Discipline control: Comparative Literature at the turn of the millennium

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> Le contrôle disciplinaire ne consiste pas simplement à enseigner ou à imposer une série de gestes définis; il impose la relation la meilleure entre un geste et l'attitude globale du corps...
>
> Michel Foucault

Is Comparative Literature dead yet?

There is, of course, no one single answer to this question. To some it might even seem that this is not a question at all. Like its models, «are we there yet?» or «are we having fun yet?», the question wears a Janus mask, affecting to display a risible ignorance while making the thorn of its irony, its impatience and implicit criticism of received appearances, felt. Although the question could be understood as facetious, the issues it raises, of the validity of a certain disciplinary practice, of the ideological bulwarks informing it, and even of the very nature of disciplinarity are not. To those who have been gleefully singing the demise of a certain type of Comparative Literature and its substitution by a new improved brand, or who have asserted the death of Comparative Literature tout court, there is a seriousness characteristic of any power struggle. What follows is an attempt to consider those issues taken to their logical consequences. My motivation is multiple: starting with the dedicated group of graduate students at the University of Leon who were not dismayed by my initial assertion that Comparative Literature does not exist outside of its practice, and for whom this paper, I would hope, can represent some evidence of the ways in which they moved me to continue assessing methodological issues; going over to the students at Bryant College who bring a very different investment to literary studies but can be rigorous skeptics. At the center is my commitment to the discipline, however multi-faceted, and my unease at what I regard as serious lapses in current methodological debates.

Dedalus, 7-8 (1997-98), pp. 223-252

My own, provisional, answer to the question above is negative. Comparative Literature, I would argue, has never been more vital. This, however, does not mean that it is unchanged or unchangeable. Self-criticism and constant renewal are disciplinary imperatives. No discipline exists in a vacuum and Comparative Literature is no exception. Many of the debates raging through the ranks of comparatists are common to other disciplines and fields of inquiry. And, just as one can discern in the beginnings of Comparative Literature a reaction to world affairs (even if they seem primarily to affect Europe), especially the rise of totalitarian states[1], today the ways in which the discipline is being redefined are equally inseparable from sociopolitical developments, be it decolonization, transnational capitalism, or their global effects. One problem in particular concerns me, and that is the dogmatism which, under the cover of refusing the dangers of an uncommitted liberal pluralism, permeates the discourse of revisionism. As I will argue, not change, expansion, and shifts in emphasis threaten the discipline. Quite the contrary, all those moves are necessary to insure the intellectual vitality and validity of the enterprise. Even at an extreme, when comparatists demonstrate the untenability and undesirability of disciplinary boundaries, I do not see any abyss opening, but rather the logical outcome of a discipline which from the beginning has also sought to emphasize the necessity to avoid rigid academic and intellectual compartmentalization. Conversely, when the eagerness to reform the field jumps into an attempt at controlling the discipline, even if such a regime and policing are to be done under the guise of efficiency and justice – as such repressive gestures always are – then I see a clear threat. Not crisis, or the rhetoric of crisis, which Comparative Literature shares with much of the Humanities and indeed, with the contemporary world, will ever undo the discipline; but discipline control can. It is with this in mind that I (mis)appropriated the epigraph from Foucault's *Surveiller et punir*, to which I will turn in time. Methodological controversies and epistemological contests, after all, are also thoroughly enmeshed in structures of desire and power and to pretend otherwise or fail to acknowledge it, when not the gesture of hypocrisy, is but the result of either myopia or self-absorption.

1. *The rhetoric of crisis.*

Comparative Literature has always been in crisis. The perennial state of crisis that invariably is alluded to in introductory books and essays on the discipline might even be said to constitute the only point of agreement among the divergent opinions comparatists hold on their chosen field of the Humanities. So much so that were one to step outside – imagining or pre-

tending that it would be possible to relinquish, however momentarily, the disciplinary mold and habit – one might well be led to deduce that rather than representing a deep and problematic inability to construe solid disciplinary borders, constant crisis instead names the «truth» of the discipline.

An apt point of reference in terms of disciplinary history would be René Wellek's often cited «The Crisis of Comparative Literature», of 1958 [2]. In it, as is well-known, Wellek not only delineated the problems afflicting the discipline when conceived in the parameters then current, especially the positivism associated with the so-called «French» school, he also called out for a renewal of the discipline along lines that many today might feel still pertinent, yet have been forcefully challenged. While clearly conceiving of the discipline as focused primarily on Western literature, Wellek denounced binary influence studies: «The attempt to narrow 'comparative literature' to a study of the 'foreign trade' of literatures is surely unfortunate. Comparative Literature would be, in subject matter, an incoherent group of unrelated fragments...» (283). Consequently, Wellek outlined three factors that seemed to him to be responsible for «the long-drawn-out crisis of comparative literature» – «An artificial demarcation of subject matter and methodology, a mechanistic concept of sources and influences, a motivation by cultural nationalism» (290). As a way out of such crisis Wellek envisioned an expansive discipline in which the name «Comparative Literature» had already become synonymous with «any study of literature transcending the limits of one national literature» (ibid.), and should strive for a humanistic universality, in which «Man, universal man, man everywhere and at any time, in all his variety, emerges...» (295).

The objections raised against such seemingly lofty and unquestionable goals are many: on the one hand, renewed attention to what indeed are the limits of «national» literatures, or even what constitutes «literature», make the first objective anything but straightforward; on the other hand, the claim for universality, along the lines of other intended master narratives and discourses, has been for a long time assailed for its covert assertion of an eurocentric male model as the standard against which all others could not but appear as inferior. Before turning to an examination of the current attempts to revise the discipline, however, it should be noted that if we can now strive to refashion Comparative Literature along more inclusive lines, in the process rejecting the sort of goals set out by Wellek, this can also be seen as a logical extension of the efforts Wellek and others expanded in moving Comparative Literature away from binary influence studies and positivistic approaches. In other words, if Comparative Literature is still far from being a clearly defined field with rigid boundaries and a set of agreed upon methodological tools, that in itself can and should be seen as axiomatic for the discipline and not as a negative

failing. Charles Bernheimer does so when he states that «Comparative Literature is anxiogenic» (1) right at the opening of his introduction to a volume collecting the different «Reports on Standards» submitted to the American Comparative Literature Association and a large number of reflections on the state of the discipline by noted comparatists[3]. When, after briefly reviewing the issues that make up the current crisis, notably the need to revise both the canon of texts compared and the methods employed for such comparisons, especially in view of the multifaceted nature of United States society, he concludes that «the comparatist's anxiety has finally found a field adequate to the questions that generated it» (16), Bernheimer does affirm the value of being in crisis.

Beyond rhetoric, however, there is a sense in which Comparative Literature might indeed be said to be in a crisis like no other before because even though, or precisely because, the number of comparatists has exploded in recent decades, discord on what should be the aims and practices of the discipline has never been so acrimonious. The methodological disputes that characterized the 60's, even the polarization between what some termed the «French» and «American» schools, was quickly superceded by the embrace of theory and the predominance of American comparatists[4]. Theory, however, no longer is as distinctive of Comparative Literature as it was a decade or two ago. If Clayton Koelb and Susan Noakes's observation that theory, which «began as a curricular imperative [and] is now the intellectual center for many comparatists» (10) still holds, it could also be applied to a large number of students across the spectrum of national literature departments. In the United States, at least, the partial success of Comparative Literature in its focus on theoretical issues and in its implicit and explicit challenge of the isolated practices of national literature study, has also meant that, at the same time that it has become more coveted, the discipline has also appeared to become more indistinguishable.

