

The New Humanities: The Intercultural, the Comparative, and the Interdisciplinary

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ABSTRACT

This essay is a proposal for the rejuvenation of the humanities, that is, proposals of how to make the study of literature and culture socially relevant in today's world. The proposed framework, "comparative cultural studies," is a field of study where selected tenets of the discipline of comparative literature merge with selected tenets of the field of cultural studies, meaning that the study of culture and culture products—including but not restricted to literature, communication, media, art, etc.—is performed in a contextual and relational construction and with a plurality of methods and approaches, based on an ideology of interculturalism, practiced in interdisciplinarity, and, if and when advantageous, including team work, as well as employing the advantages of new media technology.

In this paper I discuss, in the context of the humanities and social sciences, perspectives of globalization with regard to the discipline of comparative literature and cultural studies (and comparative cultural studies). An embattled discipline since its inception in the 19th century—intellectually as well as institutionally—comparative literature continues to experience pressure(s) today. However, at the same time it remains a discipline that has much to offer especially in the context of globalization. In the last few years a number of seminal publications appeared about the global, globalization, and the humanities (and within the field of the humanities, comparative literature as well as cultural studies). To list a few, I find the following of seminal impact: Rey Chow's *The Age of the World Target* (2006); *Globalism and Theory*, a special issue of *sympleke* (2001); Ning Wang's "Confronting Globalization" (2001); *Language and Literature in the Academy: Papers from the 2003 ADE-ADFL Summer Seminar*;

Globalization and the Humanities, a special issue of *Comparative Literature* (2001); Avery Plaw's collection *Frontiers of Diversity* (2005), Françoise Lionnet and Shuh-mei Shih's coedited collection *Minor Transnationalism* (2005); Suthira Duangsamorn's collection *Re-imagining Language and Literature for the 21st Century* (2005); Geoffrey V. Davis, Peter H. Marsden, Bénédicte Ledent, and Marc Delrez's edited volume *Towards a Transcultural Future* (2005); and I would like to call attention to Sean Latham's and Robert Scholes's paper "The Rise of Periodical Studies" in the March 2006 issue of *PMLA*, where the authors discuss—among other things—the advantages of new media technology for a global humanities (on this, see below).

In a discussion of and planning for global humanities and comparative literature (and comparative cultural studies), a tangent area that would have to be included in my opinion would be the ideology and practice of interculturalism and of inclusion; or this perspective I refer, in particular, to the thought of Will Kymlicka and Kwame Anthony Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism* (2006). Interculturalism has of course always been a basic tenet of comparative literature. However, because of the discipline's approach to literatures as nations and its national approach and its long-standing Eurocentrism, the principles of interculturalism and inclusion have been compromised, and this is where scholars such as Kymlicka and Appiah offer crucial adjustments to and in the framework of comparative literature (and, as I profess, for comparative cultural studies). Here, I would like to make a brief excursion regarding interculturality, a corollary of both comparative literature and comparative cultural studies in the manner I conceive these fields of scholarship and practice, here as a criticism of continental European thought and practices.

A professed cosmopolitan in the context of concepts and practices elaborated by such thinkers as Kymlicka and Appiah, I view the issue of interculturality/interculturalism in an international context where Europe is just one region of cultures with the omnipresence of exclusion.¹ At the same time, the new Europe—I mean here the European Union of 25 as well as the yet-excluded Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, the Ukraine, Russia, etc.—is in dire straits when it comes to intercultural communication in all its width and perspectives. In my view representing a regression, nationalisms in all areas whether culture or business are rising anew in Europe (and everywhere else, for that matter). But first, what do I mean by interculturality/interculturalism? Here is one possible definition, taken from my ten-point conceptualization of the emerging discipline of comparative cultural studies:

The second principle of 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 *Comparative* 259)

Clearly, this definition in scholarship is based on explicit ideological and practical premises where interculturality/interculturalism stands in opposition to “essentialism”—the concept that best describes the various forms and practices of self-referentiality, nationalism of varied types, and altogether its built-in exclusion of the Other. And examples of essentialisms abound worldwide and keep rising. The December 2005 riots in Paris showed the misguided thinking and practice and the opportunities the French governments—and indeed French culture altogether—missed when it comes to the integration of its immigrants and the situation is no different whether in Germany, Austria, or any other European country (with some positive attempts in the United Kingdom, perhaps). Whether in policymaking, education, government, or scholarship, intercultural communication—a basic ingredient of integration—is still unexplored in Europe. Here is a recent quote by Shemeem Burney Abbas, a Pakistani teacher in the US who returned to Texas after an extended period of lecturing in Europe: “The attitude in Europe is still very colonial... It doesn’t allow this kind of scholarship to flourish. There’s more innovation here, more curiosity, more interest in learning about other cultures” (qtd. in Applebome A20). And this is in the US where, as we know, things are not all wonderful and where racism and exclusion do exist; the substance of the matter is the comparison with the situation in Europe, of course. Why, for example in Germany and in Austria, the discourse in general and in scholarship does not allow for the designation of *Türkisch-Österreicher/in* or *Türkisch-Deutsche(r)*; instead, the designation is *Migrant*, a term and concept that effectively prohibits a Turkish person from being recognized and accepted as an Austrian or German of Turkish background and culture. Of course there are real “migrants,” people who maintain residences in both countries and spend 50% in one country and 50% in the other, but we are not speaking about this minority

of commuters. Rather, the issue is the integrative recognition of individuals and groups of immigrants of no matter what type who have another cultural/linguistic background than the majority culture but have lived for a long time in their adopted country.

