempt to develop and unfold a process of linguistic and grammatical cleansing and polishing but where the “suchness” of the meeting is presented as such. Agamben goes further when he



claims that “this dream, which is fully contemporary today, is in fact dreamt every time a text, restoring the bilingualism and discord implicit in every language, seeks to evoke the pure language that, while absent in every instrumental language, makes human speech possible” (*The End of the Poem* 60). Is thus bilingualism as such and not as process, the simultaneous taking place of two languages and cultures in one language, the language of humankind’s original home? Joyce in his *Finnegans Wake* was perhaps alluding to something similar and Pound’s work with ideograms taken from the Chinese language and his working of metaphors influenced by Japanese haiku had a third language in mind. As Charles Taylor has commented interpreting Pound’s writing, “these juxtapositions [were] just to see reality undistorted” (474). In Pound’s work art “means constation of fact. It presents. It does not comment” (Pound qtd. in Taylor 474). Is art here presenting the “such-as-it-is,” and thus locating itself in the space of the interim? It appears so, especially if one compares Taylor’s analysis of Pound’s writing with my discourse on the interstices: “This is the nature of the Poundian epiphany; it happens not so much in the work as in a space that the work sets up; not in the words or images or objects evoked, but between them. Instead of an epiphany of being, we have something like an epiphany of interspaces” (476).

Modern and contemporary literature enters the space of the interstices to evoke something, perhaps an absence or a presence, the conflagration of the self or maybe its gradual recomposition in the uncanny space of mediality and possibility. Or perhaps even to celebrate its inadequacy or simply its status as mere copy, as petrified simulacrum which unsuccessfully searches for its own originality in the attempt to escape its nature as the shadow of reality. Here, I suppose, we have the great irony and paradox of art, that is the coexistence of the notions of originality and copy, the fusion and the embedding of an apparently unsolvable dichotomy. This living together of opposite principles is the body and the flesh of art, its fascination but also its irredeemable sin. Never was the hybridity and hermaphroditism of art so clearly stated and exposed, its supposed originality problematized as in modern and contemporary art. And yet we still think of translation as that which has to be faithful to the original when, in fact, translation could be used to reclaim the profound meaning of art’s incompleteness and vagrancy through emphasizing, indeed, organizing and clarifying its epiphanic errancy, ultimately restoring art to the originality of its multilinguism and polyculturalism. This is translation as theory and not as practice, translation as the contemporary hermeneutic of language and culture. It is translation working its epistemological method and purpose through its inherent and tremendously relevant status as “halo,” as the interim and interstitial par excellence in a world of believed originals which are there waiting and hoping to be deconstructed. And this is also translation as an ideological and existential home and habitus for those who, by choice or necessity, are physically living in-between and who for many years have thought and lived their interstitiality as a loss, of home, the self, their traditions. It is now perhaps time to see the “error” of being potential, of being

“as such,” as the locus of responsible criticism and the geography where in losing oneself one can eventually find oneself.

The shift in the theoretical perspective of the last twenty years and the general overhaul of the paradigmatic and ideological tools through which translation theory operates seem to go in the direction I have described so far. So much so that key methodological terms such as “equivalence,” “faithfulness,” and “transparency” have been replaced by “difference” and “resistance.” The original is no longer the incontrovertible point of reference, the solid and monolithic model to which the translation must reverentially tend. One could well argue that the sacred aura surrounding the original was torn up long time ago and that already in the writings of Goethe and Croce—to name two theorists whose discourse on translation has been seminal—the best translations were identified as those which departed from the “foreignness” of the original and entered the comfortable zone of “home.” Thus, the Crocian phrase equating translation to women by coining the patriarchal and misogynist motto “beautiful and unfaithful” comes to mind. The approach seems sympathetic to the notion of relevance interpreted as the need to render the text appetizing to a certain audience regardless of its technical and literary merit as a translation. It is certainly not “difference” that is valued in Croce but rather a gentle and captivating sameness, not to the original, but to the aesthetic values of the target audience. It is in this sense that one is also reminded of Horace’s argument where the priority, for convenience’s sake, is firmly placed on the readability of the translation. Horace believed, and many commercial publishers of today appear to agree with him, that the essence of the original could be sacrificed to the altar of transparency, and therefore the translator was more than justified in changing and altering the text according to the cultural values and tastes of his/her audience (see Bassnett and Lefevere 3–7). But disrespect for the original is here only apparent, and in fact it hides a solid belief in its sacrality and purity in that it implicitly mocks any attempt to copy it as useless and ugly. Why not then keep the essence of the original (would Croce have used “chastity”?) intact and write something else, inferior, no doubt, but at least palatable? And should the audience wish to rise to the perfection of the original, it is its duty to learn the other language.

The contemporary theoretical and critical shift from the “original” to the “translation” is not determined by an ecstatic contemplation of the original but rather by a reinterpretation of linguistic and cultural values along the lines of a fluid and equal relationship in which the encounter happens and is interpreted as a cross-cultural exchange. “Transparency” is therefore traded for “resistance,” which discourages the tendency to assimilate the “other”—an assimilation which will not only erase the novelty of another culture but also negate a critical confrontation with one’s own culture—and “sameness” is exchanged for “difference,” which stimulates critical awareness and suspicion of taken for granted certainties. And yet, I find this approach limiting as well. While I see the inherent value of changing the focus from one point to the other of the translating equation, I still

find that the emphasis of the theoretical debate is disabling when it is placed so firmly on either the “original,” the point of departure, or the “translation,” the arrival. This prioritizing ends up reigniting an old juxtaposition which has held sway in translation theory for many years thanks to that justly useful but also dated opposition offered by Friedrich Schleiermacher, according to which “either the translator leaves the author as still as possible and moves the reader towards author, or the translator leaves the reader as still as possible and moves the author towards the reader” (qtd. in Lepschy 133; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine). The privileging of finite products, the original and the printed translation, seems to go right against the very nature of translation which is intrinsically fluid, under way. I believe that the time is ripe to propose a further theoretical shift which rather than occupying itself with what is at the beginning or the end of the process of translation, investigates the area in-between the original and the translation, that zone in which two languages and two cultures come together and fuse in a kind of cross-fertilization where their distinctive traits are blurred and confused by the process of superimposition. It is the zone, which in the course of this article I have called “interstitial” and “potential,” where the original is no longer itself, having experienced already the departure from its point of inception, and where the translation is not yet completed, being still in the process of reaching its “home.” The “potential” zone is neutral and defies the clear definition of “home” as a given set of accepted cultural values and tastes. It lies in-between, in the mid-way and as such is characterized in equal measure by the memories of the origin and the expectations of the arrival, by the features of the known (the original) and those of the “becoming” (the translation). It is the zone in which source and target cultures melt and generate a culture under way which resembles, yet it is also markedly different from them.

The theoretical emphasis on the zone in-between is not new. One of the first theorists to enter this domain was Mary Louise Pratt who, in her book *Imperial Eyes: Studies in Travel Writing and Transculturation*, coins the term “contact zone.” By “contact zone” Pratt means “the space of colonial encounters, the space in which people geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (6). Pratt’s study is not on translation, but rather the investigation of the ways in which European travellers read, represented and culturally colonized or were influenced by exotic lands. And yet *Imperial Eyes* is of interest here for the strong emphasis which is placed on the “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (Pratt 4), and, if not primarily, for the etymological usage of the word “contact.” Pratt employs “contact” in the meaning that it has in linguistics, that is referring to “languages that develop among speakers of different native language who need to communicate with each other consistently” (6). The notion of Creolization and hybridity and its alleged qualifications as chaotic, barbaric, and unstructured are relevant perspectives here. Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* was

published two years after Pratt's *Imperial Eyes* in 1994. Bhabha introduces the notion of the "third space" whose meaning is not "based on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of cultural hybridity" (38). One of the methods Bhabha employs to investigate the notion of "third space" is translation. By borrowing Walter Benjamin's notion of translation as liminal and irresolute, Bhabha stresses that his interest lies in the "foreign element that reveals the interstitial" and creates the "conditions through which 'newness comes into the world'" (227). As I understand it, he is not so much interested in reflecting on the relationship between the original and the translation as to study translations' modes of productivity whose "newness" or "foreignness" end up challenging the cultural values of the establishment: "The sign of translation continually tells, or 'tolls' the different times and spaces between cultural authority and its performative practices. The 'time' of translation consists in that movement of meaning, the principle and practice of a communication that, in the words of de Man 'puts the original in motion to decanonise it, giving it the movement of fragmentation, a wandering of errance, a kind of permanent exile'" (228). Here, Bhabha touches on a series of problems which are vital to this discussion on translation: "movement," "wandering," and "erring." These are concepts which invite a reflection on the basis of a fluidity whose outcome is found in the problematization of univocality and purity and the reappraisal of cultural encounters and fertilizations.

It was not long before translation theorists understood the importance of the "contact zone" or "third space" and seized it to enter an innovative exploration of translation and translating practice. The most recent discussion of translation through this perspective is by Sherry Simon who presents a stimulating account of three Canadian authors, Jacques Brault, Nicole Brossard, and Daniel Gagnon. The communality of these three authors is found in their hybrid idiom and a writing which is "self-consciously provocative, jarring traditional alignments, blurring boundaries of cultural identity, and writing against a cultural tradition which has been deeply suspicious of the work of translation" (Simon 161). Their "potentiality" is, obviously, located in their belonging to a borderline country par excellence, Québec, but also in their lucid attempt to debunk the notion of originality. And they achieve this not only by following the referential and self-referential path of South American writing for which, in the words of Carlos Fuentes, "originality is a sickness" (70)—a sickness that has to be contained by a continuous dialogue between works of different cultures and times—but also by questioning the values inscribed in monolingualism and monoculturalism. As Simon argues, "it is not a question of simply overturning cultural influences, of reversing the tide of influences, but of creating a new idiom through the encounter of languages and traditions" (63). It is precisely here that Simon connects with Pratt's "contact zone" on the grounds of a third language comprising two or more idioms. The difference is that she takes the "contact zone" a step further by stressing the potential richness and novelty of this third language in opposition to the chaos and barbarism which were traditionally attached to it.

The interstitial zone of “potential” is linked to postcolonial theory as evident in the work of Bhabha, Pratt, and Simon. Notions of hybridity, cultural pollinations and encounters, the destabilization of the monolithic and the colonizing cultures, and the surfacing of the periphery originates and are brought to the fore of cultural debate by postcolonial theory. But it is also inextricably part of the contemporary postmodern condition. There is no doubt that the fragmentation of the self and the attendant problematization of language, although experienced and to a certain extent narrativized in modern fiction as well, are paradigmatic to postmodern narratives, simultaneously propelling the narrative proper and the poetic and theoretical preoccupations of postmodern authors. As a result, notions such as time, space, landscape and its apperception, on which until last century some claims of transparency could be made, become increasingly blurred. Their reappraisal, together with that of the self and language, has determined a renegotiation of a set of cultural and philosophical values that in turn has challenged our position of beings in the world. One of the results of this debate is to be found in the gradual disappearance of tangible points of arrival, be they master narratives or universally accepted truths. This has also allowed a vast zone, until recently unseen or unexplored, to emerge in-between those almost taken for granted truths. As Paul Carter argues, our task today ought not to revolve around the question of “how to arrive” but on that of “how to move, how to identify convergent and divergent movements; and the challenge would be how to notate such events” (*Living* 101; see also “The Chi Complex”). In other words, our role should be that of plunging ourselves into the “potential” zone and experience the interaction of cultures and languages as they fluidly intermingle, their dialogue still in progress and undamaged by the purposefulness of finality. It is in this sense that Simon’s discussion of the “contact zone” could yield even more interesting results were it to be recontextualized and recast not so much on the analysis of a set of finite products but on that of works in progress. It would be interesting to take a step back and try to follow the process which gave way to the cultural choices made by the three Canadian authors as they were negotiating distinct cultures and languages and ask how they arrived at certain decisions rather than others. Indeed, it might be instructive to study their first or second drafts—those writings in motion—rather than the published books. This course of action would also do justice to what Itamar Even-Zohar predicated for translation when he opened up a new perspective for the study of translation theory through addressing central questions on the relation between literary translations and national cultures (for an application of Even-Zohar’s work and Anton Popović’s *Dictionary* with the contextual [systemic and empirical] approach to literature and culture see Tötösy de Zepetnek, “Taxonomy,” “The Study of Translation,” “Towards”; see also Hermans).

Giovanni Gasparini defines an interstice as “usually a narrow space separating two different bodies or two parts of the same body: therefore it refers primarily to the experience of being in-between two things or objects” (1). To the notion of

not belonging, which strongly characterizes the “interstice,” I would like to add, following Bhabha’s suggestion, that of “wandering” for it powerfully expresses the “dynamism” and the constant flux of the interstitial zone: writing and speaking happens in a language in-between that moves in and out of national and cultural borders, resulting in a narrative which is the result of a combination rather than an exclusion. Thus, the notion of “wandering” could be also lived as a loss—the loss of home, the loss of the direct route, the loss of the self—especially when it is linked with the attendant notion of “erring.” Yet, I think that this sense of loss is a Western mystification wrought around a set of values of which the affinity between “erring” and “error” is an emblematic outcome. Western culture appears to insist on and stress the danger of straying from the path. Indeed, a traveler ought to be aware of his or her destination and the time necessary to reach it before embarking on a trip. This also means that by being focused on the place of arrival, our traveler will not (should not) be distracted or diverted by other routes encountered during the course of the journey. Any suggestions of diagonal, zig-zagging, forking, and branching paths acquire an eerie, uncanny feeling compared to the bright, familiar, direct linear course. Wandering is thus discouraged not only because it might take the traveler into unwelcoming and threatening territories, but also because it is a waste of time and an indication of indolence. In the Western tradition, the wanderer, the Gypsy (i.e., Roma/Sinti), is usually looked upon as a strange and peculiar type, an outcast who lacks the more basic social skills and ambitions, namely a home, a place and a structured context to return to: “free from every secure dwelling,” suggests Mark Taylor, “the unsettled, undomesticated wanderer is always unsettling and uncanny. Having forsaken the straight and narrow and given up all thought of return, the wanderer appears to be a vagrant, a renegade, a pervert—an outcast who is an irredeemable outlaw” (150). But it might be that, paraphrasing Robert Dassaix, to enrich our humanity one needs to venture into “the grubby lane” rather than hug the “better-lit, better-paved way” (15). And it might be that in losing oneself one might even find oneself. Finally, it might well be that a helpful and innovative way of discussing and approaching translation could be found in the exploration and articulation of the experience of the “potential,” giving it credence not only at theoretical and academic level but also at the level of commercial publishing.

**Note:** The above article is a revised version of Paolo Bartoloni, “Translation Studies and Agamben’s Theory of the Potential.” *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 5.1 (2003): 1–11. Copyright release to the author.

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# Comparative Cultural Studies and the Study of Medieval Literature

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Roberta Capelli

**Abstract:** In her article “Comparative Cultural Studies and the Study of the Medieval Literature” Roberta Capelli discusses the importance of studying medieval authors and manuscripts using a contextual and comparatist approach. She postulates that the conceptual eclecticism and empirical pragmatism of comparative cultural studies offer scholars useful theoretical and methodological parameters of analysis to understand the palimpsestic nature of medieval texts. While inter- and multidisciplinary training in the traditional fields of medieval studies (textual criticism, history, philosophy, etc.) is necessary to deal with the socio-cultural, textual, visual, etc., complexities of the medieval world, Capelli suggests that medievalists would benefit from employing new media technologies in digital humanities.

## INTRODUCTION

Today, the fascination with matters medieval—in particular the Gothic—occur in all manners and genres whether literature, cinema, television, and new media including the world wide web and video games, etc., and the resurgence of medieval genres, heroes, themes, myths, and traditions are re-shaping our understanding of the Middle Ages (see, e.g., Charlesworth; Fugelso; Pearsall; Utz and Shippey; Weisl). But also the scholarly approach to the Middle Ages has been undergoing significant changes through the last century including the re-thinking and updating the theoretical and methodological bases of research in light of the new literacies and technologies.

The Middle Ages is the period of European history from the fall of the Roman empire in the West (fifth century) to the fall of the empire in the East with Constantinople in 1453. The use of a tripartite periodization—which postulates a declining *medium aevum* following the luminous *saecula antiqua* and anticipating a flourishing *nova aetas*—dates back to the humanistic notion of the Renaissance and the idea of the resurgence of learning based on Greek and Latin sources. This Eurocentric assumption prevents us from relating the expression “Middle Ages” to any generic before/after paradigm, entailing necessarily a development in the past, a transitional time shift from antiquity to modernity. Confirmation of the limited range of validity of this axiom can be found in the fact that we apply the same terms (i.e., Middle/Dark Ages) to different periods of human history:

for example, we allude to the Greek Dark Ages referring to the period of Greek history from 1200 B.C. to 800 B.C., marked by the collapse of the palatial centres and by the “birth of the *polis*” (Bianchi Bandinelli vii).

What antiquity and modernity are meant to represent is another issue: as Jacques Le Goff suggests, we could even say that the Middle Ages, designed in terms of a set of slowly evolving structures, endured from the third century until the middle of the nineteenth century (10). Beyond the construction of a long seventeen-century Middle Ages, Le Goff’s proposal illustrates the difficulty of mapping something that cannot be counted as singular event but as a system of comparable socio-historical and cultural settings. The gradual change from the old to the modern age did not occur at the same time all over the world. For example, China’s medieval period corresponds with the Ch’in through the T’ang dynasties (approximately second century B.C. through the tenth century A.D.); the Japanese medieval era is a nearly seven-hundred-year period beginning with the Kamakura shogunate (1185–1333); in India, the Middle Ages may be said to have begun with the ninth-century Moslem invasions; the African Middle Ages covers the period of African history from 1400 to 1800. Even within the same geographical period, the phenomenon can have various chronological extensions. The uncritical acceptance of one-sided historiographical visions of the past results not only in methodological and intellectual exclusion, but also encourages the crystallization of defective and misleading definitions. For example, the idea of the European Middle Ages as a period of intellectual darkness, rooted in Petrarch’s conception of the “Dark Ages” (see Mommsen), propagated during the Renaissance and taken for granted until the beginning of the twentieth century (see, e.g., Abrams and Harpham; Brague; Del Torre), does not match the multiform spirit of those centuries and clashes with other historiographical perspectives. Suffice it to say that in the Arab world the Middle Ages are regarded as the “Golden Age” of Islamic history (see Lombard 9). Trivial as it may appear, this statement aims to avoid the risk of predicating upon the erroneous premise which would follow the question “what was happening outside Europe while Europe was going through the medieval phase of its history?” because not all historical phases aligned on the horizontal axis are homogeneous typologically. Different historical phases taking place in different cultures may stay at the same temporal height in the chronological chart of world history.

## THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES FOR THE STUDY OF THE MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

Globalism and relativism are two key concepts that underpin the study of the Middle Ages. They reveal themselves as complementary facets of multiculturalism inherent in medieval culture and this ought to be a perspective of scholarship today. It is important to stress terminological implications: first, globalism and globalization are not synonymous: while globalization can be regarded as a process

of “colonization” on a planetary scale (i.e., economic strategies, massification, the world wide web, etc.), the system of medieval international exchanges and mutual influences cannot be compared to present-day supra-national interconnections; rather, the large-scale geopolitical atlas of the medieval world calls for wide-ranging critical approaches (see, e.g., Antunes; Barbero). Thus globalism is a vision of the world where multiple itineraries mark out a broad network of intersections and interactions. By means of this conceptual simplification, we can say that globalization is the field of the study of mass culture in the context of international relations (see, e.g., Thompson). Further, the idea of universality as an “inner essence” is different from the medieval idea of a “world-oriented moral and state doctrine” where religion permeated every aspect of society and no universal perspective seemed conceivable other than the commonality of religion (it is the ruling principle of the Holy Roman Empire, the Koran-based Arab empire, and Muslim Indian sultanates, the dynasties of Chinese emperors, or the Shinto theocracy in Japan [see, e.g., Curtius; Eberhard; Lombard, Keirstead; Rachoudhry]).

Critical relativism proves effective in reducing the risk of anachronism, which occurs when we forget that “the thoughts of a people distant in time or space cannot be at all deeply shared without our becoming acquainted with things and ideas important to them but of which we have no exact equivalent” (Hodgson 3). When trying to establish functional parallels between past and present, it often happens that coincidental and polygenetic recurrences are mistakenly set on the same path of diachronic development and it happens equally often that modern categories of criticism or modern critical perspectives are applied incorrectly to medieval socio-cultural phenomena. In order to clarify my argument, I focus on the concepts of originality and original text and gender and genre.

## ORIGINALITY AND ORIGINAL TEXT

In the Middle Ages, originality was a concept that can be made meaningful today by reference to the concept of *auctoritas*. That is, the concept of *auctoritas* asks us to reconsider the function of the author as a model of opposition between the general, transcendental anonymity of literary works and the overt authoriality displayed by scientific works (see Foucault 120). Artistic creativity is not defined as one’s capacity to individualize, culminating in genius, but as one’s ability to rely upon tradition and the reusing of textual heritage and commentarial history (see, e.g., Chenu; Häring; Meier; Minnis). In consequence, *auctoritas* means a wide spectrum of interrelated levels of meaning associated with authority, authorial influence, and canon, and has to do with the dialectical relationship between the author (*auctor*), the writer (*scriptor* or *compiler*), and the written text (*scriptum/scriptura*) (Zimmermann 10; see also the entry *auctor*, (*actor*, *aut(h)or*, *auctoritas*) in Teeuwen 222–23). Subverting our notion of authorship and ownership (see, e.g., Barthes), medieval literary traditions want us to get used to the idea that the

original text has hardly ever survived to our days; instead, at its place we have more or less close copies and reconstructed archetypes, which give us plausible versions of the original text. The fact that neither manuscripts nor philological works will ever replace the original emphasizes the central onto-epistemological difference between original(s) and archetype(s), the first conveying the truth of the author(s) and representing the absolute referentiality of tradition, the latter conveying a truth of copyist(s) and representing the contingent referentiality of transmission. This theory of the Ur-text—presupposing a text once existed and later split into different versions—merges with the theory of the Ur-source presupposing an inventory of concurrent oral traditions and non-written materials (anthropological motifs, folk-religious customs, cultural themes, etc.) (on various approaches to medieval texts and their study, see, e.g., Dain; Maniaci; Febvre and Martin; Nichols).

## GENDER AND GENRE

The categories of gender and genre existed in the Middle Ages as they exist today: what did not exist at that time were gender-based and genre-based perspectives, that is, the scholarly consciousness of the socio-cultural construction of masculinity and femininity and the interest in exploring the relationships between gender and creativity, identity, and genre. Once we are—and make the reader—conscious of the difference between the history of the text(s) we study and the historicity of the concepts and categories by which we try to understand those texts (Jameson ix), then we can approach the past from as many perspectives as our intellectual and academic orientations suggest to us.

The historical framework of a gender-oriented analysis of medieval literature can be found in religious dogmatic mentalities—expressions of religion based societies—and in the dynastic and succession policies through which medieval people viewed the difference between male and female (see, e.g., Brooke; Brundage; Duby; Hansen; Rouche). Feminist and queer studies theories have been lifting the veil on the challenging possibility of using the modern idea of gender to encourage innovative ways of looking at medieval literature in cultural, social, and anthropological perspectives (see, e.g., Barolini; Gaunt, *Gender*; Krueger; Vasvári). Thus, it is fruitful to study the representation of gender and the perception of identity, sexuality, and difference in medieval literature with a critical eye on new conceptual and disciplinary trends, for instance, the question of style (see, e.g., Palander-Collin on male and female style; Sandig and Selting on gender style), and the question of transgression (see, e.g., Classen). Contextualizing the representations of men and women in the medieval world, gender and cultural studies make us cognizant of the roles fictional literary characters have in transposing onto the artistic metaphorical realm the issues of everyday life. Distinguishing between language and action, we can analyze the physical and metaphysical nature of literary creations, eliminating the risk of bypassing the large charge of cultural attitudes from the classical and patriarchal

tradition: hence, sex and love, misogyny, and homosexuality—in a word, every gender-oriented issue—become literary paradigms of social changes, diffracted by the artistic intent of the texts (see, e.g., Bloch on misogyny; Ferrante on women's role). I use the term “diffraction” (borrowed from textual criticism and originating in physics; see Beggiato; Contini) because it helps to describe the refractive cultural index of medieval texts. That is, the chronological and intellectual distance we have to cover to decipher and restore the original message of the authors, balancing the available documentary sources with our own spectrum of expertise, conjecturing—without contaminating—the most suitable interpretations (on the use of potentially misleading vocabulary, see Gottlieb; see also Gaunt, “Straight Minds”).

The notion of cultural diffraction proves valid also for genre studies: medieval writers obeyed in every respect the rules of rhetoric, which means they were interested in problems and issues concerning style, register, literary and metrical forms; however, the concept of genre has modern—Romantic, to be precise—origins. Consequently, it is of limited use to apply a system of classification on medieval literary production and thus matching current standards of aesthetics: an imposition of modern literary categories upon medieval genres makes sense only when they are considered as speculative instruments capable of creating taxonomies of strategies of definition (see, e.g., Croce; Dubrow; Le Goff and Schmitt; Martiny). Instead, systematization must be based on first-hand data, borne out by ancient primary and secondary sources (medieval textbooks, treatises, encyclopedic manuals, etc.) (see, e.g., Lindberg-Wada; Mace). The latter approach also affects the complexity of specific traits we normally isolate to characterize fields of research: concepts such as hybridity, contamination, or crossover do not have today the same range of meaning and significance they had in medieval culture and literature. Today they provide paradigms of and for aesthetics applicable to the notion of trans- phenomena: translation and postcolonial theories, genetic and racial issues, the idea of nation, community, and belonging, multiperspectivism, blend of styles, etc. This dialectical impulse toward transformation and multigeneric communication and the intentionally experimental attitude did not exist in the medieval mindset. Instead, it was dominated by determinism while hybridity, contamination, and crossover related chiefly to *translatio studii* (i.e., the acquisition of Latin and Greek cultural legacy by the medieval Christian world through the systematic moralization of pagan sources; however, the re-functionalization of knowledge on the basis of specific local paradigms is typical of all medieval mentalities) and vernacularization processes (the birth of vernacular tongues as a mix of cultisms, dialectalisms, and foreign words), irregularity, and monstrosity (the infraction of highly standardized social and literary codes), textual interference, unconscious blends of models and influences (the contact phenomena responsible for intercultural circulation and contamination of literary themes and genres) (see, e.g., Budick and Iser; Di Girolamo; Dundes; Galderisi; Stagi).

Given that in medieval literature we can observe the tendency to thematize genres according to fixed rules of style and register, the (post)modern association between genre and gender can have a major impact when applied to thematic sub-categories defined on the bases of formal and function devices (e.g., women writers and didactic literature, the treatment of sodomy in poetry, sexual activities in hagiography, etc.). If we consider genres as a space-time continuum it becomes clear how our understanding of the past can be improved by today's cultural paradigms which rest "variously on the native critical tradition or on parallel types of material from other cultures ... to show wide variations in level of sophistication" (Birch 4). And it becomes also clear how many new aspects of interest our culturally-oriented analysis can reveal when examining medieval texts from contemporary perspectives in order to clarify them synchronically, to define their cultural implications as a complex of synchronous phenomena that make the subsequent traditions significant (Birch 4; see also, e.g., De Capdevila, Cassagnes, Cocaud, Godineau; Gaunt; Jones; Treharne; Whetter).

The multicultural and multilingual nature of medieval societies is responsible for shaping the syncretic and encyclopedic nature of knowledge (see, e.g., Eco). For example, medieval Spain was called the "land of the three religions" (Islam, Judaism, and Christianity), because of the more or less peaceful coexistence of and interaction between the three religions (see Castro; see also Eco, *Il Medioevo*). The multi-ethnic nature of the medieval world helps explaining the multilingual character of medieval societies, where different languages were employed in different fields of life, that is, at different levels of society (local, national, and global), and with further diversifications in relation to public and private uses, aulic and popular styles, etc. For example, the multilingualism of medieval Indian literature (see, e.g., Ayyappa Paniker) or the competition between Latin, the chancellery language and vernaculars in Romanic Europe (see, e.g., Foster; Wright). The movement of goods and people promotes the exchange of information and ideas and this circulation on a horizontal plane corresponds to an increase in the quantity and depth of general and local knowledge, because the absorption of foreign data through intentional incorporations and spontaneous sedimentations thickens the multilayer strata of complex synchronic superpositions and their chronological sequence. The mechanical process of gathering heterogeneous materials, their selection through a more or less conscious critically oriented collation—that operates at various levels within autochthonous traditions and ways of transmission—allow us to formulate hypotheses on the reigning literary canon(s) during a given period in a given place. Needless to say, any medieval canon(s) respond to norms of ethical validity and doctrinal authoritativeness rather than to norms of aesthetic taste, feelings, and originality. The pedagogical canon of the Middle Ages (Guillory 72; see also Mancini) of themes, motifs, and forms between literary creation and imitation needs to be examined as a diasystemic network of contact phenomena, negotiating the active and passive reception of materials in different contexts. This fusion of horizons in the past fosters new



horizons of investigation today, promoting the synthesis of textual and contextual information (see, e.g., Murdoch), “inner” and “outer” aspects of the literary work (Odmark 60) toward a non-neutral but equilibrated aesthetics of literariness (see, e.g., Busby, *Codex*; Calin; Patterson).

Umberto Eco suggests that “perhaps what our postmodern era has in common with the Middle Ages is the voracious impulse toward encyclopedic pluralism” (89). This may be true as far as the ambition of universal knowledge is concerned, but we cannot forget that postmodern pluralism has to do with the atomization of information and hybridism in knowledge caused by mass culture and that “as inflation hyperpluralizes the social and political order, it progressively negates cultural pluralism” (Newman 135). While medieval culture was pervaded by the aspiration to attain to a greater universality through systematic compilation and epitomization, contemporary culture favors sectorial hyperspecialization which risks transforming our stock of knowledge into an incongruous checkerboard of skills when in fact culture is only meaningful as a whole and as a system of interaction dynamics. That is why the study of the Middle Ages particularly benefits from scholars’ multiple areas of expertise and their varied methodological tools.

## THE CONTEXTUAL AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY OF MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

Given that my approach to the study of the Middle Ages is literature based, it is important to assess the centrality of the text, that is, the literary work and its author; when, where and why it was written; how it is formally structured, and—only in the last instance—its past and present significance. If we ground our understanding of medieval texts on their contemporary reception, we fail to understand the changeable qualities and unpredictable metamorphosis of the text through the ages. For example, the romantic approach to the Middle Ages produced an error that, receiving the imprint of initiators as influential as Goethe (*Götz von Berlichingen*, 1773), François-René de Chateaubriand (*Le Génie du Christianisme*, 1802), and Walter Scott (*Ivanhoe*, 1820) ended up permeating the entire European culture of the nineteenth century (see Chandler). The romantic sentiment of “national ruins” led to consider medieval authors as they were inspired forerunners of modern historical and artistic criticism, instead of considering medieval texts as the early monuments, the emergent witnesses of linguistic and literary consciousness, still far from possessing the features—and correlated ideological implications—of national literature(s) (see, e.g., Boos; Durand-Le Guern; Klinger; Simons).

In my opinion, the range of theoretical and methodological tools contemporary scholars should have to study medieval literature extends over several disciplinary fields: philology, history, philosophy, and sociology, and the study of literature. Philology reconstructs and studies the originary status of a specific text in

comparison with its present status; history locates that text in its geopolitical framework; sociology enquires into the social parameters of the period; philosophy elucidates the speculative background beyond it; and the study of literature helps evaluate to what extent a work accomplishes its overall artistic and/or aesthetic goals. It is clear that these areas are interdependent and refer repeatedly to the same bibliographic resources and methodological devices; however, when these different perspectives converge to illuminate common ground, the object(s) of study can be examined in its/their full complexity. Hence, it is also clear why no merely literary (i.e., aesthetic) analysis can provide an adequate characterization of the multifaceted nature of the text, without first establishing the truth of its *littera*, the circumstances that generated it, and its intent.

The systemic and inter- and cross-disciplinary perspective to the study of the medieval world is the starting point for my contextual and comparatist approach. I postulate this approach in order to emphasize the not so infrequent proclivity to look at philological practices as old-fashioned remains of nineteenth-century historicism (see, e.g., Guillén 7). The space-time map of the Middle Ages must be regarded as a supra-boundary network of geopolitical realities and human activities (the Neo-latin domain, the Slavic world, the Mediterranean Arab mosaic, the Far East territories, etc.), to be described in its chief respects as a referential interplay between the singular (specific elements of every single area) and the iterative (polygenic and/or contact phenomena), and the paradigm they represent within the overall macro-system. Philology shows us the laws and strategies for reading medieval texts, going into the activity of producing a critical edition based on direct source materials: the reliability of our critical work sets forth the basic premises for any aesthetic assessment. If it is as obvious as accurate to say that books are the foundation stone of literature, it is equally important to remind ourselves of the seemingly banal but crucial point that during the Middle Ages all books (i.e., manuscripts) were handwritten and hand painted. Talking about the standards of production and the dynamics of circulation of books before the age of printing we must leave aside the question of reproducibility of the work of art and shift our focus to the singularity of the work of art, because “language stabilization and stylistic idealization ... are the blowback of the printing press” (Bernstein 99; see also Chaytor).

The emphasis on the “uniqueness” of the medieval manuscript does not depend on the small number of exemplars copied by hand, but on the unique morphostructural facies and the unique errors every single handwritten exemplar displays, even when it is copied by the same scribe. This is what we refer to as phenomenology of the original and phenomenology of the copy. The variability of medieval texts is a factor of relevance in our understanding of medieval literature, because the characteristics of each text and manuscript gives us precise information about the cultural milieu that moulded and enjoyed them. However, although the “praise of the variant” as argued by Bernard Cerquiglini for a “new philology” is legitimate and the notion of the “manuscript as artifact” carried out by codicology

and material philology is also useful, they cannot replace the traditional pursuits of traditional philology (i.e., traditional textual criticism) (see, e.g., Busby, *Towards*; Pickens). The main goal of philologists should be that of drawing on the most stable textual formations from multiple scriptorial epiphenomena aiming towards an “equilibrium of the text.” Although this route is artificial because it results from a *a posteriori* methodologies, it is not arbitrary because it is based on physical and empirical data from text traditions. Thus it allows specialists and non-specialists a coherent and coherently organized model to study and read. Today philology rethinks the too general hierarchical abstractions of Lachmannism and Bédierism (i.e., the first too orthodox in assuming the unconditional validity of lower- and higher-level system standards of transmission, the latter too empirical in idealizing the single best manuscript) (see Timpanaro) in terms of composite interpretive models and editorial strategies.

Historiographical scholarship provides documentary evidence of texts and authors in a verifiable space-time framework. Against naïve anti-historicist assumptions and anachronistic interpretations of the past, the historicity of texts corroborated by documentary evidence is a guarantee of authenticity and objectivity; nevertheless, since history is not an exact science and, like all disciplines in the humanities and social sciences undergoes constant revisions and improvements, “critical perspectivism leads us to recognize that different epochs and civilizations have each their own foundation premises and their own world-views” (Auerbach 18; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine; see also Bachtin; Lerer). This historico-hermeneutic approach for the study of medieval literature is not complete without interpreting and contextualizing the text philosophically—and theologically—since “we can see the same linkage between philosophy and theology in the Middle Ages” (Hegel 80) with focus on aesthetics: philosophy highlights the intertwinement and tension of spirit (ideas) and matter (forms), human thinking (inspiration and motivation), and human action (work of art), and paradigms and paradoxes (general theories and single events). And aesthetics concentrates specifically on art, culture, and nature, the three regarded as mirrors of human interrelations in society. Therefore, if we agree to consider medieval texts as interactive systems, the theoretical knowledge of the structure of reality improves our polyvalent attitude toward a better understanding of the openness of the text to a plurality of meaning possibilities across time(s) and space(s) (see Heidegger’s discussion of temporality and historicity; for an example of the application of postcolonial theory to medieval culture, see, e.g., Lampert-Weissig).

The problem of multiple meanings embedded in a text or texts is the object of literary scholarship. Thus, the study of literature is the theoretical backbone of any scholarly investigation and raises epistemological and aesthetic issues concerning both the nature of a text (its genesis, its stylistic features, the author’s intent, etc.) and the life of that text (readers’ and critics’ horizon of expectation, exegetical theories and practices, etc.). The object of critical inquiry is the literariness of the

text and literariness is closely related to the literary object and its literary function; no more than any other literary entities can medieval handwritten texts be taken as perfect examples of what Gérard Genette defines “palimpsest”: literally, they are manuscripts or pieces of writing on which later writing has been superimposed on effaced earlier writing, often with the remnants of erased writing still visible. Metaphorically, palimpsests are the result of multiple sedimentations of literary and non-literary material in a trans-textual form (i.e., a text in relation with other texts) (see Pioletti 249–59; see also Avalle; Kolakowski). However, the first and foremost aspect of the study of medieval literature has to single out is not the out-text dynamics of influence, intermediation, and contamination, but the in-text transfer of meaning from the literal to the symbolic through the allegorical/exemplary function of the narrative discourse. In the end, the most fruitful literary approach to medieval texts is likely to be one that gives preference to traditional rhetorical hermeneutics centered on the theory and practice of literary interpretation through the study of language and modern rhetorical criticism centered on the ideologically charged construction of reality through symbolic language.

The composite and palimpsestic nature of medieval literature calls for multi-perspective approaches, conceptual eclecticism, and methodological and systemic (empirical) pragmatism. After conceptualizing the study of literature as the act of dealing with the “textual event” in order to bring to the fore all those ontological and phenomenological elements which allow for reconstructing the nature and life of texts, that is, the complex structure that lies behind the physical/artistic object, it is clear that the most effective analysis we can perform should harmonize the above outlined approach into a combination of disciplines, fields, and approaches (see, e.g., Jauss; Pocock). There has been such work—within a contextual framework (e.g., Locatelli; Tötösy de Zepetnek)—in the discipline of comparative literature and the field of comparative cultural studies. I posit that a comparative cultural approach to medieval literature is advantageous to provide deeper insight into the dialectical relationship between texts considered as works of art and vehicles of meaning in a synchronic and diachronic perspective.

## NEW MEDIAEVALISMS

If we conceive the Middle Ages as hypersystems and medieval literature as hypertexts, we understand the potential of new media technology. For example, through electronic editing of historical documents and literary works we could set up virtually limitless e-libraries and collections, with high-definition digital interfaces and high standards of legibility; we could obtain maximum amount of storage with minimum loss of (meta)information; we would optimize the synchronous modes of e-consultation and real-time (meta)data sharing. The recreation of the past has always appeared as a multifaceted phenomenon and today medieval revivals are heavily anchored in mass and new media culture. It

is not by chance that while architecture played a crucial role in disseminating the neo-gothic paradigm, the principal architectural (i.e., aesthetic and ideological) contributions to the (re)construction of today neo-medieval scenarios have to be sought in virtual reality (high-tech and video games). Following Karl Fugelso I suggest the notion of “new mediaevalisms” as a syncretic concept to study syntactically and visually the plural manifestations of medieval literature and culture in (inter)mediality and digital humanities. Gathering many genres and media, the study of medieval literature and culture as a broad phenomenon is capable of bridging methodological gaps and overcoming disciplinary barriers (see also Metzger; Workman).

### INSTITUTIONAL PARAMETERS OF THE STUDY OF MEDIEVAL LITERATURE AND CULTURE

For the study of medieval literature and culture, the comparative cultural studies approach is able to provide both vertical and horizontal insight into dialectical relationships; however, the perspective must remain with focus on “literature.” In keeping with the above outlined postulates, team work could handle multi-tasking enterprises of a wide scope and form cooperative alliances with several programs and departments of the same university or other/foreign institutions. The (pluri-) qualifications of practitioners in medieval studies ought to be accompanied with a commitment to cross-disciplinarity and cross-institutional short-term and long-term strategies in research and scholarship involving the mobility of scholars, global partnerships, digital databases, etc. To date, institutional structures of the study of medieval literature rarely foster interdisciplinary cooperation in supra-departmental organization. Interdisciplinary and inter-departmental co-operation would be important because of the multi-ethnic, multireligious, and multilingual medieval world ought to compels scholars to acquire in-depth knowledge of several cultures, encouraging academic and intellectual exchange. Further, humanities programs ought to require students to take some courses on medieval topics (history, literature, philosophy, art, etc.).

On the institutional level, I list selected centers where research and teaching occurs in the comparative study of the Middle Ages: in the United States notable are the Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies and the Institute for Medieval Studies at Indiana University; in Canada there is the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto, a program that includes resources of the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies; in the United Kingdom there are the Institute for Medieval Studies at the University of Leeds and the Institute for Medieval Research at the University of Nottingham; in Continental Europe there are the Centre d'Études Supérieures de Civilisation Médiévale at the University of Poitiers, the Centro Europeo di Studi sulla Società Cavalleresca in San Gimignano, the Interdisziplinärer Arbeitskreis Mediävistik at the University of Mainz, and the Mediävistischer Arbeitskreis of the Herzog August Library in

Wolfenbüttel; in Japan the Historiographical Institute at the University of Tokyo collects and researches material from ancient times until the Meiji Restoration and the International Research Center for Japanese Studies in Kyoto is an inter-university institute devoted to Japanese culture including medieval culture.

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# Comparative Cultural Studies and Linguistic Hybridities in Literature

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Elke Sturm-Trigonakis

**Abstract:** In her article “Comparative Cultural Studies and Linguistic Hybridities in Literature.” Sturm-Trigonakis takes her point of departure with Goethe’s notion of *Weltliteratur* and proposes that owing to globalization, literature is undergoing a change in process, content, and linguistic practice. The framework Sturm-Trigonakis constructs is based on comparative cultural studies and its methodology of the contextual (systemic and empirical) approach to the study of literature and culture and the concepts of the macro- and micro-system. In order to exemplify her proposition, Sturm-Trigonakis discusses selected literary texts which show characteristics of linguistic hybridity, the concept of “in-between,” and transculturality, thus located in new *Weltliteratur*.

## INTRODUCTION

In 1827 Goethe inaugurated the age of *Weltliteratur* with his observation that national literature has lost importance and must now be substituted by world literature (Goethe qtd. in Eckermann, *Gespräche* 174). Goethe’s ambiguous inheritance has provoked a plethora of interpretations since then (with regard to current work on this, see, e.g., Birus; Koch; Lamping; Pizer; Prendergast; Schmeling). Two aspects of Goethe’s notion, namely world literature as a process of communication and exchange between various national literatures and the anchorage of world literatures in the economic and technical context of Europe at the outset of the nineteenth century offer a common denominator with the contemporary age of globalization. Goethe did not question the existence of national literatures, but today matters are more complicated as we are confronted with a boom of linguistically and culturally hybrid texts to which the monocultural methodological tools and national canon-based aesthetic criteria generally do not offer an adequate approach. Thus my proposition that a new approach is necessary to locate and analyze texts found in what I designate as a “new *Weltliteratur*,” texts which have the following characteristics: on a formal level they contain code switching—not necessarily between standardized national languages, but also dialects—and on the thematic level they negotiate issues of a globalized world—that is, they perform the dynamics between the global and the local as far as the fictive personal, spatial, and temporal dimensions are concerned

(see Nassehi; Sturm-Trigonakis, *Comparative Cultural, Global playing*, “Global Playing”). My discussion of linguistically hybrid texts in contemporary world literature and the construction of a new *Weltliteratur* is based on the framework of comparative cultural studies with its methodology of the contextual approach to the study of literature and culture (see, e.g., Schmidt; Tötösy de Zepetnek, “From Comparative Literature,” “The New Humanities”; Villanueva; on the concepts of the micro- and macro-systems of culture and literature, see, e.g., Apter; Schmidt; Wallerstein).

## FORMS AND FUNCTIONS OF MULTILINGUALISM IN HYBRID TEXTS

Traditionally, code switching in literature has carried negative connotations and lingual *puritas* was the rhetoric ideal (see, e.g., Eco; Forster; Steiner). At the end of the twentieth century, however—owing to decolonization, (im)migration, and an increasingly globalized economic environment—interlingualism (i.e., code switching within the same text) has become a widespread phenomenon, often with an anti-imperial or anti-colonial intention. Azade Seyhan differentiates three main phases in multicultural texts: within a situation of diaspora, in the first stage, authors usually express themselves in their first language describing particular or collective themes in relation to their (im)migration, in the second phase they often change to the language of their “host country” focusing on “an aesthetically inscribed field of social observation, critique, and innovations and use of the target language” (107). In the third stage we find phenomena of pidginization and Creolization where texts produce a “borderland of different languages, rites of passage, and negotiations of myth and reality, memory and presence, madness and reason, and factual account and revolutionary experimentations in language and style” (Seyhan 107). The examples of hybrid texts of new world literature(s) I discuss belong to the third stage as they have overcome the “writing back” to/of postcolonial literature, as well as the longing for a lost mother country and substituting clearly shaped inscriptions with a sovereign and often playful negotiation of nomadic existence between different worlds and languages.

For the construction of a framework of the new *Weltliteratur*, based on Ernst Rudin’s research of Chicano texts, I use a hierarchy of description from single word entries to whole passages in a second language, where the former is the most usual form of code switching and consists of nouns up to 95% (Rudin 79). Typical single word entries refer to food or items of clothing, as in Sandra Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street*, in a children’s song: “Cold *frijoles*/Mimi, Michael, Moe.../Your Mama’s *frijoles*” (Cisneros 37) or in the Chicano novel *Trini* by Estela Portillo Trambley where references to family such as *mamá* or *papá* but also pet names like *pollito* or *chinita* always appear in Spanish in the English text (Portillo Trambley 17, 27, 31). Generally speaking, vocabulary from the family context or other relationships, religion, or collective memory marks cultural difference within a heterocultural ambiance and thus has a strong tendency to

remain in the first language. Further, as a synecdoche, it transports the world of the second language into that of the first, creating a “third space” in the sense proposed by Homi K. Bhabha.

Extreme acculturation is reached with whole passages in a second language, for example in the way the German Turkish author Feridun Zaimoglu narrates in his novel *Abschaum. Die Geschichte des Ertan Ongun* with northern German argot and not translated Turkish phrases. Similar to many Chicano texts, this poetic strategy, at first sight, suggests a high degree of authenticity (see, e.g., 98). However, in reality it is nothing but a pseudo-mimetic lingual strategy and thus an aesthetic construction represented by fictional protagonists with a multiple personality and a highly differentiated language competence (see Bogdal 238–40). Further, this sort of pseudo-colloquial language questions Western stereotyped ideas of oral narrative art, for example in African or Arabic contexts as it places pseudo-oral style on the same hierarchical level as canonized writing registers of European standard languages and thus undermines their dominance. Specifically literary forms with a synecdochical function are meta-multilingualism and transtextuality. The first means “sprechen über Sprachen” (“speak about languages”) (Sturm-Trigonakis, *Global playing* 133), that is, talking about languages in the widest sense, for example by informing the reader about the language of a certain scene in the text without using a second language explicitly. For example, in *A House for Mr Biswas* by V.S. Naipaul, the reader always learns whether a dialogue is realized in English or Hindi and this is part of the narrative discourse as it underlines positions within the intra-textual world and explains relations between the different fictional persons. Other texts thematize the extra-textual lingual situation, thus taking on an autoreferential and metanarrative character of which the texts by the Algerian Assia Djebar are paradigmatic because of the lingual relations between Berber, Arabic, and French. With regard to transtextuality, multilingual authors have access to texts in different languages and this access can mean not only intimate knowledge about other literary systems, but can also dislocate canonized texts as in the case of Salman Rushdie’s short stories *East, West* or in *Satanic Verses* through persiflage.

In order to facilitate the process of communication, most of these texts offer a kind of translation mechanism within their poetic discourse, for example, by explicit translation of the secondary language interferences in footnotes, in a glossary, or by paraphrasing them indirectly. The most extreme case is refusal to communicate by non translation. For example, in Martin Walser’s *Augenblick der Liebe* and Antonio Muñoz Molina’s *Carlota Fainberg*, the reader is confronted with English as secondary language in long passages which are not translated, but, nevertheless, equal a modus of interaction by means of a certain context, allusions, and connotations (see Boback 78). In the last few decades, the general acceptance of bi- and multilingualism in literary texts has grown perhaps owing to the attractive elaboration of globalization issues.

## THE DISCOURSE OF GLOBALIZATION, TRANSNATIONALISM, AND REGIONALISM

It has become commonplace to locate phenomena of globalization in the dynamic space between transnational nomadicity and patterns of reevaluation of regional or local cultural patterns (see, e.g. Nassehi; Nethersole). In literary texts, this oscillation between “McDonaldization” on the one hand and the acceptance of heterogeneity on the other can be explored in fictional biographies, in settings like borderlands or megacities, and finally, in constructions of time. One important manifestation of globalization is the extensive mobility of ever larger groups, be it refugees, (im)migrants, or tourists and this mobility impacts not only the individual but also society. Marriage, for example, gives occasion for the start of a new life in Monica Ali’s novel *Brick Lane*, where the protagonist Nazneen, coming from a little village in Bangladesh to get married in London, evolves from an existence as a shadow of her husband to an increasingly independent woman who takes care of the family income and even decides to stay with her daughters in London when her husband moves back to Bangladesh.

Exile is another relevant trope in linguistically hybrid texts in literature. In the short story “Orbiting” from Bharati Mukherjee’s *The Middleman and Other Stories*, the young woman, Rindy, introduces her new partner, Ro, to her parents: he is a political refugee from Afghanistan and reveals to Rindy another image of the U.S.: “When I’m with Ro I feel I’m looking at America through the wrong end of a telescope. He makes it sound like a police state, with sudden raids, papers, detention centers, deportations, and torture and death waiting in the wings,” she comments (66). Another member of her family represents the common U.S.-American citizen: “He thought only Americans had informed political opinion—other people staged coups out of spite and misery” (74). In texts such as this, the established asymmetrical centre-periphery-relation is devalued in the sense that the Western hemisphere appears as decadent and alienated and its pseudo-superiority is unmasked by the behaviour of the fictive figures. Another type of global nomads search for work or leave their countries for studies abroad and a wide range of texts contain stories and tales about such (im)migration, for example in Michael Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost*. Conflicts appear often not as a “clash of civilizations,” that is, as a gap between own behavioral patterns and others, but the protagonists become misfits within themselves, because they inhabit a locus of in-between marked by alienation and distance from both the original and the host culture, including the two languages. Generally, problems of identity play a minor role in the texts as identity is supposed to be a flexible and dynamic process which is realized according to the circumstances.

The shift towards smaller societal entities than the nation-state towards regionalism, localism, or religious communities has been stated as a contrary tendency to globalization (see, e.g., Dahrendorf 22). Cultural practices manifest themselves in food, clothes, religions, and traditional feasts, for which the language



of origin is almost always used in order to mark a difference from the dominant cultural space, sometimes playing ironically with stereotypes of exoticism: “So if I wanted the additional personality bonus of an Indian past, I would have to create it,” argues Karim Amir in Hanif Kureishi’s *Buddha of Suburbia* (213) when he perceives that he can be successful as an actor in London by adopting “Indianness” as a cultural capital which sells. All these transnational biographies have in common that identity is considered as transitory and constructed consciously. Seldom is the question of assimilating processes forced upon the protagonists; instead, in their majority, the stories offer narrations about individuals who are capable to adjust themselves according to new environments and without giving up their personality thus living their global existence in interaction with their local state of “in-between.” Although there is always a certain potential for conflict inherent in processes of (im)migration, the narrative discourse often presents a playful, ironic, or satirical elaboration of this theme and this marks a decisive difference from postcolonial texts (see, e.g., Díaz).

Comparable to the relational character of identities, spaces are also relational to social environments: they are mental constructions wherein fictional persons can be located and whose boundaries, in many cases, are contrary to those of nation-states. This is the case, for example, in the Caribbean area, in the Mexican-U.S.-American borderlands, or in the triangle between Switzerland, Southwest Germany, and Alsace in France. The old European metropolis, but even more contemporary megacities, too, are places with an international population. Distances have become an irrelevant factor and although most people are inscribed in local systems of relation and context, they have virtual access to global systems by electronic media and/or they live in “polygamy of place” (Beck 43) traveling around the world, be it for professional reasons, be it (im)migration, or be it for tourism (see Ong). Thus, fictional representations of world cities such as Berlin and Istanbul in *Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde* by Emine Sevgi Özdamar, Paris in *French Dream* by Mohamed Hmoudane, London in *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali and in *Buddha of Suburbia* by Hanif Kureishi, or in Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* inscribe/insert these cities in a polycentric rhizomatic world system where one place can easily be substituted by another (see Castells), invalidating or even reversing traditional center-periphery hierarchies of location, for instance between the suburbs and the center of London in *Buddha of Suburbia* or between the former empire’s metropolis London and colonized cities such as Mumbai or Dhaka in *Satanic Verses* or *Brick Lane*. Thus, the other side of the coin of the “polygamy of place” is *atopia* for which the airport—as yet another example—as a liminal space is perhaps the best paradigm (see, e.g., Muñoz Molina).

One of the most relevant theoretical configurations for my discussion is the concept of “borderlands.” While originally applied to the Mexico-U.S. frontier as a paradigm of place, culture, and cognition, the concept is now used to analyze other space and culture situations (see, e.g., Balkan; Mignolo and Tlostanova). In Djébar’s *Les Nuits de Strasbourg*, for example, the reader is confronted with a

plethora of persons from somewhere else, who have all transferred their histories, languages, and cultures into the city of Strasbourg and create there transitory, individual “third space” of their own, sometimes overlapping one with another, sometimes fighting with each other (about the Mexican and U.S. border, see, e.g., Herrera). Generally speaking, the literature of new world literature(s) is about polycentric spaces which contain simultaneously—in reality or virtually—other (urban or other) places such that the exclusivity of determined places is suspended and every kind of positioning is characterized by contingency. Every symbolic appropriation of space creates dehierarchized, transnational, and atopic arrangements which correspond with the derangement of established Western perceptions of time. Reinhart Koselleck introduced the metaphor *Zeitschichten* (“strata of time”) as a concept for processes of mixture, compression, and acceleration of time under globalized conditions of living in order to describe perceptions of time beyond the dichotomy between linear and cyclic time. As most texts in new world literatures introduce real or mythic strata of past times as a form of alterity thus suspending the linearity of the narrative, the idea of strata of time reveals the overlapping and gearing together of different times, the “contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous” (“Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen”) (Koselleck 126). In Chicano texts, for example, the past is sometimes a mythical primeval construction implanted in the present in order to explain contemporary stages or to get orders to act now, as in Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* where the Aztec gods and the mythic homeland of the Mexica, Aztlán, functions as a foundation for a new configuration of the *mestiza*, revaluating the established historical discourse: “The Aztec nation fell not because *Malinali* (*La Chingada*) interpreted for and slept with Cortés, but because the ruling elite had subverted the solidarity between men and woman and between noble and commoner” (34; see also Lahens). Thus, Anzaldúa deconstructs history from a feminist perspective and offers an alternative interpretation of the mythic betrayal of Mexico committed by Malinche through her relationship with the conqueror Cortés (see also Balkan). Thus, established national history is displaced and deconstructed and, instead, it is presented as an alternative concept of time, one which allows for complexity and against trivialization through simplification of time structures. Texts in new world literature are characterized by transnational fictional persons, polycentric spaces and borderlands, and transtemporality.

## NEW WORLD LITERATURE, LITERARY SYSTEM, AND TAXONOMY

Following the above discussion, it is clear that most texts of the new world literature function operationally as a semi-permeable literary system, as “a micro-system within a macro-system,” that is, “in an autological and self-referential way” as Siegfried J. Schmidt notes (“Literary Studies” 8) and, as a consequence, capable of offering intersections with similar systems within a rhizomatic, non hierarchical macro-system. There is an overlap, to some extent, with postcolonial

literature, since texts such as Kureishi's *Buddha of Suburbia* or Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* could figure in both systems, but this is not the case of Chinua Achebe's classical *Things Fall Apart*, for example. This is because the latter moves thematically in a local dimension and because it is characterized by the writing-back-strategy of postcoloniality. In a country with a rich diversity of languages, such as India, however, a taxonomical approach becomes rather complicated and scholars are trying to define an ephemeral "Indian" literature through "unity in diversity" and taking into account the individuality of diverse literatures, as Amiya Dev suggests (see also Patil, "Comparative Literature"). This happens because similar asymmetrical hierarchies are created in view of the experience of colonialism. Consequently, scholars such as Linda Hutcheon and Mario J. Valdés and Anand Balwant Patil ("The Rebirth") claim multiple strategies for cultural studies including experiences from the discipline of comparative literature using Goethe's concept of *Weltliteratur* as a universal point of departure. With regard to the system of "postcolonial literature," the concept of "new *Weltliteratur*" represents a sub-category for contemporary texts with specific aesthetic criteria beyond monocultural or multicultural national literature.

The same can be stated for the problematic German terms *Migrationsliteratur* ("migration literature") or *interkulturelle Literatur* ("intercultural literature") (see, e.g. Chiellino; Howard), since the first is based on extra-literary criteria and often causes the blurring of approaches between the author-based language competence and the performance of the text. Hence, for example novels such as Muñoz Molina's *Carlota Fainberg* written by an established author without a migration background, the novel's designation as *Migrationsliteratur* is misplaced with regard to the production of the text nor corresponds to the novel thematically (on the problem of taxonomy see Tötösy de Zepetnek, "Interculturalism"). The second term, *interkulturelle Literatur* starts from a binarism of two clearly shaped containers of cultural paradigms, which, at least as far as the second immigrant generation is concerned, lacks reason for existence. Both of these terms—and that contain ideological and political intentions—create hegemonic relations by classifying hybrid literature as "minority" texts compared to the monolingual and monoculture majority. Thus, there is an overlapping space between any kind of (im)migration literature and new world literature. In German scholarship further approach is the "Literatur der Globalisierung" (see Schmeling, Schmitz-Emans, Walstra), which intends to establish a system of texts with particular focus on processes of globalization. Since the thematic approach here is distributed in linguistically hybrid texts, as well as in monolingual ones, clearly the common space with texts of new world literature excludes fiction written in one language only, even with the elaboration of globalized circumstances. Nevertheless, both paradigms—new world literature and "Literatur der Globalisierung," as well as "comparative cultural studies"—complement and inspire each other because of their comparative and cultural methodology and their value as a cognitive model which allows identification of symbolic representations of globalization.

Mads Thomsen Rosendahl's concept of "constellations based on formal and thematic similarities in international canons" (140) which he exemplifies by (im)migrant writers and traumatic literature, offers the advantage of being grounded on an empirical basis "connecting less circulated literature with the most internationally canonized works ... [with emphasis on] details of literary history and the identity of the international literary system" (141–42). However, in my view the problem is the focus on canonization: if a text must be first canonized on a national level in order to become part of the international canon, many contemporary works are excluded automatically. In the framework I propose there is no intention to "reduce complexity by the use of international canonization" (Thomsen Rosendahl 142). Instead, the framework I propose allows complexity so that there would be overlapping contact zones between the two systems without leaving out—as-of-yet-non-canonized—texts.

National literatures shares no common space with new world literatures, since they are generated by excluding any form of cultural or lingual alterity and are based on a homogenizing and essentialist discourse not only in the production of literature but also in academic institutions "in such a way that the normativeness of linguistic and national traditions is undermined and the horizons of the extensive field of literature in the world are within view" as Suman Gupta underlines (144). Consequently, national literature and new world literature are juxtaposed as literary systems whose components are contoured by specific differences. As such, the literary system of new world literature suggests relevance as a cognitive, as well as ideological model by means of the categorization and analysis of texts with similar characteristics identified empirically on the level of performance, process, and content. Concerning the linguistic hybridity of such literature and its dynamics between the global and local in thematics, the theoretical framework best able to analyze them is Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek's framework of comparative cultural studies with its methodology of the contextual (systemic and empirical) approach. The claim to offer a universally applicable configuration leads directly to the question of whether the framework equips scholars in the humanities with adequate tools to investigate historical aspects and whether there is a common denominator with a historiography that transgresses the nation based paradigm of the nineteenth century and current approaches still adhering to some, if not all, of the national paradigm (see, e.g., Sucur).

## HISTORICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE NEW WORLD LITERATURE

In 1958 Fernand Braudel's idea of the *longue durée* shaped the perception of repetitive structural patterns in history and of the existence of an *économie-monde*, a concept which was completed by Immanuel Wallerstein's notion of the macro-system in 1974 with its "the core-periphery-antinomy" (*The Modern World System*, "The Scholarly Mainstream"; see also Apter). Following Wallerstein, Samir Amin differentiates three phases in "the imperialist conquest of the planet"

(7): the first consists of the “conquest of the Americas,” the second “manifested itself in the colonial subjection of Asia and Africa,” and the third “was encouraged by the collapse of the Soviet system and of the regimes of populist nationalism in the Third World” (7–10; see also Sloterdijk). Similarly, Erhard Schüttpelz investigates the relationship between global mobility and world literature(s). He proposes a universal system of five different globalizations: 1) the spread of humanity out of Africa, 2) the period until 1500, 3) European expansion with a shift from Asian superiority to European and from Mediterranean to the Northern Atlantic world system, 4) the climax of European territorial imperialism between 1880 and 1917 with the mobility of products and peoples, and 5) the period of contemporary globalization (341–45). These five strata of time (in Koselleck’s sense) are not to be perceived as evolutionary stages, but, rather, as processes characterized by different forms of global entanglement and mobility, all of which have left a cultural legacy, relevant today: the first stratum, for example, left shamanism, magic, or rites of initiation and metamorphoses and these are found in world bestsellers like *Harry Potter* (346).

Following Schüttpelz, Thomas Geider underlines the advantage of a universal-historical perception of world literatures: he identifies *ecumenes*, that is, demographic, linguistic, or cultural subsystems and links them to any kind of literary material (361–63). Hence, world literature can be defined—beyond the qualitative and quantitative approach—as communication in Goethe’s sense, as an open discursive space, containing, for instance, African oral literatures before 1850 and grounded in the historicity of Schüttpelz’s model of strata (367). Koselleck adds another operational differentiation by separating the history of singular events (*Ereignisgeschichte*) from the history of occurrences, which renders possible the repetition of events (*Zeitschichten* 231). By discerning these repetitive structures, history is not only explicable *ex post* but, to a certain degree, can be predicted because of the knowledge of determined structures (*Zeitschichten* 323). Thus, we are able to differentiate between various temporal dimensions, for example the consequences of one single event for a concerned person or consequences of the same event for the economic, social, or juridical system (*Zeitschichten* 329–30). This operational approach also supports the analysis of literary texts: Franco Moretti’s “graphs, maps and trees” and his “distant reading” demonstrate the existence of durable literary structures (64) claiming that “this is what comparative literature could be, if it took itself seriously as world literature, on the one hand, and as comparative morphology, on the other. Take a form, follow it from space to space, and study the reasons for its transformations – it is only in such a wide, non homogeneous geography that some fundamental principles of cultural history become manifest” (90; with regard to the methodology of Moretti it is interesting that he takes his clues from the work of the empirical study of literature, i.e., Schmidt, see, e.g., *Foundations*, “Literary Studies,” *Worlds*). Similar to Koselleck’s historical model, in Moretti’s model the single event elucidates the repetitive structures and vice versa and inscribes every individual

realization, for example in form of a novel or another text, into a diachronic structural system. In my context, these considerations complement the concept with a historic dimension, not only as far as the criteria for the acceptance in the system are concerned, but also with regard to the singular text as a realization of various time strata.

Ilya Troyanov's novel *The Collector of Worlds* is a fictionalization in part of the life of Richard Francis Burton (1821–1890) exploring three stages of Burton's life in British-India, in the Arabian Peninsula on a *hajj* to Mecca, and in East Africa. The framework of these three long episodes consists of a short introductory chapter, maps, a glossary, and translations of vocabulary in Hindi, Arabian, Persian, and Swahili. According to selection criteria for new world literatures, *The Collector of Worlds* would not fit, since the plot does not thematize contemporary symbolic representations of phenomena of globalization, although the text is multilingual. However, one can adjust the framework of new world literatures to modified historic dimensions with reference to earlier periods of "globalization" and this way the text can be located in new world literatures. In other words, on a formal level one notes multiplicity of languages in narration, such as Burton's servant in India, his guide into the bush in East Africa, representatives of the Ottoman empire in Mecca and Medina, etc., so that the reader is forced to construct a patchwork about the contradictory portrayal of the protagonist. Burton's flux in a space beyond social, national, or religious loyalties is also performed on the thematic level: he is refused by his English colleagues because he speaks Indian languages and imitates perfectly their mannerisms and behaviour while this provides the British with much knowledge about the colonized and their intentions (see, e.g., 91, 186–88). Burton even goes so far as to undergo circumcision and suffer prison and torture in order not to reveal himself as British. Nevertheless, he is condemned by his Indian teacher who denies him the right to change sides and to interfere in the Indian struggle against the colonizers (177). Throughout the novel, the debates and doubts of people around Burton are intent on defining his identity, whether he acts, for instance, as a spy for the British empire and not as a researcher for the Royal Geographic Society (204) or whether he is Muslim or Christian (437–38). The text leads us back to a former stage of globalization, but its main concern is the exploration of the contingency of national or religious affiliations—which of course are "imagined communities" (Anderson)—and this allows a reading of this text as an example of new world literature complemented by a historical dimension.

In conclusion, my concept of new *Weltliteratur* is built from the concepts of both the macro-system and the micro-system approaches to the study of literature and culture. Equipped with complementary expertise from historiography, the concept of new *Weltliteratur* is also useful for the analysis of texts which negotiate historical globalizations providing the scholar with a cognitive model to identify and analyse literary texts with linguistic hybridity and with analytical tools to decipher their specific characteristics of narration and language.



**Note:** The above article is a revised excerpt from Sturm-Trigonakis, Elke. *Comparative Cultural Studies and the New Weltliteratur*. Trans. Athanasia Margoni and Maria Kaiser. West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2013. Copyright release to the author.

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# Comparison and Postcoloniality

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Natalie Melas

**Abstract:** In her article “Comparison and Postcoloniality” Natalie Melas discusses comparative literature’s forgotten relation to the positivist comparative method. Comparison was Eurocentric by exclusion when it applied only to European literature and Eurocentric by discrimination when it adapted evolutionary models to place European literature at the forefront of human development. Melas argues that inclusiveness is not a sufficient response to postcolonial and multiculturalist challenges because it leaves the basis of equivalence unquestioned. The point is not simply to bring more objects under comparison, but, rather, to examine the process of comparison. Melas offers a new approach to the either/or of relativism and universalism, in which comparison is either impossible or assimilatory, by focusing instead on various forms of “incommensurability”—comparisons in which there is a ground for comparison but no basis for equivalence.

## INTRODUCTION

The qualifier “comparative” has its origin in what was considered one of the great innovations of scholarship in the nineteenth century, the comparative method. Applied across disciplines, it provided a comprehensive and systematic approach to the totality of objects in a given field and replaced the directionlessness of a merely taxonomic comparison with a positivist evolutionary teleology. When, in the course of the twentieth century, comparative literature turned away from studying all the literature in the world, its adjectival appendage lost the positivity of its reference to the comparative method. The matter of scope has now, however, reasserted itself and with it the adjective “comparative,” partly in response to the concerted critique of Eurocentrism over the last twenty years, and partly in response to the exigencies of the rapid pace of globalization in contemporary life. Whereas a temporal scheme of evolution unified the comprehensive field of an earlier positivist comparatism, a spatial scheme of sheer extensiveness undergirds this new attention to a comparative scope. Comparison, under these conditions, involves a particular form of incommensurability: space offers a ground of comparison, but no given basis of equivalence. When shifted out of the epistemic realm of knowledge, this incommensurability, I argue, does not present an obstacle to discourse or understanding. On the contrary, in the postcolonial condition, incommensurability is the necessary premise for a world in relation.

It can come as something of a surprise that comparative literature did not make its first appearance in the U.S. university after or in reaction to modern national literature departments, but in concert with them. When Charles Mills Gayley, a crucial figure in the institutionalization of comparative literature at the turn of the twentieth century, is brought to the University of California at Berkeley in 1889 to chair the Department of English and reform its curriculum, his main action is to expand and systematize the department's course offerings in order to present English literature synoptically within the broader frame of the general development of literary forms. National literature, in other words, was to be studied in a comparative context arrived at through the application of the comparative method. In Gayley's 1903 essay "What is Comparative Literature?" the adjective "comparative" indicates a scientific approach that is at once systematic and historical and a global scope for the study of literature, a scope so all-encompassing that it depends upon broad-based collaborative work. Gayley calls for the formation of a "Society of Comparative Literature," in which he imagines scholars collaboratively discovering the "common qualities of literature, scientifically determined" (86), a true and universal canon of criticism. For Gayley, the comparative method has a fundamental and dynamic historical or temporal component. It is this stress on development that most distinguishes his scientific version of comparative literature and underwrites his insistence on the inclusion of all verbal expression as the proper subject matter for the discipline. Thus, the comparative method is not limited to various interactions of European national literatures because it applies across time. Gayley's insistence that "the cradle of literary science is anthropology" is key here. The comparative method that dominated late-nineteenth-century anthropology applied across a single civilizational scale where all the world's cultures had their place in an evolutionary hierarchy progressing from the simple or "savage" to the complex and highly differentiated societies of "civilization." In what Johannes Fabian has critiqued as a "spatialization of time," "savages" were, culturally speaking, the "ancestors" of civilized man, a view that made possible the recovery of the past in the present (see also Bock). Comparison along the civilizational scale allowed all differences in kind to be measurable as differences of degree in development or growth. This temporalized comparison accounts for the consistent attention to non-Western subject matter in Gayley's work on aesthetics and comparative literature. Gayley's and Benjamin Putnam Kurtz's *An Introduction to the Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism: Lyric, Epic and Allied Forms of Poetry* (1920) covers thirty-three different "nationalities" in its survey of the Lyric poetry. Some nationalities are treated in greater depth than others (English lyric, for instance, earns 41 pages of commentary, while the Afghan, Syriac and Armenian lyric share a single page), but the aim is to produce a geographically comprehensive account of the genre.

Compared to post-World War II handbooks of comparative literature, the range and diversity of nations gathered together under the rubric of a genre in

Gayley's and Kurtz's study is remarkable. René Wellek's and Austin Warren's *Theory of Literature*, an influential handbook continuously in print since it was first published in 1942, is organized around concepts and methods with no separate heading whatsoever relating to national or cultural scope. The literatures of Europe are to such an extent given as the unified field of comparative literature that it neither requires argumentation nor prompts even the shadow of a question. Gayley's and Kurtz's *An Introduction to the Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism* and Wellek's and Warren's *Theory of Literature* thus mark a clear shift from a geographically comprehensive or global Euro-centered comparatism to a uniquely European comparatism. Criticism of Eurocentrism in comparative literature tend to conceive of Eurocentrism uniquely as geographical exclusion and consequently tend to emphasize inclusiveness as a solution or a corrective. The example of the early positivist comparatist, however shows that a comprehensive geographical scope is neither novel nor sufficient as a response to Eurocentrism. The history of the discipline draws our attention instead to the comparative method itself and suggests that a non-Eurocentric postcolonial comparatism needs to supplement its insistence on geographical inclusion with an account of the concept and practice of comparison (on cultural anthropology and comparative cultural studies, see, e.g., Pinxten).

## THE TIME OF COMPARISON

Scientific principles transferred from the social sciences inform the first work on comparative literature to appear in English, Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett's *Comparative Literature* (1886). Widely read and translated, this study exerted a powerful influence. Posnett interprets the development of literature according to the principles of Spencerian evolution and thus treats literature primarily as a social phenomenon influenced by environmental factors, amenable to classification, and governed by large processes and general laws rather than as the product of individual genius. Comparison itself turns out to be a prominent measure of social progress: the more a society advances, the more it brings under the purview of comparison. The civilizational activity of comparison is reproduced "consciously" at the yet more advanced stage where the critic, or student of literary science, himself undertakes to track these comparisons: "it is the business of reflective comparison, of the comparative method, to retrace this development consciously, and to seek the causes which have produced it" (Posnett 78). The comparative method thus both recapitulates the progress of civilization and represents its highest accomplishment. It follows that empires, including earlier empires (China, India, Macedonian Greece, Rome) but especially the British Empire, simply by virtue of the extent of their conquest and holdings, have entered into more extensive comparisons and have therefore advanced furthest toward cosmopolitan humanity. Comparison is ultimately indistinguishable from imperial progress.

For Posnett, comparison's expansion reaches its highest point in Western empires because these empires combine the greatest variety of cultural contact—one should of course write “conquest,” but this aspect of empire is never mentioned in Posnett, just as those on the receiving end of conquest are not counted amongst those who have developed the habit of comparison—with the highest degree of individual autonomy or consciousness. Posnett's comparatism is imperial in various respects, but not as one might expect in the most obvious or instrumental sense as a pretext or justification for empire, whereby, for instance, Western literature and Western society, having reached the highest development, set out naturally as part of an impersonal process to civilize the world. His comparatism is imperial in that it is intrinsically expansionist, but most important it is imperial because by definition it can only be available in its most evolved scientific or reflective form to a privileged denizen of empire. The authority to encompass comparatively all the literature in the world is thus reserved implicitly and without argument to the Western scholar because he represents comparison's highest development.

The innovation of the comparative method in the view of its practitioners was its subordination of the unruly and directionless similarities and differences generated by the table or chronological list of earlier attempts at universal literary histories to a meaningful and progressive temporality. Time is to such an extent the motor and frame of the comparative method that in Posnett's view the scientific comparatist's task is not so much to compare one object to another as to “retrace the development” of comparison's progress. It is unlikely that anyone would have thought to ask Posnett (although he would have welcomed the questions, especially as he claims—incorrectly—to have invented the discipline's name), “what exactly do you compare?” since the adjective “comparative” was ubiquitous at the time in the names of fields of inquiry. But if the question had arisen he might have answered, “I compare comparisons in time.”

The comparative method is not directed ultimately toward the objects under comparison, but to an invisible and impalpable entity manifested through them. Positivism imputes a transparent knowability to the empirical object and a corresponding capacity to know in the subject, but the objective of its knowledge is itself obscure, as Michel Foucault reminds us: “there is a whole layer of phenomena given to experience whose rationality and interconnection rest upon an objective foundation which it is not possible to bring to light; it is possible to know phenomena, but not substances; laws, but not essences; regularities, but not the beings that obey them” (Foucault, *Order*, 219). This mode or condition of knowledge is peculiar to what Foucault calls the modern episteme, which is grounded in History. Foucault's definition of History helps situate the positivist dimensions of comparative literature in a broader modern epistemic field, particularly to the degree that it highlights the crucial link between empiricity and temporality: “History . . . is the fundamental mode of being of empiricities, upon the basis of which they are affirmed, posited, arranged, and distributed in the



space of knowledge for the use of such disciplines or sciences as may arise" (*The Order* 219). The adjective "comparative" indexes precisely this temporal "mode of being of empiricities."

Foucault's *The Order of Things* can be read as an archaeology of comparison, since shifts in the modality of relations among objects of knowledge are crucial elements in the ruptures between the three epistemes he isolates, pre-Classical, Classical, and modern. What seems particularly useful in Foucault's almost clinical isolation of modes of knowledge from everything that might impinge on them is that it allows one to reflect on the structure of comparison itself as bounded but historically mutable. The pre-Classical world of knowledge Foucault evokes is to such an extent infused with resemblances that these can be divided into various dominant types. Foucault lists four: "convenientia," in which sheer proximity in space signals a hidden resemblance; "aemulatio," the ability of things to imitate each other over great distances; "analogy," which Foucault defines as "subtle resemblances of relations"; and "sympathy," the tendency of likeness to assimilate things into identity, a power counterbalanced by its opposite, antipathy (*The Order* 18–23). What makes these multifarious similitudes (between flowers and the sky, apoplexy and tempests, stars and plants, shells and moss) possible is the presupposition of a harmonious disposition in the world between microcosm and macrocosm. This provides all investigation with an assurance that "everything will find its mirror and its macrocosmic justification on another and larger scale" (*The Order* 31).

Thinkers in the Classical episteme will break with this system of resemblance as a form of knowledge, consigning it to the realm of error, illusion, and the deception of the senses. Both Francis Bacon and René Descartes elaborate formal refutations of resemblance, which henceforth gives way to reason as a ground for knowledge. Comparison now emerges as the central function of thought, not in the service of tracking resemblances but rather of analyzing them "in terms of identity, difference, measurement, and order" (Foucault, *The Order* 51–52). To know through comparison is thus no longer to draw things together, but to "discriminate." Measurement and ordering, and they are often indistinguishable, submit resemblance to proof by comparison, and at the same time open a new possibility for certainty based on enumeration and taxonomy. The form of Classical knowledge, as Foucault describes it in comparison with the modern episteme that follows it, is static in that it presents knowledge in its totality in the fixed form of taxonomic tables and series. But if resemblance is contained and submitted to comparative analysis in the Classical episteme, it almost vanishes altogether in Foucault's account of the modern episteme, in which "from now on the contemporaneous and simultaneously observable resemblances in space will be simply the fixed forms of a succession" in what he calls a "mutation of Order into History" (*The Order* 219). This mutation of knowledge's object from resemblances in space to successions in time underlies a crucial aspect of the idea of comparison for the comparative method of the positivist comparatists:

comparison is not primarily a procedure for analyzing similarity and difference in order to determine individual units suitable to evaluation, but rather a means of determining the general laws of development ascertainable beyond objects of analysis. Comparability as such, a prominent concern for taxonomic comparison, does not emerge as a central problem for the positivists because a unified field or totality for knowledge is given in the comprehensive process of temporal development.

## THE SPACE OF COMPARISON

In “Of Other Spaces” and first delivered as a lecture in 1967 a year after the publication of *The Order of Things*, Foucault writes that “The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space ... We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and the far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network” (22). While this present “epoch of space” is clearly contrasted to a previous epoch of time, the governing terms of this essay differ sharply from those of *The Order of Things*. At issue here is space as an epoch, not an episteme; space is an object of experience, description, perception, emplacement, but not a modality for the formal production of knowledge. The simultaneity of juxtaposition or “heterochrony” emerges in “Of Other Spaces” as the primary modality of spatial comparison. To describe and analyze that spatial comparison, Foucault develops the concept of “heterotopia,” which he defines in contrast to utopia as “real places ... which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, and the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted” (“Of Other” 24). Including such diverse instances as boats, cemeteries, libraries, colonies, Oriental carpets, prisons, and museums, the heterotopia is a site that can be construed as an “elsewhere” that produces the effect of dislocating one’s fundamental sense of fully inhabiting a single space. It is a parcel of the world that at once brings the totality of the world into apprehension and destabilizes or contests its unity.