The rise of interdisciplinary studies and the attention given to continental theory in the wake of structuralism on the part of other departments, especially departments of English, has both served to validate the institutional articulation of comparatists and to weaken their claims for separate status. The two forces that more seriously challenge the traditional view of Comparative Literature in its universal goals have been Feminist theories and the rise of Postcolonial Studies. Yet, Feminist concerns are obviously not limited to Comparative Literature – indeed, one could argue that Comparative Literature, in spite of its usually liking to claim avant-garde status, has lagged behind in this respect[5]. And, while Postcolonial Studies have been expanding attention to non-anglophone texts and would have to be viewed as necessarily involving transnational features, their major initial impact has been on English studies[6].

In an important essay that deserves more attention than it has received, Wlad Godzich, while starting from the premise that «[i]t is in the nature of knowledge to be unstable», quickly lists a series of conditions that go beyond such a given and «put a discipline in jeopardy», arguing that they «prevail in Comparative Literature» even if «this danger represents a major opportunity for all of us». The conditions Godzich has in mind, although never explicitly named, are related to what he considers to be the «four basic constitutive elements of a discipline»: «(1) a normative object of study; (2) a defined field within which this object obtains or is constituted; (3) a determinate set of theories and methodological procedures that are applied to the object in the field (these theories and methodologies need not be at all unified or even dovetail with each other, though there must be a sense that they are limited in number); (4) a set of individuals who are recognized and identify themselves as practitioners of the discipline and some of whom are engaged in, among other things, the training of those who will succeed them in this practice» (18-19).

One can readily agree that as far as number four and number three are concerned, Comparative Literature is not really experiencing any problems as Godzich also points out. If anything, it might be useful to refer to the fact that even though the number of comparatists has never been greater, their identification with the discipline is not as transparent as might seem. For one, many comparatists, in spite of their training, only find employment in national literature departments and do have to satisfy the demands of their specific placement both in terms of their teaching and of their research. Furthermore, many new comparatists, while passionately involved in the discipline, feel alienated from the institutional organs, be it the national associations of Comparative Literature, or the journals dedicated to the discipline, preferring instead to join other professional groups and publish in other journals[7]. As far as theory is concerned, besides its general spread to literary studies, and even after a dissastifaction with more abstract theoretical exercises has made many turn again to more historicist approaches, there is no doubt that it continues being a fulcral element of the discipline. In this respect, perhaps the biggest change has to do with the fact that the proliferation of theories has considerably weakened any unifying factor that the study of theory might have exercised in the past. And not only has the number of theories gone far beyond what Godzich might consider «limited», but they are very often in sharp opposition. To Godzich, what sets Comparative Literature more at risk, are the first two categories, the definition of its «object» of study and the field proper to it. Godzich's essay indeed turns on an examination of the concept of «field» through a re-examination of its conceptual force in Kant's *Critiques*, culminating in his assertion that «the 'field' of Comparative Literature is

field», meaning that «within the prevalent organization of knowledge, it is incumbent upon comparatists to inquire into the relationship of culture to givenness, to its other» (28).

The one point where I would disagree with Godzich (and this might be less of a real difference than a question of emphasis) would be in separating the question of «field» from the question of «theory» as it seems to me the two are inextricably bound. Whether one conceives of «theory» as an abstract, formalistic, and dehistoricized endeavor – in other words, a parody of what became current as «deconstruction»[8] – or one views «theory» as indeed focusing on conceptual, but thus also always necessarily contextualized, issues and problems, these are already part of the question of «field» and what aims Comparative Literature variously holds. Seen from this perspective, perhaps the fierce polarization currently manifest (principally but not exclusively) in the re-assessment of the discipline in the United States, might even be explained. The attempt to refashion the discipline along the lines of what some practitioners hold to be the right kind of aim for Comparative Literature, in sharp contrast both to what Comparative Literature has been and to what other comparatists do, should be understood as both a question of theory and methodology as it is a question of field. This type of crisis, as Gozdich points out, can indeed undo the discipline or it can be very salutary.

All those engaged in actively calling for a radical shift in the field of Comparative Literature could be said to share one common goal irregardless of their respective preferences. Whether advocating a full and rigorous adoption of various feminist theories and strategies, or insisting that the focus on issues of postcoloniality should provide a new paradigm, or even that the study of translation become the main activity for comparatists, reformers claim to direct their efforts towards a breakdown of repressive barriers that would serve to arrest Comparative Literature within a totalizing and hegemonic discourse centered on European models. These efforts can (and sometimes explicitly do) invoke a primacy of difference, which would be liberating and remove imposed barriers meant to insure the reproducibility of traditional values and norms. A quick way for checking on how radical the current attempts at revising the field of Comparative Literature are, can be had by looking at how the field was constructed in the diverse introductory manuals that have appeared in the United States, in Germany, France, and England. Claudio Guillén provides a map for such an inquiry in the chapter «Taxonomies» of his *The Challenge of Comparative Literature*. Even though there are constant changes, these tend to be of emphasis rather than of substance. As Guillén notes, «as the years go by the card game stays the same, but the deck changes, so any card could be a winning one depending on the rules of the game at any given moment»[9] (93). As the latest (1993) «Report on Standards» presented

by Charles Bernheimer to the American Comparative Literature Association amply demonstrates, by now the very game and the nature of its rules is being challenged, starting with the decision to forego the title of «Report on Standards», with its normative and prescriptive overtones, and replacing it with another one indicative of a state of flux, «Comparative Literature at the Turn of the Century»[10].

One key aspect of the Bernheimer report is its concern with recognizing that indeed in practice Comparative Literature no longer conforms to more traditional views of the discipline, coupled with its emphasis on broadening the field while retaining its distinctiveness. As could not but be, such an approach has been both criticized for not going far enough, and, especially, for giving away the discipline in its attempt to accept new views. Among more conservative critics, one cause for concern in special has surfaced: the Report's assertion that «Literary phenomena are no longer the exclusive focus of our discipline» (42). Coupled with this is a fear that Comparative Literature would just become yet another form of «cultural studies», something the Report explicitly takes a stand on, acknowledging the obvious similarities while taking care to separate itself from predominantly monolingual studies (45). At stake, indeed, is a concern with boundaries and how to delimit the field of comparison. Against critics who would insist on sharply delimiting the field, such as Michael Rifaterre, who argues for a separation of Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies[11], I would like to point out that even though Comparative Literature has traditionally privileged literary texts, especially high literature, it has also been concerned with other arts and other forms of discourse, be it philosophical, economic, political, and so on. To pretend that it is now that «literature» is being threatened with displacement is to ignore the way in which comparatists have operated all along. As Godzich points out, there has never really been a comparatist canon such as it informs the study of literature according to national divisions[12]. To pretend to hold the line at «literature», assuming one could agree on what precisely constitutes literary-ness, would not only attempt to foreclose an expansion of the discipline, it would also ignore a great number of work already done by comparatists.

Mary Louise Pratt's response to the Bernheimer Report is one of the most celebratory in her advocacy of a renewed Comparative Literature «as an especially hospitable space for the cultivation of multilingualism, polyglossia, the arts of cultural mediation, deep intellectual understanding, and genuinely global consciousness» (62). Pratt starts with an image from childhood, of farming country in Perth County, where «fencing is a big issue»: «You have to keep your cattle in, your neighbor's out, keep your chickens in and the foxes out, keep the bulls from the cows, the boars from the sows, and everybody out of the manure pile. Fences take a lot of monitoring and maintenance» (58).

In her view, traditional Comparative Literature in the United States, judging from the 1965 and 1975 Reports, was much like that, appearing «to have been founded by a rhetoric of vigilance associated with the Cold War» (58)[13]. To replace such a view, Pratt calls on comparatists to «imagine that the CompLit types are the animals in the coops and pens. The farmer no longer exists. He has retired to Florida, and before he left, he opened all the doors and gates. [...] The foxes now have access to the henhouse; the hens, however, are free to go somewhere else. Animals will move from pasture to pasture and pen to pen; strange matings will occur and new creatures born. The manure pile will be invaded and its winter warmth enjoyed by all. It will be a while till new order and new leadership emerge. But the farmer won't be back» (58).