The concept and practice of multiculturalism is today often derided in Germany and Austria, and more recently also in the USA and Canada, as a failed approach.² What participants in this discourse do not see, in my opinion, is the fact that it is not the concept and practice of multiculturalism that are “at fault” but the ‘how’ of its practice! In other words, if in the concept of multiculturalism it is a built-in requirement that the newcomer must be fluent and culturally adapted to German and German culture in order to become a citizen (which does not necessarily mean acceptance, unfortunately), and this requirement is not paralleled with an inclusive attitude by the host culture/people and by integrative practices, multiculturalism is obviously not going to work. If, however, there is an inclusive attitude present and there are practices of integration in place at all levels of government, education, the work place, etc., the newcomer becomes interested in integrating and will learn German. Unfortunately, what has happened in Europe instead of integration is the ghettoization and exclusion of immigrants, with the results of hostilities such as the Paris situation of 2005. I am aware that undoing the thinking and practices in place across Europe since the 1960s presents a difficult task, especially when there is a complete lack of thinking in the context of interculturalism and integrative multiculturalism in Europe even in scholarship and at all levels of education. Why, the basic idea of integration as a policy and practice on governmental levels has begun only in the last couple of years in Germany, for example.

Or, let us consider the latent and often public anti-Semitism and anti-Roma in today’s Hungary, a newly admitted member of the European Union, or the non-allowance of ethnic rights of Romanian Hungarians in Romania.³ While this rejection, implicitly and explicitly, of any Other as a cultural attitude based in said essentialist ideology has many curious, unfortunate, and unsavory results, perhaps the most recent and prominent example would be the objection by a substantial number of “true” and “authentic” Hungarians to the 2002 Nobel Prize in Literature awarded to Holocaust survivor Imre Kertész.⁴ In sum, a Europe that insists on the maintenance of national cultures and thus based in ideologies of essentialisms will remain mired in territorial disputes and exclusion, with the obvious negative results including violence and the ghettoization of immigrants. A Europe, however, that learns to accept the Other and that adopts and practices interculturalism and integrative multiculturalism where a “migrant” individual becomes a Turkish German (thus German), Turkish Austrian (thus Austrian), Polish French (thus French), or Algerian French (thus French), etc., individual who is not only fully integrated but also accepted by society at large, including on the street where she lives, would be a progressive

Europe. In my opinion, the ideology and practice of interculturalism remains of tantamount importance everywhere, including Europe. Europe would do itself great service to abandon all types and versions of nationalism and (cultural) essentialism and adopt, instead, interculturalism based on a regional approach instead of the sovereignty of nations. Should this be possible, ethnic conflicts still in place in many European countries (e.g., Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Czechia, the Baltic states, etc.) would dissipate by design, because instead of the emotional attachment to their own versions of history all “nations” would become ethnic and cultural groups living side-by-side in a unified Europe.

In the context of the above brief exposé regarding the importance of interculturality, I will begin with selected perspectives of the current situation of the discipline of comparative literature in a theoretical and institutional context. At the same time, I will locate my discussion of the discipline’s current intellectual and institutional situation in the context of the humanities (and the social sciences) in general. In other words, my discussion concerning the discipline of comparative literature is applicable for a number of reasons to the current situation of the humanities as a whole, in theory and in practice. I have covered aspects of the present discussion in some of my previous work, such as the current situation of comparative literature worldwide, including evidence that comparative literature is a developing field in many parts of the world while it is shrinking in its traditional loci in Europe and North America (the US and Canada); the importance of the social relevance of scholarship in literature; and so on.⁵ The present paper, then, is an expansion of notions I have introduced previously, now including some pertinent examples from within the situation of comparative literature as an academic discipline, as well as its extension as in the field of “comparative humanities,” “comparative studies,” etc., fields that at times in various institutional settings are now replacing or are taken as alternate designations of comparative literature. The discipline’s intellectual content and my insistence on explicit theory and methodology when working in the study of literature and culture comparatively (and contextually the framework of comparative cultural studies I develop) is based principally in contextual thinking and work.⁶

When George Steiner, a scholar of seminal texts in comparative literature and in the humanities in general, gave his inaugural lecture as the Lord Widened Professor of European Comparative Literature at Oxford in 1994, presented a paper entitled “What is Comparative Literature?”⁷ First, Steiner describes how “every act of reception of significant form, in language, in art, in music, is comparative” (1), and he argues that “from their inception, literary studies and the arts of interpretation have been comparative” (3). Steiner thus negates the status of comparative literature as a self-contained and functional discipline. Susan Bassnett suggests in her 1993 *Comparative Literature: An Introduction* that comparative literature is dead (47); and more recently Gayatri

Spivak entitled her 2003 book about comparative literature, a collection of lectures she delivered as the 2000 Wellek Library Lectures in Critical Theory, as *Death of a Discipline*, i.e., the death of comparative literature.⁸ Here we have three examples of scholars in the major leagues, who publish texts about comparative literature and at the same time are tenured professors in the same discipline with an international reputation and a significant citation rate. Their suggestions indicate a number of problems I will take up in this paper. Comparatists of course, but also scholars of literature and literary theory in general, are aware of the curious history of comparative literature where, in set intervals of ten years since the late 19th century, publications appear and conferences are held about the definitions and meanings of, reasons and justifications for, problems of, etc.—indeed, the survival of the discipline.⁹ First and foremost, in my view scholars such as Bassnett and Spivak make a grave error to suggest that comparative literature is “dead.” While they are right to suggest new thought and notions to revive and alter the intellectual parameters of the discipline, this ought to be done in such a way that no dean who wants to eliminate yet another comparative literature department or program to save money would be able to point to Bassnett’s statement or the title of Spivak’s book for justification.

