

# Comparative Literature in Europe



# Comparative Literature in Europe:

## *Challenges and Perspectives*

Edited by

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Textual Note .....	ix
Theoretical Introduction .....	1
Frédérique Toudoire-Surlapierre	
Practical Introduction .....	15
Nikol Dziub	
<b>Part I : Comparative Literature and Decoloniality</b>	
Chapter One.....	25
<i>Comparative Literature and New Hispanisms</i>	
César Domínguez	
Chapter Two .....	41
<i>Comparative Studies in Portugal: The Iberian and the Atlantic Perspectives</i>	
Ângela Fernandes	
Chapter Three .....	51
<i>Teaching and Researching Comparative Literature in a Postcolonial and Bilingual Context: The Case of Ireland</i>	
Brigitte Le Juez	
Chapter Four.....	69
<i>Comparative Literature in Ukraine: Brotherhood and Periphery</i>	
Nikol Dziub	
<b>Part II: Comparative Literature and Cross-Cultural Studies</b>	
Chapter Five .....	81
<i>Comparing in Finland: A Method in a Moving Field</i>	
Harri Veivo	

Chapter Six .....	95
<i>Belgian Comparatism at the Crossroads</i>	
Michel Delville	
Chapter Seven.....	103
<i>Comparison in a Cross-Cultural Context: An Overview of Comparatism in Luxembourg</i>	
Jeanne Glesener	
Chapter Eight.....	117
<i>Comparative Literature in Austria: Between Socio-Literary Approaches and Literary Theory</i>	
Sandra Vlasta	
Chapter Nine.....	131
<i>Switzerland, the Ideal Republic of Comparative Literature?</i>	
Thomas Hunkeler	
<b>Part III: Proximity and Distance: Comparative Literature and Translation</b>	
Chapter Ten .....	141
<i>National Literature Gone Comparative: Mobility Challenges in Romanian Studies</i>	
Mihaela Ursa	
Chapter Eleven .....	161
<i>Comparative Literature in Estonia: Towards a Symbiotic Approach</i>	
Katre Talviste	
Chapter Twelve .....	171
<i>Comparison in Lithuania: Traditional and New Ideas</i>	
Ausra Jurgutienė	
<b>Part IV: Comparative Practices and Perspectives</b>	
Chapter Thirteen.....	191
<i>The Search for a Method in Slovak Comparative Literary Studies</i>	
Róbert Gáfrik	

Chapter Fourteen .....	209
<i>Comparative Literature—Academic Discipline or/and Intellectual</i>	
<i>Modus Vivendi: From a Macedonian Standpoint</i>	
Sonja Stojmenska-Elzeser	
Chapter Fifteen .....	223
<i>The Mole Reads the World: Paradoxes of Comparative Literature</i>	
<i>in Poland</i>	
Ewa Łukaszyk	
Index .....	239





## TEXTUAL NOTE

For ease of reading, in the text the original titles and words are placed in parentheses, in the bibliographies the original titles are placed in square brackets.



# THEORETICAL INTRODUCTION

FRÉDÉRIQUE TOUDOIRE-SURLAPIERRE

Our working hypothesis is that a “Europe of comparisons” is a meaningful proposition. I would like to sketch out the main project, ideas and concepts underlying this book by starting from a question that we often have to face (a very annoying question for comparative researchers, because in fact, that questioning presupposes the vagueness of our discipline): what is exactly comparative literature? But perhaps, we should rather answer another question: why is it so important to know what we do when we compare? Comparison is everywhere, simply because comparison is deeply human. We need comparison, not only because we like comparing ourselves to others, but also because it is a way of thinking, that reveals things.

Comparative literature is a discipline implying relationship, or rather a discipline that has chosen the Other (or the stranger) as the first comparison standard. This perspective allows us to be put in relation with other entities (disciplines, corpuses, objects, subjects). It is not enough to say that comparative literature brings several books, texts or masterpieces together. We should add that this comparative principle implies a specific holistic way of thinking the world. Ours is the opposite of an autotelic or autarkic conception of literature. The comparative process enables us to bring out elements that may not have been seen before, and to discover a meaning derived from the comparison.

We know the different functions of comparative literature:

- 1) *A finding function*: comparative literature allows us to become familiar with the unknown, but it contains the risk of misleading us because it encourages identification of objects, or may replace a specific reflection.
- 2) *A function of representation and recognition*: at first, it seems to be opposed to the first function. Comparative literature responds to a human need (a simple and basic one): we try to find *the known in the unknown*. The danger lies in the analogies-screens (which are

presented to avoid questioning the unexpected) and in the lack of epistemological precaution.

- 3) *A prospecting or anticipation function*, which can also be called “generalisation function”.

Comparative literature corresponds to an expansive movement of the human: we need to generalise and to check the validity of the concepts we invent. We have to know the meaning of comparison itself and we have to wonder where we focus the lights: on the meaning of each literary work, on their mutual relations, on the meaning of the title or on the corpus.