What troubles me in this amusing scenario is not so much the celebratory tone that leaves unspoken the fact that academic squabbles over designated disciplinary fields can be fierce and always involve issues of power that will simply not go away as they tend to express themselves in personal politics[14]; rather, what appears problematic is the way in which such a vision of the current state of the discipline, while it positively turns the rhetoric of crisis upside down, revelling in a supposed disorder that traditionalists would deplore, leaves out two crucial aspects: one is that such «disorder» is nothing new; we have not finally reached a state of crisis in the discipline, merely yet another facet of it. The other, is that even the metaphors of border crossing and removal of fences, were already deployed by Wellek in 1958, when, arguing against narrow specialization and the confinement of national literary scholarship, he noted: «There is nothing presumptuous or arrogant in advocating a greater mobility and ideal universality in our studies. The whole conception of fenced-off reservations with signs of 'no trespassing' must be distasteful to a free mind» (291).

This is not to say that Pratt's concerns duplicate Wellek's; nor are the fences in question still the same. Nevertheless, it is useful to recognize that much as some current reformers might want to imagine Wellek as a possible prototype for the «farmer» Pratt mentions, that would be myopic. While Pratt and others, already before the appearance of the Bernheimer Report, but especially after it, rightly reject the exclusive focus on high literature advocated by Wellek and would attempt to replace «the so-called universal» which «has been a locally European discourse in metropolitan academies» (64) with more truly global perspectives, the desire to cross accepted boundaries and remove conceptual fences is the same. If in 1958 Wellek was arguing for an international perspective in reaction to the disastrous consequences of nationalism in the modern world, Pratt in turn still, and rightly, aligns Comparative Literature with world events, as she notes that «[t]he current flux in comparative literature [...] can be attributed [...] to three historical processes that are

transforming the way literature and culture are conceived and studied in the academy: globalization, democratization, and decolonization» (59). In this respect it is useful to think of how Eric Hobsbawm views the modern world in «The Crisis of Today's Ideologies»: «In some respects, at least for those who think and write about society, all times since the French and first Industrial Revolutions have been times of crisis, for every generation has been faced with experiences and developments that had no precedent, and for which past experience and theories based on it provided no guidance – or at least no adequate guidance. And yet it is also true that historical change in some periods has been so headlong and profound that it has been more than usually difficult to come to terms with or even to grasp, let alone understand, it. We are now living through such a moment, and we have been living through such a period for the past generation or two» (55-56).

Translating this view to the debate on Comparative Literature means recognizing that beyond a rhetoric of crisis, the discipline cannot but accept that its very interest in transnational questions implicates it fully in a generalized global sense of crisis that is very actual. In methodological terms this situation can be viewed most acutely in terms of the steady gains made by Postcolonial Studies and, differently, the increased attention to issues of language inasmuch as their obvious intrinsic involvement with politics has come to the fore, either in reference to the hegemonic advances resulting from the influence of English as the language of transnational capitalism, or the problematic positioning of translations within the discipline. It is to these issues that I would like to turn now, as they represent perhaps the most obvious challenges to a traditional view of the discipline, and also embody a need for change that, to a great extent, has already started to take place.

2. *The «chic» of it all.*

In one of the most quotable sentences of his response to the 1993 Report, K. Anthony Appiah lets out a lashing criticism of traditional Comparative Literature that is telling for its nakedness: «What was absurd, I think, in the talk of comparative literature, tout court, in a world that contains, at the present, thousands of languages, was the hubris, the chutzpa, the cheek of the label. A franker labeling – literatures of Western civilization, say – would have identified something more like what was going on. And I would have no problem in continuing that study, at least insofar as it relates to the period up to the Enlightenment» (55).

One could start by asking what prompts such a negative and reductive view of the work of comparatists before him, that would lead to such a mis-

characterization of the discipline in its past practice and stated goals. Obviously, Comparative Literature has traditionally privileged European texts, but it has also tried to go beyond them. Since Appiah appears to focus on the name of the discipline, the «label» as he terms it, it would not be simply petty to remind ourselves that there is a distinct difference between Comparative Literature and World Literature, a distinction that has often played itself in curricular terms. Comparative Literature, to my knowledge, has never attempted to take over the world. There have always been comparatists whose work was limited to Western texts and who were keenly aware of their limitation. Just as there have been other comparatists, René Étiemble, Earl Miner, and Eugene Eyoang, to mention just a few, who both stressed the need for comparatists to expand their horizons, and who provided models, each in their own way, for how Comparative Literature could break away from its Eurocentric beginnings. World Literature, conversely, as it had come to realize itself in North American publishing and teaching strategies, often did attempt to cover the world (or parts of it), without reconsidering its Western point of view. But even in respect to this, one could point to the work of comparatists like Sarah Lawall[15], who have been attempting a redirection of World Literature so as to make justice to its global claims while realizing that such a task must be a collective effort. Also obviously, what leads Appiah to ignore previous comparatist work that goes beyond Western civilization or even focuses on other parts of the globe, is not eclecticism but rather an ideological rift. This can be surmised already in the tone in which Appiah declares no objection to further study of the «literatures of Western civilization» up to the Enlightenment, and becomes very clear once one takes into account both the rhetorical setting for his essay and the recommendations he makes on what should engage comparatists involved with the modern period.

The rhetorical setting for Appiah's essay, titled «*Geist* stories» is telling because it involves the figure of Wellek, or more appropriately a memory or a fantasy of a memory, of Wellek, as symbolic of traditional Comparative Literature studies that were supposedly monolithically Eurocentric. Appiah's opening gesture, is both a quasi-autobiographical narrative that situates him in relation to the U.S. academic world – as an outsider who has been brought to the inner circles – and also articulates his antagonism of traditional disciplinary values, while assuming or calling for a supposed intellectual generational affinity. In short, Appiah relates how he remembers (or imagines remembering) the concluding words of a lecture by Wellek:

> [...] I heard, – or, at least I think I heard – a voice that sounded Mittel Europäisch pronouncing a dozen or so words [...]: '[...] the life of reason, which is the life of the spirit'. [...] I remember thinking, at the time [...] that 'spirit' was not the right word for what was obviously 'Geist'. [...] I suppose

> the life of the *Geist*, in this technical sense, is indeed, almost by definition the life of Reason. And for Wellek, I imagine, both literature and its criticism are expressions of the life of the *Geist*. But I confess that I think of the life of what we now call literature as having little to do with reason as most of the rest of our lives; and while the criticism of literature may often have claimed to be the home of reason in the past, I do not think of reflection on reason as a central part of criticism's task. In this I imagine myself typical of our academy in our age.
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> Wellek's *Geist* – no one, I hope, will take very seriously my pinning this fantasy on Wellek's eleven words – was, I imagine, somewhat like Hegel's. It was singular. [51-52]

What is so striking in this scenario is not so much the vagueness that pervades it – we can never be certain of what exactly Appiah means by the life of literature, nor whether his positioning himself against Reason and Hegel's *Geist* (via Wellek) he would want us to interpret that as a Nietzschian anti-metaphysical gesture or what, nor why this fantasy is necessary. It is also not the cavalier jumping from what he thinks he heard Wellek say at the conclusion of a lecture he missed[16] to an identification of Wellek with Hegel and by deduction of Comparative Literature with a transcendental hegemony that is truly bothersome. Rather, it is the facile gesture of evading intellectual responsibility that I find numbing. For it is one thing to criticize traditional Comparative studies for their focus on one, privileged, area of the world, a criticism which, even though it forces me to recognize the limitations of my own work and interests, is unquestionably valid. But to do so in such a slippery manner – «no one, I hope, will take very seriously my pinning this fantasy on Wellek's eleven words» – and then take the moral high ground – «What was absurd [...] in the talk of Comparative Literature [...] was [...] the cheek, of the label...», I find more than cheeky itself.