I argue that there are other ways to maintain the achievements of comparative literature (particularly with regard to its institutional dissipation). And this is, in my view, the more important because the fate of comparative literature is obviously tied closely to the fate of the humanities as a whole everywhere. I should also like to note that Spivak’s book contains many if not all of my own suggestions and notions as to how to revive and do comparative literature, notions I have published in a number of journals in different languages since the early 1990s. Rather, the problem, at least in my view, is the spurious and in-your-face title of Spivak’s book. Much more to my liking are the argumentation and thinking of Emily Apter in her 2006 *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature*, in which she argues in similar ways for translation as the field and practice to innovate comparative literature but without the proposition that the discipline would be or ought to be “dead”:

A new comparative literature, with the revalued labor of the translator and theories of translation placed center stage, expands centripetally toward a genuinely planetary criticism, extending emphasis on the transference of texts from one language to another, to criticism of the processes of linguistic creolization, the multilingual practices of poets and novelists over a vast range of major and “minor” literatures, and the development of new languages by marginal groups all over the world. (10)

This new work continues to make a serious impact in Europe, including in comparative literature and the humanities generally, with—granted—slow arrival in literary and cultural studies in the United States.

Parallel to my various criticisms of “stars” such as Bassnett, Spivak, et al., I should like to mention that there are still a good number of seminal—and recent—texts whose authors endorse the discipline of comparative literature (albeit without attention to or discussion of the discipline’s institutional shrinkage). The list of such texts would include Chow’s *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work*; the work of Arturo Casas, César Domínguez, Francisco Chico Rico, María José Vega and Neus Carbonell, Anxo González Abuín and A. Tarrío, Montserrat Iglesias Santos, Dolores Romero López, Darío Villanueva, etc. in Spain, or in Italy the work of Armando Gnisci and Franca Sinopoli (so as to mitigate here the “standard” of US-American scholarship where attention is paid, if at all, at best to French-, or to a much lesser degree even to German-language scholarship of a relatively few texts...); or Eugene Eoyang’s *Intercultural Explorations* (mostly dealing with East-West relations); Johann Strutz and Peter V. Zima’s works on Austria, Switzerland, and the Adria; or Gerald Gillespie’s *By Way of Comparison*; or Bart Keunen and Bart Eeckhout’s *Literature and Society*; or Sophia A. McClennen’s *The Dialectics of Exile*; or McClennen and Earl E. Fitz’s *Comparative Cultural Studies and Latin America*.¹⁰ As a caveat, Apter appears unaware of the contextual systemic and empirical approach and decries, for example, “the fetish of ‘social systems’ analysis brought to the United States by Talcott Parsons” (233). To me, such unfamiliarity with current developments of cultural and literary theory—which, by the way, is very much present in the US in the fields of psychology, cognitive science, and education—is most unfortunate.¹¹

Now back to my selection of the discipline’s epistemology of the discipline. In his paper, Steiner proceeds to say:

I take comparative literature to be, at best, an exact and exacting art of reading, a style of listening to oral and written acts of language which privileges certain components in these acts. Such components are not neglected in any mode of literary study, but they are, in comparative literature, privileged. (9)

Here Steiner makes reference to that established type and traditional form of comparative literature where the knowledge of foreign languages is an essential factor. Steiner then outlines three specific areas that in his opinion are essential features of the discipline. First:

It aims to elucidate the quiddity, the autonomous core of historical and present ‘sense of the world’ (Husserl’s *Weltsinn*) in the language and to clarify, so far as is possible, the conditions, the strategies, the limits of reciprocal understanding and misunderstanding as between languages. In brief, comparative literature is an art of understanding centered in the eventuality and defeats of translation. (10)

Second and third, respectively: “The primacy of the matter of translation in comparative literature relates directly to what I take to be the second focus” (11), and “[thematic] studies form a third ‘centre of gravity’ in comparative literature” (13). The way I understand Steiner’s notions is that he hinges them clearly on the knowledge of foreign languages, and I have no trouble with that. However, while I agree that this knowledge is an essential and basic aspect of the discipline, I find the package of his notions, as it were, lacking. For as we know, knowledge of foreign languages is not necessarily a privilege of comparatists, i.e., many scholars in departments of English or in other national language departments speak and work with other languages. In my opinion, the mark of comparative literature is, or ought to be, the knowledge of foreign languages with the inclusionary ideology of the discipline (interculturalism) *tied* to precise theory and methodology. Steiner does not mention methodology either explicitly or implicitly in his argumentation. The still much-discussed Charles Bernheimer volume *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* is similarly lacking (and so is the American Comparative Literature Association’s newest report, Haun Saussy’s *Comparative Literature in the Age of Globalization*, which I discuss below). While most contributors to Bernheimer’s volume argue for a political ideology of inclusion, they do not mention methodology either. More, the question of methodology does not appear in most comparative literature textbooks or works in general. Perhaps this is for the reason that comparative literature, either as the translation of literatures and cultures (as in a conceptual and ideological or/and actual translation) or as a cross-cultural inclusionary ideology and practice, is assumed to be a methodology per se. While I accept this as an argument anchored in the history of the discipline and an essential characteristic in the same historical context, I propose that this is not enough to justify or to “make work” the discipline today. And the fact that the above approach is not enough to convince scholars today is evident in a row of studies, for instance in a 1996 article entitled “Why Comparisons Are Odious” by the editor of *Critical Inquiry*, W.J.T. Mitchell, his response to the 1995 topical issue of *World Literature Today* entitled *Comparative Literature: States of the Art*.