On the other hand, comparison includes (and means) comparing oneself. Comparison is a human tropism that consists in comparing oneself to others, it looks like what René Girard (1961) has called “the triangulation of desire”<sup>1</sup> (“le désir triangulaire”): I desire what my neighbour owns, desires or likes. Comparison is involved in the coupling between me and others, and as Paul Ricœur (1986) said: “the Other is another me similar to me, a me like me”. It proceeds here by direct transfer of the meaning “I”. We have to notice the importance of the word “like”: “To say that you think like me, that you feel like me pain and pleasure, means to be able to imagine what I would think and feel if I were in your place” (*ibidem*). Comparison interrogates the relationship between self and the Other, hearing like another (Ricœur 1990). The characteristic of the comparison is to be able to associate the same and the Other in the same movement, as Paul Ricœur explains. To give another person the power to say “I”, I have to compare his/her behaviour to mine and proceed with a fourth proportional argument based on the resemblance between the behaviour of others perceived from outside and mine tested in its direct expression. If I postulate that the Other is *like* me, it means that I make him/her my fellow (“*like*” is very important, it makes all the difference). We have to consider that the Other is a subject like any other. He/she is a subject perceiving me as another one. This means that the other person sees me as “another”. What can be deduced from that? We can make five remarks:

- 1) Comparison is a relation which contains by principle a symmetrical or reciprocal process.
- 2) Comparison implies interaction.
- 3) Comparison is an existential project: I do not only project properties and data linked to the analogical process, I also project elements belonging to the human psyche.

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<sup>1</sup> All translations are by Michel Faure.

- 4) Comparison induces a particular way of conceiving “each other”. This phrase should be interpreted literally, meaning that the others are made of each one.
- 5) Comparison depends on the context, the space, the period.

Guy Jucquois (1989, 15-17) says that there are golden ages of comparatism and these periods correspond to times when the values vindicated are humanism, otherness, the importance of foreign trade, but also the pre-eminence of trade. Comparative studies focus on the Other and on otherness, but this discipline is, so to speak, naturally expansive, so that we can use comparison in several disciplines or fields: culture, sociology, media, law... What about our contemporary age of globalisation? Is it a good period for comparisons? On the one hand, we can answer “yes”, because as we know each other better, we are moving expansively, so more comparisons are possible. On the other hand, the globalisation of literature tends to reduce the differences between literatures, making them all alike. It does not mean that there is no more comparatism but that comparison has changed perspective. The aim of comparatism will now be rather to seek the differences than the common points.

Our third observation above is borrowed from Ricœur. For him, one of the skills of analogy is to “preserve and identify all relationships with our contemporaries, our predecessors and successors”. Recognising someone according to Ricœur (1986) is “comparing a present perception to a memory”. Comparison has to do with recognition, it inscribes human beings in a lineage and a filiation. We can say that comparison is genealogical, it creates continuity, or at least it provides the information needed to think of it. What Paul Ricœur calls “the analogy of the ego” is the definition of our relationship to others (defined as those who precede us, those who accompany us and those who follow us), which allows us to recognise “the difference between the course of history and the course of things”. It is also a matter of time. We have to take into account the historical context, the evolution (the passing of time). All this allows us to state that the comparison is both vertical and horizontal. The comparison inscribes the subject in synchrony and in diachrony. Or to say it quite differently: comparison is both syntagmatic and paradigmatic.

If we return to our fourth observation, we remember the ironic title of Étiemble’s *Comparison is not Reason* (*Comparaison n’est pas raison*). This title should be contextualised: the book was written in 1963, and the subtitle is important—*The Crisis of Comparative Literature*. Étiemble borrowed this title from Diderot’s *Letter on the Deaf and Dumb*: “But I leave this figurative language [...] and I return to the tone of philosophy

for which we need reasons and not comparisons”. Étiemble tried to portray the ideal comparatist as a cultured humanist. This book is an implicit answer to the criticism according to which comparison is not scientific. As we know, the main reproach made to comparative literature is its lack of scientificity. Comparison is one of the main intellectual tools implemented in critical thinking. In *Further Concepts of Criticism*, René Wellek (1970, 34-58) devotes several chapters to general and comparative literature: he highlights the capacity to provide a choice whose relevance is due to the ability to compare oneself to others. It is a kind of self-criticism and introspective self-examination, which has the function of channelling the narcissistic impulses of an intellectual practice. Comparative literature “comforts” us from what Freud called “our three narcissistic wounds”:

- 1) The earth is not the centre of the solar system.
- 2) We are made of organic materials.
- 3) We do not control everything inside ourselves.