This experiential and representational emphasis of spatial heterotopia’s comparative function contrasts starkly with Foucault’s articulation of heterotopia in *The Order of Things*. Few readers can forget the extraordinary quotation from Jorge Luis Borges with which Foucault begins his preface to that text, the description of the Chinese encyclopedia, which reads, in part: “animals are divided into: a) belonging to the emperor, b) embalmed, c) tame, d) sucking pigs, e) sirens, f) fabulous, g) stray dogs, h) included in the present classification, i) frenzied, j) innumerable... l), et cetera... that from a long way off look like flies” (*The Order* xv). For Foucault, the assortment of items on this list suggests there is “a worse disorder than that of the incongruous and of the inappropriate comparison; it would be the disorder that makes the fragments of a great number

of possible orders sparkle in a single dimension, without law or geometry, the disorder of the heteroclite" (*The Order* xvii). Heterotopia appears in this epistemic and epistemological context as a figure for absolute incommensurability, which paralyzes the knower into aphasia if he looks too directly upon it. The taxonomic sites occupied by the disparate elements clash to the extent that it is impossible to "define beneath them a common ground." Although the incommensurability of the heteroclite precedes and utterly confounds all the modes of knowing through comparison developed in the three epistemes, it nonetheless performs what one might call the foundational comparative function of revealing, negatively, that there *is* order. Heterotopic difference in the preface to *The Order of Things*, is the other order at the limit of "our" own thought. In the spatial epoch sketched out in "Of Other Spaces," however, heterotopia is describable precisely as "fragments of a great number of possible orders [that] sparkle in a single dimension," and thus no longer figures absolute incommensurability. The status of heterogeneity (the *hetero* in heterotopia) has shifted markedly from that which exceeds and confounds the ordering function of comparison for knowledge to that which, on the contrary, generates relationality. Similarly, the status of place (the *topos* in heterotopia) has undergone a marked materialization from the metaphorical "site" of taxonomic categories to the actually existing common ground underlying disparate spaces. Borges's diverse elements become less forbidding and perhaps even partly intelligible if instead of seeking a conceptual common ground for them, we attempt to think of them spatially, using, for instance the terms with which Foucault describes the spatial epoch: simultaneity, juxtaposition, the near and the far, the side-by-side, the dispersed.

Foucault's analysis of space has been celebrated as a pivotal critique of chronocentrism because it offers a historicization of space and sketches a framework for considering space not as a static backdrop to social meaning but as a dynamic constituent of it. I am more interested here, however, in exploring how it might illuminate the status of space as an epistemic (or epochal) ground for comparison in the realm of knowledge. The attempt to examine the epistemic frame within which one's own discourse might be taking place is indeed an abstract and markedly hypothetical exercise, but useful in order to defamiliarize what seems given about the comparative project. Several important studies of the relation of space to knowledge from theoretical vantage points different from Foucault's arrive at a paradox similar to that which one might read in the cleavage between his two elaborations of heterotopia. For example, in *The Production of Space* Henri Lefebvre insists on the analytical separation and disjunction between various registers of space: "logical-epistemological space, the space of social practice, the space occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination" (12). He formulates the paradox of this disjunction in the following terms: "it is not therefore as though one had global (or conceived) space to one side and fragmented (or directly experienced) space to the other—rather as one might have an intact glass here and a broken glass or mirror over there.

For space ‘is’ whole and broken, global and fractured at one and the same time. Just as it is at once conceived, perceived and directly lived” (356). At issue is not primarily space as an object of interpretation, a fundamental constituent of meaning, but rather space as a perplexing condition of knowledge in which there is a fundamental cleavage between the possibility of conceiving a spatial totality and the impossibility of experiencing or representing it as such.

Temporalizing comparison encompassed a multiplicity of cultures as objects of knowledge because the evolutionary scale allowed that comparison to discriminate; it welcomed all the difference in the world, so long as all those differences could occupy fixed places on a hierarchical scale. The space of comparison, inclusive by virtue of its transversal extensiveness, would in a first moment negate the negation of this temporal unity and withdraw the discriminating evolutionary hierarchy from the geography of the globe as one might lift a distorting temporal veil in order to reveal space as such. All cultures would thus appear as Fabian would urge—coeval, or truly “simultaneous.” Simultaneity, itself a temporal category, becomes a kind of degree zero of equivalence. Comparability, in the form of a ground or a space of comparison, remains, but without discrimination. The grounds of comparison today, thus, are in a first moment, literally ground—that is, in a rather bewildering way, potentially the globe itself. But if space provokes comparison, it also confounds its epistemological operations.

## INCOMMENSURABILITY, POSTCOLONIALITY, AND COMPARISON

James Clifford offers in his “Traveling Cultures” (1992) one symptomatic instance of the problem I outline above. Clifford urges the idea of traveling cultures as a “spatial chronotope” that would dislodge anthropology from its constricted locations and lingering colonial vocation, and humanist disciplines from their national and canonical limits. “Traveling Cultures” is shot through with “comparison” (the word occurs sixteen times in various grammatical guises) and the term points in a general way at once to the extensive scope of culture’s possible travels and to the diversity and interconnectedness of those itineraries. Clifford avers that “a comparative cultural studies needs to work, self-critically, with compromised, historically encumbered tools” (18), but there is no mention of comparison’s disciplinary history, although it often seems to haunt the text. The supreme teleology of the comparative method in early anthropology is reversed implicitly in a phrase like “genuinely comparative and nonteleological cultural studies” (29). Comparison no longer points to a method but rather to a scope and a disposition toward knowledge that clearly aims to displace the Archimedean view of the traditional comparatist with a transversal practice of comparison: “the comparative scope I’m struggling toward is not a form of overview. Rather, I’m working with a notion of comparative knowledge produced through an itinerary, always marked by a ‘way in’” (31). The term “comparative knowledge” suggests that comparison might not be the end or object of knowledge but intrinsic to its

processes. Nonetheless, comparison persists implicitly as a perplexing problem of method, particularly in some of the examples. Clifford proposes a comparison between Alexander von Humboldt's view of the "New World" and that of an indentured Asian laborer: "but although there is no ground of equivalence between the two 'travelers,' there is at least a basis for comparison and (problematic) translation. Von Humboldt became a canonical travel writer. The knowledge (predominantly scientific and aesthetic) produced in his American explorations has been enormously influential. The Asian laborer's view of the 'New World,' knowledge derived from displacement, was certainly quite different. I do not now, and may never, have access to it. But a comparative cultural studies would be very interested in such knowledge and in the ways it could potentially complement or critique von Humboldt's" (35; on Humboldt and comparative literature, see, e.g., Lubrich).

What this passage so presciently grazes but never quite brings into focus is a particular form of incommensurability. Incommensurability is precisely the problem comparison reveals here and Clifford phrases it with great accuracy: there is a "basis for comparison" between the laborer and Humboldt, presumably the space they have in common, but "no ground of equivalence" when it comes to the production, circulation, and analysis of their knowledge. But when Clifford does compare cultures in motion or travel, the comparison is of the classic taxonomic variety, in which a type or category is reinforced rather than dispersed or diversified. For example, elsewhere in the essay his inclusion in the cultural category "Haitian" both those Haitians residing in Haiti and those living in New York as a kind of comparative or traveling culture, as one of his respondents remarks, can easily essentialize the cultural identity and preclude analysis of the multiple relation into which Haitianness enters in New York, Haiti, or points in-between. The normative powers of taxonomic comparison here overwhelm the very incommensurability the culture's "travel" has introduced it to in the first place. The ground of comparison has become a basis of equivalence.

"Incommensurability," which denotes literally, "that which cannot be measured by comparison" is, I propose, a useful term to name that tenuous space Clifford has briefly identified between a basis for comparison and a ground of equivalence because it suspends the relation between comparison and measure. I would reverse the terms here and propose "ground for comparison and basis of equivalence," since it is the spatial chronotope's ground that brings previously separated objects into comparison, even as that ground offers no given basis of equivalence. Incommensurability is probably more familiar in its maximal, epistemological sense, as the radical absence of common ground between different orders in Foucault's initial definition of heterotopia or as the rupture between paradigms in the history of science described by Thomas Kuhn. With Foucault's spatial heterotopology in mind we might propose a minimal form of incommensurability which produces a generative dislocation without silencing

discourse or marking the limit of knowledge. This minimal incommensurability instead opens up the possibility of an intelligible relation at the limits of comparison.

The spatial chronotope of the postcolonial condition is precisely one in which the apprehension of the world's totality is intrinsically mediated through incommensurability. Renewed attention to comprehensive geographic scope in comparative literature has prompted a surprising return to the systematizing approach spearheaded by earlier scholars including Posnett, Gayley, and Kurtz. Franco Moretti, for example, adapts models from sociology and even natural history to construct a framework for world literature (on similar and earlier work, see, e.g., Schmidt; Tötösy de Zepetnek). Such an approach, while historical in the broadest sense, presumes a fundamental neutrality both to conceptions of geographical space and to the constitution of literature as an object of study. A postcolonial perspective, in contrast, takes central account of the history of colonial domination for the constitution of literary relations. Edward W. Said's *Culture and Imperialism* can be said to initiate postcolonial comparativism and central to his approach is the notion that cultural relations mediated by imperialism are "contrapuntal," that is to say, the equivalence they imply is not given in any unmediated way, but instead always discrepant. Perhaps the most thoroughgoing elaboration of the ramifications of the imbrication of space and incommensurability in a postcolonial framework is to be found in the work of Martinican writer and philosopher Edouard Glissant (on Glissant, see, e.g., Bermann; Melas).

Glissant's thought is premised on a cultural logic that subtends the history of European conquests begun more than five hundred years ago, conquests which brought, for the first time, the world as an empirical totality into apprehension. This history, whose extraordinary violence and almost unmitigated exploitation persist in various forms to this day, nonetheless also initiated an unprecedented dynamic of cultural ruptures and cultural contacts. For a long time the conquering powers asserted their cultures as a unified and universal expression for the whole of the world, but, Glissant argues, the increasing presence of other views and other voices challenges fundamentally that unicity (see *L'Intention*). The totality of the world which conquest first revealed is, in this restricted and cultural sense, not systematizable. Glissant postulates that we exist, we think, we write in the presence of all the cultures in the world, without possessing them in a single concept or idea: "the multiplied poetics of the world present themselves to those alone who attempt to gather them into equivalences that do not unify" (*Discours* 471; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine). This is the state of the world in "Relation," in which, to put it briefly, the overarching commensuration of imperialism's cultural comparison is overturned and also relayed in the postcolonial condition in which cultures come into constant contact without a unifying standard and in which, thus comparison is no longer bound to



commensuration. The promise of postcoloniality thus takes the form of a relational and necessarily comparative “degeneralized universal” in which worldliness does not inhere in exemplary representativity, that is, in standing for the world, but rather in standing in the world, in multiple relation with its unsystematizable extensiveness (see Glissant, *Poetics*).

Glissant’s account of Relation presumes a very particular notion of postcolonial global space and therefore presents us with a very precise outline of the grounds for comparison in a condition of postcoloniality. Loosed from the hierarchies of cultural value imposed by an imperial order, place is as much a specific cultural and geographic terrain as it is a site of enunciation from which a history, or a story of the world can be told. Space in Relation, Glissant suggests, is not the hard ground of a unified empirical entity reducible to masterable and distinct objects of knowledge. Constituted in an imaginary field of relations, space is above all the condition of emplacement necessary to an engagement in Relation. The point is made with perspicacity by one of Glissant’s interpreters, Jacques Coursil, who writes that “the Relation of the World totality is not a vast world model that contains peoples and cultures in contact. This spatializing vision of a great totality that contains everything is directly induced from an absolute in the form of a universal assemblage that contains territory-objects. All to the contrary, Relation is a psychic content, a symbolic structure, a totality of cultures, inscribed in each of us. It is an unknown. Hence there is no observer or observatory of Relation. Differently for each, Relation is the same for all: “discoverer and discovered are equivalent [or equivalent] in Relation” (99). The equivalence Glissant provocatively installs in this citation from *Poetics of Relation* between “discoverers” and “discovered” or colonizer and colonized in the postcolonial condition is not a relation of equality, far from it. But while inequality obtains in economic and political relations, cultural relationality relays an alternative comparative schema for co-existence in the world to the extent that the equivalences mobilized there do not unify and thus relate incommensurably.

Comparison makes its comeback not as a method but as a space, where it signifies inclusiveness and a non-hierarchical transversality. But the age of multiculturalism’s impulse not to discriminate easily verges into the indiscriminate and the spatial scope of comparison can open on a limitless horizon of interchangeable objects. In large part this particular temptation to equivalence has to do with the increasing hegemony of the commodity form in late capitalism. There are no limits to commensurability on this model insofar as it can hypothetically bring all objects into relation on the basis of equivalence. As commodification increasingly permeates all aspects of social life, a previous era’s normativity gives way to a generalized equivalence and the commodity form subordinates normative comparison to its laws of exchange. This is something akin to what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has in mind with the notion of the “global commensurability of value” as a massive countervailing force to the utopian hope for a planetary comparatism (46).



In conclusion, the renewed scope of comparison in comparative literature thus involves a fundamental ambiguity. On the one hand the space of comparison fulfills a postcolonial cultural promise in which the “fragments of a great number of possible orders sparkle in a single dimension” a dimension that neither reduces those fragments to equivalent forms nor induces a paralyzing incommensurability. It is a mode of cultural relation—if not an inclusiveness—that contrasts with academic comparison’s institutional past, the one remembered and the one forgotten, the cosmopolitan discrimination of comparative European literatures and the positivist discrimination of an evolutionary hierarchy of races and nations. On the other hand, this space coincides with what is variously called late capitalism or globalization whose generalization of exchange value makes a fetish of equivalence.

Note: The above article is a revised version of Natalie Melas, “Grounds for Comparison.” *All the Difference in the World: Postcoloniality and the Ends of Comparison*. By Natalie Melas. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007. 1–43. Copyright release to the author.

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# (Inter)mediality and the Study of Literature

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Werner Wolf

**Abstract:** In his article “(Inter)mediality and the Study of Literature” Werner Wolf elaborates on the “intermedial turn” and asks whether this turn ought to be welcomed. Wolf begins with a discussion about the definitions of “medium” and “intermediality” and the impact these concepts and practices exert on scholarly, as well as student competence. He argues that despite of the fact that literary studies ought not simply turn into media or cultural studies, mediality and intermediality have become relevant issues for both teaching and the study of literature especially in the fields of comparative literature and (comparative) cultural studies. Following his postulate of the relevance of mediality and intermediality in the study of literature, Wolf explores ways of integrating the said concepts and practices into the study of literature and, in particular, their integration in the field of narratology. In this context, Wolf presents a typology of intermedial forms.

## INTRODUCTION

For some time the humanities and the study of literature in particular have witnessed yet another “turn”: the intermedial turn. The integration of the key concepts of this turn — mediality and intermediality — into the study of literature raises at least three issues: 1) problems of the definition of these concepts; 2) the problem of competence with reference to non-literary media; and 3) the question as to whether the concept would overburden literary studies to the detriment of what many still view as the core matter, namely the study of written literary texts. In what follows, I discuss these problems and suggest solutions, followed by more specific issues such as 4) the plurality of possible uses of the concept “medium” in the study of literature; 5) a typology of intermedial forms and the way they can be used in the study of literature; and 6) possibilities of integrating medial concerns into existing theories for the study of literature including narratology.

1) Problems of definition of terms/concepts: the terms “medium” and “intermediality” are abstractions and designate phenomena which cannot be observed in themselves but only with reference to certain manifestations (see Lüdeke 23). Since the range of these manifestations can be conceived of in different ways, both notions can be observed to have divergent meanings in research: “medium” can be used in a broad sense, as suggested by Marshall McLuhan, for whom a medium is “any extension ... of man” (3), but also in a narrower and technical sense as proposed by Hans Hiebel, who defines media as “material

or energetic transmitters of data and information units” (8; unless indicated otherwise, my translation). Both definitions cause difficulties when using the term in literary studies: the most obvious of these difficulties stems from the fact that the first definition is too broad, so that even a pair of glasses or a bicycle that might be used on stage as “extensions” of the actors would become media. While this definition would produce too many media even within one literary genre such as drama, Hiebel’s definition would not even give literature media status, since literature is not a physical transmitter of information but a matter, among others, of reflection. In addition, Hiebel’s concept, which coincides with what Marie-Laure Ryan calls “the hollow pipe interpretation” (“Media and Narrative” 289), does not leave much room for accounting for the possible effects media may have on transmitted contents. What we need in literary studies are not such problematic definitions—which are geared to media-theoretical or technical-historical concerns—but, rather, a viable definition of medium that takes into account its current use in the humanities including literature: in this context “medium” is on the one hand applied to literature as a whole (and in this is opposed to semiotically different ways of organizing information such as music, photography, film etc. (see Nünning and Nünning 132) while on the other hand “medium” refers also to institutional and technical “sub-media” such as theater and the book (see Nünning and Nünning 133). In other words, a conception of “medium” is required that possesses a certain flexibility and combines technical aspects of the channels used with semiotic aspects of public communication, as well as with the aspect of cultural conventions that regulate what is perceived as a (new) medium. Or, in Ryan’s terms, the scope of the definition required should include elements from what she calls “the transmissive definition ... [and] the semiotic definition” (“Media and Narrative” 289) in order to combine these facets with the element of “cultural use” (Ryan, “Theoretical Foundations” 16). Drawing on Ryan (“Media and Narrative,” “Theoretical Foundations”) I propose the following definition: medium, as used in literary and intermediality studies, is a conventionally and culturally distinct means of communication, specified not only by particular technical or institutional channels (or one channel) but primarily by the use of one or more semiotic systems in the public transmission of contents that include, but are not restricted to, referential “messages.” Generally, media make a difference as to what kind of content can be evoked, how these contents are presented, and how they are experienced. In my view, it is necessary to describe “messages” transmitted medially not only in terms of referential contents but also in terms of other kinds of contents such as expressive contents in order to be able include, for instance music in the definition of medium.

As in the case of a medium, (inter)mediality can also be conceived of in both a narrow and a broad way: the narrow sense focuses on the participation of more than one medium within a human artefact (see Wolf, *Musicalization* 37). As opposed to this “intracompositional” definition, I propose a broader one that follows Irina O. Rajewsky’s thought (see “Intermediality,” *Intermedialität*):

intermediality, in this broad sense, applies to any transgression of boundaries between conventionally distinct media ... and thus comprises both “intra-” and “extra-compositional” relations between different media (Wolf, “Intermediality” 252). “Relation” in this context denotes, from a mainly synchronic perspective and with reference to individual artefacts, gestation, similarity, combination, or reference including imitation, but it may also designate, from a diachronic, media-historical perspective, what David Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin have termed “remediation.”

2) Problem of competence with reference to non-literary media: in most current educational systems, scholars and students tend to have advanced competence in one medium only. This mono-disciplinary and, often enough, mono-medial background creates obvious problems. To a certain extent this already applies to the meaningful use of the concept of mediality in literary studies, for this presupposes a perspective on literature as one medium among several others and thus a view, so to speak, from the outside. The problem becomes more acute for intermediality studies, as they, by definition, involve more than one medium. Teaching as well as scholarship in the field of intermediality therefore run the risk of dilettantism wherever one transgresses the boundaries of one’s own field of expertise. This problem is difficult to solve. One obvious suggestion presents itself, namely that studies in intermediality in departments of literature ought to be centered on literature (see Wolf, “Intermedialität als neues Paradigma”), that is, they should always involve literature as one of the media under scrutiny and then highlight the role of intermediality in and for literature. Yet firmly anchoring the discussion of mediality and intermediality in one field of expertise does not entirely do away with the problem of competence with reference to the other fields involved in intermediality studies. As for literary scholars, one may perhaps trust that only those who have at least some competence in one other medium will engage in (inter)media studies. Alternatively, or in addition, cooperation with experts from other fields would be welcome, a practice which scholars in both comparative literature and cultural studies are used to more than in national literature departments. As for student competence, establishing media and intermediality studies as a permanent component of university curricula would entail reflection on where and how to integrate courses that foster media competence beyond literature. One possible solution would perhaps be to reserve a part of the elective courses prescribed in curricula to the coherent study of at least one further medium, so that all students of literature—be it a national literature, comparative literature, or cultural studies—acquire some competence, for instance in the interpretation of film, music, or one of the visual arts.

3) Introducing (inter)mediality into literary studies: this poses inevitably yet another problem, namely the problem of overburdening a field that, both from a scholarly as well as a didactic perspective, is already in danger of over-expansion and of disintegrating into incoherence. Can one really implement — whether in comparative literature, English studies, or cultural studies — yet another field

into the curricula? Are not the capacities of both students and scholars naturally limited? Is the addition of medial, that is, mostly non-literary concerns perhaps ultimately a symptom of the growing uneasiness with literature as an academic subject? Above all, do literary studies not run the risk of losing sight of their central subject, namely written literary texts, when seemingly alien matter is introduced in it?

At taking a closer look, mediality and intermediality, both from a historical and a system(at)ic point of view, appear to be anything but alien matter in literature. From a semiotic point of view literature is a medium transmitted by many technical and institutional media: lyric poetry, as well as the epics of old were orally performed, in part with musical accompaniment, before becoming “literature” in the etymological sense of “written” texts. As for drama, a play is not just a “bookish” or “written” medium, but a multimedial performance, involving words, sounds, music (notably in musical drama such as opera and the musical), as well as visual media. In addition, since classical antiquity the visual arts in particular have contributed to transmitting literary content and the development of media since the nineteenth century (from Daguerro-type to DVD and audiobooks) has further added to the spectrum of media which do so. Thus the notions of mediality and intermediality are clearly not just theoretical chimera, but have a substantial foundation in historical, as well as contemporary reality as is shown by the manifold cross-relationships which have occurred between what we today call literature and other media. If literature has influenced and has in turn been influenced, as well as been transmitted by a plurality of media, the study of media should become an integral part of literary studies. McLuhan’s dictum the “medium is the message” (7–21) is no doubt exaggerated, but an apt reminder of an undeniable fact: the multiplicity of literary media, including their technical aspects, is not, as Ryan justly emphasizes (e.g., “Media and Narrative”) a negligible accidental. Rather, medial conditions shape the literary content to a considerable degree and therefore merit attention—even where literature shares features with other media. Examples of such transmedial features, in which medial conditions are a particularly important shaping force, include aesthetic illusion (see, e.g., Bernhart, Mahler, Wolf), narrativity (see, e.g., Ryan, *Narrative across Media*; Wolf, “Das Problem der Narrativität,” “Narrative and Narrativity,” “Cross the Border-Close that Gap”), descriptivity (see Wolf and Bernhart, *Description*), and self- or meta-referentiality (see Hauthal, Nünning, Peters; Nöth and Bishara; Wolf and Bernhart; Wolf, *Metareference across Media*; Wolf, Bantleon, Thoss, *The Metareferential*). All of these individual phenomena can, of course, be studied from a monomedial perspective, but they gain relevance when studied from a comparative media point of view. This even produces benefits for the literary scholar since looking at one’s own medium not only from the inside but also from the outside can reveal new aspects. In narratology, for instance, this means that it does not make “intermedial” sense to insist on the existence of an anthropomorphic narrator when defining narrativity, for this would exclude

most media beyond fiction and fly in the face of the obvious, namely that there are many more media other than just “epic” fiction (e.g., novels) that can tell stories. This process of providing transmedially useful concepts is, of course, not restricted to literary studies but works both ways: literary scholars can thus be “exporters,” as well as “importers” of concepts, as is practiced particularly in comparative literature. In all of these cases, an awareness of (inter)mediality is necessary.

4) The plurality of possible uses of the concept “medium” in the study of literature: one possibility is to acknowledge the fact that literature is a medium in its own right and as such is in opposition to, but also in competition with, other media. A less obvious fact is the use of the concept of mediality within the field of literature as in the case of drama. Traditionally, drama is understood as a literary genre. However, should we—instead or additionally—designate drama as an individual medium, a literary sub-medium or as a plurimedial form of representation (see Pfister)? In my opinion it is beneficial to link drama to media in all three proposed ways because a medial perspective is apt to reveal aspects which a merely generic one would not highlight in the same way. If one considers drama from the perspective of a media profile in a given epoch, it makes sense to classify it as an individual medium in contrast to opera, film, and other media. Viewing drama as a literary sub-medium allows one to emphasize its particularly performative character, which opposes it to the sub-medium of book-transmitted fiction. Further, regarding drama as a plurimedial form of representation permits to highlight the fact that drama combines several semiotic systems which can be attributed analytically to individual media; it uses verbal and body language, visual representation, and sound and music. Verbal language affiliates it with literature, body language and visual representation with visual, and sound and music with music as an individual medium.

5) A typology of intermedial forms and the way they can be used in the study of literature: this proposition leads us to the question as to what extent (inter)mediality in its various forms would be relevant to the study of literature. In this context (inter)mediality studies should preferably be centered on literature. In particular, scholars of textuality would be able to activate their expertise when focusing on literature in the following five ways, which at the same time are elements of a general typology of intermedial forms: a) literature as a medium that shares transmedial features with other media and thus invites a comparative perspective; b) literature as a medium that can yield material for transposition into other media or can, vice versa, borrow material from other media; c) literature as a medium that can enter into plurimedial combinations with other media in one and the same work or artefact; d) literature as a medium that can refer to other media in various ways; and e) literature as an element in a historical process of remediation.

5.1 Literature as a medium that shares transmedial features with other media: transmediality concerns phenomena which are non-specific to individual



media and/or are under scrutiny in a comparative analysis of media in which the focus is not on one particular source medium. Being non-media specific, these phenomena appear in more than one medium. Transmediality as a quality of cultural signification can occur, for instance, on the level of content in myths which have become cultural scripts and have lost their relationship to an original text or medium (notably, if they have become reified and appear as a “slice” of [historical] reality). Transmediality also comprises ahistorical formal devices that can be traced in more than one medium, such as the repeated use of motifs, thematic variation, narrativity, descriptivity, or meta-referentiality. Further instances of transmediality concern characteristic historical traits that are common to either the formal or the content level of several media in given periods, such as the pathetic expressivity characteristic of eighteenth-century sensibility (in drama, fiction, poetry, opera, instrumental music, the visual arts). A transmedial perspective on such phenomena implies that they do not have an easily traceable origin which can be attributed to a certain medium or that such an origin does not play a role in the investigation at hand.

5.2 Literature as a medium that can yield material for transposition into other media or can, vice versa, borrow material from other media: there are cases in which similar contents or formal aspects appear in different medial manifestations and where at the same time a clear heteromedial origin can be attributed. In these cases a transfer between two media can be shown to have taken place, that is, an intermedial transposition. Its best-known realization involving literature is the adaptation of novel to film. Transmediality and intermedial transposition (as well as remediation [see below]) are the basic systemic forms of extracompositional intermediality and are part of intermediality in a broad sense. In contrast to these, there are two basic forms of intracompositional intermediality which constitute intermediality in a narrower sense: plurimediality and intermedial reference. Here, the involvement of another medium is to a lesser degree the effect of the scholar’s/critic’s perspective since it is discernible within the work in question where the intermedial relation is additionally an integral part of its signification (as in the case of intermedial reference) and/or semiotic structure (as in the case of plurimediality).

5.3 Literature as a medium that can enter into plurimedial combinations with other media in one and the same work or artefact: plurimedial artefacts produce the effect of medial hybridity whose constituents can be traced back to originally heterogeneous media. An example relevant to literature would be illustrated novels.

5.4 Literature as a medium that can refer to other media in various ways: In contrast to plurimediality, intermedial reference does not give the impression of a medial hybridity of the signifiers, nor of a heterogeneity of the semiotic systems used; rather, intermedial references represent a medial and semiotic homogeneity and thus qualifies as “covert” intracompositional intermediality. The reason for this is that intermedial references operate exclusively on the basis of the signifiers

of the dominant “source” medium and can incorporate only signifiers of another medium where these are already a part of the source medium. In contrast to intermedial transposition—which, as a rule, creates works that signify in their own right—the decoding of intermedial references is part of the signification of the work in which such references occur and is therefore a requisite for an understanding of the work. Intermedial references fall into the following two main subforms: a) The first is explicit reference (or intermedial thematization, a term which is best used in the context of verbal media). Here, the heteromedial reference resides in the signifieds of the referring semiotic complex, while its signifiers are employed in the usual way and do not contribute to heteromedial imitation. Explicit reference is easiest to identify in verbal media. In principle, it is present whenever another medium (or a work produced in another medium) is mentioned or discussed (“thematized”) in a text as in discussions on art in an artist novel; b) As opposed to intermedial thematization, an alternative subform of intermedial reference is implicit reference or intermedial imitation, which elicits an imagined as-if presence of the imitated heteromedial phenomenon (see Rajewsky, *Intermedialität* 39). There are various ways and with varying degrees of intensity to realize this form, ranging from imitating references through partial reproduction (as in the quotation of song texts in a novel which make the reader remember the music of the song) to evocation (as in *ekphrasis*, which goes beyond the mere thematization by describing the heteromedial object) to formal imitation (as in the imitation of sonata form in a poem or “musicalized” novel; see Wolf, *Musicalization*). Formal intermedial imitation is an especially interesting phenomenon because the intermedial signification is, in this case, the effect of a particularly unusual iconic use of the signs of the source medium. In fact, as opposed to explicit references but also to other implicit variants of partial reproduction and of evocation, the characteristic feature of formal imitation consists of an attempt at shaping the material of the semiotic complex in question (its signifiers, in some cases also its signifieds) in such a manner that it acquires a formal resemblance to typical features or structures of another medium or heteromedial work.

5.5 Literature as an element in a historical process of remediation: remediation is the process by which media merge or become differentiated thus leading to the emergence of new media. In this process all of the four system(at)ic forms of intermediality can come into play, as, for instance, in the emergence of computer games: from a system(at)ic intermedial point of view these games can be analyzed by discussing their partial narrativity (a transmedial feature), their being derived (in part) from heteromedial artefacts such as novels (thus showing elements of intermedial transposition), their combination of several originally distinct media (plurimediality), as well as their reference to other media (e.g., in the imitation of filmic features). A focus on remediation allows a historical dynamization of intermedial investigations and highlights processes in media history, for instance developments in media configuration from individual media (such as theater and

music) through regular combination to (new) hybrid media such as the opera or nineteenth-century melodrama and thus bring about both media convergence and media differentiation.

6) Possibilities of integrating medial concerns into existing theories for the study of literature including narratology: In the scholarship of narratology (see, e.g., Fludernik, *Towards a "Natural"*; Genette; Stanzel) the medium of narratives is not a major issue and is sometimes not even given a systematic location in the description of narratives. It is therefore appropriate to remember the fact that one of the pioneers of structuralist narratology, Seymour Chatman, already made a simple and convincing proposal of how and where to integrate medial concerns into a systematic description of narratives. In *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, drawing on Louis Hjelmslev, he equates Tzvetan Todorov's constitutive levels of narratives, story and discourse, with narrative "content" and "expression." In addition, Chatman, like Hjelmslev, differentiates within each of these categories between "substance" and "form" (in practice, of course, "form" cannot exist without "substance"). While the content of "story" refers to individual stories (such as Ulysses's adventures), its form corresponds to what Vladimir Propp analyzed in his *Morphology of the Folktale* (i.e., the "functions" of forming the "grammar" of folktales). The bulk of Chatman's narratology is about the form of discourse and this includes, for example, the use of hetero- or homo-diegetic narrators, the use of discourse time as opposed to story time, etc. In contrast to this, the substance of discourse receives only a brief mention, but this is where mediality is introduced: Chatman defines the substance of discourse as "its appearance in a specific materializing medium, verbal, cinematic, balletic, musical, pantomimic, or whatever" (22). This location of medium as an aspect of "discourse" is a viable possibility for the category of medium in all general narratologies and narratological interpretations on the level of "intracompositional" dimensions.

What we, however, still need in this context are elaborations of the "substance of discourse." This concerns both the wider context in which media can be placed together with basic other categories requisite for a systemic description of narratives, as well as the relationship between the typical properties of individual media and their potential to affect narrativity. Here, I propose the solution that we leave the narrow focus of Chatman's "intracompositional" narratology, namely the individual text. Instead, we ought to try to account for the position of media within a wider system of cognitive (macro)frames or semiotic macro-modes, media, and genres, as well as the notion that macro-frames can also occur on the micro-level of individual works (e.g., where narrative passages occur along with descriptive, argumentative ones, etc.). Perhaps the best way to systematize what is under discussion here would be to start from the open category of cognitive macro-frames or, what one may call from a semiotic perspective, basic semiotic "macro-modes." On this abstract level we find, for example, "narrative" with its defining, gradable quality of narrativity as opposed to the "descriptive," "the

argumentative,” etc. Monika Fludernik designates this level as “macrogenres” (“Genres” 282). These macro-frames or macro-modes are, however, highly abstract and require for their realization not only genres (be they general, system[at]ic genres such as drama or epic or historical sub-genres such as melodrama) but also something that concerns us here most immediately, namely media (such as the verbal and the pictorial media, film, instrumental music, etc.). The fact that narrative, like all macro-frames, can be realized in more than one medium shows that these macro-frames are, to a large extent, media independent. As to genres, this level refers, first, to general genres (which sometimes overlap with media, see Fludernik, “Genres” 282) such as, within verbal media drama (as typically not narrator transmitted) or narrations of the type of the novel, the epic, and the short story (as typically narrator transmitted). Second, the category genre also refers to historical genres (within the pictorial media, for instance, religious painting, historical painting, still life, etc.). As a rule, the macro-frames—or more precisely their occurrence as dominant—is a defining feature both of general genres and historical sub-genres. However, in individual texts and artefacts, these frames can also occur on the micro-level alongside other, subdominant frames (novels, which on the macro-level are defined by the dominant macro-frame “narrative,” can contain descriptions on the micro-level). The semiotic macro-modes or macro-frames can thus not only be realized by several media but may, within individual works, be seen to operate both on the macro-level and on the micro-level, in which case they may only be present as subdominant frames together with other frames. With reference to a typology of verbal texts, this potential recursivity of frames has already been discussed by Tuija Virtanen and in similar terms by Fludernik (“Genres”).

Having proposed possible ways of integrating medium as a category into narratology as part of a theory of literature, I now address the relationship between the typical properties of individual media and their potential to affect the realization of macro-modes. I focus on the narrative macro-frame (in which narrativity is dominant), where the problem has not been given much attention so far. Indeed, compared to the many forms of discourse which scholars of narratology discuss (e.g., concerning the format of covert or overt narrators, the establishment and use of diegetic levels, etc.), systematic reflections on the categories that may apply in a narratologically relevant way to media as the substance of discourse are remarkably scant. However, Ryan prompts reflection on this: she proposes six categories which may well serve as a matrix of criteria according to which narratologists could evaluate individual media (see “Media and Narrative”). Ryan’s categories are of heuristic value by revealing aspects which important narratologically. Thus, a) “spatio-temporal extension,” as well as b) “kinetic properties” of individual media have an obvious and direct relevance to narrativity. As for c) the “senses ... addressed” one can imagine that “pluricodal” or “plurimedial” media can attain easily a particularly high degree of experientiality (one of the defining features of narrativity), which is one reason

why film is of such importance in today's culture; d) The "priority of sensory channels," in particular in plurimedial media, is relevant narratologically because, for instance, the visual priority in film pre-structures not only the production but also the reception of this medium in a different way than is the case in theater, where the verbal code is more important; e) The "technological support" and the nature of the signs used are relevant since traditional, analogical photography as an indexical, as well as iconic medium (regardless of the possibility of manipulation) has documentary value, which a digital photograph possesses to a lesser degree. In contrast to photography, painting (except for the portrait) does not possess this ambivalence for it is only iconic (see Ryan, "Media and Narrative" 291). Finally, the influence which f) "methods of production [and] distribution" of given media and their "cultural role" may have on narratives are linked to generic and other conventions and are responsible for the fact that different versions of the same story are produced and different cultural connotations are triggered depending on whether the story is transmitted, e.g., as opera or the comic strip.

Thus, as we see, there are many ways in which the concept of (inter)mediality can be integrated into the study of literature, comparative literature, and cultural studies in particular concerning the manifold functions of (inter)medial relations in given works, genres, or cultural-historical contexts. However, is "integration" the right notion? Should we, in view of the above-mentioned intermedial turn, not, rather, adapt Antony Easthope's notion of the transformation of "literary into cultural studies" or comparative literature to "comparative cultural studies" (i.e., Tötösy de Zepetnek)? Interdisciplinarity requires first and foremost disciplinarity, otherwise it loses its basis. This does not apply only to comparative literature, or (comparative) cultural studies, but also to the study of (inter)mediality. While all of these scholarly fields are informed by a necessary and welcome interdisciplinarity, there is also, in each of them, a need of sound disciplinarity with regard to a well-informed focus on individual media, with literature being one of them and surely not the least important one. In fact, literature is one of the most complex of human art forms and by far the richest storehouse of cultural memory which humankind has as yet developed. This is true on a world wide, as well as on national basis. Literature can, moreover, function as an interface for all other media, and, owing to the flexibility of its verbal medium, it can do so in a more detailed manner than any other medium (see Schmidt). In addition, literary studies has developed one of the most elaborate tools for the study and interpretation of not only literature but also culture at large. All of this shows that it would be misguided to compromise literary studies in favor of cultural studies. Instead, what we need is a stronger awareness of medial and intermedial concerns within literary studies thus to make sure that the study of literature remains its own discipline. After all, it is the study of literature that constitutes one of the best contributions to the elucidation of (inter)mediality, as well as culture at large past and present.

**Note:** The above article is a revised version of Werner Wolf, “(Inter)mediality and the Study of Literature.” *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 13.3 (2011): 1–9. & *Digital Humanities and the Study of Intermediality in Comparative Cultural Studies*. Ed. Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek. West Lafayette: Purdue Scholarly Publishing Services, 2013. 19–31. Copyright release to the author.

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## **PART 2**

Comparative Literature in World Languages



# African Literatures as World Literatures

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Isaiah Ilo

**Abstract:** In his article “African Literatures as World Literatures” Isaiah Ilo proposes alternative criteria for language choice in modern African literatures via the example of drama. The two most influential constructs on the language question are Fanon’s essentialism that rejects Western languages as instruments of subjugation and Achebe’s hybrid approach which entails subversion of the foreign languages by infusing them with African verbal characteristics. Ilo argues that present reality rather than past experience should influence decision about language choice for modern African literatures. The ideal criteria should consist of practical consideration for audience needs, rather than a romantic fixation with the colonial experience that requires from writers rare or inaccessible skills in the use of mother tongue or usage of local lore to indigenize a foreign tongue.

## INTRODUCTION

Linguo-aesthetics is the term by which I identify the subject known as the language issue in African literature. The concept has been a field of scholarly discourse since the 1960s and has materialized a body of prescriptive and descriptive literature on language aesthetics in African literature and literary creativity. The representatives of the two leading, albeit divergent ideas in the field, are Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and Chinua Achebe. The relationship between language and literature is so central in African writing that it constitutes the main aesthetic and critical standard. Considering the growing body of knowledge on the subject, it may be inappropriate to continue to recognize this field merely as “the language question,” “the language problem,” “the language factor,” or “the language debate.” Therefore, I do not conceptualize the subject as a debate in which to take an “either/or” stand; rather, I recognize the subject as a continuum in which the major constructs on the issue are acknowledged as different theories which have influenced present practices of playwriting in Africa, namely the Nativist or Indigenist essentialist and hybrid schools and build a case for a post-Indigenist aesthetic for African literatures as world literatures.

## SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT IN AFRICAN LITERARY AND CULTURAL SCHOLARSHIP AND CRITICISM

I begin with a brief overview of schools of thought focusing on the thinking behind them and some practices they have inspired. The father of the Indigenist

Essentialism school is Fanon whose anti-colonial polemics introduced the language question. Fanon's background prepared him to write a most influential analysis of the impact of colonization on the black psyche in his 1952 book *Black Skin White Masks*. Fanon was born in the Carribean island of Martinique (a French colony) to a mixed parentage of African slaves, Tamil indentured servants, and a White man, and was educated in France. The disorientation he felt after experiencing racism in an inhospitable white world motivated his discourse on the psychological consequences of colonial subjugation. For Fanon the subjugation ensures that the black man is mentally enslaved to universalised Western norm at the expense of his own consciousness, the consequence of which is his disorientation or alienation. The worst assault on a people's consciousness is its linguistic colonization. Fanon noted that the issue of language is important because speaking a colonizer's language means existing absolutely for the colonizer: "to speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but also to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilisation ... Every colonised people—in order words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation: that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonised is elevated above the jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards" (17–18; see also Hungwe and Hungwe). Thus, Fanon rejects the colonizer-colonized dichotomy and advocates the rejection of the standards of the colonizing culture including its language. His reason is that a person who has taken up the language of the colonizer has accepted the world of the colonizer and therefore the standards of the colonizer. This view of language on which the essentialist school stands is known as the expressive theory of language and implies that particular languages embody distinctive ways of experiencing the world, of defining what we are. That is, we not only speak in particular languages, but more fundamentally become the person we become because of the particular language community in which we grew up. Language, above all else, shapes our distinctive ways of being in the world. Language, then, is the carrier of a people's identity, the vehicle of a certain way of seeing things, experiencing and feeling, determinant of particular outlooks on life (see Bell 158–59). A Marxist, Fanon also said that true revolution in Africa could only come from the peasants or rural underclass. He considered as inadequate the type of nationalism espoused by the comprador bourgeoisie and urban proletariat in new African nations. Such classes enjoy profit from the economic structures of imperialism and use power for selfish ends once it is obtained.

Echoing Fanon, Obiajunwaka Wali argues that the adoption of English and French as media of literary creation by African writers was an aberration, which could not advance African literature and culture. Wali affirms that African literature in European languages was only a minor appendage of European literature and that an authentic African literature could not be created in non-

African languages. Wali also argues that African literatures could only be written in African languages because these were the languages of the peasantry and working class “most suitable for triggering the necessary and inevitable revolution against neo-colonialism” (Wali qtd. in Menang 1). Ngũgĩ agrees with Wali: African languages are the languages of the people the writers want to address; they provide direct access to the rich traditions of African peoples and, by using them, writers participate in the struggle against domination by foreign languages and against wider imperialist domination (see his *Writers in Politics*). In his collection of essays, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Ngũgĩ points out specific ways that the language of African literature manifests the dominance of the colonizers. He argues for African writers to write in the Native languages of Africa rather than in the European languages. Writing in the language of the colonizer, he claims, means that many of one’s own people are not able to read one’s original work. Ngũgĩ observes that the greatest weakness of African literatures in European languages is their audience—the petty-bourgeoisie readership assumes automatically the very choice of language (*Decolonising* 22). He submits that a literature written in a European language cannot claim to be African literature and thus he classifies the works by Wole Soyinka, Achebe, and Gabriel Okara as Afro-European literature. wa Thiong’o’s thesis is that “language occupies a significant position in the entire hierarchy of the organization of wealth, power, and values in a society” (“Europhonism” 6). In his view, language was the most important vehicle through which the colonial power captivated and held the colonized soul prisoner: “The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation” (“Europhonism” 7). For wa Thiong’o, therefore, Africa is in need of healing from the longstanding injuries that colonialism has wrought on the Indigenous languages and cultures and that this healing can only come through cultural autonomy and self-determination. So writing in African languages is a crucial step toward cultural identity and independence from continuing neo-colonial exploitation. But writing in African languages alone will not bring about the renaissance if that literature does not communicate the message of revolutionary unity and hope and embody the content of the people’s anti-imperialist struggles for socio-political and economic liberation.

Ngũgĩ had not always held a radical view about language. He began his career and attained fame as a novelist in English, but his venture into a community theater project eventually brought about a change in his thought. His first play *The Black Hermit* was produced in Kampala in 1962. His second play, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, written with Micere Mugo, was performed at the Kenya National Theatre, a Western-style indoor theater where a British-based company produced mostly Western plays in English for the educated elite. However, in 1977 villagers in Kamiriithu invited Ngũgĩ, then resident in their community as a lecturer in the nearby University of Nairobi to work with the local theater group on literacy projects. Thus Ngũgĩ decided to write and produce a play in

his own Native language, Gikuyu. The experiment resulted in a popular play, *Ngaahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)*. In the play Ngũgĩ critiqued the existing neo-colonial order in Kenya by recalling the revolutionary spirit of the Mau Mau rebellion that forced the British to give up direct control of the country. He drew from the experiences of participants and the play was produced in a less formal open-air theater that approximated the traditional space of Indigenous African theater. But a few weeks after the performances began, the government withdrew the permission to use the center, arrested Ngũgĩ, and incarcerated him in a maximum-security prison for a year without trial. In prison, Ngũgĩ reflected on his strategies as a socially committed writer and arrived at the decision to discard English for Gikuyu, his mother tongue, for all his future writings. He believed that his theater work attracted censorship particularly because of its use of the local language and its capability to sway a larger number of people to political action and from this point Ngũgĩ set his mind on working in the language with which he could reach his people and maximize his impact.

It is pertinent to note that Ngũgĩ's decision in favor of the local language and literature arose from an experience in community theater practice. Community theater is an approach to develop communication by means of participatory drama involving rural dwellers. The practice shares in common with the essentialist school the ideal of reaching poor rural dwellers with transformational political education. Community theater enables city people and West-educated Africans to touch base with the grassroots, the largely illiterate rural dwellers, who constitute the majority of African population. While the essentialist school is a justification of community theater's procedure in Indigenous languages, the practice can learn from Ngũgĩ's literary use of Gikuyu to extend activities to literary development of Indigenous languages as additional means of community empowerment. The budding literary theater in the Creole language in Mauritius conducted in the spirit of the essentialist school is an example of what a literary approach can do to Africa's marginalized Native languages. Mauritius is a former French and British colony where English enjoys official status and French a semi-official status. Creole, the most widely spoken language and the native tongue of 75% of the population cutting across various ethnic groups, is officially unacknowledged and unstandardized. The public is reluctant to read texts in Creole and publishing in the language is unattractive. Yet, theater has developed in Creole through the plays of Dev Virahsawmy, Azize Asgarally, and Henri Farori. Virahswasmy, the first playwright to publish in Creole and who is credited with the most successful plays is the figurehead of the movement. He has translated *Macbeth*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, and *Julius Caesar* and his translations allow to work simultaneously on promoting the status of the language, as well as its linguistic features. By proving that it can be a medium of dramatic creativity, the playwrights seek to put it on equal footing with the two colonial languages. The choice of Creole represents the interest of the majority and defies those who refuse to acknowledge it as a language in its own right. The playwrights believe that Creole is the only

language that can translate the experiences and cultures of Mauritius for the stage. Using the language is also a political struggle against the class system since the language is identified with the exploited proletariat. Thus, theater is shown to be an important and influential factor where the official status of languages, or lack of it, can be confronted by concrete practice. Reviving a language and its culture through drama gives voice to the silenced and threatened communities (see Mooneeram 25–35).

## COLONIALISM AND AFRICAN LITERATURE

The objective of modern African literature in colonial languages is to express an African content in the medium of a European language such as English or French. A publication of the 1977 FESTAC (Festival of Black & African Arts and Culture) suggests that African content in literature consists of the following five elements: “1) The writer must be African and must use 2) Traditional themes from oral literature, 3) African symbols, 4) Linguistic expression taken from African languages, and 5) Local imagery, that is, images from immediate environment” (Amoda 201). The resources of traditional African oral literature, such as myths, legends, folk tales, poetry, proverbs, and other forms of African languages, constitute the background of African writers whose imprint they must impose on the colonial language. African literary criticism therefore recognizes the applied content of Indigenized substance and language as the canon of modern African literatures. Many African critics and scholars such as Onwuchekwa Jemie Chinweizu, Ihechukwu Madubuike, and Abiola Irele hail the linguistic, thematic, and aesthetic hybridism of this style as Africa’s literary identity and unique contribution to world literature. In “The African Writer and the English Language” Achebe argues that although English was imposed by colonialism, it is now an asset to Africa for helping to foster continental and national unity. What is more, it offers Africans the opportunity to speak of their experience in a world language. Achebe says an African does not need to use the language like a Native speaker: “the African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English, which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience” (55–62). Achebe’s use of English in *Things Fall Apart* is widely accepted as a standard for other African writers. In a review in 1959, Ben Obumelu said that the African writer “is not merely to use but to expand the resources of English” and that “the verbal peculiarities of the novel suggest Achebe’s approach is to attempt literal fidelity, to translate wherever possible the actual words which might have been used in his own language and thereby preserve the local flavour of his situations” (38). G. Adali Mortty, a Ghanaian critic, in another review in 1959 said Achebe knows and uses English with consummate skill and that “his language has the ring and rhythm of poetry. At the background of the words can be heard the thrumming



syncopation of the sound of Africa—the gongs, the drums, the castanets and the horns” (49). Achebe himself describes his style as that of adapting the English language “to carry the weight of my African experience ... a new English still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surrounding” (62).

Irele has also praised language usage in the writings of J.P. Clark-Bekederemo who in Irele’s opinion recognizes that in the African context the task of a creative writer in English is more than that of adapting the foreign language to the reality of the African environment: rather, it involves a total appropriation in order to bring African expression into a living relationship with the tradition of literature in English. More, Irele notes that in this respect Clark-Bekederemo’s attitude toward the use of English goes further in its implications than that of Achebe who speaks of making the imposed language “carry the burden” of his African experience. To Irele, Clark-Bekederemo stakes out a more extensive claim to the resources offered by the English language and its literary tradition (175). Soyinka’s special contribution to home-grown content of African literature is his reinterpretation of Yoruba myths to give a local philosophical depth to his drama. His poetics is embodied in a “The Fourth Stage” which explores the philosophical implications of precolonial cultures for modern African arts: “Idanre”—his poetic celebration of Ogun’s mythical tragedy—and *Myth, Literature, and the African World*—an appropriation of Yoruba rituals for a theory of tragedy—are examples of this. In Soyinka’s poetics, the duty of African literatures is to impose the cosmic overview that organizes traditional performances (see Adeleke 14–20) and Soyinka subscribes to the method of indigenizing the colonial language in African literatures. Soyinka remarks that “when we borrow an alien language to sculpt or paint in, we must begin by co-opting the entire properties of that language as correspondences to properties in our matrix of thought and expression. We must stress such a language, stretch it, impact and compact it, fragment and reassemble it with no apology, as required to bear the burden of experiencing and experiences, be they formulated or not in the conceptual idioms of the language” (Soyinka 107).

This attitude to language, as consisting of neutral properties capable of manipulation in rendering African authenticity is based on the Chomskian conception of language and how it bears on ideology. Noam Chomsky theorized that there is a genetically determined language faculty innate in the mind and that language is reducible to a certain universal element that finds replication in particular languages. According to Chomsky, what is ordinarily taken as “the commonsense notion of languages” is defective because it possesses “a crucial sociopolitical dimension,” the view that language is “a dialect with an army and a navy” (Chomsky qtd. in Botha 81). In its place, he prefers what he sees as being truly commonsensical about language: when a person knows a language, he is taken to know “what makes a sound and meaning relate to one another in a specific way, what makes them ‘hang together’” (Chomsky qtd. in Botha 172). This

structural notion regards language as consisting of sentences and words, including grammatical forms and syntactic constructions. Thus grammaticality expresses the essential property of language, whereas the ideology language embodies is only incidental and does not constitute its property. Every language therefore is a harvest of grammaticality, which makes it a tool in the hands of users who can mould it to suit their purpose. In a study describing Soyinka's use of English in his collected plays, Timothy T. Ajani observes that as someone greatly influenced by the Yoruba language and culture and traditional beliefs, Soyinka makes the English language to express his cultural, religious, and emotional experiences. Ajani notes that Soyinka's strategies include neologisms, extensions of or change in meaning, colourful idiomatic expressions, word for word translations, and loan words from the Native language to English. Ajani presents examples of the lexico-semantic and syntactic devices in a few of the plays including direct borrowing, cultural and religious loans and customs, and Indigenous norms. At the syntactic level some of the strategies are repetition, the translation of Yoruba proverbs into English, reduplication, and direct translation of Yoruba into English. Other examples are code switching and code mixing, as well as the transfer of Yoruba language communicative strategies, such as indirectness, punning, riddles, and proverbs (see Ajani 1–23).

In sum, different logics underlie the two schools I describe above and these are noticeable in their divergent conceptions of language, readership/audience, purpose of literature, and in the assumptions they embody: the essentialist school's premises are that language is so loaded culturally and ideologically that its imposition by colonialism implies mental control of the colonized and its use by the colonized is practically the same as propagating the worldview of the colonizers and that the audience of literature is the underclass users of a local language. Further, the purpose is to mobilize them for revolution against neo-colonialism, the assumption being that in the spirit of cultural essentialism writers should reject every linguistic influence of colonialism in favour of pre-colonial African languages and thus the argument and practice that African culture as purveyed in the traditional languages as antithesis to hegemonic Western cultural universalism. In contrast, the hybrid school's premise is that language consists of neutral grammatical properties which may be harnessed for cultural and ideological communication in favour of either domination or resistance: if the White man has used English for domination, Africans can use it for resistance through literature. While their assumption is that owing to post-colonial hybrid reality writers can utilize the linguistic influence of colonialism as blended with pre-colonial African oral traditions, they propose African culture as purveyed in the blend with foreign languages as antithesis to hegemonic Western cultural universalism. In answering the question: "what should decide the choice of language for African literature?" both the essentialist and hybrid schools agree that the decider should be consciousness of the colonial experience, but disagree about the strategy. While essentialists say that what should decide the choice of

language for African literature is consciousness of the colonial experience for which African writers should reject the dominant colonial languages in preference for the subjugated local tongues, the hybridists agree that consciousness of the colonial experience should preoccupy African writers in the use of language, but believe the right strategy is not to reject but to subvert the dominant colonial languages in difference to the subjugated local tongues.

## AFRICAN LITERATURE AND HYBRIDITY

Arguably, the changing context of African literatures demands corresponding alteration in critical and literary aesthetic practices with respect to application of critical standards, language choice, ideology of literary identity, response to the philosophy of Western universalism, and the use of literary style. An alternative paradigm is desirable because it is unsuitable to continue to apply the literary criteria adopted in the context of anti-colonial literature to writings in a different situation. The 1962 *Conference of African Writers of English Literature* at Makerere University was convened to have writers review the achievements and strategies of African literatures in English. African literatures were to be piloted away from the dominant anti-colonial subjects which were believed to have been overtaken by events, since by that year virtually all of the British colonies in Africa were either independent or on the verge of self-rule. The participants of the conference felt that colonialism was passing, that new African societies were emerging, and that a corresponding cultural agenda must be formulated (see Adeleke 1–2). Nevertheless, the conference ended up not addressing that objective because an acrimonious debate ensued at the start in an attempt to define African literature. As Odun Balogun notes, there will never be a final resolution of the African aesthetic since taste always changes with time and although the change may take several years, it is enough to warrant a continuous process of re-evaluation (17). There has now arisen a new generation of African writers whose cultural orientation was entirely formed in present-day post-independence and a multicultural urban milieu. Can this younger generation apply the same literary aesthetics as the older generation that had closer contact with the African linguistic and oral traditions and faced an obligation to tackle colonialism? Current African aesthetic standards for literature accord much importance to a content of Indigenous oral traditions to the point of defining African literary identity in terms of their application in creative works. If this rule continues to apply to the canons of African literatures, how will the new generation of writers who are unpracticed in the oral traditions fare in the judgment? Might a standard that tends to limit writers' choices in matters of cultural values and language not have an incapacitating effect on the literary productivity of prospective new generation writers?

Proponents of the two schools of thought and practice have defended their positions in a manner suggesting that the choice of language for African literatures must be mutually exclusive between the colonial language and a writer's Native

tongue. My view is that the arguments on both sides for colonial and African languages are right. The resolution is that all available languages should be used in African literatures, thus establishing a dialogue as Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek suggests in his framework of comparative cultural studies (see also Young). And if a writer cannot use his/her Native tongue nor can color his/her work with oral tradition, there is no need to feel inadequate. There should be a third way: another African language, various types of English, Pidgin, Creole, etc. He/she can write with the language he/she knows best, provided it is appropriate for content and context and thus the work will bear the weight of his/her experience as an African writer. In this light, all of Africa's languages, as well as foreign languages are potential vehicles of African literature and identity. A bilingual or multilingual policy of education would ensure that individuals acquire proficiency in the literary use of at least two languages: an African language, which may be the writer's Native tongue or any other language of his/her choice and at least one European language. Such an option will enable Africans to preserve, develop, and use not only one or a few of the numerous Indigenous languages but all of them.

The oral tradition of proverbs, riddles, ballads, and stories from which modern African literatures draw is often spoken of as though such tradition is an exclusive patent of Africa. It seems easily forgotten that other societies had similar traditions in their pre-literate era, which came to feature in their written literature. Ancient Greek plays, for instance, drew from the myths, legends and stories of an oral tradition. Just as Western societies have come through the pre-literate, pre-modern, and modern phases and each phase has had its characteristic artistic imprint, African societies and literatures are evolving similarly. It is natural therefore that if in the phase of transiting from a pre-literate oral tradition, emergent African literatures are marked by a content of oral tradition. But such content—now hailed as the unique identity of African literatures—is only a passing phase, because the further a society moves from its pre-literate past and oral traditions, the less such background exerts an influence on its contemporary literature. The uniqueness of African literatures is, rather, to be traced to the bi- or multilingual background of the writers that sees their works in a second language influenced naturally by the resources of their Native tongue. But as writers emerge from a growing number of Africans who no longer have an African language as a Native tongue, the Native influence will be further eroded. Nevertheless, the marker of African identity in literature will continue to consist of the individual writer's cultural experience as an African and the influence of that experience on the writer's use of language.

Western universalism which African writers sought so passionately to counter by deliberately projecting an Afro-centric worldview through creative writing is today a fading ideology and this should motivate a reassessment of a subsisting critical and aesthetic standard that is almost wholly based on cultural nationalism. Imperialism, the moving spirit of colonialism was founded on an ideology of cultural absolutism and assumed that there was only one Western culture which

was universal and permanent and that all other people had to imbibe through a mission of colonization. However, anthropology has undermined cultural imperialism by bringing other cultures to light and showing that Western culture is just another culture and questioning the belief that the civilization it was spreading was potentially universal. Culture is no longer defined as universal but as diverse: a culture is a set of denotations, principles, and practices of a specific group of people and all peoples have their own cultures. Going by this view, there is no reality that is universally valid and applicable to peoples in all periods of history and in all societies across the world. In today's hermeneutics as applied to literature there is a shift from the pre-eminence of the writer of a text towards that of the reader. According to Hans-George Gadamer, every interpreter of a situation or a text comes to it with a pre-understanding or tradition, a preliminary idea, or anticipation of its meaning, within which he/she encounters the text and engages it in conversation. This leads to a fusion of two elements: the text and the reader's tradition thus making a new creation. This new horizon is a different perspective from the original perspective of the interpreter and that of the writer of the text. The original meaning of any writer can never really be discovered, because the cultural and historical distance involved is too great for the reader to cross. So the purpose in reading is not to discover the author's intended meaning, but to find an understanding that is practically relevant to the reader (see also Cheesman 26–27). In view of the decline of Eurocentric colonist ideology, alternative aesthetic criteria for contemporary African literatures will not include the colonial experience as a factor in the choice of language. This is because the colonial past is remote from the present that literature should address and reaching for the past is a hard task for a new generation of writers who are unable to use the Native tongue and/or traditional orature. Therefore, the criteria of another aesthetic paradigm is not “backward looking” and romantic, but contemporary and realistic. The deciding factor of language for literature should be communicative exigency including practical considerations for the target audience.

In his analysis of Greek tragedy in *Poetics* Aristotle commented on language usage in drama. He noted that language, which is in the form of speech in plays, is made up of the following parts: letter, syllable, connecting word, noun, verb, inflection or case, sentence or phrase. Every word is either current, or strange, or metaphorical, or ornamental, or newly coined, or lengthened, or contracted, or altered. A dramatist distinguishes himself/herself by his/her word usage (diction, style). A good style is clear and lofty and transcends the use of abstruse idioms. The clearest style uses only current or appropriate words and substitutes a strange (or rare) word, metaphor, or any similar mode of expression. According to Aristotle, six elements determine the quality of a play—namely plot, character, thought, diction, song, and spectacle. Diction—the expression of meaning in words—is a medium for dramatic representation that serves the important purpose of communicating the impact of a play's events, personalities and ideas. For Aristotle, therefore, the hallmark of good dramatic language is the use of suitable

present-day words in characters' speeches: language that enhances the realism of a play and makes its story, characters and logic plausible and hence affective to its audience. Thus, whether a play is rendered in a foreign or local language, its diction should suit its characterization and target readership/audience: current expressions should be used in place of outmoded ones unless it is a historical play. Since language choice implies audience choice, a play's target audience should normally influence the playwright's word usage. Consequently, the aptness of a playwright's diction ought to be assessed on the basis of the play's intended audience.

## CONCLUSION

The properties of a new aesthetic paradigm for contemporary African literatures as world literatures (local and global) may include the following: 1) Premise: language as a medium of subjective communication bears the tint of a user's experience, 2) The audience of literature may be local or international and the purpose can be any matter, 3) Assumption: in an environment of cultural diversity, a writer may use any language on the basis of competence and communicative criteria, and 4) Does not propose African culture since multi- and inter-cultural reality overtakes hegemonic Western cultural universalism. Already, there are tendencies in the new direction in thematic and stylistic treatment in some contemporary African plays whose content and purpose are no longer cultural and nationalist. For instance, some radical political plays target a local and national audience and advocate social change. Some plays on the theme of gender politics provide the perspectives of African women playwrights and address contemporary social problems in a non-Indigenist linguistic style. Further, some playwrights are experimenting alternative uses of language such as Creole, Pidgin, or bilingual texts. In sum, there is now a need for a deliberate shift from self-conscious Indigenist aesthetics to a local, as well as global perspective and practice in African literatures as world literatures.

Note: The above article is a revised version of Isaiah Ilo, "Language in Modern African Drama." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 8.4 (2006): 1–10. Copyright release to the author.

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# Comparative Literature in Arabic

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Marie-Thérèse Abdel-Messih

**Abstract:** In her article “Comparative Literature in Arabic” Marie-Thérèse Abdel-Messih presents a brief history of the discipline’s development in its intellectual and institutional provenance. Abdel-Messih’s approach to the history of comparative literature in Arabic is with focus on translation understood as a “planetary movement.” Of note is that the discipline was taken up and propagated by literary journals prior to the establishment of comparative literature in the academe. Owing to the colonial histories of the region, Francophone scholarship remains as a driving force although U.S.-American comparative literature is gaining in interest.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Locating geographies and dating beginnings of comparative scholarship in Arabic would ignore its multiple histories and distinct practices. Instead, I describe comparative literary scholarship in Arabic as part of a planetary movement that came in response to historical events which required mutual translation (see, e.g., Allush; Gould). Relevant is that this counters exclusionary approaches based on competitive scenarios of priority and origins; besides, Arab cultural processes cannot be studied as self-enclosed systems divided from world systems. Scholars of Arabic—regardless of origins or geographical locations—ought to be looked at as actors and creators of discourse in comparative scholarship. Among Western scholars, Rebecca Gould acknowledges that comparative scholarship in Arabic may be considered as part of a planetary movement when Arab-European contacts along history would be taken into account (169). In the Western Middle Ages, Arabic translations from Latin texts abounded. Abul-Walid Muhammad ibn Rushd (1126–1198) known as the translator of Aristotle’s *Poetics* (Cordoba 1170) and Hazim al-Qartajanni’s (1211–1285) theoretical engagement with the Aristotelian tradition in *A Methodology for Rhetoricians and Guidebook for the Literati* (Cordoba, 1285), are a case in point. Translation and the travel of knowledge which occurred during the Andalusian period created encounters eventually raising comparative issues in the following centuries. For example, in 1822 Jean-Francois Champollion, a philologist with a background in Greek, Latin, Persian, Sanskrit, Ethiopian, Zend, Pahlavi, and Arabic deciphered the Rosetta Stone by comparing phonetic characters in the demotic section bearing similarities to Greek. Champollion discovered the kinship relations among languages, a practice comparable to Leo Spitzer’s linguistic studies in Istanbul during the interwar

period, perhaps best described as “worldly linguistic exchanges containing the seeds of a transnational humanism or global translation” (Apter 46).

Likewise, translation projects resulting from the French campaign in Egypt (1798–1801) were accelerated during Mohamed Ali’s reign (1811–1848), with the first group of Egyptian students sent to France for study. Ironically, imam Rifa’a al-Tahtawi (1801–1873) who accompanied the students to maintain their religious observance was the one to initiate the translation movement in Egypt, eventually germinating secular thinking. al-Tahtawi acquired French and extensive knowledge in French literature and culture and in his work compared linguistic syntax, cultural backgrounds, and the political systems produced by them. Upon his return to Egypt, he founded Madrasat al-’Alsun (School of Languages) in Cairo, translated French literature, and published his major work *Takhlis al-Ibriz fi Talkhis Bariz* (1849) (The Quintessence of Paris), a book describing cultural practices in France during the mid-nineteenth century. His writings invoked cultural comparison and thus prompting different modes of thought. At this time, Egypt was partially free of Ottoman intervention and in the process of constructing its status as a nation, Egyptian intellectuals called for new ideas to counter and mediate traditional thinking. Furthermore, al-Tahtawi’s book came as an Egyptian response to literature written by Voltaire, Rousseau, and Montesquieu among other French travelers in whose work the image of the Orient was prominent and thus established the Western view of the Orient. Thus, imagology or the study of East-West image circulation and interchange was another major stimulus for the comparative approach. In the 1960s imagology was adopted by Hasan al-Nuti (Lebanon) and Mu’nis Taha Husain (Egypt), among others (see Allush 154) and the first international symposium in comparative literature—held in 1989 at the Department of English, University of Cairo—was entitled *Images of Egypt in Twentieth-century Literature* (in European scholarship with regard to imagology, see, e.g., Andraş).

As I mention above, starting in the nineteenth century the introduction of foreign cultures through translation raised inquiries calling for comparative scholarship. We know that in its inception and despite Goethe’s concept of *Weltliteratur*, comparative literature was developed as a discipline based on national literatures and we also know that this remains—at large—the case today with the corollary of Eurocentrism (on this, see, e.g., Pireddu; Porter; Tötösy de Zepetnek, “The New”; Witt). Most Arab nations fell under European imperialism by the beginning of the twentieth century, which bred a conflicting relationship with the West. Consequently, the comparative approach emerging in Arabic bifurcated in two directions: studies of cultural interchange on the one hand and influence studies on the other with the latter appropriating European methodology with an inverse view. Sulayman al-Bustani belongs to the first approach: in the critical introduction to his translation of the *Illiad* (1904) he compares the Greek epic with ancient Arabic poetry. What is innovative in his approach is that he works with no inclination to trace influences. He avoids making value judgments and by setting

his study in cultural context shows how poetic creativity in different geographies share some affinities despite their variance. He focused on tracing transcultural concepts without setting priorities. Conversely, Arab comparatists, who adopted influence studies challenged their Western counterparts by appropriating the latter's findings. This reveals Arab contributions to Western culture with the consequence that influence studies were to prove the West's indebtedness to Arab culture and thus the suggestion of Arab superiority to their colonizers.

In the West, references to Islamic sources were made as early as in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Edgar Blochet's *Les Sources Orientales de la Divine Comédie* traced the connection in 1901 (see Allush 192) and his hypothesis was later fostered by Miguel Asin Palacios in *La escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia* (1919). Qustaqi al-Himsi adopted this assumption in his *Manhal al-Wurrad fi 'Elm al-Intiqad* (1906–1907) (Foundation of the Discipline of Criticism). He pointed out connections between Abu al-'Ala' al-Ma'arri's (953–1057) *Risalat al-Ghufran* (Epistle of Forgiveness) and Dante's *Divine Comedy*. His model was later followed by 'Abdul-Wahab 'Azzam (1933) and Darrini Khashabah (1936) in *al-Risala* (The Epistle), a Cairene weekly journal. More influence studies were pursued by Ruhi al-Khaldi who presented a contextual study of Arabic, Andalusian, and Sicilian influences on European Renaissance literature in a series of articles published in *al-Hilal* (The Crescent), a Cairene monthly digest (1902–03), to later reappear in book form in 1912 with several reprints (see Isstaif 2) and Fakhri Abul-Su'ud traced Arabic influences on English literature (1936). Traces of Arabic impact in troubadour poetry, the picaresque novel, and the diffusion of *A Thousand and One Arabian Nights* were topics of major interest among Arab comparative scholars, but with conclusions previously drawn by European scholars. Owing to the historical contact between Egypt and France, comparative literature in French was diffused by the translation of Paul Van Tieghem's and Marius François Guyard's comparative methodologies and frameworks. The impact of the French school was felt in particular in the work of Muhammad Ghoneimy Hilal who published several books in comparative literature in the 1950s. Another variety of the French school was presented by René Etiemble—an opponent of Eurocentrism—whose impact became more prominent among Arab leftists (see al-Khateeb 16) and this approach was able to survive during the military dictatorships of the 1960s; however, the non-nation approach has not taken hold in general and remains a minority approach in Arabic literary study including comparative literature.

The French model was established also at the University of Algiers during the French occupation (1830–1962). However, the theoretical and methodological approach and practice did not change much after independence in 1962. For example, the first issue of *Cahiers Algériens de Littérature Comparée* in 1966 contains mostly influence studies. By the 1970s the use of English instead of French became wide spread in the Arab world and translations from English exceed by now those from French and thus a number of seminal texts published

in English were translated (e.g., Remak; Welles and Warren; see al-Khateeb 14). The U.S.-American school of comparative literature was imported to Arabic mostly in the work of Hussam al-Khateeb. Starting with the 1980s and in response to the impact of globalization, new comparative methodologies were adopted by scholars working at several universities, for example in Cairo, Damascus, Beirut, Kuwait, Riyadh, and the Maghreb. Scholars trained in poststructuralist theories rejected influence studies as remnants of a hierarchical discourse and pursued instead the analysis of texts and themes such as *Thousand and One Arabian Nights*, the picaresque, troubadour lyrics, etc.

Surprisingly, the discipline of comparative literature was promulgated in literary magazines before being established in the academe. For example, references to the discipline that had already been made in *al-Hilal* in 1904 were followed in a series of articles published in *al-Risala* (1933–53) (The Epistle) by Khalil Hindawi as early as 1936 while in ensuing years a growing number of literary journals dedicated space to the discipline. The first specialized annual journal in comparative literature, *Cahiers Algériens de littérature comparée* issued three volumes in 1966–68. Major Arabic literary journals issued in the 1980s have devoted several volumes to comparative literature, for example: *Fusuul: Majalat al-Naqd al-Adabi* (Expositions: Journal of Literary Criticism, Cairo), *al-Mawqif al-Adabi* (The Literary Perspective, Damascus), *al-Adab al-Ajnabiya* (Foreign Literatures, Damascus), *‘Alam al-Fikr* (The Realm of Intellect, Kuwait), and *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* (Cairo). In university education, the comparative approach was introduced in 1940 to undergraduates of Dar al-’Ulum (Cairo), an independent academic institution, by Ibrahim Salamah, Najib al-’Aqqi, and ‘Abdul-Raziq Hamidah. By the 1970s, the discipline was taught in departments of Arabic at the University of Cairo and Ein Shams University. The Department of English at the American University in Cairo became the “Department of English and Comparative Literature in the late 1970s (on the history of comparative literature in Egypt and at the University of Cairo, see Ghazoul). Dissertations in comparative literature were on the rise during the 1980s both in Arabic and foreign language departments. This is relevant because until then doctoral dissertations were written mostly with approaches instituted under colonial rule. While many scholars working in comparative literature remain with focus on the nation approach and publish influence studies to suggest the superiority of Arab literature, since the 1980s scholars have been unraveling this approach as an offshoot of a reductionist discourse. Advances of new media technology and communication enable scholars working in the Arab world to read and analyze cultural products within a comparative planetary perspective which, in consequence, cannot be restricted to national borders. However, their contribution has not always had wide reception in Western scholarship. In particular since the 1990s—although, in lesser numbers, even before that—books in comparative literature published in Arabic with theoretical and methodological frameworks, as well as application are of a large number and come second only to English

(see Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári; see also Tötösy de Zepetnek, “Multilingual Bibliography”).

While Francophone Arab scholars maintain the established dialogue with scholarship in French and focus on a binary relationship of French and Arab literature, bilingualism, and intercultural relationships, Anglophone Arab scholars have not always managed to develop a dialogue with Anglophone scholarship. An alternative has been provided by Edward W. Said’s “secular criticism” and postcolonial studies thus providing a space of resistance to stereotypes constructed by institutional or political systems whose hegemony is much in place also in literary studies. It is my hope that literary scholarship in Arabic would adopt tenets of comparative literature and evolve it with knowledge from the vast resources available in Arabic culture. Further, postcolonial, gender, minority, and diaspora studies would be areas of inquiry—in particular when located in the contextual approach as proposed in the framework of comparative cultural studies—with focus on the “other” and the study of exclusions and cultural transactions. The resistance towards “imported theories,” while justified, can be overcome by parallel attention to Western frameworks and the development of “domestic” theory construction followed by application in the study of Arabic literature and culture. The fact that Arabic-speaking scholars have good command of at least one foreign language means constant negotiation with alterity and this facilitates the suggestion of the said “parallel approach” to the study of comparative literature and comparative cultural studies in Arabic.

## THE INSTITUTIONAL PRESENCE OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

With regard to the contemporary institutional presence of comparative literature in the Arab world, in Egypt the Department of French at the University of Cairo launched comparative literature as an undergraduate course in the 1980s and the same occurred in the Department of English in the early 2000s and scholars working in these departments publish(ed) a large number of books and articles. At the University of Cairo international conferences in comparative literature are held biannually since the late 1980s and the Egyptian Society for Comparative Literature was founded there in the 1980s. In the Levant, comparative literature was introduced in the Department of Arabic at the University of Damascus in 1971 and where also the Department of English has offered courses in comparative literature since the 1980s (al-Khateeb 11). The Arab Comparative Literature Association in Damascus has also held international conferences in comparative literature since the 1980s. In Lebanon, the American University of Beirut offers an M.A. in comparative literature. In the Gulf, comparative scholarship has become active at several universities including Kuwait University where an M.A. program in comparative literature and cultural studies is offered since 2007 and a minor in comparative literature is being launched in 2012. The United Arab Emirates University is planning to introduce comparative literature at its undergraduate

level and establish a graduate program in comparative literature. The English Literature program at Sharjah University (Emirates) offers undergraduate courses in world literature and a graduate course in comparative literature is offered at King Saud University (Riyadh). In Yemen, comparative Literature is applied in the teaching of English literature in the Faculty of Education at Sana'a University (see Sharyan). In the Maghreb, a chair of comparative literature was established in the University of Algiers in the 1960s. Comparative scholarship plays a significant role at universities in Morocco, for example at Bin M'isk University and at the University of Casablanca, where an association called Coordination des Chercheurs sur les Littératures Maghrebien et Comparées exists with the objective to promote inter-university research programs, conferences, etc. While in Tunisia there is no department or program in comparative literature, there is an increasing demand for the institutional recognition of the discipline as scholars at various universities publish studies in the discipline, although mostly in French. However, the University of Manouba has established an M.A. program in comparative literature in 1986 (see Sidaoui) and has also issued a series of books in comparative studies published in English (see Ghazoul 119).

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# Comparative Poetics in Chinese

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Xiaolu Wang and Yan Liu

**Abstract:** In their article “Comparative Poetics in Chinese” Xiaolu Wang and Yan Liu describe the development of comparative poetics by sketching major publications and the general institutional situation of the discipline. Wang and Liu suggest that comparative work remains impulsive although dynamic. Like other fields in the humanities, the study of poetics—comparative or other—in Chinese is no longer traditional in terms of a discursive form, but copied from the West. Although the scholarly achievements in the field within the past thirty years are considerable, problems remain including the issue of translation of Western theories and the approaching foreign scholarship with narrow minded nationalism. Wang’s and Liu’s postulate that the role scholars working in Chinese ought to knowledge from the ways of how the issues and questions studied would cross cultural boundaries.

Poetics (*shixue*), like most of the frequently used literary terms with a long history, does not necessarily carry a strict definition. In both China and the West, poetics has long been used as a technical term referring to different approaches to composition, interpretation, and the exegesis play in the humanities in general and in comparative poetics in particular. According to *Webster’s New World Dictionary of American Language*, poetics is “the theory or structure of poetry” (1100), whereas in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* it is defined as “theory of literature,” “theory of literary discourse,” and “theory of poetry” (930). As poetry was the major literary genre in ancient China, several other terms were used with similar connotations but slight differences, such as *shifa* (rules of poetry) and *shige* (manner and structure of poetry). Other similar terms include *shiwei* (poetic flavor), *shiyuan* (highlights of poetic diction), and *shiqu* (liveliness in poetry) (see Peng). As observed by Richard John Lynn, “The earliest remarks that have bearing on poetics are found in the philosophical writings of pre-Confucian, Confucian, and other early thinkers—notably Daoist (Taoist)—from the 6th C.B.C. to the 2nd C.A.D.” (“Chinese Poetics” 187). Therefore, poetry writing in ancient China “enjoyed a unique prestige” and “every cultivated person was expected to be able to compose poetry” (Van Zoeren 146). Huarong Xiao writes that “Poetics in my book does not refer to the ‘poetics’ Aristotle held to cover all the literary and art theory in general, but to the theory concerning poetry in the narrow sense... because the pure theory involving literature and art throughout ancient China is one on poetry only” (1; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are ours). At the same time, Xingpei Yuan believes that Aristotle’s idea on ambiguity in his *Poetics* is still of use for the discussion of the art of poetry (3).

Since the late nineteenth century, however, Chinese scholarship has been impacted by Western ideas with the result that scholarship in China was fashioned on a large scale in the Western way. Consequently, in Chinese poetics the above referred to notions and terms are no longer used; instead the translated term *shixue* (although the word *shixue* appeared several times in the poems in the Tang (618–907), Song (960–1179), and Yuan (1271–1368) dynasties. Since the late twentieth century *shixue* has been frequently used to indicate literary theory and the composition of literary works in a more general sense. Therefore, “poetics” in contemporary China always stands for “the learning to evaluate and examine literature” (Yue 468). In fact, this new notion of “poetics” is not new at all but could be traced back to that of Aristotle: “Aristotle’s example enables us to define the word as an account of the nature and practice of (in his case dramatic) literature considered as an autonomous subject” (Miner 12). Such a review enables us to differentiate the true meanings of the word in Chinese academia and thus paves the way for further analysis in order to find out the changes of its connotations as a result of Western influences. The research conducted by Chinese scholars in the field of comparative poetics in the past reflects these changes in more ways than one.