Steiner’s paper about comparative literature, and that from an internationally reputed scholar whose work otherwise is without doubt influential, manifests in some ways even a certain regression, although in general he is very much on the same wavelength as the contributors to the Bernheimer volume. Again, what is missing for me is the question of method. Interestingly—to go back in time—one of the doyens of comparative literature, Hugo Dyserinck, with Manfred Fischer, located comparative literature—a decade earlier, in 1985—in two principal areas:

1. A comparative history of literature, involving the mutual relations, as well as the similarities and differences, between individual literatures

[and] 2. A comparative theory and methodology of literature, dealing with literary theories developed in individual countries (or linguistic areas) and with corresponding methods of literary criticism. (xvii)

Dyserinck's second area, at least in principle, prescribes methodology for the discipline, but this focus appears to have retreated in most of the current textbooks (graduate or undergraduate) of comparative literature.¹² However, Steiner's argumentation includes one area that corresponds to both Dyserinck's first area of comparative literature, literary history, and to Bassnett's, Spivak's, and Apter's proposals that in their opinion may save the discipline, namely translation studies. In Steiner's proposal this appears in the "dissemination and reception of literary works across time and place" (11), further specified in the study of "[who] reads, who could read what and when? (12). This area of scholarship, indeed, I find promising, and that I define as the field of "sociology and history of reading and readership."¹³ However, my criticism of the above more recent texts should be understood in context, and I hasten to state that there are a good number of texts which represent the best and still to be discovered (that is, by scholars and students in cultural studies and in English) of what the discipline has to offer in addition to the above texts I have listed. Among these seminal texts I list Wlad Godzich's *The Culture of Literacy*, Miko Lehtonen's *The Cultural Analysis of Texts*, Clément Moisan's *Le Phénomène de la littérature*, Bart Keunen and Bart Eeckhout's *Literature and Society: The Function of Literary Sociology in Comparative Literature*, Zoran Konstantinovi's *Grundlagentexte der Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft aus drei Jahrhunderten*, and Claudio Guillén's *The Challenge of Comparative Literature* (the latter remains, in my opinion, one of the most important texts of comparative literature to date). I would like to add that in literary theory per se, the best text—in depth and in scope in a comparative context—is Antonio García-Berrio's *A Theory of the Literary Text*.

A further item, one that I find most important to develop, is the question of a typology of comparative literature. Scholars such as Eva Kushner or Yves Chevrel have in the last two decades repeatedly called for a typology of the discipline; however, to my knowledge no such exists to date. I have just begun to work out such a typology, and here I list a few items of a typology in-the-making: the comparison of text with text (the "traditional" approach), the period approach, inter-comparative literature (the comparison of different texts within one language), the thematic approach, the mythological approach (e.g., Northrop Frye); the comparison between genres of text, forms of text (e.g., literature and film), forms of art and text (e.g., painting and literature), etc. What needs to be done, of course, is to "order" the vast number of publications in comparative literature into a classification of differences based on types, thus establishing a typology of the discipline.

In my book *Comparative Literature: Theory, Method, Application*, I propose a number of areas which represent specific factors and thought of such that make comparative literature a self-defined and self-defining discipline as well as a socially relevant area of study in the humanities and social sciences. My conviction of the intrinsic value of comparative literature is that the discipline underwent/undergoes changes in thought—both epistemological and institutional/administrative—since the 1990s in a hastened speed, precisely because of the acute difficulties with and of the discipline (and of the humanities altogether). I list here a few: the discovery and appropriation of literary theory (a foremost domain of comparative literature since its inception) by departments of English; the Eurocentrism of the discipline; the slow but certain diminishing of the knowledge of foreign languages; the status quo of patriarchy and refutation of feminist scholarship (implicit as well as explicit) of many scholars in comparative literature; the often occurring attitude of “superiority” by comparatists based on their knowledge of several languages and cultures (in itself a good thing but negative when this suggests an attitude of “higher” and more relevant competence); and the problematics of the most basic yet crucial and ever-repeated question, “what is comparative literature?”

Publications about the intellectual wagers in the context of the institutional situation of comparative literature, indeed of the humanities in general, are rare: I am aware of one book discussing aspects of departmental politics, issues of tenure, etc., Sande Cohen’s *Academia and the Luster of Capital* (1993), while the authors of a good number of books and papers about the situation of the humanities published in the 1990s discuss such issues at best meta-theoretically.¹⁴

Although this is not the place to discuss in detail the arguments and opposition between comparative literature and cultural studies—an opposition as much intellectual as institutional—it surprises me continuously how in seminal texts of cultural studies comparative literature and its ideas, often on the same or similar topic and in content published much earlier, are omitted. One need only look into the index of any better-known text in cultural studies, for example Graeme Turner’s *British Cultural Studies* (1990–2003); Richard E. Lee’s *Life and Times of Cultural Studies* (2003); John Hartley’s *A Short History of Cultural Studies* (2003); or the even earlier collected volume, Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman’s *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (1994), to discover that comparative literature is not mentioned or referred to in any form or shape anywhere in the texts. Such an omission, that is, the disregard of similar and often identical scholarship, is in my opinion inadmissible despite its ubiquitous nature; the omission signifies either substandard scholarship or a politically motivated act towards another field of scholarship, neither of which are acceptable to me. But returning to the comparative literature’s situation, a curious approach to and understanding of comparative literature’s current situ-

ation in the US appears in Haun Saussy's *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*. Saussy begins his discussion writing that