Today, we know that the statement by Emperor Augustus in *Cinna* of Corneille, “I am master of myself as of the universe; / I am master, I wish to be”, is a thing easier said than done. This double movement is precisely what characterises comparison—a balance between narcissistic self-esteem that arouses thought and the narcissistic wounds. The comparison is made of this double movement: it is “the double temptation of comparison”. On one side, there is an egocentric temptation, the comparison reveals several elements of our identity. On the other side, comparison uses otherness as a vector of understanding. It is based on the principle of shifting perspectives and integrating the opinion of others. This double temptation is found in the definition of the comparative subject (the person who compares) who must have at the same time a capacity for decentring (indispensable for objectivity) and a capacity for self-implication (the *comparative subject* compares and crosses works, whereas *his intersubjectivity* makes him a subject).

Following on from that, two other questions must be answered: *how* do we compare and *why* do we need to compare? Why do we use comparison? Why do we prefer sometimes to identify the *same* and sometimes make the *difference* emerge? To answer, it is necessary to identify where “our need for comparison” (Toudoire-Surlapierre 2009, 67) comes from: this has never been done before. I chose this title because of a small text of the Swedish existentialist writer, Stig Dagerman: *Vårt behov av tröst* (1955), which can be translated as *Our Need for Consolation is Insatiable*. Can we show the existence of a specific comparative behavioural and intellectual

way of thinking? Answering yes to this question leads to ask: is it inherent in human nature? Is this comparison *evolutive* (or not)? Does it follow the evolution of society and what makes it evolve: history, mentalities, peoples, economy, culture, or even politics and ideology? Is it a fact of Western culture (in comparison with Asia)? Are there European specificities? All these questions postulate that the history of countries in Europe, together with mentalities, manners, and culture, are all comparison criteria. Comparing induces a specific conception of the study of artworks and texts, which integrates ontological considerations. If I decide to compare, it means that I adhere to a specific ethical position, I build a specific conception of the (literary) world. It even involves an ethical or ontological posture (how I relate to others). It is a human behaviour emblematic of our way of positioning ourselves in relation to the group but it also reveals something about our relationship to minorities, to so-called marginal, minor or dominated cultures. Comparison challenges the postulate of a thought of the oneness stigmatised as an overvaluation of originality and singularity. This corresponds to our European (Western) phantasm of the unique work: for Hans Belting (2001, 34), “the masterpiece” is a “product of the European imagination”. Belting’s way of thinking against the *unicity* of an artwork brings him to favour the thought of an open system which echoes directly with the comparative corpus, defined as open or closed. Envisaging European literature as a whole (and not as a monad) requires conceiving it as an *archipelago* more than an insular block. It is one of the features of European culture. It is no coincidence that Goethe’s concept of “Weltliteratur” was translated as “universal literature”. In reality, Goethe was referring to a Chinese novel that had just been translated into French and he wanted to show the importance of translation. Nowadays, this word enjoys worldwide critical success. This success, as often in a variety of cases, is based both on a *misunderstanding* and a *real need*. The simple explanation is that this word is *intuitively understandable*, even if it is not translated, it is easy to understand for everybody, irrespective of one’s language. It also echoes a certain evolution of our contemporary world where interconnection and interaction prevail as active concepts. Étiemble wonders if one can compare “practices of assembly in Ethiopia, those of the Greek cities and those of the Cossacks of the twentieth century”. For him, it amounts to “bringing closer people or things of different nature or species [whereas they cannot be totally assimilated]”. It is difficult to identify a real difference, or to bring together very distant domains, but the interest for us is that the comparison goes from the most common to the most singular, it moves away from an iterative model to take in new data (thus moving

towards the unknown). Comparing involves both associating and dissociating. There is a double function of comparison, combining integration and differentiation. But when we compare, we never have a perfect and exact balance, we are always caught in a circulation, a movement between the two ends of the scale, with on one side *integration* and on the other side *differentiation*. This is a *scalar principle* which can be called *comparative gradation*. Each of us has to wonder which way he looks and tries to know the relations inside the corpus and to define the *nature* of these relations: interactions, circulations, connections, relations, contacts, influences, convergences...

For a comparative approach, the following data must be articulated:

- 1) *The corpus*. The first condition is the plurality of the corpus (it is a *sine qua non*), which may imply a corpus with linguistic differences, but also affect the nature of the corpus, with two possible strategies: construction by *deviation* which leads to what the Anglo-Saxons call “contrastive literatures”, or on the contrary promotion of the *homogeneity* of the corpus.
- 2) *The title or the subject*: the choice of this element justifies associating the texts together. If it is too obvious, it does not make it possible to identify a problem. A great subject privileges a principle of *decentring* or *disorientation*.
- 3) *The thesis*: comparative literature is not only a subject, there must also be a *hypothesis*. We have to show something new and original. There must be some paradox, enigma, or even misunderstanding in our subject.
- 4) *The method* (or *the approach*): this includes the conditions of comparisons. We can classify them (theoretical, esthetical, methodological, thematic, epistemological), because they allow us to compare the works with each other. Furthermore, they provide an answer to the question: “How do I compare the works?”
- 5) *The results*: we always have to wonder why we compare and what we are looking for, but also what we can do with the results obtained. It is the result that brings out the relevance of the analysis, but comparison can be problematic, it can raise enigmas, mysteries, misunderstandings or malfunctions of the cultural field. What is most difficult is to determine the extent of these consequences. We have to ask if it will make us think differently.