The history of the Chinese usage of “poetics” in literary studies, as well as in comparative studies since the twentieth century is carried out in accordance with the changes of taxonomy as mentioned above. From the early twentieth century to the 1930s, Chinese scholars in this field include Guowei Wang, Xun Lu, Honglie Yang, Zhongfan Chen, Xiaoyue Fang, Genze Luo, and Mi Wu, to name a few, among whom Guowei Wang is the most representative. Wang is one of the earliest scholars who consciously employed Western conceptions of philosophy and concepts from aesthetics in the study of literature and in his studies on the novel *Story of the Stone* (other translations of the title include *Dream of the Red Chamber*; *Dream of Red Towers*) and on early Chinese drama and song lyrics he adopted the comparative approach. In a way he regulated the standards for literary criticism in China. In turn, “Lu Xun desires a ‘demonic,’ aggressive role for poetry. He laments the absence in China of poets who, in ‘singing of themselves,’ disturb a national psyche that wants nothing more than the peace and solace of spiritual slumber” (Denton 27). Lu’s essay “Moluo Shi Li Shuo” (“On the Power of Mara Poetry,” 1907) set a fine example of literary criticism by appealing for new perspectives from the West (see Tang 58). Yang, who used “Chinese poetics” almost for the first time in Chinese history, states in the preface of his 1928 book that European and U.S.-American principles in poetics should be used in doing literary criticism on Chinese poetry. His *Zhongguo Shixue Dagang* (Chinese Poetics: An Outline) offers a detailed definition of Chinese poetry, its classification, structures, composition, and functions and involvement in history. Wu’s essay “Honglouloumeng Xin Tan” (“Reread *Dream of the Red Chamber*,” 1920) refers to Western concepts, especially those by Aristotle, in

treating traditional Chinese literary subjects (see Xu 54), thus standing as one of the earliest attempts at comparative studies in the Chinese academia.

During the 1930s to mid-1960s, the leading scholars in the field of comparative poetics in China included Zhongshu Qian, Guangqian Zhu, and Cunzhong Fan. Qian adopts comparative approaches in *Tan Yi Lu* (Discourse on the Literary Art) in an attempt to find out the common effects behind the different Chinese and Western conceptions (see, e.g., Longxi Zhang, “Qian Zhongshu as Comparatist”). His ways of making comparison across different cultures and disciplines in order to observe the general principles of literary creation mark him a unique figure in Chinese literary history whose academic achievement remains insurmountable by scholars of later generations. His *Guan Zhui Bian* (The Tube and Awl Chapters) published in 1979 made an immediate impact upon the academia. It is culturally interesting, too, that Qian, as he did in his previous book on art and literature, wrote the book in the very form of traditional written Chinese. Zhu in his *Shi Lun* (On Poetry), first published in 1943, traces the origins of Chinese poetry, especially focusing on how Chinese poetry has taken on rigid rhyming schemes and tonal patterns. His perspectives combine history, archeology and psychology, and he compares poetry with music, prose, and painting in order to find out poetry’s unique features. Fan published articles on the relationship between English literature and Chinese culture, especially his essays on Chinese thought in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England, some of which were collected later in his *Zhongguo Wenhua zai Qimeng Shiqi de Yingguo* (*Chinese Culture in the England of the Enlightenment Age* 1931 as his Ph.D. dissertation at Harvard and published in Chinese in 1991). Fan closely observes how Chinese culture went into English literary genres such as poetry, prose, and drama, and one chapter of the book is devoted to the discussion of the influence of Chinese gardening and indoor decorative art in English literature (on this, see also, e.g., Zheng; Zou).

Studies in comparative poetics in the following decade or so almost became suspended because of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Thus, during this period most scholarship in the field was published by Chinese U.S.-American scholars but this turned out to be influential in Mainland China starting from 1976. One of the many achievements made by overseas Chinese scholars was by James J.Y. Liu, whose *The Art of Chinese Poetry* (1962) and *Chinese Theories of Literature* (1975) carry some of Liu’s own theories of poetic criticism. In the former, by analyzing how Chinese language works as a medium of poetic expression, Liu further summarizes the four kinds of Chinese views of poetry, namely, the didactic view, the individualist view, the technical view and the intuitionist view. And he finally attempts to describe how poetry and some of the poetic elements are able to bridge gaps across cultures. In the latter book, Liu looks closely at the seemingly chaotic threads of literary theories in China, makes comparisons between these theories and similar theories from the West, and then attempts to draw up some universal literary theory through such a dialogue. As Lynn said, Liu’s thought was always upon “the nature of Chinese

poetic expression, how to induce systems of literary theory from the often unsystematic and fragmentary modes of critical discourse in China, how to build on the comparative study of Western and Chinese theories of literature to develop fruitful methods of practical criticism and interpretation—to name but some of them” (x).

In 1981 the journal *Guowai Wenxue* (Foreign Literatures), which later turned into one of the leading academic journals for the study of foreign literatures, began to be published by Peking University Press. Starting in the 1980s foreign scholars in the field of comparative literature were invited to Peking University and their lectures raised interest. Visiting professors who were invited included John Deeney (The Chinese University of Hong Kong), Eugene Chen Eoyang (Indiana University), Douwe Fokkema (Utrecht University), Claudio Guillén (Harvard University), J. Hillis Miller (University of California Irvine), and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek (University of Alberta), to name a few. At the same time, Xianlin Ji initiated a group for the study of comparative literature with members including Ji, Funing Li, Zhouhan Yang, Daiyun Yue, and Longxi Zhang. Soon after, the Peking University Academic Lectures Series was launched and the books published impacted scholarship in China. Most recently, in 2011 Peking University and Harvard University co-organized a Summer Institute for World Literature. Further, the founding of CCLA: Chinese Comparative Literature Association in 1981 marks the arrival of comparative literature in Mainland China. Especially Yue (Peking University) has made both with her scholarship and her administrative institutional work an impact (see, e.g., Zhang and Yue). Since the founding of the Association, scholars have enjoyed a relatively peaceful period to pursue comparative poetics (it is interesting and different from the West that the discipline of comparative literature—if not a full-fledged department—is housed mostly in departments of Chinese rather than in departments of foreign languages; further, it is in China where the discipline achieved the highest percent per capita, similar to the situation in the West, where the discipline until recently is most wide spread in the U.S. (see, e.g., Tötösy de Zepetnek, “The Study of Literature in China”).

In the meantime, access to Western publications has increased and as a result, scholarship in comparative poetics began to appear in a substantial measure starting from the 1980s. Examples of scholarship in this period in comparative poetics included *Bijiao Wenxue Yiwen Ji* (Essays in Comparative Literature, 1982), edited by Longxi Zhang, and *Bijiao Wenxue Yanjiu Yiwen Ji* (A Study in Comparative Literature: A Collection of Translations, 1985), edited by Yongchang Yu, Junliao Hong, and Ruiqin Ni. Both collections of essays provide Chinese scholars with new sources in comparative poetics from abroad. Further, Kemu Jin, a scholar in Indian studies, published in 1984 *Bijiao Wenhua Lun Ji* (A Collection of Comparative Cultures). Scholars in English studies also published important works in comparative poetics, for example, Zuoliang Wang whose *Lun Qihe: Bijiao Wenxue Yanjiu Ji* (Degrees of Affinity: Studies in Comparative Literature,

1985) and his essay collection *Zhongwai Wenxue Zhijian* (Between Chinese and Foreign Literatures, 1984) cover Chinese and English poetry and translation studies in which the differences and similarities in both Chinese and Western literatures are discussed from a cross-cultural perspective. Also translations of seminal texts in comparative literature appeared, for example, Ulrich Weisstein's *Comparative Literature and Literary Theory: Survey and Introduction* (1973), translated by Xiangyu Liu and published in 1987. Yuanhua Wang focuses in his *Wenxin Diaolong Chuangzuo Lun* (On Creation of *Wenxin Diaolong*, 1984) on traditional Chinese literary theory based on Xie Liu's principles drawing on Western philosophy. Although not published until 1981, Baihua Zong's *Meixue Sanbu* (Strolling in Aesthetics) covers a wide variety of aesthetics where ideas are compared from ancient Greek aesthetics to Kant in the West and a number of poets and artists in China. Some of his ideas were already published in the 1940s and 1950s.

Starting with the 1990s, the publication of works in comparative poetics increased. For example, Zhouhan Yang, in *Jingzi yu Qiqiaoban* (The Mirror and the Seven-Piece Puzzle, 1990), a collection of essays on comparative literature, provides his readers with ways to understand the nature of literature with multi-dimensional angles. Zhaojun Di, in *Zhongying Bijiao Shixue* (A Comparative Study of Chinese and English Poetics, 1992) discusses more specifically the different aspects of poetry and poetics between the two regions. In 1993, *Shijie Shixue Da Cidian* (Dictionary of Poetics) edited by Daiyun Yue, Lang Ye, and Peigeng Ni was published. This is the first comprehensive reference book on poetics in China with 2,497 entries including Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Arabic, continental European, and Anglophone concepts, schools, critics, works, and terms. By juxtaposing major concepts, terms, critics, scholars, and books from different regions of culture, the *Dictionary* is an effort by Chinese scholars to comprehend poetics with and through an overall perspective. And Hui Zhu compares in his *Zhongying Bijiao Shiyi* (Comparative Studies on the Art of Chinese and English Poetry, 1996) the techniques in both composition and the appreciation of poetry. An influential overseas scholar in this period was Wai-lim Yip whose publications include *Chinese Poetics* and *Diffusion of Distances Dialogues between Chinese and Western Poetics* (1993). Other books relevant here, although strictly on Chinese poetics, include Xiaoming Hu's *Zhongguo Shixue zhi Jingshen* (The Spirit of Chinese Poetics, 1993) and Siqu Li's *Zhongguo Shixue Huayu* (Discourse of Chinese Poetics, 1999). These two books are based on traditional Chinese culture and deal with the inner style of Chinese ways behind the discursive forms. Other translations to Chinese published by Peking University Press include Earl Miner's *Comparative Poetics: An Intercultural Essay on Theories of Literature* (1998) and Douwe Fokkema's and Elrud Ibsch's collected volume *The Study of Literature and Cultural Participation* (1996). Also since the 1980s, some scholars have attempted to carry out the study of literature with systemic and contextual approaches and thus beyond one-dimensional comparison, for example Shunqing



Cao's *Zhongxi Bijiao Shixue* (Comparative Poetics: China and West, 1988) and his *Zhongwai Bijiao Wenlun Shi* (A History of Chinese Foreign Literary Theory, 1998), books which initiated extensive discussion including the criticism by Xian Zhou who points out that Cao's 1998 book exaggerates the role of Western critical terms in Chinese comparative studies. Two other examples are *Zhongxi Bijiao Shixue Tixi* (A System in Chinese-Western Comparative Poetics, 1991) edited by Yaomian Huang and Qingbing Tong and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek's *Wen hsüe yen chiu ti ho fa hua* (Legitimizing the Study of Literature) translated by Jui-ch'i Ma (1997).

Some scholarship since the 1980s, however, shows that comparative poetics is understood as "straight" comparison between texts either of the original or the translated with focus on the comparison between certain categories but without tracing historical contexts. Hong Yu acutely observes in *Zhongguo Wenlu yu Xifang Shixue* (Chinese Literary Theory and Western Poetics, 1999), "Chinese and Western comparative poetics' has deleted the fundamental difference in cultural thought between the Chinese literary theory and the Western poetics. And in the context of modern Chinese there has been a giant semantic gap between the ancient Chinese and the translated modern Chinese terms, for the Chinese literary theory and the Western poetics have been arbitrarily taken for granted as exactly equivalent categories" (3). Yu compares the origins and uses of "poetics" in China and the West and warns scholars of the danger of forced comparisons without taking into consideration the true meanings of the word in different contexts. Like James J.Y. Liu and Zhongshu Qian, Yu attempts to look for something common beyond cultural differences.

Since the 2000s, studies have kept an overall approach regarding poetics as literary theory in general in both China and the West (see also Wang, Ning, *Comparative Literature*, "Confronting Globalization"). Pengzi Rao's collection of articles in *Bijiao Shixue* (Comparative Poetics, 2000) are not only about poetic tradition, but also some other related fields such as drama, fiction, as well as the general situation of Chinese literature in Southeastern Asia. Ganjian Lai focuses in *Ershi Shiji Zhongxi Bijiao Shixue* (Chinese-Western Comparative Poetics in the Twentieth Century, 2003) on modern literary theories. Jiemin Liu's *Zhongguo Bijiao Shixue* (Chinese Comparative Poetics, 2004) is an attempt to establish an overall perspective by taking the West as an integrated whole and Naiqiao Yang's *Beili yu Zhenghe: Dongfang Rudao Shixue yu Xifang Shixue de Benti Lun Yuyan Lun Bijiao* (Comparative Poetics: East and West, Paradoxes and Integration, 1998) covers some of the basic categories of language and ontology in order to find a way for effective communication. Hanwen Fang, in his *Shijie Bijiao Shixue Shi* (History of World Comparative Poetics, 2007), attempts to cover phenomena in almost every major region of culture based on scholarship in national literatures and literary theories. Shunqing Cao, in his *Zhongxi Bijiao Shixue Shi* (History of Chinese-Western Comparative Poetics, 2008), deals with modern Chinese and Western poetics. However, both books contain unnecessary repetitions. Ying Fu,



in *Zhongguo Xiandai Wenxue Lilun Fasheng Shi* (History of Modern Chinese Literary Theory, 2008), traces the origin and development of such a theory by indicating how modern Chinese literary theory is influenced by that of the West (see also Zheng).

Interesting examples of case studies in Chinese comparative poetics include the translation of Monika Motsch's *Guanzhuibian Yu Du Fu Xin Jie* (With Tube and Awl: From Zhongshu's Guanzhuibian to a New View of Du Fu) (1998), translated by Shude Ma, in which Motsch discusses Qian's ideas in his *Chapters* and cultural significance in the poems by Du Fu (Tang Dynasty). Motsch foregrounds relevant issues in comparative literature in China, as well as some fundamental concepts in the study of literature. Xiaolu Wang's *Zhongxi Shixue Duihua: Yingyu Shijie de Zhongguo Gudai Wenlun Yanjiu* (Dialogue between Chinese and Western Poetics: Traditional Chinese Literary Theory in the English Speaking World, 2000) is a case study of how traditional Chinese literary theory is studied by Sinologists in different cultural contexts. Wensheng Wang's *Lun Qingjing: Zhongguo Shuqing Wenxue Jiegou Zhuyi* (Structuralism in Chinese Lyric Literature, 2001) is an attempt to interpret Chinese lyrics by adopting the analytical framework of structuralism. Xiaolu Wang's collected volume *Xifang Hanxue Jie de Zhongguo Wenlun Yanjiu* (Chinese Literary Theory in the West, 2003) is a supplement to his 2000 single-authored book with articles on the studies by German and French Sinologists. Meng Hua's collection of essays *Bijiao Wenxue Xingxiang Xue* (Imagology in Comparative Literature, 2001) and Yanqiu Zhao's *Xingxiang Shixue* (Poetics of Literary Images, 2004) are relevant in both comparative literature and with regard to one of its subfields, image studies. Similar is Xinlin Zhao's *Image yu Xiang: Zhongxi Shixue Xiang Lun Suyuan* (Image and xiang: A Study of Image in Chinese and Western Poetics, 2005) in which he traces the origins of both the Chinese *xiang* and Western "image" with their cultural traditions and how some Sinologists study *xiang* as a referent (see also Owen 587). And the collected volume *Zhongguo Yindu Wenhua Bijiao: Dongfang Wenhua jicheng* (Chinese and Indian Poetics: A Comparative Study) by Longyu Yu and others contains studies from the perspective of the East within both Chinese and Indian traditions.

Apart from work discussed above, the study of poetics and literary criticism with comparative perspectives in general have become an integral part of curriculum design in higher institutions in Mainland China (for a list of books see Tötösy de Zepetnek, "Multilingual"). The first university course in comparative literature was offered by I.A. Richards at Tsinghua University between 1929 and 1931 and, based on Richards's lecture notes, P.D. Jameson compiled teaching materials *Comparative Literature* (unpublished). However, comparative literature was not offered on a large scale on the Mainland until after the 1990s. By 1994 comparative literature in both undergraduate and graduate education has become a presence at universities and colleges and this trend continues. Even the official category of the discipline of "Foreign Literatures" was changed to "Comparative

Literature & World Literature” (on comparative literature in Chinese, see also Zhou and Tong). Some of the books mentioned above have served as textbooks for such courses as well. Among the textbooks, Yuehong Chen’s *Bijiao Shixue Daolun* (Comparative Poetics: An Introduction, 2005) is now in the “21st-century Textbook Series in Comparative Literature.” Such series are issued, more often than not, by the Chinese Ministry of Education and thus have an impact on the teaching of comparative literature nationwide. The most recent textbook is Longxi Zhang’s *Bijiao Wenxue Yanjiu Rumu* (Comparative Literature: A Guide for Study, 2008). Like Zhang’s other books, it is not intended to cover all phenomena in the area, but as a practical guide for students to engage in further study. In addition to theoretical and methodological issues, Zhang’s book includes cases studies.

The above mentioned scholarly books (published both in Chinese and in Chinese translations) can be categorized into the following groups with regard to their contents:

Topics/themes	Numbers of books
poetics in general/literary theory	29
area studies/specific topics	10
history of comparative poetics	5
poetics as the art of poetry	4
textbooks	2
reference books	1

Apart from scholarly books on poetics, a great number of critical articles have also appeared in the same period, thus adding another dimension to scholarship in the Mainland. An overview of the CCLA quarterly journal *Zhongguo Bijiao Wenxue* (Comparative Literature in China) 1984–2008 allows us to gauge types of scholarship published on:

Topics/themes	Number of articles
poetics in general/literary theory	28
area studies/specific topics	17
categories of genre	15
culture	10
Western literary theory and China	9
translation studies	6
methodology	2
interviews/book reviews	2
gender studies	1

Based on the above, we can see that more scholars are interested in discussing poetics by taking it as literary theory in general and we have the same situation with regard to books. Chinese scholars pay more attention to the comparison of categories of genre, as well as to the comparison between different areas and literary works. Since the 1990s, other foci of attention include translation studies

and gender issues although the latter field is represented by only one article and no article has yet appeared on issues of race in literature.

Statistics of articles on comparative poetics published in other leading journals in China are of course relevant and we present our findings with regard to the following journals: *Wenxue Pinglun* (Literary Review), *Wenyi Yanjiu* (Literature & Art Studies), *Wenyi Pinglun* (Literature and Art Criticism), *Waiguo Wenxue Pinglun* (Foreign Literature Review), *Waiguo Wenxue Yanjiu* (Foreign Literature Studies), *Wenyi Zhengming* (Forum in Literature and Art), *Wenyi Lilun Yanjiu* (Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art), and *Wenyi Lilun Yu Piping* (Theory and Criticism of Literature and Art). All these journals are key journals in China on literature and art criticism and articles published in these journals are indexed by the Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index. The articles are published in Chinese in most cases with abstracts in English. Topics on comparative poetics carried in these journals from 1980–2008 can be grouped and classified as follows:

Topics/themes	Number of articles
aesthetics/poetics	23
area studies/specific topics	18
Western literary theory and China	14
categories of genre	5
drama studies	4
culture	3
interviews/book reviews	2

What the above statistics indicate is that the range and number of articles are roughly the same as that in *Comparative Literature in China*. Another common feature is that studies conducted on specific topics/themes occupy only a small proportion: 20% for scholarly books and articles in *Comparative Literature in China* and 30% for articles in the other journals. In comparison, however, more books (nearly 80%) and articles (nearly 70%) have been written on the theoretical level in *Comparative Literature in China*. This reflects the tendency on the part of Chinese scholars to approach an issue from a broad perspective rooted in Chinese cultural tradition but is also greatly influenced by the importation of Western literary theories. Overall, almost 40% of Chinese scholars engage in comparative poetics by taking poetics as literary theory in general whereas 10% of them deal with poetic techniques.

A further way in which we can gauge the situation of comparative poetics in China is with the themes of CCLA conferences 1985–2008. The first national conference of the Association was convened in October 1985, two months after René Etiemble delivered his lecture on the revival of comparative literature in China at the triannual congress of the International Comparative Literature Association / Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée in Paris (ICLA/AILC). Etiemble's prediction that the third phase in the development of comparative literature could possibly happen in China inspired the expansion of comparative

poetics. The themes of CCLA conferences were as follows: 1) *The Revival of Comparative Literature in China* (Shenzhen, 1985), 2) *The Space and Boundary of Literature* (Xi'an, 1987), 3) *Passion and Illusion: Chinese Literature in World Literatures* (Guiyang, 1990), 4) *Literature in the Context of Multiculturalism* (Zhang Jiajie, 1993), 5) *Cultural Dialogue and Cultural Memory* (Changchun, 1996), 6) *Comparative Literature in an Age of Multiplicity* (Chengdu, 1999), 7) *Comparative Literature in Cross-Cultural Context in the New Millennium* (Nanjing, 2002), 8) *Review and Prospect: Comparative Literature in China in the Past Two Decades* (Shenzhen, 2005), 9) *Literary Dialogue in Multicultural Interactions* (Beijing, 2008), and 10) *Comparative Literature Today and Research Methodology* (Shanghai, 2011).

In the conferences participants have focused on the different attributes Chinese poetics have in comparison with Western poetics and this interest lasted for more than ten years as more and more Chinese scholars have begun to engage in the reconfiguration of Chinese poetics in an attempt to dialogue with Western critical discourse. From the above presented gauge of scholarly books, journals, and CCLA conferences the following can be deduced with regard to the development of comparative poetics in Mainland China: the phase of translation and introduction of the parameters of comparative poetics, the phase of adoption to adaptation of European and Anglophone forms of comparative literature to the study of Chinese literature, and the phase of adaptation with stress on cross-cultural interaction.

While there is ample evidence that comparative poetics have become a major field in the humanities in Chinese, we view this imbued with a problem of what remains a major drawback of comparative literature, namely the discipline's nation-based orientation or even narrow-minded nationalism. This occurs in Chinese scholarship in the following version. Owing to the fact that most of the concepts and notions in use are translated from Western languages, an anxiety is seen among scholars about the theoretical discourse as they insist that there is a lack of such discourse in Chinese scholarship. Therefore, it seems necessary for them to establish a Chinese school of comparative literature with its own Chinese based theoretical and methodological frameworks and taxonomy (see, e.g., Chen, *From Thematics*; Cao, "How the Chinese School?"). However, such so-called "Chineseness" in comparative poetics makes no sense because, in our view, the importance and relevance of the humanities—and especially of comparative poetics—is to study and explore different cultures and literatures, thus maintaining and transferring knowledge. With the attempt to make the Chinese noticeable in humanities scholarship, most books mentioned in this essay attempt to cover almost every aspect of poetics, but some books, especially in the 1990s by the mainland scholars mentioned above, provide the reader with insight in terms of new scholarship and many include repetitions of already discussed matters. While comparative poetics as a field and comparative literature as a discipline are well established within the humanities in China, too many texts are based on

translated Chinese versions of the original. To make matters worse, not many Chinese scholars are able to read Western theories in the original language. As translation is often regarded as a form of re-creation, research based on translation will naturally lead to misunderstandings and the misuse of Western theories in the Chinese context. Of course, this problem is no different from the situation, for example in the U.S., where in the last several decades there is an ongoing debate about the lack of language knowledge in comparative literature (see, e.g. Apter).

Different from Mainland China, in Taiwan and in Hong Kong comparative literature is practiced in departments of foreign languages and the few books in comparative literature from a global perspective and/or with regard to theory appeared also in English (see, e.g., Chen, *From Thematics*). With regard to institutional presence, there exists a Graduate Institute of Comparative Literature at Fu Jen Catholic University and a Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Hong Kong. With regard to the international presence of comparative literature in Asia, although Mainland China proposed to hold the 1997 congress of the ICLA/AILC in Beijing, the bid that was rejected by the executive of the Association with the reasoning that the Chinese organization was not sufficiently developed and without the required resources to hold a successful congress. Thus, since the inception of the Association in 1955 in Venice ICLA/AILC congress held outside of Europe and the Americas were held only four times: in Tokyo (1991), Pretoria (2000), Hong Kong (2004), Seoul (2010), and none in India or in the Middle East.

In conclusion, we postulate that in the field of comparative poetics many issues can be studied best and with relevant results within the relevant context and through an understanding and knowledge of both primary texts and theory. In comparative poetics the issues and questions themselves are not “what” is relevant; rather, it is “how” these issues and questions become the subject of study as suggested in the framework of comparative literature and comparative cultural studies (see, e.g., Tötösy de Zepetnek, “From Comparative”). The role scholars in China ought to play in the humanities in general and in comparative poetics in particular is to bring about knowledge from the ways of how the issues and questions studied would cross cultural boundaries. Scholars working in Chinese are able to contribute to the study of poetics worldwide as they have done, but as to how to improve the field of comparative humanities remains fundamental and depends on a cross-cultural perspective.

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# Comparative Literature in French

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Anne Tomiche

**Abstract:** In her article “Comparative Literature in French” Anne Tomiche presents the current situation of comparative literature in France, institutionally and pedagogically, as well as intellectually. She stresses the most recent changes that have happened in the field, focusing on the evolution of the discipline within the academic curriculum, on the evolution of research organization, and on the evolution of academic and scholarly domains of research in comparative literature. Finally, without claiming any bibliographical exhaustivity, she refers to recent scholarship that has marked the evolution of the discipline in French with emphasis on works published in the past fifteen years. Further, although she focuses on comparative literature in France, Tomiche presents aspects of French-language comparativism in Belgian French, Swiss French, and Québécois Canadian scholarship.

Without devoting too much space to the pre-history of French comparative literature—already well-documented (see, e.g., Brunel, Pichois, Rousseau; Chevrel, “Littérature (générale) et comparée”; Pageaux)—it might be worth recalling that while the first French textbook using the expression “comparative literature” in its title was François Noël’s *Cours de littérature comparée* which merely juxtaposes French, English, and Italian “lectures,” the true initiators of the discipline were Abel Villemain (whose 1828 lectures at the Sorbonne focused on the reciprocal influences of France and England over each other and on French influence in Italy in the eighteenth century), Jean-Jacques Ampère (whose inaugural lecture at the Sorbonne in 1832 dealt with medieval French literature in its relations with foreign literatures and who promoted what he called the “comparative study” of literature), and Philarète Chasles (who dedicated his inaugural lecture at the Parisian Athénée in 1835 to *la littérature étrangère comparée*).

Institutionally, the first chair in comparative literature was created in Lyon in 1890, where Joseph Texte was appointed, followed by Fernand Baldensperger. A *charge de cours* in comparative literature was created at the Sorbonne in 1910 for Baldensperger, while another chair was created in Strasbourg in 1919 and then at the Sorbonne in 1925. At the Collège de France, Paul Hazard held, as of 1925, the first “chair in the history of comparative literatures of Southern Europe and Latin America” (“chaire d’histoire des littératures comparées de l’Europe méridionale et de l’Amérique latine”). In 1921, with Baldensperger, Hazard created the *Revue de littérature comparée* and then a collection, the Bibliothèque de la Revue de littérature comparée (which, by 1939, included more than 120 volumes). The

*Revue de littérature comparée* has long been and still is the most important French scholarly journal in comparative literature. At present, it is directed by Pierre Brunel, Véronique Gély, and Daniel-Henri Pageaux, and it publishes four issues a year.

In France, the development of comparative literature as an academic discipline cannot be dissociated from the emergence and the development of the concept of *lettres modernes*, i.e., the study of literature considered less from the point of view of its relations to classical literature (*lettres classiques*) than from the point of view of its relations to modern languages. Historically speaking, what gave comparative literature a strong institutional status in the curriculum was the creation, in 1959, of the *agrégation de lettres modernes* with two examinations focusing specifically on comparative literature (as opposed to the *agrégation de lettres classiques*, with examinations in Greek and Latin). As long as the requirement of *agrégation*—the examination required to teach at the high school level and strongly recommended to be able to teach at the university level remains—the presence and the status of comparative literature in the curriculum of French studies is probably not going to be called into question. Because the *agrégation* includes two major examinations in comparative literature, one written and one oral, and because the entire curriculum of studies in literature is conceived as a preparation for the *agrégation*, comparative literature is a mandatory component for French literature students throughout their studies. Courses in comparative literature at the undergraduate level—at the level of the *licence*, which covers the first three years of studies—can be varied in terms of numbers, as well as of content. Depending on the institution, a comparative literature course may be mandatory in the first semester of the first year of undergraduate studies or it can be mandatory only in the second year. However, comparative literature courses usually tend to be organized around the study of literary genres (for example the picaresque novel, the fantastic, theater during the Baroque, etc.), of literary myths (Faust, Oedipus, Phaedra, etc.), or they deal with the relations between literature and the other arts such as cinema, painting, or music. The goal of such courses at this level is to introduce students to the main currents of European and extra-European literature. Texts are studied in French translation, but some universities make it mandatory to also study one of the texts of the corpus in its original language. In terms of its presence in the undergraduate curriculum, comparative literature is thus present and established, even if the number of mandatory courses in the discipline is rather limited compared to the number of other courses. Students interested in comparative literature can choose optional courses in the field. No university delivers a *licence* (the equivalent of a B.A.) in comparative literature. At best, comparative literature constitutes a *parcours* (a minor) within a *licence de lettres modernes*. For students in foreign languages, visual arts, art history, or other fields of the humanities, comparative literature can be an option they take within the course of their studies, but the situation concerning the possibility and the number of such options varies from institution to institution.

At the level of the Master of Arts degree, students can specialize in comparative literature: the nature and the number of courses they have to take vary depending on the university, but the comparative nature of their Master of Arts degree depends mainly on the subject of their thesis and on their supervisor. In terms of courses required to complete a Master of Arts degree, the importance given to specifically comparative literature courses varies, each university offering a unique set of combinations. Some Master of Arts degrees are entirely comparative in focus and content while others offer only a comparative component. Besides the courses that a Master of Arts student has to take, he/she also has to write two theses (one in first year and another one in second year, usually between 60 and 100 pages long). These master's theses constitute a student's first serious pieces of academic research and the second thesis often forms the beginning of a doctoral dissertation. At the doctoral level, dissertations in comparative literature encompass a broad range of subjects and languages, examined either in a diachronic perspective or with a focus on a given period. A working knowledge of the languages represented within the chosen literary corpus is a requisite, as all texts from the corpus must be quoted in the original language and analysis must be based on the original versions. After four or five years on average, the student submits a dissertation of an average length of 400 to 700 pages, which is then defended in front of a panel of three to five professors.

Faculty in comparative literature—both as *maîtres de conférence* and as *professeurs*—amounts approximately to 200 members. *Maîtres de conférences* and *professeurs* are tenured types of positions, but *maîtres de conférence* have not taken the *habilitation à diriger des recherches*, which grants those who have taken it the right to supervise doctoral research. Since the end of the 1980s, the *doctorat d'état* no longer exists and the diploma required to become a *maître de conférences* is called *doctorat nouveau régime* while to become a *professeur* the *habilitation à diriger des recherches* is required. Non-tenured faculty (teaching assistants, adjunct faculty) is also likely to teach comparative literature courses. *Maîtres de conférence* and *professeurs* are called *enseignant-chercheurs*, which means that they are both teachers and researchers. They most frequently conduct research in one of the research centers of their university. Most research centers in France are not exclusively composed of faculty in comparative literature but, rather, gather specialists in comparative literature, as well as in French or foreign literatures. Only a rather limited number of research centers, at large institutions, are entirely devoted to comparative literature. Research centers are evaluated every four years and the amount of financial support they receive depends on this evaluation. Until recently, research centers were financially supported directly by the Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur. The situation has changed with a new law, voted in 2007 and implemented gradually since 2008, and that has granted so-called “autonomy” to universities, i.e., the law grants university presidents and their boards the power to use whichever way they want the funding given to their institution by the Ministry: they can, for example, decide not to renew positions,

transfer a position from one discipline to another, and/or decide to give a research center more or less funding than what could have been expected on the basis of the results of the evaluation. Consequently, the French academic system, wherein all universities used to be government-run, is changing as universities are now in the hands of the presidents and their boards. The impact of this new law on the status of research, scholars, and teachers in comparative literature, as well as in other fields, cannot be fully measured yet.

In French-speaking Switzerland, both the University of Genève and the University of Lausanne offer undergraduate and graduate degrees, with the possibility to pursue a doctoral degree in comparative literature. Undergraduate and M.A. programs in comparative literature exist at the University of Fribourg. Comparative literature is with focus on European literature and mostly on bilingual work between French and German and this is reflected in the publications of scholars working in the field (see, e.g., Casasus and Haupt). In French-speaking Belgium there are no programs in comparative literature and thus the discipline is not present institutionally (however, when considering Belgium as a country, in Flemish there are two departments, one at the University of Leuven and another at the University of Ghent; on comparative literature in the Low Countries, see Foster, T'Sjoen, Vaessens; Lernout). In Québec there is a full-fledged Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Montréal and at the University of Sherbrooke there is a bilingual English-French Department of Comparative Canadian Literature where undergraduate and graduate programs are offered.

In France in terms of organization, the discipline of comparative literature is represented and supported by the *Société Française de Littérature Générale et Comparée* (SFLGC), similar to the American Comparative Literature Association, the British Comparative Literature Association, the Chinese Comparative Literature Association, etc. The SFLGC was created in 1956 and it held its first conference in Bordeaux (at the time it was called the SNFLC, the *Société Nationale Française de Littérature Comparée* and it became the SFLGC in 1973). Since its inception, each year except when the International Association of Comparative Literature / Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée (ICLA/AILC)—whose legal address is in Paris—holds its triannual congress, SFLGC organizes a conference attended by a large number of comparative literature specialists from France and abroad. Most French universities have hosted the said annual conference, for example Lille, Dijon, Toulouse, Lyon, Rennes, Poitiers, Tours, Rouen, Paris, etc. The 2012 conference was in Tours and its topic was criticism and creation in literature. In 2013, the ICLA/AILC congress takes place at the University of Paris Sorbonne (Paris IV) and its topic is comparative literature as a critical approach. In 2011, SFLGC counted about 300 members, an official interlocutor with the government when dealing with matters pertaining to the discipline. The Association's website includes a directory of French comparative literature specialists, a list of research centers in comparative literature, announcements of new publications in the field, calls for papers, etc.,



and a web-based library with selected articles on a diversity of issues relevant to the field such as, for example, on the notion of comparison in its relation to the discipline (Pageaux), on the articulations between comparative literature, philosophy and psychoanalysis (Dumoulié), on the relations between comparative studies and postcolonialism (Bijon and Clavaron; Moura), or on the relations between myth and fiction (Gély). The articles in the web-based library can be read in conjunction with the 2007 report, published by the SFLGC, that describes the status of the discipline in France and its various fields of research at that date (see Tomiche and Zieger; see also Chevrel, “Littérature (générale) et comparée”; Montandon, “Comparative Literature in France”). Insofar as the purpose of the SFLGC 2007 report is to draw a picture of the various areas of comparative literature both in a national context and in an international perspective and as to what relations diverse areas of scholarship have with similar domains in other cultures, it can be read in conjunction with another report on the status of the discipline, the 2006 report published by the American Comparative Literature Association (see Saussy). The SFLGC also publishes an internal quarterly—*Feuille d'Information Trimestrielle*—distributed through electronic mail to all its members and a yearly edited volume in the collection *Poétiques comparatistes* (see Arnoux-Farnoux and Hermetet; Clavaron; Duprat and Lavocat; Montandon; Parizet; Tomiche and Zoberman). Each volume deals with one of the theoretical aspects of comparative literature in France and frames it within an international context (for example, the relations between literature and anthropology, between literature and gendered identities, between culture and fiction).

With regard to the French tradition of comparative literature, three domains constitute the “founding grounds” of the discipline: myth studies, image studies, and reception studies. Less prominent in the Anglophone North American tradition than in the French tradition (with the exception of Northrop Frye and Theodor Ziolkowski), myth studies—as in and following Raymond Trousson’s and Pierre Brunel’s work—have long been considered to be a prominent area of study in French-language comparative literature. They also represent an important area of study in Swiss French (e.g., Heidmann; Steiner) and in Belgian French comparative literature (e.g., Couloubaritsis and Ost; Klimis). Véronique Gély distinguishes three directions of research on literary myths today: 1) “mythocriticism” (*mythocritique*), which uses myths as critical and hermeneutic tools in order to read literary texts, and which operates upon the assumption that myths pre-date texts (see also Chauvin; Eissen and Engelibert), 2) studies devoted to specific myths or mythological figures (see, e.g., Backès, *Oreste*; Ballestrapuech; Dancourt; Foucrier), and 3) “mytho-poetics” (*mythopoétique*), which, rather than consider myths to be exterior to texts, focuses on the question of how texts “make” myths and how myths “make” texts (see, e.g., Brunel; Ballestrapuech). Two further areas of research, linked to myth studies even if they extend beyond questions of myths, have developed in the past fifteen to twenty years. The domain pertaining to the investigation of the relations between literature and



the Bible was initiated by Robert Couffignal in the late 1960s and then by Danièle Chauvin. Today it covers three types of approach: studies of Biblical myths (e.g., Hussher; Léonard-Roques; Parizet; Wajeman), the analysis of Biblical references or quotations in a given text (a type of approach that does not constitute a field of study in itself but is explored whenever there is a Biblical reference in a text), and the investigation of an author's relation to the Bible (see, e.g., Couffignal on Apollinaire; Chauvin on Blake; Prigent on Huysmans). The second domain, related but not limited to myth studies, concerns the investigation of the Greek and Roman heritage, an investigation that can take several paths: the study of images of Antiquity either at a given moment in time or throughout several centuries (see, e.g., David-de Palacio), the analysis of a writer's relation to the Latin language, the investigation of the evolution of a given literary genre since Antiquity (see, e.g., Humbert-Mougin; Plazenet), or the exploration of the becoming of a given work or of a given author from Antiquity to the present (see, e.g., Backès, *L'Iliade d'Homère*; Stead).

The second "founding" domain in the French tradition of comparative literature is image studies (*imagologie*), going back to the work of Jean-Marie Carré (e.g., *Images d'Amérique*) and Marius-François Guyard (e.g., *Littérature comparée*), and then Michel Cadot (e.g., "Les Etudes") and Daniel-Henri Pageaux (e.g., *Littératures*). As defined by Pageaux, a literary image is "a set of ideas concerning what is foreign, a set of ideas caught in a joint process of socialization and of becoming-literary" (unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine) ("un ensemble d'idées sur l'étranger prises dans un processus de littérisation mais aussi de socialisation") (*La Littérature* 60). The study of images thus understood does not aim at evaluating the more or less important degree of similarity between the image and the "real," but aims at analyzing the conditions of the production of such images and the distance between the culture that produces the image and the culture that is represented by it (see Clavaron; Montandon; Moser-Verrey; Moura; Westphal). Bertrand Westphal developed studies in "geo-criticism" (*géocritique*), i.e., image studies which focus on the representation of space rather than on the representation of humanity. While until recently image studies in France focused on relations in the West or relations within Europe only, Jean-Marc Moura has opened the field to new geographic horizons including the image of the "third world" in French contemporary literature and exoticism in Western literature. Moura's work is relevant with regard to postcolonial studies, a field of research that already has a fairly long history in the United States, where it has developed since the late 1970s (with the work of, e.g., Edward W. Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, or Homi K. Bhabha, among others), but it has started only recently to develop in France, especially in the context of Francophone studies (see, e.g., D'hulst and Moura; Bessière and Moura).

The third "founding" area of French comparative literature, reception studies, has developed in the wake of a longstanding tradition of studies of literary influences and has gradually replaced it. The term "reception" entered French

critical terminology in the 1970s, as a result of the introduction in France of Hans Robert Jauss's and Wolfgang Iser's work. While reception theory first developed in Germany and while the "French School" in reception studies, as developed by Yves Chevrel (see, e.g., *Oeuvres*) and Claude de Grève, certainly owes to the German school, the French school distinguishes itself from the Konstanz School in at least two respects: first, because it considers real readers much more than implicit ones, thus relying on critical tools borrowed from such fields as the sociology of literature or the history of reading and second, because it is less interested in a theoretical approach and in constructing theoretical models than in case studies. Against René Wellek's and Austin Warren's position in *Theory of Literature*, asserting that there is no methodological difference between a study devoted to Shakespeare in France and a study devoted to Shakespeare in eighteenth-century England, Chevrel argued for the specificity of the critical discourse elaborated on a foreign text. Such a position, which prevails today in French comparative reception studies, stems from the fact that critical discourses on foreign texts need to rely on a specific object, i.e., translations, which, in turn introduce a specific dimension absent from critical discourses on literary objects written in the same language as the critical discourse itself. While it has been for a long time only a privileged tool for reception studies, the analysis of translation and translated texts (*traductologie*) has become an autonomous field of investigation within comparative literature since the mid-1990s, and has developed in two directions: the investigation of the poetics of translation (be it the analysis of a number of different translations of a given text through time or the analysis of different translations of a text at a given moment in time) and the analysis of the works of specific translators or of the role played by translation in the works of specific writers (see, e.g., Dayre, *L'Absolu*; Lombez; Marty; Oséki-Dépré in France; see also D'hulst; Meylaerts in Belgium; Le Blanc in Québec). One of the most important work in-progress to-date in the field is the series of volumes devoted to the history of translations written in French (see Chevrel and Masson).

Fields of study which have been developed more recently include the exploration of the relations among the various arts: relations between literature and music (see, e.g., Backès *Musique*; Cannone; Claudon *La Musique*; Faivre-Dupaigre; Locatelli; Rallo-Ditche), literature and opera (Claudon, *Dictionnaire*; Picard; Rallo-Ditche *Opéras, Passions*), literature and painting or text and image (see, e.g., Hénin; Labarthe-Postel; Wajeman), literature and cinema (see, e.g., Cléder; Murcia), literature and dance (see, e.g., Ducrey; Montandon *Sociopoétique, Ecrire*), and literature and architecture (see, e.g., Prungnaud). These areas of study are not exclusive to comparative approaches since they are also explored by other disciplines such as visual arts, film studies, music studies, media studies, or studies in foreign literatures. The issue is, thus, that of the specifically comparative dimension brought to the study of these issues: such a dimension stems both from the corpus chosen (with the presence of several

linguistic and cultural traditions) and from the method(s) used (with privilege given to broad spaces and long duration in order to confront diachronically, in large cultural and linguistic areas, the relations among the different forms of artistic expression).

Another more recently developed domain is research on children literature and popular literature (mainstream novels, detective stories, science fiction, fantasy, speculative fiction, etc. [see, e.g., Ferré and Besson “La littérature”]). While research on children literature has developed following Jean Perrot’s and Isabelle Nières-Chevrel’s work, this has gone hand in hand with an increase in the number of courses taught on subjects related to children literature and, consequently, in the number of university positions in order to teach such courses. Scholarship about detective novels, fantastic literature, or science fiction already has a history going back to the 1990s (see, e.g., Boyer; Bozetto; Mellier) and recent developments include work on Tolkien and the genre of fantasy (see, e.g., Besson, *D’Asomov*, *La Fantasy*; Ferré), as well as a dialogue with Anglophone cultural studies. In that respect, the 2008 SFLGC conference was devoted to an investigation of the relations—convergences, as well as differences—between cultural studies in their Anglophone versions and the developing field in France concerning popular culture and the investigation of frontier zones between “high” and “low” culture (see, e.g., Leiva, Hubier, Chardin, Souiller).

Yet a further area of study in the last ten years is the importance taken by theoretical investigations of articulations between literature and other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences including philosophy, history, (cultural) anthropology, etc. Beyond the question of the philosophical or ideological dimension of a text or of a literary movement—a question which bears on the history of ideas (*histoire des idées* and *histoire des mentalités*) and that has a long tradition in French comparative literature (see, e.g., Chardin; Chevrel, “Littérature”; Souiller, *La Littérature baroque, Calderon*; in Québec, see, e.g., Moisan)—research has been recently developed to explore relations between literature and philosophy (see, e.g., Dumoulié; Manzari; Tomiche; Tomiche and Zard). Such relations are explored in at least two complementary directions: the confrontation between philosophers (and philosophical systems) and writers (and literary representations and constructions)—for example Nietzsche and Artaud (e.g., Dumoulié), De Quincey and Kant (e.g., Dayre) or Nietzsche in France (e.g., Le Rider)—and the investigation of the literary dimension of philosophical writings or of the stakes of a philosopher’s discourse on literature. If, owing to structuralism’s rejection of the historical dimension of textuality, research on the articulations between literature and history had not constituted an important field of research until the beginning of the 1980s, it has since then been developed (e.g., Morel). Scholarship in this area developed in at least three directions: the investigation of the poetics of history (i.e., the investigation of the specifically literary means used to write history in relation and as opposed to the means of historiography), the confrontation between the way literary history constructs

literary periods and the way general historiography divides history in periods, and a more sociological investigation of the inscription of literature within the historicized social field (i.e., the investigation of the relations between the symbolic field of literature and historical temporality and the investigation of the possibilities, for the actors of the literary field, to act upon history with specifically literary means). Many recent collective volumes edited by scholars in comparative literature have embarked to study in this field (e.g., Bessière and Daros; Bessière and Sinopoli; Bouju; Bouju, Gefen, Hautcoeur, Macé; Coquio). The development of a critical dialogue between literature and anthropology has been and is crucial in the works of major figures in French comparative literature (e.g., Daros; Montandon; Pageaux; Souiller). Coming from a different philosophical horizon, research on fiction and fictionality has recently been developed under Françoise Lavocat's initiation. Borrowing a large part of their theoretical and epistemological foundations from analytical philosophy and theories of possible worlds, comparative literature scholars interrogate the notion of fiction and its operating modalities (see, e.g., Duprat and Lavocat).

What is striking in the evolution of comparative literature in French in the past fifteen years is that while approaches such as postcolonial studies, gender studies, and cultural studies already have a long history in Anglophone scholarship, they have only recently started becoming part of French-language scholarship (see, e.g., Chalard-Fillaudeau; López-Varela Azcárate and Tötösy de Zepetnek). However, they are now clearly involved in the current disciplinary reconfiguration of comparative literature in general. The longstanding tradition of image studies has opened up its corpora, its objects and its questionings to postcolonial concerns and approaches. Creating a dialogue between the French traditions of historical investigation (embodied by the *Ecole des Annales*) and of historical and cultural anthropology on the one hand and Anglophone cultural studies on the other, French comparative literature is defining its own specific territory of *études culturelles* (see, e.g., Leiva, Hubier, Chardin, Souiller). Questions of gender construction and representation are being raised in a dialogue with U.S.-American gender studies (i.e., from feminist studies to queer studies) (see, e.g., Tomiche and Zoberman; for a Québécois perspective, see Saint-Martin). One of the specificities of French approaches to gender studies, postcolonial studies, and cultural studies remains, at this point, an emphasis on the study of literature proper and the assumption of the specificity of literary objects within the cultural field. Finally, in the double context of the growth of the European Union and of the development of a globalized world, one of the issues at stake within French comparative studies today is the articulation between the concept of world literature, a concept that such French comparative literature specialists as René Etiemble already promoted in the early 1970s, and the concept of European literature in the context of comparative literature (see, e.g., Casanova; Chevrel, "Peut-on écrire," *Précis*; Didier; Souiller and Troubetzkoy; Tomiche, "Littérature européenne"; Troubetzkoy).

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# Comparative Literature in German

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Oliver Lubrich

**Abstract:** In his article “Comparative Literature in German” Oliver Lubrich discusses the status quo of the discipline against the backdrop of recent debates about the future of literary theory and comparative literature as a global discipline. Starting with the as-of-yet rarely explored history of comparative studies under national socialism, Lubrich sketches the development of the discipline after World War II with particular focus on the work of Peter Szondi. Further, Lubrich reflects on selected areas of study including German colonialism, travels to fascist countries, postsocialist literatures, and (im)migrant writing. Brief mention is made about German-language comparative literature in Austria and Switzerland.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years some scholars stated—not for the first time—that comparative literature is dead. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s *Death of a Discipline* and Terry Eagleton’s *After Theory* epitomize this provocative position. Eagleton takes a polemical look at the literary and cultural theories of the last decades and laments their “postmodern” disinterest in politics. He demands a repoliticizing of theory and, consequently, of the disciplines it inspires. In the past years, the most widely discussed development in the humanities, postcolonialism, has intended to do just that. The study of (post)colonial literature is both political and comparative because it treats cultures in their (conflicting) relationship to each other—e.g., conquest, colonization, domination, (im)migration. Spivak’s argumentation for the renewal of comparative literature with a postcolonial grounding is about bringing together comparative literature with area studies and thereby forging an alliance between the humanities and the social sciences. Any strand of comparative literature which refuses to take part in this process is, according to Spivak, threatened by extinction as Eagleton declares only those theories obsolete that are not informed by politics.

The greatest asset of comparative literature lies in the close reading of texts. This capital, Spivak argues, must be reinvested. At the same time, comparative literature cannot but arm itself with tools of the social sciences in order to understand the local conditions under which the texts it examines emerged. Modified in this way, the discipline can claim a new ethical legitimacy. Close reading in the original language of any text is as much a cognitive process as it is a symbolic act and a cultural technique of communicating with the “other.” In the context of postcolonial studies, this means the giving of agency to those who

have been suppressed by colonialism, excluded by imperialism, and marginalized by capitalism. Not surprisingly, Spivak demands that comparative literature be widened beyond the boundaries of the West. The notion of comparative (or world) literature should no longer be confined to, at best, English-language translations of “Third World” texts, but should take into account all possible “peripheral” contributions. Comparative literature should cast its area of competence as widely as possible. For Spivak, only a comparative literature that, in principle, approaches all literatures in all languages will be able to adapt to the challenge of globalization.

But can the discipline be truly global? Spivak’s vision begs a number of pragmatic questions: since its aim is to analyze literary texts in their original form, the linguistic competence of students and scholars will always limit its scope. Moreover, comparative literature will exhibit site-specific predilections for particular languages. For example, German scholars’ rising interest in the cultures of Central and East Europe, as well as their engagement with the writings of Turkish or Russian immigrants rather than with the situation of India transformed by British imperialism is only “natural.” With linguistic abilities and cultural affinities, as well as thematic priorities and conceptual designs varying from region to region, comparative literature cannot be global in a true sense. It is always bound to be particular, partial, and contingent. It is by necessity dependent on its historical perspective and on its social and cultural positionality. In Berlin or Vienna it has different aims and agendas than in New York or São Paulo. And not only does it make a difference in which language the literary material has been produced, but also in which language the studies are being conducted. The chances of literature becoming the subject of a particular discipline and the chances of scholarship being received internationally are dependent on which idiom they use, where they are published, and what audience they reach out to. Each environment encourages its own set of themes and methods. Of all disciplines, and despite its efforts to transcend national borders, comparative literature is not, paradoxically, a universal science. If we define it—following Spivak—as a means by which to engage with alterity, we should not overlook its own specificity.

## COMPARATIVE STUDIES IN NATIONAL SOCIALIST GERMANY

In twentieth-century Germany, political history and the history of the humanities have been closely linked to one another. History has left not just its marks, but its scars on both the theory and practice of the study of literature. Following World War I, historical periods and events such as national socialism, World War II, exile, the Shoah, the post-war division of the country, and its reunification shaped the development of the philologies in Germany. For example, and for obvious reasons, Jewish Studies play a central role in German scholarship today, after some of the most influential scientists, scholars, and writers of the twentieth century were German or Austrian Jews who had been persecuted and exiled. As a

discipline, comparative literature in Germany has constructed for itself a distinct trajectory, identifying—often Jewish—precursors and leading figures from within the German traditions of the humanities. Along Walter Benjamin, who neither restricted his topics to one national culture nor limited his method to philology, the following names recur: Georg (György) Lukács, the Hungarian Marxist who wrote predominantly in German and whose *Theory of the Novel* brings together the history of literary genres and the philosophy of history with material from various literary traditions; Ernst Cassirer with his study of “symbolic forms” across world periods and cultures; Aby Warburg, whose *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek* (“library of cultural science”) was compiled in such a way as to propose unexpected connections between various forms of cultural discourse and art otherwise dissociated by the borders of established disciplines; and Ernst Robert Curtius, who in his work about medieval European literature draws on the transnational concept of the Latin Middle Ages.

Indeed, Romance philology—by its nature the study of literature in a variety of languages—has played a decisive role in the formation of German comparative literature in exile during the Nazi period. Many founders of post World War II comparative literature were Romance philologists whose scholarship was informed in one way or another by their experiences under national socialism. Erich Auerbach and Leo Spitzer were forced out of Germany for being Jewish. Auerbach wrote his seminal comparatist work *Mimesis* in Turkey while Spitzer emigrated to the U.S. Werner Krauss wrote his most important works in a state of (internal) opposition. Viktor Klemperer, another Jewish Romanist, spent the war hiding in Germany and documenting his experience in his now famous diaries and later completed a seminal study on the language of the “Third Reich.”

Like these Romanists, many Germanists and other scholars in the humanities left their native Germany or Austria to flee Nazi persecution (e.g., Hannah Arendt, Ruth Klüger, Richard Alewyn, Bernhard Blume, Walter Naumann, Wolfgang Paulsen, Henry H.H. Remak, Guy Stern, Karl Viëtor, Werner Vordtriede, Hans Wolf, Erich Heller, Heinz Politzer, Egon Schwarz, and Walter Sokel, etc.). U.S.-American German studies—a discipline established by the 1970s and different from its German-language counterpart *Germanistik*—refers by and large to this group of emigré(e) scholars who focused on cultural contexts and intercultural research at the cost of a more narrowly defined classical philology with its traditional emphases. In some areas, comparative literature converges with transcultural German studies which internationalize German issues in a partial overlap with *interkulturelle Germanistik* (see, e.g., Seeba). Yet, owing to institutional necessities including competition between national language departments, German studies in the United States today remain concentrated on the literature of German-speaking countries and seldom engage in comparative research across linguistic boundaries.

A transnational approach to literature, however, is not the prerogative of people who were exiled. In fact, a national socialist variant of comparative literature

emerged in the period. This historical circumstance may be counter-intuitive for a discipline which today sees itself as a steadfast opponent of totalitarianism. In its late phase national socialism supported a cross-national “European” agenda which embraced “crossing borders” both literally and figuratively. It is little known that Germany’s aggressive territorial politics led it to commission a pan-European literature. After invading the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941, the German government propagated an “anti-bolshevist” struggle and exported it to its allied or occupied countries. This geostrategic objective convinced Joseph Goebbels to forge a new concept for a foreign policy of culture that competed with the pan-Germanic ideology proposed by Alfred Rosenberg and favored by Hitler. This internationalist approach left its most visible mark in the shape of a typographic reform where fonts in Roman Antique replaced Gothic script as the latter was considered “Jews’ letters” (Martin Bormann qtd. in Willberg 48).

Writers who were to act as spokespersons for a German-dominated Europe in their native countries played an important role in this scheme. International congresses organized by the Propaganda Ministry took place in Weimar in 1941 and 1942 and authors from all over the continent participated (see Dufay). They founded the Europäische Schriftsteller-Vereinigung as a counter-institution to the international PEN-Club (see Hausmann). Almost 200 members from 14 countries committed themselves to its cause. The German participants (with the exception of its president, Hans Carossa) were almost exclusively *Blut und Boden* (“blood and soil”) poets, while among the foreign authors were the well-known Swiss novelist John Knittel, the Romanian writer Liviu Rebreanu, the Hungarian poet Lőrinc Szabó, and the Frenchmen Abel Bonnard, Robert Brasillach, Jacques Chardonne, Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, Ramon Fernandez, André Fraigneau, Marcel Jouhandeau, Georges Blond, and André Thérive. The journal *Europäische Literatur* (1942–1944) served as the voice of the organization, as an instrument for German literary policy and as a forum for national socialist scholarship. It published poetry, essays, travel reports, translations, scholarly criticism, and articles, as well as literary theory. Many of the contributions appeared in more than one language.

## COMPARATIVE LITERATURE IN POST-WORLD WAR II GERMANY

For post-1945 German comparative literature there was no need to dissociate itself from this precursor since its influence remained marginal after the war. Like the rest of German society, most German scholars (and writers) implicated in national socialism tended not to talk about their past while some even tried to reestablish their careers under different names. After 1945, comparative literature in Germany constituted itself as an alternative to *Germanistik*, a discipline thoroughly infiltrated by nazi ideology, often entailing a long and in some cases grotesque after-life (on the careers of individual scholars, see the *Internationales Germanistenlexikon* [König and Wägenbaur]).



Comparative literature would not be what it is today in Germany but for one scholar, Peter Szondi (1929–1971), who was the driving force behind the (re) establishment of the field from the 1960s onward. When he was appointed at Free University of Berlin in 1964—a Hungarian Jew who had been deported to the concentration camp at Bergen Belsen—he was spared the prospect of having to work in a department of German literature still under the influence of former nazis. Instead, he was offered to chair his own Department of General and Comparative Literature (see, e.g., Lämmert). As one of the first Jews to obtain his *Habilitation* after the Holocaust (in the German educational system, following a doctorate, in order to be appointed to a professorship one needs to do a *Habilitation* including the publication of a second book), Szondi went on to teach at the university until committing suicide in 1971.

Szondi is considered an exceptional scholar in German-language comparative literature. He contributed to the formation of Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft, turning his attention first to drama, then to lyric poetry and to hermeneutics, all the while engaging himself in university politics and corresponding with colleagues, thus in many ways transgressing disciplinary boundaries of the humanities. Szondi's *Theorie des modernen Dramas*, his doctoral dissertation he defended in 1954, is typical of his way of thinking. Szondi regards literary genres (such as dramatic or epic plays) neither as purely formal nor as a-historical phenomena. Instead, he considers their semantics and their evolution as dependent on social contexts. Szondi's notion of comparative literature is political in so far as it historicizes the themes and poetics it investigates. For him, literature is an ethical medium posing existential questions. For example, Szondi relates the scarcity of dialogue in modern drama to the failure of communication, a characteristic of modernity. For Szondi, theory is always embedded in history and emerges from the literary material rather than being a pre-existing method "applied" externally and retroactively to texts. He relates the specific to the general, negotiates aesthetic contemplation and objective reflection in order to furnish the "scientific" foundation for sophisticated exegesis and comparison (while in English the term "science" is applied only to the "natural" and the "social sciences," in German the study of literature as *Literaturwissenschaft* makes a claim to understand "science" also with regard to the humanities). Szondi's vision became evident in both his policy of inviting international guest speakers to Berlin and his introductions to their talks: Jacques Derrida (before he attained world wide recognition), Pierre Bourdieu and Lucien Goldman from France, Paul de Man from Zürich, Gershom Sholem from Jerusalem, Theodor W. Adorno from Frankfurt, Hans Robert Jauss from Konstanz, and from the U.S. René Wellek, Geoffrey Hartman, and Peter Demetz. The names of these visiting scholars, who form a methodological canon, epitomize Szondi's program. Yet, while he was oriented towards the West (the new allies of West Germany) and paid little attention to comparativists in East Europe, his conception of a transnational comparative literature was, nevertheless, influenced by Central and East European

literary theorists of the Russian and Prague schools of structuralism. Typical of Szondi's approach are the following programmatic comments in his introduction to Jean Starobinski who lectured in Berlin in 1966 on melancholy and irony: scholars like Starobinski do not simply ask "questions about influence (who read whom and when?) ... and they avoid merely speculating (about such things as the nature of irony), they much rather mediate the general and the particular, the idea and history, the theoretical and the empirical" (Szondi qtd. in Raulff 77; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine). Szondi argued that Romance philology is by nature comparativist: "if philologists—such as Starobinski—are true to the principles of comparative literature and fulfill its programs from within their own disciplines, comparative literature shall become superfluous ... Anyone who ignores the boundaries set up by the traditional philologies ... is helping to make comparative literature redundant, since they are merely doing of their own accord what this discipline invites them to do in the first place" (Szondi qtd. in Raulff 77). By establishing relations between distinct national traditions, panoramas of stereotypes, or positivistic reception histories, traditional *littérature comparée*, Szondi lamented, only reinforced the barriers national philologies have erected between one another. A modern comparative literature, by contrast, ought to strive to transcend the limits of traditional literary studies by accommodating not just various philologies alongside the manifold forms of art (painting, architecture, photography, cinema, etc.), but also by exploiting as many modes as possible of interdisciplinary access to its subject matter (through anthropology, history, political science, sociology, psychology, etc.). This expanded vision of the discipline encapsulates Szondi's contra-dogmatic approach which allowed him to avoid branding a specific "school" of theory and criticism. Working from the margins of traditional humanities, Szondi's version of comparative literature never felt the need to affirm its identity artificially or to defend itself against competing approaches.

Szondi's agenda for comparative literature is surprisingly up-to-date. By studying poetological programs in their historical contexts and by conceptualizing literary forms as social constructs, Szondi established the connection between a methodologically trained philology interested in theory (comparative literature) and history cum sociology (area studies) we find in Spivak's agenda for example. Indeed, Szondi's work anticipated Spivak's demand for close-text reading and his discussions of Hölderlin and Celan are exemplary hermeneutical analyses, as is his treatment of the dialectical relationship between dramatic and epic theater in the plays of Ibsen, Chekhov, Strindberg, Brecht, Wilder, and Miller, among others. The discipline envisaged by Szondi—with its existential motivation, ethical base, and contextual historical foundation—has by now lost its affinity with theater, a literary form which Szondi believed in the 1950s to be the privileged means of social reflection: theater is replaced by novels or essays which deal with the experience of cultural foreignness and collective speechlessness in a rapidly expanding global canon. This "world literature" centers on alienation or solitude

as a poignant metaphor for the history of decolonized peoples. In some respects the program Szondi developed in the 1960s even anticipates the poststructuralism inspired postcolonial critique of cultural theory formulated by Homi K. Bhabha some thirty years later. Bhabha criticizes the multicultural concept of diversity based on stable paradigms of identity, difference, and otherness. Instead, he focuses on processes of hybridization which take place between cultures and extend beyond their (only apparently fixed) borders. The negotiation of the meanings of cultures (and hence literatures) is no longer defined as fixed givens, but, rather, as inter- and trans-cultural, that is, across various contexts which are in permanent flux and impossible to disentangle from one another. The *différence* between distinctive traditions has given way to a *différance* (Derrida) within and among themselves. Comparative literature's affinity with deconstruction is not surprising in light of the fact that the discipline—as said in opposition to a *Germanistik* in alliance with national socialism presenting itself as a caricature of a racially essentialist national(ist) philology—had made the challenging of borders and fixed identities a cornerstone of its agenda.

If many comparative and postcolonialist readings have in common that they attempt to reveal the latent structures of dominance in European or Anglophone American texts, we of course also encounter the limits of this kind of undertaking. Literary texts adhere rarely to a simple schema of this sort and tend to resist reductionist interpretations. Instead of simply reproducing dominant structures, advanced theoretical models of the relationship(s) between text and context must leave room for the fact that texts always manifest an excess of meaning and survive discourses of power through subversion, dialogism, and polyvalence. Avoiding both the sweeping generalizations of postcolonialist study in the tradition of Edward W. Said (along with the analogous reasoning of discourse analysis and new historicism) and the more abstract propositions of a postcolonialism as put forward by Bhabha that are rarely drawn from concrete readings, is one of the challenges yet to be met (on this, see Lubrich, “Welche Rolle”). A postcolonial theory and practice in comparative literature can be advanced only by recourse to the full range of tools of textual analysis developed by rhetoric and poetics, structuralism and poststructuralism. But, as Szondi pointed out early in his career, the most sophisticated theoretical models should always be allowed to grow out of the literary texts themselves, rather than being forced upon them. Comparative literature's theoretical potential is, hence, not exhausted because theory seems exhausted; rather, new theories should originate from the imaginative closer and counter-reading of texts.

## COMPARATIVE LITERATURE IN GERMAN TODAY

In today's Germany, comparative literature presents itself as a transnational discipline of many perspectives. In my view, four fields in particular, all of which closely linked with German history, exemplify promising potential for

German comparative literature and the transcultural study of German literature: colonialism, fascism, communism, and (im)migration. Although the phase of German overseas expansion was short and has—unlike in Great Britain or France—few repercussions today, German scholars have begun to engage in a debate about the legacy of (post)colonialism. Substantially different from Anglophone postcolonial studies, this German debate is nevertheless not unrelated to them. Prepared as it was by comparative imagology, that is, research on literary images of foreign cultures and cultural interrelations especially in German Latin American studies (see, e.g., Barth, Gruschka, Meinert, Nitschack, Dieter Rall, Marlene Rall, Richartz, Siefer, Vital, Willkop), and by impulses from German studies in the U.S., both German literature and comparative literature have at long last begun researching the overlooked corpus of German texts from the colonial period. Russell Berman, for example, compared Georg Forster's and James Cook's accounts of the same voyage in order to distinguish a particular German discourse. Susanne Zantop identified a "latent" or "virtual" colonialism in German intellectual history, with German texts on Latin America engaging in a "colonialism without colonies." Hans Christoph Buch related exoticist texts to provincialist visions in German literature. German travel writers—from Hans Staden through Forster to contemporary authors such as Buch, who is both travel writer and postcolonial critic—have become popular subjects of investigation (see, e.g., Lützeler; Hamann and Honold; Struck). With some delay, postcolonial German studies have developed considerable momentum, with German comparative literature now also taking up the challenge of postcolonialism (see, e.g., Dunker; Lubrich, *Schwinden der Differenz*).

A particular case in point is Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859) who experienced an unexpected surge in prominence in 2004 when his works turned bestsellers (*Kosmos, Ansichten der Cordilleren*) and a year later when a novel on Humboldt became one of the most successful books in post-World War II Germany, Daniel Kehlmann's *Die Vermessung der Welt* (also translated to English as *Measuring the World*). That Humboldt, who is probably the German writer whose fame (as an almost mythic figure, most notably in Latin America) was radically disproportionate to the reception of his texts, should experience such a renaissance can be attributed to the newly discovered transnational relevance of his writing. Of all the authors from the time of Goethe, Humboldt—naturalist, traveler, artist—was by far the most polyglot, cosmopolitan, and multi- and interdisciplinary. I submit that he was one of the earliest practitioners of a genuinely comparative pursuit of knowledge: "everything is exchange," he noted on 2 August 1803, thus coining a motto for his belief in global interconnectedness in both nature and culture. In character with his transnational thinking, this note appears in German in the middle of the French section of his travel diaries on Mexico, at the time a Spanish colony (*Reise auf dem Río Magdalena* 358). In his cultural-historical essays Humboldt draws extensive comparisons between civilizations in Europe, the Orient, and Indigenous America. While juxtaposing one with

the other, he seeks to combine a number of disciplines—anthropology, botany, art history, geology, linguistics, and many more—transgressing the boundaries between the humanities and the natural sciences, precisely at the moment when their separation had become institutionalized. By correlating the Aztecs with the Greeks or modern Prussians with the ancient Egyptians he dissolves the hierarchies on which colonial hegemony was being premised, not to mention the fact that he criticizes colonial practices in his political writings (see, e.g., Lubrich, “Alexander von Humboldt,” “In the Realm,” “‘Como antiguas’”). Humboldt’s *Kosmos* (1845–1862) contains a comparativist study of world literature with respect to the history of science, as well as the first postcolonial theory in German letters (in its second volume) and thus the work is a comparative and postcolonial cultural and literary study *avant la lettre*. His texts present themselves to us today as an originary form of *Komparatistik* engaging the critique of the colonial condition, escaping the confines of national philologies, and embracing multi- and inter-disciplinarity. While Humboldt, self-critically, explored the collusion between *Weltanschauung*, *Weltbeschreibung*, and *Weltherrschaft*, his contemporary Goethe developed the concept of *Weltliteratur*, a concept that is experiencing a remarkable renaissance not only in Germany but, in particular, in the U.S. (see, e.g., Birus; Damrosch; D’haen; D’haen, Damrosch, Kadir; Lamping; Lamping and Frieling; Lamping and Zipfel; Pizer; Sturm-Trigonakis).

My second example is an area of study that has been overlooked for many years, namely travels to nazi Germany. Numerous foreign authors experienced the “Third Reich” at first hand and presented their impressions in contemporary essays, letters, diaries or short stories such as Christopher Isherwood, Virginia Woolf, Jean-Paul Sartre, Max Frisch, Albert Camus, Denis de Rougemont, Samuel Beckett, Thomas Wolfe, Jean Genet, Sven Hedin, and Karen Blixen. While some of these authors felt genuinely drawn to the ideology or aesthetics of fascism, others were overtly hostile to the regime and yet others saw their attitudes fluctuate over the course of their stay (see, e.g., Lubrich, *Travels in the Reich, Berichte aus der Abwurfzone*). Such commentaries based on actual experiences by contemporary observers are illuminating in that they exhibit an air of immediacy and authenticity rarely contained in retrospective memoirs written long after the event. Such records are hence documents of both literary and testimonial interest and belong in equal measure to the fields of comparative literature and history. But while they also provide material for a comparative analysis of images of nazi Germany, they tend to challenge certain theoretical notions of intercultural exchange or discourse analysis. For instance, especially those authors who responded most negatively towards nazi Germany, viewing the country with a kind of colonial gaze, find themselves in hindsight justified in having branded it as barbaric. And in most cases, it is precisely their ambivalences, contradictions, or developments that make these testimonies fascinating.

Revisiting the (literary) history of state-imposed communism is understandably a vast field calling for an international and inter-disciplinary approach. Its

reflection of postsocialist literature seems predestined for comparative analyses especially in Germany, the only European country which was divided and saw two post-war literary traditions merge. Just as it appears logical for former and current empires such as England, France, or the U.S. to turn to literature as a means to analyze the legacy of colonialism and decolonization, scholars of East German and East European literature will want to use literary texts in order to illuminate the legacy of the state-imposed communism that dominated those societies in the second half of the twentieth century. Texts by authors from the former German Democratic Republic describing their “real-socialist” past and the upheaval they experienced in the late 1980s and 1990s such as by Heiner Müller or Christa Wolf offer much ground for comparison with writers from other countries of the former Soviet block, for example Vladimir Sorokin or Tomas Venclova. Other equally intriguing subjects for comparative research are authors who are ethnically or culturally German, but who were born outside of German-speaking countries, such as Nobel Laureate Herta Müller who in her texts, written and published in German, depicts life during the Ceausescu era in Romania. The comparative study of postsocialist literature can in many ways contribute to the larger enterprises not only of postcolonialism but also of diaspora studies, area studies, and socio-political history (see, e.g., Lisiak).

My fourth example concerns German-language writers with non-German backgrounds. It is only recently that Bulgarians (Ilija Trojanow), Russians (Wladimir Kaminer, Vladimir Vertlib), Czechs (Jaromir Konecny), Poles (Radek Knapp, Dariusz Muszer), Turks (Feridun Zaimoglu, Emine Sevgi Özdamar), Spaniards (Juan Moreno), Japanese (Yoko Tawada), or Ethiopians (Asfa-Wossen Asperate) are making their mark on the German literary scene (I should like to mention here that on the terminological level in German scholarship there is an insistence to call such literature *Migrantenliteratur* [“migrant literature”] thus not recognizing the possibility of integration of immigrants as German authors [on this, see, e.g., Nell; Tötösy de Zepetnek]). From a contemporary German perspective, vast fields of research are opening up. Even if Germany and Austria, not to mention Switzerland seem to offer only a coda to postcolonial topics, a postcolonially oriented comparative literature will find rich grounds for exploration in today’s German-language culture and literature including non-German authors writing in German, German authors writing in a foreign language, multilingualism, ethnic minority literatures, etc.

Comparatists in Austria have published since the 1980s incisive work in theory and methodology of comparative literature, literature and sociology, literature and book publishing, and the literatures of Central and East Europe (see, e.g., Bachleitner; Burtscher-Bechter and Sexl; Grabovszki; Konstantinović; Weisstein and Konstantinović; Zima; Zima and Strutz). While today there is no full-fledged department of comparative literature, it is taught at the University of Innsbruck (founded in 1970, now within the Institute of Languages and Literatures) and at the University of Vienna (founded in 1980, now within the Institute for European



and Comparative Language and Literature Studies) and in both instances both undergraduate and graduate degrees are offered. In German-language Switzerland comparative literature began at the University of Zürich in 1902 (with regard to comparative literature in French-speaking Switzerland, see Tomiche). However, professorships and teaching were intermittent with several periods when neither a department nor teaching existed and today there is no department of comparative literature offering a comprehensive undergraduate and graduate program. While Switzerland as a multicultural country of four languages—German, French, Italian, and Romansch plus a sizable (im)migrant population—might appear to be the ideal place for the study of literature and culture comparatively, it may be precisely cantonal identities which impede the development of scholarship to transcend the specificities of and the insistence on local language and culture (see Schnyder).

## CONCLUSION

Different contexts generate different questions and require different approaches. Whether the logic of research leads to create conceptual models from individual case studies or to develop disciplinary programs from previous curricula, scholars are compelled to reflect on their point of departure. Viewed from a country located in the heart of Europe, it seems much less “Eurocentric” to engage in the study of European languages and literatures and to participate in the formation of a specifically European (and thus comparative literature in French, German, Italian, etc.) comparative literature than may be the case from the vantage point of Anglophone North America. Hence, German-language comparativists may with good conscience focus on the study of their neighbors’ cultures, on British, French (or Swiss French), Spanish, Italian, Polish, Russian, etc., literature. Perhaps it is this positionality, its specific geo-historical condition that enables comparative literature to confine itself to a manageable field and thereby maintain a clear profile, a profile that might easily dissolve if too much material from too many cultural contexts is tackled at once. In comparative literature one ought not to be oriented towards the same criteria and agendas all over the world. While variations and differences are inevitable, they are also desirable and it is precisely these variations and differences which deserve to be discussed from a comparative perspective.

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# Comparative Literature in Iberian Spanish and Portuguese

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María Teresa Vilariño Picos and  
Anxo Abuín González

(Translated from the Spanish by Manus O'Dwyer)

**Abstract:** In their article “Comparative Literature in Iberian Spanish and Portuguese” María Teresa Vilariño Picos and Anxo Abuín González present the current situation of comparative literature in the region. Their description of the discipline’s intellectual and institutional situation suggests that starting with the mid-twentieth century scholars on the Iberian peninsula adopted comparative literature’s theory orientation and proceeded in applying the framework in the study of literature. Vilariño Picos and Abuín González pay particular attention to the development of intermediality and digital humanities, fields which attract scholars who work in comparative literature in particular and produce(d) seminal scholarship. Further, they suggest that scholarship ought to place emphasis of the value of the local in a global context and to explore linguistic difference, while at the same time accompanying this exploration with theoretical reflection on the importance of digital humanities.

## INTRODUCTION

We should not be surprised—given the lamentations about the state of affairs of comparative literature since its inception in the nineteenth century—that the discipline is associated with “crisis” (see, e.g., Gumbrecht and Moser). The reasons for this view are multiple and well-known. Not least important is the decline of the study of literature conceived as an expression of national identity, as was traditionally the case in comparative literature. We now know that the crisis of the discipline was accompanied by a considerable extension of its area of study and its implication with other spheres of thought. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s introduction is informative in this regard: “since we discovered that there was no return to a concept of ‘Literature’ which could provide unity and shape to our discipline, the notion of ‘culture’ has made an amazing career among us” (18). The contact with cultural studies — one could also mention postcolonial, translation studies, etc.—meant analysis of discursive phenomena in comparative humanities and a blurring of the boundaries between disciplines. Walter Moser confirms this in his epilogue in the said journal issue, although his vision is more optimistic and he suggests that we are to welcome the new circumstance

and objects of study (hypertexts and hypermedia, interart studies, etc.), and the renewed epistemological approaches that come along with them. In this context we subscribe to the approach of two complementary concepts of comparative literature, namely the knowledge of more than one literature and the inclusion of the Other (*alterité*), which provide an escape from the prevailing Eurocentrism of the discipline (see, e.g., Tötösy de Zepetnek, *Comparative Literature*, “The New Humanities”). This approach is an attempt to overcome the “death” of comparative literature heralded by Susan Bassnett in 1993 and is consequent to the innovations of cultural studies, the contextual approach, the empirical approach, and systems theories. These frameworks attend to the new reality of globalization and the emergence of the discipline in spaces removed from Europe and the United States. As Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek writes, the objective of a “new comparative literature” is “to study literature in relation to other forms of artistic expression (the visual arts, music, film, etc.) and in relation to other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences (history, sociology, psychology, etc.)” (*Comparative Literature* 15–19). Further, Tötösy de Zepetnek postulates the importance to mediate Euro-U.S.-American centrality in order to make the study of literature and culture global and thus locate a commitment to the realities of the Other within a dialogical perspective (“The New Humanities”; on this, see also, e.g., Mukherjee).

## (NEW) COMPARATIVE LITERATURE IN IBERIAN SPANISH

Comparative studies in Iberian Spanish do not offer ground for optimism, as it is still not completely removed from the dogmatic paradigms that understood literary phenomena as incontrovertible facts to be placed in a binary relation to other such facts. However, contemporary Iberian Spanish comparatism has strengthened its links with literary theory, a fact reflected in the academy with the change of the department sections previously named *Teoría de la Literatura* to *Teoría de la Literatura y Literatura Comparada* (see, e.g., Casas, “Three Years”; Villanueva, “Possibilities”). With respect to this linking of literary theory and comparative literature, Claudio Guillén and Darío Villanueva hold divergent opinions. Guillén, in his *Múltiples moradas*, understands comparatism as a problematizing concept that is absolutely mobile. It is a type of concept that has its value not as a systematic and closed approach to phenomena, but in its capacity to present and evaluate problems in detail. For Guillén—as he argues in the 2005 reedition of his *Entre lo uno y lo diverso*—the fusion of comparatism and literary theory is pernicious as it impedes an authentic renovation of comparative studies in Spain, already threatened by the effervescence of cultural studies (on Guillén, see, e.g., Villanueva, “Claudio Guillén”). Guillén had already expressed his position on the situation of comparative literature and the institutional linking of *Teoría de la Literatura* and *Literatura Comparada* in an article from 2001 included in the volume *Entre el saber y el conocer*: “in Spain, in spite of some authoritative

individuals, conferences, and scholarly literature, comparative literature has not been recognized as an autonomous discipline because the Education Department has not approved the corresponding area of knowledge. The discipline's position is inferior and subservient: comparative literature has come under literary theory's jurisdiction and is entrusted to professors of literary theory. This is a local aberration. ("Sobre" 105; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are by Manus O'Dwyer; see also Domínguez, "Comparative Literature" 17). Villanueva, as one of the proponents of this linkage, declared as a priority the "tightening of that chain which extends from literary theory to the criticism of specific works based on that theory to the comparison of different literatures and to the teaching of the literature itself" ("Teoría literaria" 1). Literary theory, criticism, and comparative literature would then be three interrelated ways of approaching literary phenomena. These declarations are made in the context of what José María Pozuelo Yvancos calls the "theory years," during which traditional courses in philology were obliged to include a course on literary theory as part of curricula. This new situation led to the formation of an exciting new generation of comparatists such as Antonio Monegal and Domingo Sánchez Mesa, among others.