Comparative Literature has, in a sense, won its battles. It has never been better received in the American university. The premises and protocols characteristic of our discipline are now the daily currency of coursework, publishing, hiring, and coffee-shop discussion. Authors and critics who wrote in "foreign languages" are now taught (it may be said with mock astonishment) in departments of English! The "transnational" dimension of literature and culture is universally characterized, even by the specialists who not long ago suspected comparatists of dilettantism. "Interdisciplinarity" is a wonder-working keyword in grant applications and college promotional leaflets. "Theory" is no longer a badge of special identity or mark of infamy; everyone, more or less, is doing it, more or less. Comparative teaching and reading take institutional form in an ever-lengthening list of places, through departments and programs that may or may not wear the label of comparative literature (they may be figured as humanities programs, interdisciplinary program, interdepartmental committees or collaborative research groups). The controversy is over. Comparative literature is not only legitimate: now, as often as not, ours is the first violin that sets the tone for the rest of the orchestra. Our conclusions have become other people's assumptions. (3)

The above view is most curious to me: while I appreciate the positive spin on the situation of comparative literature instead of the habitual lamentation, I am myself guilty along with most in the discipline and thus I am not sure about the reality of this optimism. In particular, while it may be true that some tenets and principles of comparative literature have become staple fare in other humanities disciplines, where does that leave comparative literature in its institutional settings? Here, what Saussy writes has been practiced, for example when the Department of Comparative Literature was abolished at the University of Alberta (see below). Granted, Saussy admits to the institutional woes of the discipline in his subsequent discussion; nevertheless, the fact remains that the discipline—despite the positive tone and explanations in virtually all contributions to the volume (Saussy's book form of the *ACLA Report 2003*)—continues to be marginalized, both intellectually and institutionally. There are very few universities where the discipline is really "safe," that is, at less than a handful of universities in the US. It would be inappropriate on my part to name universities, but those who know in some depth the situation of departments of comparative literature in the US would attest that there is no light at the end of the tunnel.¹⁵

To illustrate the misguided optimism professed by Saussy and his colleagues (all of whom are tenured professors at top US-American universities

whose departments of comparative literature are—apparently and *perhaps*—”safe”) and for the simple reason that—as unusual as it may appear—a “living,” albeit anecdotal, example would serve us in a discussion on the current situation of the discipline of comparative literature, I introduce the story of the dissolution of the oldest full-scale (i.e., undergraduate and graduate) Department of Comparative Literature in Canada, at the University of Alberta. My view of the Department, in this case based on personal experience and information, points to some of the ailments—intellectual as well as institutional—of comparative literature’s situation, which in turn illustrates the discipline’s precarious situation not only at Alberta but elsewhere, and by proxy points to several of the problems I perceive in the humanities generally. My view is a summary of my opinion expressed over the years while I was at Alberta, which I repeated in a number of e-mail exchanges during the process of the Department’s elimination, completed with July 2003.

In several stages, Alberta’s Department of Comparative Literature was established as the first such department in Canada in the early 1960s, with an undergraduate as well as a graduate program. From its beginnings other language and literature departments—in particular the Department of English, the second largest in Canada after the University of Toronto’s with over 70 full-time faculty—viewed the existence of comparative literature with caution and consequently, depending on the good will of deans and vice presidents of research, comparative literature received minimal or at best somewhat more funding than usual. Official collaboration with other departments did not go further than polite co-existence and the occasional collaboration on a project between faculty members housed in other departments. The average number of full-time faculty counted no more than seven. The Department housed the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* since its founding in 1964 by Milan V. Dimi.¹⁶ The Department achieved a distinguished record, it had some good pedagogues, some above-average scholars, some excellent ideas and projects, faculty members had in general an open mind towards scholarship (as we know well, this is not a standard in the humanities), and there existed at least an acceptable level of collegiality among the Department faculty. Students of the department completed their degrees at all levels, usually in less time than other departments at Alberta.¹⁷ The Department also had an excellent placement rate, the highest in the Faculty of Arts for many years, while at the same time it always had a large number of Ph.D. graduates who never exercised what they set out to do and disappeared into other types of work or gave up on scholarship altogether.

On the negative side, the Department constituted a friendly patriarchy; it had two faculty members without doctoral degrees (who nevertheless supervised Ph.D. work); it performed Ph.D. supervision that operated on the most minimal levels; it had no sense of an intellectual community; it had to struggle

for survival throughout its existence, etc. Then, for a number of reasons—intellectual, financial, political, personal—in the mid-1990s the dean of arts decided (with minimal consultation) to merge all language and literature departments (German, Romance, Comparative, Slavic, but not English) into one megadepartment, and this new department existed for a couple of years. Following intensive lobbying by the members of the former Department of Comparative Literature and its current and former students, as well as for other reasons, such as the outcome that the new department in fact did not save any money for the university, the same dean decided to de-merge the megadepartment into a Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies and a Department of Comparative Literature, Religion, and Film/Media Studies. At the time of the consultations regarding the title/name of the new departments, I suggested to colleagues in both departments and to the external advisory committee of the merger to avoid the implicit duplication of related fields, and predicted that the two new departments would not exist concurrently for a long time and for obvious reasons.¹⁸

With the new Department of Comparative Literature, Religion, and Film/Media Studies came some funding and the possibility of rejuvenation. However, the search for a new chair resulted in little interest and the two final candidates and their profiles were less than overwhelming, as most agreed. The new department chair proved an able administrator, but his activities and scholarly standing did not raise the profile of the department. The department also received funding for several faculty positions, which have consequently been filled. In all, the newly re-created department was on its way to exist with some, if limited, potential and was, nevertheless, one of the handful departments and programs of comparative literature in the country. And then the situation some of us predicted happened: Why have two departments with similar tasks and contents? The fault line was in the non-acceptance of comparative literature faculty to endorse cultural studies, while the dean and various members of other departments (and a couple of members of the department) endorsed such. My suggestion to create a Department of Literatures and Comparative Cultural Studies, including all language and literature departments and including English, did not find sufficient support.