An important question for the comparative researchers is the *position*, the *point of view* they adopt. There are three possibilities. First position: when



we are rather on the side of the integrative trend. The main disadvantage is to bring everything back to the same, for example when we compare esthetical movements of different countries. If we compare the symbolist or decadent movement in France and Belgium, the danger is to show that they *look alike*. It is not certain that this research may bring new and exciting conclusions. It is difficult to have interpretative tracks: we discover something we already knew. What we have learnt is to bring together in order to assimilate: it is an integrative, congruent approach, which makes it possible to project properties or other characteristics from one of the items to the other (or others).

Second position: the comparative researcher is rather on the side of the differences. He wants to *compare the incomparable*, as Marcel Detienne said in his book *Comparer l'incomparable* (2000). Detienne started from the principle that nothing is incomparable, and that we have a right to build “comparables”, without limiting oneself to comparing what is acquired and therefore what is obviously similar. Marcel Detienne considers that we can compare everything: for him, we can compare the *Russian formalist tradition* and the *English Romantic Movement*, or *Taoist lyricism* and the *Romanian novel*. These areas have not been in contact, so here we have a rapprochement by intuition or emulation and we try to find common points. It is not a mere coincidence: Borges instinctively brings closer together Han Yu, a Chinese writer of the eighth century, Zeno and Kierkegaard, as precursors of Kafka. Doing this, he reveals the “literary utopia” of a writer dialoguing with the others.

There is a third halfway position, which we may call *the European position*. What is European comparatism? It stems from the idea that there are strong European convergences (which does not prevent differences) and that these convergences have to do directly with Europe, which will motivate—or justify—the choice of bold comparisons. The most important is the scope, the result of the comparison. A comparison is never impossible, but sometimes, it may not be useful (its results can be deceptive or minimal). About that, it is interesting to remember that Pierre Fontanier, in *Figures of Discourse* (*Les Figures du discours*), declares that three conditions are necessary for a good comparison. The first condition is its *relevance*. It should be right and true, “not in all relations of any kind, but in those that serve as its foundation”. It thus confers a moral criterion on a figure of speech on the one hand, and on the other, it attributes to the comparison a criterion of accuracy and relevance. The second condition is its *operational* dimension, “that the object from which it is drawn should be better known than that which one wants to be better known”. Fontanier makes the didactic virtue of the comparison one of its imperatives

(limiting in fact the comparison to the field of the controllable). The third condition is its *stimulating* power:

It should present to the imagination something new, brilliant, interesting; nothing, therefore, low, abject, or even worn out or trivial. What is most desirable is that the findings be unexpected and striking as well as easily felt and perceived.

In these words, an important notion is introduced, *i.e.*, the imagination. For Ricœur (1986), the imagination is an innovative space of comparison, a place “where motives as heterogeneous as desires and ethical requirements, themselves as diverse as professional rules, social customs or strongly personal values, can be compared and measured”. An epistemological problem arises: how can we know that what we have drawn to light is or not a personal projection? Am I just seeing and projecting links between things that are unrelated? To raise people’s awareness of the person who compares, it would be appropriate to introduce myself as a *comparative researcher*, explaining who I am, where I come from, on what I work, why I chose comparison... It is important to understand the *nature* of what is interpreted. Is it cultural or social? Are these elements inherent in human nature?

I would like now to return to a central question in comparative literature: how do we build a corpus? The different kinds of corpus depend on the delimitation of it. The question of its limits is essential:

- 1) *Spatial limits*: all kind of limits need to be studied. Everything is a matter of limits. There are two types of corpus: open or close.
- 2) *Quantitative limits*: from how many common criteria can I establish links between works (does it take at least one, two, three...)? The answer to this question depends on what I want to show.
- 3) Is it the same thing to compare two or three elements? Can I always add an item to the corpus? Does it change anything? If it is still conceptually *possible* and even *recommended* (even from a strictly phantasmatic point of view), what are the consequences?

I can give the example of a corpus built around women emancipation to show what is produced by the addition of a supplementary text. A preliminary corpus is composed of the plays of Goldoni, Aristophanes, Shakespeare, and Molière. From this corpus, I draw a certain number of elements: on the woman, her representation and her capacity (or not) to be represented in a process of emancipation. I ask if this emancipation is an illusion, a parenthesis therefore a question of theatrical representation, or,