If, as María José Vega and Neus Carbonell point out, the polemic has moved from the term "comparative" to the term "literature," now understood not as a group of texts, but as a conjunction of institutional and historic processes (138), the discipline of comparative literature has been opened to new textual practices, a change that has provoked a renewal of the canon in the light of cultural, postcolonial, and translation studies. Despite this, it is difficult to see in the context of the university in Spain a multicultural vision which recognizes the ethical demands of marginal groups. The idea of a crisis in the canon did not produce widespread change and there is still a more or less explicit defense of the efficacy of the traditional conception of canonical literature (on the argumentation for the enlargement of the canon, see, e.g., Aradra; Pozuelo; Sullá). The defense of the traditional canon holds that criticisms of this are informed by an almost irrational skepticism, and are unable to understand the past in a way conducive to constructing a future (see Beltrán). If multiculturalism attacked the Western canon as reflecting a specifically white, middleclass, and heterosexual habitus, the result of ideological construction, the design of syllabi in literature at Iberian Spanish universities are still based on the idea of privileged works that supposedly personify the spirit of a given period. Cultural studies did enter the Spanish academy, especially in departments of English literature, but always in a limited manner and without threatening the status of literary texts perceived as high literature. A notable exception is David Viñas's *El enigma best-seller*, in which he analyses the best-seller in an international context through a focus on a corpus which includes the authors Stephen King, Umberto Eco, Noah Gordon, Paulo Coelho, Ken Follett, Arturo Pérez-Reverte, J.K. Rowling, Carlos Ruiz Zafón, Javier Cercas, Dan Brown, and Stieg Larsson. The non-canonical reading of



canonical texts is a more widespread tendency, evident, for example, in the work of Paul Julian Smith in the area of Spanish cultural studies and in the attention he gives to marginal and contestatory discourses in film, television programs, fashion, and painting. The study of the relationship between cinema and literature has been especially prominent in Spain and has produced interesting work (e.g., Becerra Suárez; Faro Forteza; Peña Ardid; Pérez Bowie, Sánchez Noriega, Villanueva). Notable are manuals and introductions to comparative literature (e.g., Abuín González and Tarrío; Gil-Albarellos Pérez Pedrero; Llovet; Morales Ladrón; Pulido; Romero López; Vega and Carbonell; Villanueva [*Avances*]).

Feminist and gender studies are fields in which the patriarchal ideology underlying studies in traditional comparative studies are rejected, and where, instead, work is focused on difference without dissolving texts into a regular and homogenous whole (see, e.g., Díaz-Diocaretz and Zavala; Lozano de la Pola). Seminal works have been published which recognize the importance of a *parler-femme*, a libidinal, liminal, and feminine discourse with a greater symbolic range than the authoritarian masculine voice (see, e.g., Colaizzi; Carbonell and Torras; Torras). Comparative cultural studies (e.g., Tötösy de Zepetnek, “The New Humanities”) too had been progressive and we pay attention to the work of Itamar Even-Zohar, whose theory of polysystems proves to be central not only in translation studies (see, e.g., Gallego Roca; Iglesias Santos; Sales Salvador), but also in the analysis of the interliterary relations between Iberian literatures (Castilian, Catalan, Basque, Galician, and Portuguese). Further, derived in part from the work of Dionýz Ďurišin’s concept of “interliterariness,” the project of a comparative history of Iberian literatures and cultures is particularly innovative with publications in Spanish, as well as in English (see Abuín and Tarrío; Cabo Aseguinolaza; Casas; Domínguez, “Dionýz Ďurišin”). The concept of this work is the notion of region as opposed to the traditional notion of national literature and this change of paradigm is especially useful in understanding pluricultural spaces such as the Iberian Peninsula, where literary transfer is prevalent. Thus, the Iberian geocultural space may be understood as a (macro)system or as an interliterary polysystem (see Casas, “Sistema interliterario”). In general, the application of systems theories in the study of literature and culture of Spanish Galicia are especially noteworthy (see, e.g., Abuín and Domínguez; Cabo Aseguinolaza; Casas; Vilariño Picos and Abuín González, *New Trends*). Of special interest here are the collected volumes “Relaciones literarias en el ámbito hispánico” (Pegenaute, Gallén, Lafarga).

Iberian Spanish comparative literature can also be characterized—and this is corollary to systemic approaches—by the attempt to abandon ideas of genetic causality through the study of literary universals, whether these are seen in similar phenomena in distinct literatures or in distinct forms and expressions of art. However, the study of East-West literature has not received the attention it deserves. Postcolonial studies that seek to break down hegemonic binary structures such as “White/Black” or “First/Third” world have been mostly carried out on literature

in English and, paradoxical as it may seem, this had a repercussion in the study of Latin American literature, apart from a few isolated examples (e.g., Álvarez Méndez; Vega) or studies published in English by scholars working in Spain (e.g., Ochiaga) (about comparative literature in Latin American Spanish and Portuguese, see McClennen). Among the efforts to widen the field of comparative literature, Tomás Albaladejo has proposed interdiscursive analysis as a methodological tool. This would be a comparative analysis, with Bahkthian roots, of different types of discursive genres, with special attention given to the non-literary, and to intra- and inter-semiotic translation.

### (INTER)MEDIALITY AND COMPARATIVE LITERATURE IN IBERIAN SPANISH

Among the new approaches to the study of literature, the impact of hypertextual and interactive platforms made possible by the development of information technology stands out. Carlos Hernández Moreno, following the work of George P. Landow, has employed the Barthesian notion of *texte* as irreducible to notions of high literature and generic hierarchies and thus capable of deferring meaning, the object of appropriation and play, and implying a reader that is a producer, not just a consumer, of the text to these new literary practices: “the Barthesian (hyper)text describes the nonrestrictive, nonlinear and heterological functioning of texts in both the culture of the manuscript and the printing press. Information technology has done nothing more than facilitate this function of the text on the electronic screen, and including the capacity to join oral and group elements to the text, already a feature of manuscript, though not so much print culture” (22; see also Moreno Isidro; Wolf). Following Hernández Moreno’s pioneering work, electronic, rhizomatic, and nomadic “neowriting” has been an object of attention in Iberian Spanish scholarship and studies of cyberliterature show the emergence of a “new humanities,” implying the intermedial and inter- and multidisciplinary thus comparative approach.

Of note is that in Iberian Spanish—similar to other languages—the production and publication of electronic literature has diminished since its heyday in the 1990s and are replaced by videogames, blogs, wikis, social networks, and transmediatic products in which textuality, and therefore literary and critical theory, are less important. The internet has created new forms of textuality and even new forms of knowledge and literature that have modified the role of agents in the literary field. It is, therefore, vital to understand electronic literature in terms of its effects on the creation, edition, distribution, and reception of literary texts, as well as its effect on the understanding of basic concepts such as author, reader, text, writing, and book. Noteworthy here is the magazine *Espéculo* and its section *Hipertulia* dedicated to digital literature. It is also important to mention that scholars and critics have approached questions to do with the relationship between literature, the humanities, and new media from distinct approaches, whether these be aesthetic,

philosophical, sociological, political, or more strictly literary. The philosophically informed work of José Luis Molinuevo on the relationship between aesthetics and new media stands out here, as does that of José Antonio Millán who since the 1990s has published studies about the new expressions in literature and their modification within the literary system. Further, José Luis Orihuela has paid attention to the formal and linguistic characteristics of new electronic textualities and José Luis Brea has researched the idea of “postmedia” as the combination of previously distinct media. Miguel Santos Unamuno considers the texts of Jorge Luis Borges and Italo Calvino as proto-hypertextual works and Núria Vouillamoz has written the first seminal study on hypertextual and hypermediatic products.

There are a number of research groups at various universities in Spain which conduct studies in literature and (inter)mediality with diverse foci. For example, SELITEN@T (Centro de Investigación de Semiótica Literaria, Teatral y Nuevas Tecnologías) at the National University for Distance Education has among its objectives the study of the relationship between literature and other media, there is *Hermeneia: estudis literaris i tecnologies digitals* whose projects include the study of the phenomena of migration between media, the differences between digital literature and digitalized print literature adapted for electronic media, aspects of reading in a digital environment, and, in general, the critical analysis of electronic literature. At the Complutense University Madrid there is LEETHI: Literaturas Españolas y Europeas. Del Texto al Hipertexto, a project for the study of literature and hypertext. At the University of Santiago de Compostela there is the project *Proxecto Le.es: Literatura Electrónica en España*, where research is conducted on electronic literature in order to build a network for the preservation of electronic literature. The project aims to create a noncanonic and nonhierarchical virtual space that ignores generic boundaries, an intermedial and hybrid space made up of texts in which the verbal, the visual, the auditory, and the aural predominate. Further, participants in the project study performativity as an alternative model of knowledge capable of understanding the aesthetic, ethical, social, and political implications of the link between technology and artistic production. The performative turn implies the functioning of a work that is not closed, the active incorporation of the reader in the formulation not only of the signified of the work, but also in the “work in itself,” and the formations of new identities of both the personae of production and the production itself. There are also research projects for the study and presentation of experimental literature such as the University of Balears project *PEC: poesia experimental catalana* where research is conducted in literary history, criticism, comparative literature, and cultural studies to address experimental poetics from the decades of the 1970s and 1980s in Catalan. In Iberian Galician, the University of Santiago de Compostela houses the project *poesiagallega.org: arquivo de poéticas contemporáneas na cultura* with focus on Iberian Galician poetic production of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (for works in digital humanities in general and including literature and hypertext, literature and television, literature and

imagology, etc., see, e.g., Borràs Castanyer; Moreno; Moreno Hernández; Pajares Tosca; Romero López and Sanz Cabrerizo; Sánchez-Mesa; Sanz and Romero; Scolari; Tisselli; Tortosa Garrigós; Vega; Vilariño Picos and Abuín Gonzalez, *Teoría del hipertexto*).

Today it is even possible to contextualize new Spanish fiction in terms of the mediatization and digitalization of culture, an approach that implies interdisciplinary crossovers, hybrid networks that create connections between traditional forms, and new media. Digital technology has not only changed the way in which narrative is being written and received, but has changed perceptions of reality. While the word “text” was key in the understanding and development of postmodern thought, now new terms have emerged such as “(post)code” or “texture,” along with new methods of research. An example is the increasing interest in the aesthetics of error (repetitions, loops, self-corrections). Similarly, increasing attention has been given to the creation of narrative databases, collections of individual items through which the reader navigates. The inclusion of disordered lists or incoherent name-dropping are characteristic of these works, especially among those authors that have been collectively defined as *Mutantes* (a term proposed in the anthology of Julio Ortega and Juan Francisco Ferré; see also Fernández Porta; Mallo; Mora; Sierra). Many of these authors are also essayists and often come from professional spheres removed from the literary, often working in the hard sciences. Fundamental in this respect are the contributions of Agustín Fernández Mallo (*Postpoesía*) and Vicente Luis Mora, who in *El lectoespectador* analyses the new spaces of the literary such as Google, Twitter, digital television, or literature that could be defined as inter- or transmedial.

## THE INSTITUTIONAL PRESENCE OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE IN SPAIN

The institutional presence of comparative literature in the Spanish University system was established by a Royal Decree of April 2001, under the minister of Education Pilar del Castillo. In Spain, the government determines the name of the university degrees as well as the “areas of knowledge” in which the different disciplines of the curriculum are included. Darío Villanueva, as Rector of the University of Santiago de Compostela, which had implanted ten years earlier the first doctorate program in Theory of Literature and Comparative Literature, intervened as a member of the Council of Universities for the area of knowledge of “Theory of Literature,” renamed *Theory of Literature and Comparative Literature*, since the ministerial authorities were not ready to accept the inclusion of a new area for a single discipline. In any case, since then the university positions specialize in one and other one of the two disciplines, and for the first time comparative literature had official recognition. Following the government’s official designation of the discipline, the appointment of a large number of professorships occurred. Today, departments and/or programs with undergraduate and graduate degrees in comparative literature exist at at least seventeen universities.

The Sociedad Española de Literatura General y Comparada was founded in 1977 and holds biannual conferences and it publishes the journal *1616*, as well as volumes of proceedings of selected papers from its conferences 1978 to current. The most recent progress in Spanish comparatism have been showcased in the three volumes of the acts of the XVIII symposium of the SELGYC coordinated by Rafael Alemany and Francisco Chico Rico, published under the titles *Literatura y espectáculo*, *Literaturas ibéricas medievales comparadas*, y *Ciberliteratura y comparatismo*.

## COMPARATIVE LITERATURE IN IBERIAN PORTUGUESE

With notable precursors such as Fidelino de Figueiredo, Iberian Portuguese comparative literature was developed foremost by Margarida L. Losa (1945–1999), at the University of Porto from the early 1990s, who was also a principal founder of the Associação Portuguesa de Literatura Comparada. The Association has held biannual conferences since 1995, some of whose proceedings are published in volumes with articles in English and Portuguese. Maria-Alzira Seixo at the University of Lisboa is another scholar who promotes comparative literature both through her work and with regard to the discipline's institutional presence (Seixo served 1991–1994 as president of the International Comparative Literature Association / Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée). Since 1998 the University of Porto houses the Instituto Literatura Comparada Margarita Losa, where a graduate degree is offered and the Institute has several research and publishing projects including the publication of the journal *Cadernos de Literatura Comparada*.

It is important also to make reference to the Centro de Estudos Comparatistas, coordinated by Helena Carvalho Buescu at the University of Lisbon, which has a notable base in intercultural studies, including the study of travel literature and translation, and intersemiotic studies, the investigation of the relations between literary discourse and other artistic practices (adaptation, books illustration or ekphrasis). Further, the field of intermediality studies takes a significant place in Iberian Portuguese scholarship (e.g., Esteves Pereira; Vieira and Rio Novo). In terms of the relationship between literature and film, the last ten years have seen the groundbreaking volumes of Sérgio Guimarães Sousa, Mário Jorge Torres, and Anabela Dinis Branco de Oliveira, who explore the discursive relationship between film and novel. It is also important to note the new approaches—still with a link to Iberist ideas (see the anthology of texts edited by César Antonio Molina)—which are emerging in new Hispanic studies (i.e., de Abreu). But without doubt it is in within Lusophone studies that the most intense comparative work has been carried out, especially in the context of postcolonialism. The concept of *lusofonia* has itself been interrogated, as it is a consequence of colonial imposition that goes beyond the linguistic and strikes to the heart of Portuguese national identity. The reflections of Alfredo Margarido are exemplary in this regard as they associate

the idea of *portugalidade* with resistance to Spanish expansionism and *lusofonia* with a messianic, colonialist project (e.g., Abdala Júnior; Arenas; Mata; Soares; Vieira).

Where Iberian Portuguese comparative literature shows promise—similar to the situation in Iberian Spanish—is in (inter)mediality studies and digital humanities. For example, following the pioneering work of Pedro Barbosa, projects housed at the University Fernando Pessoa include the journal *Cibertextualidades* (see also Rui Torres and Petry). The project is premised on a close link between the tradition of concrete poetry and digital poetics. At the same time, in comparative humanities seminal work has been published by Carmo Castelo Branco, who deals with the relationship between literature and painting in the 1970s, and Eduardo Paz Borroso, who reevaluates the role of contemporary Portuguese painters in the context of (inter)mediality. Elisa Costa has explored the applications of digital poetry in an pedagogic context; Pedro Reis's research has to do with the precursors of new textualities and the significance of notions such as potentiality in current digital formats which mix the visual, verbal, and aural in genres such as videopoetry, animated poetry, or holopoetry. At the University of Coimbra there is the project *DigLitWeb: Digital Literature Web* with the objective to catalogue and analyze electronic poetry in Portuguese. The corpus of poetry researchers in the project investigate include the genres of graffiti (Anna Hatherly), anthologies and manifestos, photocopy art (Antonio Aragao), graphic poetry (Salette Tavares), image-based formats of visual poetry, collages, audio capturing for sound poetry (Américo Rodrigues), happenings (Albérto Pimenta), combined techniques, (Helberto Helder), and literary software. Many of these texts were conceived with computer programming language developed by Pedro Barbosa, Silvestre Pestana, and Eduardo de Melo e Castro.

As to the institutional presence of comparative literature in Iberian Portuguese, in addition to the University of Porto, departments and/or centers of comparative literature exist at the University of Beira Interior, the Catholic University of Portugal, the University of Coimbra, the University of Évora, the University of Lisboa, the University of Minho, and the New University of Lisboa. Studies on intermediality are active in the University of Aveiro and the Instituto Superior da Maia, an institute of higher education founded in 1990.

## CONCLUSION

In the volume *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* (Bernheimer) published in 1995, a specific area for a “new comparative literature” is defined by the postulate of what would consist of “comparisons between media, from early manuscripts to television, hypertext, and virtual realities” (45). Ernst Grabovszki analyzed the impact of globalization and new media on the notion of world literature and suggested areas which would need revision that included copyright, the role and function of literary institutions, the question of the global economy,



the reading of literature (democratization and decentralization), the development of electronic media and information cultures in a global and regional context, control and censorship, the monopolies of the powerful media, and the alarming predominance of English as the *lingua franca* of scholarship. We suggest that part of the work of scholars working in comparative literature in Iberian Spanish and Portuguese ought to place emphasis on the value of the local in a global context and to explore linguistic difference, while at the same time accompanying this exploration with theoretical reflection on the importance of digital humanities. In addition to the study of literature in digital humanities, research should be carried out with regard to interartistic practices, a field that is “comparative” by definition (see, e.g., Finger). Further, we believe that interdisciplinary teamwork would benefit scholarship greatly. Although there has been a marked development of comparative literature in Iberian Spanish and Portuguese since the 1980s and increasing since the 1990s, Jenaro Talens emphasizes the necessity for a discursive transversality removed from the discourse of “academic tradition,” because it is impossible to ignore the slippage in the notion of reading from what was once mere passive transcription to more active analysis and intervention. In sum, we submit that—not only in Iberian Spanish and Portuguese but globally—what makes the comparative approach vital in the analysis of literature and culture is the social relevance of humanities scholarship.

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# Comparative Literature in Indian Languages

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Anand Balwant Patil

**Abstract:** In his article “Comparative Literature in Indian Languages” Anand Balwant Patil discusses developments in humanities scholarship in India. He posits that giving much space to “modern” Anglo-American aesthetics in university curricula is itself a politics of aesthetics. The changed political status quo after 1947 effected a change in the mediation of Anglophone aesthetics in humanities scholarship. For example, India has no school of postcolonial studies to offer a blueprint of the “postcolonial project” to counter balance the influx of Anglophone scholarship. Patil presents a discussion of the status quo of comparative scholarship in India, its theoretical underpinnings, and argues for the development of home-grown comparative scholarship in the humanities.

## INTRODUCTION

The developments in Indian comparative discourse have taken place according to Lord Macaulay’s (1835) predictions in the theory of downward infiltration of education in the Indian caste system. This history of hierarchical comparativism cannot be studied without a reference to the rigid frame of four castes and *varna*-s: the Brahman priestly caste, Kshatriya warriors, Vaishya tradesmen, and Shudra servants. Within this frame there are thousands of subcastes and tribals with separate cultures, crafts and neo-casteist classifications of literature (mainstream, rural, regional, *dalit*, and tribal, respectively) in the same language. This is one of the hurdles in making learning more dialogic and dwarfs development of, in Emily Apter’s words, “democracy of comparison” (9). A foreigner can hardly understand, to use Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s “critique on the sign and the signifying monkey” (“Race” 902) in terms of the Indian caste system. It is not a coincidence that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi begins his autobiography with a reference to his “Baniya caste” (Vaiyshya varna), Raja Rao’s *Serpent and the Rope* parades superiority of the protagonist that he was born a Brahmin, and especially a number of *dalit* self-auto-photo-narratives exhibit markers of the castes of authors in the titles of books. The diversity of religions and hundreds of languages has added new dimensions to this caste system and that is not identical to classes as Marxists tend to believe. India is neither a multilingual “melting pot” like the U.S. or Canada nor a country with a single official language like China. It is a subcontinent with thirty-one federal states and six centrally governed provinces

with a rich cultural diversity. Constitutionally recognized languages are twenty four and spoken languages are hundreds: Hindi 551.4, English 125, Bengali 91.1, Telugu 85, Marathi 84.2, Tamil 66.7, Urdu 59, Kannada 50.3, Gujarati 50.3, Oriya 36.5, Malayalam 13.8, Punjabi 31.4, Assami 18.9 (all figures are in millions, 1991 Census). Five percent English educated elites with “cultural capital” dominate the rest of the population. Sixty percent of the population is illiterate. The sudden rise of English to the second largest language in prominence is not an accident of a neo-colonial situation. It is the triumph of Anglicization and the twin processes of Sanskritization (Brahmanization) + Westernization (modernization) = acculturation started after the colonial contact with Europe and this is where the pseudo concepts of “Indianness” and “newness” in new literatures can be and ought to be contested. Unfortunately, Orientalists and sociologists disregarded the Indigenous and rich folk cultural traditions of India and thus Shakespeare has not been studied together with Indian folk culture but with Sanskritized *shastris* (pundits), who committed ritualistic “bardicide” for material gain (see Patil, Anand Balwant, *The Whirligig of Taste* 142). A rare exception is that the committed leftist Habib Tanwir adapted *Midsummer Night’s Dream* in Chattisgadi folk forms only when the British Council commissioned him. Because of these inherent intra-colonial structures of literary perceptions in Indigenous culture, a culturalist cannot imagine resistant “Black aesthetics” in India.

The classical poet Chandrashekhar privileged comparative thinking, but it was too hierarchical to be effective to produce new knowledge. In contrast, Karl Marx criticized the British Parliament and Press for being responsible for “the emergence of sharp class divisions ... and a so called ‘public opinion’ which is manipulated by the Brahmins of the press have, on the contrary, brought in to being monstrous sameness of character that would make Shakespeare,” and further pointed out how new bungalows of lords being built on the banks of the Thames with the “blood and flesh of the colonized people” (Deshmukh 265) and Fyodor Dostoevsky ridiculed the Indian Brahman priest in the prisoners’ mime show in *The House of the Dead*. Such internationalizations of the image of Indian culture also display intricacies in Indian cultural politics of aesthetics. Colonial records reveal how the Brahmins, traditional monopolizers of scholarship and guardians of religion and culture, internalized English and mediated Western knowledge and power structures. This was present first in European imperialism and today it is a major component of Indian diaspora. It is on this historical background that humanities scholarship in India is in need of “home-grown framework”-s of comparative scholarship with reference to Indigenous “ancient cultures with substantial theoretical thinking embedded in both scholarship and creative works” (Tötösy de Zepetnek, “Anand Patil’s” 194).

In keeping with the above postulate of “home-grown” comparative scholarship I argue that the medieval saint-poet Namdeo, for example, can be understood as an icon of Indian “home-grown” comparativism (see Patil, Anand, *Taulanik*, “The New Indian”). Namdeo hailed from the *shimpi* (tailor) lower



caste community, but had traveled all over India and mastered many languages. His sixty-five *abhangas*-devotional songs were studded like pearls in Shikhs's *Gurubani* (scripture), which includes the compositions of 36 saint poets from other castes. Later, we have Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, an "honest" Nativist and internationalist, who provided still wider comparative perspectives (see Jaidev). At the same time, the focus of Indian comparativism lies not on such rich Indigenous interculturalness and intertextualities but mostly on the Western impact of internationalism, especially on Anglophone views and practices. While Indian culture is translational and thus comparative, this is based on differences of caste and the latter perspective is lacking in Indian scholarship.

### THE LEGACIES OF ANGLOPHONE SCHOLARSHIP

Since 90 percent of teachers at all levels during the colonial period belonged to the Brahmin/priestly caste, postcolonial comparativism is determined by their literary tastes. For example, the histories of literature in any Indian language exhibit 99 percent names of the contributors from this subculture group only (see, e.g., Jog). Such a discourse of power by the priestly class and that mediated and mediates Western culture and imperialism is bound to use it to maintain its traditional hegemony. Library holdings and curricula in the beginning of the twentieth century display such Western comparative texts as Frank Byron Jevons's *Comparative Religion* (1908), A.W. Jackson's (1862–1937) *An Avesta Grammar in Comparison with Sanskrit Phonology Inflection-word Formation with an Introduction on the Avesta* or Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett's *Comparative Literature* (1886), etc. But the discipline of comparative literature did not strike deep roots in India because of the resistant Vedic cultural structures and caste conditioned literati. For example, Ganesh Sadashiv Bhate, who was educated in England, wrote a number of comparative essays in 1913, which were posthumously published in 1995. Tryambak Shankar Shejwalkar was a historian and critic in comparative scholarship and vision and he warned his own priestly class not to mediate Western scholarship instead of performing such in a comparative Indian-Western context: in consequence, his work was disregarded. Vasudev Balawant Patwardhan (1870–1921)—editor of the weekly *Sudhakar* (Reformist) and a scholar of English and philology at Fergusson College Pune—suggested the inclusion of comparative chapters on affinities between Western literature in the history of Marathi literature. However, his proposal was turned down by the conservative teachers of Sanskrit and Marathi (see Jog). Thus the Janus face (or two layers/voices, i.e., Indigenous and Western) of modern Indian languages and literatures remains unexplored. The achievements of two students of his college, who studied in England, exhibit two distinct sub-caste conditioned cultural contributions to humanities scholarship: Panjabrao Shamrao Deshmukh's *The Origin and Development of Religion in Vedic Literature* (1933) was a pioneering comparative study and B.S. Mardhekar, who studied Anglophone aesthetics of

modernism and attended poetry writing workshops in England during the years 1929–1933 for his Indian Civil Service examination but failed the exams. He returned to India to publish his *Arts and Man* (1937) in English and *Saundrya ani Sahitya* (1955) in Marathi and became the father of modernism and new poetry (see Patil, Anand, *Samagra*). Mardhekar's work is relevant because of his studies of European and U.S.-American literature and the transplantation of British modernism in Bombay (see Edman; Shoemaker). Importantly, Mardhekar's theories of aesthetics and "new" poetry generated formalist criticism in Marathi.

While René Wellek's and Austin Warren's *Theory of Literature* (1949) and its translation remain a "Bible" of critical thought in India still today, in contrast, Wellek's *Discriminations: Further Concepts of Criticism* (1970) neither entered university curricula nor appeared in translation and thus suggests that the move from formalism has not been recognized in India. While new criticism has diminished in presence the U.S., it survives in India. Following Paulo Freire, I describe this as the "pedagogy of the oppressed" (*Teekavastraharan* 203–18) and postulate (see *British Bombay*) how conflicts of caste constitute a persistent factor in the study of literature in India. In turn, the postulate ought to lead Indian comparativism to the internationalization of the study of literature and culture—among others—to include aspects of interculturality. Since its inception in the mid-twentieth century Western-based comparative literature in India has been displaying a rich colonial legacy along with its paradoxes and mediating Anglophone aesthetics. But even if we consider Anglophone-based scholarship in India, within such, for example, although 26/11, 13/7 and other symbolic references to terrorist attacks in India have acquired the semiotic significance of 9/11 in New York, Indian scholars have not produced interdisciplinary interventions like Apter, whose book "was shaped by the traumatic experience of September 11, 2001" (viii).

The impact of the Cold War in humanities scholarship is a further interesting subject for research but here, too, the colonial impact is felt: K.M. George's edited volume *Comparative Literature* (1984) is a misnomer because it is a merely juxtaposed survey of literatures. Better work is presented, for example, by Sisir Kumar Das who compared literary terms in Indian languages and compiled a comparative English history of Indian literatures. Namwar Singh pleaded for the decolonization of the Indian mind, but this occurred two and half decades after Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's avowed comparativism and Nativism. A theoretical problem that tortures a teacher of English in the "Third World" is the question of what kind of English studies would replace it. Indian authorities of university curricula attempt to restructure syllabi by replacing *Hamlet* in place of *Othello*, but hardly displace either by Derek Walcott's *The Branch of the Blue Nile* (1995) or by a Chinese play. Hence, the level of scholarship is not only conditioned by Western paradigms but also by the Indigenous paradigm which fails to make the understanding of Edward W. Said's notion of the "worldliness of text" (*The World*). Although the Government of India has issued priority to comparative humanities and made it mandatory to establish interdisciplinary schools of

languages and literatures, these were usually transformed into departments and thus the institutional presence of the discipline of comparative literature is met with resistance. As I indicate above, this does not mean that there is no comparative scholarship in India; what this means is that because of the lack of a good number of full-fledged departments of comparative literature and thus degree granting institutional presence with the corresponding availability of teaching positions, the discipline lacks relevant presence compared with, for example, departments of English. This situation is similar to the West (i.e., the U.S. and Europe): Susan Bassnett declares the death of comparative literature in 1993 or Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak remains Euro-U.S.-American centered with characteristics from hierarchical “innate Nativism.” While Haun Saussy declares that comparative literature has achieved a place in the sun intellectually, this positive view is not borne out on the institutional level (see Tötösy de Zepetnek, “The New Humanities” 55) and in my view this is relevant to the situation of comparative literature in India as well.

Spivak’s problematic notion of “can the subaltern speak?” or one of V.S. Naipaul’s indictments that Indians need certificates of recognition from foreigners show how Spivak’s and Naipaul’s caste inheritance makes them ignore the inter-caste battle for recognition (see, e.g., Shih, “Global Literature”). Moreover, Salman Rushdie’s charge of “shadow literatures” (ix) cannot be answered adequately unless Shu-Mei Shih’s concept of “comparative racialization” is modified in Indian contexts as “comparative castealization” of culture and literature (“Comparative Racialization” 1347). The notion of the “empire writes back” was privileged by Western scholars, but hardly practiced in India except perhaps in power politics. The use and misuse of caste not only in literature but also in all walks of life is a serious issue, and hence the need of the merger of comparative literature and cultural studies. For example, Roy Moxham brings to the light how the plot of the film *Bandit Queen* was a convincing lie devised to criticize Thakurs (Kshatriyas): the “true story is that there are no upper caste guys” in Phoolan Devi’s village and “even director Shekhar Kapur admits that” (9). To boot, this international “fakedom” (see Ruthven) of caste politics was accepted as “true” by Robert Young Jr. in his *Postcolonialism Theory* (2003). And thus, for example, Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s concepts of “race, writing, and difference” (“The Blackness”) have not yet gained currency in India.

## RETHINKING THE STUDY OF CULTURE WITH COMPARATIVE DIALOGISM

The effects of globalization in culture need to be studied comparatively because Western literature, cinema, song, music, dance, and the many types of popular culture are part and parcel of contemporary Indian culture. A few scholars such as Aparna Dharwadkar and Vinay Dharwadkar have exposed the misuse of Western texts that colonize Indian literati and scholars again. But it is necessary to study, as Stephen Greenblatt suggested by the phrase “invisible bullets,”

not only the poetics of culture but also the politics of style and caste-culture in adaptations of Western texts. The narratives about the West's shaping of colonial identities are not paired with both the narratives about the colonizer's shaping of Indigenous identities and of their own identities. "India" is not, in Homi K. Bhabha's terms "narrating" in comparative double voice but more powerfully in an alien master's voice. Thus I postulate that we need new models for agency in comparative studies. The binaries implied in the cultural encounters, which give rise to the "annihilation" and its "resistance" models, have their own limitations. Power constitutes knowledge. In the globalization of Anglo-U.S.-American dominant culture, the process is understood as appropriating aspects of others' cultures to construct the self and repress the other. This circle shelters a small circle of *comprador intelligentsia* (see Majid). The Indian diaspora is used to appropriate what Said had pointed out in the context of European empire in his *Orientalism* (1979): "because of Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action" (i). The *comprador intelligentsia* always emphasizes "literariness," "rhythm" and "aesthetic experience" which strengthens cultural amnesia, weakens resistance, and increases ignorance implied in the Kantian aesthetic (see Majid). It is necessary to argue that Euro-U.S.-American texts are also sites of cultural heterogeneity and it is through such comparative shift that we can arrive at a better model for comparative studies about the literatures of India and including Indian diaspora writing. In current scholarship, for example in Patrick Colm Hogan's and Lalita Pandit's collected volume *Literary India: Comparative Studies in Aesthetics, Colonialism and Culture* or in Stuart Blackburn's and Vasudha Dalmia's collected volume *India's Literary History: Essays on the Nineteenth Century* we find no answers to the question of which Indian writing is represented as literature or as documents of poverty in the "First World." Who represent them? Are the mediators the agents of imperialism or resistant rebels or opportunist Nativists? Hence there is the need of a synthesis of "Indian" comparative literature and comparative cultural studies and not Anglo-U.S.-American "planetary hegemony" (with regard to scholarship in comparative literature published in India, see Dasgupta; James, Mohan, Dasgupta, Bhattacharjee; Dev; Majumdar; Patil, Anand "The New Indian"; Singh, Gurbhagat).

One illustration is sufficient to explain the significance of caste-based comparative culture criticism in India. After Mahatma Gandhi's murder in 1948, the Brahman caste adopted the image of Jews. Vyankatesh Madulkar (1964) wrote a novel on the theme of "wild fire" engulfing the houses of only Brahmin's houses after Gandhi's assassination. But he did not mention a single house that was protected by the non-Brahmin secular villagers. In spite of his other far better fictional works, non-resident Indians singled it out for its translation to English, as well to Russian. The present Indian diaspora consists of this caste in majority and its "remote control" retains its hegemony. I submit that this "distant Nativism" strengthens Anglo-U.S.-American-centrism and (cultural) imperialism which throttles comparativism. For example, the list of research fellowships or the U.S.

PL480 grants for translations determine and indicate the hegemonial hold on Indian scholarship to remain singularly U.S.-American centered. There is a mushroom growth of Ph.D. dissertations on African U.S.-American and *dalit* writings owing to U.S. fellowships and library and other material facilities. This gave rise to the trend of studying African and U.S.-American literature or Canadian at the cost of comparative African, Caribbean, or Arabic literatures in a wider context than with focus on U.S.-American paradigms. A comparative study of literature of the *dalit* movement and of Negritude is more relevant and revealing than any superficial analogy of the *dalit* and the U.S.-American Black Panthers' texts. The other side of European and U.S. cultural imperialism has been coming to light in the age of information and "influence studies" have become staple food in Indian scholarship. For example, M.K. Naik's (1984) culturally biased judgment of Raja Rao's *Kantapura* as an epic in prose or Meenakshi Mukherjee's Prospero-Caliban complex in *Perishable Empire* (2000) speak volumes about this double bind of the Indigenous hierarchical *desi*, as well as colonial Western circles within the West-oriented circles of Indian literati and scholars. The "reciprocal enculturation model of encounter" (Belcher 250) is useful not only for analysis of international contexts, but also effects several local boundaries marked by caste and cultures. This "Otherness" of one kind or the other is a constitutive element of both the formation of identity and the Euro-U.S.-American impact on it. However, a number of comparative works not only in Indian languages but also in English fall short in accepting, in Claudio Guillén's sense, "the challenge of comparative literature": a strong postcolonial comparative consciousness of textual exchanges at the international level is necessary for decolonizing the canon (for examples where this is executed successfully of recent, see, e.g., Patil, Manisha; Tiwari).

Following the above argued, interdisciplinarity is a quintessential function of comparative literature and comparative cultural studies and means the de-emphasizing of the literary text as close-text study in favor of the contextual study of literature (see, e.g., Tötösy de Zepetnek, "The New Humanities"; see also Moran). A corollary function is of course translation studies and both interdisciplinarity and translation studies remain less explored in Indian scholarship. However, a wave of recent translations of Western texts has posed a serious threat to local literary traditions leading to, in Apter's terms "language wars, great and small" (4). Thus we know more about Dante, Homer, Virgil, Eliot, or Hemingway and less about versions of the *Ramayanas* and the *Mahabharatas* or folk myths and tales in different Indian languages. However, there are developments which are encouraging, for example because transformations in Indian hierarchical social structures have brought about radical changes in the traditional priestly class's monopoly of learning and lower caste scholarship is becoming aware of the varied structures in/of culture. The change of Frantz Fanon's title *Black Skin, White Masks* as "Brownblackish Skin, White Masks" would suit well and the next step to Gauri Viswanathan's exposition of "masks of conquests" is to reveal the impact of imported Western aesthetics to "civilize" and to recolonize.

## THE FUTURE OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AND COMPARATIVE CULTURAL STUDIES IN INDIA

In relation to the intellectual history and development of comparativism in India, the institutional presence of the approach is relevant: the first Department of Comparative Literature was established at Jadavpur University in 1956, at that time following the French model. The Department, along with the publishing of the *Jadavpur Journal of Comparative Literature*, paved the path for new developments. Since then and particularly since the 1990s—while based, principally, on Anglophone scholarship—comparative literature scholarship in India produced a wide array of work including studies about Western texts compared with Indian and within Indian literatures (see, e.g., Bandyopadhyay; Chanda; Mohan; Pollock). An important development is that the Comparative Literature Association of India (established in 1987) founded a digital journal, *sāhitya: The Journal of the Comparative Literature Association of India* <<http://www.clai.in/journal.html>> in 2011. Among other journals published in India of interest is the *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* published since 1978 at the Vishvannath Kaviraja Institute.

Departments, centers, or programs in comparative literature in India exist today at Calicut University, Banaras Hindu University, University of Burdwan, University of Delhi, Gujarat University, Central University of Gujarat, South Gujarat University, University of Hyderabad, Jadavpur University, Jamia Millia Islamia University, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Kannur University, Central University of Kerala, Central University of Punjab, and Saurashtra University. While the field of cultural studies is represented increasingly in Indian scholarship, on the institutional level there are only a few departments, for example at D.D.U. Gorakhpur University and Kumaun University. Further, at Ranchi University there is a program in history and cultural studies, at Pondicherry University there is a program in arts and cultural studies, at Dravidian University there is a Department of Comparative Philosophy and Religion, and at the Vishvannath Kaviraja Institute there is a Department of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics.

The increased speed of communication in response to new information technologies is bringing a new international “connectedness” including interdisciplinary scholarship. Among others, this means comparative humanities scholarship in India is in need of a new cultural literacy of interdisciplinarity and attention to the politics of internationalization. With this, comparative literature and comparative cultural studies will give rise to resistant aesthetics framed by the collective ingredients drawn from all cultural fractions. For example, in my *Literary into Comparative Culture Criticism*, I suggest a tentative outline of specifically Indian theory and method construction. This outline of theorization depends on terms and concepts used in the varied areas of the cultures of India and an encyclopedia of such concepts would lay the foundations of an Indian comparative poetics. Each caste has its own age-old practices such as the Brahmin’s love of



classical scholarship Kshatriya's leadership and chivalry, Vaishya's business management, the Shudra's skill for crafts, songs, and dance, etc. The diversity of religions would contribute much to such comparative and dialogic thinking: their amalgamation with foreign aesthetics of resistance might increase not only "home-grown" intertextuality and but also competence in internationalization. Such a "postcolonial project" will show how Indian culture and scholarship are with much richer "inheritance of gain" than what Ferdinand de Saussure derived from Sanskrit grammar or Jacques Derrida from Buddhism. The representations of different castes and religions in Indian cultural products and power structures in minority discourses offer a fertile field for interdisciplinary study. The impact of Indian culture and literature on not only Euro-U.S.-American countries but also on other cultures is a neglected area in Indian scholarship and thus it is necessary to cross the boundaries and theorize transcultural intertextuality differently and at different levels.

While my propositions are preliminary with limitations, I submit that a theorizing of caste-conditioned comparativism in the context of the postmodern condition would enhance scholarship not only in India but also elsewhere: my hope is that scholars and scholarship would come out of the narrow confines of castes to analyze how literary caste politics begins with the personal, but proceeds to local, as well as global place-making. This new comparativism would give more space to India's ancient de-centeredness of culture in identity politics, geopolitics, and hybridization and it would expose the sham of *comprador intelligentsia*. In postcoloniality and beyond, a higher degree of scholarly integrity is possible. All this is bound to happen slowly in course of internationalization and, therefore, Indian scholars ought to reorganize scholarship methodically into "home-grown" theory construction, as well as the application of the theoretical frameworks. The future will show how far Indian scholarship as non-national scholarship—with independence from Western-based thought but such integrated and based on the vast history of Indian cultures and scholarship—succeeds in revitalizing the study of culture in general and the study of literature in particular.

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# Comparative Literature in Italian

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Mauro Pala

**Abstract:** In his article “Comparative Literature in Italian” Mauro Pala presents a historical, as well as contemporary overview of comparative studies in literature and culture. While there is no discernible school of comparative literature in Italy because the discipline is considered and practiced as part of literary criticism, there are broader orientations with regard to the understanding of art and culture. With regard to the contemporary status of the discipline, there are several areas since the 1990s where tenets of comparative literature have gained interest. These areas include postcolonial studies, the phenomena of hybridization, the relationship between town and countryside, identity formation, the role of language in the process of integration, travel literature, and processes of representation. On the institutional level, comparative literature has a relatively stable presence at a number of universities.

In 1997, Remo Ceserani raised the question as to whether it would be a possible to develop in Italy a specific school of thought and practices in the discipline of comparative literature (“Italian Literary”; see also *Guida allo studio*). In the time since then, a number of changes have taken place including the presence of several departments and programs in comparative literature. In contrast with the U.S. and Mainland China—two countries where the discipline has the largest institutional presence, as well as specific types of comparative literature (see Gillespie; Wang and Liu) or in contrast to Germany (see Lubrich) or France (see Tomiche)—in Italy there is no discernible school of comparative literature because it is considered and practised as part of literary criticism. However, there existed broader orientations with regard to the understanding of art and culture. For example, Benedetto Croce argued in 1903 for a broad and multivalent approach in the study of literature in a cultural and theoretical framework. At the same time, Croce criticized comparative literature for its lack of methodology. While in the history of comparative literature Croce’s opposition to comparative literature is well known, it is of importance that in his work Croce performed comparative scholarship (see, e.g., Barberi Squarotti; Barilli; Della Terza; Folena Luperini). It is also true that while comparative literature has not gained institutional presence, comparative studies in the humanities flourish(ed) (see, e.g., Cammarota, *Gli strumenti*; Gnisci; Gnisci and Sinopoli).

Following World War II literary scholarship and criticism has undergone several stages in Italy. Between 1945 and 1965, roughly, the prevalent context was that of Marxist criticism, although the impact of Erich Auerbach’s *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (trans. Alberto Romagnoli

and Hans Hinterhäuser) or the work of Ernst Robert Curtius have also been evident. In the 1960s structuralism and semiotics gained importance and content or cultural contexts of the literary work were paid less attention to (see, e.g., Agosti; Avalle; Corti; Eco; Marchese; Sanguineti). Following this development, the definition of categories for classifying works of art in terms of beauty and pleasure was abandoned and there was a move towards explaining the linguistic processes of text construction and how this functions in communication. In the 1970s a conflict in methodological approaches and perspectives erupted with the arrival of psychoanalytical criticism (see, e.g., Agamben; Agosti; Gianola; Lavagetto; Orlando; Segre), thus adding to the by now varied set of approaches including Marxist, structuralist, and semiotic criticism. While the institutional presence of comparative literature remained non-existent, comparative literature expanded owing to the work of scholars—called *comparatisti loro malgrado* (“involuntary comparatists”)—who taught, officially, Italian literature, but who performed scholarship and taught literature with a comparative perspective.

In the above context, the study of literature from a comparative perspective was performed by such as Maria Corti and Cesare Segre who developed theoretical frameworks applicable to the study of literature and the other arts. Structuralism, which later evolved towards semiology, also dealt with the relationships between the literary text and the cultural context in which it is collocated. Segre distinguishes four levels of the narrative text in its linearity, its plot, the range of themes present in the discourse, the *fabula*, the logical-temporal sequence of the text itself and, lastly, the narrative model, which identifies the functions of the various elements. In turn, scholars of medieval literature established criteria for the examination of how a text is constructed and how the recovery and the interpretation of the text go hand-in-hand (on comparative cultural studies and medieval literature, see Capelli). Following Auerbach and Curtius, they argued that it is necessary to explain the system of representation on the basis of the transmission of the text. In this view, the literary text needs to be deconstructed and reconstructed in order to be understood: the praxis of this type of comparative philology ensured that the text is deconstructed with respect to the multiple subtexts which make up the universe of communication: text is no more Text but its study is done in a relative and comparative mode and understood as discourse (see, e.g., Antonelli; Avalle; Bologna; Cecchi and Ghidetti). Among theorists there were also those who returned to the field of rhetoric and initiated the field of neo-rhetoric as related to the study of the aesthetic techniques of persuasion, thus a tool of understanding textual composition (see, e.g., Barilli; Folena; Mengaldo). With the arrival of semiotics/semiology, the field of Italian neo-rhetoric underwent further development with Umberto Eco’s systemic approach in particular. This was an obvious development because semiotics tends to employ classical rhetoric (see

also Anceschi; Battistini; Raimondi). Overall, the situation of the discipline of comparative literature remained a subfield of the study of Italian literature and literary criticism until the 1990s.

After the introduction of doctoral programs in comparative literature in the late 1980s, the discipline arrived with an orientation towards the study of literature and culture in a context of theory and thematics. Given the above discussed historical background of the discipline, of relevance is that in addition to the adaptation of theoretical frameworks from the humanities, this occurred also from the social sciences. Nevertheless, it can be said that a specific school of comparative literature has not developed. Rather than a hegemonic critical tendency, in Italy there is a convergence of different approaches to the study of literature. As Giulio Ferroni predicted in 1996, with the end of the classical connotation of literature certain practices such as textual commentary tend to be paid less attention to. Aware of the strong link between commentary and the construction of a critical precept, Italo Calvino provided a celebrated definition of the classical work, i.e., worthy of the critical precept on the basis of its productivity and its capacity to stimulate its acceptance in different historical periods and environments. Calvino's approach to the problem of the critical precept is pragmatic and is constructed in two stages (see, e.g., *Perché*). The first is dynamic, based on the dialogue which a literary work establishes with preceding works and the second stage is diachronic and aiming at classification. There is the risk, however, that the latter can become inflexible in defence of a certain aesthetic ideal linked to the critical precept itself.

Different from what took place in the English-speaking world, first with T.S. Eliot and later with Harold Bloom, there was no debate on critical precepts and their social implications. However, a related issue did evolve, namely that of identity. This occurred on the understanding that identity and its literary representation are relative cultural constructions, that is, identity is never extraneous to history and specific social circumstances and thus the field of the intercultural approach has gained interest (see, e.g., Grossi and Rossi; Raimondi). Further, the question of identity with regard to the concept of national identity and their role of symbolic practices in the construction of an imaginary community—following the model of Benedict Anderson—have become an area of scholarship for the mapping of literary forms in the Mediterranean (see, e.g., Anselmi and Prete; Chambers). One particularly dynamic sector of this area of comparative studies interprets and, thus, recycles critical works and proposals from the classics of postcolonial criticism—following such as Edward W. Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, etc.—a trend which links postcolonial literature with the phenomenon of (im)migrant literature. As it has already happened in the United Kingdom and France over the last few decades (but not in Germany, see Sturm-Trigonakis),

literature produced by (im)migrants who have adopted Italian as their means of expression is undergoing a rapid growth and achieving considerable success with the reading public. (Im)migrant literature privileges the autobiography and deals with circumstances where issues are linked to globalization from (im)migration to integration in a cultural context (see, e.g., Gnisci, *Creoli meticci migranti*). A further area of comparative literature—in theory and application—with regard to systemic and empirical approaches to the study of literature and culture is also a field that has raised some interest (see, e.g., Nemesio; Pagnini).

Since the 1990s, postcolonial studies represent a prominent field in Italian comparative literature and includes the study of the phenomena of hybridization, the relationship between town and countryside, identity formation, the role of language in the process of integration, orality and folklore, and various aspects of (im)migrant literature (see, e.g., Albertazzi; Cerina, Lavinio, Mulas; Ceserani; Chambers). Here, I observe a militant trait—although different from Marxist criticism—and it is the concept of class, ethnicity, or group identity as studied in literature. Processes of representation which can lead to forms of discrimination are highlighted including the matter of race and gender. Within postcolonial studies, there is also much scholarship devoted to travel literature (see, e.g., Cometa; Mellino). Texts in travel literature are examined with regard to their ideological function, revealing how they often reproduce the attitude of the dominant culture towards representations of the Other. Further, in the study of travel literature there is an interest in folklore, especially with regard to representations of the south of Italy or forms of exoticism—contemporary or historical—with respect to contexts outside Europe (see, e.g., Chemello; Perocco). With a combination of comparative literature and sociology, gender studies mark a focus in travel studies, with particular attention to the history of emigration from Italy (see, e.g., De Clementi and Stella), as well as the “journey” as a metonym for the contact between cultures (see, e.g., Agazzi; Brilli).

Thematic studies in Italian comparative literature started in the 1930s about Romantic literature (see, e.g., Praz; Mazzacurati and Moretti; Pagnini; Raimondi) and nowadays include studies on the transmigrations of the figure of Ulysses, the theme of duality, the relation between classical theater and contemporary literary and/or cinematic adaptations, and aspects of psychoanalysis with regard to literature (see, e.g., Boitani; Fusillo; Guidotti). Echoing Werner Sollors’s return to thematic criticism, the confines of modernity seen as an existential condition rather than a historical period with clear boundaries are explored with regard to the figure of Don Giovanni, postmodernity as a theme in literature and how the experience of the artistic avant-garde is today impossible thus exposing the vacuous nature of postmodernism, the theme of railways, the representation of



nobility in literature, or the figure of the “rag and bone picker” (see Ceserani; Ceserani and De Federicis; Domenichelli; Cerina, Lavinio and Mulas; Luperini; Macchia; Orlando). The theme of metamorphosis and the labyrinth, the foreigner, the shipwreck, or the secret are also themes dealt with (see, e.g., Ceserani; Fasano and Domenichelli; Cerina, Domenichelli, Tucci, Viridis; Floris and Viridis; Sannia and Viridis). Further, the periodization of modernism and postmodernism with regard to literary history is a frequent topic (see, e.g. Luperini; Moretti). As part of the debate about modernity and theory there are scholars who study key texts in Anglophone and Francophone literature (see, e.g. Izzo; Lavagetto; Rosso and Ferraris).

In Italian scholarship mass culture has been viewed from the 1950s to the 1970s negatively thus bringing about the commodification of all forms of cultural life (see, e.g. Pasolini). Yet, unlike Theodor W. Adorno, already in the 1930s Antonio Gramsci was, similar to Walter Benjamin, a careful observer of technology and modernization, a forerunner of cultural studies long before the field attained academic recognition. Gramsci’s lasting importance derives from his insightful and wide ranging analysis of the politics of culture and its operations in industrialized and capitalist cultures. Raymond Williams and the founders of British cultural studies grappled with several of the issues Gramsci dealt with, first of all the typical challenges of modernization, such as education and mass culture (see, e.g., Pala, “Gramsci,” Gramsci’s”). Politics for Gramsci could not be conceived in narrow terms of state and government but must encompass the wide range of education, the role of the intellectuals, and how active cultural consumption and everyday beliefs and behaviour shape our perception of the world. Several of his concepts and theories have provoked widespread discussion either in literary and cultural studies. For example, the idea—valued by scholars such as Said and Stuart Hall (see, e.g., Chambers)—of uneven development that bids to recognize regional differences on both the national and transnational level. With regard and related to a corollary field, Eco is considered a pioneer in defining the way in which literature interacts with other media and elaborated on a semiotic analysis of cultural products. This line of research in media studies affects comparative analysis on literature and the arts and much work has been produced regarding this (see, e.g., Cometa; Cometa, Coglitore, Mazzara; Dorfler; Macchia; Orlando). Similarly, comparatists and cultural historians alike show an interest in urban literature with a focus on contrasts between country and city life. In this line of work, what the city typifies is the intersection of private and public spaces, identity formation, and public and political perspectives (see, e.g., Cianci and Cifarelli; Macchia; Marroni, Meloni, Dongu, Locatelli, Deidda, Pala; Pala).

In cultural anthropology and cultural studies scholars investigated how Italian literature elaborates on the national experience—from Carlo Levi's *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* to Tomasi di Lampedusa's *Il gattopardo* to recent historical novels by Andrea Camilleri—and show how in these texts the South of Italy figures as a subaltern reality (see, e.g., Asor Rosa; Bollati Cirese; De Martino; Lombardi Satriani). However, at the same time popular culture had been neglected in literary studies and it was seen at best as a secondary factor, which may at most modify other and more decisive historical processes. This is not only because it was diagnosed as a superstructure by Marxists, but also because idealism oriented scholars understood tradition as a relatively inert and historicized segment of social structure. The history of the past three decades of Italian criticism has made this distinction impossible to sustain and nowadays literature and both traditional and popular culture are viewed together within a single frame of reference. Thus, semiologically and anthropologically oriented comparative studies have emphasized the relation between historical and signifying practice. Comparatists and cultural historians alike (see, e.g., Contini; Ferroni; Fortini; Gargani) have debated the relationship between literature and politics and what a new progressive literature would look like claiming that the premise of a new literature cannot be but historical and from below (see, e.g., Domenichelli, *Lo scriba e l'oblio*). Mapping literary artefacts means finding the point where an anthropological view of society meets an ensemble of symbolic connotations and this situation has particular relevance in Italian culture, which, throughout its history, has maintained its regional and polycentric features within unification imposed from above (see, e.g., Anselmi and Prete; Dionisotti; Farnetti; Guglielmi and Pala; Pedullà and Luzzato). Last but not least, we should not overlook translation and reception studies, an area that has been traditionally a field within comparative literature (see, e.g., Cadioli). If we consider translation as an essential stage in every act of perception, reading, and re-reading, the study of translation is not only located in general literary theory, but it transforms into a manipulative and dynamic process on the text itself, an impulse of and for intertextuality (see, e.g., Eco; Folena; Guglielmi; Lepschy).

Next, I enumerate selected institutional formations of comparative literature as they exist in Italy today. The *Centro Interdipartimentale di Teoria e Storia Comparata della Letteratura* at the University of Bologna is an interdepartmental structure dedicated to the study of general literary theory and comparative literature. Various departments of the university cooperate and the center works on the basis of unifying different disciplines including Italian studies, classical philology, aesthetics, the history of art, music, and popular culture. At the

University of Bologna there is also the *Dipartimento di Lingue e Letterature Straniere* which includes other areas of interest for comparative studies. Among these are the *Centro di Studi sulle Letterature Omeoglotte dei Paesi Extra-europei* and the *Centro Interdisciplinare di Studi Romantici*. At the University of Cessino there is the *Laboratorio di Comparatistica* where the comparative literature journal *Trame* is published, and the *Laboratorio di Traduttologia* where the journal *Testo a fronte* is published. At the same university there are the *Centro di Ricerca su Traduzione e Tradizione* and the *Laboratorio di Linguistica e Nuove Tecnologie*. At the University of Palermo in the *Dipartimento di Arti e Comunicazioni* epistemological, comparative, and cultural theories and methods are studied. The Department coordinates a series of events and projects including the publication of the online journal *Arcojournal*, edited by Roberto Deidier, as well as the *Dizionario di Studi Culturali*. At the University of Rome “La Sapienza” in the *Dipartimento di Italianistica e Spettacolo* there is the section *Critica Letteraria e Letterature Compare*. The Department includes the sections Research in Progress, Activities and Seminars, Publications and Collections, the *Banca Dati Scrittori Immigrati in Lingua Italiana*. It also publishes the journal *Kumà: Creolizzare l'Europa* which presents previously unpublished literary texts, critical essays, bibliographies, and news concerning the art, literature, culture, music, etc. of (im)migration. In the *Dipartimento di Lingue, Letterature e Culture Compare* at the University of Bergamo focus is the fields of Anglistics and Slavic studies and at the same University there is also the program *Internazionale Studi sulle Avanguardie e sulla Modernità* which promotes interdisciplinary research into the avant-garde and modernity including matters outside the strictly literary sphere. The *Dipartimento di Letterature Compare* at the University of Rome “Tre” has the only department in the Italian university system dedicated entirely to comparative literature. At the University of Siena’s Arezzo campus there is the *Dipartimento di Letterature Moderne e Scienze dei Linguaggi* where the influences among different art forms are studied and aspects of theater, cinema, and literature are taught and at the University of Venice there is the *Dipartimento di Studi Comparati*. Programs of comparative and/or cultural studies exist also at the universities of L’Aquila, Chieti-Pescara “G. D’Annunzio,” Firenze, Messina, Milano, Perugia, Torino, Trieste, and Venezia cà Foscari. Comparative literature is also studied at the *Istituto di Arti, Culture e Letterature Compare* at the *Libera Università di Lingue e Comunicazione* in Milano. The interuniversity summer school *Synapsis: Scuola Europea di Studi Comparati* offers programs concerning research into European comparative literature, the arts, theater, and cinema and invites reknown scholars from within Italy and abroad to teach.

Among journals of comparative literature, in addition to those mentioned above, there are the comparative literature or comparative literature oriented journals *Allegorie*, *Crocevia*, *La parola del testo*, *Rivista di letterature moderne e comparate* (a continuation of the journal *I Quaderni di Gaia* (1990–1996), *Rivista italiana di letteratura comparate*, *Semicerchio*, and *Igitur*, and *Between* (an online journal of the *Associazione per gli Studi di Teoria e Storia Comparata della Letteratura*). With regard to scholarly associations, there is the *Consulta Universitaria di Critica Letteraria e Letterature Comparate* and the *Associazione per gli Studi di Teoria e Storia Comparata della Letteratura*. With regard to manuals and textbooks of comparative literature, since Armando Gnisci's edited volume *Introduzione alla letteratura comparata* (1999), notable is the collected volume by Raffaella Bertazzoli, *Letteratura comparata* (2010).

While my overview of comparative literature in Italy is incomplete (for further material and with different perspectives see, e.g., Cammarota, "Entwicklung"; Mildonian), it is clear that the discipline is, although not strong, active in both research and teaching. On the institutional level and with regard to teaching, students are able to study comparative literature in most cases as an option. Interestingly, the field of cultural studies has not as of yet acquired substantial interest in Italy in either scholarship or in teaching to date: Italian cultural studies is prominent, however, in the U.S. and Canada where a large number of scholars publish(ed) books and articles in the field (on this, see Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári).

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# Comparative Literature in Latin American Studies

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Sophia A. McClennen

**Abstract:** In her article “Comparative Literature in Latin American Studies” Sophia A. McClennen argues for the comparative study of Latin American literature in order to accord the field more canonical status both in Latin American Studies in Anglophone North America and in Latin American humanities scholarship. Believing in the efficacy of the comparative method and in its implicitly egalitarian approach to the world’s languages and literatures, McClennen’s intention is not to weaken or diminish comparative literature as a politically and intellectually important form of literary study but to strengthen it in order to open it up to the authors, texts, and traditions of one of the world’s most complex and challenging cultural conglomerates, Latin America.

## INTRODUCTION

Because of the sheer breadth of fields in Latin American studies and because of their complex histories, any investigation into the critical intersection between Latin American Studies, comparative literature, and (comparative) cultural studies must by necessity be partial, provisional, and heuristic. My interest lies in the tracing of the historic disarticulation between humanistic studies of Latin America in the U.S. and the traditional practice of comparative literature while paying attention to the ways that cultural studies has influenced contemporary practice in both areas. I also discuss comparative literature and its situation in Latin America proper.

Latin America has historically been marginalized in North American Anglophone comparative literary studies and dialogue between the fields has been minimal. Although scholarship on Latin American literature has steadily risen since the 1960s, articles treating the region rarely appear in the most respected, traditional journals of comparative literary study. The lack of familiarity with comparative methods, especially those that treat the intersections between national cultural developments and those that cross national borders, weakens graduate student preparation and scholarship in Latin American literary/cultural studies. So, just as traditional comparative literature has often ignored Latin American culture, comparative methods and approaches have been virtually absent from curricular requirements in Latin American literature programs. Further, in considering interactions between Latin American studies and comparative

literature, it is worth noting that the field of comparative literature is especially vibrant in Latin America. Long-standing programs, such as the Program in Literary Theory and Comparative Literature at the University of São Paulo (founded in 1961) or the Brazil Comparative Literature Association (founded in 1985) are now accompanied by newer programs such as the Association of Comparative Literature in Argentina established in 1992. In Mexico, the Universidad Autónoma de México has had a graduate program in comparative literature dating back to 1989 (on programs and departments of comparative literature in Latin America, see, e.g., Franco Carvalhal; Dornheim; Nitrini; Pimentel; since the mid-1990s a number of comparative literature programs have been founded, for example at the University of Costa Rica, the University of Paraíba, etc.). These programs tend to approach the study of comparative literature from a position that links questions of national identity and those of cultural value. Zulma Palermo argues in her survey of comparativism in Argentina that comparative literature as it is presently practiced in Latin America can enable a reconsideration of a number of institutional paradigms which have affected the way that the region “conceives itself in these times of economic and commercial globalization, times when the peripheral societies return to a problematicization of their autonomy and identity from an ‘alternative’ theoretical position” (212). Lisa Block de Behar recounts the history of comparative literature in Uruguay and she emphasizes the ways that Uruguayan literary study, beginning with the work of Carlos Real de Azúa at the end of the nineteenth century, has always depended on comparative methods. In 1988 Block de Behar hosted a Latin American comparative literature seminar which led to the founding of the Uruguayan Association of Comparative Literature. Further, in 2004 the Asociación Brasileña de Estudios Comparativos was founded and it hosts biannual conferences since 2005, in 2007 the International Comparative Literature Association / Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée had its first triannual congress in Rio de Janeiro and the Association published selected papers from the congress (see Coutinho; Coutinho and Coco), and in 2008 the Asociación de Literatura Comparada en América Central y el Caribe was founded with its own scholarly journal *Revista Ixchel* (on comparative literature in Central America, see Chavarría).

## COMPARATIVE LITERATURE’S U.S.-EUROCENTRISM

The US-Eurocentric history of comparative literature is well known and well documented (see, e.g., Bassnett; Chevrel; Tötösy de Zepetnek). From C.L. Wrenn’s statement in 1967 that the “only proper object of study for comparatists ... is ‘European languages medieval or modern’” (Wrenn qtd. in Bassnett 20) to Henry Gifford’s comment in 1969 that “whole continents are becoming articulate—South America yesterday, Africa today” (78), comparative literature has a long history of dismissing the culture of the “peripheries” as unworthy of study. When we combine the traditional Eurocentrism of comparative literature

with its early emphasis on major authors, great books and universal literature, i.e., the highest of high culture, we find the combination of elitism and cultural imperialism that has contributed to the stereotype of comparative literature as fundamentally incompatible with the study of postcolonial cultures, such as that of Latin America. It is worth considering the extent to which such problems over the privileging of US and European culture are more about comparative practices than comparative methods. As early as 1969 Owen A. Aldridge registered the critique of comparative literature's equation of world literature with Western literature: "These objections are valid, but they should be applied only to inadequate applications of the theory of world literature rather than the principle itself" (2–3). Certainly, Aldridge is raising a contentious point, since many scholars specifically consider the study of European literature to be at the heart of comparative methods. For Latin Americanists, Eurocentrism is not a problem limited to primary sources. Not only do we note the bias against "peripheral literatures" as objects of study, but we also object to the imprudent use of European/U.S. theory as the sole critical base for understanding Latin American culture. Traditional comparative literature studies texts from Europe and the U.S. and it has historically taught methods and theories that emanate solely from these areas as well.

## THE CULTURAL COLONIZATION OF LATIN AMERICA

Comparative literature has been repeatedly associated with cultural colonization. Arguments about universal literature, literary value, great books, master writers, etc., all serve to create cultural hierarchies, where texts from the U.S. and Europe inevitably rise to the top (see, e.g., Bassnett; González Echevarría; Tötösy de Zepetnek). Susan Bassnett explains that the question of universal value, at the heart of much work in comparative literature, reveals the colonialist viewpoint of many early comparatists (19). In this sense, the quest for literary universals and the desire to define World Literature(s) (both common principles to traditional comparative literature) are gestures that only serve to reinforce cultural hegemony when the criteria for assessment always derive from a U.S.-Eurocentric point of view. This critique of comparative literature moves beyond the issue of practice to method, since the comparative method of seeking compatible objects of study often implies assumptions about cultural value. As a consequence, canonized writers from the "peripheries" are often read in ways that either strip them of their cultural context or that consider their cultural context as a marker of lesser literary value. Such practices reveal the cultural colonialism of traditional comparative literature. Bassnett argues that "cultural colonialism was also a form of comparative literature, in that writers were imported by the colonizing group and Native writers were evaluated negatively in comparison" (19). This practice, perhaps best termed "the poor imitation syndrome," explains the transference of literary movements onto the non-U.S. European "other" as a futile exercise that exposes the desire of the margins to be like the center. Such thinking is not limited

to scholars and writers working in cultural “centers” but is found among writers working from the “peripheries” as well. Robert J. Clements, in *Comparative Literature as Academic Discipline*, refers to José Donoso’s personal history of the Boom when he argues that only with the Boom are “Hispanicamerican writers no longer influenced by American [*sic*] and French authors” (103; on the use of “American” when referring to the U.S., see McClennen). Clements rests his analysis on a “native informant” who ratifies his argument that Latin American writing prior to the Boom was merely “poor imitation.” Those authors that do produce a body of work that merits inclusion into the comparative literature canon, like Jorge Luis Borges, are often read with no regard for their cultural context. In contrast, Latin Americanists are more inclined to be familiar with the complexity of Borges’s relationship to Argentine national culture, especially as it is expressed in his essay “The Argentine Writer and Tradition.” A further problem with the inclusion of “newcomers” to the traditional canon, according to Rey Chow, is that in many contemporary cases the traditional Eurocentric canon is replaced with simply another set of texts that repeat the same hegemonic practices of seeking masterpieces and master narratives in accordance with a European privileging of the nation-state. A new practice of comparative literature “must question the very assumption that nation-states with national languages are the only possible cultural formations that produce ‘literature’ that is worth examining” (Chow 109). A progressive program of comparative cultural study will have to question not only problems of practice, but also problems of method, particularly those methods that are attached to questions of cultural value.

As we consider the conservatism and colonialist impulses of traditional comparative literature we should bear in mind that Latin American Studies, especially as it has been practiced in the U.S., has a similar history of cultural hegemony. The Latin American Studies Association (founded in 1966) and the American Comparative Literature Association (founded in 1960) reveal parallel moments in U.S. academic developments after World War II. Latin American Studies has historically been dominated by the social sciences and has frequently been associated with conservative political agendas (see Mignolo, *Local Histories*; Moreiras; Morse). Walter Mignolo connects the rise of Latin American Studies with the increased global power of the U.S. during the Cold War (194). Richard Morse, writing in 1964, suggested that many U.S. Latin Americanists were unconscious of their own colonialist attitudes towards the region, and he claimed that their work often revealed a “subconscious hostility” towards their object of study (170). Mark T. Berger’s *Under Northern Eyes* provides a history of Latin American studies in the U.S.; he argues that: “The professional study of Latin America is embedded in a long tradition of viewing Latin America through northern eyes” where “most Latin American specialists, like US policy-makers, are estranged from Latin America” (19). Mignolo, Morse, and Berger point out

that Latin American Studies, like any academic practice in the U.S., reflects prevailing discourses of power. Alberto Moreiras also describes this tendency in Latinamericanism: “Latinamericanist knowledge aspires to a particular form of disciplinary power that it inherits from the imperial state apparatus” (32). This conservative, reactionary form of area studies is concerned with containing and controlling the flow of information about Latin America. Moreiras, however, also points to a second tendency where “Latinamericanism works primarily not as a machine of epistemic homogenization but potentially against it as a disruptive force” (87). In this version, Latinamericanism challenges traditional knowledge structures and homogenizing cultural forces. Like the progressive side of comparative literature described in *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* (Bernheimer), Latin American Studies also has a long history of politically oppositional practice of which Moreiras’s “antirepresentational Latinamericanism” is a recent example. Neil Larsen calls attention to the Marxist politics of Latin American Studies in the 1980s and he underscores the leftist approaches which ground many studies of Latin America (*Reading* 18–22; see also Larsen, *Determinations*). Regardless of the scholar’s training, in comparative literature or Latin American Studies or both, one cannot overlook the colonialist history of these disciplines. Any reassessment of our scholarship will have to address the unequal relations of power between the U.S., Europe, and Latin America in political, economic, and cultural contexts and in terms of scholarship.

## THE PROBLEM OF APPROACH

A reason for the lack of dialogue between Comparative Literature in Latin American Studies is a problem of critical approach and cultural theory. Comparative literature in its theoretical dominance by formalism and new criticism is incompatible with the dominant critical paradigms for the study of Latin America, which favor study of culture in political, economic, and historical context. Bassnett points out that the ahistoricism and formalism of comparative literature was a gradual process that eventually led comparatists, through the example of René Wellek, to eschew any socio-economic or political aspects of literature (35–36). She maintains that “the crisis of comparative literature derives from a legacy of nineteenth-century Eurocentric positivism and from a refusal to consider the political implications of intercultural transfer, which are fundamental to any comparative activity” (159). Charles Bernheimer also points to the legacy of formalist approaches in the practice of comparative literature (“Introduction” 10–11). It is interesting to note, however, that there is also a long history of comparatists who have insisted that attention to socio-historical context is essential for comparative work and that this tradition lives on. Jan Brandt Corstius wrote in 1968 that a foundation of comparative literature was the study of literature in its political, social, economic,



cultural, and formal context (6) and this is what—since the late 1980s Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek has proposed as “comparative cultural studies,” a framework of the contextual (systemic and empirical) approach where the notion includes the historical, economic, cultural, political, etc., dimensions of a literature or of a text (see, e.g., *Comparative Literature*, “The New Humanities”). Although much of the history of comparative literature is fraught with over-determined questions of cultural value, U.S.-Eurocentrism, and the persistence of imperialistic knowledge structures, there are aspects of the comparative approach that help illuminate the cultural history of Latin America including its literatures. While scholars in Latin America have not considered their work as inherently comparative and thus have not fully utilized comparative method, this appears to be changing in the last several years towards the use of comparative methods.

## CULTURAL HERITAGE

Comparative methods can provide useful critical approaches to the complex cultural heritage of the region. Latin America does not present us with one unified cultural history. Instead, we find a combination of Indigenous, African, European, and U.S. influences, not to mention a variety of immigrant communities. Latin America has a rich and diverse Indigenous culture with many regional variations. Spanish and Portuguese colonization, followed by U.S.-American neo-colonization, coupled with the cultural imperialism of Europe, especially France and England, has meant that Latin American culture has been influenced in intricate ways by Europe and the U.S. Moreover, these influences have not been unidirectional; Latin American culture has also had an impact on the cultures of Europe and the U.S. (see, e.g., Brotherston and Sá). Not only do cultural influences flow between the U.S./Europe and Latin America, but foreign culture is often manipulated, transformed and hybridized upon arrival in Latin America. Ángel Rama argues that Latin America does not simply passively absorb foreign cultural intervention (33). Unpacking these relationships requires careful attention to comparative approaches of understanding cultural influence. Referring to the legacy of the European literary tradition Djelal Kadir explains that “Spanish America’s literary culture engages most often and most virulently with its ancestral other” (*The Other Writing* 8; see also Kadir, “World Literature”). In addition, we must factor in the cultural effects of slavery, migration, immigration and exile (see Palermo). Comparative methods expose how these different cultural sources intersect, at times in conflict and at others in cooperation, within Latin America. One possibility is that comparative methods, inspired by anthropology and sociology—such as that found in the work of Néstor García Canclini, Mary Louise Pratt, Fernando Ortiz, or Rama—can be used to trace cultural influences and to identify cultural assimilation, dissimilation and transculturation (see also De la Campa). The strength of the comparative method in understanding Latin America’s cultural heritage lies in the premise that cultural influences and movements track differently in different contexts. The

comparative method of studying analogies, trends and influences provides useful tools for understanding the way a particular cultural form undergoes regional variations and displays a hybrid of cultural markers (see Jost). Such an approach, informed by post-colonial studies and comparative cultural studies, would yield more sophisticated readings of cultural hybridity in the region. For example using such a conceptual framework might help explain how the testimonial reveals a combination of complex narrative strategies. Doris Sommer's *Proceed with Caution* exemplifies this type of comparative work, as she argues for attention to the "rhetoric of particularism" that she tracks across a number of "minority" texts and Kadir's *The Other Writing* also provides a similar comparative model as he analyzes the tension between a number of "peripheral" texts that represent multifarious confrontations with the "mainstream."

## CULTURAL CARTOGRAPHY

Many geographic parameters contribute to understanding the region designated as "Latin America." In the broadest sense, Latin America must be studied in relation to global history and across regions, as in the case of Inter-American, Transatlantic, or postcolonial studies. Another cultural map is that of the entire region of Latin America. The concept that all of the Spanish speaking countries of America plus the non-Spanish speaking countries in Central and South America (occasionally including the non-Spanish Caribbean) have common cultural connections is fraught with problems (see, e.g., Berger; Mignolo, *Local Histories, The Darker Side*). Mignolo reminds us that the term "Latin America" came about in the nineteenth century and was imposed from outside the region (*Local Histories* 132). Frank Tannenbaum claimed in the 1960s that the countries of Latin America were more diverse than those of Europe and he insisted that "lumping them together" was a "matter of convenience for literary purposes rather than a methodologically permissible device" (Tannenbaum qtd. in Berger 244–45). Berger explains that the notion of Latin America as a single unit has been a common tendency in academic study and that it has typically been employed from a "colonialist" perspective. A relevant example of this direction is *Collaborative Historiography: A Comparative History of Latin America* where the problematical premise that it is possible to comparatively study an entire continent is taken up: "mapping has always been a way to make something exist for imperial eyes" (Hutcheon, Kadir, Valdés 2). Nevertheless, the notion of a unified region of Latin America served as a key conceptual category during the struggles for Independence, especially through the efforts of Simón Bolívar. Regional unity has been the source of a number of Latin American cultural movements, such as the Boom or the New Latin American Cinema. On the other hand, the notion of a unified Latin America has also been central to colonialism and neo-colonial politics, like the "Good Neighbor Policy." Linda Hutcheon, Kadir, and Valdés maintain that "the continent's culture and cartography have both been created in

reaction to outside pressures and engendered in proactive and reactive ways” (6). Since the concept of Latin America as a single unit has served as both a tool of cultural colonization and as a source of cultural empowerment, scholars working on the region need to constantly reevaluate the notion of “Latin America.”

Narrowing the map further, within Latin America there is a tendency to assume that culture tracks according to inter-Latin American regions such as the Caribbean, Southern Cone, Central American, Andean, etc. It is generally accepted that each of these regions presents us with common cultural characteristics. In fact most Latin Americanists consider their area of study in regional terms, which relates to the way that the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) groups panels at their annual convention according to regional designations. Yet these regions should also be critiqued and investigated. They, too, are constructs that derive from discourses of power that employ universalizing tendencies and seek homogeneous cultural markers. For instance, what happens to Paraguay? Sometimes it is considered part of the Southern Cone and sometimes not. Paraguay is not included in the countries of focus for the LASA Southern Cone Studies Section and yet it is included in many other scholarly considerations of the region (on comparative literature in Paraguay, see Lefort). The Caribbean poses a whole new set of problems, since it is multilingual and since its colonial legacies are so varied. Many Latinamericanists who study the Caribbean highlight only a few of the nations on the region. Clearly the regional designations are cartographic spaces that should be subject to scrutiny.

Narrowing still further from a conceptual map of inter-Latin American regions, the nation-state continues to be a site of supposed cultural commonality. Latin American culture is understood to develop along national lines. Chow writes that “comparative literature should remain the place where theory is used to put the very concept of the nation in crisis, and with that, the concept of the nation as the origin of a particular literature” (112). Pratt suggests that we should expand comparativeness to include comparisons within national cultures (60). Other axes of Latin American comparison do not conform to any of these spatial markers as in the case of Indigenous studies, ethnic studies or the study of women’s culture, etc. These practices might happen subnationally, as in the case of Chiapas, or transnationally, as in the case of Quechua culture. Rama characterizes culture as developing along Latin American, national and regional lines. He suggests that literature has many layers of geographic affiliation and that the common elements of culture often do not conform to national borders (58). Hutcheon, Kadir, and Valdés explain that their project focuses on “transnational zones of cultural interaction” since these cultural practices have been largely ignored (6). In each case comparative cultural work must be mindful of the

geographic boundaries used to mark textual difference. Regional designations, such as Latin American, Andean, Peruvian, or Indigenous, for example, chart a text's interpretive course. The text's context of reception is coded, at least in part, by its geographical affiliation, mapping the readers it will appeal to and the interpretive directions readings will take. We should be suspicious of the politics behind these types of cultural categorizations. Moreover, these cognitive cultural maps are only guidelines and cultural developments may not always conform to these groupings. Comparative methods help disentangle all of these spatial markers that delineate patterns of cultural practice and they help us to critique these cartographic categories. Studying cultural developments in more than one context also helps drawing attention to the values that we place on regional designations. Such a perspective helps explain why, for instance, a text by Borges might be understood as an example of Argentine, Southern Cone, Latin American, or universal literature depending on the context of reception and the politics of interpretation.

## THE INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

Both Latin American studies and comparative literature are grounded in a belief that interdisciplinarity strengthens scholarship. In 1974, François Jost described the interdisciplinary study of literature in relation to other cultural domains as one of the four main areas of research in comparative literature (viii). Latin American scholars, like Rama, working in roughly the same time frame, have also argued for the need to study literature in historical and political context. Rama finds it troubling that two currents of literary study put the context of the literary text at odds with its formal study. He argues that the literary text must be studied with its social-cultural context and also within its literary intertext (19). While interdisciplinarity in comparative literature has often meant the comparison of literature with philosophy or other art forms, for scholars of literature working in Latin American Studies interdisciplinary work has meant the study of literature in terms of critical theory and historical-political contexts. Latin American interdisciplinary research, like that found in cultural studies, could serve to challenge the formalist, textualist and positivist tendencies in comparative literature. Dialogue across both fields, with added insight from cultural studies, would serve to create better methods of interdisciplinary research. In fact, the premise behind interdisciplinarity is that fields like comparative literature, cultural studies, and Latin American studies, which ostensibly, in and of themselves, constitute interdisciplinary approaches to research, are improved by greater scholarly engagement, collaboration, critique and intellectual challenge. As many have noted, successful research in such broad fields of study requires collaboration, such as research teams (see, e.g., Hutcheon, Kadir, Valdés; Pratt;

Tötösy de Zepetnek, *Comparative Literature*, “From Comparative,” “The New”). Not only should we make greater efforts to be aware of developments in each field, but we should also begin to break down the tradition of individual scholarly research. According to Pratt, “Facing the crisis of accountability and expertise will have the overwhelmingly positive consequence, one hopes, of clarifying the need for collaborative work in literary studies. Developing global perspectives cannot mean that each person must try—or claim—to know the whole globe” (63). Instead of begging off the need for global awareness by arguing that such scope is beyond one’s capabilities, scholars should relinquish their single-author mentality (it is ironic that so many claim the death of the author, and yet in academia we continue to operate in a system where work is understood as the product of an individual creative mind). Certainly, the volume *Literary Cultures of Latin America: A Comparative History* (Valdés and Kadir) makes an important move in this direction (see also Fitz; McClennen and Fitz), as well as the articles published by scholars in Latin America in proceedings of congresses hosted by the International Comparative Literature Association / Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée (e.g., Coutinho; Coutinho and Coco; see also Crolla).