In 2003 the Department of Comparative Literature, Religion, and Film/Media Studies was dissolved. Some faculty were relocated to the Department of English, some to History, some to Classics, and some to the Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies. A core remained in a new program (nota bene: not a department but a program) called Interdisciplinary Studies.¹⁹ Students who began their graduate work in comparative literature would be able to complete their degrees, but it remains to be decided whether with the designation of comparative literature. Most recently (in 2004) and most interestingly, the merger of several faculty from the Department of Comparative

Literature with the Department of English resulted in the re-naming of the Department of English to the Department of English and Film Studies. This new development is intriguing since from the over 70 full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty members of the previous Department of English, from the former Department of Comparative Literature three scholars were/are in film studies. Of course, several more faculty members of the former Department of English also work in film studies. Thus, in my reading of the situation, the renaming must have been a result of a widening of the disciplinary boundaries of the field(s) of English-language literature(s), as well as owing something to university politics in order to “pacify” scholars who lost their home department (thus a situation as Saussy explains it on the intellectual level).

As I mentioned above, my thoughts and proposals for comparative literature *sui generis*, and for the study of literature, languages, and culture in general, I believe would be best located in comparative cultural studies. Am I thus part of those who are “destroying” comparative literature? I am uncertain. The truth is that even in the US, where, institutionally speaking, comparative literature has achieved the highest number of departments and programs in comparison with all countries in the Western hemisphere—the only country where there are now more departments of comparative literature is the People’s Republic of China—there are increasing fiscal pressures on all levels on comparative literature departments, and “safe” departments exist only at a handful of universities, such as Columbia, Harvard, Yale, and Berkeley. I am utmost committed to comparative literature but taking into account the intellectual and institutional pressures, I believe the best way is to opt for a widening of the discipline while maintaining its strengths and achievements. This I believe is possible, wherever, with the inclusion of cultural studies and with a focus on both in-depth philological scholarship *and* an orientation towards pragmatics in the context of the employment possibilities for graduates. In my view, cultural studies is taking hold everywhere and this is reason enough for me to accept this discipline as a major force, one that has gained institutional recognition not only in the US and in other English-speaking countries but also across the globe. However, my suggestion is not accepted widely: I would suggest that for every scholar who is interested and agrees with the tenets I propose, there is another—in comparative literature—who rejects them (it appears to me, however, that it is more often the junior scholars who is taking up the proposal while established scholars, for a number of reasons, are more cautious). For example, Tomo Virk, a noted European scholar of comparative literature at the University of Ljubljana, published his view of my proposition in a paper, “Comparative Literature versus Comparative Cultural Studies.”²⁰ Gvozden Eror, another noted comparatist, at the University of Beograd, writes in his paper “Qu’est-ce qu’on compare en littérature comparée. L’innovation en tant que désintégration (résumé)” that

Dans les années quatre-vingt-dix du XXe siècle les Nestors de la littérature comparée américaine ont publié les articles critiques avec des titres très explicites par eux-même: “Once Again: Comparative Literature at the Crossroads” (H. Remak), “From Ecstasy to Agony: the Rise and Fall of Comparative Literature” (U. Weisstein), “The Rape of Literature” (A. Balakian). Ils exprimaient les réactions concernant les domaines “innovés” de la comparaison, c’est à dire le nouveau “modèle” de la littérature comparée, soutenu énergiquement par un certain nombre de comparatistes américains et canadiens issus pour la plupart des nouvelles “générations” d’universitaires. C’est l’année 1993 qui a marqué un tournant dans la littérature comparée au États-Unis, l’année de la publication du “*Bernheimer report to the American Comparative Literature Association*” (publié en 1995 dans *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* sous la direction de C. Benheimer). Il s’agit d’une nouvelle focalisation des approches comparatifs, et en même temps d’un élargissement *in extremis* du domaine de la littérature comparée, qu’on veut connecter étroitement avec les “Cultural Studies. Dans ces nouvelles approches comparatives la littérature (belles-lettres) n’est plus au premier plan de l’étude, elle est placée au même “niveau” avec les autres “pratiques discursives” et phénomènes culturels. Le nom “comparative literature” se maintient néanmoins comme une coquille terminologique vidée des sens originels, propre à “recouvrir” divers domaines culturels—mais en fin de compte on l’y voit la “littérature” supplantée et substituée par la notion même de “culture” (“comparative cultural studies”). Cette tendance peut être le mieux perçue dans la courbe évolutive des textes de Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek.²¹ (86)

Again there is no mention of method, and Eror, while he appears to have read some of my texts, seemingly did not pick up on one of the most important factors of my proposal, namely to insist on an explicit theoretical framework and methodology. What is somewhat comforting is that the notion of comparative cultural studies appears to be taken up by a good number of scholars, gauged by the many submissions I receive for *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, the journal I founded at Alberta that Purdue University Press has published since 2000, and the literal deluge of book-length manuscripts submitted to the series *Books in Comparative Cultural Studies* I publish with Purdue.