on the contrary, something deeper, more transgressive and above all more extensive (with the liberation of women on stage foreshadowing or extrapolating social literature). Do we have a case of dramatic efficiency, some impact in real life, or is it just a reflection of the spirit of the times? We can notice that in this corpus, the authors are men. The corpus stops in the eighteenth century, and the female characters are married or end up getting married (with the recovery of what Bourdieu called *Masculine Domination—La Domination masculine*). They seek to free themselves but in the end they conform. However, we could add Ibsen's play, *A Doll's House* (*Et Dukkehjem*): at the end of the play, Nora is leaving the family home. This modifies our conclusions, showing that there is indeed a chronological and geographical evolution in the transcription of this pattern. Now, if we add also a play by the Austrian writer Elfriede Jelinek, *Was geschah, nachdem Nora ihren Mann verlassen hatte; oder Stützen der Gesellschaften* (*What Happened after Nora left Her Husband*, 1979), this play changes our conclusions, because this writer (a woman) imagines what happened when Nora left her husband and her children. Jelinek is an author of the twentieth century and she locates her plot in 1930 in Germany, when the condition of women is situated in a specific political, social, and ideological context. She defends feminist claims and gives a feminist point of view about women's independence. Nora tries to be free, it is not easy, but she absolutely refuses to depend on a man. She does not need a husband anymore. It provides the conclusion for this theatrical corpus. If we choose the same subject with a different—for example a non-theatrical—corpus, the results may be changed. We can take a novel by a Swedish woman writer who frees the women: *Silver* (*Pengar*) by Ernst Ahlgren (*male pseudonym* of the feminine writer Victoria Benedictsson, a writer of the modern breakthrough that could be described as *feminist*). Selma leaves her husband at the end of the novel. So, the answer to the question “Are women free in literary productions?” depends on the *number* of texts in the corpus, on the authors, and on their sexual condition. We see that the *nature* of the corpus, the gender of the authors but also the genre of the texts modify the results of comparisons. Depending on many data, the conclusions are deeply relative and cannot be generalised without many precautions. It is important to see how the results obtained for each item can be transferred to the corpus (either individually or collectively).

From this, we can distinguish different kinds of corpus:

- 1) *A synchronous corpus*, which can be called “historical coincidences”.

It means we work on *one time period* (the equivalent of a

generation), for instance in a comparative study of the literary and historical repercussions of a historical or artistic event. In this case, we capture the moments of change, the signs of mutations to try to explain them. This is often the case for the study of artistic movements (Romanticism, Naturalism, Symbolism...).

- 2) *A diachronic corpus*, which is characterised by “structural similarities”. We see the effects of a movement (or a theme) on another period, sometimes accompanied by a geographical displacement; these are called myth studies. I give one example: Hamlet, and particularly the play by Shakespeare who gave the story its mythical status. If we compare Saxo Grammaticus’ text and Shakespeare’s play, we notice several differences. Saxo Grammaticus was a Danish writer translated into Latin, he was the first who wrote about the Danish Prince. In his text, Hamlet was not melancholy; he did not commit suicide but died heroically on a battlefield. Shakespeare gave to Hamlet his hesitation, his inaction, the two visits of the ghost, the murder of his father by his uncle and his mother, he also added Ophelia and his enigmatic love for her. Our hypothesis is that Shakespeare re-invented the Hamlet fiction by giving him “Northern tropisms” that have made his success and gave the story its mythical dimension.
- 3) *A micro corpus*, characteristic of *endogenous comparatism*, where texts belong to the same sphere (geographic or artistic), a corpus strongly identified as unified (for example the Scandinavian countries, Russia, or Europe). For this, we have to take into consideration the analytical point of view, to identify from where the researcher analyses. It is important to know where I compare so as to be aware of who I am, of my nationality, my anchor point, my culture, and finally of the risks, the limits, the dangers, the dead ends. In order for comparative epistemology to be valid, several conditions must be fulfilled and many dangers avoided. From the epistemological point of view, it is emphasised that the analytic point of view is also internal (with one advantage, an access to valid works and critical apparatus, and one disadvantage, a lack of distance). For my part, I advocate playing on both tables, a system of back and forth.
- 4) *An exogenous corpus*, corresponding to what we can call *macro-comparatism*. It is a study of the relations of a determined sphere with other spheres. This approach takes into account the effects of globalisation. For example, when you want to compare Scandinavian countries with neighbouring countries, they can be in Europe or in

countries geographically close (like Finland or Russia). The corpus can be more distant but always with reasons and logical explanations.

To build a corpus, we must have some *comparative criteria*, which Guy Jucquois called “criteria of comparability” (1989, 45-76):

- 1) *The law of non-property*: the comparative researcher never has his own objects, but he *borrow*s them, in a way. The specificity of a comparative corpus is to bring together: it borrows the objects from other disciplines and fields because the comparative corpus is made up of works belonging to different countries, different cultures, it is made of temporary loans.
- 2) *The law of collective updating*: the fact of choosing several works makes the corpus a temporary space; in comparative literature, the object never exists *alone*, it must always be associated with others.
- 3) *The law of impermanence*: it is due to the fluctuation of corpuses; the comparison corpus builds its fields of study (there are no preestablished corpuses): the “comparative researcher produces what he deals with” said Pol Vandeveldt (2005, 56).
- 4) *The humanist law* which is not peculiar to the elements compared, a characteristic common to the human sciences; it affirms the interdependence between comparing subject and objects compared; this interdependence is due to language. Literary works are based on words. There is a strong correlation between the analysis of the object and the consciousness of one’s own identity.