If I take such a hard view of what, after all, could be downplayed as rhetoric – but of course, that does not alter its effect – it is because I also agree strongly with other pronouncements Appiah makes in the same essay, such as the critique of cultural essentialism implied in his view on the access of Western culture to anyone (54; but I would add that the reverse also applies); or his conclusion with its call for «one kind of comparative study» to «explore what can be learned by looking at [Western and other civilizations] together» (57). I especially agree with his sharp view of a problem of many traditional comparatist studies as he moves from considering a statement of the 1975 Report on the need to adjust to a «new vision of *global* literature» by «absorb[ing] such a shift without slackening our dedication to the best of our heritage», to a further critique of the 1993 Report: «The 'we' whose heritage is here in question encompasses, of course, all the heirs of Western civilization, because,

as the most recent report rightly observes, the older comparative literature, in stressing its inter-*nation*-alism, 'paradoxically sustains the domination of a few European national literatures'. The paradox, for me, is not so much that it is *European* literatures whose domination it sustains, but that it sustains them *as national* literatures» (54). A position of Appiah's that I can only partly agree with, and which explains why in a passage already quoted, he was willing to allow further study of «literatures of Western civilization», but only «up to the Enlightenment», is his view of the need to follow the perspective of Postcolonial Studies: «When we come to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it seems to me that studying literature in the languages of Western Europe without exploring questions of empire, colony, and postcolony is about as sensible as refusing to read Newton when one is studying the Farbenlehre because Newton, after all, contributed to literature in Latin and English, not German» (55). While I agree with the importance of Postcolonial Studies and the necessity to bring them to bear fully within the discipline, I would both expand and limit Appiah's assertion. Expand it, because obviously, those issues of empire and colony do not wait for the nineteenth century to manifest themselves. Indeed, I would rather argue that as soon as Europeans started to involve themselves in exploring and exploiting other regions and other peoples, they were in turn affected by them, so that the issues Appiah mentions are crucial from way before; and limit it, because even in the apogee of colonial domination, there are still many aspects of literature that are important to study comparatively although they do not pass directly at all through the filter of Europe's colonial interventions.

Appiah, however, does not go quite as far in proclaiming the inescapability of a Postcolonial viewpoint for the comparatist as other critics do. Emily Apter, for instance, in yet another response to the 1993 Report, «Comparative Exile», is much more outspoken and totalizing. Whereas Appiah is more restrained, Apter declares a straightforward replacement of Comparative Literature by Postcolonial Studies: «With its interrogation of cultural subjectivity and attention to the tenuous bonds between identity and national language, postcolonialism quite naturally inherits the mantle of comparative literature's historical legacy» (86). Doubtless also a rhetorical position which, if it goes further than Appiah's, interestingly picks up the same issue of inheritance, along with some of the vagueness surrounding it. What I would like to focus on however, is the manifesto-like quality of the sentences that follow: «Of course several generations of Europhilic, deconstructively trained, predominantly white comparative literature critics do not necessarily see the matter this way; many are predictably loath to cede the field to a newly minted Third Worldist community of scholars. Once the pressure is on to move beyond tokenism (and the pressure is on), once intention is carried out to recruit in the

field of the world, what, many argue, will prevent comparative literature from becoming Asian, Near Eastern, African, or Latino studies with some French, German, Slavic, or Portuguese thrown in to provide a wider global or historical perspective? The answer, I think, is that nothing will prevent this from happening; it clearly *is* happening; and as it happens, the historical European center of the discipline decries the loss of disciplinary identity» (86-87).

Like any manifesto, the intention is partly to provoke and partly to draw on the emotions to rally for a cause. But what cause? At first it would seem that the matter would be simple, Postcolonial Studies «naturally inherit[ing] the mantle of Comparative Literature», but even that operation is not straightforward since what becomes enveloped in an aura of inheritance, that is, of passing on a hallowed tradition, is in fact either an attempt at dismantling such a tradition or, actually, a confusion, since Postcolonial Studies obviously *is not* Comparative Literature because it wants to *become* it. I find it worthwhile to pay attention to the different rhetorical effects involved here for several reasons. First, Apter's essay is an important and astute statement on the discipline's historicity which develops the fundamental condition of exile that has always, and still does, inform its practice and theory. Likewise, her essay is also an important finger in the disciplinary wound, and as such it serves to sharpen all of our methodological senses. However, and in the same token, if Apter's essay is to be taken seriously – and I do take it so – then one must also be ready to clarify what precisely is being done here and in the name of what.

One could start by objecting to the conflation inherent in Apter's categorization of predecessors to her community of «Third Worldist» scholars as Europhilic, deconstructively trained, and predominantly white. First, because as Apter herself is well aware, the pioneering generation of comparatists in the United States that she has in mind – she mentions Building a Profession – were not really Europhilic but Europeans, whom circumstances propelled into the United States; second, because the majority of their work precedes deconstruction and even after its advent in the U.S., they have remained apart from it. Invoking the specter of race as another separating boundary is also misapplied, in my opinion, if one considers that many of those comparatists were themselves threatened by Nazi racial policies, as Apter also does not forget to add (88). But one could as well object to the lumping together of the new type of comparatist under the label of «Third Worldist». Their characterization as «newly minted», likewise, is misleading if one considers, for instance, such a senior scholar as Homi Bhabha, whom Apter proceeds to quote as an example of a turning away «from specific methodological formulations of 'dissensual,' 'traumatic' comparativism, to fictional evocations of hybridity and in-betweenness» (92). Apter does draw interesting and valid distinctions between Derrida and «the Moroccan critic/writer Abdelkebir Khatibi» on the subject of the

rhetoric of borders which, if it has always informed comparatist's work, has gained renewed attention and added force in the last decade. Even though Apter recognizes ultimately that «Khatibi and Derrida, each representing distinctly different critical tendencies, are nevertheless easy to align with each other...» (90), there remains a sense of two opposing perspectives, one abstract, and thus less real, given to a self-contemplative fixation with «the intractable 'problem' of aporia» (ibid.), while the other would let the reader recognize 'ontological exilicity'» (91). What, one cannot but wonder, would happen to such a distinction, were Apter instead to focus on a figure like Gayatri C. Spivak, (mentioned once) at once clearly one with a «Third Worldist» community, indeed, a principal proponent of subaltern studies, yet not only «deconstructively trained», but actually one of the key figures in disseminating Derrida's thought (starting with her translation of *Of Grammatology* in 1974) in the United States[17]?

The issue of «the historical European center of the discipline decr[ying] the loss of disciplinary identity» is one that Apter herself does not believe in since, as she notes immediately, «when, I would ask, was this identity ever secure?» (87). The real issue then must be the «turn» of Comparative Literature into «Asian, Near Eastern, African, or Latino Studies». However, what Apter is proposing there is not so much a renewal of the discipline or even a shift in focus but the abandonment of the discipline and its replacement with other emergent fields[18]. To this one could object that such areas of study have been developing without necessarily encroaching on Comparative Literature. Latino Studies, for instance, has been growing quite apart from Comparative Literature and, if anything, it would be found as a development of Hispanic studies in the United States. Obviously, the focus on questions of transculturalism and of linguistic border-crossing would make such studies, in many cases, comparable to the goals of comparatists. But to advocate the replacement of Comparative Literature with a series of «area» studies seems to me to uncritically confuse issues. Comparative Literature certainly has a broader scope. The problem also, is not simply one of fragmentation because «traditional» comparatists themselves always had to face their own limitations, but rather one of methodology. If the types of studies Apter has in mind as replacements for Comparative Literature simply represented a shift in the cultures to be studied, I doubt that there would be so much controversy. Instead, by advocating the replacement of Comparative Literature by Postcolonial Studies Apter is not so much outlining an expansion of the discipline but its substitution with something whose scope, by necessity, is more limited.