But what do I propose? Here is my short definition of comparative cultural studies, a manner of scholarship that would include, at its best, the comparative, the intercultural, and the interdisciplinary:

Comparative cultural studies is a field of study where selected tenets of the discipline of comparative literature merge with selected tenets of the field of cultural studies, meaning that the study of culture and culture products—including but not restricted to literature, communication, media, art, etc.—is

performed in a contextual and relational construction and with a plurality of methods and approaches, inter-disciplinarity, and, if and when required, including team work. In comparative cultural studies it is the processes of communicative action(s) in culture and the ‘how’ of these processes that constitute the main objectives of research and study. However, comparative cultural studies does not exclude textual analysis proper or other established fields of study. In comparative cultural studies, ideally, the framework and methodologies available in the contextual (e.g., systemic and empirical study of culture) are favored.

It should be self-understood that in my proposal I do not mean to exclude *any* theoretical framework and/or methodology useful for the study of culture and its products, including literature; in other words, I am not arguing for a “master narrative.” Rather, what I propose is that no matter what cultural product a scholar analyses or investigates, a theoretical framework and methodology must be part and parcel of the work. What I mean is that as long as the framework is explicit and an explicit methodology is described and used in the work, it is, in principle, moving in the right direction. This should be understood in the context of two types of work we must do in the humanities: One is scholarship per se and the other is for popular consumption, including pragmatics (as in what jobs graduates can find). I am dead against the current tendency in scholarship—most visible with academic publishers—that a scholarly text must be understood by all readers and that scholarship is at its best when anyone can read it and understand it. Why, no one in his right mind would suggest to a pharmacologist or physicist to publish scholarship for all to understand: Such a requirement would bring the development of knowledge to a standstill. Yes, the popularization of what we do is crucial but only if it is done parallel to in-depth and serious scholarship. Certainly, philological scholarship generates jargon, difficult to understand descriptions, etc., but this is part and parcel of what scholarship needs to be in order to advance knowledge.

It is well-known that cultural studies is, among many things, ideological, and that this is severely criticized in particular by comparatists. My response to this is that comparative literature, by definition, is also ideological and has always been so. What if not ideology is one of the main tenets of comparative literature, to study literary texts as inclusionary—namely that a national literature must not be viewed as primary? Of course, this inclusionary aspect of the discipline—against the primacy of national literatures—has not been followed owing to its Eurocentrism. Similarly, tenets of feminist scholarship are another sore point for many a comparatist (albeit in my understanding, by now only implicitly and over a beer among male faculty and the occasional member of the “old girls network”: another undisclosed and unpublished view shared by too many established scholars, still today). I imagine a faculty of humanities or a department of languages and literature(s) this way: fiscal and social responsibilities today acutely demand that all disciplines in institutions of higher learning focus on both

knowledge-based *and* application-based results in a global economy, in a parallel fashion. The matter of utmost importance today is the question of the social relevance of the study of literature (and culture).²² Speaking in general terms but also applied to the study of literatures and languages, all fields in the humanities and the social sciences are in need of re-evaluating content and practice, because governments and taxpayers everywhere are hard-pressed to support the large number of academics in the humanities and social sciences and the tandem process of education resulting in the graduation of scholars who have a demonstrably difficult time finding employment. Practitioners in all fields, but particularly in the humanities, ought to realize that they are today a “luxury item,” whether this is justified or not; (unfortunately) the state of affairs of the liberal arts and social sciences is such that scholars and students alike would do best to adopt pragmatic and application-oriented approaches in their programs of study while at the same time maintaining traditional in-depth scholarship, including theory. This is not to suggest that comparative literature, for example, is to become a strictly applied field of study. The proposal here is that the humanities and the social sciences at all times pay close attention to venues, approaches, and possibilities to design and implement programs of study with attention to the pragmatics of the study at hand, and pay very close attention to the question of what the graduate is going to do for employment and how.

How difficult such a proposal can be to perceive, I demonstrate again with an example from my own experience. As editor of the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* for many years, I developed and proposed to my Department at the University of Alberta (and to successive chairs) that we implement an undergraduate as well as graduate course on editing and publishing. The idea was to use the journal as a locus for the teaching and learning of all aspects of editing and publishing, including aspects of marketing, finances/funding, etc. The proposal was rejected each time with the argument that a department with any scope of scholarship would not be the place for aspects of publishing because that would constitute a downgrading to professional levels, thus taking away from the Humboldtian ideal of scholarship. This despite the fact that I had plenty of evidence that many a graduate student under my guidance working for the journal as editorial assistants gained employment with publishers for summer work or even as full-time employees, at a time when many a graduate was unable to obtain a tenure-track or part-time position in literature departments, let alone a department of comparative literature. And to my knowledge, there are very few comparative literature or literature departments of any type anywhere where such a pragmatic approach has been adopted.

It is a further *violon d'ingrès* of mine to promote publishing scholarship in the humanities online.²³ Briefly put, I am continuously surprised by the negative attitude to online publishing by scholars in the humanities. And there

is little reflection in print on this; a notable exception is George P. Landow, who discusses this curious and misguided situation in his book *Hypertext 03*:

As Geert Lovink, the Dutch advocate of the sociopolitical possibilities of the Internet, has wryly observed, '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' (*Dark Fiber* 13). This resistance 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 nontechnological realm. *Technology*, in the lexicon of many humanists, generally means "only that technology of which I am frightened." In fact, 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*. (46)

That is because, at best, only the young generation of scholars and junior faculty understand the importance of new media technology in the study of culture and literature and value such; but without the strong support of tenured and established scholars, only in the future will the humanities arrive at an appreciation and full support of publishing in online journals with peer review, in full text, and—and this is the clincher—in journals with open access. Indeed, if anything it would be scholarship published online that could and would—among other factors I argue for above—put comparative literature back on the map, and globally. However, this is not the case. Why, the ICLA (International Comparative Literature Association)'s website is continuously outdated and altogether unimpressive; for instance, they are even unable to input—for the last two years, since a redesign of the website—in the list of the publications of congress proceedings the books of the 1994 University of Alberta congress, and for four years now the association is unable to issue its journal *Literary Research*. Such matters would be considered trifles by some, but to me they are indicators of a larger problem serious enough to be concerned with.