Much of Latin American studies scholarship is comparative because most scholars work across national boundaries and thus their work is considered within a comparative framework. Yet for some comparative literature may appear so steeped in its conservative, imperialistic past that it is unable to be of much use. Nevertheless, the transformation of comparative literature away from traditional cultural practice and its growth as a field of study in areas like Latin America suggest that it has moved beyond its conservative past. Drawing on the comparative methods used in comparative literature as well as in other disciplines allows us to avoid what we might call a “comparative subconscious” where scholarship displays elements of comparative analysis without direct attention to comparative methods. Alternatively, comparative literature has yet to fully embrace cultural works produced outside of the “mainstream,” and this has crippled the applicability of research in comparative literature in a global context. Despite common concerns over nation, history, politics, and cultural identity and common sources of critical theor, Latin American studies and comparative literature remain largely epiphenomenal. While these fields will continue to produce valuable research separately, I hope to have suggested a number of productive areas for collaboration. I do not suggest, however, that these fields merge into one totalizing machine of cultural analysis. Rather, I hope to have argued that mutual awareness and recognition of intellectual developments in these fields would help us to avoid insularity and mistaken claims of exceptionalism. Moreover, despite a lack of interaction and dialogue, the fields have developed in strikingly parallel ways and they have often been influenced by similar trends in criticism.

**Note:** The above article is a revised version of Sophia A. McClennen, “Comparative Literature in Latin American Studies: From Disarticulation to Dialogue,” *Comparative Cultural Studies and Latin America*. Ed. Sophia A. McClennen and Earl E. Fitz. West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2004. 105–130. Copyright release to the author.

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# Comparative Literature in Russian and in Central and East Europe

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Alexandra Berlina and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek

**Abstract:** In their article “Comparative Literature in Russian and in Central and East Europe” Alexandra Berlina and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek present aspects of the history and current situation of comparative literature in the languages of the region. They describe briefly the evolution of comparativism in the study of literature from the nineteenth century to present from the perspectives of intellectual direction and institutional presence. The situation of comparativism in the study of literature and culture in the region suggests that comparative literature—to various degrees according to location—has been experiencing a development in particular since the end of the Soviet empire and communism.

## COMPARATIVE LITERATURE IN RUSSIAN

Galina Tihanov argues that modern literary theory originated in Central and East Europe (see “Why Did”). This is an interesting proposition because his discussion is about Russian thought and Central and East Europe does not include Russia—that is, from a “Western” perspective, although for West-oriented Russians Russia is part of Europe—and the designation is useful when one considers intellectual history based on “regions” of thought instead of geographical, political, historical, and sociological parameters (see also Dobrenko and Tihanov; on the definition of Central and East Europe, see Tötösy de Zepetnek, e.g., “Post-colonialities,” “Comparative”).

In Russian the first professorship of “world literature” was established in 1860 at the University of St. Petersburg. Fedor Buslaev (1818–1898) was the first to lecture in the field and his student Alexander Veselovsky (Veselovskii; 1859–1906) became its first official department head in 1870 (see Shaitanov, *Komparativistika*). Buslaev’s approach was comparative and interdisciplinary as he was an art historian, ethnographer, and folklorist. Associated with the Russian school of the study of mythology, he was influenced by the work of the Grimm Brothers and later subscribed to the school of Theodor Benfey. Buslaev argued that the key source of European folklore is in East Europe and he

analyzed similarities between Russian and Western mythologies and literatures. Importantly, he insisted on comparative methods including attention to visual art, especially icon painting. Veselovsky developed Buslaev's ideas into the theory of *vstrechnoe techenie* ("approach of the flow"). The idea is that a culture accepts only ideas, motifs, genres etc., towards which it is directed in its own development (*Istoricheskaia poetika* [1913] [Historical Poetics]) and in 1870 Veselovsky proclaimed comparativism to be the most rewarding way to study the history of literature (see "On the Methods").

Veselovsky had many disciples who developed his ideas further. For example, Vladimir Propp's theory of literary morphology was based upon Veselovsky's view of plots as subdivided into motifs. Formalists Yuri Tynyanov and Viktor Shklovsky were both inspired by Veselovsky and also Olga Freidenberg's comparativism is indebted to Veselovsky. Although Mikhail Bakhtin often engaged in polemics with Veselovsky, his concept of dialogism has much in common with Veselovsky's work. Of note is Gustav Shpet's (1879–1937) contribution to the study of culture including philosophy and that ought to be relevant to the history of cultural studies in general and in particular (see, e.g., Tihanov, *Gustav Shpet's*).

During the Soviet regime, the most influential comparatist was Viktor Zhirmunsky (1891–1971) but who, owing to the politics of the time, was made to recant his "comparativism" and "Veselovskiyism" during the 1948 purge. However, he managed to complete much research before comparative studies became taboo. His *Sravnitel'noie literaturovedenie* (Comparative Literature) was published posthumously in 1979 reinstating his acknowledgement of Veselovsky's work, although in the foreword he stresses Marxist thought as the main source of inspiration. Zhirmunsky's interests ranged from comparative linguistics in German, Russian, and English literature to the oral epics in Asian languages in the Soviet Union. Further, it was based on Veselovsky's research that Eleazar Meletinsky (1918–2005) developed the study of mythology including narrative theory with regard to literature and folklore (see also Toporkov). However, during the Soviet period comparative literature—because of the communist party's views of the discipline—remained a dangerous field of study until the 1960s (see, e.g., Wellek). At the same time, comparative work was performed under the designation of "world literature," for example at the Moscow Institute of World Literature of the Academy of Sciences (founded in 1933, renamed in 1936 the Maxim Gorky Institute of World Literature and today it is called the Institute of World Literature) and the Institute published the journals *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* (Literary Heritage) and *Voprosy literatury* (Literary Questions), the latter co-published by the USSR Writers Union. An important, although ideologically

marred, publication is Irina Neupokoeva's 1976 volume on the history of world literature.

Similar to the situation in other postcommunist countries, it is since the end of Soviet rule that comparative literature came and comes into a presence both in scholarship and institutionally (see below). Since the 1990s a number of humanities journals feature articles in comparative literature. For example, *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie* (New Literary Review) (1992–), is keen on Western methods and theories, even those on their way out in the West. Opponents to the approach publish in *Voprosy Literaturny* (1957–), a journal that managed to trick the government censors and remained during Soviet rule within the official framework. One important intellectual direction of the journal is that it is wary of mixing the literary with the “popular” and rejects affiliations with Marxist thought. Further, in Russian the name of “comparative literature” is problematic. The areas of comparison—*literatura* and *kul'tura*—allow for diverging opinions over priorities and attempts at unification and this is similar to argumentation in the West with regard to comparative literature where the focus is literature and to cultural studies where literature is not necessarily the principal object of study: cultural studies or comparative cultural studies—the latter a framework of the merger between the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies (Tötösy de Zepetnek)—unlike in the U.S., Europe, India, or China, has not arrived in Russia. In Russian scholarship there are at least three ways to denote the comparative approach: the loan noun *komparativistika* and two near-equivalents for “comparison,” namely *sравнение* and *сопоставление*. Some scholars employ the latter to denote a separate sub-discipline, *сопоставительное литературоведение* (contrastive literary studies), dedicated not to similarities but to differences between unconnected literatures and cultures. In 2003 Venera Amineva and N. Andramonova published the collected volume *Сопоставительная филология и полилингвизм* (Contrastive Philology and Multilinguality). Although dedicated mostly to linguistics, the volume includes six articles on literary translation, poetry, motifs, and myths. The idea of “contrastive literature” is hardly new and while there is no reference to, for example, Michael Palencia-Roth, the context in which contrastive literature is used in the volume is similar. It is also to be noted that the word *исторический* (historical) often accompanies and sometimes substitutes “comparative” in the tradition of Veselovsky's work.

With regard to the concept of history of comparativism, Igor Shaitanov argues that “Russian comparative studies were born within historical poetics ... For the Russian philological school, the words ‘poetics’ and ‘comparatistics’ do not contradict each other” (“Kruglyi stol”) (“Panel Discussion”) and postulates

that Russian comparative studies are prone to extremes: “traditional comparative studies ... tended to deal with connections, similarities and influences taken out of context. To balance out its concentration on literature, today we see a culturological approach which proclaims literature to be merely one kind of text among many” (Shaitanov, “Triada” [“The Triad”] 135). While many Russian comparatists seek to be as “modern” and “Western” as possible, nevertheless at most universities today it is still the “influence studies” type of analysis that is practiced. For example, in the introduction to their volume serving as a syllabus Liliia Chernets and Vladimir Kataev define comparative literature in terms of influences in canonical literature and art. And the bibliography of work recommended for further reading is puzzling where the Marxist theoretician and revolutionary Georgi Plekhanov is cited as a “must-read,” while the few foreign comparatists—René Wellek and Austin Warren and Paul Van Tieghem being the most recent—are listed at the end as “possible additional reading.” As it happens, the Chernets and Kataev volume is recommended by the Ministry of Education, so that the 3000 copies printed of the volume are the principal text on comparative literature in Russia in 2011 (email correspondence Shaitanov and Berlina 2011). This is regrettable, since there are several alternatives available, for example Amineva’s 2007 *Osnovy sravnitel’nogo i сопоставitel’nogo literaturovedeniia* (Fundamentals of Contrastive and Comparative literature) or Tamara Selitrina’s 2006 *Sravnitel’noe literaturovedenie* (Comparative Literature) offer competent overviews. More recently, in 2010 Shaitanov’s monograph *Komparativistika i/ili poetika* (Comparative Studies and/or Poetics) was published. The title of the book is at the heart of Shaitanov’s line of thought and he argues that comparative studies and poetics are at least mutually supportive. He criticizes Earl Miner’s 1990 *Comparative Poetics* as too much involved with and relying on cultural studies. Shaitanov defines comparative literature as the study of literatures in different languages and argues that the humanities in Russia need this more narrow approach because of its traditional logocentrism. With regard to texts and themes Shaitanov discusses in his book, he concentrates on Pushkin and Shakespeare and he analyzes aspects of genre, translation, and the history of ideas. In 2005 Caryl Emerson published in Russian an article entitled “Ob odnoi postsovjetskoi” (“On Post-Soviet”) and the article had significant impact in Russia with regard to comparative literature and multiculturalism. Emerson’s article offers a valuable description of the region’s inherent “comparativity” and mentions the debates that shaped East European comparative literary studies. Emerson’s article—which initiated considerable debate in Russia—includes a description of the battle between the “normalizers” who accept “trivial” (i.e., popular) literature and other

cultural phenomena as a field of study and the “exceptionalizers” who insists on studying canonized literature.

On the institutional level, in post-Soviet Russia the first Department of Comparative Literature was established in 1992 at the Russian State University for the Humanities in Moscow (although the above referred to Institute of World Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences continues). The Kazan Federal University has a Department of Contrastive Philology and Intercultural Communications. With regard to world literature, programs exist at Moscow State University and at Tumen State University. At Udmurt State University’s Department of Foreign Literature there are a number of courses offered in world literature, the Department of Philology at Ural State University offers a Master of Arts program in comparative studies, and at Perm State University and Southern Federal University there are departments of world literature (founded in 1946 and 1986, respectively).

## COMPARATIVE LITERATURE IN CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPE

The region includes the languages and cultures of the historical Austrian and Austro-Hungarian monarchy, as well as the Baltics, South East Europe, Bulgaria, Poland, and (West) Ukraine (for the definition of the region, see Tötösy de Zepetnek, “Comparative Cultural”). However, the former East Germany and Austria—also considered part of the region of Central and East Europe—are not dealt with here: they are discussed in the present volume in Oliver Lubrich’s “Comparative Literature in German.” In most cases and with few exceptions—owing to the relatively small number of speakers in the languages of the region versus major European languages (except Russian), as well as the problematics of nationalism—comparative literature is performed with focus on the national language in its relations with/to another language and literature and how it is received or influenced by other literatures, genres, movements, etc.

In Czech scholars focus mostly on literature in Czech, but more recently there is a move to develop a global view. In the Czech Republic there is a Department of Czech and Comparative Literature and Literary Theory at Charles University and where the journal *Svět Literatury* (World Literature) has been published since 1991. At Palacký University there is a Center for Comparative Cultural Studies where research is conducted but no degrees are offered. In Czechoslovakia there has been since 1964 an Institute of World Literature and Languages at the Academy of Sciences and focus has been and remains the study of literature based on national literatures and their relationships. In Slovak a particular type of comparative literature has been developed, namely the concept of “interliterariness” (see, e.g., Durišin; Durišin and Gnisci; Gálik). Further, scholarship in translation

studies has produced seminal works in the Nitra School (see, e.g., Popovič; see also Tötösy de Zepetnek, “The Study of Translation,” “Taxonomy”). Of note is the 2004 collected volume *Comparative Cultural Studies in Central Europe*—edited by Ivo Pospíšil and Michael Moser—although despite the volume’s title in English, it contains articles in Czech, German, and Russian and the articles are about linguistics.

In Hungarian comparative literature began with Hugó Meltzl de Lomnitz (1846–1908; see Damrosch; Fried; Kerekes; Komáromi; Marno; Vajda, “*Acta Comparationis*”). Meltzl de Lomnitz published with his colleague Sámuel Brassai at the University of Kolozsvár (today the University of Cluj-Napoca) the first learned journal of comparative literature—*Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténeti Lapok* (Papers in Comparative Literary History) (1877–1878) and *Acta comparationis litterarum universarum* (1878–1888)—in which articles in several European languages were published by scholars working across the globe (for an extensive coverage of Meltzl de Lomnitz’s work including a complete list of publications in the two journals, see Fassel). Meltzl de Lomnitz’s program of comparative literature was impacted by the politics of his time, namely his adherence to the concept of *magyarság* (Hungarianness) by non-Hungarian ethnicities of the Hungarian Kingdom who fought in the 1848–49 Revolution against Austrian oppression and the imposition of German as the language of administration. This adherence to the then intensified concept of *magyarság* (Hungarianness, i.e., nationalist and essentialist) was “natural”: the Meltzl de Lomnitz-s were originally Zipser German landowners in Trencsén County (northern Hungary)—ennobled by Matthias Corvinus, King of Hungary (1458–1490) and their noble status confirmed in 1658—who moved to Erdély (Transylvania) in the early nineteenth century, intermarried with Székely (Transylvanian Magyar) nobility, and produced intellectuals, priests, and senior bureaucrats over several centuries (see, e.g., Mann 2, 83; “Meltzl de Lomnitz”; “Meltzl von Lomnitz”). Hugó’s brother Oszkár was member of the Hungarian parliament who published studies on legal issues pertaining to Transylvania and Hugó’s son Balambér was professor of jurisprudence at the University of Kolozsvár (see “Meltzl de Lomnitz”; “Meltzl von Lomnitz”). Thus he thought and acted according to his time and consequently his work had ideological bents, for example the exclusion of Romanian-language literature owing to the historical animosity between Hungarians and Romanians in Transylvania (part of the Hungarian Kingdom with Székely [Magyar], German, Romanian, and Roma [Gypsy] ethnicities). Since Meltzl de Lomnitz’s time in Hungarian comparative literature scholarship focus is mostly on Magyar literature in relation to other literatures or work in binary comparative literature or influence studies. In post-1945 scholarship there is, however, a limited corpus



with a global perspective (see, e.g., Kemény and Fried; Kulcsár Szabó; Kürtösi and Pál; Szili; Szabolcsi, Illés, József; Vajda, “Egy irodalmi”; Szegedy-Maszák, *Literary Canons*). Similarly, in the postcommunist period manuals of comparative literature have been published with a global perspective (see Fried and Hódossy; Fried and Kovács; see also Szegedy-Maszák, “Comparative”). Notable is the learned journal *Neohelicon: acta comparationis litterarum universarum* (1971–) in which articles are published in several languages by authors worldwide. A curious situation is with regard to Hungarian Jewish literature and culture and one particular scholar—Aladár Komlós (1892–1980)—published a number of books in a comparative perspective. Komlós’s principal argument is that it were mostly Hungarian Jewish authors, scholars, and critics of the nineteenth century who with their knowledge of languages imported foreign literatures and it was then that European literature became part of Hungarian culture (see, e.g., Kőbányai; Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári, *Comparative Hungarian*; “The Study of Hungarian”). Institutionally the discipline of comparative literature was established after World War II at the University of Szeged and following the end of communist rule in 1989 a Department of Comparative Literature was established at Eötvös Loránt University. While these two departments remain the only teaching centers of the discipline, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences supports research in comparative literature within Hungarian language and literature scholarship.

In Romanian the discipline of comparative literature was introduced in 1948, when Tudor Vianu proposed a course on “universal literature” at the University of Bucharest. In the 1960s courses in comparative literature were offered at Babes-Bolyai University where a full-fledged Department of Comparative Literature was established in 2002. In the period shortly before and since the fall of the communist system, scholars with publications in comparative and/or universal literature include Paul Cornea, Adrian Marino, Adrian Lăcătuș, Dumitru Chioaru, Marina Cap-Brun, and Romanita Constantinescu (on comparative literature in Romanian, see also Cornea; Ursa) and an important work is the 2007 *Dicționar de literatură comparată* (Dictionary of Comparative Literature) (Constantinescu, Lihaciu, Ștefan). Of interest is that the field of imagology and comparative literature is prominent in Romania (see, e.g., Andraș; Brînzeu; Lăcătuș). Today there are programs or departments of comparative and/or universal literature (the latter a specific designation in Romanian) at the University of Bucharest, at Babes-Bolyai University, the University of the West, at the Hungarian University of Transylvania, and at Cuza University.

In Bulgarian, while comparative literature was practiced in the 1960s and 1970s, work was published in the discipline in the context of Slavic literatures. Similar to other postcommunist countries, a good number of books appeared in

comparative literature, particularly since the 1990s (e.g., Nichev; Stancheva) and of interest are collected volumes published with work in comparative literature and the literatures of East Europe in French (see, e.g., Stancheva and Vuillemin). As far as the institutional presence of the discipline is concerned, the Institute for Literature at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences was established in the 1950s which in 1973 was renamed to the Department of Comparative Literature Studies and in the same Department a journal of comparative literature was published 1982–1989. While most universities have courses—mostly undergraduate—in general, world, or comparative literature, the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and the University of Sofia have graduate programs and conduct research in comparative literature.

In Ukrainian works in comparative literature appear since the 2000s (see, e.g., Budny; Ilnitsky; Nalivaiko; Shevchenko Institute) and between 2005 and 2008 three volumes on comparative literature were published as special issues in the journal *Літературна компаративістика* (Comparative Literature). Institutionally, the discipline existed with a Department of World Literature founded in 1944 at the University of Lviv; however, it was discontinued in 1950 and re-established in 1997 as a Department of Comparative Literature. Today there are departments of world literature at the National University in Kyiv, at the University of Odessa (where there is also a Department of Theory of Literature and Comparative Studies), and at Kherson State University in 2002 a Department of Comparative Literature was established at the Shevchenko Institute of Literature of Ukraine's National Academy of Sciences.

In Polish, studies in comparative and world literature were done mostly in the context of literary history and with focus on Polish literature and its relations within European literature. In the 1950s to the 1980s such works dominate, for example such as by Mieczysław Klimowicz, Henryk Markiewicz, and Jerzy Ziomek. Since the 1980s there is increasing publication of scholarship in comparative literature in a global perspective (see, e.g., Bakula; Janaszek-Ivaničková; Płaszczewska; see also a dictionary of literary terms which is by its nature comparative [Głowiński, Kostkiewiczova, Okopień-Sławińska, Sławiński]). Departments of comparative literature exist at Jagiellonian University (Krakow), the University of Poznan, and at the University of Wrocław, and world literature courses are taught at the University of Silesia.

In Serbian, comparative literature existed similar to other languages in the region of Central and East Europe with focus on one of the region's Slavic language's relationship with another and since the 1980s there have been a number of books published from a more global perspective (see Eror). One field where there is a sizable corpus of work is comparative folklore studies. Interestingly,

shortly before the dissolution of Yugoslavia, some scholars promoted work in comparative Yugoslav literature (see, e.g., Mitrović). Teaching and research in comparative literature existed since 1962 at the Center for Theory of Literature and Art at the University of Belgrade where in 2000 a Department of Comparative Literature was established and further departments of comparative literature exist at the University of Novi Sad and at the University of Niš there is a Department of Serbian and Comparative Literature. The syllabi of these departments are with focus on the comparison of national literatures and the study of literary theory. In Croatian research in comparative literature is conducted at the Academy of Sciences and the Arts and there is a Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Zagreb where both undergraduate and graduate degrees are offered. In Slovene, research in comparative literature is performed mostly about Slovene literature and its relationship with other Slavic languages. Prior to World War II notable is the work of Anton Ocvirk who published on the theory of comparative literature. Since the end of communist rule and the dissolution of Yugoslavia, scholars with publications in comparative literature include Darko Dolinar, Marko Juvan, and Tomo Virk. Notable is the comparatist journal *Primerjalna književnost* (Comparative Literature) (1978–) in which in addition to articles in Slovene articles in English translation are published often by authors from outside Slovenia. Institutionally, comparative literature was established in 1945 at the University of Ljubljana and the Slovenian Academy of Sciences has an Institute of Comparative Literature where research is conducted (on the history of comparative literature in Slovene, see Kozak). In Macedonian, it is since the independence of the country that comparative literature has raised interest (see, e.g., Ćurčinova, Stojmenksa-Elzeser, Prokopiev; Stojmenska-Elzeser) and there is, within the Institute of Macedonian Literature a Department of Theory of Literature and Comparative Literature at the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University.

In the Baltics, at the University of Tartu literary theory has a long history, in particular with Jury Lotman's work (on comparative literature in Estonia, see Talvet). While some articles in comparative literature have been published, no books—single-authored or edited—appeared in comparative literature to date, unless about a specific national author and thus in a limited comparative context. Since the independence of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, world literature is taught in the Institute of Cultural Sciences and the Arts at the University of Tartu, comparative literature is taught at the Institute of Literature, Folklore, and Art at the University of Latvia and at the Vilnius Pedagogical University in Lithuania. At Daugavpils University there is an Institute of Comparative Studies. Notable is the comparative literature oriented journal *Interlitteraria* whose objective is

to promote Đurišin's framework of "interliterariness" (see above). The journal is published by the University of Tartu Press since 1995.

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# Comparative Literature in the United States

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Gerald Gillespie

**Abstract:** In his article “Comparative Literature in the United States” Gerald Gillespie outlines the repertory of comparative literary and cultural studies in the United States and points to relevant factors leading up to the effective merger of older literary criticism and sociological approaches. Gillespie argues that the fragmentation of comparative literature into a plethora of subfields is natural and corresponds to the complexity of the U.S.-American situation of scholarship. Further, Gillespie argues that the educational institutions hosting comparative studies have become stymied and have failed, thus far, to boost such studies to the level of current international awareness.

## INTRODUCTION

Academic life in the USA has long been marked by a considerable participation of immigrants and occasional visiting scholars from a host of nations. This cultural resource was especially important in the discipline of comparative literature following World War II and continued to play a significant role. The enormous size and complexity of the U.S.-American system of higher education has contributed to what are the two primary characteristics of comparative literary and cultural studies in their entry into the new millennium in the USA: a) their extraordinary, probably unavoidable and irremediable fragmentation and b) the tendency to generate new waves on a fairly regular basis, originating from various sectors of the humanities and social sciences (on an earlier outline of comparative literature in the U.S., see Mourão). In hindsight, we can perceive something like a ten-year pattern or rhythm of overlapping generations. The twentieth-century pioneers of the roughly the postwar generation of scholars such as Harry Levin and René Wellek were well-versed mainly in European and North American Anglophone cultures. They tended to promote intellectual and cultural history and pursued formalist and morphological analysis, the tracing of cross-cultural currents and movements, and literary and art periodization, but their attention was also focused on the influence of the sciences (especially modern physics, psychology, and

anthropology) in imaginative writing. From the mid-1950s on, the linguistic turn in anthropology—initiated by Claude Lévi-Strauss—began to affect comparative literature, and the so-called “structuralist” wave attracted a large number of literary scholars. “Discourse analysis”—a subspecies of “structuralism”—emerged and placed great weight on the play of various constituent codes in specific modern societies. One decade further along, the delayed impact of existentialist philosophy began to be felt in literary scholarship in the increase of so-called “deconstruction”—initiated by Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida—and by the mid-1970s a tendency to combine deconstructive techniques with older modes of social criticism (i.e., non-political Marxist approaches) appeared in two prominent branches, namely “new literary history” and “postmodernism.”

By the mid-1980s, a large contingent of scholars in comparative literature borrowed from the foregoing a *mélange* of notions with which to attack Europe-based culture and elaborated on “cultural studies.” Prominent branches of this newer concentration included “postcolonial studies” and “ethnic studies” dedicated mainly to investigating the life and expression of minority segments of the population principally in West European societies. “Feminist” and “gender” studies also burgeoned in the new climate. These activities were often drawn together and bundled under the umbrella label “multiculturalism” which implied some far-reaching (desired or inevitable) transformation of an older dominant Eurocentric culture or its programmatic abandonment. Many faculty members hired for positions in “ethnic” or “gender” studies regarded themselves and were thought by colleagues to represent some aspect of “identity” within a larger, and presumably oppressive, social order. Thus identity politics became a force and a considerable contingent of scholars were essentially “performative” activists rather than traditional scholars. By the threshold of the current century, a new complex of interests and complaints began to be sounded with increasing insistence. The themes of “globalization” flourished and were largely inflected according to the ideological stances of one or several of the many strains of U.S.-American scholarship (on globalization and literature, see, e.g., Gupta). However, a significant cross-section of scholars felt dissatisfaction with “multicultural” trends as “shallow.” Seasoned comparative literature scholars were prominent among the several thousand faculty members who began to shun the Modern Language Association of America and in 1992 founded the Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers as an alternate organization with an open intellectual agenda accommodating traditional concepts such as authorship, creativity, and aesthetic pleasure. Discontent with the generally hostile environment produced by a spectrum of aggressive claims inside the humanities did not subside in the U.S. A remarkable collection of some sixty essays, in the main by prominent scholars,

appeared in 2005 under the title *Theory's Empire: An Anthology of Dissent* (Corral and Patai) rejecting excesses in literary studies in detail.

What complicates the above briefly outlined sequence of developments is the fact that most of these waves hailed initially as innovatory tended to run their course in approximately twenty years, yet lingered as concepts beyond their declines and often had some of their usable parts cannibalized by yet more recent initiatives. For example, plus or minus a few years, the study of postmodernism arose in the 1970s and declined in the 1990s. Marxist thought remained thoroughly entrenched in the humanities and then acquired a variety of pseudo-scientific forms, often subsumed under the label of "materialist" criticism in the past twenty years (see Fernández-Morera). Also, the older positivistic desire for a more objective investigation of literary life has come back in the call for more thorough micro-systemic and empirical approaches and/or macro-systemic approaches in the study of literature and culture (see, e.g., Apter; Damrosch; Schmidt; Tötösy de Zepetnek, *Comparative Literature*, "Systemic," "The New Humanities"; Villanueva). The interest in science evident in the 1950s and previously oriented toward various psychologies (Bergsonian, Freudian, Jungian, later Lacanian, etc.) has been reborn fifty years later in the push to align literary studies to various fields of the sciences, in particular to cognitive science (see, e.g., Nalbantian, Matthews, McClelland; Zunshine).

It is instructive to look back at the breadth of vision of the work of post-World War II comparative literature scholars. Especially fascinating is to consider potential approaches in the opening paragraph of Henry H.H. Remak's "Comparative Literature: Its Definition and Function": "Comparative Literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country, and the study of the relationships between literature on the one hand and other areas of knowledge and belief, such as the arts (e.g., painting, sculpture, architecture, music), philosophy, history, the social sciences, religion, etc., on the other. In brief, it is the comparison of one literature with another or others, and the comparison of literature with other spheres of human expression" (1). These two sentences contain, explicitly and implicitly, all the specialized cross-cultural and interdisciplinary exercises that the cascading series of innovations of the next half century were to take up. And, in essence, since the ensuing field of "cultural studies" has plied the same connective routes as adumbrated in Remak's blueprint, what has differentiated them is that proponents of cultural studies usually relegate literature to a subordinate status alongside other presumed societal forces or "codes." Many practitioners of particular brands of "multiculturalism" in the USA do not realize that their work is just a subfield of U.S.-American studies. At the same time, a large contingent of U.S.-American scholars with ties to the

international sphere have been a powerful force in shaping both comparative literature and cultural studies.

## THE INTERACTION BETWEEN THE NORTH AMERICAN ANGLOPHONE AND INTERNATIONAL REALMS

Like West Europe, Anglophone North America benefited throughout the twentieth century from a lively traffic of (im)migrants of scholars working in literature, the arts and the surge in numbers resettling in the USA during the period of World War II and the Cold War contributed an extra stimulus to the interaction between U.S.-American scholars interested in comparative studies and their counterparts overseas. For example, Anna Balakian, Henry H.H. Remak, René Wellek and Austin Warren, or Ulrich Weisstein were instrumental in collaborating with their European colleagues and in founding the International Comparative Literature Association / Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée (ICLA/AILC) in 1954 and the U.S.-American expatriate poet T.S. Eliot served as treasurer in the initial group of ICLA/AILC officers. In consequence, the U.S.-American situation of comparative literature also engendered European developments. For example, returning from his career in the U.S., Claudio Guillén became the major force in building the Sociedad Española de Literatura General y Comparada in Spain. Other retournees and visitors from the U.S. have contributed to comparative studies on every continent. After the first ICLA/AILC congress in Venice in 1955, U.S.-American scholars helped establish the pattern of holding world triennial meetings with the congress at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill in 1958. Wellek, Milan V. Dimić, and Eva Kushner (the latter two Canadians) with roots in Central and East Europe deserve recognition for their efforts to keep open the lines of communication with scholars in the Soviet bloc during the difficult Cold War period. They and many others contributed to the happy outcome that ICLA/AILC developed as a virtually unique space of open discourse for literary scholars from a variety of political systems ranging from liberal democratic to authoritarian and totalitarian. Through skillful mediation, ICLA/AILC was able to hold its fifth congress in Belgrade in 1967 and its eighth in Budapest in 1976 increasing contacts exponentially outside the so-called “West.” To date, four ICLA/AILC congresses have been held in North America (U.S. and Canada): Chapel Hill 1958, Montréal-Ottawa 1973, New York 1982, Edmonton 1994 (for an example of reports by organizers of congresses, see, e.g., Tötösy de Zepetnek, “Report”) whereas eleven have been held in Europe: Venezia 1955, Utrecht 1961, Fribourg 1964, Belgrade 1967, Bordeaux 1970, Budapest 1976, Innsbruck 1979, Paris 1985, München 1988, Leyden 1997, and Paris 2013. The first Congress in



Africa was held in Pretoria in 2000, the first in Latin America in Rio de Janeiro in 2007, the first in Asia in Tokyo in 1991, the third and fourth in Hong Kong in 2004 and in Seoul in 2010. The ICLA/AILC Executive Council has met at least once annually over the past sixty years in conjunction with an international conference sponsored by a national academy, a regional association, or a prominent university center of comparative literature

The American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA) was founded by 1960. Because of the importance of North American contributions to the humanities, the ICLA/AILC established early the tradition of electing a U.S.-American as one of its two secretaries in every triennial cycle and has frequently chosen a U.S.-American for president or vice-president. Also, Canadian Eva Kushner—organizer of the Montréal-Ottawa congress—later presided as ICLA/AILC president of the 1982 New York Congress, one division of which was dedicated to Hispanic literatures. U.S.-Americans were prominent in the significant move to stage world congresses in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Earl Miner helped foster and presided over the Tokyo Congress of 1991, Eugene Eoyang was the organizer of the Hong Kong Congress in 2004, and Dorothy Figueira presided over Rio de Janeiro Congress in 2007. Remak was one of the driving forces in the creation of ICLA/AILC's first large collaborative project, the Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages (CHLEL), which emerged from debates in the late 1960s (see Gillespie, "Comparative Literary History," "Newer Trends"). The first projects to reach press were directed by Weisstein (*Expressionism as an International Literary Phenomenon*, 1979) and Balakian (*The Symbolist Movement in the Literature of European Languages*, 1984). Numerous other U.S.-Americans and Canadians have directed further volumes in this series which considers literary streams and cultures not only in the traditional European territories but also other cultures. The complexities of pursuing an international collaborative project that is both cross-cultural and interdisciplinary can be illustrated in the case of the Romanticism sub-series of CHLEL, the five volumes of which were directed by North Americans who enlisted some one hundred scholars from two dozen countries (see Gillespie, "The Horizons of Romanticism"). Starting in 1995, Miner designed and Eoyang chaired the ICLA/AILC's multifaceted Committee for Intercultural Studies, whose charter encompassed worldwide research in the subjects matters understood under the European concept of general literature, literary phenomena and history of regions outside Europe, and inter-regional literary relationships (on this, see, e.g., Gillespie, "Literary Studies").

## THE DIVERSITY OF INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS FOR COMPARATIVE STUDIES IN THE UNITED STATES

As indicated above, the ACLA has been the most important “clearing house” for the research and teaching interests of comparatists in the U.S. It has always figured among the largest regional affiliates of ICLA/AILC in number of active members. Since 1995, ACLA has maintained the vigorous pace of holding an annual national conference and a few of these have convened in Mexico or Canada. A separate Association of Departments and Programs of Comparative Literature, concerned with furthering the institutional status of comparative literature, has increased to a current level of about 150 institutional members. The tradition developed within the ACLA taking stock formally of trends and concerns in the earlier years of every decade. The two most recent exercises by the tasked committees—*Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* (Bernheimer) and *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization* (Saussy)—have enjoyed considerable resonance also outside the U.S. The pattern of a shifting of generational mood every ten years is evident from the main thematic term in each title and the breadth of subject matters in each volume contrasts with the more modest kind of assessment of curricula practiced by ACLA up to the 1980s (see “Report”).

As one would expect, the Modern Language Association of America (MLA), the U.S.’s biggest omnibus collection of scholars in the humanities, is dominated overwhelmingly by groups interested in English-language literatures and topical cultural questions. Comparable groups involved in the study of several areas (mainly West European) are next in importance. European literatures of lesser diffusion and non-European literatures come in at a very slender third place. While perhaps enjoying disproportionate prestige, the explicitly comparative literature groups trail behind, having only four named divisions in the MLA currently designated for their work: “General,” “Medieval and Renaissance,” “Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” and “Twentieth Century.” These designations in big chunks, according to a well-entrenched Eurocentric picture of cultural periods, exhibit a strikingly limited horizon compared to the contemporary practice of comparative literature on the worldwide level and the difference is evident in the work of the many collaborative research committees of ICLA/AILC, their numerous interim conferences between congresses, and resultant publications. However, there is a much larger, completely separate category of MLA activities labeled “General Literature” which encompasses a wide variety of areas that connect in many instances with comparative studies, e.g., cultural studies, the sociology of literature, various media, genres and themes, literary theory

and criticism, interdisciplinary topics, translation, etc. On balance, the work turning up in recent years in the MLA under the label general literature reflects predominantly the current interests inside departments and programs of English and/or U.S.-American literature. A large amount has been borrowed from other departments (i.e., in translation of work by such as Mikhail Bakhtin and introduced via departments of Slavic literatures, Walter Benjamin via German, Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man, and Michel Foucault via French, Antonio Gramsci, Gianni Vattimo via Italian, etc.). U.S.-American habits in general literature resemble the same in many European nations, with some local variations of repertory and/or differences in phases of reception. These programs in departments of Anglophone literature with a pronounced general literature component have tended to co-opt materials taught in foreign language programs and to appropriate theorizing by comparatists. This natural process of absorption of ideas and subject matters in translation helps perpetuate the dominance of departments of English literature institutionally and politically within colleges and universities in the U.S. (this can be extrapolated to fit this pattern to national literature departments in other countries). In some instances (e.g., Columbia University), comparative literature has long been subordinated as a part of English, while at others (e.g., Stanford University) a “disproportionate” cross-appointment of faculty members in departments of English literature as comparatists creates a corresponding power bloc within the still separate comparative literature groups.

The lack of a clear consensus for defining the variety of comparative literary and cultural studies reflects the actual hodgepodge of levels and kinds of institutions of higher education in the U.S. Striking differences appear even within the hierarchy of more highly developed comparative literature programs. Institutional politics rather than a solid academic rationale are often determinant for the actual staffing and curricula, as well as the nomenclature listing the “field” of activities. While experienced U.S.-American academics may be able to navigate among the variegated terms used in the several thousand institutions and grasp what is actually happening in them, a serious sociological study of the administrative practices at colleges and universities in the U.S. would be useful to non-U.S.-Americans. The older established term comparative literature may mean virtually nothing at all in many places and amount to a mere camouflage gesture. As mentioned, several professional organizations and journals (in the U.S. and Canada such as the journals *Comparative Literature*, the *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, *Comparative Literature Studies*, *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée*, *The Comparatist*)

provide some guidance and coherence, but this coherence often melts away as one crosses the threshold of a particular school of thought and enters the practical reality of actual teaching programs.

## A TYPOLOGY OF INSTITUTIONAL AND/OR SELF-DESIGNATED COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

The backgrounds and capacities of individual practitioners who are styled comparatists in the U.S. are as diverse as the checkered character of educational institutions. I offer a table (based on Gillespie, "Comparative Literary History") to assist in understanding this confusing variety. The total "comparatist" faculty population is comprised of some combination of the following:

- 1) those who are sometimes still termed comparatists although they have actually have abandoned literary studies:
  - 1.1 by deliberate migration to cultural studies or crossing over from a social science department or philosophy, etc., and often specializing in or representing a specific ideology or world view
  - 1.2 sometimes in ignorance of the historical grounding of literary studies
- 2) those who are active in theory and who:
  - 2.1 are more comprehensive literary and/or interdisciplinary generalists
  - 2.2 specialize in relations of literature to intellectual history, science, other arts, or semiotics or general systems theory
  - 2.3 sometimes are deliberately migrating out of literary studies
  - 2.4 sometimes act in ignorance of or lack sufficient prior grounding in literary studies, and are
  - 2.5 antipathetic toward or skeptical of cultural studies and regard movements such as deconstruction to be anti-intellectual
- 3) those who remain decidedly in literary studies and who are:
  - 3.1 well conversant in theoretical issues and debates and sometimes share with scholars in categories 2.1 and 2.2
  - 3.2 are more interested in literariness and in literature as art
  - 3.3 are more oriented towards ("old-style") literary history, although they share much with scholars in 3.1
  - 3.4 pursue studies in the history of ideas, but in parallel to literary history, and 3.5 want to practice the craft of criticism, critical appreciation, evaluation, and interpretation

- 4) those in literary studies whose work is divided between research appropriate to globalists and research appropriate to particularists, in varying dimensions, such as:
- 4.1 concentration on European, North, Central, and/or South American, Asian, and/or African literatures on a regional basis
  - 4.2 concentration on complex internal and external crossovers, e.g., in literatures of the Caribbean or the Mediterranean, the intermingled South European or Indian area, etc.
  - 4.3 “enhanced” specialization in a major literature (e.g., Italian, Bengali, Japanese) by investigation of interchanges with other streams and over its longer-term chrestomathy and:
  - 4.4 understanding historically the juncture(s) of vertical and horizontal dimensions in literary culture and in the life of seminal works (e.g., through multi-perspectival and/or cross-cultural treatments of *Hamlet*, of the *Koran*, etc.)
  - 4.5 specialization in drama, opera, film, television, the other arts and media, but in relation to literary contexts of varying scale from local to worldwide.

## ABOUT THE REPERTORY OF U.S.-AMERICAN COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

In addition to the fact of enormous variability among U.S.-American colleges and universities, anyone looking at the “old” accrued repertory of comparative literature must sort through an incredible tangle in order to understand the current profile of the discipline. In 1989 I published an essay on “Newer Trends of Comparative Studies in the West” which crisscrossed between the international and Anglophone American scene. This exercise was in some measure meant to contribute to the intense debate in India about their future comparative literature as they considered the enormous complexity of their own linguistic and cultural heritage and the new position of the Indian subcontinent vis-à-vis the world (on this, see, e.g., Dev; Patil).

First, the U.S. was already marked as a geocultural realm where critical “schools” of foreign pedigree competed with “native” (i.e., British and U.S.-American literary) tenets. Second, although the influential example of practitioners such as Ernst Robert Curtius lasted well past World War II, a serious decline in the prestige of literary history set in and was felt also in the allied field of the history of ideas which once boasted eminent U.S.-American figures like

Arthur O. Lovejoy (*Essays in the History of Ideas*). Later attempts to reconstitute a historical approach would bring the so-called “new literary history” to the fore in the 1970s (e.g., the journal *New Literary History*). A third trend was an increasing rejection of the centrality of creative authors and a turning away from the interpretation of canonical works of art as primary units and documents of literary and cultural history in favor of attention to a broader generic range of expression and production including neglected sociolects. In Anglophone North America, this meant the subsidence even of anti-biographical, text-oriented “new criticism” and “close reading” of the 1940s and 1950s (e.g., Ransom; Richards). A fourth trend was a widespread repudiation of aesthetic considerations, except when investigated as elements in a sociology of literature (e.g., Löwenthal). Mitigating the sociological impulse was interest in authorial intentionality and critical hermeneutics (e.g., Frye; Gadamer; Ingarden). Fifth and sixth were rolling general trends on the one hand towards putative “scientific” approaches and on the other towards revisionary philosophies of literature (e.g., Peterfreund). The existentialist wave, at its peak in literature (e.g., Beckett, Heidegger, Sartre) roughly 1935–1955, was later to bleed into U.S.-American postmodernism in the 1970s. As in Europe, U.S.-American comparative literature, too, experienced a proliferation of consequences stemming from various philosophies of culture and phenomenology and co-extant with the impact of Marx, Freud, and Jung.

Prominent in the decades of the 1960s and down to the present in U.S.-American and Canadian comparative literature were structuralism, semiotics, general systems theory, hermeneutics, discourse analysis, deconstructive criticism, postmodernism, neo-Marxism, and reception aesthetics. Structuralism’s distinguished ancestry stretched roughly from World War I to 1930 in the work of the Russian formalists, and from the 1920s to World War II in the morphological thought of the Prague School. The U.S. careers of Wellek and Roman Jakobson, among others, furthered their introduction. Determined to grasp basic constructive elements in literary works, the formalists anticipated many aspects of Anglo-American “new criticism” and of French “structuralism.” In their urge to take literary phenomena apart and detect underlying linguistic rules independent of ideological suppositions and with pioneering work in narratology, formalists foreshadowed the deconstructive passions of the 1970s and 1980s in the U.S. Their exploration of the semantic and syntagmatic features of literary expression helped open up the bigger question of literature as a system with its own logic and dynamics. The tasks implied in their stance were taken up as the primary challenge by semioticians ranging from A.J. Greimas to Itamar Even-Zohar, and renewed attention was paid to Charles S. Peirce, the U.S.’s own philosopher of semiotics of the early twentieth century. The so-called “linguistic turn” in

anthropology, initiated by Lévi-Strauss in the 1950s, had immense repercussions when the fundamental propositions were applied to literature.

The beliefs most widely shared by structuralists, semioticians, and micro- and macro-systems analysts from the 1990s to currently are 1) that we can analyze an artistic text as a code with discoverable grammatical, syntactical, and other rules, 2) that literary preferences, themes, and genres which are exhibited in texts participate over time in larger cultural “systems” with shifting centers and peripheries, 3) that literary coding is interactive with other kinds of media coding and societal discourses, and 4) that cultural systems of varying size and complexity interact and experience “interferences” (e.g., exchanges and appropriations of matter). Compatible with the structuralist trend, but pursuing a distinct large-scale agenda, has been a further broad swath of Anglo-American scholars influenced by the study of myths, comparative religion, and psychology. Anglophone North America produced its own formalist-structuralist theoreticians such as Northrop Frye whose approach to cultural systems harks back to Renaissance and Enlightenment thinkers (e.g., Kircher; Vico).

## THE SOCIAL HORIZON AND INTELLECTUAL PROFILE OF COMPARATIVE STUDIES IN THE UNITED STATES

The recent termination of all foreign literature programs at the State University of New York Albany is one of several ominous signs that public authorities of education have been influenced by a combination of factors to rein in broad-gauged literary studies during economic crisis. Political leaders who think instrumentally often cite the status of English as a world lingua franca as grounds for cutting costs. This mirrors the shallow attitude widespread in programs which self-interestedly co-opt “foreign” materials in translation and fail to support foreign language and literature programs, without which there can be no adequate base for the transfer of knowledge. Nominally, comparative literature programs, in turn, which have become lopsidedly devoted to “theory” and contemptuous of close reading of foreign works play into the hands of Anglophone programs which claim they now command the same spectrum of theory. It should come as no surprise if impecunious schools seize on this “success” of older comparative literature to seed other departments like English and philosophy as an excuse to drop comparative literature. The years leading up to the proclamation of an age of “multiculturalism” were also years in which “political correctness” increased its impact on U.S.-American academy and media. As self-ordained arbiters of cultural rules for the USA, the Anglo-American programs were skilled in co-opting new initiatives such as in ethnic studies which were organized around social strata and sociolects, whereas comparative literature was much more difficult and demanded deeper knowledge of the original cultural homelands



of various minority elements in the population and a consciousness reaching beyond Anglophone North America. The “national” language department at U.S.-American universities knew better how to talk in Native cultural terms to administrators with backgrounds in the social sciences and sciences.

The years leading up to the proclamation of an age of “globalization” both have not seen any abatement of “political correctness” and have once again been a time favorable to those skilled in using sociological discourses which in general reassure the bulk of educational administrators in the U.S.-American academic system. Two trends prominent in the 2000s within nominally comparative literature groups illustrate this situation. One is the persistence of so-called “materialist” approaches which give the appearance of being “scientific” but on closer inspection prove to be Eurocentric, primarily rooted in older Marxist thought and almost invariably looking at the spread of influences and impacts from the “West” upon other regions of the world, but not requiring deep knowledge of non-European cultures. Listening carefully to the complexity of non-Eurocentric expression as created by non-European people is not the prime interest. The other trend is the push supposedly to reinvent world literature and proposals to reorder comparative literature or replace it with “world literature” (see, e.g., Damrosch; D’haen; D’haen, Damrosch, Kadir). Upon closer inspection, it is clear that the proponents of world literature are doing nothing much more than recycling the older attitudes and procedures of general literature and/or comparative literature. In my opinion, it is likely that the U.S.-American world literature movement will blunt the historical drive of the discipline of comparative literature to encourage a more effective kind of cultural reciprocity and exchange on the global level. Further, it is safe to predict that departments of English literature will absorb world literature into their repertory and thereby further undercut any serious pursuit of comparative literature. Interestingly, a number of seasoned comparatists warned against this danger, for example Dorothy Figueira, who argues that the entrenched academic *élite* in the U.S. and even most of their imitators overseas who act as performative representatives in U.S.-American identity politics are a “Brahmin class” that reinvents ways, for example, “world literature” to maintain control in contrast to a more generous and more demanding practice of comparative literature that explores and embraces the contributions of other cultures. Institutionally, apart from Mainland China (see, e.g., Wang and Liu), the discipline of comparative literature remains most wide spread in the U.S.—although mostly at Ivy league and thus private—universities and at a few state universities.

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## **PART 3**

Examples of New Work in Comparative Literature,  
World Literatures, and Comparative Cultural Studies





# African Literatures and Cultures and the Universal of Motherhood

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Remi Akujobi

**Abstract:** In her article “African Literatures and Cultures and the Universal of Motherhood” Remi Akujobi analyzes the place and the role of women in African tradition and interrogates the loci of motherhood in the production, circulation, and consumption of motherhood as a sacred, as well as a powerful spiritual component of women’s life as represented in African literature and culture.

## INTRODUCTION

Motherhood is often defined as an automatic set of feelings and behavior that is switched on by pregnancy and the birth of a child. It is an experience said to be profoundly shaped by social context and culture. Motherhood is also seen as a moral transformation whereby a woman comes to terms with being different in that she ceases to be an autonomous individual because she is one way or the other attached to another—her child. In many societies, motherhood is wrapped in many cultural and religious meanings—cultural as in what society thinks a mother should be, that is, some elements associated with a mother and what the practiced faith of a particular society attaches to motherhood. Motherhood assumes different names and shapes depending on the society that is practicing it. The word procreation or giving birth and nurturing new life, whether physically or otherwise, has led to different definitions for the words “feminine,” “maternal,” and “feminine spirituality” in many cultures, and religious traditions. Motherhood in some quarters is seen as a sacred and powerful spiritual path for a woman to take. In literature and in other discourses alike, motherhood is a recurrent theme across cultures. It is one striking term in women’s discourse that is given prominence. Motherhood has been viewed by many in different lights and presented in diverse ways. Motherhood as an experience and as an institution has and is still receiving different definitions from different writers — both men and women.

Religions, whether Christian, Judaic, Hindu, or Islam, accord an important place to motherhood. It is an exalted realm for the woman and hence religious

imagery sentimentalizes and idealizes motherhood. The image of Madonna characterizes Roman Catholicism and there is the similar *Devi-Ma* in Hindu tradition. The African goddess of creation is often depicted as a mermaid or a beautiful woman and she is associated with the moon and the ocean. Although Buddhism does not give motherhood such overwhelming spiritual status and significance, maternal imagery and symbolism are present in the concept of the archetypal female Bodhisattvas who are seen as supreme mothers. Motherhood as experienced and practiced in Africa is influenced by religious mythologies and local lore and it is coloured with examples of self-sacrifice/giving and much more in the name of motherhood. While mothers are revered as creators, as providers, cradle rockers, nurturers, and goddesses, they also inspire awe because they are known to wield huge influence in their children's lives. The idea of self-sacrifice emphasizes the centrality of motherhood in African society.

The way and manner in which societies conceptualize motherhood has come to command popular appeal because it is seen as a symbol of the nation-state. Thus nationalists often deploy the nation-as-mother symbolism to mobilize patriotic sentiments. In most texts written in Africa writers refer to the mother Africa trope and it has remained a prominent subject in African discourse. Love of mother and love of nation have been taken as one and the same. The symbolism of the enslaved and exploited motherland was at the heart of the anti-colonial nationalist struggles in Africa in the 1950s and early 1960s up to the point of independence. It was much more evidenced in South Africa especially after Nelson Mandela went to prison in the 1980s and 1990s until the all-inclusive election that brought him to power in 1994. There are also patriotic songs and monuments in many countries that celebrate the nation-as-mother, these patriotic songs often invoke sentiments of loyalty toward the land of birth. Motherhood is a major theme in contemporary women's literature so much so that it features prominently in most texts written by women. The experience of motherhood according to Barbara Christian is an "unwritten story" and she contends that the story is just beginning to be told and this story to Christian interrogates women's struggles to become "all that they can be" (212). The role of a mother and all that goes with Christianity is "universally imposed" and it is the only role that everyone agrees should be the domain of the woman. John S. Mbiti recognizes the concept of mother when he says that it is central to African philosophy and spirituality. Motherhood is a joyful and privileged state for the woman because in pregnancy, the woman is said to "glow and shine" and she receives special treatment especially from her husband and her mother-in-law. No matter the skills, the desires and the talents of a woman, her primary function is that of motherhood, at least in Africa. Motherhood in Africa

is seen as a God-giving role and for this reason it is sacred. So whether one sees African women as victims or actors (Christian 147) or whether or not one depicts women's travails (Ojo-Ade 161) is and remains an often discussed issue. In this sense, Lauretta Ngcobo believes that, generally Africans take motherhood to be all about children: "every woman is encouraged to marry and get children in order to express her womanhood to the full. The basis of marriage among Africans implies the transfer of a woman's fertility to the husband's family group" (144). Motherhood is so critical in most traditional societies in Africa that there is no worse misfortune for a woman than being childless. A barren woman is seen as incomplete, she is what Mbiti calls the "dead end of human life, not only for genealogical level but also for herself" (144). Yes, motherhood is vital but it should not be all that the woman is made for. It should be a matter of choice as some women would rather not experience motherhood. If it a choice, it might save the woman some troubles in society.

## THE UNIVERSAL OF MOTHERHOOD

Following women's experience, scholars and critics dwell more on the oppression and victimization of the woman in all areas of human endeavors. Patricia Hill-Collins derides the woman's acceptance of victimization as part of her experience. The metaphor of the "veil" is vital especially in a predominantly patriarchal society: it is important the woman tears this veil because if she does not, it will mask her identity, it will muffle her voice and distort her vision (Adebayo 23). Remy Oriaku dwells on the anatomy of the woman as underlying the prejudices against her in society (75), Elizabeth Ogini wants the woman to throw away the yoke of discomfort and oppression and preoccupy herself with freedom, comfort, prosperity and dignity (18), and Nana Wilson-Tageo says that the woman must contest and revise misconceptions and narrow representations (12). Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie recognizes the possible limitations and stereotyping the woman's biology can generate and with this in mind and O. Austen-Peters feels that it is time for the woman to reject negative images. Chinyere Grace Okafor recognizes the spiritual power of women especially as mothers (81, 160). With all his masculinist dissection of the anatomy of the woman, Onsucheka J. Chinweizu recognizes the power of the woman as he believes that the man suffers a form of oppression in the hands of the woman (121). To him, the woman has exploited her biological superiority and has consolidated her power by taking over the role of mother, cook and nurse in the household. He also sees marriage as a source of man's oppression. Of course one knows his stance—men may rule the world, but women rule the men who rule the world. Deirdre L. Badejo does not share of all of these but recommends the mutual sharing of roles (94). Some critics of African literature believe that this idea of "Mother Africa" often found in literature written

by men is a ploy to silence the woman but most female writers are not silenced by this sentiment; rather, it encourages them to work hard hence some of them defy negative tags and present the female experience the way it occurs. In doing this, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie suggests that the first task is the demystification of certain male stereotypes of the African woman as goddess or as Supreme Mother, self-sacrificing and suffering willingly and silently. She says women should not completely embrace the image of the fertile mother of the nation, an image that African male writers have helped in disseminating. It is generally agreed that “Mother Africa” may have been declared free, but mothers of Africa remained manifestly oppressed.

Feminists in Africa, while conceding that motherhood may at times operate in an oppressive manner, have tried to read other meanings to motherhood, meanings that are empowering for women. Within these meanings, they agree that giving birth bestows a certain status on women — even mystical powers. Yoruba traditions point to this fact. Among the Yoruba people, motherhood is said to confer privileges that give credence to the very foundations of society and women’s presumed roles in it and thus symbolize fertility, fecundity, and fruitfulness. The Yoruba saying, “*Iya ni wura, baba ni jigi*” (“mother is gold, father is a mirror”) goes a long way in showing the importance of motherhood in African society. Mother is gold: strong, valuable, true, central to a child’s existence, wise is also very important. Motherhood is not always as smooth as it seems in that it is also self-denying. The Yoruba also believe that *ikunle abiyamo*—the kneeling position assumed at the moment of birth—confers special spiritual privileges on a mother. Thus there are powers, privileges, and entitlements that come with motherhood even in the act of giving birth. Adrienne Rich posits that although the reality of motherhood is experienced by women, the institution is controlled by men, because the experience is being interpreted by men and the structure they control (45–49). Buchi Emecheta dwells on the concept of motherhood in most of her books, especially in *Joys of Motherhood* and *Second Class Citizen* and Flora Nwapa mirrors this concept in her *Efuru*, where childlessness and failed marriages mandate a literary criticism that mirrors the importance of children in the African family.

Although maternal ideals are entrenched and valorized in all cultures, patriarchal societies present a woman’s central purpose to be her reproductive function and so motherhood and mothering become intertwined with issues of a woman’s identity. Most theories postulated whether by men or women define women in terms of fertility and this is particularly reinvented in real life through many female archetypes. It is common to hear such terms as the Virgin, Venus, and Mother Earth and these are tied to women’s functions as mothers in society.

After all, Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus. These myths about the woman have been in existence since primordial times and they authenticate the belief that motherhood is an essential part of being a woman, outside which the woman is empty. It is no longer a secret that the Nigerian woman considers herself a real woman only when she has proved herself to be fertile and the “halo of maternity” shines over her. This holds true for most women in Africa where the index of motherhood is used to define “real” women or responsible woman. This is so in the sense that motherhood is a prerequisite for social acceptance, many non-mothering women experience feelings of rejection and low self-esteem. Examples abound in African literature, especially that written by women. For example, Nnuego in Emecheta’s *Joys of Motherhood* never considers herself a woman until she started giving birth, Efuru in Nwapa’s *Efuru* is frustrated by her inability to procreate and as such becomes a priestess.

In contemporary Black Africa, women are still seen as an object and “property”: they are not entitled to the same right as men and they may be disqualified when it comes to inheritance. In life as in literature, motherhood is the only perspective in which a woman’s worth is measured. A woman without a child is viewed as a waste to herself, to her husband and to her society. So in cultural/traditional sense, one finds out that patriarchies can easily deploy notions of motherhood to foster traditions no matter how obsolete these may be, and in especially these traditions motherhood also becomes a means of female control. Expectations of mothering roles intensifies social pressure to conform to what the culture says or what the tradition decrees, this seems to be driven by levels of modernity or urbanization than by the status accorded to norms of society and community. For instance, one will expect that with urbanization and modernity, people will begin to adjust to trends of times, but Iyuku in Estakor (west of Edo State) continues to perpetuate highly prescriptive notions of motherhood. In this community of farmers, women are made to pass through some unhealthy practices in the name of motherhood. Women are expected to undergo certain rituals during pregnancy, especially first pregnancy. The woman must go through circumcision when she is seven months into the pregnancy. For this reason, the practice of circumcision and clitoridectomy, now seen in many quarters as a violation of human rights, is vitally placed in Iyuku. Mbiti recognizes the power in the blood which he says binds the individual to the land and consequently to the departed of the society. In this case, the circumcision blood is like making a covenant, or a solemn agreement, between the individual and her people and until the individual has gone through the operation, she is an outsider. In Iyuku, the woman is to stay for seven days in a secluded room without taking her bath. After seven days, the circumcision

takes place and it usually performed on her by an elderly woman in her clan. After the circumcision, she is also to remain in the secluded room without bathing for extra seven days; she is to drink herbs for seven days and the number seven is important. Apart from this, the woman is also expected to go for what is known as *stakor* which is the presumed source of the name for the local government area, Estakor (this entails that the woman goes for what is termed a sign of commitment to motherhood—it is done in a way that as soon as the woman opens her mouth, everyone must see that she has gone through the ritual of *stakor*). This act is a situation whereby one side of the woman's tooth is chopped off with a local hammer and it is to show the world that the woman is married and that she is successfully experiencing motherhood. Despite differences in economic status and levels of development, every woman from this community is expected to pass through these rituals when she is pregnant with her first baby to prove that she is worthy to be called a mother. It is a sign of acceptance and because society has strong beliefs about the importance of family and community linkages, for a woman to disregard these things means that she is excluding herself from very important secular and spiritual commitment. The Estakor woman actually enjoys this experience. She does not in the least consider this harrowing; rather she sees it as a privilege. A woman who has not experienced this often envies those who have and motherhood in this community is a sign of the woman's vitality and worthiness, it is seen as an induction into the hall of fame so to say, because through the woman, reproduction has taken place and her cod with that of her new born merging is a sign of a higher bonding—that of the community at large.

In the Estakor community, the python represents the essence of motherhood, it is generally referred to as *Uwe* ("mother"). She had played a significant role in the history of Iyuku hence she is seen by the people to be a mother to all, assisting nursing mothers in the nurturing of their babies because for the first three months after the birth of the child, the python comes around the baby cot to help the baby's mother in nursing the baby. The python's presence is thus not considered unusual by the people who believe that it must be revered and worshipped. With this, one sees that motherhood is not limited to humans alone, animals also have the maternal instinct.

## AFRICAN LITERATURE, RELIGION, AND MOTHERHOOD

Most African communities have their own idea of motherhood and how a woman should experience it. In literature, different patterns and methods of motherhood are portrayed, for example, most of Emecheta's works deal with the portrayal of the African woman. Her main characters often show what it feels like to be

a woman, an African woman and a mother in society. Emecheta looks at how sexuality and the ability to bear children may sometimes be the only way by which femininity and womanhood are defined. Adah in *Second Class Citizen* has to work and support her family because the so-called bread winner can not provide any bread for the family, so she is forced to support the family and at the same time be responsible for the children. Adah is faced with numerous battles in a foreign land and she must do whatever she can to preserve her womanhood; not only that, she must also be a good mother to her children. In *Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta's central character defines validity of her womanhood solely by the success of her children; she sees her success as a woman in her success as a mother. Without motherhood, Nnuego sees herself as empty and so fought very hard to be a mother even if it entails marrying a man she does not really love. The chapter titles, "The Mother," "The Mother's Mother," "The Mother's Early Life," "First Shock of Motherhood," etc., follow the highs and lows of the heroine, Nnu Ego's, destiny. Nnu Ego's whole destiny is centred on her as a mother. Her hope for happiness and prosperity are viewed through her ability to bear children and the success of her children, but her expectations are never met by these same children she is giving up so much for as she is constantly disappointed. As a result, Nnu Ego finds no joy in her grown children. Ramatoulaye in Ba's *So Long a Letter* very much like Bitek's Lawino laments her fate but suffers the reality all the same as she must follow the bidding of the tradition that says she must be a complete mother no matter the situation she finds herself hence she mourn her husband whether or not he abandoned her when he was alive. So she lives through widowhood fending for twelve children all alone.

The role of religion in African culture is vital in the discussion of the spiritual woman, so it is pertinent to ask certain questions as we journey through the spiritual aspect of a woman and in this vein, we ask: What does it mean to be a spiritually powerful being? More specifically, what does it mean to walk in spiritual strength on a consistent basis, as a woman or mother? These questions are very important in determining the inner strength, the energy that lies within the woman which the woman may not be aware of. It is known that in life as in literature, the woman has been known to carry a lot of power within her, from personal explorations of the world of women's history, it is discovered that there is an emerging field of intense research and publication looking at women's participation and influence on the early Christian movement as well as in traditional communities around the globe. For example, in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Chielo becomes a priestess and a healer whose roles allow her control of spaces that the fearless Okonkwo can not even venture into. She is so sure of her power that she runs through the town with a sick Ezimma on her back and as she races, she calls out greetings to notable community personages and agbala. With the confidence



displayed by Chielo, one can not say that she is in any way oppressed as other women in the novel. The fact that Ezimma is restored after the encounter with Chielo says a lot about Chielo's spiritual power in agbala.

In *Efuru*, Nwapa expounds on the spiritual powers of the woman especially mothers as she makes woman-as-mother the primary upholder of the native culture. The mother teaches the child about the society's ways of knowing and doing things. In this way, the woman-as-mother becomes significant to the essential development and maintenance of the community. Most African writers have often posited that there is no male equivalent to the role of the priestess in African life; we see a woman as priestess in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, a woman as priestess in Nwapa's *Efuru*. Nwapa's presentation of Efuru in her various roles and functions model the spirituality of women and by extension the spiritual powers embedded in motherhood. The question is what happens when the woman is without a child? Do women without children share in the power that motherhood confers on mothers in the society? In African society, having children confers a lot on the woman, but Nwapa thinks otherwise in her presentation of Efuru in that at the end of the novel it is Efuru's wealth that substitute for motherhood. Even in life motherhood confers so much power on the woman, a woman without a child can not even see herself as a member of her husband's family. In Iyuku, a community in Estakor west of Edo state, some women carry so much power so much so that whatever they decree must be taken seriously. The reference here is on the "Istogwa" women. This is a group of elderly women, they are well above birthing and nurturing; they are revered and feared at the same time. They are said to possess certain powers, that when they utter any word it must come to pass. These women are rarely seen as they only come out when there is an important event and when there is crisis in the community. The Istogwa women come out in the night when there is a problem to make some pronouncements: their outing is heralded by the town crier who goes round the town to admonish everyone to stay indoors that night because anyone who sees the Istogwa in action is often said not to live to tell the story. It is said that the women always come out naked, hence the warning, because it is an abomination for a child to see his grandmother's nakedness.

When a mother tells a child that "I will bring out my breast," this means much as this is enough to caution any erring child. The power of the breast is significant in the sense that everyone is considered to have suckled the mother's breast. No child will be so stubborn to the extent that he/she will not dread the mother's breast. Given all of these about motherhood, mothers command so much respect and at the same time awe, perhaps the reason why African societies view birthing

with great significance. The importance of these cultural and religious symbols of motherhood is borne out by the fact that they are repeatedly alluded to in life and literature. Literary and artistic works through the ages dwell on the attributes of motherhood. Depictions of self-sacrificing mothers, mothers as creators who must bear pain with patience and nurture selflessly leave no space for mothers as women who feel pain, anger, frustration, or women drained by the responsibilities that accompany their roles as mothers.

Mbiti is a theologian, an author, a teacher, and a pastor. He is often referred to as the father of contemporary African theology and philosophy. He was born on 30 November 1931 in Mulango (Kenya). He has researched extensively on African religion and philosophy. His book on African religion and philosophy is a ground breaking manifesto on how Africans live and what they believe in. His book as stated before dwells on practically every subject about life, particularly as it relates to Africans: he talks about what we believe in, how we relate with the supreme being and ourselves. Many issues are raised but my concern rests on his chapters nine and ten where he discusses birth and youth (82–97) and marriage and family life (98–109). Here Mbiti tries to convey the importance and joy of birth, how the mother nurses her infant, and he talks about celebrations and rituals that heralds and welcome the birth of a baby. And he dwells on family life beginning with marriage. Marriage to Mbiti is the meeting-point for the three layers of human life according to African religion. These are the departed, the living and those to be born. The departed come into the picture because they are the roots on whom the living stands. The living is the link between death and life. Those to be born are the buds in the loins of the living, and marriage makes it possible for them to germinate and sprout (98). Mbiti has written a book called *Love and Marriage in Africa* and he hints at the fact that parents get involved in the selection of marriage partners, they visits, present gifts, they dictate customs concerning the bride's change of residence, marriage ceremonies and celebrations. Mbiti also states the importance of children to the African family and he says that childless couple may take steps to ensure offspring, such as an additional wife or another bed partner for the first wife. Children are very important in that, apart from continuing the lineage, they run errands when young and help out in the work. When the parents become old and weak it is the duty of the children, especially the heirs or sons, to look after the parents and the affairs of the family. When the parents die, the children give them befitting burial, survive and remember them.

## CONCLUSION

The mystification of African mothers Ogundipe-Leslie refers to is owing to the importance of motherhood in Africa. This theme is of extreme relevance to

African societies and for this reason; it is widely documented in most of the works by African women. There are other issues now that are of utmost importance to women in Africa, but the issue of motherhood is still very important and this is largely due to the imposition of mothering in Africa. The concept of motherhood has been of central importance in the traditions of people of Africa and it has been presented by many — even the so-called feminists. Writers, both men and women, have always encouraged women to bear children and women without children are seen as evil. With motherhood, a woman is considered blessed, she acquires a higher status in society, she is respected and mythologized.

**Note:** The above article is revised version of Remi Akujobi, “Motherhood in African Literature and Culture.” *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 13.1 (2011): 1–7. Copyright release to the author.

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# World literatures and the Case of Joyce, Rao, and Borges

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Bhavya Tiwari

**Abstract:** In her article “World Literatures and the Example of Joyce, Rao, and Borges” Bhavya Tiwari discusses the work of James Joyce and poses the question why Joyce is considered an important figure in Latin America and South Asia. Have Indian languages (e.g., Bengali and Hindi) responded differently to Joycean aesthetics? If yes, can there be political reasons behind this difference? Joyce’s own position in Europe as a modernist aesthetician complicates his reception in the “periphery,” India and Latin America. Hence, Tiwari queries as to what happens when Joyce’s texts are received on two different continents. In this context, Tiwari discusses Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* (1938), and Jorge Luis Borges’s texts with regard to their linguistic innovations and word play. Tiwari’s comparative and contextual analysis is meant to illustrate the relevance of the study of comparative world literature.

## INTRODUCTION

In *The Translation Zone* Emily Apter postulates that although there are “historical and pedagogical reasons for maintaining geopolitical relations between dominants and their former colonies, protectorates, and client states, there are equally compelling arguments for abandoning postcolonial geography” (87). Hence, “Francophone” would no longer “designate the transnational relations among metropolitan France and its former colonies, but linguistic contact zones all over the world in which French, or some kind of French, is one of many languages in play” (Apter 87). Indeed, globalizing postcolonial studies by freeing it from the “master” and “native” narrative would be a path to broaden our notions of language, politics, aesthetics, and translations. Taking Apter’s thoughts as my point of departure, I propose that even if common “linguistic contact zones” do not exist, for instance, between Latin America and South Asia, a comparative cultural and literary approach, especially with respect to world writers, would yield relevant results in postcolonial discourses.

In order to elaborate on my argument, I take the example of James Joyce—a global figure who has influenced writers and critics across the world—and explore the following questions: Why is Joyce an important figure in Latin America and South Asia? Can there be a comparative study on Joyce’s reception in India and Latin America? If yes, what could be the relevance of such a study? Have Indian

languages (i.e., Bengali and Hindi) responded differently to Joycean aesthetics? If yes, can there be political reasons behind this difference? Joyce's own position as practitioner of modernist aesthetics complicates his reception in the "periphery" (India and Latin America). What happens when an important writer such as Joyce is received in two linguistically different geographical regions, in former colonies of European powers? For my discussion on India, I look at Raja Rao's novel, *Kanthapura* (1938), which decolonizes and naturalizes English to Kannada (one of the Dravidian languages of India) rhythms. I compare his linguistic innovations with Jorge Luis Borges's dislike for neologisms and word-play in Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). I conclude my article arguing for the advantages of comparative cultural and literary study.

## JOYCE AND INDIA

There is an amusing scene in Vikram Seth's novel, *A Suitable Boy* (1993), where James Joyce becomes an inspiration of a "sudden murderous impulse" for a young university professor who is seized with an incomprehensible desire to kill his senior colleagues for not including Joyce in the curriculum. Dr. Pran, who as a young student had risked his Ph.D. orals and his career at Allahabad University by devoting his time to reading *Ulysses*, stands alone against his seniors to support the inclusion of Joyce in the course called "Modern British literature." The head of the department, Dr. Mishra, who might remind many readers of Mr. Deasy in the "Nestor" chapter of *Ulysses*, thinks that *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* (1939) are "unreadable." To him, that kind of writing "is unhealthy for our students. It encourages them, as it were, in sloppy and ungrammatical writing." And what about the ending of *Ulysses*?, he thinks aloud, "There are young and impressionable women in our courses" and it "is our responsibility to introduce" them "to the higher things in life" (Seth 56–57). Dr. Mishra dismisses his young colleague's ideas and thinks that Dr. Pran has imported his ideas about Joyce from Anglo-American scholarship, and thus reminds him reproachfully that India is an independent country, and that he should be careful on blindly following the "American dissertation mill" (56). He goes on to argue that the faculty is already hard-pressed for teaching twenty-one writers in the time allotted to the course, and if "Joyce goes in what comes out?" is his response to Dr. Pran's earnest plea. "Flecker," bursts out Dr. Pran, to which the head of the department laughs indulgently and says: "Pass not beneath, O Caravan, or pass not singing, Have you heard / That silence where the birds are dead yet sometimes pipeth like a bird?" (57). It is at this moment that Dr. Pran remembers that his head of the department has two more years before he retires. The narrator tells us that a sudden murderous impulse seizes Pran now as "he realized that his hands were trembling slightly. And all this over Joyce, he said to himself" (59).

The humorous episode could be taken as an instance from any faculty's meeting in the world where debates on the inclusion and exclusion of writers in the syllabi take a mock epic stature. But more than that, the episode showcases objections to the reading of Joyce in an Indian university in 1950s, interestingly, three years after India's independence from the British Raj. Clearly, Joyce, for many members in that committee was then not a postcolonial, marginal, and subaltern figure. In fact, he comes out as a dangerous writer who can corrupt India's second official language, English, and the innocent minds of young Indians, especially women. Moreover, the episode also highlights that the senior faculty members of the Department of English at the university in the novel are oblivious to Indian English writers like Mulk Raj Anand or G.V. Desani, who in the 1930s and 1940s had published their major works which subverted the use of the English language, literary genres, and Indian nationalism. It is only a decade or so later that in Joyce becomes the touchstone for many scholars of English-language literature and a staple entity in departments of English departments at Indian universities.

Unlike Eliot and Yeats—who were being translated into Indian languages and had become the muse of at least 600 dissertations and publications by 1988—Joyce's presence, reception, and contact with India has remained intangible (see Sen 207). Indeed, Dr. Pran, after the episode on Joyce wonders why Eliot is such a "sacred cow for us Indian intellectuals?" (61). Although, many important essays by Eliot and poems by Yeats, who were contemporaries of Joyce, were being translated in India, Joyce's works remained outside the intellectual discourse for a long time. Much of this has to do with Eliot's engagement with Sanskrit, and Yeats's close connection with Rabindranath Tagore, whose *Gitanjali* (1912), a collection of poems, bore a preface by Yeats, and had won him the Noble Prize in Literature in 1913, thus making Tagore a national, as well as a world poet. The situation has changed since then. With Salman Rushdie's acceptance of Joycean aesthetics as a primary inspiration for his work and with the *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and *Ulysses* becoming the staple diet of all departments of English in India, it would be a sign of a lack of university education to dismiss Joyce the way the chair of the Department of English did in Seth's novel. In fact, Rushdie satirizes this new found respect for Joyce amongst South Asian academicians in his *The Satanic Verses* (1988), when a protagonist tries to impress by telling that she has read the *Finnegans Wake* and is therefore well versed in sophisticated Western postmodern discourse (261). But even if Joyce's relationship with India has been intangible at first, Joycean aesthetics in India and fragments of Eastern philosophy in his own work beg a fresh approach to this subject because the connection between India and Joyce is difficult to



dismiss after looking at the Buddhist and *Upanishadic* philosophy one can find in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. Further, as essays such as “Home Rule Comes of Age” demonstrate, Joyce was well aware of the political similarities between Ireland and India as England’s colony (Sen 208). To showcase Joyce’s knowledge of India, its religious and mythical complexity, Suzette Henke discusses J.S. Atherton’s speculations in his *Books at the Wake* which propounds that Joyce’s knowledge of Hindu mythology came from Helene Petrovna Blavatsky’s *Isis Unveiled*, her *Mahatma Letters*, and a German text by Heinrich Zimmer entitled *Maya, der Indische Mythos* (see Sen 208). As pointed out by Krishna Sen, in the factual and philosophical haziness of “Madam Blavatsky and the carefully cultivated Orientalist mystique of Zimmer are only too apparent in Stephen’s and Bloom’s figuration of India in *Ulysses*” (208).

Krishna Nand Joshi in his *The West Looks at India* (1969), gives a long list of words from various Indian languages that Joyce uses in *Wake*. Indeed, it is now an axiom that Joyce was a great innovator of words and that he believed in the suggestive power of words which could represent multiple levels of an individual’s consciousness. Joyce’s remark on his multi-linguistic experiments is relevant here. Joyce said he felt he could not “use words in their ordinary connexions. Used that way they do not express how things are ... in the different stages — conscious, then semi-conscious, then unconscious ... when morning comes ... I will give them back their English language” (Joyce qtd. in Joshi 114). Clearly, it is his multilingual experiment that has impressed Indian English writers the most. Although many scholars and critics think that Joyce employed Eastern philosophies the most in his *Wake*, one can find an undercurrent of Indian philosophy in *Ulysses* too. The discourse on metempsychosis that Bloom delivers to Molly in *Ulysses* brings to mind the ancient Hindu and Buddhist theory on rebirth and avatar of the soul. Metempsychosis is an important concept in *Ulysses* especially because the novel records not only personal deaths, but also a national death in the figure of Parnell. Additionally, the dead, the living, and the semi-dead are present in the minds of Bloom and Stephen all the time. In fact, they all come alive in the “Circe” chapter, which belies not only the conventional narrative and generic techniques of a novel, but challenges the concept of time. Further, the numerous references to Hindu gods and goddesses and Bloom’s active imagination—which deludes him into thinking that he is “somewhere in the East” while walking on the streets of Dublin—makes Joyce’s text a microcosm of Indian philosophy.

However, despite using Eastern philosophies liberally, Joyce was satirical of the commercial exploitation of Orientalist fantasy in the British press, as evident

in his review of Aquila Kempster's *The Adventures of Prince Aga Mirza* in Dublin's *Daily Express* (see Sen 209). One could argue that for Joyce Eastern philosophies became a tool to replace the locus that once belonged to the catholic religion. But more than a replacement, Joyce's use and burlesque of catholic and Eastern religions is a reflection of the plague that every modern artist carried in his/her work: the death of god. And, in this godless world, only the artist could become the creator, the destroyer of myths and beliefs, and only he/she through his/her art could provide metempsychosis to salvage humanity. Unfortunately, the godless world of Joyce does not have a tangible presence in India. One would think that the close link formed between India and Ireland in the early nineteenth century with respect to Home Rule League or Annie Besant's connections with the Theosophical Society (see Sen 208) would make Joyce a success in India. This is not the case and Joyce's direct presence has remained spectral in the vernacular literatures of India. For instance, Joyce's *Dubliners* is easily the most translated work of Joyce in the world, but so far only two stories from it have been translated in the Bengali literary magazine, *Desa* in 1946 and 1948 (see Sen 216). Although a small piece on the narrative technique of Joyce's *Ulysses* was also published in a leading Hindi literary journal, *Aajkal* in 1964, it unfortunately does not touch upon the influence of *Ulysses* in Hindi literature. Further, as recently as in 2005 the first complete work of Joyce, *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, was translated into Malayalam, one of the Dravidian languages of India (Joyce, *Yuvāvenna*). No attempts to translate *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* have been made. Indeed, it would be intriguing to ask why Joyce has been such a refracted and marginal figure in Indian languages, even after becoming the golden muse for so many Indian authors writing in English. Could it be that Joyce's use of parodic tone and catholicism make him unreceptive for translations in India? Or, is it that unlike Latin America, where English remains a foreign language thereby necessitating the need to translate US-American, Canadian, Australian, and British authors into Spanish, Indians have become what Thomas Macaulay wanted and declared in articles 33 and 34 in his "Minutes on Education"?

I think it clear that we are not fettered by the Act of Parliament of 1813, that we are not fettered by any pledge expressed or implied, that we are free to employ our funds as we choose, that we ought to employ them in teaching what is best worth knowing, that English is better worth knowing than Sanscrit or Arabic, that the natives are desirous to be taught English, and are not desirous to be taught Sanscrit or Arabic, that neither as the languages of law nor as the languages of religion have the Sanscrit and Arabic any peculiar claim to our encouragement, that it is possible to make natives of this country thoroughly good English

scholars, and that to this end our efforts ought to be directed (Article 32) ... In one point I fully agree with the gentlemen to whose general views I am opposed. I feel with them that it is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern—a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population (Article 34).