Obviously, a field such as «Asian Studies», for example, has all the potential for being even wider than Comparative Literature traditionally has been in its focus on European literatures. The linguistic and cultural diversity

of Asia, its multi-faceted traditions, and its long encounters with the West, would mean a vaster ground for comparative work. However, if one restricts such a field to Postcolonial issues, their obvious importance notwithstanding, it is easy to see how much more restrictive it becomes. Focusing on the issues surrounding the colonial experience can still result in important, interesting, and rigorously comparative studies. Analyzing the historical significance of colonialism, in which both the colonized and the colonizer were affected in wide-sweeping ways whose effects are still very visible and operative today, must be recognized as one of the important perspectives a comparatist might pursue. My argument is not against Postcolonial Studies at all, nor against the recognition that they are vital for comparative studies, but rather that we should not accept an either/or situation, and that Postcolonial Studies represent both more and less than what Comparative Literature as a discipline strives for. More, because its focus is clearer and its commitment to analyzing the interrelation between culture and ideology more openly declared; also more inclusive in practice since traditionally Comparative Literature has tended to focus on Western texts and followed a Western perspective. Yet also less since its very defined focus also means that Postcolonial Studies is not concerned with other aspects of literary and cultural studies that are covered by Comparative Literature, and because it does not have to concern itself with the traditional comparatist's emphasis on different languages.

Ultimately, given the admittedly open antagonism expressed by proponents of a «Third-worldist» community inheriting the mantle of Comparative Literature to the discipline as it has developed, what is perhaps most surprising is the fact that they would bother at all. What is it about Comparative Literature that is either so irksome or so enviable that it would justify the struggle, when it would appear simpler to just declare a new field of studies? One could take a cynical, pragmatic, point of view, and argue that in an academic environment more characterized by cuts than by expansion, it is politically expedient to simply take over an existing field, declare its contents intellectually and ethically bankrupt, and install in their place a new program. Or, if one takes into account that the academic world is itself very much a hierarchical and prestige-driven microcosms, it might be useful to consider the significant allure of the name of Comparative Literature. Rey Chow makes that very clear when she notes that, «in a manner beyond the control of those who have strong feelings about what comparative literature is and is not, all kinds of claims are being made and all kinds of practices flourish in its name. CompLit in this first instance signals prestige, cosmopolitanism, and power – besides having the respectability of a long-established discipline, it is also a kind of 'classy' designer label, like Armani, Dior, Givenchi, St Laurent, and so forth, which many want to display» (107).

And so, just as Appiah is astounded at what he perceives to be the «cheek» of traditional comparatists in their arrogant claim to do it all under the label of Comparative Literature, one can follow Chow's observation and realize that in some cases what is involved in the attempts to declare the discipline bankrupt and refashion it into something else while preserving its name, is rather a question of enabling all to be equally «chic».

3. *Unfashionable observations.*

Tobin Siebers, for whom there is not much difference between traditional Comparative Literature and its supposed replacement (which he labels as «multiculturalism») beyond perhaps standards, does not hesitate to view the discipline as moribund: «To my mind, there is no doubt that comparative literature as a discipline is dying. The irony is that it is being wrecked by its own success...» (196). While tempting to follow such a logic – a logic that would preserve the value of traditional Comparative Literature (even if recognizing its practical inefficacy) while assuming that all that is new, or appears to be new, especially if it has a broader mass-appeal or market-share, is bound to succeed[19] – it would be misguided on several accounts. For one, rigorous Postcolonial Studies are as demanding as anything under the aegis of Comparative Literature, so if they appear to have a broader appeal, such an appeal must be credited rather to the fact that such studies do provide a perspective that was often absent and as such do correct everyone's view of cultural history and the role played in it by literature. Seminal studies such as Anne McClintock's Imperial Leather, Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*, and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan's *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism*, to name just a few, do present models, in their diverse ways, for how Postcolonial Studies can both focus on the specific issues of postcolonialism and satisfy any disciplinary standards of Comparative Literature. But it would also be misguided because in wanting to see Comparative Literature and Postcolonial Studies (or what he terms «multiculturalism»)[20], as simply two versions of a common dream, one old, the other new, Siebers loses sight of the important methodological issues. Also, by apparently resigning himself to the passing of Comparative Literature while holding on to its claim for successes, as if new disciplinary trends were still, after all, just a chip off the old ideological block, Siebers does not even come to terms with the question of disciplinary control. Perhaps this is because, as Chow points out in the passage just quoted above, all kinds of claims are made about the discipline, and this really is out of the control of those who have strong feelings about it. But maybe even such a statement misses the very point about disciplinary control and that is what interests me primarily. It should be obvious that traditionally all kinds of competing claims were made about Comparative Literature. Whether one sees this as a weakness, or as a strength, as I do, is not in question. Rather, what I see as a more important question, is the way in which there currently is an attempt to control the discipline, to reduce it to a clear, well-defined and restricted field, and that this attempt is being made both in the name of Comparative Literature and of replacing its assumed hegemonic production of knowledge with a supposedly polyphonic, and thus liberating, view from the margins.

One could start to unravel this paradoxical situation by considering what Foucault says in the quote from Surveiller et punir used as epigraph to this essay: «Le contrôle disciplinaire ne consiste pas simplement à enseigner ou à imposer une série de gestes définis; il impose la relation la meilleure entre un geste et l'attitude globale du corps...» (154). Of course Foucault here is being literal, whereas my adaptation is metaphorical. The body I have in mind is no longer the human body but rather the academic body. Still, I do not see this as a misapplication of Foucault's thought since, in my view, what he has to say about the human body and the forms of power it is subject to, applies equally well to the situation at hand. As in Foucault's example, I also see discipline control as going beyond just a question of pedagogy or of what canon to teach, even if that appears to be one of the main battlegrounds. On the one hand, those like Appiah, Apter, and many others, who claim both the need and the inescapability of re-orienting Comparative Literature's focus away from European or Western texts and perspectives, are claiming added value for a new set of texts, which, irregardless of variety, are to be precisely defined as «outside» of the main Western canon; on the other hand, that is not considered enough. What appears to be even more important is the realignment of value between two sets of texts. Whereas traditional Comparative Literature has usually taken a Western, self-privileging, perspective even when approaching other cultures, the claim from the advocates of Postcolonial Studies is that it becomes necessary to privilege non-Western texts, while still allowing for some study of the Western tradition as long as it knows its proper, supplementary place – or, as Apter says, «what, many argue, will prevent Comparative Literature from becoming Asian, Near Eastern, African, or Latino studies with some French, German, Slavic, or Portuguese thrown in to provide a wider global or historical perspective?» (87). The gesture of allowing for a continuation of the study of Western literatures under the rubric of Comparative Literature, now inverted to the role previously allotted to other, non-Western literatures, is thus intended as a corrective to insure the best relation between the gesture and the global attitude of the discipline. One cannot but wonder whether those who are so

keen on such a controlling relation ever feel the slight bother at perpetuating, in reverse, the dichotomy between East and West, privileged and marginal discourses.

At this point I too must wonder whether I am not exaggerating the situation either for argument's sake or because of a (traditional, Eurocentric) disciplinary lens of my own. And so I would like to return to Apter's views, specifically her conclusion, which must be examined inasmuch at it both seeks a conciliation between Postcolonial Studies and Comparative Literature, and reaffirms, what to her is the imperative replacement of an Eurocentric discipline with another: «I would tend to frame the issue as a border war, an academic version of the legal battles and political disputes over the status of 'undocumented workers', 'illegal aliens', and 'permanent residents'. What everybody knows is that no amount of border patrolling is going to 'keep out' the new arrivals; they will find a place to park themselves much like the previous tenants: deconstruction, feminist theory, gay and lesbian studies, film, popular culture. Postcolonialism will claim its place whether Continental comparatism likes it or not; but I think the field stands to become a great deal more interesting if it provides an international house rather than a hotel for the multicultural future» (94-95).