In sum, I believe that to make the *study* of literature and culture a socially relevant scholarly activity today, we must turn to contextual and evidence-based work parallel with pragmatics, with responsibility for graduates in the context of employment. This does not mean that the traditional study of literature or close-text study would be relegated to lesser value; rather, we must do both and in parallel. Comparative literature (and comparative cultural studies), conceived in interculturalism, based on the basic tenets of the comparative approach and practiced in interdisciplinarity, and employing the advantages of new media technology, could/would achieve such a global presence.

Notes

1. See for example Tötösy “Ethnicity.”
2. In France, for example, the issue did not get even that far. It should be noted, however, that there are substantial differences in concept and in the practice of multiculturalism between the US and Canada. See Kymlicka, Tötösy “Ethnicity.”
3. See for example Marsovszky. See also Tötösy “Imre.”
4. See Vasvári, Tötösy “Imre.”
5. See Tötösy *Comparative* “From.”
6. For a recent and highly interesting text on contextual thought, see Blaauw.
7. All references are to the later published version of Steiner’s lecture. See Steiner.
8. For discussions of Spivak’s book, see for example *Responding*, Guran.
9. See for example the large number of such publications in Tötösy “Bibliography.”
10. When Villanueva was Dean of Arts at the Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, he “established” comparative literature as a discipline in Spain by successfully placing it on the official list of academic fields issued by the Spanish Ministry of Education. The result has been a veritable explosion in Spain of activities on all intellectual and institutional levels for the last ten or more years. Also, McClennen and Fitz represent a growing number of scholars who endorse my notions for a “comparative cultural studies.”
11. On said contextual and systems approaches see for example Even-Zohar, in particular regarding translation studies, the field Apter champions; Luhmann; Maturana; Riegler; Schmidt; and Tötösy “Constructivism.”
12. For a selection of the best-known volumes, mainly in English, see Tötösy “Shortlist.”
13. See Tötösy “Introduction” & “Readership.”
14. See for example Readings, Gilman, Sosnoski, Veese, Reuben, Graff, Simpson, Hall, Giroux, Surber, and A. Lee. My selection is mainly from US-American texts which, incidentally, discuss aspects of cultural studies and, rarely, comparative literature and are then appropriated/used in publications elsewhere.
15. In a different context and on a different topic, I take issue with Saussy’s use of “America” when he refers to the US; America is comprised of two continents containing some 40 different countries, of which the US is one. I am of course aware that in public discourse and the media “America” means the US and that everyone understands this use of the term. Nevertheless, in scholarship I would expect a more exacting and appropriate differentiation instead of a blatant hegemonization of the US, especially in comparative literature.
16. In 1989 the journal was relocated to the Research Institute for Comparative Literature, where I published it until 1997; it has struggled since 1997 to maintain its publishing schedule. On this and related matters regarding the Institute’s history, see Tötösy “History.”
17. The average number of years for a Ph.D., after an M.A., is seven years in the US and Canada. See “Index” & Jaschik.
18. I also received a large number of e-mail from across the globe, and was asked by colleagues elsewhere about the unlucky combination of similar designations within two departments. In fact, many a colleague ridiculed the duplication and surmised that it must be a result of internal politics, and indeed the designations represented factions among faculty and students.
19. See the Program’s web page at <http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/arts/ois.cfm>. Here is an example of the “Saussy solution” of optimism.

20. See Virk.

21. “In the 1990s the Nestors of American comparative literature published critical articles with titles explicit even for them: “Once Again: Comparative Literature at the Crossroads” (H. Remak), “From Ecstasy to Agony: the Rise and Fall of Comparative Literature” (U. Weisstein), “The Rape of Literature” (A. Balakian). They were reacting to the “innovative” fields of the comparison, that is to say the new “model” of comparative literature, supported vigorously by a certain number of specialists in American and Canadian comparative literature with the majority from the new “generation” of academics. It was the year 1993 that marked a turning point in comparative literature in the United States, the year of the publication of the “Bernheimer Report to the American Comparative Literature Association” (published in 1995 as *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* under the direction of C. Bernheimer). It acts as a new focusing of comparative approaches, and at the same time a widening in extremis of the field of comparative literature, which it wants to narrowly connect with “Cultural Studies.” In these new comparative approaches the literature (belles-lettres) is no longer the first object of study, but is placed on the same “level” with other “discursive practices” and cultural phenomena. The name “comparative literature” is nevertheless maintained as a terminological shell emptied of its original sense, suitable for “recovering” various cultural fields—but in the final analysis one sees that “literature” is supplanted and substituted by even the concept of “culture” (“comparative cultural studies”). This tendency is best perceived in the evolutionary curve of the texts of Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek.”

22. Nota bene, because this is often misunderstood: I am not speaking of the social relevance of literature but of the relevance of the *study* of literature and culture.

23. This, too, is difficult to argue for. For a presentation of my argument, see Tötösy “New.”

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