That is why we cannot work in comparative literature without questioning what I call “the *comparing subject*” (Toudoire-Surlapierre 2009, 132). My identity as a researcher is in specific interaction with the object I study, but also with my community. The comparative researcher must have several characteristics: distancing of the subject from his objects; acceptance of his subjectivity; individual responsibility as a comparing subject; awareness of scientific doubt; transfer to the subject of analyses and comparisons made. He creates an intersection between different areas, a kind of *third space* created by drawing on the others’ domain. The comparative researcher crosses different methods. But it is not easy and it raises several problems, because he can choose different critical disciplines: reception studies, translation studies, geocriticism, literary history, imagology, gender studies, postcolonial studies, myth studies... It is important to know where we are, and to know what we are going to look

for as a kind of result. The comparative researcher must have a united vision: even if the nature of the results can be very diverse, it requires consistency in what we seek (it is necessary to know it). Above all some criteria must be taken into account, such as what I call the effects of comparisons: the relevance and the legitimacy of the comparisons are reflected in the effects.

It is time now to map out what we will do in this book. First, we will endeavour to highlight “generic kinships between heterogeneous ideas” (Ricœur 1990, 169). It allows a parallel between two apprehensions of the world: the microcosm and the macrocosm. Comparative literature is a “propaedeutic of predictability”, to borrow Gilbert Simondon’s phrase. We are straining towards the discovery of a vision of networks organised as systems or in extension, which implies a quest for coherence that is not reifying (once and for all) but energetic and dynamic.

We would like this book to adopt a *theoretical position*, with each of the participants trying to make theoretical propositions. We believe it is important to show a “European comparative reflection in progress”. Each contributor will present what seems important and representative of comparative literature in his or her country. It means that there is a correlation between *comparison* and *nation* (or at least country, European territory), and the postulate is that Europe functions as a *macrocosm* which interacts with different *microcosms*, but comparative literature can also disprove this claim by the comparison of these microcosms. Here are the guidelines we proposed to follow:

- 1) Surveying the way we compare in Europe (but also why and how we compare) and identifying our assumptions, our respective knowledge, our methods, our concepts, our theories, as well as the cultural, political, historical and media issues.
- 2) Answering the question: “do we have common trends (or not)?”
- 3) Observing whether it is opportune or even useful to constitute a scholarly community, or more precisely a European comparative community, in a time of globalisation, and defining what this can bring us concretely and what this may tell us about Europe.

Translated from French by Michel Faure

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# PRACTICAL INTRODUCTION

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The aim of the book is to offer a “peripherally centred” panorama of European comparative literature, its methods, its topics, its challenges, its perspectives. Thanks to the historical, theoretical, methodological and partially interdisciplinary dimensions of their papers, the contributors to the volume show how comparative literature works, both on an institutional and a practical level, in the country they come from or they work in; but they also try to define the characteristics of European comparative literature on a continental level. The editors invited not only representatives of countries where comparative literature is a major discipline, but also representatives of countries where it is an emerging discipline, to contribute to the book. From Switzerland to Ukraine by way of Ireland, Finland, Lithuania, Poland, Austria or Romania, the book offers a large panorama, placing great emphasis on usually “invisible” countries. Moreover, the book relates both to the (postcolonial and post-Soviet) present and to the future of comparative literature: it is a handbook, but also a laboratory.

Comparative literature is a major discipline in European humanities. However, the discipline, which is relatively young, has manifested itself at different times in the different countries of the continent. Comparative literature is both a science and a laboratory of contemporary cultures, which promotes the cultural diversity and fecundity of Europe. The aim of the book will therefore be to propose an inventory of European comparative literature, but also to study its theoretical and practical features. That is why intercultural studies and national identities, world literature and regional specificities will be the keywords of the book. *Comparative Literature in Europe: Challenges and Perspectives* is organised theoretically rather than geographically, and is divided into four parts: Comparative Literature and Decoloniality; Comparative Literature and Cross-Cultural Studies; Proximity and Distance: Comparative Literature and Translation; Comparative Practices and Perspectives. In addition to studies relating to comparative literature in Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macedonia,

Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, and Ukraine, the book also proposes a transnational comparative approach, crossing national borders and offering a global perspective on the discipline.