Here, what started out as an assortment of «fields», «Asian, Near Eastern, African, or Latino studies», not necessarily having to do with issues of colonialism, has come to be designated by «Postcolonial Studies» as the entity for which accommodation should be made in the house of comparison. Apter likens Postcolonial Studies to previous «tenants», who have also stayed, from deconstruction to popular culture, and in doing so she is right; but also reveals the basic flaw and, in my view, greatest problem, with such an argument. For one, it seems that what Apter is referring to really comes down to «trends» in literary/cultural studies, since that is the one thing all entities named have in common. Deconstruction is certainly more limited, irregardless of the versions in currency, than feminist theories, just as one can approach film from all kinds of theoretical perspectives. In other words, what Apter is characterizing as «tenants» is a motley group of theoretical, methodological, perspectives as well as proper fields of study and genres. Furthermore, it is not just Comparative Literature that has experienced the advent of the theoretical and subject foci that Apter mentions. All the fields of humanistic study have been affected by them. Singling out «continental Comparatism» then as the one agent of reaction seems simply odd. Granted, Apter is writing on Comparative Literature, but the effects she mentions have as much to do, if not more, with other departments of literary studies. The reason for this, however, can perhaps be gleaned from the antagonism which informs Apters's characterization of «traditional» comparatists and postcolonial scholars. Apart

from the fact that both groups would share *Heimlosigkeit*, this is how Apter views them: «The current generation of exilic critics is often, as might be expected, deeply antithetical to their Eurocentric counterparts: non-German speaking, nonmetropolitan, nonwhite, antipatriarchal, and, in varying degrees, hostile to elitist literariness» (90). This simple scenario of opposing forces leaves too much out, beginning with the fact that conservatives come in all colors too and one would only have to refer to the case of a Dinesh D'Souza, for instance, to complicate it. However right Apter may be in outlining such a divide, the picture presented is too broad and too manichean that I, for one, find that its polarization might serve rather to harden the positions of scholars who, given the way the contest is being defined, will see themselves pushed into one camp, whether they «belong» there or not. As such, arguments like Apter's, instead of helping to bring about and consolidate disciplinary renewal, may only serve as examples of divisive rhetoric.

A key point of division would be the question of elitism. On this subject I would like to echo two observations made by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese. The first, which is mainly directed at the vagueness that characterizes some of the more dogmatic (on either side) pronouncements on the discipline, attempts to bring a bit more precision to the debate: «Eurocentrism versus globalism and high versus popular culture are not the same discussion, and their conflation barely masks an agenda that is no less ideological than comparative literature's original agenda is charged with having been» (136). The second, focused obviously on the question of standards and specifically on the issue of whether to require competence in several languages – long a distinguishing feature of comparatists and something which Postcolonial (and other) advocates would gladly give up in return for what they perceive as an expansion of the field facilitated by translations and global English – involves a fundamental distinction: «Comparative literature is and should remain an intellectually elitist enterprise, on the proud conviction that intellectual elitism may not be taken as a proxy for social elitism. Make no mistake: the 'democratization' of comparative literature through an expansion into cultural studies will not ensure one iota of social democratization. Social democratization occurs when we ensure the openness of our self-consciously difficult and demanding discipline to practitioners of all backgrounds» (142). The distinction is important because it serves to remind everyone that a change of subject or of focus by itself does not do away with elitism; furthermore, by candidly asserting the need for the discipline to remain intellectually elitist, Fox-Genovese is stating a, perhaps unfashionable, but very much needed, commitment to intellectual distinction. Postcolonial studies such as those already mentioned by Bhabha, McClintock, Sunder Rajan, Spivak, and others, impose themselves precisely because of the intellectual force they bring to bear on the subjects they treat,

which cannot be disassociated from the very subject matter of the studies, since it is to a great extent what constitutes them.

Closely linked to the question of elitism, of course, is the issue of positionality, which vantage point any given critic or critical tendency speaks from, and what kind or authority is claimed. As Arif Dirlik argues, «the popularity that the term postcolonial has achieved in the last few years has less to do with its rigorousness as a concept or with the new vistas it has opened up for critical inquiry than it does with the increased visibility of academic intellectuals of Third World origin as pacesetters in cultural criticism» (329). Although I take a more positive view of the way in which Postcolonial Studies has indeed opened up new perspectives for analysis than Dirlik, I agree that the importance currently being accorded to such studies has very much to do with the prestige attained by a number of intellectuals with «Third World» origins in United States academic circles. Which is to say, these, in many cases already privileged intellectuals, conduct their work from influential positions, in most cases far removed from the subjects and material circumstances that they study and for whom they often claim to speak. Obviously this is a problematic condition known to them and on which they have also self-critically reflected. Its importance is manifest for instance in essays such as Spivak's «Can the subaltern speak?» in the thematization of hybridity that figures so prominently in the writings of Bhabha and others, or in the care with which Sunder Rajan reflects on the meaning of being an Indian academic, working in India, but relying to a great extent on Western theoretical notions. Beyond positionality, however, the problem really has to do with the gulf separating intellectuals in the West from the masses of people, especially those outside Western Europe and North America, so that theoretical pronouncements meant as radical, have a starkly different counterpart in the world. Dirlik notes this in a clear way: «Within the institutional site of the First World academy, fragmentation of earlier metanarratives appears benign (except to hidebound conservatives) for its promise of more democratic, multicultural, and cosmopolitan epistemologies. In the world outside the academy, however, it shows in murderous ethnic conflict, continued inequalities among societies, classes, and genders, and the absence of oppositional possibilities that, always lacking in coherence, are rendered even more impotent than earlier by the fetishization of difference, fragmentation, and so on» (347).

To the contrast Dirlik points out between theoretical concepts produced in the context of North American and Western European academic circles and the realities of the world at large, one should also append a consideration of the question of hegemony. Those who would like to substitute Postcolonial Studies for Comparative Literature see such a change as essentially counter-

hegemonic, a necessary means towards breaking up Western cultural hegemony over the rest of the World. However, before blindly nodding agreement to what appears indeed a desirable corrective, one must ponder exactly what constitutes Western hegemony and how does it operate. Dirlik cautions foremost about the need to remember that all cultural interactions operate in a field that is to a great extent determined by transnational capitalism, and to beware of «confounding [...] ideological metanarratives with actualities of power...» (347). E. San Juan Jr. goes even further in his skepticism over the ideological basis of Postcolonial Studies (which he sees as «a symptom produced by poststructuralist theories») and in his denouncement of the implication of Western intellectuals in what he views as the destructive spread of United States hegemony [21]. As much as one may admire San Juan's sharp criticism of intellectuals and his hope towards the possibility of an utopian multiculturalism, my interest in this essay is far more limited. What I would like to call attention to is that what so often is bandied about as eurocentrism and Western cultural imperialism, and understood as constituting the malaise of Comparative Literature in particular, is also usually constructed as a monolithic concept that has no correspondence in reality. The Europe or the West so invoked are but myths.

For a reconceptualization of Comparative Literature to go beyond its dismantling, I would propose, it should obviously include greater attention to areas usually neglected, but not co-opt them for a power game in which one element is always made to be superior to another [22]. In the same vein, Postcolonial Studies should direct more attention to the way in which Europe and the West have also produced their own internal colonies, which is what in effect has happened to so-called minor literatures and cultures. Some of this realization surfaces sporadically in comments such as those by Appiah when he notes that «the *Geist*'s rare trips to the Iberian Peninsula probably wouldn't necessitate a knowledge of Spanish, never mind Portuguese» (52). And the attention given to the Irish case by Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson and Edward Said represents an important step. Said's words on Yeats, for instance, demonstrate the type of re-evaluation that I think would be crucial for many facets of «European» and Western literature: «Yeats is a poet who belongs to a tradition not usually considered his, that of the colonial world ruled by European imperialism» (69) [23]. Of course one could object that this would still mean that critical focus would remain centered on Europe and the West. But that is not the point at all. Rather, the impulse should be to critically articulate what exactly constitutes eurocentrism and how to go beyond it. Chow correctly notes that «[o]f all the prominent features of Eurocentrism, the one that stands out in the context of the university is the conception of culture as based on the modern European notion of the nation-state. [...] But

the problem does not go away if we simply substitute India, China, and Japan for England, France, and Germany» (109).