Has Macaulay been successful in creating Indian authors who write in English and who have become English in tastes, in opinions, and in intellect, and are now “interpreters” of aesthetics for and of the English speaking world? On the surface, English-speaking South Asians are nothing but Homi Bhabha’s hybridized mimics of the colonizers. However, India’s multilingualism and the dominations of languages such as Hindi and Bengali not only in north India, but also in places like Fiji, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Bangladesh, does not leave us with a simple answer to the powerful presence of English in India. Further, the English used by Indian English authors is hardly the English Macaulay wanted his subjects to learn. I submit that it is difficult to imagine that Joyce would not have left an impression on Indian vernacular authors, especially after considering the fact that Indian vernacular authors are mostly well versed in canonical British and even Continental European literatures. A marked difference between the vernacular literatures of India and Indian writing in English can be seen when it comes to Joycean aesthetics and techniques. The early part of the second half of the twentieth century prompted Indian authors to create protagonists that felt alien to the world around them. This motif of the alienated individual helped the writers in foregrounding the psychological analyses of characters through the technique of interior monologue (see Sen 216). In Bengal, for instance, the exploration of psyche begins with Tagore’s novels and dramas and it is possible, as argued by Sen, that the motivating impulse for creating interior monologue would have come from Joyce and Proust.

The vernacular literatures of India, as argued by Sen, used the stream of consciousness and interior monologue more readily than the early Indian English authors. For example, the use of interior monologue was well used in an experimental novel *Lagna Bilanga* (1961) by an Oriya writer, Gopinath Mohanty. Further, Buddhadeb Bose, one of the early comparatists of India, used stream of consciousness narration in his *Lal Megh* (1934) (*The Red Cloud*) for the first time in a Bengali novel (see Sen 217). The technique of stream of consciousness and

interior monologue was also employed by the Bengali author Gopal Haldar—in *Ekadā* (1939) (*Ekada* 1969), *Arek Din* (1951) (Some Day), and *Anyadin* (1950) (Some Other Day)—in order to capture the anguished memories of three captured freedom fighters sentenced to death by British authorities, where each part is occurring within a single day as in *Ulysses* (Sen 217). Something similar can also be seen in the novel *Suraj ka Satva Ghora* (1952) (*The Sun's Seventh Horse*, 1999) by Hindi author Dharamvir Bharati in which he captures the life story of two men in a mere span of three hours. Contrary to writings in vernacular languages, Indian English novels such as that of G.V. Desani's *All About H. Hatterr* (1948), and Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) exploit counter-discursive techniques as used in *Ulysses* for the subversion of colonial language. Further, Indian English writers often turn to Joyce's texts for generic conventions.

Rushdie says that English has been “conquered” by acculturation: “we can't simply use the language in the way the British did ... it needs remaking for our own purposes” (Rushdie qtd. in Elleke 201). Rushdie's words only echo what Raja Rao has said in his Foreword to his novel, *Kanthapura*, almost three decades before him: “We cannot write like the English. We should not” (vii). Joyce, too, believed that the Irish language, although of the Indo-European family, differs from English as the language spoken in Rome differs from that spoken in Tehran (Sen 215). Indeed, Stephen in the *Portrait* debates on the origin of the word “tundish” and decides that the English words “home,” “ale,” and “Christian” are different on his and his headmaster's lips, who is apparently British: “The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine” (146). Clearly, Joyce was particularly aware of the position of English the language of imperialism. In both *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* Joyce narrates stylistically in a manner that initiates a loss of the grandeur of English as an imperial language to become any other language.

Set in a mythical village of India—which Rao says could be any village in India—*Kanthapura* records the colonial struggle against the British, Indian nationalism, the victory of the Indians over the British, and the pervasive presence of Gandhi through his devout follower, Moorthy, the protagonist of the novel. Here, I submit that the Gandhi of *Kanthapura* could be replaced by the ghostly presence of Parnell in *Ulysses*, who, like Gandhi in *Kanthapura* remains in the narrative without ever being seen. Apart from not following the linear structure of a traditional narrative, the novel abounds in linguistic and stylistic innovations similar to the erasure of the difference Stephen had felt while speaking in English with his headmaster. For instance, the abundant physical objects and mythical allusions Rao uses not only “Indianize” the English language, but also “localize” or “Kannadaize” it. Thus, the blowing of conch, the burning of camphor, the

breaking of coconut before any temple, the offering of bananas and the lightening of lamps before the goddess inflects English linguistic properties in such a manner in which to replace the word “Christian” from Stephen’s mouth with the word “Hindu” would not sound alien. Further, the references to a number of south Indian dishes like *od’e*, *Happalams*, *sajji*, *payasams*, *chitrana* — despite sounding different like the word “ale” on Stephen and his headmaster’s lips — barge into the English language to create a new world. A similar effect results in Rao’s narrative from his speech tunes he gives to English, for example the functional address of “No, no, Bhattare” or in the non-functional address of expressions like “Yes, sister” and the general habit of using the Native words for “brother,” “sister,” “mother,” and “father” in the narrative creates a “home,” which would “other” the headmaster of the *Portrait*. But it is just not English that is subverted in the novel. Rao’s Foreword to the novel advocates subversion of only the colonizer’s language and to a casual reader the novel may seem to be a weapon of protest against the colonial center — and in this case it is England. Nevertheless, the Foreword, as well as the novel, address complex language issues connected with the power structures that go beyond Rushdie’s notion of “the empire writing back”: “English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up—like Sanskrit or Persian was before—but not of our emotional make-up” (vii). By associating English with Sanskrit and Farsi, Rao is emphasizing the hegemony of three past empires in India, and by dividing the function of language in “intellectual” and “emotional” categories, he is preparing his readers for the linguistic subversion he performs in the novel, where this dichotomy is broken.

The campaign for the employment of a local language in *Kanthapura* accomplishes a dual purpose for Rao: not only is he able to explore the potential of a “Kannada English,” but presents it as a measure against the growing hegemony of Hindi (at the time of the writing of the novel soon to become the national language of independent India). In many ways, the linguistic innovations in *Kanthapura* are comparable with those of Latin American authors such as José María Arguedas and Juan Rulfo, who challenged their readers with a Spanish which Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari would say contains a “high coefficient” of a minor/indigenous language. *Kanthapura* has popular Kannada phrases translated to English without changing any words. For instance the phrase, “make our stomachs burn” is used instead of “heartache” or “heartburn.” There are also numerous South Indian rural expressions in the novel, for example, Subba Chetty calls to his bulls “Ho” and “H’e-H’e” (1) or when Suranna and Rangappa call Bhatta every morning before his house: “H’e Bhattar’e, are you up? Time to go to the river, h’e !” (23), or when Lakkamma uses the same expression when she sees a snake: “H’e, H’e,

H'e, a snake!, a huge snake! A cobra!" (47). Yet another case of typical south Indian expression is used when Ramayya sees the cobra while passing through jungle and he cries "Ayyo ... Ayyoo" (49). Then, there are certain culture specific phrases translated to English, intelligible to a foreign reader and also to an Indian not from the south of India. For instance, the expression "before the cock has time to crow three times," which in Kannada means that the action was done speedily or the phrase "let them set fire to their dhoti and sari and die" (4) meaning that let them destroy themselves demands local knowledge. Sometimes there are Sanskrit and Kannada expressions and words not translated in the novel. The untranslated words have a functional value in postcolonial literature (see, e.g., Brahms): they signify certain cultural experiences or objects or rituals which can never be reproduced accurately in a foreign language and this is the case of India where regional languages can be as foreign to Indians as French could be to a Russian. Thus, words like *thothi*, *maya*, *vada*, *jamadar*, *sahib*, *charka*, *sravan*, *bhajans*, *thirtham*, *lathi*, *prayaschitta*, *dasarahavu*, *thoo!thoo!thoo!*, *mandap*, *dharma sastras*, *vedanta*, *sutras*, *gaas*, assist in domestication of English by drawing it closer to the new cultural environment while it excludes other Indians or Indian languages from the discourse.

Rao is not dissociating English at just the lexical and syntactical level: he is creating a whole new language for a community. By clothing the language with myths, local beliefs, religious rituals, social practices, a cultural outlook, and superstitions, Rao advances in "foreignizing" English. Thus, we are told in the novel that the plantation workers would not have allopathic medicines but would hang "a three piece bit and a little rice and an areca nut" (52) on the roof to get rid of fever. Superstitions like "why, my right eye winks, we shall have a grand harvest" (110) or certain community specific phrases like "she will come home in a few week's time" (22), a reference to a young girl about to have puberty or even bidding farewell: "and they get a coconut and betel-leaf goodbye" are new to English, as well as other north Indian languages. Also, Rao sometimes uses a corresponding Kannada proverb in lieu of an English proverb or an idiom when the English one could have conveyed adequately the meaning. For instance, the proverb, "crow-and-sparrow story" (15) is used instead of "cock and sparrow story" or "every squirrel has his day" in place of "every dog has his day" (77). In the first case the "crow and sparrow" story is famous parable in India. Without any changes Rao has been able to convey his thought to both audiences, English and Kannada. In the second case, however, a squirrel has been used as a substitute for a dog, which is a stretch for anyone who does not speak Kannada.

The linguistic innovations in the novel are ample and could be argued to have been a result of Rao's European connections: Rao wrote the novel in France and

writes in his Foreword that “we cannot write only as Indians” (vii). Rao says about himself that “a south Indian Brahmin, nineteen, spoon-fed on English, with just enough Sanskrit to know I knew so little, with an indiscreet education in Kannada, my mother tongue, the French literary scene overpowering me. If I wanted to write, the problem was, what should be the appropriate language of expression, and what my structural model” (“Entering the Literary” 537–8). In other words, a man educated in four languages tries to give expression to his thoughts in his own idiom. Just as the language in Joyce’s textual world is fluid, free of syntactical prisons, and often interspersed with many other languages of the world, Rao’s text demands constant active participation from readers in understanding polyglottism, heteroglossia, and neologisms captured in the text. Neologism, heteroglossia, polyglottism, and word play, however, can also be “annoying” to some writers or readers.

## JOYCE AND LATIN AMERICA

I began my discussion about Joyce’s journey in India by referring to a humorous scene from a faculty meeting at a university in India, where a junior colleague is ready to kill his head of the department for not including Joyce in the curriculum. The fictional murderous impulse continues in Latin America, while this time it is not for including Joyce in the syllabus but to kill him and his encyclopedic readers. Dr. Yu Tsun, a Chinese professor who teaches English in England kills Dr. Albert in Borges’s “The Garden of Forking Paths” for the conveying to the Germans the name of the city that was to be attacked. But before being shot by Dr. Yu Tsun, Stephen Albert reveals to him that he has finally solved the labyrinth that Ts’ui Pên created in his unfinished novel. Interestingly, on his way to Albert’s house, Tsun was thinking about the genius of Ts’ui Pên’s artistry in creating an intricate novel, where all men had lost their way. We cannot overlook at Borges’s satire on Ts’ui Pên and Joyce’s common intention in keeping readers astray from arriving at any conclusive interpretation. Further, the first name of Dr. Albert is the first name of Dedalus in *Portrait* and *Ulysses* and we can assume that Borges was mocking Stephen Deadlus, whom Leopold Bloom imagined of becoming an inspiring professor in *Ulysses*.

Borges’s literary relationship with Joyce is to a great extent an example of what I term the “Bloomdian complex,” where a young author (generally the son) harbors the intentions of killing his admired author (generally the father) in order to replace him. A lover of short fiction, who declared the death of the novel, Borges was never able to reconcile his love-hate relationship with Joyce (see Salgado, *From Modernism* 33–47). In fact, the death of Funes in “Funes the Memorious” is a strong statement by Borges on the death of an ideal reader of Ulyssean-like novels, who must have an encyclopedic memory to understand a



meta-text like *Ulysses* or *Wake*. In fact, as pointed out by César Augusto Salgado in his “Barroco Joyce: Jorge Luis Borges’s and José Lezama Lims’s Antagonistic Readings,” Borges pictures *Ulysses* as the last phase in the dissolution of the genre: “Isn’t *Ulysses*—with its charts, itineraries, and precisions—the splendid death rattle of an entire genre?” (65). However, Borges was not always anti-Joycean with regard to aesthetics (see, e.g., Novillo-Corvalán). While writing on *Ulysses* in his “El Ulises de Joyce” (1925), the twenty-six years old Borges had proudly declared: “I am the first traveler from the Hispanic world to set foot upon the shores of *Ulysses* ... I will speak of it with the license my admiration lends me and the murky intensity of those ancient explorers who described lands new to their nomadic amazement and whose stories about the Amazons and the city of the Caesars combined truth and fantasy” (“Joyce’s *Ulysses*” 12) (“Soy el primer aventurero hispánico que ha arribado al libro de Joyce ... Hablaré de él con la licencia que mi admiración me confiere y con la vaga intensidad que hubo en los viajadores antiguos, el describir la tierra que era nueva frente a su asombro errante y en cuyos relatos se aunaron lo fabuloso y lo verídico, el decurso del Amazonas y la Ciudad de los Césares” (3).

Although by using the marine metaphor Borges was able to attach his name permanently to *Ulysses* in Latin America, even when he was not the first one to write on it, it was Antonio Marichalar who had first published an article on *Ulysses* in 1924 in *Revista de Occidente* (see Pérez Simón 122). But his initial enthusiasm was short lived and Borges started criticizing neologisms, word-play, and the high order of signification and language game in Joyce’s works. Later, in his “Course in English Literature” Borges described *Ulysses* as a frustrated attempt to “replace its lack of unity for a system of laborious and useless symmetries” (Pérez Simón 126). A similar condemnation is repeated in an interview that Borges gave to Richard Burgin, published in *Conversations with Jorge Luis Borges* (1969), where he retorts: “Well, by the time it is read through, you know thousands and thousands of circumstances about the characters, but you don’t know them ... you know all the book they read ... but you don’t really know them. It’s as if Joyce had gone over them with a microscope or a magnifying glass” (Burgin 36). But why did Borges become disgruntled with Joyce’s novels? Did Joyce’s ability to twist and invent language seem a monstrous talent to Borges that he secretly wished for? Or, was Borges uncomfortable with Joyce’s treatment of sexuality and other tabooed subjects in his novel. Interestingly, Borges defends censorship while mentioning Joyce:

I know that everyone opposes the idea of censorship of literary works: in my case, I believe the censorship can be justified, when executed with probity and not used to conceal persecutions of personal, racial, or political nature ... A skillful writer is

able to say without infringing good manners and conventions of his time ... It will be said that one thing is Joaquín Belda's pornography (which I do not remember having read) and another, James Joyce's occasional scatology, whose historic and aesthetic values nobody can deny. But the dangers of literature are in direct proportion with the talent of its authors. To affirm that nobody has the right to modify Joyce's works, and that every modification or suppression is a sacrilegious mutation, is a mere argument of authority ... As for me, I suspect that all work is a draft and that modifications, even made by a magistrate, may be beneficial (Borges qtd. in Pérez Simón 130–31).

Andrés Pérez Simón interprets Borges's dislike of *Ulysses* as personal. In fact, in the prologue to his book, *The Conspirators*, Borges mentions, a few months before his death that "theories can be admirable encouragements ... but at the same time can engender monsters or museum pieces ... We just have to remember James Joyce's interior monologue" (32–3). Despite Borges's antagonism with Joycean aesthetics Gerald Martin argues that a number of writers in twentieth-century Latin America saw in Joyce a potential to narrate the colonial and postcolonial experiences of their nations in the genre of novel. Martin considers Latin American boom and post-boom writers as practicing Joycean aesthetics in their novels, but Martin asks a relevant question: "Is 'Joyce' something that is bound to happen to each or to most cultures anyway at a given moment of technocratic-capitalist development, or did Latin America simply imitate an original model some forty years too late, when the conditions for such assimilation were finally favorable?" (140). Indeed, the works of writers like, Alejo Carpentier, Miguel Angel Asturias, and José Lezama Lima cannot be called a blind imitation of Joycean aesthetics; instead, they can be appreciated by a "new type of reader" (Salgado 80). With regard to Martin's question and my above discussion of Joyce and India, even if "Joyce" is something that is bound to happen to all literary traditions at a particular time in history, the "Joyce" of Indian writings in English will differ from the "Joyce" of writings done in other Indian languages. Further, to build upon Martin's question, what could be the point of recording several "Joyces" of/ in different cultures?

## WORLD LITERATURES AND GLOBAL WRITERS

In the beginning of my article I propose that even if common "linguistic contact zones" do not exist, as for instance between Latin America and South Asia, a comparative approach, especially with respect to world writers would yield beneficiary results in postcolonial discourses. David Damrosch, in "World Literature in a Postcanonical, Hypercanonical Age," writes that

So, it's said, we rely on Butler, Foucault, Said, and Spivak to provide the common basis for conversations formerly underwritten by a common fund of knowledge of Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Proust, and Joyce. But *have* these old-economy authors

really dropped by the wayside? Quite the contrary: they are more discussed than ever, and they continue to be more strongly represented in survey anthologies than all but a very few of the new discoveries of recent decades. Like the Lexus, the high-end author has his (much more rarely, her) market share by adding value from the postcanonical trends: the James Joyce who used to be a central figure in the study of European modernism now inspires ambitious collection of articles with titles like *Semicolonial Joyce* and *Transnational Joyce*. Undeniably, comparatists today are giving more and more attention to “various contestatory, subaltern or, marginal perspectives,” as the Bernheimer committee hoped we would, yet these perspectives are applied as readily to the major works of the “old” cannon as to the emergent works of the postcanon. (44–45)

Damrosch’s concerns remind us of the scene from Seth’s novel where the exclusion of Joyce from the syllabus had inspired a “murderous impulse” and had thrown the faculty members of the university in a dilemma. In an age where literary canons are being contested from within and outside national traditions, one wonders about the benefits of reading repeatedly “established” and “iconic” writers like Joyce. Would it not be equally important to read some other authors instead of Joyce? To this Damrosch suggests to take Joyce as a central modernist figure and that scholars can work on authors that Joyce knew well, such as Ibsen, and authors that Joyce did not know such as Tagore and Higuchi Ichiyo. Certainly, such contrapuntal reading of texts can expand our ideas of aesthetics and open doors to unforeseen results in new knowledge. Moreover, such a reading would introduce us to authors who are located beyond the common “linguistic contact zones,” where the Hispanic Asturias could be read with the Bengali Bibhutibhushon Bondopaddhae or Indian English author Rao with Borges, either via Joyce or not. This would further us in going beyond the usual debates on dichotomized comparisons between authors from the “old” and the “new” counter canon of categories of colonial “self” and the “other.” Such contrapuntal reading also gives us the hope of including authors in languages often ignored, thus encouraging us to go beyond Deleuze’s and Guattari’s concept of “minor literature” in a “major language.”

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# Abject Spaces and the Hinterland in Bolaño's Work

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Stacey Balkan

**Abstract:** In her article “Abject Spaces and the Hinterland in Bolaño’s Work” Stacey Balkan discusses magical realism, the trope of the return (to a precolonial utopia), and the use of the quixotic in Bolaño’s texts. Bolaño’s signatures are “visceral realism” and global contexts which represent a transnational imaginary over and against the precolonial. The ambiguous borderlands emphasized in “Macondo” literature are herein replaced by a new epistemological horizon. The border is no longer a fixed point, but is, instead, a shifting hinterland that separates the objective real from the subjective imaginary, an imaginative horizon over and against a specific geopolitical mapping. More amorphous than its previous incarnation, Bolaño’s transnational Latin American borderland is a polycentric spatial matrix that resists normative categorization because it relies on new conceptions of geography and identity. Balkan postulates that a focal point in Bolaño’s texts functions as a commentary both on traditional notions of colonialism and globality and on their representations in the Latin American literary canon.

## INTRODUCTION

If “world literature” implies a mode of circulation (see Damrosch)—read often by comparatists as an ordered system conceived within a global paradigm that insists on the centrality of Anglophone scholarship and the alterity of the non-English speaking Other—it follows that it likewise implies a specifically colonial cartography that posits an educated and civilized urban space (i.e., Angel Rama’s “lettered city”) against a rural hinterland characterized by premodern savagery or the non-English speaking other. This is why David Damrosch in *What is World Literature?* offers that we need a “phenomenology” of the work rather than an absolute “ontology of the work of art” owing to the multiple ways that works “manifest” in different global contexts (6). Lacking a sufficiently reasoned phenomenology, the corpus of Latin American literary theory has long suffered from the colonial (and later postcolonial) model that does indeed work off of a specific ontology that derives from such “local literary values” as those espoused by the Anglophone university (Damrosch 4). Thus, world literature as a category herein makes the same assumptions (and attendant mistakes) of postcolonialist approaches to Latin American fiction that offer a model of, e.g., post-independent urban spaces as fixed in time — atemporal spaces still delimited by the sixteenth

century engineers who sought to impose a specifically Spanish aesthetic on a newly colonized South American continent—consequently reading them as “tragic coda” rather than a viable present (Gallo 8). Coloniality rather than globality, its implied hierarchies and so on, is ostensibly the lens through which readers come to understand the experiences of persons living in an imagined “Macondo”—Gabriel García Márquez’s Quixotic utopia—rather than a post-contemporary McOndo—Roberto Bolaño’s urban real. Alternatively, a transnational or comparative cultural studies approach to Latin American literature and culture emphasize the interstices of the urban center and the rural periphery where (pluralized) translocal communities are conceived as a consequence of the geopolitical exigencies of a post-contemporary Latin America. The very notion of the translocal implies a plurality that is lacking in conventional postcolonial discourse—the colonizer/colonized polemic that has produced readings of Latin America that imagine the whole of the South American continent as a rural Macondo. The theoretical move toward an understanding of a specifically urban McOndo is a departure from such polemical thinking and the interdisciplinary nature of this pursuit depending as it does on a study of economic and social policy in addition to Latin America’s cultural productions and thus adheres to the theoretical framework of comparative cultural studies (see, e.g., Tötösy de Zepetnek; McClennen and Fitz).

McOndo literatures are especially implicated in comparative cultural studies: these narratives demonstrate the obvious need to consider regional literatures in their appropriate context and, more to the point, novels like Roberto Bolaño’s *2666* emphasize the effects of corporate colonialism on indigenous populations, thus meeting the ideological imperative of the discipline as well. The McOndo aesthetic is specifically ideological insofar as it calls for a recognition of the effects of global capitalism for a newly conceived *mestizaje* working in the *maquiladoras* of, e.g., Mexico City—the setting for Roberto Bolaño’s *2666* and *Amulet*. Toward that end, Bolaño’s novels—works that emphasize the pluralized hinterland of a newly conceived McOndo—allow for a comparative understanding of indigenous persons. And, in response to Damrosch’s call for a phenomenological understanding of cultures and persons, Bolaño’s signature “visceral realism”—the palpable moments of violence, and the centrality of the abject spaces too often relegated to the periphery—allows for a departure not only from the universalizing rhetoric of “world literature,” but likewise from the semiotic rhetoric of post-structuralist criticism.

### ABJECTION IN *2666* AND *AMULET*

The notorious borderlands—an often ambiguous geopolitical interstice—has been fodder for tomes of criticism about Latin American fiction that scrutinize this site as an analogue for the partition of pre-colonial landscapes decimated long ago. These colonial borders not only partitioned Macondo—a common referent for that mythical site of pre-colonial innocence that served as the setting for Gabriel



García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*—they severed indigenous history. As a means of hinging disparate points of the colonial superstructure, these often dangerous lines of demarcation dissolved the pre-colonial spatial matrix of Macondo and imposed a European conception of order. Centuries later, these borderlands, now more ambiguous as the post-colonial nation-state becomes the transnational global colony, represent a new epistemological horizon. The border is no longer a fixed point, but is, instead, a shifting hinterland that separates the objective real from the subjective imaginary (see Crapanzano 14). This is because the nature of the transnational political landscape is shifting likewise in relation to capital markets and the consequences of those markets for formerly local (now translocal) groups of persons. More amorphous than its previous incarnation, these transnational Latin American borderlands are a polycentric spatial matrix which resists normative categorization because the notion relies on new conceptions of geography and identity. This strange hinterland is the focal point of a correlative movement in transnational Latin American fiction wherein the hybrid *mestiza*, as dynamic and multivocal, displaces the pervasive conception of *mestizaje* as a site of internal conflict and consequent stasis.

Bolaño's novels *2666* and *Amulet* centralize the translocal Other in a reconfigured geopolitical landscape. His protagonists are the decolonized (or more precisely deterritorialized) *mestiza* subjects living in a nation no longer delimited by colonial cartography or its attendant logic and rhetoric (i.e., a hierarchical conception of society that relies upon the hegemony of empire at its center) and the alterity of the subaltern (i.e., *los mestizos*, those persons of mixed colonial and native ancestry occupying its margins). Such outmoded approaches to postcolonial Mexico do little more than propagate the perception of indigenous persons as *a priori* pre-colonial. Conversely, novels like Bolaño's establish new conventions for the postmodern Latin American novel. They replace magical realism, the trope of the return (to a precolonial utopia), and the use of the quixotic (or the paradigmatic Quijote figure, Romantic, utopian, and magical) with narrative strategies that are relevant to and representative of the transnational Latin American city: multivocal and fluid conceptions of *mestizaje*; visceral realism (Bolaño's signature recapitulation of the urban real); hyperreal violence; and global contexts that represent a transnational imaginary rather than a precolonial (read local) village. However, while Bolaño has been criticized of merely recontextualizing Macondo in the twentieth century and romanticizing Latin America for a global audience, *2666* neither romanticizes Latin America nor does it sustain the hemispheric polemic that offers readers a comfortable sense of superiority. On the contrary, it undercuts this polemic by subverting colonial conceptions of order and by collapsing the objective distance between the reader and the text with palpable moments of violence.

Bolaño creates *sui generis* work which imbue the Latin American hinterlands with the abject horrors of “stipulated modernity,” the mutilated corpses of a post-industrial *indigenismo*, the largely indigenous population of Central and South America sacrificed on the altar of globalization (see Crapanzano 13). Bolaño’s Mexico City is a “vast expanse of putrefaction ... a sampler of abject styles ... a baroque revelry full of contrasts,” it is the hinterland beyond our ordered imaginations (see Guillermoprieto 295; Gallo 51–52). In his repulsive descriptions of this site and its residents, Bolaño dissolves the objective distance between reader and text and any pretense of objective realism by disrupting the reader’s imaginative resistance, something that magic never achieved. On the contrary, magical realism (while supremely effective in satirizing such figures as *conquistador* Cortés and his minions) relies on the suspension of the reader’s disbelief to sustain the very binary that novels like *2666* ultimately shatter epistemologically: “magical realism, as the organizing principle of ethnofiction, is shattered because it is revealed to be inexorably dependent upon the subordination of indigenous cultures to [the] Western-hegemonic machine of ... modernization” (Moreiras 202). The “extreme cultural nostalgia” implied in the utopian fantasies of the magical realists “hinders our ability to make sense of the present”: it valorizes an ancient past turning the present into a “tragic coda” rather than a living culture (Gallo 8). Consequently, McOndo—the postmodern version of the long forgotten Macondo—requires a different literary artifice and that corresponds with a different geographic and political configuration of culture and power. The pervasive search (in Macondo literature) for an impossible utopia—a “temporal endeavor rather than a spatial one” that sought the restoration of a precolonial utopia rather than the assertion of postcolonial sociopolitical autonomy—is the hallmark of a mid-twentieth century Latin America that sought such quixotic restorations vis-à-vis romantic Marxist insurgencies that were poised against the august global fascism(s) of the twentieth century (see Santiso 2). Departing from what he sees as a magical white-washing of Latin American history, Bolaño’s terrifying depiction of the siege of Mexico City offers an image of a Latin America “in ruins.” The “temporal endeavor” to restore a precolonial (read precapitalist) utopia seems absurd given the exigencies of global capitalism, and so Bolaño resists the Macondo narrative of return opting instead for a new “epistemological horizon” (Mignolo and Tlostanova 132).

Employing the abject as artifice and situating it in a reconfigured (read transnational) Mexico City, Bolaño is able to articulate a new Latin American imaginary in a way that neither relies on such utopian fantasies nor delimits the *mestiza* in terms of the civilized/uncivilized polemic that reduces her to the sum of her myriad colonized identities. He subverts the colonial order of Mexico City by centralizing the hinterland—that horizon just beyond our imaginations—and

subjecting his readers to the basest forms of human savagery that lie there: “it is [the hinterland] that gives us an edge, at times wrenching and painful, at times relieving and pleasurable, on the here and now in all its viscous immediacy; and it allows us to escape” ... the strictures of post-colonialist discourse that depend upon the relentless tropes of exile, diaspora, and displacement that reduce visceral pain to romantic melancholia (Crapanzano 14). *2666* is an encyclopedic novel comprised of five interwoven tales (novellas actually) sutured by the pervasive theme of corporate imperialism and the consequent genocide in Juarez. The novel begins with “the part about the critics,” referring to the four European academics in search of the reclusive “Archimboldi”—the great novelist, whose nazi past finds him hiding, where else, in Latin America. The following two novellas chronicle the trajectory of the crimes: the city of Santa Teresa and the university in its center (a fictional portrait of Mexico City and the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico [UNAM]), the tale of Amalfitano—the aging professor unaffected by the Europhilia of his more rank countryman, aptly named “Puerco”—and Amalfitano’s daughter Rosa, whose perspective is the ostensible voice of the novel. What follows then (in the fourth novella) is an excruciating series of crime scenes in which the protagonists are permutations of the women of Juarez: “in an alley in the center of the city, some garbagemen found another dead woman. She was about thirty and dressed in a black skirt and low-cut white blouse. She had been stabbed to death, although contusions from multiple blows were visible about her face and abdomen ... In October ... the body of another woman was found in the desert...in an advanced state of decomposition ... an employee of Hipermercado Del Norte ... the next woman was found near the highway ... that same month, the partially charred body of Silvana Rivez Arjana was found in a vacant lot” (*2666* 355, 411, 425).

Less violent than *2666*, *Amulet* is no less disturbing in its use of the abject. The protagonist begins this “horror” story while trapped in a bathroom stall at UNAM in 1968 during the infamous massacre at Tlatelolco. Locked in the stall, she offers a series of incoherent images of her past, of Mexico’s past, of the poets—Octavio Paz, Pedro Garfias, etc.—who chronicled its history. Replacing the mutilated body with a soiled toilet (and a woman defecating), Bolaño undermines the distance between reader and narrator through repulsion. In *Amulet*, as in *2666*, Mexico City is characterized by filth and a pervasive sense of disorder: the university as a symbol of modern order is being destroyed and the would-be translocal Other is its ostensible savior. The city’s “slightly humid air conjured up unstable geometries, solitudes, schizophrenia, and butchery;” and poised against this “schizophrenia” and “butchery” was the “hierarchical” space of the university under siege by a set of revolutionaries, who represent the rather

paradoxical institutionalization of the Socialist revolution and the cooptation of Marxism by the neocolonial and thoroughly corrupt Mexican government (*Amulet* 67). The massacre at Tlatelolco was symbolic indeed: hundreds of students were murdered by a militia that claimed to advocate freedom from imperialism and it is this striking symbol of the interstice between revolutionary Mexico City and transnational (and corporate) Mexico in the background throughout the novel. It is through the merciless images of the crumbling university and its attendant sense of modern order on the one hand, and the descriptions of the narrator's rank body as well as moments of extreme violence on the other the reader comes to understand the space of Mexico City as a deterritorialized site of chaos. And, in positing the reader in the stall with Auxilio Lacouture (the novel's unreliable narrator), she/he likewise loses any sense of objectivity or order.

The ultimate dissolution of the reader's objectivity vis-à-vis successive depictions of horror that disrupt his/her ability to mediate cognitively the subject matter is a tactic that Bolaño employs in both novels to convey the decolonized condition of the transnational *mestiza* over and against the postcolonial condition of the global *india* (i.e., the new "metropolitan migrant") over and against the romanticized *zapatista*. In disrupting cognition, Bolaño disrupts the *de facto* interpretative stance that situates the reader's understanding of persons and cultures within the "imperial/colonial organization of society" (Mignolo and Tlostanova 132). The "abject simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes" the reader who is left to create meaning anew (Kristeva 5). Rather than alterity as an essential condition of the *mestiza* Other who lives on the margin of an otherwise dynamic modern state, new conceptions of *mestiza* identity are herein made possible by the centrality of her person (and of her pain) in a new transnational conception of order. If coloniality is indeed the ideological state apparatus of modernity—a co-requisite of sorts—then it follows that the "epistemic and affective de-linking" of knowledge and being "from the imperial/colonial organization of society" is indeed a prerequisite to the assertion of a transnational subjectivity that neither depends upon nor recalls a precolonial (or pre-modern) past (Mignolo and Tlostanova 132). Bolaño achieves this in several ways through the centrality of violence in his narrative(s). The ravaged borderlands of *2666* are resituated in the narrator's perspective and centralize the "problem" by shifting it from the margin to the center as a means of departing from normative postcolonial narratives. Instead, Bolaño asserts a kind of new global placement where the *mestiza* is placed in one of multiple centers in a deterritorialized (and polycentric) transnational imaginary. Through means of narrative displacement and the centrality of the *mestiza's* experience, a new order is indeed conceived: "instead of maintaining the divide between the known object and the knowing subject, the decolonial

approach allows for a specific epistemic, political and ethical instrument for transforming the world by transforming the way people see it, feel it and act in it” (Mignolo and Tlostanova 131).

The excessive violence the reader is exposed to reveals the real differences between the experience of the transnational *mestiza* and the postcolonial *india*: “a wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not signify death” (Kristeva 3). The use of the physical body in both novels functions as a means of undermining post-structuralist attempts to reduce the real lived experiences of persons to mere symbols: the physical body herein “offers an escape from the entrapments of poststructural thought ... because it resists, in the phenomenological sense, symbolism and rhetoric” (Crapanzano 69–71). The mutilated body inscribed with the violence of colonialism and the savagery of its agents dissolves the formidable binary of colonizer/colonized that makes an understanding of decolonial logic impossible. Decoloniality is herein used to refer to the condition of a transnational Latin American imaginary that is founded upon several presumptions that defy colonial logic: a polycentric global social order rather than a hierarchical empire, a pluralized subject, and a multivocal conception of modernity and culture. It undermines the neat constructions of subject and object, civility and savagery, colonial and postcolonial. In Bolaño’s imagined hinterland—the Sonoran desert in his novel *2666*, for example—the reader encounters successive instantiations of this broken *mestiza* body inscribed with the conflicting narratives of colonialism and globalization: the bodies are found alongside the aforementioned *maquiladoras* and it is implied that these displaced *indias* are former employees. In this sense, the *maquiladora* is not only a symbol of corporate imperialism, it invokes the notion of Mexico City as an ethnoscape, a “landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers” characterized both by postmodern abjection and the disintegration of a prosperous global market (Appadurai 33).

Protagonists like Rosa Amalfitano in *2666* and Auxilio Lacourture in *Amulet* live in Mexico City in a state of suspended decoloniality, in a “baroque revelry.” Its dwindling desert, the refuse-strewn creeks flowing alongside the fictional Santa Teresa and the desolate bathroom in which Auxilio is trapped are portraits of a Latin America in transition. Accordingly, Bolaño replaces the trope of the liberated *india* with the tale of a new translocal Other. The visceral violence in both novels is not romantic innuendo, but is, instead, a realistic portrait of post-revolutionary Mexico. Capitalism, having vanquished Marxism, finally bears its teeth and the *maquiladoras* in the novel are literally consuming the citizens of the

city: “in May, a dead woman was found in a dump between Colonia Las Flores and the General Sepulveda industrial park. In the complex stood the buildings of four *maquiladoras* where household appliances were assembled. The electric towers that supplied power to the *maquiladoras* were new and painted silver” (2666 358).

If we understand successive instances of violence in postmodern Latin American fiction as case studies in abjection and the dissolution of colonialism, we can understand novels like *2666* as the correlative narration of the august (transnational) *mestiza* born at the site of abjection and the moment of dissolution. Here, the body as a “site of inscription” is a counterbalance to the *sine qua non* of the postcolonial image of the depraved subaltern object at the mercy of first world hegemony. Unidentifiable in its grotesque presentation, the mutilated body cannot be situated nationally, culturally, or historically, and it functions metonymically throughout the novel by invoking new conceptions of order each time the reader encounters it. The temporal logic of coloniality and the normative parameters of its symbolic discourse rely on a specific imaginative stance that is disabled by this grotesque image. As readers, we are first repulsed and then estranged. It is appropriate to note that South Asian authors have employed similar means of cognitive mediation—e.g., Salman Rushdie or Rohinton Mistry—in their depictions of post-independence India. However, their protagonists for the most part are linked with a pre-colonial utopia and thus are categorized as post-colonial phenomena. Bolaño’s protagonists, on the other hand, cannot return because these hybrid constructions simply did not exist before colonialism. Unlike Rushdie’s use of the *Mahabharata* as a means of recontextualizing his characters in a specifically Indian place, Bolaño situates his characters in a new conception of Latin America, Mexico City in *2666* and in *Amulet*, “a city where memory cannot be recharged” (Celorio 52). The protagonists of these novels are *sui generis* as the texts themselves and thus Bolaño’s *mestizas* are perhaps not *mestizas* at all, but prototypes of what a transnational, deterritorialized Other might actually look like. He gives us “a brilliant model of how ethnography in a deterritorialized world might handle the problems of ‘character’ and ‘actor,’ for he shows how self-fabrication actually proceeds in a world of types and typification ... and [he] retains the tension between global and local” without privileging either in the relationship between characters (Appadurai 208). Unlike the image of a fixed homogeneous site experiencing a kind of “decolonial malaise,” Santa Teresa is a dynamic site wherein the heterogeneous communities of the transnational subaltern collide constantly: the colonizer has left, and so too have the parameters of the former colony been obliterated (see Gilroy 89–91). He does not “reproduce

the logic of coloniality,” but, instead, annihilates both its agents and its victims, reading more like the stuff of Shakespearean tragedy than normative postcolonial prose (see Mignolo and Tlostanova 137).

Bolaño’s novels effect the dual benefit of negating the quixotic notion of a fixed homeland—the basis for earlier approaches to Latin American fiction that were taken up by theorists like Angel Rama who argued for the notion of a transculturated subject living in exile—a product of successive diasporas. Rama’s concept of transculturation falters because it relies on a revolution (or return) to a precolonial utopia that no longer exists. On the contrary, for Bolaño, the “homeland is partly invented, existing only in the imagination of deterritorialized groups” (Appadurai 193). He creates a transnational “*indigenismo* ... [which] does not indulge in fantasies of utopian restorations” but instead lives in the muck and mire of the post-industrial wasteland of a crumbling modernity (José Carlos Mariategui qtd. in Young 199). In *Amulet*, we watch the protagonist disintegrate slowly in a bathroom stall literally dissolving into her own excrement, and in *2666* the modern savages are hacked to death in brutal compositions that use the abject metonymically to displace the oft sensationalized horrors of colonization (*Amulet* 29). Bolaño locates his postmodern savages in a newly reconfigured urban space: spurning the opportunity to be an academic like her father, Rosa Amalfitano in *2666* instead opts to live the life of a whore in an effort to “fit in” the translocal community of misfits—drug dealers, pimps, and other wayward criminals—with no discernible origin. The dark, often vacant, seedy backdrops in *2666* seem to offer the only tangible bridge between the civilizing force of the university in Santa Teresa and the gritty streets of Mexico City. And the mutilated body in the desert functions as an analogue for the urban depravity of Santa Teresa, thus collapsing both narratives into a sustained commentary on globalization (i.e., postmodern colonialism). With meticulous detail, Bolaño offers up images of this exotic body in numerous crime scenes and a host of snuff films that are presumably shot by the same assailants. In counterpoising Rosa Amalfitano against the mutilated “whores” in the desert, Bolaño collapses the space between the postmodern subject and the savage object.

In *Amulet*, Bolaño’s protagonist Auxilio Lacouture is neither subject nor object: she lives among the “subway poets,” an international underclass who move about in the dark bars and underground clubs of Mexico City. An exile and possible refugee, Auxilio lives first as a housekeeper for Pedro Garfías—one of myriad greats of Mexican (and otherwise Latin American) poetry that Bolaño uses throughout the novel as referents for the Macondo generation—and eventually, in a succession of rooftop apartments, all portraits of filth and desperation. Bolaño’s descriptions of Auxilio’s toothless face, her scent, and her soiled clothing add



to the image of this transnational vagrant, who will eventually get locked in a bathroom stall while Mexico City is brought to its knees. The use of the bathroom as a setting is particularly interesting in the scope of decoloniality as it relates to a transnational *mestiza* consciousness: the bathroom is a site of filth, a place where civilized subjects are reduced to savagery. In *Amulet*, it is the bathroom where the protagonist is ostensibly born. Herein, alterity as an essential condition of the subaltern *mestiza* is negated by the centrality of the *mestiza* in a new conception of order that is delimited by the logic of decoloniality and made possible by the destruction of the colonial condition. This is illustrated in the novel by siege of the university and in Mexican history by the massacre at Tlatelolco. Auxilio, a woman whose genesis defies colonial logic—spatially and, more to the point, temporally—becomes not only the “mother of Mexican poetry,” but the matriarch in a new social/political order. She is, furthermore, the voice of the “lost children” of Latin America, and, perhaps appropriately, she narrates her strange cosmogony and that of her new nation in a bathroom stall half-clothed and in a state of suspended fear.

While a massacre ensues around her, Auxilio enters into a sustained hallucination and begins to paint the history of the Latin American martyrs—the “lost children” murdered in the name of imperialism—on the wall beyond the toilet. The castrating objectivity of the postcolonial novelist is thus undermined by an excessively subjective glimpse into the plight of the translocal *mestiza*, that rotting *Lumpenproletariat* be it Auxilio, Rosa, or the countless corpses in the desert of 2666. Auxilio’s experience is a “complex nesting of imaginative appropriations” that lay the foundation for the conception of a specifically transnational *mestiza* and a specifically transnational novel (Appadurai 193). As an omniscient (and unreliable) narrator, these “imaginative appropriations” are made palpable in chronologically disparate vignettes that collectively epitomize the trajectory of Mexican modernity and globalization: it is the year 1968 to which the narrator returns repeatedly and that functions as the point of demarcation for Mexican postmodernism. The massacre at Tlatelolco and the consequent shift in both governmental policy and Mexican conceptions of nationalism inaugurated a correlative movement in fiction that departs from nostalgic conceptions of Mexican history and herald instead the movement toward a viable Mexican future. Auxilio, as the “mother of Mexican poetry,” is posited at this moment as an analogue for this shift. Her physical body is placed at the site of the destruction of revolutionary Mexico as a symbol, and the emphasis on her incoherence is likewise a symbol of the delirium of this transitional moment.

*Amulet* is a portrait of Mexico City and it is thus a perfect portrait of the abjection that lies underneath the grandeur of both conceptions of Mexican

modernity. *Amulet* and *2666* expose modernity's hidden abjection as a means of narrating the interstices of the local colony and the global empire: it is this interstice—this hinterland—that is the focal point of both novels. Toward that end, however much the encyclopedic *2666* seems to follow the stories of four European academics in hot pursuit of a reclusive old writer presumably living in exile in Mexico City, it is Bolaño's fictional version of Juárez—a city now famed for the thousands of kidnapped, murdered, and brutally raped women who were its population and who worked in its global factories (or *maquiladoras*)—that is the real story. The mutilated bodies catalogued in the fourth novella function in two ways: they shift the locus of the discussion about “postcolonial” Latin America replacing the colonial conquest with a corporate one; and they make this palpable to a reader who is *a priori* poised to consider the *mestiza* as the Other in relation to himself/herself. Too repulsed to think, the distance between the subject and the object collapses and the reader becomes the *mestiza*. The haunting image mirrors the reader's fears. Abjection thus functions as a means of distorting our sense of self and other or outside and inside. The reader, “confronted with the apparent explanatory gap between physical processes and consciousness”—i.e., the ways that we respond physically to intellectual input like fictional narratives including sadness, repulsion, and myriad other affective responses—is indeed beside himself/herself reading some of the more disturbing passages in these novels (see Chalmers). Cognitive responses are “disrupted” by these affective responses (on cognition and reading, see, e.g., Chalmers; Zunshine). Thus, depictions of violence are more often than not ostensible illustrations of real political turmoil or not so playful permutations of such horrors. Consequently, the effectiveness of the power of the abject to disrupt our cognition is enhanced by the knowledge that these are not just fictional characters. Our experiences of sorrow and fear disrupt the normative escapist quality of the literature: we are first saddened, then horrified, and finally repulsed and in our repulsion we become disoriented.

I am not suggesting that Bolaño is unique in his use of abject violence or that the aforementioned South Asian authors, not to mention García Márquez or, more recently, Marjorie Agosin, did not narrate the pain and violence of nations in transition. I read Bolaño's work by the amplification of the abject as it disrupts our ability to scrutinize objectively the images he paints. Bolaño's images do not “signify death. In the presence of signified death I would understand, react, or accept: without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live” (Kristeva 3). The ontological gap that functions as a means of sustaining our disbelief — of not allowing a conflation of real and fictional characters—is negated in Bolaño's novels. Geographical distance notwithstanding, his corpses are made palpable by the sensory quality

of the narratives. Bolaño amplifies their corporeality and thus reminds the reader of the violence of colonialism, modernity, and globalization. He situates their bodies at this interstice as a brutal remonstrance. Auxilio is a prime example: she is posited in “that indeterminate space of in-betweenness” and she narrates her tale allochronologically and quizzically, often questioning her own memory of forgetting names, dates, her own origins, etc. (Moreiras 190): “As I went back through the dates, the rhombus shattered in a space of speculative desperation ... the year 1968 became the year 1964 and the year 1960 became the year 1956. But it also became the years 1970 and 1973 and the years 1975 and 1976 ... I started thinking about my past as if I was thinking about my present, future, and past, all mixed together and dormant in the one tepid egg, the enormous egg of some inner bird ... nestled on a bed of smoking rubble” (*Amulet* 32). Auxilio is less the depraved victim of colonialism than a harbinger of a kind of new world order. With protagonists like Auxilio, Bolaño severs any ties between the *india* and her perceived “homeland” and, in so doing, he creates a transnational imaginary. By replacing the postcolonial concept of the return with a dynamic tale of deterritorialized chaos, Bolaño reifies Arjun Appadurai’s concept of the ethnoscape in a post-revolutionary and transnational Mexico City.

In *Amulet*, Bolaño dissolves national distinction: Mexico, Chile, and Uruguay seem to be mere versions of a singular state, he narrates the revelatory fantasies of a refugee who gives birth to a generation of homeless poets, the “ghost-children” entombed in the “martyrology of Mexican poetry,” and places his heroine in what is perhaps a prolonged hallucination. Auxilio is the quintessential post-realist and translocal hero, a character who has no clear national, cultural, or historic origins, no discernible moral code in the traditional sense, and who foments a community of underground poets as a kind of anti-establishment—an antidote to hegemonic notions of order and civility. Readers are entreated to fleeting reminiscences that may in fact be delusions, and we watch as she squirms across the bathroom floor illuminated by the ethereal reflection of moonlight that casts a haunting glow on her “personal Rembrandt,” the illusory painting that becomes more and more like the picture of Dorian Gray as Auxilio paints a sort of Mexican “Guernica” with the blood of indigenous children. *Amulet* is also a horror story and the reader is assaulted with visceral violence in the underground clubs of the city, as well as moments of palpable fear: “I saw myself and I saw the soldier who was staring entranced at his image in the mirror, our two faces embedded in a black rhombus or sunk in a lake, and a shiver ran down my spine, alas, because I knew that for the moment the laws of mathematics were protecting me, I knew that the tyrannical laws of the cosmos, which are opposed to the laws of poetry, were protecting me and that the soldier would stare entranced at his image in the mirror and I,

in the singularity of my stall would hear and imagine him, entranced in turn, and that our singularities, from that moment on, would be joined like the two faces of a terrible, fatal coin” (*Amulet* 30). As two persons participating in the conception of a new political order, Auxilio and the soldier are the Janus-faced reality of a transnational Mexico City and they represent the multiple iterations of the transnational subject.

The “lost children” of *Amulet*—the “subway poets,” the real victims of Tlaleloco, and even Auxilio herself—displace the centrality of characters like Che Guevara, Pablo Neruda, and Pedro Garfias making them footnotes in a new story of Latin America. Bolaño actually spends several pages delineating the rise and fall of a great many poets and novelists (from Latin America and beyond) and he also offers specific dates for their imminent deaths as a brief foray into science fiction, which seems an appropriate tangent for this experimental novel. Rather than look back to an alluring past, we are horrified by the visceral realities of colonialism and long for the conception of a new way of being. Unlike the postcolonialist approach to *mestizaje*, which counterpoises a dynamic Western subject against a static subaltern object rife with inner conflict, the genocide is not a defining characteristic of Bolaño’s “lost children,” but is instead a defining characteristic of colonialism. Auxilio, like her counterparts in the Sonoran desert in *2666*, is a translocal subject, whose pluralized identity undermines our hierarchical (i.e., colonial) sense of order. Accordingly, she is the actualization of our horror, the loss of distinction between pre-colonial subject and postmodern object. The transnational hinterland from where she tells her tale resists articulation from the castrating objectivity of the postcolonial and postmodern novelist; and her abject condition destroys the sanctity and comfort of magic. As her body dissolves into the moonlight in the bathroom of the university, so does the nostalgic fantasy of Macondo fade into oblivion. The notion of a utopian return is as absurd for Auxilio as justice might be for the victims of Tlaleloco or the daughters of the Mexican desert. And thus the bathroom like the desert offers a new epistemological horizon symbolizing the dissolution of colonial order and, perhaps more to the point, colonial systems of knowledge and being.

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# The Motif of Fleeing in Gao's Work

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Mabel Lee

**Abstract:** In her article “The Motif of Fleeing in Gao’s Work” Mabel Lee explores the aesthetic dimensions of fleeing in Xingjian Gao’s 1990 play *Escape*, and how they are manifested in his novels *Soul Mountain* and *One Man’s Bible*. Lee argues that the intensely emotional times during which Gao wrote *Escape* were comparable to those seventy years earlier confronting writers of the May Fourth era (1915–1921). Urging his compatriots not to be “bystanders,” Xun Lu, the most influential of May Fourth writers, had chosen to allow his creative self to suicide, as shown in his 1927 prose-poem collection *Wild Grass*. For Gao, however, such heroic gestures are anathema and his work is a declaration for literature unburdened by politics.

Xingjian Gao (born in China 1940) was proclaimed 2000 Nobel Laureate on the basis of his short stories, eighteen plays, and two novels, a substantial part of which had also been published in French, Swedish, and English. However, following the announcement, self-professed authorities from various parts of the world condemned the award, but curiously, they only mention one or two plays he had written in the early 1980s, so it was obvious that the condemnations were based on political or personal motives not related to Gao’s literary achievements. Here, I focus on the aesthetic dimensions of the play *Escape* and shed light on that controversy, but do not seek to explore it further. Nonetheless my study is prefaced with the statement that such a controversy took place (see Tam, “Gao”). To be criticized for his writings was not a new experience for Gao. In fact, criticism had dogged his career from the early 1980s as soon as he began to see his writings published. Already aged forty, he had more than twenty years of writing practice, but nothing to show on paper, because during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) he had burned all of the manuscripts he had written in secret, rather than have them discovered, and, needless to say, presenting his manuscripts to a publisher in those times would have invited disaster.

With the death of Mao Zedong and the end of the Cultural Revolution, Gao’s criticism and short stories began to appear in literary magazines. In late 1981 his *Preliminary Discussion on the Art of Modern Fiction* was published as a slim 129-page book that immediately sold out, and was reprinted in the following year. After some established veteran writers had voiced their enthusiastic approval of it in various influential literary magazines, the organ of the Chinese Writers’ Association, *Literary Gazette*, began to attack this “ridiculous” and “reactionary” book that posed a threat to the established socialist-realist goals and direction of the literature of the nation (Gao, “Wilted” 142). In 1982 Gao also made his debut as a

playwright with the staging of his play *Absolute Signal* at the Beijing People's Art Theater. It was staged ten times to ecstatic audiences as "experimental theater", open only to people in drama circles, before public performances followed. A reviewer in the French *Cosmopolitan* wrote that the play announced the birth of avant-garde theater in Beijing, and numerous theater groups from various parts of China clamored to put on performances. All this had not gone unnoticed, and at the beginning of 1983 the authorities launched an attack on modernism and capitalist liberalism in which *Preliminary Discussion on the Art of Modern Fiction* was targeted, and Gao was summoned to appear at three mass meetings to face public criticism. These meetings failed to achieve their intended objective, because established veteran writers came forward to speak in defense of both the book and the author (Gao, "Wilted" 144–45; see also Zhao 67–69).

The outcome of those meetings encouraged Gao to stage his second play, *Bus Stop*, in July 1983, again as "experimental theater," but without first seeking approval from the authorities (see Gao, "Wilted"; see also Ma; Riley and Gissenwehrer; Tam, "Drama"; Tay; Zhao). However, an unannounced visit by the party secretary of the Writers' Association led to the immediate cessation of further performances, and major publications were instructed to publish criticisms of the play. Gao also learned that there was talk of having him sent to Qinghai province to do some "training" on a prison farm (see "Wilted" 149). The head of literature in the Ministry of Propaganda had called *Bus Stop* "the most pernicious play" written since the establishment of New China. Indeed, Gao's use of the absurd in *Bus Stop*, with people waiting for a bus that never stops, challenged the predictable literary models of the past decades. The absurd forced audiences to reflect on what was taking place on stage as well as what was happening in real life, and, as such, represented a clear break with established literary practice in revolutionary China where all literary production was required to provide clear depictions of positive or negative characters, so that people could emulate the positive characters, and report to the authorities anyone acting like the negative characters. After finishing *Bus Stop*, a routine health check resulted in a diagnosis of lung cancer, but a few weeks revealed a wrong diagnosis: in the interim, Gao had confronted death. His escape from death made him a "reborn" human being, and he was determined to live fully as a human being in charge of his own thinking and perceptions and expressing his visceral need to express himself in literature. His autobiographical novel *Soul Mountain* tells of his solitary 15,000-kilometer journey on the fringes of Han-Chinese society until it was safe for him to return to Beijing at the end of 1983. In the following year the ban on his publications was lifted, but when his third play *Wild Man* was staged in 1985, the actors were cautioned against appearing in any of his future plays. His next play *The Other Shore* was stopped after a few weeks of rehearsals (see Chen 89–110; Zhao 80–85).

Gao immigrated to France at the end of 1987. He had fled to an environment where he thought he would enjoy total freedom in his creative endeavors.



However, in a little over a year, the tragic events in Beijing's Tiananmen Square on 4 June 1989 made him realize that for the writer to achieve creative freedom required more than simply an environment where freedom of artistic expression existed. The writer needed to be in a constant state of abstract fleeing. It was in response to a request by a US-American theater group for a play on China that in late October 1989 Gao completed his two-act play *Escape*. The theater group arranged for the play to be translated and afterwards suggested changes, because there were no student heroes. Gao paid for the English translation and promptly withdrew his manuscript. *Escape* was published in Chinese in 1990 in the first issue of the journal *Today*, published in Stockholm, and premiered in the following year in Stockholm (see Gao, "About *Escape*"). Ironically, *Escape* was also published in China in 1991, prefaced by an article attacking the moral depravity of the characters, and drawing attention to the fact that the author was not in the square to witness the killing of students as alleged in the play (see Lee, "Two Autobiographical" xv–xvi). The first print-run of 25,000 copies of *The Diaspora "Elite": Who They are and What They are Doing* went on the market in May 1991 and was reprinted within a couple of months. Its aim was to provide incriminating evidence of "reactionary writings" by "unpatriotic," "anti-Party," Chinese "elites" living abroad. The book was read eagerly in China but not with the intended effect (see Zeng 6–7). The full text of *Escape* was reproduced, although prefaced with a three-page attack on the play for wrongly alleging that thousands of students had been killed in Tiananmen Square. Much space was also devoted to criticizing the sexual promiscuity and moral depravity of the three characters (see Yu 235–37). The publication of Gao's works in China thereafter was problematical and this certainly has been the case since he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2000 (see Lin 122–23).

In "About *Escape*" Gao states that some of his friends had criticized the play as being "too political." Gao, on this point, defends his right to discuss politics in his writings, but he indicates his disapproval of biased writings that tie literature to the war chariot of a particular camp. He, of course, was aware that the play had displeased members of the Chinese democracy movement, because it had criticized the naivety of the student movement. However, he maintains that in writing the play his intention was not to denounce only this particular massacre, and that he had clearly stated in the stage instructions that this was not a "socialist-realist play." As a writer Gao saw literary truth as his only criterion, truth as he perceived it and not truth as perceived by others, no matter how noble the cause. In those times of high emotions, he knew that to write a play critical of the students would be seen as a betrayal of the Chinese democracy movement. In *Escape* he placed his commitment to literary truth above politics and, in the process of writing the play, his past reflections on literature versus politics and on the individual versus the collective began to coalesce. After the publication of *Escape*, there is evidence of a marked change in his writings and he began to articulate his thinking on various aspects of what it meant to be a writer. In the

process of writing *Escape* he had decided that as a writer, he was a frail individual and that his writings were simply observations of human behavior. He had no illusions about changing the world through his writings.

Seventy or so years earlier, during the May Fourth period, Xun Lu (penname of Shuren Zhou 1881–1936) who played a leading role in the founding of China's modern literature faced a similar choice. Those highly emotional times following the end of World War I and the Paris Peace Conference coincided with the first wave of Nietzsche fever in China, and young intellectuals, including writers, saw themselves in the role of Nietzsche's superman. Through their writings, they saw themselves as the saviors of the nation (see Gálik 51–64; Lee, "On Nietzsche"). China's youth rallied to Lu's call to cease being bystanders and to participate in bringing about the social and cultural reforms necessary to save the nation. As a student in Japan, in 1903, Lu had inscribed a pledge on a photograph: "I offer my blood to the Yellow Emperor." He would keep that pledge. He had experienced ecstasy and personal fulfillment while writing the powerful short stories that were later collected in *Outcry* (1922) and *Hesitation* (1926), and he knew that he would suffer agony because of his decision to abandon creative writing. His prose poems collected in *Wild Grass* (1927), indicate the extent both of his passion for his creative writings and his anguish at the imminent prospect of allowing his creative self to suicide (see Lee, "Suicide," "Solace"). His would suffer like Christ refusing myrrh to deaden his pain at the Crucifixion as graphically portrayed in the poem "Revenge II" (20 December 1924), and like the corpse that had ripped out its heart to see what it would taste like in the poem "The Epitaph" (27 June 1925) (see Lee, "Suicide," "Gao").

Whereas in the poems of *Wild Grass* Lu announces ambivalently his decision to renounce creative writing, in the play *Escape* Gao loudly proclaims his resolve not to remain a passive bystander, but to take the stance of a critical observer and a creative writer. In choosing the title for the play, Gao articulates his stance as a writer: he stands apart from the will of the collective. The notion of "fleeing" enabled Gao to explain with greater clarity and conviction what had been instinctive to preserving his integrity as an individual and as a writer. Fleeing is a recurring motif in his subsequent writings, and lies at the heart of what he has coined "cold literature" and "without isms" to describe the type of literature he writes. *Soul Mountain* shows how important physically fleeing Beijing was for Gao's survival after the closing of his play *Bus Stop* by the authorities. His second novel *One Man's Bible*, however, reveals numerous acts of physical and psychological fleeing without which he would have been destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. In formulating his thinking on fleeing, Gao uses as his starting point the thesis presented in *Eloge de la fuite* by Henri Laborite (1914–1995). Laborite's thesis is that once protest becomes organized, the protester is reduced to being a follower of the organization, and the only escape is to flee. Gao broadens the scope of Laborite's thesis, and posits that human life is continual fleeing, either from political oppression or from other people and, furthermore,

fleeing from one's self. When the self is awakened, it is this self that cannot be escaped. Gao argues that there are external pressures such as political oppression, social customs, fashions and the will of others, but that the misfortunes of humankind also derive from the self. The self is not God. It cannot be suppressed but there is no need to worship it. The individual cannot escape his self and this is mankind's fate. This truth, he maintains, is central to classical Greek tragedies and to Shakespeare's tragedies, and it was for this reason that he had written *Escape* as pure tragedy (Gao, "About Escape"). Indeed, the stage instructions for *Escape* explain that from ancient times mankind's survival has been the same unending tragedy and that his play *Escape* aspires to portray the dilemma of modern mankind as a classical tragedy (see Gao, "Notes"; see also Lee, "Two Autobiographical").

Gao's strategy of presenting *Escape* in the form of a classical tragedy is aimed at inducing a psychological distance from the emotional trauma of the specific event of Tiananmen Square, making it possible for critical thinking and reflection on that event. At the same time, this strategy allows him, as a playwright, to achieve psychological distance to write about the harrowing event that at the surface level is ostensibly the theme of the play. *Escape* is unmistakably about 4 June 1989 after the army tanks have rolled into Tiananmen Square. However, the play only indicates the time as from early morning until daybreak, and the stage setting as some derelict city building resembling a dilapidated warehouse. The events in the square are related in graphic comments contained in the dialogues between the three characters: Youth (aged about twenty), Young Woman (aged about twenty-two or twenty-three), and Middle-aged Man (aged over forty years). The play is matter-of-factly critical of the slaying of "thousands" in the square, but it is equally matter-of-factly critical of the political naivety of the students. Middle-aged Man, sympathizes with the student cause, but suggests that a massacre should have been foreseen and that the students should not have been led to the slaughter. Contingency retreat plans should have been worked out. Young Man responds by angrily taunting him: if he had foreseen that a massacre would take place, why had he not come forward to do something about it.

While sympathizing with the students, Gao refused to distort the truth by portraying them as heroes. Moreover, he was aware of how heroic sentiments were capable of distorting the individual's perception of the self, even causing the individual to lose control of it. To be a hero was anathema to Gao and he would not follow in the footsteps of Lu who, for patriotic reasons, had sacrificed literature in order to devote himself to polemical writings. In *Soul Mountain* (chapter 71) Gao writes that as a young student also he had been inspired by heroic sentiments and would often recite that line of Lu's poem: "I offer my blood to the Yellow Emperor." However, later noting that "Yellow Emperor" could stand for homeland, race, or one's ancestors, he argues that his head is his own so why did it have to be chopped off for the Yellow Emperor? Lu was indeed an enigmatic personality, for he too was acutely aware of the psychological consequences

of being upheld as a hero. In a letter dated 1 October 1927, he wrote that he found it profoundly disturbing to be called a “fighter” and a “revolutionary” after presenting a lecture at Sun Yat-sen University. It made him think about Qiu Jin (1879–1907), the young revolutionary from his hometown of Shaoxing who had been “clapped to death.” Clapping had caused her to sacrifice her life for the revolutionary cause, and he asked: “Does this mean then that I too must die in battle?” (Lu, “Tongxin” 3 433). By this time Lu had already allowed his creative self to be “clapped” to death. As a public persona, a hero, he found that he could not publicly acknowledge the suicide of his creative self. However, to live a half-atrophied physical existence was excruciating, and to assuage his pain Lu returned to writing classical poetry as well as throwing himself into the work of translating Russian and Japanese writings. When he died of lung cancer in 1936 he was translating Gogol’s *Dead Souls* (see Lee, “On Nietzsche”).

Lu had led a younger cohort of writers in founding China’s modern literature during the May Fourth era, at the very time when a “Nietzsche fever” was raging throughout the Chinese intellectual world. Translations and essays about Nietzsche suddenly emerged in avant-garde publications and the names Nietzsche, Zarathustra, and Superman were repeated like mantras by Chinese youth. Nietzsche’s philosophy empowered the younger generation to reject the authority of their elders, as well as traditional culture in its entirety. China’s modern literature differed from traditional writings in that it was written in the vernacular language, instead of the classical language, and was heavily influenced by modern Western literary models, especially in respect of focusing on the social problems of the times. The most prominent May Fourth writers were so widely read in the modern Western writings that they often read in the original German, Russian, French, English, or in Japanese translation; although Japanese authors were also widely read, there was a definite bias towards emulating Western authors because the West was admired as the source of modernity. Chinese translations of Western authors had begun around the beginning of the twentieth century. When Lu had arrived as a student in Japan in 1902, it was at the height of a “Nietzsche fever,” but only the handful of Chinese publications about Nietzsche that appeared in 1904 were available (see Cheung 25). He had a reading knowledge of German and Russian and quickly become a proficient reader of Japanese as well, he read Nietzsche voraciously, as well as other Western writers and thinkers. As early as 1907, he began publishing what can be described as studies in “comparative literature.” However, returning to China in 1910, he succumbed to depression because of the political situation, and immersed himself in studying ancient inscriptions and annotating ancient texts. A friend urged him for a manuscript, so he wrote “Diary of a Madman.” This short story instantly made him a celebrity and a writer in 1918, and he consolidated this reputation with the short stories he subsequently published (see Gálik; Lee, “On Nietzsche,” “Gao Xingjian’s”). Having written the preface to *Wild Grass* in 1927, he turned his pen to literary

translation, essays on Russian and Japanese writers, and works of social and political criticism.

Although of a later generation, like Lu, Gao has made significant contributions to studies in comparative literature in China. Under Mao's authoritarian regime, for decades Western modernist writings had been banned in China. However, having graduated in 1962 in French literature at the Beijing Foreign Languages Institute, as soon as the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976 Gao was immediately amongst the most prolific writers on Western modern literature, publishing essays on writers including Jacques Prévert, Samuel Beckett, Antonin Artaud, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Jerzy Grotowski, and Tadeusz Kantor. As a literary translator, he published Prévert's *Paroles* (1984) and Eugene Ionesco's *La Cantatrice chauve* (1985). Importantly, the unique innovations in dramaturgy and narration he developed and implemented in his plays and novels are informed by his interrogation of both Eastern and Western traditions and practices. He has detailed how he has made these breakthroughs in comparative essays such as "Literature and Metaphysics: About *Soul Mountain*" and "Another Kind of Theatre" (see *The Case for Literature*), and in his more recent essays collected in 2008 in the volume *Lun chuangzuo* (Aesthetics and Creation).

In the play *Escape*, against a backdrop of rumbling tanks and machine-gun fire, Young Man and Young Woman escape into an old warehouse. After catching her breath, Young Woman suddenly realizes that she is covered in blood. She thinks she has been shot and becomes hysterical. Young Man tells her to calm down, that it is someone else's blood. Aghast, Young Woman recalls that there was a girl running alongside with her hands clutching her stomach. She was about to cry out, when she collapsed, and blood oozed out from between her fingers. Young Man responds that tanks were out there smashing up roadblocks, garbage cans, bicycles and tents. Filled with terror Young Woman throws her arms around Young Man to affirm that she is still alive, and she hugs him even tighter as another burst of gunfire is heard. At that point she notices that he has been wounded in the head. It turns out to be bits of someone's brain. A person was running just in front of him. He heard a plop, and the back of the person's head exploded. The smell of blood on Young Woman's clothes makes him feel like throwing up, so Young Man suggests that she removes her skirt, and to calm down. She tells him to stay close by, and that she feels like crying, and crying loudly. He warns her not to, otherwise she would be heard. Suddenly Middle-aged Man slips through the door and lights a cigarette. He is soon talking with Young Man about the slaughter occurring outside in the square. Young Woman, who had moved into the shadows, emerges without her skirt, and Middle-Aged Man suggests that this might not be the appropriate time or place for enjoying themselves. Through these snatches of dialogue at the opening of the play, Gao has announced that there were killings in the square, but to wallow in the tragedy, is not the intent of *Escape*. Under scrutiny is the human psyche and behavior in the context of extreme terror and confrontation with death. The righteous indignation of Young Man's heroic

declarations is neutralized by the cold cynicism in the lucid comments of Middle-aged Man. Young Woman, who is older than Young Man, represents a middle position in the discussion of the events. However, *Escape* is devoid of emotional fervor, despite the gravity of the situation as the three characters face imminent death or long-term incarceration within an hour or so, when police searches would begin at daybreak.

The dramatic impact achieved by the clinical presentation of tragic events in *Escape* is intensified by comic dialogue. For example, when Middle-aged Man enters the warehouse and lights a cigarette, Young Man challenges him and asks what he is doing, the response is: "Just looking for a place to hide, to smoke a cigarette" (7). To this Young Man warns: "You can't smoke in here" (7). Middle-aged Man's response to this is: "the soldiers are setting fire to the whole city, and there is thick smoke everywhere. What do you care about one tiny little flame? Save your breath. It won't matter. Come over here and have a cigarette with me" (7-8). In the dark, Middle-aged Man's lighting a cigarette is unsettling for Young Man and Young Woman who had begun fondling one another in the dark. Meanwhile, Middle-aged Man is worried that in the hour or so left before daybreak there will not be time to smoke all the cigarettes in the pack and he starts counting them. He finally works out that he will have to smoke one cigarette every five minutes. Young Woman asks Middle-aged Man for a cigarette, but he warns her it is not one of those trendy menthol cigarettes women pretend to smoke, and asks if she has ever tried pot. She asks if he has instead. He tells her he has tried everything, but that he has never counted cigarettes one at a time like this. The three characters are in a predicament: they are staring at imminent death. Gao portrays the extent of their terror, not at a linguistic level but at a primal psychological level. Sexual lust is depicted as a primal physiological response to extreme terror and fear of death: it is a manifestation of lust for life and has nothing to do with sexual promiscuity or moral depravity. Because of emotional trauma and terror, Young Woman instinctively seeks the warmth and protection of Young Man's body, and he is both heroic and responsive to her needs. With each burst of machine gun fire they begin hugging one another tighter until interrupted by the arrival of Middle-aged Man. Afterwards there is much political and philosophical discussion about politics, the happenings in the square, as well as about life. The three characters also talk about their lives and aspirations. It is as if life is about to end for each of them.

As it draws close to daybreak, Young Man decides to make a run for it, and suggests that the other two follow. However, as soon as Young Man is outside, a single rifle shot resounds and then there is silence. Young Woman starts screaming hysterically and Middle-aged Man puts his hand over her mouth to prevent her screams from being heard. She struggles to get to the door to go outside, but Middle-aged Man grabs her and takes her in his arms. She demands that he let go and as soon as he releases her, she starts hitting him and blaming him for not having stopped Young Man. Eventually she throws herself upon him, sobbing



uncontrollably. He strokes her hair, and tells her that the soldiers would be coming soon. She becomes hysterical again. He slaps her, tells her to find somewhere to hide, and to keep quiet: in that way they might not find her. He tells her he will have a smoke and wait for them to come. She takes his hand and tells him not to smoke because she is afraid of light, afraid of everything. In the darkness, he takes her into his arms and kisses her. Their lust for one another is awakened, and she says she wants them to make love. He says she is being silly and protests that he can't make love while rifles are pointing at him. Nonetheless, he succumbs to her frenzied kisses, her chiding him for holding back, and her urging him to hurry up because the soldiers could turn up at any moment. This is not gratuitous sex, but sex as a psychological response to terror and confrontation with death that Gao is describing. He is examining sex as an affirmation of life, and he bases this on his personal experiences. His autobiographical novel *One Man's Bible* tells of similar behavior in situations of extreme fear and terror. It tells of his fear, sense of powerlessness, and his cowardice that led to his masturbating and writing in secret to remind himself that he was still alive, while living in what he describes as hell. However, his equating of sex to an affirmation of life, a lust for life, in situations of extreme terror is best portrayed in his depictions of women. Three instances are mentioned below.

Soon after the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, the school student Xiao Xiao came to him, and offered herself to him. At the time he did not know that she was soon to be sent to the countryside. She had come to him out of fear, but because she was so young and fearing she was still a virgin, he did not dare to provide her with the comfort she wanted. It is many years later, when he bumps into her that he learns she was raped soon after she arrived in the countryside, and that she had been raped many times afterwards (*One Man's Bible* chapters 28 and 55). After he arrives in a small town, shooting starts between rival Red Guard factions, and he flees for his life. A young woman joins him, and together they search for somewhere to stay. They eventually find an inn but have to share a bed in a small room under the stairs. Suddenly there is a night search and people are shouting and running up and down the stairs. They cling to one another in terror as screams and then a heavy thud is heard. After the searchers leave, he and the woman engage in carnal lust. Some time later, this woman Qian becomes his wife in the remote mountain village to which he had fled to escape being publicly denounced and arrested for his activities as the leader of the rebel Red Guard group at his Beijing workplace. However, their marriage effectively ends the following day, after she reads what he has been writing. In a violent attack of hysteria, she accuses him of being a counter-revolutionary, and, throwing the chamber pot at him, covers him in urine. She departs soon afterwards. After this violent episode with Qian and her threat to expose him as a counter-revolutionary, he resolutely suppresses his sexual urges. In his loneliness and state of repressed sexuality, he writes in secret to gratify his lust for life (*One Man's Bible* chapters 30 and 42). After a period of working as a peasant in the fields, he secures work



as a teacher in the local school, where the student Sun Huirong develops a crush on him. On graduating, Sun is sent to work as a peasant in a production brigade. One night she comes to him, clearly offering herself to him: again it was because of fear. However, afraid of jeopardizing his job, he quickly pushes her out of his room. Some months later, he learns that Sun was pregnant after having been raped by Hunchback Zhao the party secretary of her work brigade. He reads the testimonies from the court case. She had either been raped by Hunchback Zhao, as she claimed, or had slept with him in order to gain enough merit points to get a permit to work in town, as Hunchback Zhao claimed (*One Man's Bible* chapter 50).

In *One Man's Bible* Gao relates how during the Cultural Revolution he had responded to heroic sentiments and ended up being pushed into a leadership role in the rebel Red Guard group at his workplace. The army was subsequently called in and disbanded all Red Guard activities, and soon after Gao was moved with his workplace colleagues to work as peasants in a May Seventh Cadre School. One day he found that his colleagues had been mobilized to denounce him at mass meetings for his rebel Red Guard activities. Sensing that he was in grave danger of imminent arrest, he fled as far as he could to a remote mountain village where he resigned himself to living out his life as a peasant. When he joined the rebel Red Guard group he had felt that he was carrying out a "sacred duty" in standing up for old colleagues and cadres who had been hauled out for criticism by the orthodox Red Guards, but he soon discovered that he too was being manipulated by politics (see *One Man's Bible* chapters 13 and 19). By the use of the absurd in chapter 20, Gao demonstrates how easily the individual can be manipulated once he loses control of the self. Persuaded by the joker that he might be able to move the rock, he foolishly stands on the rock and becomes totally disoriented, and is manipulated by the joker egging him on. Gao's strongest indictment of the individual being forced to submit to the will of the collective is found in chapter 58. Everyone is running to welcome the good times that are ahead. The setting is startlingly reminiscent of the setting in his play *Escape*. It is clear that the good times will always be ahead, and he decides to hurry away before the good times actually came. In the process of writing the play *Escape*, at a time of intense emotions both for himself and for his readers, Gao established fleeing as a defining aspect of his future writings. His thinking on fleeing is enunciated with great clarity in many of his subsequent essays, and reiterated in his Nobel Lecture (2000) and Nobel Centenary Lecture (2001). However, it was in his novel *One Man's Bible* that Gao had the space for a full literary exploration of the notion of fleeing for both the individual and for the writer.

**Note:** The above article is a revised version of Mabel Lee, "Nobel Laureate 2000 Gao Xingjian and His Novel *Soul Mountain*." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 2.3 (2000): 1–6. Copyright release to the author.

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# Arab Fiction and Migration in the Work of Haqqi and Salih

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Ikram Masmoudi

**Abstract:** In her article “Arab Fiction and Migration in the Work of Haqqi and Salih” Ikram Masmoudi proposes that twentieth-century Arab fiction is marked by the theme of the journey in literal and figurative ways. *The Saint’s Lamp* by Yahya Haqqi and *Season of Migration to the North* by Tayeb Salih depict two different kinds of enigmatic arrivals. Their arrival is the opportunity to adjust and assess their positions and their cultural differences. Although the two arriving protagonists in these novels have different attitudes vis-à-vis the West and their local culture, the structure of arrival in both novels is not straightforward and immediate, but instead reflects a negotiation between two attitudes and a transition from an immediate, physical arrival to an inner, mental arrival. This leads to a new understanding of and an adjustment to a fuller sense of arrival.

In the middle of his life and experience as a writer living and writing in England, the main character and narrator of V. S. Naipaul’s autobiographical novel *The Enigma of Arrival*, an Indian from colonial Trinidad retires to the English countryside to heal and reflect on a series of aspects of his life: his metropolitan encounters, his career, and his early attempts at writing. In the cottage he rents he stumbles upon a few books left there by pervious tenants. Among them was a booklet with reproductions of famous paintings. One of these catches his attention because of what sounds to him like a poetical title: *The Enigma of Arrival*: “I felt that in an indirect, poetical way the title referred to something in my own experience; and later I was to learn that the titles of these surrealist paintings of Chirico’s hadn’t been given by the painter but by the poet Apollinaire” (98). Intrigued by this title, the narrator/writer soon begins an attempt to verbalize the visual representation and to fantasize about the situation depicted in the painting: “A classical scene, Mediterranean, ancient Roman or so I saw it. A wharf, in the background beyond walls and gateways (like cutouts) there is the top of the mast of an antique vessel; on an otherwise deserted street in the foreground there are two figures, both muffled ... The scene is of desolation and mystery: it speaks of the mystery of the arrival. It spoke to me of that as it had spoken to Apollinaire” (98). Feeling unanchored and out of place in the rural English countryside, the Trinidadian narrator relates the scene to his own experience, as a man who arrived from colonial Trinidad and to his aesthetic ambition to become a writer in England. He soon identifies with the character in the painting.

Naipaul's description of the painting is brief compared with the length of the novel, but its relevance to his story and his borrowing of the title are indicative of its importance to his plot and the situation of his Trinidadian character/narrator, who, like the two muffled human figures lost on the wharf of the painting, felt out of place in the English countryside and out of place in the metropolis with his abstract knowledge of England and the world and what it meant to be a writer. His first attempts at writing alienated him from his memory and his experience which he muted for the sake of outdated imperial literary ideas and trends: "The idea of ruin and dereliction, of out-of-placeness was something I felt about myself, attached to myself: a man from another hemisphere, another background, coming to rest in middle life in the cottage of a half neglected estate, an estate full of reminders of its Edwardian past with few connections with the present. An oddity among the estate and big houses of the valley, and I a further oddity in its grounds. I felt unanchored and strange ... I felt that presence in that old valley was part of something like an upheaval, a change in the course of the history of that country" (15). Naipaul tried to break the silence of the scene by trying to establish a link and a parallel between two different art forms through the human experience of arrival. Although the scene on the painting does not evoke the countryside but a realistic, metropolitan atmosphere, there seem to be a clear disconnect between the space and the subjects it represents, i.e., the imposing buildings, their style and architecture, and the two human figures. These two figures look out of place, and unanchored amidst this décor.