Comparative literature is “a discipline in crisis”, but it is also a discipline that acknowledges the legitimacy of “literature without borders” (Domínguez, Saussy and Villaneuva 2015, xv). It is a cross-cultural and a cross-border discipline which makes literary theory and practices more complex. Trying to develop new ways of comparing is a challenge; but it presupposes also that comparison distrusts globalisation, nationalisms, schools, and habits. The aim of comparative literature is to create cross-border connections and communities. Comparative literature oscillates between two polar concepts (national literatures/world literature) that it tries to transcend by developing new notions, like regional literatures, ethnic literatures, migration literature, bilingual and multilingual literatures, or cross-border literatures. The studies we gathered show how comparative literature produces new ways of thinking and experiencing the “situations” of the countries the researchers we invited come from. Comparative literature appears to be both a pragmatic tool for “young” nations (see Andersen 1994 and Thiesse 1999) and an idealistic discipline transcended by a cross-border way of thinking. That is why we also wanted to reflect upon the pertinence of the notion of Europe in a comparative context.

But there were a lot of other geopolitical concepts we had to analyse. César Domínguez claims that though the debate on the crisis of Hispanism and the need of “New Hispanisms” has been focused on methodological issues, comparative literature has never been part of it. He engages the question of monoglossia which is the basis of New Hispanisms, and explains that in this context comparative literature would be unnecessary. But Domínguez, who thinks that Hispanism needs to be multilingual, stresses the role comparative literature, which is both a discipline and an ideology, could “play in current discussions on Hispanism”.

Ângela Fernandes, for her part, underlines the coherence of Portuguese comparative studies from Fidelino de Figueiredo’s essay *Pyrene. A Perspective Towards an Introduction to the Comparative History of Portuguese and Spanish Literatures* (*Pyrene. Ponto de vista para uma introdução à história comparada das literaturas portuguesa e espanhola*, 1935) to nowadays: the title of this seminal book shows how the “Iberian perspective” has been “instrumental” in Portuguese literary and cultural studies, the “transatlantic perspective” being the “other major movement” when “supranational readings” are explored.

Dialogue across countries is sometimes more difficult than the communication between “the centre” and “the periphery” that is a result of

each country's relation to its geographical or cultural neighbours. "Regional" languages are even nowadays ignored when it concerns education. Brigitte Le Juez, whose study is entitled "Teaching and Researching Comparative Literature in a Postcolonial and Bilingual Context: The Case of Ireland", argues that comparative methods in Ireland are different from those used in Great-Britain, because of their linguistic, historical, and political basis. Le Juez focuses on the linguistic criterium which leads to Irish independence, and shows that the postcolonial approach is useful to understand Irish duality. Comparative studies reflect those ideological issues, English and Irish subjects being rarely studied together. Le Juez's study proposes a broad view of the state of comparatism in Ireland from an "idiosyncratic perspective", that of a nation "still unsure about some of its cultural markers (Gaelic, Anglophone, and more widely European)".

But is proximity an indispensable condition for successful comparisons? Irish and Ukrainian postcolonial comparatists, in any case, have things in common. Nikol Dziub, in her article entitled "Comparative Literature in Ukraine: Brotherhood and Periphery", shows that comparative literature in Ukraine operates as a laboratory of literary theory, and that it also deals with questions that inform Ukrainian literature itself. Dziub concentrates on comparative concepts that could only emerge in postcolonial and post-Soviet contexts—starting with "Westernism"; and she shows that the development of the comparative tradition in a country like Ukraine depends on the ideological and political context rather than on the cultural environment. She argues that Ukrainian comparative literature responds to a need to rethink the concepts related to the notions of influence and contacts in order to make comparatism, if not a *modus vivendi*, at least an instrument at the service of an ethics of margins.

Westernism and Europeanism are key concepts in the book. In his study entitled "Comparing in Finland. A Method in a Moving Field", Harri Veivo shows that the role of comparative literature in Finland has always been to promote European culture. The author claims that processes such as "appropriation" and "resemantisation" that "combine adaptation with resistance and creation are therefore perhaps more vital in the periphery than in the centre". He even asks if "comparing is surviving".

In some countries, comparison is a way of life. As Michel Delville suggests in his article entitled "Belgian Comparatism at the Crossroads", Belgium is considered as a "comparative space *par excellence* by virtue of its historically and institutionally sanctioned multilingualism and multiculturalism". He argues that this is a particularity, but, even in this comparative space, Belgian chairs in comparative literature have "tended

to disappear". When he points out the danger of this exclusion of the discipline from science, Delville notes that Belgian comparative literature's future depends on individual researchers' good will.

In her contribution, "Comparison in a Cross-Cultural Context. An Overview of Comparatism in Luxembourg", Jeanne Glesener, for her part, highlights the role of the comparative approach in research on literature in Luxembourg—Luxembourgish literature being a literature with a multilingual vocation, with texts in German, French, Luxembourgish, and English. The comparative approach seems to be essential to understand the specificity of the literature in Luxembourg. Comparative literature, with its new methods, not only facilitates the networking of small literatures throughout the world, it also provides research in literature with an innovative analytical framework and highly stimulating theoretical perspectives.