Chow's appeal to reject binarism is essential and should be extended, beyond the question of hegemony and the relations between East and West, to other areas as well. Thus, it is surprising to see some critics for whom the commitment to replace traditional Comparative Literature with some marginalized aspect is so determining that they advocate precisely a simple inversion of value. Susan Bassnett for instance, rightly and convincingly argues for the recognition of Translation Studies as a discipline, liberated from the subjugation to Comparative Literature and rid of its hackneyed image as an inferior tool. But apparently Bassnett cannot control the impulse to impose her own perspective: «As comparative literature continues to argue about whether it can be considered a discipline or not, translation studies states boldly that it is a discipline, and the strength and energy of work in the field world-wide seem to confirm that assertion. The time has come for a reconsideration of the relationship between comparative literature and translation studies, and for a new beginning. [...] As we come to the end of the twentieth century, it is surely time to recognize that an era is over. [...] Comparative Literature as a discipline has had its day. [...] We should look upon translation studies as the principal discipline from now on, with comparative literature as a valued but subsidiary subject area» (161-62).

The issues involved here, beyond the millenarian rhetoric, are obviously complex. However, even though I fully agree that work on Translation Studies has developed to the point that it should indeed be seen as a separate discipline, I find Bassnett's argument that Comparative Literature, like linguistics in relation to semiotics (11), should become a sub-specialty within Translation Studies, simply unconvincing and dogmatic. It is telling that one of the key problems Bassnett sees with Comparative Literature, is its constant struggle and crisis, and so Translation Studies, in her view, by asserting itself and concerning itself with «texts and with contexts, with practice and with theory, with diachronics and synchronics and above all with the manipulative process of intercultural transfer and its ideological implications» (160), would have gotten away from Comparative Literature's self-absorption and gone to work on what matters.

Part of this constellation of problems is the issue of whether comparatists should maintain their insistence on the use of original languages or, as many proponents of Postcolonial studies insist, rely on translations (usually into English). This is a large issue that I only adumbrate here. However, even though I clearly recognize how one needs to bear in mind both the practical needs of teaching students with deficient (if any) linguistic abilities besides their native language, and the goals of the discipline, I fail to see how a shift

into Translation Studies would serve any corrective, democratizing, or even ideological purpose. The fact that makes Translation Studies a discipline also makes it as demanding. It is not by recognizing the validity of Translation Studies to disciplinary status that one can view the indiscriminate use of translations as a pedagogical panacea. In order to recognize the complexity of any given translation and the myriad issues relating to cultural transfer that it entails, one still needs to have the necessary linguistic knowledge besides the contextual knowledge needed to place the translation. Furthermore, one related issue, essential even though it might appear tangential, is the consideration of the political implications of language study, of monolingualism and polyglossia. For certain, as Chow points out, «multilingualism has always been part of a humanistic view of intellectual culture which can as easily serve the agenda of reactionary politics as it can serve progressive ones» (110). However, given the context of the debate – centered as it is on pedagogical practices in the contemporary United States, but applicable to other parts of the world – and keeping in mind the intrinsic relationship between language and hegemony, between language and colonialism, it would seem utterly uncritical to accept English as a sort of global language that would somehow innocently, transparently, enable the recognition of difference [24].

I fully agree with Chow's statement that «[i]nstead of reconsolidating the boundaries of nations through the study of national languages and literatures, 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). It is precisely along those lines that I would perceive Comparative Literature refashioning itself to meet its potential. Great part of the impetus towards this would come precisely from Postcolonial Studies, although the analysis of colonial effects should be broadened to both go beyond the current central focus on English (and to a lesser degree French) colonialism and include both intra-European forms of colonialism and earlier, pre-nineteenth forms of colonial encounters. As such one could look forward to a break-up of the notion of Europe still operative when talking about Eurocentrism, and consider instead how, for instance, «minor» European literatures, dominated by central ones, relate to each other and, in the case of Spanish and Portuguese, are also simultaneously implicated in processes of imperial control. Or one could look forward to an expansion of comparative studies focused on say, American literatures, both North and South, ranging from Pre-Columbian times to the present [25]. Needless to say these are just two of innumerable possibilities. Especially as Comparative Literature becomes more decentered, and comparatists both originate, and practice in, all parts of the globe, different views of the discipline will continue emerging and competing. Death certificates issued by fiat say more about the

anxieties of those issuing them than they do about the discipline. Indeed, only if there should come a time when we had final discipline control, and a general agreement on what Comparative Literature is or does, should we consider it, then, as dead.

1 On these issues, see Emily Apter's «Comparative Exile: Competing Margins in the History of Comparative Literature», where she discusses the exilic condition of comparatists. See also the testimonials from a great number of influential comparatists in *Building a Profession*.

2 This was initially a paper presented by Wellek at the historic Second Meeting of the International Comparative Literature Association at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. It was published in the proceedings in 1959 and reprinted in Wellek's *Concepts of Criticism* from which quotations will be taken. Wellek comments on this meeting and reception of the paper in another essay, «Comparative Literature Today», initially published in *Comparative Literature*, 17, 1965, and reprinted in his *Discriminations: Further Concepts of Criticism*.

3 See Charles Bernheimer, «Introduction: The Anxieties of Comparison», in *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*. This volume includes the first (1965) «Report on Professional Standards», the second (1975), and the last (1993). In addition it includes the three essays that were read at the MLA session dedicated to discuss the issues raised by the last Report, and a series of other essays commenting on the same issues. Linda Hutcheon, in «Productive Comparative *Angst*», provides a very useful review of Bernheimer's volume. The thematic issue of *World Literature Today* (Spring 1995) where her article appears is dedicated to «Comparative Literature: States of the Art» and includes a series of short articles by several comparatists which continue the discussions included in the Bernheimer volume.

4 Just as the designations «French» and «American» are loose constructs, so my use here of the term «American comparatists» designates in effect where they worked only. If one turns to the autobiographical essays in *Building a Profession* one quickly realizes how most of the prominent comparatists have been (and continue to be) drawn from the ranks of exiles.

5 It is symptomatic that even though there have been other comparative studies informed by feminist theories, the first volume to specifically address the intersection of feminist with comparative studies, edited by Margaret R. Higonnet (*Borderwork*) was published in 1994.

6 See for example the assertion by the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* at the beginning of their widely disseminated introductory book on Postcolonial Studies that their «book is concerned with writing by those peoples formerly colonized by Britain, though much of what it deals with is of interest and relevance to countries colonized by other European powers, such as France, Portugal, and Spain» (1).

7 This is how the Bernheimer Report (1993) puts it: «In this unstable and rapidly evolving sociocultural environment, many of the scholars involved in rethinking the field of

comparison have an increasingly uneasy relation to the practices called 'comparative literature.' They feel alienated because of the continued association of these practices, intellectually and institutionally, with standards that construct a discipline almost unrecognizable in the light of their actual methods and interests. One sign of this disaffection is that many colleagues whose work would fit into an expanded definition of the field do not have an institutional affiliation with comparative literature and are not members of the ACLA» (42).