It is this interplay between what looks realistic and known and what looks unexpected that creates the strange atmosphere of this scene as Fiona Bradley comments on De Chirico's style: "De Chirico was appreciated among surrealists for the dramas played out on his paintings: The world of such paintings is like that of dreams at once familiar and unfamiliar. Familiar because of de Chirico's minutely realist painting style which allows the viewer to recognize objects, unfamiliar because of the strange, dream-like contexts into which he paints them" (34-35). This scene has a mythological resonance and can be reminiscent of an Odyssean atmosphere. It is also fascinating in capturing the solitude of the human figures on the wharf and the emptiness surrounding them, perhaps alluding to the anxiety, the tensions and the choices they have to face after they arrived. Inspired by the loss and desolation the painting evoked for him with its high, metropolitan buildings, its wharf, and its muffled figures, the Trinidadian narrator imagined a character who would arrive for a mission but who would undergo a series of illusions, traps, and disenchantments to reach a certain awareness of the gap between his expectations and the adjustments his experience would bring about. Unfortunately it is too late for him to return to the place of his departure because the ship is gone; the only thing left is to face his responsibilities in the new place. The painting functions like a mirror where the Trinidadian narrator could see himself. It makes him aware of his own arrival to England and to

English literature. Looking at the painting he could reflect on his experience and the transition he had undergone. He recognizes himself as a man who had come to England with the ambition to become a writer and with an abstract knowledge of England. He arrives at the conclusion that being a writer is not as he puts it about recording and displaying an inward development, ideas from nineteenth-century aesthetics, but that for a man of his background it was about acknowledging his Hindu self and exploring the worlds he contained within himself (146).

In his attempt at verbalizing the painting, Naipaul translated elements from the silent scene into the written page. The scene where the subjects are disconnected from the space where they find themselves, its interplay of familiar and unfamiliar images, and its function in *Enigma of Arrival* as a paradigm for alienation is latent in many depictions of the arrival in Arabic fiction. Here, I attempt to shed some light on examples of dynamic verbalizations of this static alienating scene in modern Arabic fiction where we can find numerous depictions of unsettling arrivals. Most of these arrivals take place in the context of larger reflections and debates on the relations between Western modernity and the Arab world. Although the arrivals in these narratives are returns from the metropolis to the known, they are filled with uncertainty and anxiety, and wrapped in a riddle like the two cloaked figures of the painting. Perhaps their enigma resides also in the alienating accommodation and interplay of familiar and unfamiliar ideas, images, and attitudes, and in their protagonists who find themselves challenged in their solitude and torn between different worlds and different sets of values, making readers also feel alienated and at a loss. Common parameters or ramifications of arrival may imply missions, encounters, illusions about the place and the mission, feelings of estrangement, disillusionment, and adjustment, turning points, understandings, and transitions from one way of seeing to another. Arrivals are central to two postcolonial texts: *The Lamp of Umm Hashim* (1944) by Egyptian author Yahya Haqqi and *Season of Migration to the North* (1969) by Tayeb Salih from Sudan. The arrival of the two main characters, Ismail in *The Lamp of Umm Hashim* and the narrator of *Season of Migration to the North* are rendered not as a point, or a stopping place, but as a dialogic process that is twofold: material or physical and inner or spiritual in which Ismail and the narrator of *Season*, like the Trinidadian narrator, reach a moment where they see and acknowledge the muted dimensions of their arrivals, a necessary step in achieving a negotiated movement between two views, and two different sets of values.

The loneliness and responsibilities of the characters in the novels are more heightened than the vulnerability of the two figures of the painting because they are making their arrivals alone and facing their future choices alone. The two muffled figures in the setting of the port are intriguing in their silence and secretiveness. Shadows and bright light clash in the background of the scene where they stand. Their cloaks are dark and there are no signs of happiness on their faces, perhaps alluding as Robert Hamner suggests to the gravity of their situation and their tasks (48). They are static and have different postures. One is tall, straight, and his head

held high while the other is shorter, in a darker garb, with his head cast down. Who are they and how do they define themselves? What are their challenges arriving there? What do they bring with them? The port with its realistic representation and its ship is behind them, and they look as though they are facing a city. Their size is contrasted with the intimidating size of the imposing buildings behind them. We do not know if they know each other, if they arrived together or if they might just symbolize two sides or two complementary aspects of a “divided individual” as in the case of Naipaul’s arrival, as Hamner fantasizes, “they might well be opposed aspects of the same person: Naipaul’s ambitious writer standing beside the image of his socially inept youth” (47-48). *The Lamp of Umm Hashim* and *Season of Migration to the North* share the position of classics in modern Arab literature. They are “third world” texts of arrivals and Arab homecoming written at a moment when the cultural debate in the Arab world was dominated by the question of modernity versus tradition, by authors who travelled to the West. These texts offer possible visions and verbalizations to fill the blankness of the scene of De Chirico’s painting. This scene can be looked upon as a trope for a decisive moment in post colonial cultures pondering challenges and questions of identity and modernity.

Haqqi’s *The Lamp of Umm Hashim* started the tradition in Modern Arabic literature of the return home of the Arab student after completing his studies in Europe. Like Odysseus when he returns to Ithaca, Ismail finds everything unfamiliar upon his return. Ismail, an Egyptian from Cairo, finds himself at the crossroads of civilizations: brought up on traditional Muslim values he was subjected to modern Western culture while completing his studies of medicine in England. The text deals in detail with what Ismail is to make of his return dominated by two moments: first his rebellion on the night of his arrival against his people, his culture, his environment, and his rejection of everything followed by a revision of this attitude which leads him to a dynamic rearrangement and a reconciliation of two sets of values: his native values based on faith and tradition and the modern principles he acquired in Europe based on science and reason. Reaching this decision takes him from one way of seeing to another. This second arrival becomes a new, symbolic departure in his life and career as a physician living and working in Egypt.

Ismail returns to his homeland with practical knowledge his country and people need badly: ophthalmology. He is an eye doctor who will have to treat his cousin and bride to be and who symbolizes his ailing country. As his English professor used to tell him “Your country has a great need of you, for it is the land of the blind” (62). Egypt was fighting colonialism and corruption. Ismail’s arrival is compared to the arrival of the rain on a thirsty land. Central to the structure of the text is its setting in one of the traditional and religious neighborhoods of Cairo, the district of Umm Hashim, named after the granddaughter of the prophet Muhammad. This is where the character as a child and a teenager was immersed in traditional religious values. After seven years of estrangement from



his native milieu he feels an alien and a *deraciné* no longer sharing the beliefs and the practices of his people. Numerous details of his physical arrival back from Scotland to the port of Alexandria are given as preliminary signs of his disconnection and alienation. His arrival is marked by a mixture of feelings: idealism, solitude, impatience, and awkwardness. Ismail puts an end to his exile without telling his people of the date of his arrival. Hoping to save his family the burden of a trip to Alexandria he decides to inform them of the time of the train which will take him to Cairo. He is described on his arrival as “a smart, tall upstanding young man with a radiant face and head held high” (62). Feelings of security and peace inundate the character as he approaches and muses on the open coast of Egypt. Full of Odyssean love and longing for his homeland Ismail feels indebted to his people and his country; he doesn’t want to miss the first glimpse of its coast. So impatient to arrive, he complains about the ships and their slow pace when they approach the shore: “Why do ships deliberately dawdle on arriving and yet how speedy is their departure! She was now taking her time, caring not at all for the feelings of her passengers” (63).

The ship is greeted by the crowd shouting, kissing, and embracing each other, while Ismail is alone amid this flood of people. No one is there to meet him. He takes a train from Alexandria to Cairo, still without informing his parents of the arrival of the train, postponing the moment of reunion with his family. Suddenly he realizes that he has not brought a single gift for his parents after seven years in England, but as he consoles himself: “What is there in the whole of Europe that is good enough for my father and mother?” (70). From the ship to the train, a horse carriage takes him through the narrow alleys of his neighborhood, but the enthusiastic feelings he had on the ship start shrinking as he comes upon the dirt, dust and dereliction of the countryside and its people. The sight of his aging parents is even worse and he is under the illusion that they would look the way they had when he had left them: “The absent man lives under an illusion expecting that he will return to his dear ones and find them as he left them many years before” (71). What was familiar to Ismail becomes unfamiliar: the people, the surroundings, and the attitudes. The reunion on the night of his arrival turns out to be very short and the supper is cold and quick. Ismail’s shock and anger culminate when, as an eye doctor, he witnesses the superstitious practice of his mother treating his cousin’s diseased eyes with burning oil from the lamp of the saint’s mosque Umm Hashim. The gap between his mindset and his mother’s values is complete when he rejects the use of the oil despite the plea of his mother: “my son, many people seek the blessings through the oil of Umm Hashim, the Mother of the Destitute ... All our life it is God and Umm Hashim that we put our trust in” (74). But, “As if bitten by a snake, Ismail jumped to his feet. Was it not extraordinary that on the very first night of his return he should be witnessing — he an eye doctor — the way diseases of the eye were treated in his home country?” (73). The text refers to Ismail in his anger as “an enraged bull ... and a strange spirit ... that had come from across the seas” (74). He shocks his father

who raises doubts about what his son learned in Europe: “Is this what you learned abroad? Is all we have gained to have you return to us an infidel?” (74). Snatching the bottle of oil from his mother’s hands Ismail throws it out of the window and rushes to the square where stood the shrine of the saint. There, he does not flinch from delivering a “coup de grace to the very heart of ignorance and superstition” breaking the lamp (75). He is possessed and instead of celebrating his return his family is mourning the loss of his faith.

Rejecting superstitious practices, Ismail decides to treat Fatima with his science, only to make her lose sight completely, a reflection of his own blindness. In despair he leaves the house and he even thinks of returning to Europe to take on a position and marry there. But he does not go beyond toying with the idea. He then goes through a contemplative period every night in the square, near the mosque until the twenty-seventh night of Ramadan—the night on which the Koran was sent to the prophet: according to Muslim belief it is said to be better than thousand months when angels descend and convey blessings to the believers—arrives. On the occasion of the sacred night Ismail comes to the conclusion that the science he acquired in Europe is of no avail if it is not coupled with faith.

Flooded by the light from the lamp of the Saint and head bent in veneration, he enters the mosque on the sacred night and seeks the blessed oil. After he applies it to Fatima’s eyes, she recovers her sight. The turning point that makes Ismail adjust his attitude and experiment with both acquired western principles and elements of local tradition is placed under the mystery and the magic of the 27th night of Ramadan. The bottle of oil he smashed on the night of his arrival is what he seeks anew and reuses after he reaches an inner arrival embracing aspects of his culture he had first rejected and including them among possible remedies, thus helping his integration into the community as a successful doctor. The novel does not specify exactly how Ismail uses the oil in combination with the medical treatment. According to Wail Hassan, “Haqqi does not see any need to change social attitudes and allows Ismail to concoct an absurd solution” (86). This solution is seen by some critics as an “irrevocable bow to superstition” and the “happy ending more specious than real and that it is an act of authorial will rather than the result of artistic necessity and that it is in fact much more problematic than appears on the surface” (Siddiq 127–44). But as M.M. Badawi argues, “perhaps we are not meant to consider the matter so closely and we should be satisfied with the idea that science needs the support of religion . . . to be truly effective it is essential for an imported remedy to be related somehow to local culture” (159). What is stressed here is the upheaval Ismail’s arrival causes his community and the knowledge adjustment that is needed in these particular circumstances. What happened to the Trinidadian narrator and the awareness he gained about his alienation when he saw himself reflected in the painting of De Chirico is exemplified and magnified by the light of the lamp that moves Ismail to weigh his alienation and come to a nuanced understanding of his predicament. This is reflected in this exclamation by Ismail: “O light, where have you been all this time? Welcome back! The veil

that had descended over my heart and eyes has been raised. Now I understand what had been hidden from me. There is no knowledge without faith” (84).

Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North* is more disconcerting because of its puzzle like structure. It also absorbs a subtext of disguised Odyssean homecoming as Muhsin Al-Musawi argues and opposes two different conceptions of identity through the character of Mustafa Sa’eed and the nameless narrator who leaves Sudan to study in England and returns to the village with different ideas. Sa’eed, after “spreading his sails on the ocean in pursuit of a foreign mirage” (92) “returns to retrieve and assert identity through marriage, family, settlement, cooperation” (Al-Musawi, 197). But his sense of identity, developed against monolithic and essentialist conceptions, clashes with the vision of the narrator whose arrival is no less disturbing than Ismail’s arrival despite its apparent celebration like a honeymoon. Through the arrivals of Sa’eed and the narrator who functions as his double, Salih dwells on the predicament of Arab African elites in the second half of the twentieth century by pointing at bankrupt attitudes towards modernity: it is not by taking revenge of (the case of Sa’eed) or resisting the West (the case of the narrator) that these elites can rise to the challenges of their present but by constant movements and negotiations, migration of ideas between north and south, east and west. The nameless narrator returns to his village in Sudan at the dawn of his country’s independence and its grappling with various postcolonial issues. His arrival in *Season* is a celebration of identity, tradition, and past away from sources of fear or change which betrays deep feelings of alienation and anxiety. *Season of Migration to the North* starts where the *Lamp of Umm Hashim* ends. The happy ending in the resolution of Ismail’s crisis, the harmonious atmosphere this creates between him and his community with the general optimism sensed in the end of the novella when the narrator describes Ismail’s eyes as full of love and tolerance is echoed in the beginning of *Season of Migration to the North* (87). At the end Ismail felt secure, and the ground beneath his feet had become solid. He asserts his filiations to his countrymen “You are of me and I’m of you. I’m the son of this quarter, the son of this square” (85). These very feelings dominate the arrival of the protagonist of Salih’s novel, making him start where Ismail stopped.

Like Ismail, the narrator of *Season* arrives to the village of his memories and fantasies homesick and yearning for his people after a journey of seven years in Europe. But unlike Ismail he did not study any kind of practical science or knowledge, but poetry, and has no particular ambition or determination for change other than to reconnect with the people and the culture of his community. His moral portrait is more of a dreamer, someone disconnected from the reality: “The important thing is that I returned with a great yearning for my people in that small village at the bend of the Nile” (1). He is happy, sitting around his family members, sipping tea, and satisfied to find his room and its walls, his bed, and all the landmarks of the village from the millenary palm tree to his old grandfather, giving him a safe and secure sense of who he is: “I looked through the window at the palm tree standing in the courtyard ... I looked at its strong

straight trunk at its roots that strike down into the ground ... and I experienced a feeling of assurance, I felt not like a storm-swept feather but like that palm tree, a being with a background, with roots, with a purpose" (2). The two dimensions of his identity are geography and biography, excluding other social or historical determinants. Not only does he not see any change around him, he has no project of making any. He is only looking for elements of continuity and stability: "I go to my grandfather and he talks to me of life forty years ago, fifty years ago, even eighty, and my feeling of security is strengthened" (5). He keeps to himself, so that we are not admitted into the story of his journey which he represses, thus negating a whole dimension of who he is. Answering in generic terms, and not without conceit, a few candid questions from his family members about people in Europe such as how they live and what they do in winter, the narrator mutes all differences between his people and the people he meets during his journey, thus denying all effects of the journey on him, and the effects of colonialism on his land and his people: "Over there is like here, neither better nor worse. But I'm from here, just as the date palm standing in the courtyard of our house has grown in our house and not in anyone else's. ... Sooner or later they [the English] will leave our country just as many people throughout history left many countries. The railways, ships, hospitals, factories and schools will be ours ... Once again we shall be as we were ordinary people" (49–50).

The narrator enjoys the company of his grandfather and his circle of friends and witnesses passively their traditional joking about sex and local customs of the village such as polygamy and excision. Unlike Ismail who rebels against local superstitious practices of his community, the narrator of *Season of Migration to the North* does not object to any of the practices in his village. Indulging in these feelings of osmosis with his people and his surroundings, the narrator stumbles upon an unfamiliar face that will disturb the equation of stability and assurance he wants to establish. The narrative redirects us from the story of the narrator's arrival to the story of the unfamiliar face of Mustafa Saeed who functions as the double of the narrator and a reflection of the hidden dimension in his profile: he had also studied in England a few years before the narrator. As a newcomer from Khartoum, Mustafa's arrival and settlement are mysterious. The narrative unravels the story of the many journeys Mustafa had taken in the early twentieth century from Sudan to Cairo to England where he became an economist and took part in its historical and political preoccupations as an intellectual and an anti-colonial militant. The narrative of Mustafa's adventures, especially his violent colonial encounters in Europe, his conceptions of identity and history, which were the opposite of the narrator's ideas, disturb and shake the certitudes and platitudes of the latter. It is this very experience in the "icy fields" of Europe that the narrator censors and mutes from his narrative that Sa'eed brings to the surface. Musa Al-Halool argues that Sa'eed represents to the narrator the uncanny as not something new or alien but something familiar and established but which has been alienated from the mind through the process of repression (37).

The sudden disappearance of Mustafa from the village taking his secrets with him leaves the narrator alone with his questions, adding to the mystery occupying him. He becomes obsessed with the phantom of Mustafa, seeing him everywhere and hearing bits and pieces about him from contradictory versions of random people. But, in his frustration, the narrator goes about his business and takes on the responsibility of looking after the widow of Mustafa and her kids. He is tried in this capacity and fails to bring support or to stand for social change. The change he fears suddenly and violently hits the village, destabilizing the narrator's idealized vision of it, and his static conception of identity. The widow of Mustafa who resists local practices and refuses to be bartered in a marriage; thus, change comes from inside the village. She kills the man and takes her own life. It takes a double murder for the narrator to realize that the village to which he returned is no longer the same and that he needs to take an active role as an intellectual and stand for change. The destruction of his fantasies of a static sense of identity finally sets him in motion. In his passivity and illusions the narrator failed to support change and to save the widow of Mustafa from a forced marriage and a double murder: "His indecisiveness and failure to take action can be seen as Salih's indictment of the Arab Intelligentsia's failure to struggle for the implementation of a vital part of the *Nahda* [Arab Renaissance] social project" (Hassan 115). The change comes from within the village and the narrator decides he should support it. His choice for change and for life is shown in the final scene of the novel when swimming up the Nile and almost toying with suicide he chooses life and continues swimming northwards as if reenacting his departure for England: "All my life I had not chosen, had not decided. Now I'm making a decision. I choose life. I shall live because there are a few people I want to stay with for the longest possible time and because I have duties to discharge" (168).

*Season of Migration to the North* is the narrative of a puzzling arrival woven with craft and subtlety where the two characters Mustafa and the narrator function as one. The revelation to the narrator of his alienated face under the traits of Mustafa reflected in the light of a match struck in the darkness of Mustafa's room is an important moment. It makes the narrator aware of his shortcomings and understand the muted dimensions of his identity: "For a long time I stood in front of the iron door [of Mustafa's room]. Now I'm on my own: there is no escape, no place of refuge, no safeguard ... I turned the key in the door ... I struck a match. The light exploded on my eyes and out of the darkness there emerged a frowning face with pursed lips that I knew but could not place. I moved towards it with hate in my heart. It was my adversary Mustafa Sa'eed. The face grew a neck, the neck two shoulders and a chest, then a trunk and two legs, and I found myself standing face to face with myself. This is not Mustafa Sa'eed—it's a picture of me frowning at my face from a mirror. ... I lit another match ... looked around me and saw there was an old lamp on the table ... I shook it and found there was oil in it. How extraordinary!" (135). In this scene and in the light of yet another

lamp the narrator of *Season* stands face to face with himself and re-discovers the silenced, violent worlds he was entangled with in Europe. Like the Trinidadian narrator who saw himself on the wharf of De Chirico's painting and discovered the fissure in his being as a man and as writer, like Ismail who rediscovered a repressed dimension of his identity in the light of the night of Power and the lamp of Umm Hashim, the narrator of *Season* confronts his muted world in the room of Mustafa where was stored the quintessence of his experience in Europe. This scene functions as an illuminating moment that makes the narrator aware of his shortcomings.

The failed arrival in *Season* is the opportunity for the narrator to renounce his illusions and break with a static notion of identity and to stand for change. It stands for the symbol of the failure of a vision of Arab modernity dominated by nationalist and traditionalist discourses. The narrator's final movements in the river and the disappearance of Mustafa from the village into the realm of adventure bespeak the necessity of revising traditional ideas and attitudes. Ismail's arrival from Europe was full of promise for action and change revealing the optimism that characterized the idealism of the project of Arab renaissance (*Nahda*). Ismail first undertook that in a violent way, rejecting the local tradition which he had to compromise with later in order to accomplish change. After first being disconnected from his environment, he later achieved some kind of negotiation between his native culture and the ideas he had received in the West. The treatment of this theme is more problematized in *Season of Migration to the North*, a reflection of a deeper understanding and a dramatization of the questions and challenges of modernity in the context of the Arab world "without necessarily getting implicated in offers and solutions that may have been the pitfall of many committed and engaged narratives" as Al-Musawi points out (204).

In conclusion, the arrival scene on the painting of De Chirico functions like a paradigm for alienated arrivals. Like a mirror, it helped the Trinidadian narrator to project himself into the space of the painting and to see the muted worlds of his experience. This scene is also latent in the case of Ismail's arrival and the narrator of *Season*. Both had to step back, make adjustments, and realize the missing dimensions in their arrivals. This scene speaks to the arrival of all those "whose ships are gone and left on their own ... have to figure out their bearings and live a life different from that of their past. With the uncertainty that comes with freedom with the bitterness of betrayal and with the loneliness intensified by confusion and self-doubt, they will have no choice but to find a way to survive, and if fortunate, some fulfillment" (Jin 24). Once their ships leave, both Ismail and the narrator face their responsibilities and make their choices; it is not by returning to the past with its old equation or by rejecting it. These two opposite attitudes of the arrival in the Arab World in the middle of the twentieth century with the angst and uncertainty that characterized them continue today to dominate and divide the cultural debate in a more complex and global context.

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# Sexual Identity and Translation in Prime-Stevenson's Work

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Margaret S. Breen

**Abstract:** In her article “Sexual Identity and Translation in Prime-Stevenson’s Work” Margaret S. Breen examines the role of translation in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender studies. Breen’s focus is Edward Prime-Stevenson, who, under the penname Xavier Mayne, wrote two works: a short novel, *Imre: A Memorandum* (1906), and a general history of homosexuality, *The Intersexes: A History of Similisexuality as a Problem of Social Life* (1908). Breen argues that Prime-Stevenson’s texts are relevant to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century discussions of (homo)sexuality because they point to the importance of translation in writings concerning sexual and gender identities and behavior, specifically in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender literature from the late nineteenth century forward.

Under the penname Xavier Mayne, Edward Prime-Stevenson wrote two works which are fascinating to consider in light of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century discussions of homosexuality: a short novel, *Imre: A Memorandum* (1906), and a general history of homosexuality, *The Intersexes: A History of Similisexuality as a Problem of Social Life* (1908). These texts are key to understanding the importance of translation as both a linguistic and metaphoric act in *fin-de-siècle* writings concerning sexual and gender identities and behaviors; more broadly, these texts attest to the value of comparative cultural and literary approaches for the study of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) literature from the late nineteenth century forward. Simply put, translation facilitates the making of meaning within and across languages. One might even say “sanctioning,” for in validating certain terms as linguistic and cultural equivalencies, translation necessarily discards others as inappropriate and undesirable. Thus, as it selectively moves and creates meaning across geographical, temporal, cultural, epistemological, and discursive spaces, translation may entail not only empowerment but also restriction, loss, and even violence (see Butler 36–37; Spivak 15). Translation is an operation capable of erasure and consolidation, preservation, and subversion. Given this dynamic capacity, it is not surprising that not only cultural gatekeepers but also marginalized groups would be drawn to translation. Thus, the civil rights, democratic, feminist, gay, lesbian, and queer movements of the late twentieth century have made possible the increased creation, publication, circulation, and availability of LGBT literary works across cultural, linguistic, and national boundaries. Within the context of these movements, it is

easy to recognize translation's political register. Of course, this register is fraught with issues of linguistic, cultural, gender, and racial privileging: not all languages and not all lives are valued equally. Even so, translation can be transformative. The rendering of access to queer stories in different languages answers that ever-present yearning across cultures to hear stories that reflect queer desires and so affirm and nourish queer lives.

LGBT writers since the 1970s have engaged translation figuratively and literally in order to champion the availability of and access to LGBT literature. One thinks, for example, of lesbian poet Adrienne Rich, whose landmark collection *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems 1974–1977* (1978) has as its underlying ethos the celebration of poetry for women, by women, and about women. Rich's project turns on a metaphoric act of translation insofar as it requires the rethinking and reconstitution of the female subject as a speaking subject in her own right. One also thinks of Cherríe Moraga and her multi-genre collection *Loving in the War Years: Lo que nunca pasó por sus labios*. Here, with the movement between English and Spanish, Moraga explores her perpetual outsider status as a light-skinned Chicana lesbian who refuses to pass as either white or heterosexual. Within the contexts of both lesbian communities, she remains an un-translatable subject (see Cutter). Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body* (1992) offers another interesting use of the translation. The novel's multiply-gendered narrator-protagonist, it is worth noting, is a translator. In this case the translation trope foregrounds Winterson's formal experimentation in the novel and her playful queering of the gender conventions of storytelling and romance (see Parker).

Yet another contemporary writer concerned with translation is the gay U.S.-American poet Mark Doty. His poem, entitled "Retrievers in Translation," offers a case in point. In the poem the speaker contemplates an Italian Renaissance tapestry that features a hunting scene: men and dogs surround a wounded stag in the water. At the center of the scene are two dogs: "retrievers—recognizable but, like Renaissance lions, / unmistakably Italian, as though they've been, // somehow, *translated*. One, blue-eyed, / is caught in profile, grinning, turned/to the action a dozen feet from shore,/the other looks directly at us, the textile hung // so that his eyes meet ours dead on / with a shocked—and shocking—immediacy: / animal eyes staring five hundred years/but new as the surprise of yellow primroses, // this morning" (lines 27–37, page 82; emphasis in the original). In contrast to the hunters who, clad in their "scarlet tights" (line 23, page 81) and "horned shoes" (line 56, page 83), belong to a long-lost world, the dogs prove "intractable /, fixed ... alive" (lines 53–54, page 83). Their immediacy serves as an invitation for human connection. Of the dog staring out from the tapestry, the speaker observes, "this dog's here, now, and made/to startle us to witness, mute friend" (line 59, page 83). Within the poem the retriever proves to be Doty's metaphor for otherness. "*What do you think/ otherness is?*" asks a voice in the poem (lines 50–51, page 83; emphasis in the original). The speaker answers. It is

not something foreign, removed, unreachable; rather, in its difference it beckons and invites: “The life / of animals, the life of art, / they seem to meet in this gaze // which *is* fabric but looks back at us, / from the cinquecento and from the abyss / between dogs and people” (lines 42–47, page 82; emphasis in the original). Whether on the level of text or textile, “otherness” for Doty facilitates translation: it proffers the possibility for connection, for immediacy. In contrast to Gertrude Stein’s rose, a dog really is a dog is a dog.

The treatment of otherness can be found not only in other poems from the same 1998 collection, *Sweet Machine*, but also in Doty’s other works from the 1990s, including *My Alexandria* (1993) and *Atlantis* (1995). The recurrent exploration may be understood at least in part in terms of Doty’s twinned aesthetic and political sensibility. Whether implicitly or explicitly, he considers gay desires, intimacies, and communities often in light of their interplay with larger mainstream society. In so doing, he argues, via a kind of poetics of identity politics, it is precisely our otherness that makes us beautiful, memorable, beloved, vital, and fully human. It might seem that Doty’s perspective on otherness, especially as it underpins his understanding of translation as the basis for human connection, is a particularly contemporary one: a viewpoint that depends on the gay rights struggles of the 1980s and 1990s and that marks a generation of gay US-American writers for whom the mourning and outrage precipitated by the AIDS crisis have proven emotionally and politically formative. Perhaps this is so. (Mark Wunderlich’s and Deborah Landau’s work suggest as much.) Yet, it is worth noting that Doty’s perspective is one that he shares with late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scientists, scholars, and writers for whom, in some cases, the study and representation of homosexuality was a personal quest.

Stated slightly differently, translation, in its capacity to validate LGBT subject positions, needs to be understood not simply in terms of modern writers’ preoccupation with it; literally and figuratively, translation has been a sustained concern of LGBT writers for more than a century, and it figured especially prominently in *fin-de-siècle* and early twentieth-century scientific, social, and literary treatments of homosexuality. As Heike Bauer has argued, sexologists considered “the process of sexual classification itself . . . a process of translation, as [they] sought to reproduce in textual form what they perceived to be ‘truth of sex’” (16). This was particularly the case with regard to the study and characterization of people who were alternately called Urnings, Uranians, the third sex, similisexuals, inverts, intersexes, intermediates, and homosexuals. The very proliferation (one might say confusion) of terms in English reflects different, though at times overlapping, points of emphasis within the conceptualization of sexual and gender desires—whether the person with same-sex desires was, for example, someone with a male body but a female soul or vice versa (as in the case of the Uranian and the invert) or someone who desired a person of the same sex (as in the case of the homo- and similisexual) or, again, someone who, from an evolutionary perspective, existed as an intermediate and therefore a potentially

mediating figure between a man and a woman (as in the case of the intermediate and intersexual). This last is a recurring characterization in social philosopher Edward Carpenter's *Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women*, published in 1908: intermediates "have a special work to do as reconcilers and interpreters of the two sexes to each other" (14). Even within these terms there are finer distinctions that sexologists and scholars of the time made.

The difficulty of terminology was in turn compounded by the movement across languages, as in, for example, the translation of the work of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs and Richard von Krafft-Ebing from German, which was not only their primary language but also the predominant language of science at the turn of the century, into other languages, such as English. Summarizing the vexing complexity of this issue of terminology and translation is sexologist Havelock Ellis, who in his thirties had himself translated Emile Zola's novel *Germinal*. Ellis wrote the multi-volume *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*. In the 1927 or third edition of *Sexual Inversion*, which is the second of the ultimately six volumes and the one first written and published, he remarks:

It is scarcely legitimate to use the term "Urning" in English. "Uranian" is more correct. . . . it has been largely superseded by the term "homosexuality." This was devised (by a little-known Hungarian doctor, Benkert, who used the pseudonym Kertbeny) in . . . [1869], but at first attracted no attention. It has, philologically, the awkward disadvantage of being a bastard term compounded of Greek and Latin elements, but its significance—sexual attraction to the same sex—is fairly clear and definite . . . (Carpenter has proposed to remedy its bastardly linguistic character by transforming it into "homogenic;" this, however, might mean not only "toward the same sex," but "of the same kind," and in German already possesses actually that meaning). The term "homosexual" has the further advantage that on account of its classical origin it is easily translatable into many languages. It is now the most widespread general term for the phenomena we are dealing with, and it has been used by Magnus Hirschfeld, now the chief authority in this field, as the title of his encyclopedic work, *Die Homosexualität* (18–19).

Two points are worth noting here. First, *Sexual Inversion*, whose earliest version was co-authored by Ellis and John Addington Symonds, was published in English in 1897 after first appearing in German in 1896 (see Dixon 72–73). Second, the reference to "homosexuality" as a "bastard term" not only points to the construction of homosexual identity in eugenic race projects, but also encodes the unsettled quality of conceptualization at the core of the thinking and naming of queer desires (see Somerville). As these points indicate, translation is a culturally over-determined project that produces a taxonomy of homosexuality in order to answer (or silence) various aesthetic, legal, political, and social issues. Drawing on the earlier work of Ulrichs and Krafft-Ebing, Ellis and Carpenter made impassioned arguments regarding the acceptance of homosexuals. Key to Ellis's and Carpenter's writings regarding the emergent identity category

of homosexuality was the figure of translation. While Ellis conceived of homosexuality as an “organic aberration” and Carpenter underscored its cultural importance (Ellis and Symonds [1897] qtd. in Dixon 73; see also Foster 245), but, in the work of both, translation functions as a powerful vehicle. As linguistic act, process, and metaphor, translation facilitates early twentieth-century arguments that homosexuality was not only a naturally occurring but also a socially useful behavior within human communities over a range of cultural and historical contexts (see Carpenter, *Intermediate Types*). For Carpenter especially, the homosexual him/herself came to embody the translator *par excellence*, who not only mediated between men and women (and so in the process stabilized heterosexual practices) but also, because of a natural predisposition for the arts, literature in particular (see Carpenter, *Intermediate Sex* 32, 110; see also Ellis, *Sexual Inversion* 341), was able to create, tell, and translate homosexual stories and, in the process, affirm their valued place within Western literary history. Prime-Stevenson’s study *The Intersexes* and his novel *Imre* need to be understood within this framework.

Born in New Jersey in 1858, Prime-Stevenson spent much of his twenties and thirties as a professional writer. His early works included numerous essays and poems published in various literary magazines and three novels that he published under pseudonyms. In the late 1890s he worked for *The Independent* and *Harper’s Weekly*. He served as a literary and music critic, translator, and editor. With few exceptions, his works from 1900 onward, when he gave up his career and moved to Europe in order to travel and to write, were published privately and were self-financed. The writing from this period includes *Imre*, *The Intersexes*, and a collection of essays and criticism on music. He died in Switzerland in 1942 (see Gifford, “A Brief Chronology” 27–29). Of Prime-Stevenson’s works, *The Intersexes* is the most substantial. As John Lauritsen notes, the work takes its title from the English translation of *sexuelle Zwischenstufen* (37), the term that Hirschfeld used in his writings, notably in his *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen*, published between 1899 and 1923. The analysis of *The Intersexes* and *Imre* foregrounds the crucial role that translation played in early twentieth-century queer discussions of homosexuality. Dedicated to the memory of Krafft-Ebing, whom Prime-Stevenson had met and been encouraged by (see Gifford, “Introduction” 25), *The Intersexes* serves as a kind of guidebook—a layman’s sexological *Pilgrim’s Progress*—for homosexuality (for particularly Bunyanesque passages, see *The Intersexes* 5, 122). Whether homosexual or not, readers, Prime-Stevenson assumes, are in need of assistance in understanding people whose “similosexual instinct defines a series of originally intermediary sexes ... rather than mere aberrations, degeneracies, psychic tangents, from the male and female” (*The Intersexes* x). Initially in his study, Prime-Stevenson suggests that that understanding requires readers to engage in acts of translation: “Perhaps the clearest descriptions [of the homosexual] come when we tell the reader to take any and every phase of admiration, of attraction and sexual love, which a normal, amorous man feels for a woman, and to translate that into the

uranistic passion: into sexual love for a man or youth on the part of a man. ... There are the same struggles, hopes, fears, self-sacrifices, workings for good or ill on the nature of the lover: the same joys, jealousies, despairs: and too often (as we shall see) the same tragedies of slow or of fiercely swift culmination. All, all, are to be 'translated' from their normal relations in distinctly masculine natures, into the sexually feminine instincts and experience of the male-loving Uranian heart" (*The Intersexes* 85).

Translation, then, is a necessary methodology for the recognition of Uranians (homosexuals) as fully human. What soon becomes apparent from a reading of *The Intersexes* is its function as a mediating text: one that renders accessible to a lay audience sexological studies of homosexuality published over the previous half century. Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* especially serves as a continual reference point and source text for Prime-Stevenson: *The Intersexes* includes translations of a number of *Psychopathia's* case histories (see, for example, 104–06; 116–09). *The Intersexes* also reflects *fin-de-siècle* and early-twentieth-century scientific and scholarly views on race and sexuality. So, for example, he reports, "three races of the world ... the Jew, the Gipsy, and the North-American Negro, are all excessively similesexual" (76). This statement reveals the critical assumption engaged by contemporaries such as Ellis: racial categorization structures discussions of homosexuality.

Prime-Stevenson's rhetorical reliance on translation intensifies as the book proceeds. Increasingly, he emphasizes contributions to Western culture, the arts in particular, that homosexuals, especially male homosexuals, have made: "in the more aesthetic professions [the Uranian's] work has been the wonder of the world since it began" (81); he includes numerous lists of notable male and female homosexuals who were either "complete or partial" Uranians (77). While literary excerpts appear throughout, Chapter 13, the last chapter, is devoted completely to a discussion of the life and work of German poet August von Platen, while Chapter 9 offers an overview of queer US-American and European literary history, with special emphasis on authors writing in German. Whereas at the outset of *The Intersexes* he invites readers to consider homosexuals as if they were heterosexual, by the halfway mark, Prime-Stevenson has inverted his strategy. Across Western cultural history, he argues, homosexuals have served as their societies' artistic translators, and he himself engages enthusiastically in this role. He provides translations of excerpts from German and French literary works, letters, and diaries, some texts fairly well known, others obscure. Many of these translations are his own, marked with an asterisk and the abbreviation X.M. (for Xavier Mayne). So he translates an excerpt from Austrian writer Franz Grillparzer's play *Weh dem der Lügt!* (307), along with entries from Grillparzer's diary (304–06) and a letter (303–04). So, too, he laments the lack of any translations of Alexander von Sternberg's stories: "They have not been republished in German within many years. What English translations of them ever appeared (the present writer has not been able to find any) seem to have become lost" (308). As these textual moments



indicate, translation for Prime-Stevenson, literary translation in particular, is a form of queer activism.

Although Hirschfeld cites it in his 1914 work *Die Homosexualität des Mannes und des Weibes* (see Lauritsen 39), *The Intersexes* is not, from a medical or scholarly point of view, a significant study. Taken as a cultural document, it is, however, useful, because it offers insight into the importance of translation for late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century conceptualizations of homosexuality. As a metaphor, process, and act, translation not only facilitates but proves to be integral to Prime-Stevenson's discussion of homosexuality. Particularly important is the use of literary translation as a means for arguing for the social acceptance of homosexuality: the "man who is homosexual [must] be taught that he is not more criminal or monstrous than the 'normalist' ... Common-sense, science and humanity together demand this sort of medical-psychiatric sentiment; and in time social ideas and laws, the world around, will endorse such logical, human acceptances" (*The Intersexes* 121). Prime-Stevenson's overview and translation of Uranian-infused literature in *The Intersexes* work to that effect.

Written two years before *The Intersexes*, *Imre* encodes Prime-Stevenson's concern with translation, literary translation especially, as a means of garnering homosexual awareness and acceptance. The interplay for the terms he used to describe the work—"memorandum" (subtitle), "novelette" (*Imre* 112), and "romance" (*Imre* 210)—indicates that for him, as for Hirschfeld, literature offered readers artful case studies and that literature functioned as a mediating force, one that linked a general public with the world of scientific research (see Bauer 17). Literature and translation are intertwined preoccupations in *Imre*. Together, they facilitate not only the telling of a homosexual love story but also, more specifically, a cross-cultural (and within the terms of early twentieth-century sexology a cross-racial) homosexual love story, wherein a romanticized understanding of Hungarianness serves as a metaphoric point of reference for Prime-Stevenson's thinking through and consolidating of homosexual identities. Approximately 100-pages long, divided into three parts, and loosely patterned on Platonic dialogue, *Imre* is most immediately indebted to Otto de Joux's (Otto Rudolf Podjuki) 1893 *Die Enterbten des Liebesglücks* (1897, expanded edition), a work that Prime-Stevenson briefly discusses in *The Intersexes* and does not credit as a crucial source text for his novel (for a discussion of the two texts, see Livesey 103–16.) As Wolfram Setz, editor of the 1997 German edition of *Imre* remarks, "the correspondences are obvious. Mayne apparently liked de Joux's book and had read it with profit" (157; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine; note that the German edition of *Imre* lists Xavier Mayne as the author).

Prime-Stevenson's English reworking of de Joux begins with a one-and-one-half-page prefatory letter. Written by an English businessman named Oswald and addressed to the author Xavier Mayne, the letter introduces Oswald's account of his meeting and falling in love with an Hungarian army officer, Imre, whose name serves as the novel's title. This mediating strategy, a convention of realistic



fiction, is a reminder that Prime-Stevenson could not directly tell this gay love story without serious repercussions to his own social standing (E.M. Forster's the novel *Maurice*, written between 1913 and 1914, offers a point of comparison: the novel was not published until 1971, one year after Forster's death). Prime-Stevenson's penname and his further distinction between narrator-protagonist and author serve to insulate him from public scrutiny. The novel was released privately: the publisher, A. Rispoli of Napoli, printed only 500 copies (see Gifford, "A Brief Chronology" 28).

Translation's importance to the novel is apparent from the start. Oswald's account of his love story is linguistically mediated, racially marked, and musically themed. He and Imre speak to each other in German, as well as in French. Some of their words and phrases are, however, in Hungarian, and, at the novel's end, the swells of a "*cigány* orchestra" (Gypsy [Roma/Sinti] orchestra) together with "the free, impassioned leap and acclaim, '*huszár legény vagyok!*'" ("I am a lad of the hussars") form a musical backdrop to their celebration of "the friendship which is love, the love which is friendship" (*Imre* 126). As Oswald notes, he and Imre are "two men ... of absolutely diverse race, unlike objects in life and wide-removed environments, who could not even understand each other's mother-tongues" (72). In other words, the communication between characters of the "third sex" is in a "third [or fourth] language," and it is metaphorically aligned with an exoticized and musically inflected representation of Hungarian identity as "eternally oriental, minor-keyed, insidious, nerve-thrilling" (127). Oswald's and Imre's unfolding love story is a romance whose linguistic, racial, and sexual otherness depends upon translation; so, too, does the English-language memorandum recording that romance. The translation trope in effect structures readers' reception of the gay love story. In *Imre*, as in *The Intersexes*, translation is a means for not only understanding the naturalness of homosexuality but also discursively producing the homosexual subject. Moreover, since these processes are dependent upon readers' engagement, the trope may be said to queer the readers themselves, to place them in a mediating position that recalls Carpenter's description of Uranian men and women who "function as reconcilers and interpreters" (*Intermediate Sex* 38).

The novel's intertwining of ethnic, racial, and sexual discourses underscores Prime-Stevenson's investment in the translation trope. Imre's and Oswald's story takes place in *Szent-Istvánhely*, literally Saint Stephen Place (*Imre* 35, note 2), Prime-Stevenson's name for Budapest. This setting is interesting, given the history of sexology. As Robert D. Tobin has noted, Karl Maria (Károly Mária) Kertbeny, who coined that unruly if readily translatable term "*der Homosexuale*" ("the homosexual"), was both a homosexual rights advocate and a supporter of the 1848 Hungarian Revolution against Austrian rule (see also Takács; about eroticism and sexuality in Hungarian literature, see Tötösy de Zepetnek). *Imre's* setting draws attention not only to sexology's but also to the novel's investment in the making and movement of meaning across geographical, cultural, linguistic, gender, and ethnic/racial divides. Budapest is a twin city, whose two parts, Buda

and Pest, located on either side of the Danube, were joined together as one city in 1873. Connecting the two parts of the city was the Chain Bridge (Lánchíd) (Prime-Stevenson, *Imre* 66, note 1). In the novel the bridge functions as Prime-Stevenson's objective correlative for translation. The bridge metaphorically links the text's discourses of ethnicity, race and sexuality, even as it symbolizes German's function as the "third language" on which Imre and Oswald depend for their relationship. The bridge also proves to be the locus for the men's first conversation about the "third sex" (65–68), an intriguing counterpoint to Radclyffe Hall's post-World War I metaphor in her 1928 novel *The Well of Loneliness*, "the no-man's-land of sex" (79). Near the end of Part 1, two pages before mentioning the bridge, Oswald asks himself, "Was Imre von N. what is called among psychiaters of our day a homosexual, a Urning in his instincts and feelings and life, in his psychic and physical attitude toward women and men? Was he a Uranian? Or was he sexually entirely normal and Dionian? Or a blend of the two types, a Dionian-Uranian? Or what, or what not? ... Uranian? Similisexual? Homosexual? Dionian? Profound and often all too oppressive, even terrible, can be the significance of those cold psychic–sexual terms to the man who — 'knows'! *To the man who 'knows'!*" (63–64; emphasis in the original).

The movement here between terms—Oswald's uncertainty about Imre's relation to or location *vis-à-vis* the "cold" language of sexual identity—is recast subsequently in the bridge scene that follows the passage. What matters in the novel (as opposed to, say, in *The Intersexes*) is not so much the kind of homosexual each man is. Although Prime-Stevenson takes up this question several times in *Imre*, it proves to be less important than the possibility of recounting a romantic connection between Oswald and Imre. Sexological study gives way to love story (for a slightly different reading, see Livesey, who argues that Oswald and Imre are "entirely masculine, in body and mind and emotion"; for him, this characterization constitutes a "completely new" kind of gay male love story [89]). So, as they cross from one side of the city to the other, Imre himself broaches the subject: "'Do you have such affairs in England?' 'Yes. Certainly.' 'In military life?' 'In military and civil life. In every kind of life.' 'Indeed. And how do *you* understand that sort of thing?' 'What sort of thing?' 'A ... a man's feeling *that* way for another man? What's the explanation, the excuse for it?' 'Oh, I don't pretend to understand it. There are things we would better not try to *understand*'" (66; emphasis in the original). Much as the bridge demarcates the space between Buda and Pest, the two men traversing it explore their relation to each other. Much as the bridge is suspended over the Danube, so the men's exchange is characterized by rhetorical suspension: question follows question. Rhetorically, their conversation marks them not as "men who know" but rather as "men who wish to know." Thus, the bridge offers an intermediate space for Imre and Oswald's initial shared claim to a discourse (although as of yet not an identity) of sexual intermediacy.

In the novel, discourse depends largely on translations facilitated by Oswald in his capacities as narrator and character. So, for example, Part 1 begins with an

epigraph, taken from Austrian writer Franz Grillparzer's play *Die Argonauten* and translated into English (35). A few years later, Prime-Stevenson references the passage again in *The Intersexes* and provides a different translation that, this time, he marks as his own (307). In *Imre*, it is unclear whether the translation is Oswald's and by extension Prime-Stevenson's. Whatever the case, nine pages after offering the epigraph, Oswald alludes to it, this time in German, in order to underscore the lines' significance. The reference is meant to signify Imre and Oswald's "swift confidence, the current of immediate mutuality which sped back and forth between [them]: "Es gibt ein Zug, ein wunderliches Zug" (44), as Gifford translates, "there is an attraction, a strange attraction" (44, note 1). In the German edition, editor Setz notes that the German is "etwas entstellt" (Mayne 24, note), that is, "somewhat garbled," with a connotation of dislocation. Oswald gets the gender wrong: it is "der Zug," not "das Zug," that is, "there is a pull, a wonderful pull." Taken together, Oswald's English translation of the Grillparzer verse at the outset and his ungrammatical German recollection of the verse later in the chapter anticipate his uncertain relation to psychiatry's sexual terminology near the chapter's end. Even so, the literary citation accomplishes something that science's "oppressive," "terrible," and "cold terms" (64) cannot: it affirms a "current, mystic" the sense of which, one might argue, the imperfect translation actually intensifies. That is to say, Oswald's German may falter, but from the start his relationship with Imre, primarily carried out in German, does not. The citation, whether in English translation or in imperfect German, conveys and celebrates an intimacy that psychiatric discussions, tethered to alienating terminology, cannot. Stated differently, these moments in *Imre* reveal that translation is performative; it entails linguistic destabilization; the translation of literature in particular discloses the capacity of linguistic and social grammatical limits to be not only tested but transcended. Did Oswald get the gender wrong? Maybe not. What might be dismissed as disorderly grammatical conduct in effect points to the aesthetic and cultural production of meaning outside the confines of the gender of grammar and the grammar of gender.

A related point can be made about the selectivity of Oswald's translation, particularly an instance of non-translation that proffers a queer intimacy between narrator and reader via a shared engagement of a literary text. In the final section of the novel, Oswald offers readers an account of his "coming out" conversation with Imre. Oswald's back story—his description of years of homosexual loneliness—builds to a declaration of love for Imre. In the process, Oswald quotes Platen's poetry twice, once in German and once in English. It is the first instance that is particularly interesting because of the queer performativity that it potentially requires of the novel's readers. Oswald records, "Ah, I could well exclaim in the cry of Platen (90). A couplet, an English translation of which Gifford provides, "Woe to you whom all the world disdains just for being/And whose entire soul yearns just to be" (Prime-Stevenson, *Imre* 90, note 1), immediately follows: "O, weh Dir, der die Welt verachtet, allein zu sein / Und dessen ganze Seele

schmachtet allein zu sein!" (90). For Imre, who speaks with Oswald in German, translation of this couplet from Platen's "Ghazal IV" is not necessary (or perhaps is not a possibility). Oswald, in his capacity as narrator, offers his readers no translation. The lack ruptures the fictional continuity between narrator and reader. Did Prime-Stevenson simply forget to translate? Was his German too shaky (as the above grammar mistakes might suggest)? Or was he interested in producing a break between narrator and reader: in locating his English readership in a position of potential linguistic remove, one that rhetorically mirrors Oswald's account of his own experience of homosexual isolation?

Interestingly, this remove enacts (or performs) the meaning of the untranslated couplet itself. Thematically, a ghazal explores the loss or lack of love and, the loss notwithstanding, the beauty of that love; the ghazal does so in part through formal features such as the repetition of key words and phrases. In the case of this couplet from Platen's ghazal, the repeated phrase is "allein zu sein," which in the first line conveys the doubled meanings of "just for being" and "to be alone" and in the second signifies "only to be" (compare with Gifford's translation, Prime-Stevenson, *Imre* 90, note 1). The couplet might be rendered in English as follows: "Woe to you, whom the world despises, to be alone [(or) just for being], / And whose whole soul yearns only to be." The narratologically induced distance thus both reproduces formally for readers the isolation that Oswald experiences and calls upon them to bridge it through a direct encounter with Platen: to tease out the meaning of his German—to themselves become his translators. This instance of the text's non-translation in effect invites readers to take up the task that is a signature feature of Prime-Stevenson's queer activism: not simply to mirror Oswald in his loneliness and so connect with him but also to engage the literary representation of that loneliness. Thus the ghazal couplet becomes not only for Platen and Oswald but also for Prime-Stevenson's readers a poetic expression of homosexual yearning. *Imre*'s happy ending has as much to do with the characters Imre and Oswald's romance as with the literary act at the core of that romance: the narrator and the readers' shared experience of literary translation.

In conclusion, a comparative approach to Prime-Stevenson's *The Intersexes* and *Imre* illuminates late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century struggles to represent non-normative gender and sexual desires and identities, in this case, male homosexual desire and male homosexuality. Key to that struggle for Prime-Stevenson is translation. In his writing translation facilitates both the representation of the story of gay male desire and his articulation of that desire and its telling. The translation of literature in particular enables in these works not only the creation of epistemological and discursive spaces to think and represent same-sex desire, but also, beyond it, the emerging recognition, advocacy, and discursive codification of homosexual identity. In their awareness of the significance of translation—its capacity to validate, to de-stigmatize, and to transform—contemporary writers of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender literature such as Doty have much in common with Prime-Stevenson.

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# The Notion of Life in the Work of Agamben

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Carlo Salzani

**Abstract:** In his article “The Notion of Life in the Work of Agamben” Carlo Salzani analyzes the notion of “nudity” Giorgio Agamben’s understanding of Western culture. Beginning with a reading of the essay “Nudity,” in which Agamben proposes an archaeological investigation of the theological apparatus of the concept, Salzani analyzes the pivotal trope in Agamben’s *Homo Sacer* project, “bare” or “naked life,” that is, the nudity of life in the grip of sovereign power. Nudity and the nudity of life are construed as a “limit-concept” in a double movement of simultaneous positing and negation or in a positing that grants at the same time the inappropriability of its object. Salzani highlights how much this “liminality” owes to a tradition that borders the aesthetics and ranges from Kant’s “sublime” to Heidegger’s *Ereignis* via Benjamin’s “expressionless-ness.” In Agamben’s thought this risks to resemble a “mystical intuition,” as he argues in his first book, *The Man Without Content*, about Kant’s aesthetic judgment.

## INTRODUCTION

The work of philosopher Giorgio Agamben has gained a central place in politico-philosophical debates since the publication of his 1995 book *Homo Sacer*. Agamben elaborates on and defines Western culture with a particular understanding and construction of the meaning of life based on the methodological approach of “archaeology” he borrows from Michel Foucault. Agamben’s work has become important in the study of culture in general and in the study of literature in particular (see, e.g., Clemens, Heron, Murray), thus the relevance of his thought in cultural studies (see, e.g., Watkin; Zartaloudis) and in comparative cultural studies (see, e.g., Bartoloni; on comparative cultural studies, see Tötösy de Zepetnek). In “Nudity,” an essay published in English translation in 2011, Agamben returns to the pivotal figure of his *Homo Sacer* project about the “nudity of life” in the grip of sovereign power. Agamben proposes an archaeological investigation of the theological apparatus (*dispositivo*) of “nudity.” He is not concerned with politics or life, but, rather, with art and theology. However, the insistence on this trope reaffirms, on the one hand, its centrality to Agamben’s project and intends perhaps to shed some light on an indeterminacy that attracted so much criticism. But it also rehearses and reiterates, on the other hand, a recurrent pattern in his thought: a philosophical mode which pursues, as he writes in one of his first books,



*Stanzas*, “the impossible task of appropriating what must, in any case, remain inappropriable” (xviii). Nudity and the nudity of life are construed as a “limit-concept” and the new essay highlights, I argue, how much this “liminality” owes to a tradition that borders the aesthetics, and ranges from Kant’s sublime (*Erhabene*) to Heidegger’s event (*Ereignis*) via Benjamin’s notion of the expressionless-ness (*Ausdruckslosigkeit*). This grounding of the analysis in the inappropriability of its object risks to resemble a “mystical intuition” as Agamben argues about Kant’s aesthetic judgment, “shrouded in the most impenetrable mystery” (*Man without Content* 45), if not, as some have argued, to a mystification.

## NAKED CORPOREALITY

To Agamben, nudity is “inseparable from a theological signature” (“Nudity” 57). In the book of *Genesis*, Adam and Eve realize they are naked only after the sin and this is because before sinning, they were not naked, but dressed in clothing of grace. Nudity, therefore, exists only negatively, “as a privation of the clothing of grace” (“Nudity” 57). Through sin, humanity becomes visible as a body without glory: “the nakedness of pure corporeality, a concept Agamben borrows from Erik Peterson, to postulate that “denudation resulting in pure functionality, a body that lacks all nobility since its ultimate dignity lay in the divine glory now lost” (“Nudity” 59). This means that “naked corporeality” pre-exists the clothing of glory, and is merely made visible by the denudation of sin. The fact that grace can be added and taken like a clothing means that “human nature is always already constituted as naked, it is always already ‘naked corporeality’” (“Nudity” 63). Naked corporeality is the obscure bearer of divine grace, which disappears under it and is only revealed as *natura lapsa* in the denudation of sin. The theological apparatus works here like the biopolitical paradigm: “Just as the political *mythologeme* of *homo sacer* postulates as a presupposition a naked life that is impure, sacred and thus killable (though this naked life was produced only by means of such presupposition), so the naked corporeality of human nature is only the opaque presupposition of the original and luminous supplement that is the clothing of grace. Though the presupposition is hidden behind the supplement, it comes back to light whenever the caesura of sin once again divides nature and grace, nudity and clothing” (“Nudity” 64). Sin did not introduce evil in the world, only revealed it: sin consisted essentially of the removal of a garb. Thus “nudity” and “naked corporeality” is the irreducible Gnostic residue that implies a constitutive imperfection in creation, which must, at all events, be covered up” (“Nudity” 64–65). However, as for naked life, the corruption of nature revealed in sin did not pre-exist it, but was produced by it. Nudity is thus, in our culture, “only the obscure and ungraspable presupposition of clothing” (“Nudity” 65). It is only a “shadow” of the robe, a mere privation.

One of the consequences of the indissoluble theological bond that combines nudity and clothing is that nudity is not a “state,” but an “event,” which belongs

to time and history, not to being and form: “we can therefore only experience nudity as a denudation and a baring, never as a form and a stable possession. At any rate, it is difficult to grasp and impossible to hold on to” (“Nudity” 65). Nudity is thus defined by non-nudity, by the robe of which it has been stripped. It is therefore “impossible”: there is only denudation, only baring, and the naked body remains obstinately unreachable. Again the analogy with biopolitics is revealing: “naked corporeality, like naked life, is only the obscure and impalpable bearer of guilt. In truth, there is only baring, only the infinite gesticulations that remove clothing and grace from the body” (“Nudity” 78). I insist for the moment on the terminology used by Agamben: nudity subsists only “negatively,” as “privation,” as “shadow”; it is “obscure,” “opaque,” “irreducible,” “ungraspable,” “unreachable,” “impalpable,” “impossible,” and it is defined only by its opposite, by “non-nudity.”

#### NUDA VITA

The same terminology characterizes the determinations of *nuda vita*, “naked life” (in his translation of Agamben’s *Homo Sacer*, Daniel Heller-Roazen rendered the Italian *nuda vita* as “bare life,” establishing the norm for all future translations; Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino, in their translation of *Means without Ends* opted for the form “naked life”; I modify here all translations of *nuda* from “bare” to “naked” in order to emphasize the relation with nudity and Agamben’s essay on “Nudity”; for a discussion of some issues concerning the translation, see Durantaye 202–05). In Agamben’s works, the syntagm “naked life” appears for the first time in the conclusion of his 1982 book *Language and Death* (106) in an analysis of sacrality and sacrifice, but is first inserted in a political discourse in the 1990 *Coming Community* (64, 86). In a 2001 interview, Agamben states that it was only after reading Foucault that he was able to connect the issue of naked life, which had been haunting him for many years with regard to biopolitics and that this became thereafter the fulcrum of his investigations (see Leitgeb and Vismann). Andrew Norris remarks, however, that in the *Homo Sacer* series “naked life” is never defined precisely, but usually presented in examples: *Versuchpersonen*, Karen Quinlan, people in “overcomas,” refugees, the *Muselmann* (270; on *Muselmann*, see, e.g., Peguy). It is nonetheless the “protagonist” of the project whose implication in the political sphere in the form of exclusionary inclusion or inclusionary exclusion, constitutes the originary—although “concealed”—nucleus of sovereign power.

The few determinations we encounter never define the nudity of naked life. Significantly, it is first identified precisely as “excluded”: it is “that whose exclusion founds the city of men” (*Homo Sacer* 7). It is then described as “sacred”: the protagonist of this book—Agamben writes in the introduction to *Homo Sacer*—“is naked life, that is, the life of *homo sacer* (sacred man), who *may be killed and yet not sacrificed*” (*Homo Sacer* 8; emphases in the original).

It is further portrayed as the life in the sovereign ban, in the state of exception, which becomes indistinguishable and finally coincides with the law; it is the life that is lived in the village at the foot of the hill on which Kafka's castle stands; it is the life of Joseph K., finally indistinguishable from the trial (*Homo Sacer* 53). Not simply natural life (*zoe*), but a life that is naked because it has been stripped in every context of all the forms of life that cohere into a qualified life (*bios*) and is sacred because exposed to death. It is, as such, the originary political element (*Homo Sacer* 88), the "ultimate and *opaque* bearer of sovereignty" (*Means without Ends* 6). It is thus the "hinge" around which *domus* and *polis* are articulated and the "threshold" through which they communicate to each other: "Neither political *bios* nor natural *zoe*, [naked life] is the zone of indistinction in which *zoe* and *bios* constitute each other in including and excluding each other" (*Homo Sacer* 90). Like nudity in the theological apparatus, "naked life is a product of the machine and not something that pre-exists it" (*State of Exception* 87–88).

The meaning of the nudity of "naked life" emerges only in two passages of *Homo Sacer*: it is presented, first, without explanation almost as a cursory remark as the translation of Walter Benjamin's *das bloße Leben* (*Homo Sacer* 65). The concept appears in a number of essays Benjamin wrote in the late 1910s and early 1920s, such as "Fate and Character" (1919), "Goethe's Elective Affinities" (1919–1922), and "Critique of Violence" (1921), which is of course one of Agamben's central references. *nuda* means thus *Bloß*, which in German can mean "naked," but—and this is Benjamin's thought—in the sense of "no better than," "nothing but," "mere," and as such "bare" (see Geulen 97–98). Leland de la Durantaye emphasizes the Benjaminian origin of the term, specifying that "Benjamin's expression *das bloße Leben* designates a life shorn of all qualification and conceived of independent of its traditional attributes" (203). Although Benjamin does not offer further directions for how it is to be understood, "it is clear," Durantaye continues, "that bare life is not an initial state so much as what becomes visible through a stripping away of predicates and attributes" (203). It must be pointed out, however, that Agamben de-contextualizes Benjamin's concept and inserts it in a discourse that, although "inspired" by Benjamin, mixes it with a number of different and heterogeneous suggestions which takes it far from its original meaning. Moreover, the fact that Agamben never discusses nor describes Benjamin's notion or its translation mystifies the reader into believing that the two concepts are identical.

The second—and perhaps only—definition of "naked life" occurs in the conclusion of *Homo Sacer*: naked, Agamben writes here, corresponds, in the syntagm "naked life" to the Greek term *haplôs* by which ontology defined pure Being. There is an analogy between Western metaphysics and Western politics, insofar as the fundamental performance of both is the isolation of a primary kernel, the "proper element," which is *haplôs* ("single," "simple") and that which simply is with no other determination. For metaphysics this is pure Being, which constitutes man as a thinking animal, *zoon logon ekhon*; its *analogon* in politics

is naked life, which constitutes man as *zoon politikon*. In the first case, the stake is to isolate from the multiple meanings of the term “being” the pure Being, *to on haplōs* “that which simply is”; in the second, it is the separation of naked life from the multiple forms of concrete life. Metaphysics and politics are shown here as intertwined fundamentally in the quest for a foundation and a meaning which are linked constitutively. Pure Being, naked life, as this foundation and meaning, as the “proper element” of metaphysics and politics, are construed as the “unthinkable” limit against which both clash: “naked life is certainly as indeterminate and impenetrable as *haplōs* Being, and one could say that reason cannot think naked life except as it thinks pure Being, in stupor and in astonishment” (*Homo Sacer* 182). Pure Being and naked life are “empty” and “indeterminate” concepts, but these concepts guard the keys of the historico-political destiny of the West, and are simultaneously the task and the enigma of ontology and politics (*Homo Sacer* 182, 188; the problem of the “historicity” of life and of its stripping has been emphasized by a number of scholars, see, e.g., Eaglestone; Levi and Rothberg; Marchart; Mesnard and Kahan).

The weight of the argument, as Luciano Ferrari Bravo observes, is put on the second component of the syntagm “naked life”: life (280). The *Homo Sacer* project is in fact focused on life and it is the notion of “life” that constitutes the enigma. In *Means without Ends* Agamben insists on the intrinsic “unutterability” and “impenetrability” which characterize life in its basic forms (biological, naked, corporeal): “biological life, which is the secularized form of naked life and which shares its unutterability and impenetrability, thus constitutes the real forms of life literally as forms of *survival*: biological life remains inviolate in such forms as that obscure threat that can suddenly actualize itself in violence, in extraneousness, in illness, in accidents” (8; emphasis in the original). In every instance, naked life constitutes an “inviolable,” “obscure,” “menacing” shadow which threatens to become actual; it is “the invisible sovereign that stares at us behind the dull-witted masks of the powerful” (*Means without Ends* 8). In *The Open* (2002), Agamben rehearses this argument: in our culture, he writes, the concept of life is never defined as such, it remains indeterminate and yet is each time articulated and divided through a series of caesuras and oppositions which “invest it with a decisive strategic function” in the most diverse fields: life is thus “*what cannot be defined, yet, precisely for this reason, must be ceaselessly articulated and divided*” (*Open* 13; emphasis in the original). Life is always “played with” (*giocata*), but never possessed, never represented, never uttered, yet it is precisely because of this that “it is the possible but empty site of an ethics, of a form of life” (“Author as Gesture” 68). Around this indeterminable, empty ground revolves Agamben’s proposal for a new politics and a new ethics (see, e.g., *Remnants of Auschwitz*, “Absolute Immanence”).

In “Nudity” Agamben aims perhaps at clarifying the first part of the syntagm “naked life”: its nudity. It is remarkable that the second half of the essay, as a way of deactivating, of rendering “inoperative” the theological apparatus of “nudity,”

turns to the theory of representation and the image, using Benjamin's notion of beauty. Nudity, Agamben proceeds, is for Adam and Eve the only content of the knowledge of good and evil: when they tasted the fruit of the forbidden tree the eyes of both of them opened "and they knew they were naked" (*Genesis* 3:7). But the knowledge of nudity, as we have seen, is the knowledge of a privation, the knowledge that something invisible and insubstantial (the clothing of grace) has been lost. However, Agamben argues that this absence of content, this privation, reveals that this is not knowledge of something, but rather knowledge of a pure knowability; knowing nudity, we do not know an object, but only an absence of veils, only a possibility of knowing: "the nudity that the first humans saw in Paradise when their eyes were opened is, then, the opening of truth, of 'disclosedness' (*a-letheia*, 'un-concealment'), without which knowledge would not be possible. The condition of no longer being covered by the clothing of grace does not reveal the obscurity of flesh and sin but rather the light of knowability. There is nothing behind the presumed clothing of grace, and it is precisely this condition of not having anything behind it, this pure visibility and presence, that is nudity. To see a body naked means to perceive its pure knowability beyond every secret, beyond or before its objective predicates" ("Nudity" 81).

Agamben reproduces an old argument of his, which constitutes the third "stanza" of his second book, *Stanzas*: the theory of the phantasm (*fantasma*) and thus of knowledge, in late medieval erotic poetry. In medieval philosophy and mysticism, the process of knowledge is presented as a progressive *denudatio*, the denudation of the phantasm (the form or image that sensible objects impress in the senses) from all material accidents until the form remains naked in the final act of rational intellection. The process begins in the senses, which, however, cannot strip the sensible form *denudatione perfecta* (in perfect denudation); imagination strips it further *denudatione vera* (in a true denudation), but without divesting it from the material accidents; then the non-sensible intentions (goodness, malice, convenience etc.) are unveiled, and only at this point, when the whole process of the internal sense has been fulfilled, the rational soul can be informed by the completely denuded phantasm (see *Stanzas* 80–81). Thus, in "Nudity" Agamben writes that "through the act of intellection, the image becomes perfectly nude ... Complete knowledge is contemplation in and about nudity" (83). The nudity of the human body is its phantasm, its image, that is, that which makes it knowable, but that must remain, in itself, "ungraspable": Thus Agamben concludes "the image is not the thing, but the thing's knowability (its nudity), it neither expresses nor signifies the thing. Nevertheless, inasmuch as it is nothing other than the giving of the thing over to knowledge, nothing other than the stripping off of the clothes that cover it, nudity is not separate from the thing: it is the thing itself" (84). Again, Agamben reproduces here an argument he first explored in the 1984 essay titled "The Thing Itself." In this essay, he analyzed the meaning of the expression *to pragma auto*, the thing itself, focusing in particular on Plato's and Aristotle's definitions. To make a complex exposition short, his argument revolves around

the assumption that “the thing itself, while in some way transcending language, is nevertheless possible only in language and by virtue of language: precisely the thing of language” (31). As such, it is not simply the being in its obscurity and as object presupposed by language, but rather “that *by which* the object is known, *its own knowability and truth*” (32; emphasis in the original). The thing itself is the very medium of its knowability, its self-manifestation and announcement to consciousness. Sayability itself remains however unsaid in what is said, and knowability itself is lost in what is known: in language we always simultaneously presuppose and forget the very openness at issue in language, and the task of philosophy becomes therefore “*to come with speech to help speech, so that, in speech, speech itself does not remain presupposed but instead comes to speech,*” or, in other words, “to restore the thing itself to its place in language” (35, 38; emphasis in the original).

To illustrate further this uncovering as the opening of the thing to knowledge, Agamben recurs then, in “Nudity,” to the theory of beauty proposed by Benjamin in the third part of the essay on Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*. The essentially beautiful, Benjamin argues, rests in an intrinsic relation with semblance (*Schein*). In this relation, beauty does not coincide with semblance, but it ceases nonetheless to be beautiful when the semblance disappears from it: therefore, “beauty appears as such only in what is veiled” (“Goethe” 350). Beauty is not a semblance, not a veil covering something else, it is rather an “essence” (*Wesen*), one that, however “remains essentially identical to itself only when veiled”: “the beautiful is neither the veil nor the veiled object but rather the object in its veil” (“Goethe” 351). In the face of this, the idea of “unveiling” (*Enthüllung*) becomes that of the “impossibility of unveiling” (*Unenthüllbarkeit*), and the relationship between veil and what is veiled is defined as “secret” (*Geheimnis*). For Agamben’s argument, the following step is fundamental: since it is the unity of veil and veiled, Benjamin writes, “beauty can essentially be valid only where the duality of nakedness and veiling does not yet obtain: in art and in the appearances of mere nature” and thus “in veiless nakedness the essentially beautiful has withdrawn, and in the naked body of the human being are attained a being beyond all beauty—the sublime—and a work beyond all creations, that of the creator” (“Goethe” 351).

In the “nudity” of the human being, the unity of veil and thing veiled disappears. For Agamben, I submit, the possibility of being denuded condemns human beauty to semblance and its cipher becomes thus the possibility of being unveiled. However, there is a limit to this process: beyond this limit, we find neither an essence that cannot be further unveiled, nor the *natura lapsa*, the “mere corporeality,” but rather “only the veil itself, appearance itself, which is no longer the appearance of anything” (“Nudity” 85). Human nudity is this indelible residual of appearance, in which nothing appears. It is what remains when we lift the veil from beauty. And it is “sublime” because the impossibility of presenting sensibly the idea turns at some point, in a Kantian fashion, into a presentation of a higher order, in which it is presentation itself that is presented, in which



appearance itself appears, and thus shows itself infinitely “inapparent,” infinitely void of secret: “The sublime . . . is an appearance that exhibits its own vacuity and, in this exhibition, allows the inapparent to take place” (“Nudity” 86).

## THE MYSTIQUE OF INAPPROPRIABILITY

The language and the strategy adopted in the second part of “Nudity” emphasize the continuity between Agamben’s pre-*Homo Sacer* work on ontology, aesthetics, criticism and language, and the political investigations of the past fifteen years. This continuity has been stressed in scholarship on Agamben and that has broadened its focus of analysis to include the entirety of his work, whereas the early critique limited the focus on the *Homo Sacer* project (see, e.g., Clemens, Heron Murray; Mills, *The Philosophy*; Durantaye; Watkin; Zartaloudis). Agamben himself points out that the question of the political is one that fully involves ontology and that as such is related to the question of language. If the task of philosophy is for Agamben “to restore the thing itself to its place in language” (“The Thing Itself” 38), this task is marked in his early work by an influence by Heidegger and that leads Agamben to retort that “pure Being can emerge only where the word is lacking, but the word is lacking only at the point at which one wants to say it” (“Philosophy and Linguistics” 72). The object of investigation, be it the thing itself, pure Being (*to on haplós*), or naked life is thus construed in a double movement of simultaneous positing and negation, or in a positing that grants at the same time the inappropriability of its object.

Agamben’s first book, *The Man without Content*, provides an example. The book constitutes an attempt to wrestle art from, and thus a critique of, aesthetics. Aesthetic judgment is a paradox insofar as it defines art by always referring to what it is not and thus does not grant access to its reality, but rather presents this reality as a mere and simple nothing. It works like a “negative theology,” which tries to bypass its ungraspable object by wrapping itself in its shadow: “the critical judgment, everywhere and consistently, envelops art in its shadow and thinks art as non-art” (*Man without Content* 43). Aesthetics leads art to its own negation, and it is only in this shadow that art finds its reality; unlimited but empty, without content, and it becomes a self-annihilating nothing which eternally outlives itself, which, in turn, traverses all its contents without ever reaching a “positive” work, because it cannot identify itself with any of them (*Man without Content* 56–57). As in ready-made or in pop art, what comes to the presence is the “privation” of a potency that cannot find its own reality anywhere (*Man without Content* 64). Kant is here taken to task for seeking the foundation of the aesthetic judgment in something that has the character of concept, but that, being not determinable in any way, cannot provide the evidence of the judgment, that is, a concept through which nothing comes to knowledge. This grounding the judgment in an indeterminate idea, Agamben argues, resembles to a “mystical intuition . . . shrouded in the most impenetrable mystery” (*Man without Content* 45). The same



accusation is addressed at Kant's notion of experience in *Infancy ad History*: the transcendental subject cannot "know" an object, but can only "think" it. In the same way, the transcendental subject cannot know itself as a substantial reality. This means that Kant ends up grounding the possibility of experience in the positing of an "inexperiencible" (*Infancy* 31).

This *modus* in Kant becomes almost programmatic in the preface to Agamben's second book, *Stanzas*. Here criticism is defined as "negativity ... nothing other than the process of its own ironic self-negation," a self-annihilating nothing which nonetheless does not renounce to knowledge (*Stanzas* xvi). The awareness that the object which had to be seized has finally escaped knowledge, is claimed by criticism as its own specific character; criticism's authentic *quête* "does not consist in recovering its object, but rather in ensuring the conditions of its inaccessibility" (*Stanzas* xvi). In this impossibility of Western culture to possess the object of knowledge, criticism does not represent but knows representation: "To appropriation without consciousness [of poetry] and to consciousness without enjoyment (*godimento*) [of philosophy], criticism opposes the enjoyment of what cannot be possessed and the possession of what cannot be enjoyed. ... What is secluded in the *stanza* of criticism is nothing, but this nothing safeguards *unappropriability* as its most precious possession (*Stanzas* xvii; emphasis in the original). What is translated as "enjoyment" in this passage is the Italian word *godimento* and *godimento* is *jouissance*. In the four stanzas composing the book, Agamben analyzes the model of Western knowledge in those operations in which "desire simultaneously denies and affirms its object, and thus succeeds in entering into relation with something that otherwise it would have been unable either to appropriate or enjoy" (*Stanzas* xvii–xviii). The stanzas design, Agamben concludes, a "topology of joy (*gaudium*)," a topology of *jouissance* in which human spirit responds to the "impossible task of appropriating what must in every case remain unappropriable" and therefore "must necessarily guarantee the unappropriability of its object" (*Stanzas* xviii).

The Heideggerian framework remains dominant in the following works, *Infancy and History* and especially *Language and Death*. Different and heterogeneous influences (to name just a few: Benjamin, Arendt, Foucault) drive Agamben in other directions, whereby, for example, the language of utopia turns into an anti-utopian emphasis on messianism and the paradigm substitutes for the *topos* as methodological implant. However, the construction of "naked life" as an indeterminable, empty, irreducible concept of limit betrays, I argue, the mystique of inappropriability that marks Agamben's earlier works.

## NAKED LIFE AND IDEOLOGY

The denouement of "Nudity" raises some central questions concerning the nudity of naked life: how far goes the analogy between naked corporeality and naked life? Is the sublime vacuity that constitutes nudity also the nudity of naked life? Is this

phanstasmatic knowability, which renounces the possession of its object and, by focusing merely on appearance, guarantees its unappropriability: is it this *haplos* at the core of the Western politico-metaphysical tradition? It seems difficult to reconcile the medieval theory of the phantasm, the Benjaminian analysis of beauty, the Heideggerian narrative of illatency, and the Kantian language of the sublime with the camp as paradigm of modernity, with the nudity of the *Muselmann*. It seems also very hard to reconcile this ontological-linguistic framework with the Foucauldian paradigmatic method Agamben has adopted in his later writings. In particular, the emphasis on the Benjaminian veil, and thus on the sublime as the frustration of representation, shifts the focus onto representation itself, thus from naked life to nudity, and maintains both in a sublime inaccessibility. Ferrari Bravo points out the ambiguity of focusing less on life than on its nudity, more on “negativity” than on the positive potentialities of life. This emphasis on negativity risks, for Ferrari Bravo, to turn into an emphasis on the negation of life, that is, on death (280–81). The fundamental problem here is that, by construing the nudity of life as that inapparent which is nonetheless void of any secret, Agamben confines to inaccessibility life itself and its materiality, thereby blocking, as Catherine Mills points out, any possible question about the body and its history, gender, race, sexuality or class (see *The Philosophy* 133–37; “Linguistic Survival”; “Biopolitics”; for other critiques from the perspective of gender, see Deutscher; Ziarek).

In conclusion, to construe, as Agamben does, the supposed originary nudity of life as the unthinkable limit against which political philosophy clash, as the enigma at the core of Western politics, means to guarantee its unappropriability, its unsayability, its impenetrability. Nothing can really be said of naked life and assertions such as “the production of naked life is the originary activity of sovereignty” (*Homo Sacer* 83) are finally undecidable: nothing can confirm, articulate or invalidate them. “Stupor” and “astonishment,” in which both *haplos* Being and naked life should be contemplated (*Homo Sacer* 182) are not useful perspectives through which to conduct and articulate empirical research to analyze events or phenomena. They do not allow understanding, they do not enable investigations, even less do they prompt actions. For Antonio Negri, naked life is therefore a form of “ideology,” a “mystification,” because it absolutizes nudity and assimilates it to the horrors of the nazi death camp, thereby iterating its denudation. Sovereign power “needs” to show us this nudity in order to terrorize us. By taking nudity to represent life, the ideology of naked life neutralizes the potentialities of life and its capacities of resistance: “It is the exaltation of humiliation, of pity, it is medieval Christianity” (Negri 193–95; Negri’s criticism is also voiced in the works he wrote with Michael Hart, see *Empire* 366, *Commonwealth* 57–58; on Negri’s critique of Agamben, see Neilson). If what remains after life has been stripped of all those determinations that constituted it into a form-of-life is “the thing itself” as its sublime knowability, then this gesture iterate the stripping performed by sovereign power.

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# Aesthetics, Opera, and Alterity in Herzog's Work

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Jacob-Ivan Eidt

**Abstract:** In his article "Aesthetics, Opera, and Alterity in Herzog's Work" Jacob-Ivan Eidt analyses Werner Herzog's 1982 film *Fitzcarraldo*. Eidt's analysis is executed in the context of opera, cinema, and aesthetics. Eidt argues that Herzog uses opera as a romantic motif with which he creates a self-critical process whereby elements of the Romantic vision are called into question thus providing a nuanced reading of the main character and the Indigenous world he encounters. This process, Eidt argues, produces a complex narrative of colonial alterity where colonial self-inscription upon an Other is ultimately doomed to failure.

A prominent aspect of comparative humanities is not only its emphasis on multiple literary traditions, but also the ability to bring those traditions together to produce nuanced contextual readings of various text types (see, e.g., Finke; Tötösy de Zepetnek). In this study, I analyze Werner Herzog's 1982 film *Fitzcarraldo* and its image construction of colonial South America including the role of Otherness. I postulate that the film's image construction of the Other is based on German Romanticism and paradigms of aestheticism of nineteenth-century music. In keeping with the methods of comparative cultural studies, hierarchical relationships between traditions are avoided. Each tradition is read as contributing to an overall depiction, in this case of colonial alterity. This intertextuality draws attention to other cultures in a way that traditional film reading could not and it is through this contrast that the Other can be approached and thus included into what otherwise would remain a Euro-centric perspective.