8 The debate surrounding the term has been immense. Here I would simply like to refer to the words of Peter Brooks, which concisely state what I have in mind; besides pointing to the misuse and misunderstanding of what «theory», especially «deconstruction» was, the passage cited below also illustrates another type of «crisis» of Comparative Literature, namely the uncomfortableness with the label «Comparative Literature» and the desire to rename it according to the specific nature of the work one does under that name, a wide-spread desire. Reflecting on the work of Paul de Man and other influential comparatists at one point associated with the Yale Comparative Literature Department, Brooks notes in «Aesthetics and Ideology: What Happened to Poetics»: «what came to take on a certain predominance in the program [...] was what I would call rhetorical reading. I use this term both in honor of the course called Reading and Rhetorical Structures, created for the program by De Man and Geoffrey Hartman, and because the more obvious label *deconstruction* by now generates wildly irrelevant associations and masks the kind of intense, laborious reading that students of De Man, Hartman, and other such colleagues as J. Hillis Miller, Barbara Johnson and Andrzej Warminski were learning to perform. It was in part on the basis of his experience in The Literature Major that De Man once proposed replacing the graduate Department of Comparative Literature with a Department of Poetics, Rhetoric, and the History of Literature. I cite the proposed label because I think it well corresponded to what The Literature Major, and subsequently the Department of Comparative Literature, thought it was teaching – and to a large extent still does» (512).

9 Guillén's study, which first appeared in Spanish under the title *Entre lo uno y lo diverso: Introducción a la literatura comparada* in 1985, might be said to also just change the emphasis, while otherwise striving to preserve the «game». However, even if by the time it was published in English translation (1993), it was clearly outpaced by disciplinary developments, the deck of cards it yields is noteworthy, especially since it is one of the few manuals that gives full attention to Spanish and Portuguese texts.

10 The 1965 Report had been issued by a committee chaired by Harry Levin, and the 1975 one was under the responsibility of Thoms Greene, while the 1993 Report was written by a committee chaired by Charles Bernheimer. Between 1975 and 1993 no reports were issued even if one had been under preparation in 1985 as Bernheimer notes (ix).

11 See his «On the Complementarity of Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies», where he notes at one point, in reference to the Bernheimer Report: «Nothing in this report is more revealing than an obsessive preoccupation with the word literature» (72).

12 «In the present division of labor, academic departments that deal with 'national' literatures hold on to previously elaborated canons of texts that must be taught if for no other reason than to maintain the institutional identity of the department. [...] Comparatists have never had any such canon [...] Instead, we have either maintained

the definitions of object that obtain in the «national» literatures or have attempted to develop our own on the basis of some specific theoretical and methodological orientation» (20-21).

13 In this regard it is curious to note that Tobin Siebers dedicates a chapter of his *Cold War Criticism and the Politics of Skepticism* to a discussion of the methodological wrangles of Comparative Literature.

14 For further development of these issues see Mary Russo's «Telling Tales out of School: Comparative Literature and Disciplinary Recession».

15 See the collective volume she edited and for which she wrote several introductions, *Reading World Literature: Theory, History, Practice*, in which the critical and ideological questions surrounding the concept and practice of World Literature are discussed in detail.

16 As Appiah notes, «For some reason – I think I had a class to attend, but perhaps I had some other pressing obligation – I was unable to arrive at the start of the lecture» and those words he quotes were «the last words of the peroration» (51). As coincidence would have it, Appiah was unable to be present at the MLA session where he was to read «*Geist* Stories», although Charles Bernheimer, the session organizer, decided to have it read in absentia.

17 From her many essays and books, see especially «Can the Subaltern Speak?». At the beginning of this seminal essay Spivak takes the care to identify how thorny issues of identity politics and positionality can be: «First, a few disclaimers: in the United States the third-worldism currently afloat in humanistic disciplines is often openly ethnic. I was born in India and received my primary, secondary, and university education there, including two years of graduate work. My Indian example could thus be seen as a nostalgic investigation of the lost roots of my own identity. Yet even as I know that one cannot freely enter the thickets of 'motivations,' I would maintain that my chief project is to point out the positivist-idealist variety of such nostalgia. I turn to Indian material because, in the absence of advanced disciplinary training, that accident of birth and education has provided me with a *sense* of the historical canvas, a hold on some of the pertinent languages that are useful tools for a *bricoleur*, especially when armed with the Marxist skepticism of concrete experience as the final arbiter and a critique of disciplinary formations. Yet the Indian case cannot be taken as representative of all countries, nations, cultures, and the like that may be invoked as the Other of Europe as Self» (281).

18 I refer to them as «emergent» to avoid confusing the new type of work currently being done in those fields and what had been understood as «Area Studies» in the United States. Rey Chow's comments concisely explain the situation: «the teaching of, say, Arabic, Hindi, Japanese, Chinese and so forth already has an institutional history in this country which is fully mired in practices, habits, and biases and which is fully peopled with intentions. Instead of being a blank space ready to be adopted or assimilated by comparative literature, non-Western language and literature programs have been sites of production of knowledge which function alongside United States State Department policies vis-à-vis the particular nations and cultures concerned – such as the former Soviet Union, East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Africa. The problems that exist in these «other» programs, which are at times organized under the rubric of area studies, are familiar to most who understand the basic arguments of Edward Said's Orientalism, first published nearly twenty years ago» (108).

19 I derive these comments from Sieber's own comparison of the discipline and the methodological issues in market-terms. See for example the following observations: «In the cola wars between comparative literature and multiculturalism, the old brand cannot stand up to the new one, no matter how similar they really are, because multiculturalism has found a marketing strategy that makes it available to more people» (196); «The current debate about standards reminds me of the rival claims made by two diet plans. The first promises that you can eat all you want and still lose five pounds a week if you climb stairs for an hour a day. The second promises that you will lose the weight if you take a pill every day. Most people try the second method because it is easier. No one notices until the twenty-fifth week that there is something wrong with the theory behind both methods and that neither one works» (197).

20 I am trying to be somewhat careful here in the use of the two terms as if they related to the same phenomena, because, even if they often are deployed as if they were interchangeable, this is not necessarily the case. Among recent attempts to lay out the varied meanings of Postcolonial Studies and critically address the complexities and problems inherent in the disciplinary use of such a term, see Anne Mclinctock's essay «The Angel of Progress», included as a postscript to her *Imperial Leather*, and Arif Dirlik's «The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism».

21 See his *Hegemony and Strategies of Transgression: Essays in Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature*, especially the chapter on «Multiculturalism and the Challenge of World Cultural Studies», where San Juan maps out the debates in the United States from his perspective and ends with a «brief for a critical analysis and transvaluation of the discourse of multiculturalism and its mirror-image, the 'common culture'», stressing the «need to wrestle with the task of historicizing the cultural symbols that construct identities and ontologies of self-representation by disclosing the constellation of power and property relations informing them» as well as the «need to invent a heretical, oppositional, even utopian multiculturalism» (257).

22 A fundamental study in this respect is Aijaz Ahmad's *In Theory*. With reference to the politics of teaching «Third World» literature and its construction as the Other of Western literature, see his chapter on «Literary Theory and 'Third World Literature': Some Contexts».

23 Said's essay «Yeats and Decolonization», also included in his *Culture and Imperialism*, appears together with those by Eagleton and Jameson in *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*.

24 In other words, I would like to stress the need to separate a view of using a common language as a necessary tool for communication among people of diverse backgrounds and reliance on it as a teaching means. On these issues see Mary Louise Pratt's «Comparative Literature and Global Citizenship». The most important recent consideration of the political implications of the push for monolinguism in the United States is Marc Shell's «Babel in America; or The Politics of Language Diversity in the United States».

25 Three studies that I am aware of, varyingly illustrate the possibilities of such an objective. Alfred J. Mac Adam in *Textual Confrontations* concentrates on modern Latin

American literature, with reference to Spain and England, and with only one Brazilian example; Earl E. Fitz in Rediscovering the New World takes a more comprehensive view, striving for a much greater integration of the different American literatures and specifically arguing for such a view; Walter D. Mignolo takes a position more informed by postcolonial theory in his «Canon and Corpus: An Alternative View of Comparative Literary Studies in Colonial Situations».

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