Herzog's film is about a white European in the Amazon jungle hauling a steam ship over a mountain with Native labor at the height of the rubber trade of the late nineteenth century in order to build an opera house. Thus, the story deals with colonialism, exploitation, and Western imperialism. Because Herzog is a German filmmaker, German national identity, nationalism, and fascism can also be linked to *Fitzcarraldo*. Familiar antagonistic oppositions are established along the conventional lines of European versus Indigenous culture, machine versus nature, and white skin versus dark skin. Although such narratives play an important part in the film, they can also obscure other equally relevant aspects which I consider central to understand the intertextuality of the film as a whole. One of these central aspects is the role of music in the film and how it is used to delineate otherness. While I do not deny the main character's complicity in colonial exploitation, I argue that nineteenth-century romantic music as motif and context offers a more

nuanced reading not only of Fitzcarraldo's character, but also of the Indians and their shared dynamics in constructing alterity. Herzog creates a special kind of romanticism, which Brad Prager calls "a dialectic whereby he appropriates its themes in order to re-write them" ("Werner Herzog's" 29)." As such, the film clearly is more than the sum of its associative parts.

Herzog is often associated with Romanticism and notions of the sublime. But as Prager notes, his use of romantic themes is such that he "is quite evidently aware that there is a capacity for self-reflection and auto-critique already built into Romanticism," which also may be said of how his romantic themes relate the German self to alterity ("Werner Herzog's" 24). Herzog seems to use not only romantic motifs, but also to play with their traditions and their historical contexts. The typical starting point for emphasizing the clash of cultures embodied in the narrative of colonial exploitation is the history of the images that Europeans created around the jungle and its Indigenous peoples. Richard John Ascárate has tried to demonstrate that the imaginary world that Herzog creates cannot be separated from the historical regardless of the director's intentions (486). Although I agree, it is worth noting that there are several different layers of historical and cultural associations at play in the film. These different associations and contexts play off of one another creating a particular kind of dialectic of images and motifs. Like Herzog's earlier remake of *Nosferatu* (1979) we are dealing with a film "located within an historical tradition that is densely intertextual" (Casper and Linville 17). This dense intertextuality with its associations makes some statements about Fitzcarraldo like the following seem askew: "Following the familiar pattern of Old World encounters with the New World, African, or Asian Other, Fitzcarraldo will, without soliciting their opinions about the venture, conscript the native inhabitants for their labor, divest them of their habitat, and civilize them to the strains of Enrico Caruso" (Ascárate 484). This is certainly a familiar pattern, but perhaps not one that wholly corresponds to all of *Fitzcarraldo's* contexts.

In my opinion it is a stretch to suggest that Fitzcarraldo conscripts the Indians and nowhere in the film do we have any indication that he seeks to "civilize" them with opera. This is at best inferred through the image of a blond, blue-eyed man in a white suit surrounded by Indians in the jungle, playing opera. The idea that opera could have a practical didactic function would seem antithetical not only to Fitzcarraldo, but also to nineteenth-century aesthetics of music. A closer look at the romantic context of nineteenth-century music and Herzog's use of it as motif vis-à-vis the Indigenous reveals a different dynamic between the two and the way in which they demarcate otherness.

Alan Singer notes that German idealism is Herzog's cultural context and that the super-sensible often finds its most eloquent expression in Herzog's films through the category of the sublime (183). Most discussions of Herzog's use of the sublime tend to focus on his camera work and imagery (Prager, *The Cinema* 83). *Fitzcarraldo* not only accesses the category of the sublime through its camera shots, but also through its use of nineteenth-century music by suggesting



that Fitzcarraldo is a product of his age and as such carries with him a view of music and opera that was born out of a specifically German intellectual tradition. Ever since E.T.A. Hoffmann began to characterize Beethoven's music as sublime, romantic music has been associated not only with another invisible world, but also with that world's autonomy over the concrete (see Lönker 37). Reacting to the romantics Hegel found that romantic music aesthetics expressed the superiority of the spiritual over the material rendering it virtually insignificant, demonstrating "the hegemony of content over form" (Mosley 443). Thus understood, the music of Romanticism is the opposite of the classical or enlightenment approach toward aesthetics as an expression of harmony between form and content, inner- and outer worlds, art and nature. Fitzcarraldo's fanatic attachment to opera is an expression of his inability to reconcile these two realms. The aesthetics of Romantic music thus serve as a vehicle for the psychology that underlies a belief in an essential world behind a mere representation of that world. It is important to note that this is the essential view of the Indians and their creation of myth in the film as well.

*Fitzcarraldo* begins with a panoramic view of the jungle. Fog and mist float specter-like around the tree tops of the dense green forest. Thunder is heard in the background and the portentous music of Popol Vuh resounds as words appear on the screen relating the Indigenous myth of the genesis of the jungle. According to the creation myth God was not finished with creation and abandoned its completion until all humans have vanished. This brief prelude consisting of image, text, and music begins to frame the narrative from the perspective of the myth, which informs the Indians' world view. The music, the sublime imagery, and the myth itself establish a connection to romantic motifs. This mythical understanding of the world is the only real knowledge that Fitzcarraldo and the viewer have of the Amazon Indians' world. The myth or variations of it are revisited only in passing in second-hand fashion by outsiders. Thus a cloud of mystery surrounds the Indigenous world from the outset. The very first image is a moment of identification between landscape, myth, and the music, which establishes the alien otherness of the three. The prelude is followed by the scene of the opera house in Manaus, placing the world of opera in relation to the world of the Indians.

In Manaus the nineteenth-century tenor Enrico Caruso is singing in a performance of Verdi's opera *Ernani* with Sarah Bernhardt. The unreality of opera is highlighted by shots of a singer in the pit singing for Bernhardt. Bernhardt, played by a man and sporting a wooden leg, seems to be in her own world and does not interact well with other figures on stage. It is an unrealistic performance in which everyone, including the singers, Fitzcarraldo, and the audience, are all in their own separate worlds. Opera for Herzog is "a universe all its own. On stage an opera represents a complete world, a cosmos transformed into music" (Cronin 259). While the prelude gives us the Indigenous world of the creation myth against the backdrop of the impenetrable and unforgiving jungle, the first scene gives us opera as a dreamy other world against the backdrop of the decadent

pomp of colonialism, highlighted by exterior shots of the opulent opera house, dark-skinned servants in livery, the rich in gala attire, and the grotesque image of a horse drinking champagne. Fitzcarraldo has to pass this world in order to gain access to the inner sanctum where the better world of opera is sung. Equally, the Indians' myth sees a better world behind the jungle's unforgiving indifference to suffering and death. The jungle and its exploiters belong to the same realm representing concrete realities flourishing blindly. Herzog is never at a loss for words in describing the cruelty of nature and its ultimate incomprehensibility and it is this view of nature as indifferent and impenetrable that distinguishes Herzog from a true "Romantic" in the traditional sense and it is an important theme in his works (see Prager, "Landscape" 99–100). The colonial world of the rubber barons is brutal and senseless in its blind utilitarian pursuit of wealth while by contrast the mythical world of the Indians is closer to what Fitzcarraldo sees in opera.

Although opera may represent European social power for some groups as Ronald Dolkart has argued in his reading of the film, Fitzcarraldo does not represent the power of the upper classes. Opera as status symbol, cultural bombast, and exponent of civilization may have fueled its success among the rich and powerful, but Fitzcarraldo is presented as an outsider to this class of colonizers. He belongs to an intellectual tradition that saw opera, music, and art in general as cultural antithesis to the small-minded ambitions of wealthy high society. Life and art, and consequently, the artist and society, represented antithetical categories for many intellectuals at the turn of the century, Thomas Mann, Kafka, and Nietzsche to name but a few. Fitzcarraldo is portrayed as a self-absorbed dreamer manipulating colonial culture in order to realize an idealistic, if not solipsistic vision. Although he seeks to get rich by exploiting the jungle, his ultimate goal is not the same as that of European colonists. He wants to use the rubber trade as a means of creating a world distinct from the one which he is exploiting. The reality of his dream trumps concrete reality, even to the point of ethical questionability. Fitzcarraldo appears again and again as an outsider in the real world, even in his attempts to manipulate that world. He does not understand or identify with the world in which he lives and remains himself misunderstood throughout the film. Much like the singers on the stage in the opening scene, Fitzcarraldo looks past all of his interlocutors. He is a perfect self-absorbed outsider.

After one of his unsuccessful trips to the city, Fitzcarraldo returns home and plays the famous aria *Vesti la giubba* from Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci* on the phonograph for some local children. This is the first of several scenes where Herzog uses an aria from the world of opera to underscore a romantic motif. The text of the aria, although torn from its original context, fits Fitzcarraldo's status as outsider. Just as colonial images bring inescapable historical associations into an imaginary world, so does the aria. This aria in particular expresses great sadness, betrayal, and feelings of rejection. It is an example of Herzog's notion of opera as extremely reduced and concentrated emotion that is immediately recognizable as an archetype (Cronin 259). Pagliaccio sings the aria at the end of the first act after

learning of his wife's infidelity right before a performance of the *Commedia dell'arte*. It captures the senselessness of acting out a farce where truth is obscured by absurdity and grotesque irony. Pagliaccio sings of actions performed as if in a delirium (*I Pagliacci* 399) and this mirrors Fitzcarraldo who also has to "act" for money. It alludes to the stark contrast between the superficial popular interest in opera and genuine artistic impulse. Like a clown mocked, misunderstood, and suffering, his business endeavors embody a farce as compared to his dreams. However, Fitzcarraldo's grief is romantic *Weltschmerz*. The same pain underlying the Indigenous myth of creation which suggests that the world is not whole. This juxtaposition of real-world-farce and the ideal world of opera appears again when Fitzcarraldo tries to persuade the rubber barons to support his endeavors.

At the party organized by Molly to raise funds for the opera house, Fitzcarraldo plays Caruso singing "O paradiso" from Giacomo Meyerbeer's *L'Africana* for the rubber barons. He alone is moved by the music about paradise as the others ignore it and go on chatting and even laughing at him. When one guest tries to stop the recording, Fitzcarraldo flies into a rage nearly assaulting him. He protectively grabs the phonograph and begins his tirade against the world of his wealthy hosts saying that he is the theater in the jungle and the inventor of caoutchouc, and that only through Fitzcarraldo does caoutchouc become word. When one of the rubber barons then mockingly christens Fitzcarraldo "the conqueror of the useless," Fitzcarraldo calls the rubber barons' reality a bad caricature of what he sees in opera. Caoutchouc becoming word is an inversion of the word becoming flesh in Christ (John 1:1) and Fitzcarraldo reverses the process: instead of the word becoming visible as concrete reality, reality is turned into the less tangible and more abstract word. The word referenced in the gospel according to John is logos, which also stands for the logic and reason that orders the universe. Thus, the allusion can be read as an explanation of how Fitzcarraldo sees himself. His dreams, his imagination, in short, his romantic subjectivity all give reality meaning and order and this is reflected in how music is used in the film.

Holly Rogers examined the filmic relationship between music and image in revealing the dynamic between the opera that Fitzcarraldo plays and the music of Popul Vuh that often accompanies scenes of the forest and Indians. Interesting in Rogers's description is both the function and interplay of diegetic and non-diegetic music, as well as the association of the band with Indians, the jungle, and the non-European Other. Her analysis shows how music is the driving force behind the narrative of the film and I agree with Rogers that *Fitzcarraldo* uses opera as diegetic music heard by all, whereas the non-diegetic Popul Vuh music is only relevant in their sphere, remaining unheard by Fitzcarraldo and his crew (Rogers 94). However, I would challenge the notion that this necessarily constitutes a diametric opposition. Several scholars describe the first encounter between Fitzcarraldo and the Indians as an aggressive and even absurd confrontation. For example, Roger Hillman claims that the music of the Natives is routed by Fitzcarraldo: "the natives themselves no doubt totally bemused, by the voice of

Caruso cranked up on a gramophone” (145). Ronald Dolkart suggests that “the way Herzog uses Caruso’s voice is to sharpen the contrast between civilization’s arias and barbarism’s silences” (135). Rogers sees the musical encounter as something aggressive with the native music undermining the primacy of Caruso’s opera (93) and even Richard Leppert, who pays the most attention to details of music in the film, comes to the conclusion that “melody and harmony conquer rhythm” in the scene (105). However, this perception is largely one-sided, and ironically, it lacks a careful consideration of the Indians’ perspective, subsuming it into a dominant colonial narrative. The scene begins aggressively: as the Molly-Aida enters Indian waters, Native drums resound diegetically. Intimidated by this gesture, the crew arms itself taking up defensive positions around the boat. It is not Fitzcarraldo, but the mechanic Cholo, planted on the ship as an agent of the rubber barons, who decides to use dynamite in order to, as he says ironically, “initiate a conversation” with the Indians. Cholo is the realist foil to Fitzcarraldo’s dreams. Even in appearance he is a reminder of the concrete world as a large muscle bound pragmatist concerned with money and self-preservation and lords over the underworld of technology in the bowels of the boat. Cholo’s explosive rejoinder is but a loud and violent noise, a fearful response in the face of the unknown, signaling ignorance and blind belligerence. The mechanic’s brute force does not silence the Indians, as they send the missionary’s umbrella floating down the river as a warning that they will kill them just as they did the interlopers that preceded them. The encounter is destined to end as all colonial and Indigenous encounters do in violence, death, and eventual subjugation of one group over another. While the captain, infuriated by the mechanic’s actions, commands him to stop, Fitzcarraldo takes the mechanic’s ironic statement about initiating a conversation seriously. He responds with the phonograph recording of Caruso. Although he is also using technology to carry across his message, it does not embody the same conquering force as the dynamite, and the music silences the drums. Bemusement can hardly have been the reaction of the Indians, as Hillman conjectures. Rogers states that the Caruso recordings are mixed “with little regard for dramatic or even musical coherence” (93), but it is hard to believe that a man so consumed by opera would employ it so haphazardly. Leppert has identified correctly the aria that Fitzcarraldo plays as Chevalier des Grieux’s “dream aria” *En fermant les yeux* from Jules Massenet’s *opera comique Manon* and has also verified its particular relevance in the encounter (105).

Grieux’s dream in *Manon* describes a paradise, which is incomplete because his lover Manon is not in it. The text evokes the image of a white house gleaming in the forest and surrounded by trees and animals. Beneath the shadows cast by this scene run the clear waters of a stream (*Manon, Opera libretto* 169). It is transferable to Fitzcarraldo’s dream of building an opera house in the jungle and reminiscent of the image of the white house-like Molly-Aida floating along the river. Hillman observes that the ship is suggestive of an opera house not just at the end of the film when it serves as a floating stage, but even regarding its

physical similarities with a theater (144). Also striking is the romantic motif of a paradise, that is not quite a paradise because something is amiss, thus alluding to the Indian myth of creation. Further, it also expresses Fitzcarraldo's romantic longing for a unity of the invisible world of opera with the concrete reality of nature. Fitzcarraldo seems to feel that this aria sums up all he wishes to achieve in audible form. However, unlike the unresponsive rubber barons whose reaction to Caruso's "paradise" was to stop the recording and throw Fitzcarraldo out on the street, the Indians stop their aggressive posturing and take an interest. One does not assume that the Indians understand French, but the music is even more dreamy and revelatory than the text and, according to the aesthetics of nineteenth-century music the text is but an imperfect expression of what the music is more aptly conveying directly. Although it is true, as Leppert observes, that Fitzcarraldo's demeanor during the scene shifts from apprehension to a posture of confidence and even a "self-satisfied gloat" (105), it is not clear what his satisfaction signifies nor how the Indians have actually reacted. They remain unseen. Fitzcarraldo's "self-satisfied gloat" can just as easily be the same feeling that he had towards the rubber barons, namely that his reality is more important. And even if Fitzcarraldo does see the music as conquering the Indians, it does not mean that the Indians see it that way as well. Indeed, the later behavior of the Indians points to a different reception of the music.

After the initial encounter the terrified crew subdues the captain and abandons the boat, leaving only four members behind. After realizing that the expedition is now more or less lost, Fitzcarraldo plays Caruso for comfort and for his usual escape from reality. The piece is the quartet from Giuseppe Verdi's *Rigoletto*, "Bella figlia dell' amore." Once again, the aria is taken out of context but is nonetheless appropriate for the scene. It is a quartet and only four members are left on board, all experiencing different emotions like the singers in the opera. They sing of comfort in love, of longing, of disbelief in the face of false promises, of betrayal and rejection, and of violent revenge. The music creates an almost circular movement with its bobbing rhythm, conveying not only Herzog's typical sense of futility but also the succession of varying, recurring emotions. This is reinforced textually by the different singers. The Duke of Mantua is trying to conquer Maddalene, singing of beauty, his longing, and her ability to assuage his suffering. Maddalene sings the role of the cynic, warding off incredulously his advances. Gilda is betrayed by the Duke and sings of her anguish at being deserted and fooled. And Rigoletto sings of vengeance, violence, and dreadful justice (*Rigoletto* 1149). All of these sentiments are surely on board the Molly-Aida and perhaps all present simultaneously in Fitzcarraldo. The almost comical rhythm emphasizes a certain helplessness and melodramatic absurdity. This aria will come to serve as a leitmotif for Fitzcarraldo and his crew (see Dolkart 136). Not long thereafter, the Indians appear in small canoes pursuing the Molly-Aida wishing to capture her and blocking her retreat by cutting down large trees. Here, the notion that Fitzcarraldo has conscripted the Indians becomes difficult to

uphold. The Indians surround and board the ship, vastly outnumbering the crew who cannot escape even if they stood firm and fought with guns. They mention again and again that the Indians could kill them all at a moment's notice. As the Indians climb on board, they touch the ship and Fitzcarraldo in a gentle but probing way. They are fascinated by Fitzcarraldo and the ship because of their connection to the disembodied music that they heard. When they speak in front of Fitzcarraldo they point at him and begin playing the pan flute. They associate him with the ship and the music and seem to be making the connection that he fails to make with them. Fitzcarraldo even asks wide-eyed and apprehensively, "why are they playing the flute?" Although the question is never answered, it is clear that the music and the man who played it, have not threatened them, but, rather, interested them for particular reasons.

The Indians, too, see music as something other-worldly. A disembodied voice issues from the phonograph, an invisible entity from another realm is singing. Fitzcarraldo's music establishes for them a connection to the supra-reality of the gods they wish to appease. It is for this reason that Fitzcarraldo is not viewed entirely as an outsider like the rubber barons and the missionaries. This is the reason they do not kill him: he somehow fits into their mythical understanding of the world. Fitzcarraldo is aware of the Indians' myth of creation and plans to take advantage of it by portraying his ship as the great white vessel that will carry the white God to appease the evil spirits of the river. However, this masquerade can hardly be executed owing to the lack of nuanced communication between the two groups. Just because Fitzcarraldo believes he can "trick" the Indians into working for him, this does not mean that they have indeed been tricked. The project is accepted because his music shows him to be a conduit to the other side. If anything, the Indians have "tricked" him into offering up his vessel. However, the exact intentions and thinking of the Indians are never fully revealed. They can no more trick Fitzcarraldo than he them because words are missing and only music and images remain for communication and understanding.

Parts of the myth of creation are related again second hand by Huerequeque. The Indians have wandered ten generations searching for the white god that will bring them in a divine vessel to a promised land where there is no suffering and death. Fitzcarraldo fails to recognize that they too seek resolution and escape from cruel reality through his opera boat. They recognize Fitzcarraldo as a kindred spirit because of the music. But he does not recognize them. His romanticism is too solipsistic and self-referential. Both have a similar goal and plan. The tragic element is that Fitzcarraldo's world shuts out the Other. He is not in a position to understand them despite shared ideas. Huerequeque the drunk, a Dionysian figure related to music, is alone able to communicate somewhat with the Indians in their language. When Huerequeque explains Fitzcarraldo's plan to the Indians they respond with a simple "yes" without further need of convincing. The Indians then take to the brush with machetes and hack away concrete reality making way for the vessel of music that will carry appeasement to their gods beyond the mountain.



They are transforming the forest into a metaphor for what music is, a vessel for the transportation of essential reality, passing over the concrete world. When the panning shot of the mountain is taken we hear the music of the electronic band Popul Vuh extra-diegetically. At this decisive moment, when the plan to drag the ship across the mountain is conceived, we do not hear the opera of Fitzcarraldo's world; rather, we hear the music associated with the Indigenous world.

In subsequent days, as the ship slowly makes its way up and down the mountain, we hear the music of the band Popul Vuh non-diegetically during scenes of work and descent. As the ship makes its final descent, the music resounds with its chant-like choruses evoking an almost religious, sacred atmosphere. As the ship finally hits the water on the other side we hear for the first and only time Caruso non-diegetically. It is the quartet leitmotif from Verdi's *Rigoletto* once again. For the first time, Caruso enters the non-diegetic world of the Indians and is played in tandem with the band's music. Here we have the joining of the two endeavors in a transcendent moment and because both pieces are now non-diegetic, they permeate the scene and thus their ownership cannot be traced to any one realm. The two types of music share the non-diegetic aural space and thus a connection has been made between the two worlds for a brief instant. The Indians rejoice with the crew, having become a part of it. This is followed by the shared nocturnal Bacchanal and the journey along the death rapids. In discussing the scene along the rapids, most scholarship about the film fails to even mention the crucial fact that the Indians are on board the Molly-Aida. Lutz P. Koepnick says of the scene that "nature strikes back, refusing to be improved upon by Western geometry and technology. Once the boat has reached the opposite river, and after a communal feast of intoxication, the Indians cut the cables while Fitzcarraldo's crew is still asleep" (155). Dolkart omits the shared merriment saying that the jungle, the Indians, and the forces of barbarism foil Fitzcarraldo's plan to build an opera house: "with the ship safely on the Ucayali, the entire crew gets drunk" (138). In fact, all are drunk and dancing, and the Indians are playing their drums and pan flutes in celebration. Also, Leppert fails to mention that the Indians are on board, commenting only that the crew was tossed about and holding on for dear life (107). These omissions are curious because they not only make it seem as if the Indians are trying to kill Fitzcarraldo, after wooing him into a false sense of security, but they also obscure key elements of the Indians' motivations.

It is clear that the Indians want to make the journey with Fitzcarraldo as part of the crew. This explains the initiation ritual and the fusion of the two types of music into one non-diegetic sphere. Before Fitzcarraldo awakens, the Indians are on board smiling and singing, as if they were trying to mimic the *Rigoletto* quartet. As the ship tosses about helplessly in the water, there is a shot of the phonograph playing and then we hear the sextet from Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Leppert asserts that "we're given to believe, the boat's movement sets the gramophone into motion and it gives us Caruso in the sextet from *Lucia*" (107). It remains unclear how the movement of the boat could place the needle



properly, much less manually crank up a gramophone. Much more reasonable is to conclude that the Indians have turned on the phonograph after watching Fitzcarraldo. Thus, they are a part of the musical sacrifice to appease the gods and they sing when the ship makes it through the rapids. After this climax, we hear the band's music in the last scene with the Indians, not Caruso, as the ship returns to Don Aquilino's outpost. Leppert is correct in his analysis of the sextet and its relevance for the scene. It speaks of hopelessness and dreams lost with Lucia claiming to have been betrayed by both earth and heaven (*Lucia di Lammermoor* 237). The two realms will not find romantic union or resolution. However, it also acts as a companion piece to the first aria played in the jungle on the gramophone, the dream-aria from *Manon* that first intrigues the Indians. Whereas the *Manon* aria promised a dream, *Lucia's* prophesies is its undoing. Leppert also notes that at some point we hear only the sextet, which silences diegesis (107). The dream world and its delusion are regulated back into invisible inner reality. While the two are only briefly united and blindly so, the film ends with Fitzcarraldo bringing opera to Iquitos in the form of castle towers, singers, and an orchestra floating on the water like reality sinking, the concrete world being dissolved, when in fact unreality has been placed on top of reality, the absurd image of opera on a ship.

Singer calls Herzog's use of the sublime "the ironic sublime" noting that "Herzog's films situate the viewer uncomfortably between the human and the superhuman (the natural sublime) as though the two realms of existence demanded reconciliation" (203). This expectation is, however, a false one. Herzog always sets the viewer up for disappointment as his protagonists are rarely reconciled in any meaningful way with the superhuman forces that they encounter. One of the reasons for this is a feature of romanticism that Herzog exploits self-critically. The romantic tendency to seek harmony with nature entails an appropriation of nature, what Prager calls "an inscription of the self on an Other" and as such "Romanticism frequently stands for a potential failure to comprehend difference" ("Werner Herzog's" 24). Thus my reading that Fitzcarraldo's actions are a result of his failure and his inability to understand the Indians: he attempts to inscribe himself on the jungle and on the myth of creation. And although this is not for colonial, civilizing purposes, his self-absorbed romanticism prevents him from understanding the Other and their shared intersections. The Indians, in contrast, seem to fare better in comprehending difference, but in the end neither the romantic aesthete nor the people of the Amazon are able to reconcile themselves with their hostile environments.

Fitzcarraldo's "triumphant" return to Iquitos to the music of Bellini's *I Puritani* is ironic. The aria, a duet, is about past troubles in light of imagined happiness. However, in truth the aria takes place in the first act and although the opera ends happily, at this stage it is far from resolution with many trials and tribulations ahead. Herzog does not choose the happy end of the opera but the imagined one from act one (see Leppert 110). Despite it all, Fitzcarraldo appears again as conqueror with a "self-satisfied gloat" complete with cigar, a symbol

of colonial wealth, power, and luxury. As if in an opera, he is playing a part, masquerading as conqueror, but not as a colonialist conquistador. He is, in fact, a conqueror of the useless,” ironically still unable to realize the futility of his imagined world in the face of the real one.

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# An Intermedial Reading of Paley's *Sita Sings the Blues*

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Ipshita Chanda

**Abstract:** In her article “An Intermedial Reading of Paley’s *Sita Sings the Blues*” Ipshita Chanda discusses the film text of Nina Paley’s 2008 animation film, a culturally reconceptualized version of Válmiki’s Sanskrit epic *Rámáyana*. Chanda discusses the film as an intermedial retextualization of the *Rámáyana* in the film where media boundaries and genres are crossed in “textual,” audio, and visual media. The basic premise from which Chanda proceeds is that the condition of intermediality in film is produced by a “conceptual fusion” of different media which, in turn, are analyzed using theories of reception and contact between different media across time, space, and cultures with regard to “source” text and “received” text.

Chiel Kattenblatt defines intermediality as “those co-relations between different media that result into a redefinition of the media that are influencing each other and a resensibilization of perception. Intermediality, unlike transmediality, assumes not so much a change from one medium to another medium but rather a co-relation in the actual sense of the word, that is to say a mutual affect ... Time and space are still the two main dimensions by which we distinguish media from each other and determine their specificity. Such a determination of the specificity of media is usually related to their materiality, although we may notice in the media comparative discourse there is apprehensiveness about ascribing the specific features of a medium to its materiality” (6–7). Dick Higgins distinguishes between a number of different uses of the concept of intermediality: “intermediality may refer to the transposition from one media to another or the combination of two or more media” (51–52). References to one media in another may also be called intermediality. Thus, contact between different media and the reception of one by the other is the basic operation that makes the condition of intermediality possible. This contact may result in the formation of a text combining the semiotic structures of two media or changing the configuration of elements of one particular medium through the contact with another. In each case, Higgins points out, “one medium is present in it’s own materiality and mediality in the other” (52). This implies that the operations of contact between media and their mutual interaction or reception of one by the other regulates the production of a text resulting in intermediality.

Niklas Luhmann argues that the medium provides the conditions of possibility for creating form (105). Therefore, the condition of intermediality—since it is produced from a conceptual fusion of several types of media—results in a specific

genre. Thus, I postulate that the intermedial “text” can be best studied using the framework of comparative literature (but without the discipline’s traditional paradigms such as the nation approach, Eurocentrism, etc.). The approach I suggest is similar to what has been termed the “new” comparative literature (see Tötösy de Zepetnek, *Comparative Literature*). However, I would submit that the “new” is not in the method, but, rather, in bringing the multi- and interdisciplinary underpinnings of the discipline to the fore. I argue that comparative literature can and has provided a method for doing cultural studies and that this has gone largely unacknowledged. The critical and analytical emphasis in “new” comparative literature and in “comparative cultural studies” should alert us to the possibilities these approaches can offer (see Tötösy de Zepetnek, “The New Humanities”).

In an application of the above referred concept of the new comparative to study the intermedial, I begin from the assumption that aesthetic language and its use are both underwritten by the horizon of expectation (i.e., Jauss) within which the art work is produced and received. In proposing a definition of intermediality, it is reception aesthetics that Higgins invokes. I argue that the method of analysis proposed by Higgins, namely a “fusion of horizons” (*Horizons* 6) is congruent with the core of new comparative literature. The tools that are used by comparatists to understand reception underpin the study of the conceptual space inhabited by interliterariness (see, e.g., Đurišić). Intermediality allows us to extend this method across various modes of transmission, i.e., across media. We assume also that intermediality may be explained through the shift and interplay of horizons of production and reception of a text. Thus we are able to explore the possibilities of constructing a reading strategy of the intermedial text. In this article I “read” the film “text” of Nina Paley’s 2008 animation film *Sita Sings the Blues* through a conjunction of theories of intermediality with the tools and methods provided by “new” comparative literature and comparative cultural studies.

As Irina O. Rajewsky points out, “intermediality may serve foremost as a generic term for all those phenomena that ... in some way take place between media” (46) and therefore “intermedial” designates those configurations which have to do with a crossing of borders between media, thereby differentiated from intramedial as well as from transmedial phenomena. Current scholarship suggests two ways of understanding the concept: 1) “intermediality as a fundamental category” and 2) “intermediality as a critical category for the concrete analysis of specific individual media products or configurations” (Rajewsky 47–48). Thus I am arguing that for film, as for literary analysis, the fundamental unit is the “text,” that is, the textual system. An exact correspondence between the horizon of expectation of the artist and that of the receiver (reader) may occur at every stage because it changes with time, space, and media, even while the work as a physical object remains the same. However, I am not considering the work as a closed, finished object: “networks of meanings which ‘interact,’ producing a galaxy of signifiers ... the systems of meaning can take over this absolutely plural text, but their number is never closed, based as it is on the

infinity of language” (Barthes 5–6). Thus we have what Roland Barthes calls the “readerly text,” wherein “the goal of literature as work ... is to make the reader no longer a consumer but a producer of the text” (6). We are thus talking of a text being consumed and “read.” As George P. Landow points out, despite an exponential growth of narrative options through the rearrangement of individual lexias and the constellations of lexias, this growth is not random and if it were, one text would not leave identifiable trails in another (12). Rajewsky suggests the concept of “medial transportation” as a type of intermediality, where content travels across medial boundaries, from the source text (46). Analysis of this type of intermediality would call for an understanding of the communicative-semiotic structures of the “source” text and the “received” text, constructed from the materiality of the different media, i.e., picture / painting / animation and music and drama (Rajewsky 52) and this case cinema.

Paley’s *Sita Sings the Blues* is composed of a number of overlapping intermedial structures and presentation of a written text, *Rāmāyana*, “a multivoiced entity, encompassing retellings of the Rama story that vary according to historical period, regional literary tradition, religious affiliation, genre and political context” (Richman 161). To this may be added the movement of the text beyond the geographical boundaries of India. The text has also travelled across different media: performance forms across India and in many cultures of South East Asia aspects of the story remain iconic. Crown prince Rama, son of Dashrath, king of Ayodhya, is sent by his father into exile due to his jealous step mother Kaikeyi’s demand that Dashrath honor the boons he had granted her when she nursed him to health after an injury in battle. One of the boons she demands is the crowning of her son instead of Rama and the second is Rama’s exile into the forest. Rama and his newly wedded wife Sita and his devoted brother Lakshman go to the forest to honor Dashrath’s promise to Kaikeyi. Sita is abducted by Ravana, the demon king who rules Sri Lanka. Rama, aided by an army of monkeys under the leadership of the monkey king Sugriva, rescues Sita after a battle. The three then return to Ayodhya and Rama is installed on the throne. But the people of Ayodhya begin to suspect Sita’s chastity since she had lived in Ravana’s kingdom after her abduction until she was rescued. In truth, Sita has never stepped under Ravana’s roof, living in a grove of asoka trees, guarded by demonesses and constantly propositioned by Ravana. Yet, she is exiled by her husband to the hermitage of Vālmīki, where she gives birth to twin sons, Luv and Kush. In the Adikanda (literally, the “Canto of Origins”) Vālmīki relates the story of his composing the *Rāmāyana*. Here we are told that Vālmīki, the composer of the *Rāmāyana*, selects these two children staying in his hermitage to sing the story of the *Rāmāyana* composed by him in the courts of princes. The boys are endowed with sweet voices and the poet-sage teaches them the skills required for singing the story of Rama (see, e.g., *Rāmāyana*, Balakanda Canto IV, verse 1–9). So we see that at the inception of the epic we are told of the modes of its transmission that occur

across media: a written text is to be sung in the court, including in the court of the hero of the text itself.

*Sita Sings the Blues* offers a set of readings of Vālmiki's text (I use "text" as an umbrella term thus including film and music as text, as well the written text) and the different readings are in constant interaction, one forming the threshold of another, each in dialogue with the other, thus creating a field of reception for the film. The film thus has multiple representations of the main characters, united by the same name. The different forms of visual representation of the main characters indicate narrative levels and discourses, giving the epic characters multiple locations in time and space. This indicates that the understanding of the epic as a mobile genre is only intensified as we move across media. As the title song is played, the goddess figure that arises from the waters at the beginning of the film is a faintly funny but lovingly executed ornamental drawing. The figure is that of Sri or Lakshmi, who rose from the waters when the seas were created and became the consort of Vishnu. This is Sita's prototype, her divine form, so to speak, as Vishnu is Rama's. The frame within which the Sita of the story is fixed visually is represented from the outset by the outlined female form which exaggerates the heroine's physical attributes. This is drawn from Vālmiki's description of a particular form of *nayika* (heroine) in accordance with a notion of beauty and later enshrined in all classical Sanskrit performance manuals deriving from Bharata's *Natyashastra*, including the performance of physical desire. The heroine's attributes are provided in these manuals and the specific depiction of her hair, face, clothes, jewelry, and gait identify her state of mind and the exact stage on which her relationship to the hero rests. Such elaborate descriptions of the *nayika* are contained in manuals of poetry as examples of particular kinds of *kavya alamkar* (ornamentation of language) that renders it "poetic." Of course the *alamkar* (literary device) includes *shabd* (word) and *artha* (meaning), respectively. Thus the ornamentation of poetic language through figures of speech is inherent in the concept of *alamkar* itself. However, this is a point where the materiality of the two media, i.e., the linguistic and the visual, is evident. We may consider this incident in some detail. Shurpanakha, Ravana's sister, is enamored with Rama, and proposes to him when she sees him in the forest. When he refuses saying that he is already married, she tries to tempt him. Then, her nose is cut off by Lakshman when she refuses to take no for an answer. Enraged, Shurpanakha goes to her brother, the powerful king of Lanka, and complains that she has been insulted. She demands that Ravana should abduct Sita and avenge this insult, describing the beauty of Sita. In the film, Shurpanakha uses these words: "Dear brother, Ravana, have you seen Rama's wife Sita? She is the most beautiful woman in the world. Her skin is fair like the lotus blossom. Her eyes are like lotus pools. Her hands are like ... from ... lotuses. Her breasts like ... big ... round ... firm ... juicy ... lotuses." On screen we see an outline of Sita drawn in serious ornate style and lotuses keep popping up in place of the relevant body part as Shurpanakha's voice



describes that body part comparing it with lotuses. While this literally visualizes the metaphor, it also draws attention to the aestheticization of the human body achieved both verbally and visually.

The use of the image and concept of lotus for the description of Sita's physical beauty is attributed to Ravana when he first sees her. Maricha, Ravana's associate, takes the form of a golden deer and appears before the cottage of Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana in the forest. Sita demands that the deer be captured for her. Giving in to her demands, Rama pursues the deer into the forest and wounds it. The deer screams for help in the voice of Rama. Hearing this, Sita, who cannot see what is happening but can only hear Rama's voice, persuades Lakshmana to go to his brother's aid. Thus she is left unprotected when Ravana, who has laid this plan, appears in the guise of a hermit asking for alms. Setting eyes upon her, Ravana says "Who are you, radiant like the glow of gold, dressed in golden clothes like a lotus tendril, auspiciously garlanded with lotuses." This is a set description for the heroine's beauty in classical Sanskrit poetics. Of note is that in the *Rāmāyana* Sita is identified with Sri, the consort of Vishnu, who arises from the depths of the seas created by the gods and demons for the elixir of immortality. Both Vishnu and Sri are pictured as standing on lotuses and in some representations Sri or Lakshmi is shown as seated on a lotus emerging from the navel of the recumbent Vishnu. In fact, from the title sequence itself, the connection between Sita and the lotus is established in keeping with the source text's imagery.

However, the literalization of the metaphor into visual representation raises another question: what is the difference between literalization, i.e., taking the metaphor as "fact" or "truth" letting it remain as a metaphor? When there is a crossing of media boundaries, between verbal language and visual medium, can metaphor lend itself to visualization without being stripped of the appeal endowed by literarization? Is a metaphor meant to be visualized literally or does it open space for the human imagination, the primary function of literature? This is one of the questions of aesthetics and technique that is posed by intermediality as the condition of being of a work of art. A transposition of the construction of principles, stylistic procedures, and aesthetic conventions means that one medium takes up or imitates the representation of another (Rajewsky 52). How are the representative devices of one medium affected when transferred to another? It appears — based on the example of film — that when a metaphorical representation which allows scope for the imagination is fixed as a visual image, this undercuts the power of the metaphor. This difference is based on the materiality of the different media in question and the text that crosses media boundaries provides us an occasion to understand and further explore such intermedial crossing and the aesthetic specificities of each medium. We may thus reflect upon the results of "conceptual fusion," a process in which not only are media boundaries crossed but a fusion of horizons occurs. Trained in the reception of one medium, when we move within the same text to another medium, do we adjust our horizons to account for the intermedial transfer or do we confuse one medium's representative techniques

with those of another? What is the result of such movement upon the reception of the text which exists in intermedial space? These are questions of both aesthetics and ontology, which intermediality studies may address.

Within a particular medium the movement from one genre to another has a distinct role to play in textual construction. For example, one genre used in the representation of Sita is the cartoon, drawn in even more exaggerated outlines with overstated secondary sexual characteristics. The voluptuous cartoon of Sita's counterpart is a bare blue-bodied Rama drawn to resemble the muscled Johnny Bravo, a cartoon character who is all man and putty in the hands of women. We have already traversed two discursive visual and aural realms, both ornate, representing female beauty and male valor according to particular norms, but drawing from two different registers of visual language. In the technical language of audiovisual representation, this is called "art shift"—i.e., shifting to different styles of art within the same text for purposes of homage and/or parody. The *alamkar* (ornamentation) in the first classical Indian style with which the film begins, arises from the need to formally beautify, to create visual pleasure in proportion and design. However, the latter, i.e., the cartoon style, has a different purpose: exaggeration with a view to comic effect, as underlined by the stark resemblance between Johnny Bravo and Rama. This does not exhaust the possibilities of intermediality, however, for now we encounter a meeting across media boundaries. The visual text is a representation of a couple with exaggerated physical outlines which, in turn, define and identify masculinity and femininity, Rama and Sita. And the audio text includes the 1920s blues singer Annette Henshaw's songs. Sita, presented as located in Indian culture and as a character in a written text is brought to completion through another medium, music, from another cultural location, the twentieth-century U.S. The film text thus enacts an interpretation of the *Rámáyana* intermedially across boundaries of time and space.

How is this intermediality to be read? Can we draw inferences regarding the nature of different media and representation through them? Are these questions of aesthetics prompted by the functionality of technology and are we thus in a position to propose a new aesthetics of representation? What does this tell us about the nature of art and its relation to the medium of expression? The relation between auditory and visual media is not the only one that we encounter within the text. The story of the *Rámáyana* is narrated by a troupe of shadow leather puppets famous in Sri Lanka, where Ravana is supposed to have taken Sita after abducting her. The voices of these puppets are modern voices and they tell, discuss, and comment upon the story of the *Rámáyana* thus locating it between history and myth, fact and fiction, possibility and impossibility. The mispronunciations (e.g., Shapurnakha instead of Shurpanakha) and wrong "facts" are "corrected" and "politically correct" views emerge. Take for example the description of Ravana as a wise man whose only misconduct was the abduction of Sita. Much is made of his

ardent devotion for Shiva. He is said to have played the *vina*, a string instrument, with his intestines as a form of worship. This is discussed by the shadow puppets. The discussion continues and words and phrases like “basically,” “actually,” “you know,” etc., are used rather than arguments or references to tradition or existing texts to substantiate points. A long debate ensues about the practical possibility of Sita’s throwing a string of ornaments while being carried away by Ravana in the *pushpak vimana*, a form of transport that “flies.” In the source text this is done so that Rama follows the trail of the ornament and thus finds which way she had been taken. The shadow puppets, rooted in the realm of the possible, ask several questions. Would she have had ornaments? The three royal personages are supposed to have left everything behind for a life in the forest. Could Sita have even walked to the forest with so many ornaments, which, when put together, stretched from here to Sri Lanka? What is called *auchitya* (aptness) in classical Indian aesthetic theory and willing suspension of disbelief in the Western formulation, becomes a point of discussion for the shadow puppets commenting upon the story of the source text. Thus, the discussion is about possibility in art and the limitations of possibility in the real world. The difference between these is highlighted by the simple technique of visualization in a mixture of art genres: the real monkeys, the real ornaments, and the cartoon Sita taken by the ten-headed Ravana form an incongruous picture, accentuating the gap between metaphoricality that literary language is predicated upon and language as a transparent mirror of what actually happens.

The poetic conventions used in the source text are interrogated from the receptor’s horizon of expectation built from different media and a different cultural context. Used to scientific realism and naturalism in art, perhaps the Western audience is puzzled by the exaggeration that is the essence of poetic language in the classical Indian tradition. There is a distance created between the text and the receptor as depicted in the text. The shadow puppets dominate the front of the frame—a misnomer here because the surface on which the frame is projected is by definition is flat and two dimensional. However, depth, or the perception of depth, is created by the dark intricately carved leather shadow puppets against the bright background of the various visual styles of representations of the Rama material, from a traditional Rajasthani miniature painting enlarged for the screen to calendar art with pictures of gods and goddesses found in the country’s markets both rural and urban. The puppets are the nearest the text gets to a “narrator” or “chorus.” The distance between them and the actual narrative, their comments, questions, and clarifications, and their characterization are in constant interplay with the material of the intermedial text. This interplay gives rise to multiple narrative levels, both visually and audibly, both interacting across words and pictures in order to perform the telling and the hearing of the *Rámáyana* in a specific context and at a particular time and place. And this brings us to the stories that the text contains, of which there are three. One is the story of the *Rámáyana*,

the other is the “telling” of the story to a particular audience using different media, and the third is the frame story.

Analyzing the different states of time in the hypertextual narrative, Marjorie Lüsebrink points out that “if Real Time embodies the simulated ‘current resolution’ of the narrative mechanism, Narrative Time is the means for revealing the precipitatory causes—the conditions and events which gave rise to plot and action. In many cases the Narrative Time is concerned with backstory, or flashback, although in some cases the actual chronological location of the information is ambiguous” (110). This ambiguity does not seem to mark *Sita Sings the Blues* because the different aural and visual media genres not only provide spatial and temporal locations for the narratives linked together, but also identify the different levels of time and space in which these narratives are constructed. Different media genres therefore collaborate to establish a textualization of time. Time in *Sita Sings the Blues* is neither linear nor cyclical; rather, different time frames are traversed through the fusion of different media using the specific medium’s repertoire of temporal and spatial representational devices to achieve an effect of mythic time as a “leak between actual worlds and the world of fiction, a zone that it is not possible to attribute to either of them” (Koskima 56). The frame story narrativizes the occasion for the telling of the *Rāmāyana*. The animation style used here is “squiggle-vision,” an animation technique patented by Tom Snyder (see *Soup2Nuts*). It consists of a set of animation sequences set in a vibrating frame, the effect being the same as that of a “jittercam” (it appears as if the picture on screen is constantly shivering). The figures are those of adult cartoon strips or illustrations in graphic novels and they tell the story of a loving couple in San Francisco separated by the man’s assignment to India. He gradually distances himself from his wife once there despite her constant and overwhelming fidelity and love. This is the narrative that frames the story of Sita abducted, imprisoned, threatened with violation, and then forced to undergo trial by fire to prove her chastity to assuage the suspicions of her royal husband’s subjects. It highlights aspects of the story of the *Rāmāyana* that have entered into “mythic time” and in which *Sita Sings the Blues* functions.

The “real time” of the text’s reception is one where emotions are often expressed publicly through status updates on social networking sites. That Sita finally rejects the man she loves because he proves again and again that he cannot respect her bears the potential of becoming universal in a time when women living and working independently still retain the values of sexual and emotional fidelity. Compulsory monogamy and the exaggerated eternity of fidelity have been analyzed from the feminist position as “patriarchal” since this is seen as a duty for women. The characters of the husband and wife in the frame story are shown as loving and caring for each other, but despite this mutual affection it appears that the man moves on when his wife is out of sight, while she continues to embrace the past and in his absence waits for the past to return in the future. Sita enters the womb of mother earth disgusted with having to prove her chastity again and

again for the satisfaction of others. She disappears into earth, foregrounding the rejection of eternal slavery to love as a viable option if only in the fictional world. Válmíki's *Rámáyana* was written in order to describe the destruction of Ravana and to glorify the greatness of Sita. One wonders if placing Sita as a popular feminist icon is contrary to the general depiction of her as long suffering, devoted doormat, fobbed off with the status of goddess after her self-respect had been compromised routinely by events to which she is submitted. That she suffered for her husband's inability to demonstrably "love" her enough to support her gives her a moral stature that Rama cannot undercut. And that she acquitted herself with honor from every trial and chooses finally to retire with her dignity intact rather than continue to live with the husband who had compromised her further adds to this stature. The injustice of the judgment against her and her reaction to it are highlighted throughout publicly in *Sita Sings the Blues*. When Ravana wishes to have a physical relationship with her and suggests that he can win her consent without the use of force, she says "I can destroy you with my own power, but I do not do so only because my lord Rama has not ordered me to do it." Apparently, divine/masculine/patriarchal power is balanced by the assertion of feminine power "granted" by that same divine/masculine/patriarchal agency. Sita subordinates her own power to that of Rama willingly as long as she cares to do so. When she is disgusted with this state, however, she retreats into her own, and that gives her the status of an icon. This form of rewriting of the source text in a contemporary context proves the ability of the written epic to be an omnibus genre, not only arising out of polygenesis, but giving rise to literary and performance cultures that traverse boundaries across modes of media.

One of the genres in *Sita Sings the Blues* is the everyday dialogue between the husband and wife in the frame story which locates the story towards its primary audience, US-Americans of a particular social and economic class whose location are underscored through their profession, living space, and speech and all this is reflected in the visual representation. Further, blues as a genre of music marks a particular cultural orientation identified as it is with a period of US-American cultural and social history. The thematic and formal roots of the genre are in the trials and travails of African slaves transported to the southern states of the U.S., expressing their hardship and the sorrow of injustice against which the music is itself a form of struggle for survival. It is not limited to the expression of sorrow or the acceptance of a discriminatory world: in Henshawe's style and in the history of African American struggles for equality and freedom the resistance and struggle to rise above the depressing reality of a racist society can well be extended to express the pain of rejection as well as the spirit of survival with dignity.

The title of the film joins the text *Rámáyana* to the situation of its reception and retelling in contemporary times. This is the level of "reality" from which the text wishes to launch itself into the material of Rama, coming from a "foreign" location, temporally and spatially. The second level of narrative reality is represented visually by the stylized shadow puppets who tell and discuss the story

of *Rámáyana*. These do not represent visual reality at all; rather, the audio text is on a different register from the visual one. The shadow puppets—despite their stylized ornate appearance—use contemporary spoken language, creating a second level of reality placed in the context of the frame story. At the end of the film, Sita renounces the world that does not appreciate her not because someone forces her to do so, but because she rejects its right to rule her life: she places herself outside the power of this world. In the frame story, the woman of the couple is shown alone after her husband decides to stay on in India despite her pointing out that it is detrimental to their relationship. She is kept company by her cat and the last frame shows her closing the *Rámáyana* which she had been reading. What she has read has been dramatized in *Sita Sings the Blues* through the shadow puppets: they share the location of reception of *Rámáyana* by those who are culturally, temporally, and spatially distanced from its original audience, whether literary or oral. They are stylized visually, but they speak contemporary English. Moreover, the accents with which these voices speak English identify two of them as Indians speaking to someone who does not have an Indian accent. This is the third voice, perhaps of a person “foreign” to India who has seen some of the land and wants to know more about it from his friends. This is a perfect story telling situation for an orally told story being transposed to film. This oral situation does not remind us that the Rama theme was gleaned by Válmiki from various sources and composed in meter, not prose. Oral performance had been transferred into Válmiki’s written text when in the first part of the *Adi Kanda (Canto of Origins)* we meet Kushi and Lav, two brothers who are taught the *Rámáyana* by Válmiki himself. This occurs before the narration of the story of Rama is even begun and only after indicating the sources for the propagation of the story through performance does Válmiki proceed to tell it. They are instructed to sing it while going from court to court and their itinerary includes Rama’s court, where they go to sing of his exploits to Rama himself. Kushi and Lav are the twin sons of Rama borne by Sita while in exile in the hermitage of Válmiki, as we know sent there by the doubts cast upon her character by her husband’s subjects. Thus the intermedial nature of the text is documented within the text itself. *Rámáyana*’s travels across media begin literally from the moment of its creation when the larger world outside the text, the future of the world, is presented and the present where the events that make up the text occur are fused together allowing the traversing of space and time through the traversing of media boundaries.

In conclusion, the story of Ravana’s destruction and the narrative of Sita’s glory are the burdens of Válmiki’s epic. Paley takes the second one, i.e., Sita’s glory, and casts it into the mould of a woman’s patience in the face of emotional trauma and her final dignified choice of self-respect. This telling has already traversed time and space and Paley’s intermedial technique allows some of the many *Rámáyana*-s in *Sita Sings the Blues* available to viewers of the film through the use of multiple visual and audible genres. The text of the *Rámáyana* has traversed different media using varied modes of transmission and has been accordingly



recast time and again. Presented in advertisements of *Sita Sings the Blues* as the “greatest break-up story ever told,” the film has acquired shifts of focus: material from a text that has been received in the culture of its production as asserting a woman’s devotion and submission is presented suggesting the renunciation of worldly joys and standards. This renunciation functions as the state of freedom for the woman and the freedom from a relationship which does not bring respect and peace. The context of *Sita Sings the Blues*’s reception—contemporary San Francisco—and a global culture—provide the horizon of expectation for the reception of the text. The visual discourse—calendar art, the Rajasthani painting, ornament, cartoons, etc.—are augmented by aural representations. They do not always synchronize with the visual representation as I noted, thus providing many perspectives on a story that is part of world literature. The relation between the reception of the text in the location in which it is produced and its reception in the global context through new media generate these varied perspectives. In this context, the concept of a source text may be rethought with respect to its modes of production and re-production. Among these may be included the media used for transmission, which inflect the genres of both aural and visual representation. Thus the different levels of interacting “reality” and “fictionality” produce the film and the reading of a literary text within a particular location.

**Note:** The above article is a revised version of Ipshita Chanda, “An Intermedial Reading of Paley’s *Sita Sings the Blues*.” *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 13.3 (2011): 1–9. Copyright release to the author.

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# Painting and Representation in Teaching Balzac

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Janet Moser

**Abstract:** In her article “Painting and Representation in Teaching Balzac” Janet Moser explores the relation of text and image for use in pedagogy. The roots of Balzac’s realist representational program in seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting have been noted frequently and studied extensively. However, description and narrative are in many respects oppositional and the Balzac/Dutch analogy can be taken only so far. Balzac believed that he had grafted ethically meaningful dramatic action onto a morally static model of Dutch descriptive realism. In class discussions and exercises — through the analysis of Balzac’s rhetoric and a survey of Dutch painting — students explore the connections between Balzac’s understanding of representation in Dutch painting and his representation of the culture of Restoration Paris.

## INTRODUCTION

The classic nineteenth-century European novel in translation sits at the hub of a network of fundamental interdisciplinary connections within the teaching institutions of the English-speaking world. Playing the role of the “immediate Other” opposite the study of the contemporary English novel, continental fictions have served both to link the rhetorical tactics generically, representational strategies of the English novel to cognate literary concerns, and to provide students with a broader, less Anglo-centric view of how the novel came to represent concerns arising in the industrializing worlds of the nineteenth century. A byproduct of the generalization achieved by dislodging the novel from its traditional embedding in language-based studies is an emerging, institutionally-important role for studies of “realism” and the nineteenth-century novel as models for critical inquiry into issues of representation in visual, material, and social worlds. Whether by attracting students majoring in history, the social sciences, art history, and other cultural historical disciplines to courses in comparative literature or by providing models for descriptive rhetoric in often marginalized freshman writing courses, the “realist” theme underlying the teaching of the nineteenth-century European novel in translation inevitably transgresses and contests many timeworn institutional practices.

The two standard academic realisms, that of seventeenth-century Dutch painting and that of the nineteenth-century novel, first meet explicitly in the work

of Balzac. Introducing our exploration of this theme with Oscar Wilde's proposal that "the Nineteenth Century, as we know it, is largely an invention of Balzac" (32), class participants and I begin a course devoted to the nineteenth-century European novel with a visual reading of Balzac's *Père Goriot*. This 1835 novel, particularly rich in period detail, offers a variety of lenses through which we may observe the people, places, and objects that combine to drive the action and impose meaning on Balzac's portrait of Restoration Paris. *Père Goriot* can serve as a socio-historical document tracing the increasing importance of money and of bourgeois society and culture in Parisian life; as a topographical and demographic survey of the entangling web of streets and structures mirroring the drama of the newcomer trying to negotiate his/her place in the social world of what was to become the capital of the nineteenth century; as the exemplum of a new kind of literature, one whose images foreground the material details of everyday things, directing our attention to the significance of these objects for those who possess or desire them. It is through their reading of *Père Goriot* that students can begin to perceive the culture of social and material phenomena which characterize the birth of the modern city and the accompanying emergence of new narrative forms and stylistic devices that nineteenth-century literature employs in describing this new world.

In the 1842 foreword to the *Comédie humaine*, Balzac pronounced himself the "secretary" of a society consisting of "men, women and things" (9; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine) and it is under the persistent pressure of the Balzacian gaze, with its penetrating scrutiny, that these "things" reveal their significance to the men and women of their time. In a novelistic world in which, as Erich Auerbach notes, there is no "separation of body and clothing, of physical characteristics and moral significance" (471), much depends on the protagonist's accurate reading of the milieu and its objects. For Balzac, "everything in the real—facades, furniture, clothing, posture, gesture—must become sign," as description becomes "the very process of investing meaning in the world, demonstrating how surface can be made to intersect with signification" (Brooks, *Melodramatic* 125).

The setting and its things, the physical tokens of the new commodity culture of Restoration Paris representing new, dramatically transgressive possibilities of altering one's relation to this world, disclose their coded meanings to observers. The importance of objects—including those of art—a significance most often measured in monetary terms and as indices of who we are to ourselves and to others, permeates the novel. It is the primacy accorded to the visual in the bourgeois engagement with the furnishings of their everyday life that marks the change in nineteenth-century literature: "to see' — for nineteenth-century mentality is more than ever a prerogative of power ... to narrate is to appropriate the viewpoint of power, or even surpass it" (Moretti 136–37). And the desire to possess evoked by the sight of these objects—visual imagery representative metonymically of the secrets of an urban cultural code, signs whose meaning "will remain forever mysterious to those ... left behind in the provinces" — gives

the narrative its particular dynamism, as its characters “desire everything, at every moment, starting with the countless ‘necessary trifles’” (Moretti 166) that Balzac presents.

This privileging of the visual, then, is key to understanding the new emphasis on the “contiguity”—the term is Roman Jakobson’s—of things with what they are taken to represent that characterizes the interpenetration of artistic and literary concerns in the nineteenth century. As early as 1847, Balzac was described as a “Dutch painter in prose” (Lewes 695) and the roots of his realist representational program in seventeenth-century Netherlandish genre imagery have been noted frequently and studied extensively (see, e.g., Yeazell). However, description and narrative are in many respects oppositional and the Balzac/Dutch analogy can be taken only so far. Balzac believed that he had, in his novels, grafted ethically meaningful dramatic action onto the morally static model of Dutch descriptive realism. In our discussions and exercises, students and I construct a Balzacian narrative about a Dutch genre painting—investing a realistic description with meaningful action—in order to arrive at an understanding of Balzac’s style. Moving from rhetoric to representation, we analyze Balzac’s narrational tactics, his techniques of signification, investigating the particular ways in which his stylistic devices are designed to convey meaning. Only afterward, when we have learned about how to look at material things through Balzacian eyes, do we turn to Dutch genre painting to help us understand what these things might represent in the world of *Père Goriot*. The conclusion of the literary and artistic tour of the intricate byways of rhetoric and representation in early nineteenth-century Paris is an interdisciplinary writing assignment. Students bring together their skills in explication and interpretation in a narrative imitating Balzac in both style and spirit: they visit the European painting galleries at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, look closely at one of the dozens of Dutch genre paintings in the collection (an exercise that can also be carried out with the resources of the internet), and write an accompanying narrative in an appropriately Balzacian style.

## EXPLICATING DESCRIPTIVE TECHNIQUES IN BALZAC’S *PÈRE GORIOT*

We begin our study of Balzac’s rhetorical techniques by examining the scrupulous description of the material details through which we come to an understanding of the social world of his novel. The oft-studied opening scene of *Père Goriot* (see Auerbach 413) serves as the model for our explication of stylistic devices, introducing students to a practice that we will hone and apply throughout the semester. This careful attention to the details of an author’s style emphasizes a method of rhetorical analysis in which each revisiting of a text may be made to yield new and unsuspected interpretations. These same opening pages also offer students a broad overview of the changing face of nineteenth-century Paris. Inviting different perspectives on the rise of the modern city, the exposition of the seamless interweaving of manner and matter in this paradigmatic Balzacian

description furnishes students with a means of approach to a theme that will guide us throughout our readings of nineteenth-century European literature: the meticulous portrayal of ordinary life during a period that is socially the century of the bourgeois and artistically the century of realism. Led by Balzac on a visual tour that progressively zooms down from monumental cityscape to rundown neighborhood to seedy pension, students can trace the workings of the metonymy characteristic of Balzacian signification and come to see the artful representation of the human world by the material that typifies the “realism” of the author’s style — most notable in the dramatic and pictorial final close-up of the pension’s proprietor, whose presence makes “the whole spectacle ... complete” (10), embodying what Henry James singled out, in an image that acutely references both painting and theater, as the “fusion of all the elements of the picture—of what people are with what they do ... of all the parts of the drama with each other” (135).

Following the introductory close study of the rhetoric of the visual, we shift attention away from the investigation of how things signify in Balzac and turn to the complementary question of what these things represent. At this point, I speak about Balzac’s “realism,” employing the expression in its broad sense as a critical term “resolutely attached to the visual, to those works that seek to inventory the immediate perceptible world” (Brooks, *Realist* 16). This generic notion of realism—a broadened retrojection of the concept of realism first articulated in the criticism and polemics of 1850s French painting—unifies various kinds of visual, dramatic, and literary art that can be said to share an impulse to “work through the accumulation of things, of details, of particularities” (Brooks, *Realist* 16). The downside of this overly neat formula for conflating the “realistic” depictive practices of very different times, places, and artistic media reveals itself in an accompanying tendency—often driven from both the right and the left by ideological considerations—to impose a correspondingly unified interpretation on the meaning of all realist representations. In the case of Balzac and Dutch painting, we have perhaps the most fortuitous and influential example of the phenomenon of an anachronistic and tendentious projection of nineteenth-century political and social concerns onto interpretations of realist art of earlier periods.

Mindful of the need to see Dutch painting through the eyes of Balzac and his contemporary commentators while at the same time recognizing the period-bound particularity of this way of looking, we explore the connections between Balzac’s understanding of the representation of the world in Dutch painting and his own representation of the world of Restoration Paris. A guest lecture by a colleague in the Department of Art History provides an overview of how modern art historians approach the question of meaning in Dutch painting; then we use the resources of the internet to examine Dutch genre paintings and complement our reading of the novel. Students develop a familiarity with the characteristic subject matter and uses of color, composition, perspective, light and, most particularly, precision of detail in the painting of the Golden Age by looking at works by such artists

as Gerrit Dou, Nicolaes Maes, Adriaen van Ostade, Jan Vermeer, and Pieter de Hooch. The tops of the inventory, the “accumulation of realistic details” in Dutch painting that Barthes interprets in a Balzacian manner as “an art of the catalogue ... of the concrete itself” (7) “an empire of things” (3) finds its literary analogue in the Balzacian novel’s profoundly “visual inspection of the world of phenomena and a detailed report on it” (Barthes qtd. in Brooks, *Realist* 16–17).

## SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY DUTCH PAINTING, THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH NOVEL, AND BALZAC

Before we can consider the possible connections between Balzac’s descriptive rhetoric and Dutch painting, we must first sort out what it was that Balzac was trying to represent, what he thought Dutch painting was trying to represent, what the Dutch actually thought their images meant, and what later readers, who imposed retrospectively their own realist interpretations on his work, thought Balzac’s representations meant. The notion that nineteenth-century French novelists and critics found an analogue to the style and subject of contemporary fiction in the paintings of seventeenth-century Dutch artists is postulated in Ruth Yeazell’s assertion that Dutch painting was “as much a nineteenth-century idea as a seventeenth-century phenomenon” (xvi). A wide-ranging assortment of recent studies by cultural historians is now devoted to recovering the links between the innovations of the art of the Dutch Republic and the brave new social world depicted in its genre images. It would appear that although the painting of the Dutch Golden Age was known and—even allowing for what was taken to be the lowness of its subject matter—often esteemed outside the Netherlands in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this later foreign attention was accompanied by surprisingly little curiosity about how these images might have originally been interpreted in their homeland. Hence, a separate but equally important branch of modern cultural study examines the subsequent reception, influence and somewhat idiosyncratic interpretation of this classic Dutch art as expressed in the novels, painting, criticism, and polemics of nineteenth-century France, England, and Germany. The story of the fortunes of Dutch painting in the nineteenth century—often denigrated and sometimes defended, viewed as a surrogate for new movements in the arts and for the representation of new worldviews, enlisted wishfully as the emblem of the ordinary and anonymous—reads much like a nineteenth-century novel. By mid-century, the European idea of Dutch painting had risen from its humble beginnings as a descriptive category for one of the lesser modes of artistic expression to the pinnacle of conceptual success, the principal exemplum of the new epoch-making, anti-Classical and anti-Romantic ideology: realism.

The realities of the “Dutchness” of Dutch painting seem to have been left behind on the journey of this mode of representation from its native circumstances to the realist consciousness of nineteenth-century Europe. Contemporary critical

attention focused on the universally acknowledged mimetic effectiveness of this art, the precise manner with which these genre images were said to portray the world. But what world was this and whose? English and German thought tended to rely on catch-all formulas like the “everyday” world; the French preferred to understand the subject of Dutch painting in pointedly social terms, seeing in Netherlandish images strong analogies with the familiar world of the bourgeois of contemporary France (see Demetz 115). The modern view of what these meticulous depictions of people enmeshed in the details of their things actually might have meant to the burghers of the relatively stable and homogeneous society of the Dutch Republic for whom they were created is quite at odds with the critical reception of classic Dutch painting in the nineteenth century. These detailed images, especially in France, were believed to be a new mode of depiction, free from the classical requirement that the manner of representation be generically bound to an accompanying idealization of its subject. Balzac and contemporary critics who shared his concerns about rising bourgeois political and cultural sway found it easy to project onto the meaning of Dutch painting their own stereotypical view of the limitations in spirit and sensibility of the phlegmatic burghers of the Dutch Republic. Thus, the separation of matter from spirit in the placid world of the Golden Age suggested by the “calm and monotony of a naively sensual happiness” that Balzac sees in Dutch genre painting could serve equally as an artistic and moral model for new kinds of literary representations appropriate to the volatile and highly stratified society of nineteenth-century France (*Comédie humaine* 10 658).

Buying in at face value to the complacency so manifestly exhibited by the inhabitants of the richly-textured material world depicted in the classic images of the ordinary life of the Dutch Republic, French critics wary of materialist bourgeois culture and its accompanying political liberalism supplied what they took to be the missing moral of the Dutch manner: the meticulous detail in these portrayals was seen as a highly efficient and self-serving means of celebrating the comfort and fineness of one’s possessions—an aesthetically-compelling affirmation of the narrow spiritual vision of an unreflective, dull and materialist people. From Balzac in the early 1830s to Taine in the late 1860s, this view of Dutch character dominates the critical interpretation of Golden Age paintings. Balzac even neatly writes off the political and commercial achievements of Dutch society as byproducts of the comfort-seeking nature of its people: “Their national career was a sort of political thrift, their force of insurrection was the outcome of an energetic desire to have sufficient elbow room at the table and to take their ease beneath the eves of their steeds” (*Comédie humaine* 10 660). In this “bourgeois paradise,” life “must be as monotonously level as the lowlands . . . even the effects of climate have been modified” (*Comédie humaine* 10 659). Yeazell notes an arrestingly similar interpretation in Taine’s 1869 study of Dutch painting, in which



he asserts that “the spirit of the artist like that of his figures is in equilibrium; one would feel very much at ease in his picture. One imagines nothing beyond that” (214). And as we have seen, even as late as 1953, a version of this view of the narrowly materialistic Dutch character of Dutch painting persists in Roland Barthes’s notion of their “empire of things” (3).

There are useful ways of looking at the realism of Netherlandish images other than through the interpretive lens of this long-lived and influential tradition of concern about bourgeois ascendancy into which Balzac places his Dutch painting analogies. One might, for example, seek the views of the seventeenth-century Dutch themselves or investigate the polemics of nineteenth-century political liberalism or that of artistic Realism or, as we will find most useful later in our discussion of Balzac’s realism, art historical ideas about reconciling the inherent opposition between description and narrative. Our present concern, however, is the question of how Balzac and his readers interpreted the Dutch paintings in his novels. Balzac invites us repeatedly to compare the meticulous descriptions of the material world of his novels to the precisely rendered detailing of the Dutch genre paintings that often suggest the domestic spaces in which he sets his scenes. We are meant to recognize a certain kinship not only in depictive practices but also in the materialism of the worlds these practices depict. However, it is here, at this moral crossroads, on the question of the meaning of the portrayal of material things, that the artistic symmetry between the two worlds breaks down and Balzac parts company with Dutch painting. The novelist disdains what he regards as the low representational purposes of the Dutch—their celebration of their own complacency. We must look for Balzac’s world elsewhere.

The links between the world of Balzac and his rhetoric of depiction can perhaps best be understood by pursuing the well-known connection, first observed by Roman Jakobson, between realist representation and the “naturalness” signified by the use of metonymy. We must ask, then, what larger “reality” material things point to in Balzac’s novels. How does the dramatic structure of his fictions reflect the ontological disjunction between the cultural objects Balzac so painstakingly describes and the social reality these bourgeois commodities represent? Concluding his discussion of a passage in *Lost Illusions* which he calls “the locus classicus in understanding not only Balzac but the whole nineteenth-century novel,” Peter Brooks speaks of “the Balzacian subject as a desiring machine” and of the novelist’s representation of “the things one needs to acquire as signs of what one is, or wants to be” (*Realist* 27–29). In Balzac’s novels, as in the image underlying Karl Marx’s related concept of the fetish of commodity, the metonymy points “outward” from material reality to a metaphysically larger world (in a later Realist novel, *Madame Bovary*, we find the metonymy pointing psychologically “inward”). Thus, we can see the conflict driving the Balzacian narrative as arising from a reification of the self — what György Lukács called “a capitalization of the spirit” (53).

## A “DUTCH PAINTER IN PROSE”

Readers of the period were quick to note the Dutch analogy in Balzac’s descriptive methods but without, it would seem, recognizing the connection between the implicit critique of Dutch materialism and the social concerns of the novels. French literary commentators likened Balzac’s work to Dutch genre painting as early as 1833, when a reviewer compared a character in *Le Médecin de campagne* to a painting by Dou and another compared *Le Père Goriot* to a *tableau flamand* (see Weinberg 55). Théophile Thoré, an influential art critic and promoter of Dutch genre painting, did much to popularize this analogy. Associating Balzac’s domestic interiors with Pieter de Hooch’s paintings, Thoré notes these artists’ shared notion that “people ... are inseparable from the place,” coexisting in a “harmonious milieu” in which everything “is created for them, especially the light that animates and enlivens them” (Thoré qtd. in Yeazell 58–59). By 1860, the comparison between Balzac’s fictions and Dutch painting had become commonplace, repeated and elaborated upon by both critics and later novelists such as Gustave Flaubert, George Sand, and William Dean Howells (see Yeazell 59; Weinberg 70). And while Balzac himself often encouraged the Dutch painting analogy, on at least one occasion he called attention to some crucial differences of purpose. In the 1830 preface to *Scènes de la vie privée*, anticipating both the comparison with genre painting and critical attacks on the “apparently superfluous details” that characterize his narrative method, Balzac wrote: “often his [Balzac’s] pictures will appear to have all the faults of the Dutch school, without offering their merits. But the author can excuse himself in saying that he has destined his book only to intelligences more candid and less jaundiced, less educated and more indulgent than those of these critics whose competence he declines to recognize” (*Comédie humaine* 11 174; see also Balzac qtd. in Yeazell 61). Clearly, for Balzac, the devil is in the celebratory superfluosity of the details in Dutch painting in contrast to the high purposefulness of his own meticulous depictions.

More often, however, Balzac invoked the Dutch analogy. The detailed descriptions of bourgeois households that accompany his scene-setting are often rendered in a characteristically Dutch palette of browns. In *Père Goriot*, Balzac warns of a tale “for which the reader cannot be over-prepared with too many shades of brown” (6), associating the colors of Dutch pictures with the style of certain French bourgeois interiors (see Bonard 142). In his 1841 *Le Curé de village*, Balzac presents readers with “a portrait of a young girl, worthy of Mieris, van Ostade, ter Borch and Dou, framed in one of those old, half-destroyed casements, worn and brown, of which their brushes were fond” (*Comédie humaine* 9 653; see also Balzac qtd. in Yeazell 85). Further, in her study of description and narrative in the portrayal of psychological absorption in seventeenth-century painting, Svetlana Alpers invokes a formula of Lukács stating that “narrative establishes proportion, description merely levels” (22). Opening scenes in Balzac’s novels

reminiscent of Netherlandish portraits close typically with a woman's figure framed in a window or doorway. As we move through these tableaux, we can follow the stylistic trajectory from seventeenth-century Dutch-like leveling with its "combination of imitation or description with a suspension of narrative action" (Alpers 15) all the way through to the nineteenth-century melodramatic "excess of Balzacian narrative rhetoric" wherein, "through the reader's and character's own consciousness of their heightened enactments," these significations "read out meaning from the indifferences of reality" (Brooks, *Melodramatic* 199–200).

Michael Fried demonstrates how this stylistic path from description to narrative, this dramatization of absorption, was mapped out by painters and critics in the eighteenth century, most particularly by Diderot in his demonstration of the ways in which dramatic ideas inherent in the presentation of detail can be set into motion. In his thorough and complexly argued investigation of these issues, only briefly outlined here, Fried shows us how Denis Diderot was able to explicate and encourage contemporary experiments in unifying narrative and visual detail in painting and the theater. In his theory of "the instrumentality of the *tableau*" (93), Diderot, according to Fried, offered a visual framework wherein "figures and stage properties stood outside the action with the result that the characters themselves seemed unaware of its existence" (93). The tableau, then, visible only to the beholder, functioned "not to address or exploit the visuality ... so much as to neutralize that visuality, to wall it off from the action ... to put it out of mind for the *dramatis personae* and audience alike" (Fried 95–96), thus investing the action with a "determinism," an "illusion of the inherent dynamism, directedness and compulsive force of causation itself" (Fried 85–86).

Balzac was familiar with Diderot's linking of dramaturgy and art criticism (see Gendzier 302–10). Olivier Bonard, a noted mid-twentieth-century authority on Balzac and painting, uses language echoing that of Diderot's critical program as he traces the representational movement from details to action to meaning in the opening pages of *La Maison du chat-qui-pelote* (1830). This scene, paradigmatic of Balzacian exposition both in "style and in the power of its visual drama," presents a "tableau whose meaning we seek to pierce" (Bonard 18). Here, the "dramatic charge" of the "exterior signs," the "motifs" which "this slice of reality proposes to us ... can only be released ... by an action which will give them a sense" by "the pressure of the drama on the images which nourish it" (Bonard 18–19).

## ASSIGNMENT OF COURSE WORK

Invoking a dollhouse-like image taken from a 1707 French novel, Brooks speaks of "Removing housetops in order to see the private lives played out beneath them: the gesture also suggests how centrally realist literature is attached to the visual, to looking at things, registering their presence in the world through sight" (*Realist* 3). This view of realist fiction as a powerfully effective combination of

meticulous description and dramatic action provides not only a useful framework for critical analysis but also a model for our concluding exercise. Having acquired some understanding of the ways in which Balzac's contemporaries looked at seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting and a familiarity with some of the important Dutch works of that era, students are ready to take the skills they have developed in explicating a text and apply them to imitating both the style and spirit of *Père Goriot*.

In class, we experiment with this assignment taking our cue from Yeazell's comparison of Pieter de Hooch's 1664 *A Woman Reading a Letter by a Window* with the reader's first glimpse of Madame Claes in Balzac's *Quest for the Absolute*. We read the richly-detailed scene that opens outside a Netherlandish home in Douai, progressing inwardly through house, gallery, courtyard and "rooms which, for two centuries, had been the centre of family life" (*Comédie humaine* 10 665), arriving finally in a parlor filled with treasures of Dutch and Flemish art. The following scene opens in this same parlor in 1812, with our view directed to a woman seated in the corner (*Comédie humaine* 10 667). At this point, immediately before Balzac's description of this woman, we abandon his narrative and examine de Hooch's painting and its seated woman. We bring to our discussion the now-familiar concepts from our survey of Dutch genre painting: we look at the play of light, the perspective, the ways that the repetitions of color and of geometric forms guide the viewer's eye. We scrutinize the objects that share the space with the character—the empty chair, the rug that covers the table, the letter, the open window revealing a cityscape of Amsterdam—conjecturing, along with our observations, what these details reveal about this private world. We finally focus on the woman herself, the clothing she wears, the physical attitude she assumes, the "representation of absorption" which Fried identifies with "a new realism" (194), the portrayal of emotions that will come to drive the actions of the narrative realisms of later centuries.

Next, taking Balzac at his word that for humanity, the past strangely resembles the future (*Comédie humaine* 10 658), we engage in a little time travel, crossing over from our nineteenth-century text to enter the world of our seventeenth-century painting, allowing ourselves anachronistically to dramatize the absorption of our seated figure. We outline together the narrative we will write, modeling our progress toward our seated seventeenth-century "Mme Claes" on the movement of our eye through de Hooch's narrative-like arrangement of pictures within pictures, "each picture a collection of smaller pictures" (Hollander 2). Like Balzac, we start at the borders, gradually zooming in on the principal subject of the painting, asking along the way what these objects might tell us about the life and the world of our seated woman. Following this exercise, students choose a Dutch genre painting portraying a principal female figure in an interior setting. Applying what they have learned about the Balzacian movement of narrative gaze, about the particular rhetorical devices that indicate the direction and dramatic meaning of this movement, about the attention to detail and to what objects

“say” about character and milieu, students write a realist narrative connecting a detailed description of the things in the painting with the principal figure and with what they might imagine her world to be. In effect, students are becoming active interdisciplinarians, erasing distinctions among fields as they transfer their skills of literary explication to the interpretation of painting, acquiring a sense not only of the close ties between a particular novel and a particular school of painting but also of the broader possibilities for connectedness of literature and the arts with material and ideological aspects of social and historical movements.

### COURSE PARTICIPANTS’ ESSAYS

Student narratives about their chosen paintings often revealed a genuine affinity with the spirit of Balzac’s style. For example, several students created a narrative based on Vermeer’s *A Maid Asleep* and their writing—its movement paralleling Balzac’s scene-setting frames, with its attention to forms, to colors, to sensory appeal, to the visual and textual metonymy characterizing their views of the connections of objects to their owners—demonstrated a skillful application of what we had been studying about Balzac’s narrational tactics. In their use of personification, metaphor, and juxtaposition, students suggested the interpenetration of the social and material worlds we had emphasized in the reading of the novel. In student narratives to accompany Gabriel Metsu’s *A Woman Seated at a Window*, particular attention to the kinds of material objects present—the scalloped bowl, the leather book, the birdcage—helped convey a sense of the comfort of a self-satisfied people at home among their possessions, portraits that resonated with our study of Balzac’s novel.

### CONCLUSION

Students delighted in playing at Balzacian melodrama, even if their texts did not always end with a happy marriage of representation and rhetoric. This kind of project can be adapted to fit a variety of disciplines, with variations derived from the students’ own interests—for example describing a gown by Fortuny in Proust’s style, the sextet from *Lucia di Lammermoor* in Flaubert’s style, a Tchaikovsky sonata in Dostoevsky’s style, the décor of a French period room in Balzac’s style, etc. In a subsequent course, asking students to apply a Proustian style to descriptions of a Monet painting produced impressionistic writing. Instructors teaching the literature of other eras could easily find relationships between narratives and the other arts including sculpture, music, photography, architecture, costume, dance, theater, and painting. Student essays linking the written and the visual not only produced ambitious, painterly narratives but also informed the study of both literature and the other arts. The writing generated by the assignment provided a rich resource for explorations of the overlappings and joinings of the literature, art, material culture, and social worlds we had studied.

Detailed student descriptions of the Dutch burgher interiors provoked exciting conversations about the ways in which the links between people and things were represented, inviting students to begin to think somewhat in the interdisciplinary manner of cultural historians. Reading about seeing and writing about seeing, finding correspondences among works and societies separated by two hundred years: it is this adventurous and interconnected, yet organized and disciplined way of seeing that students will retain and transfer to much of their engagement with twenty-first century culture, coming away from our reading of *Père Goriot* empowered to enter a world where “view becomes vision” (Béguin 49).

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## **PART 4**

Multilingual Bibliography of Books in Comparative  
Literature, World Literatures, and Comparative  
Cultural Studies



# Multilingual Bibliography of Books in Comparative Literature, World Literatures, and Comparative Cultural Studies

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Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek

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