Comparative literature is the discipline of the in-between spaces. Sandra Vlasta explores the way comparative literature established itself in Austria: whereas "Innsbruck has traditionally been oriented towards the East (*i.e.*, Slavic languages)", and "has had a strong focus on theory", Vienna "has been more focused on social history studies of literature" and "has been oriented towards the Romance languages". Even though the definition of "comparison" is broad, Sandra Vlasta points out "different *foci* that, in the case of Vienna and Innsbruck, can be traced back to the founders of the departments".

Belgium, Luxembourg and Austria are, or should be, essentially "comparative" countries. So is, or should be, Switzerland. Thomas Hunkeler entitled his study "Switzerland, the Ideal Republic of Comparative Literature?" He notices that it is surprising that comparative literature is a minor discipline in a plurilingual Switzerland. In view of the cultural situation torn between the so-called "national" literatures and the traditions marking the French-speaking and German-speaking parts of the country, comparatism should be omnipresent in Switzerland. Hunkeler argues that "comparative literature is the place in which we learn, through comparison, to intellectually profit not only from the differences between languages, literatures and cultures", but also "from all the obstacles that arise when we compare different literatures". He is convinced that comparative literature might be "the school in which we learn to deal with these obstacles".

But comparative literature also studies the relationship between the "one" and the "system". In her paper, "National Literature Gone Comparative—Mobility Challenges in Romanian Studies", Mihaela Ursa demonstrates that there was a translational turn in Romanian literary

studies which altered their traditional relation to comparative literature. As for most European cultures during the nineteenth century, establishing a national body of literature was not just a literary matter in Romania, but part of the nation-building project. For the last decades however, “a clear transnational trend has altered the cultural priorities of the East-European countries, and Romania makes no exception”. After a boom in translations during the 1990s, Romanian literature is redefining itself nowadays alongside the lines of a literature-in-translation. That is why comparative studies in Romania have to “focus on the renegotiations of cultural heterogeneity and cultural border-crossing, as well as on shared and translated spaces”.

In “Comparative Literature in Estonia: Towards a Symbiotic Approach”, Katre Talviste argues that a comparative approach is inherent in the Estonian literary tradition, which has stemmed from a historically multilingual and multicultural environment, the national literature and its reception having grown out of constant interactions with other literary traditions. While it is, to a degree, a valid and natural effort to establish a dialogue and to situate Estonian literature within a larger context, it can sometimes result in tunnel vision, which today’s scholars are attempting to counterbalance in various ways. Talviste also discusses the advantages and challenges resulting from the comparatist tradition in the field of literary pedagogy, giving a brief overview of the pedagogical tradition and of the efforts to adapt it to current educational needs.

In Lithuania, the challenges of comparative literary studies are slightly different. Ausra Jurgutienė, in her study entitled “Comparison in Lithuania: Traditional and New Ideas”, explains that Lithuanian comparative literature may be defined in two ways: not only as an “inseparable component of the historical approach”, but also as a “new trend in literary research focused on influences, recurring subjects, and genres”. Lithuanian comparative literature has a complex history: in Soviet Lithuania, comparative studies had to be judgmental, and to praise the “great literature” of Russia. But “the Western mentality that had formed during the interwar period emerged again [...] when the Soviet era was coming to an end”.

As Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek (2002, 1) suggests, “the notion of Central European culture—real or imagined—(is) defined as an in-between peripheral and (post)colonial space”. And comparative literature is one of the most efficient tools to try to understand how this space works. In “The Search for a Method in Slovak Comparative Literary Studies”, Róbert Gáfrik demonstrates that comparative literary studies in Slovakia began in the 1940s, when the first generation of Slovak literary scholars “created the conditions for the study of Slovak literature in relation to other

literatures". Gáfrik's article analyses the "birth" of Slovak comparative literary studies and delineates the place of Dionýz Ďurišin's theoretical work in it in order to provide an overview of the development and state of the discipline in the past twenty years.

But what does "comparison" mean outside the "classical European tradition"? In her article entitled "Comparative Literature—Academic Discipline or/and Intellectual *Modus Vivendi*: From a Macedonian Standpoint", Sonja Stojmenska-Elzeser reconsiders the enigmatic concepts of Europeanness, the European imaginary, Eurocentrism, European cultural regions, and European urban identity. She tries to show what could be an ethical approach to comparatism, and explains the special meaning of comparative literature's *ethos* for cultures such as Macedonian.

In a more figurative perspective, Ewa Łukaszyk portrays comparative literature in Poland as "the Mole Reads the World", insisting on its "paradoxes". She considers that Polish scholars are "suspended between the longing for great universalist horizons and a peculiar world blindness, allegedly imposed by the political situation in the past and [...] self-inflicted in the present". This paradoxical characterisation may be resumed in the metaphor of a mole in the great theatre of the world, used by Czesław Miłosz. The bright lights of the spectacle appear as distant and confusing to his earthly animals: the mole, the hamster, and the hedgehog. Coming close to the tiny wet muzzles, one might nonetheless overhear what they say about the sounds of the music and the movements of the ballet. Using this as a metaphor for the situation of comparative literature in Poland is certainly a very severe judgement of this academic reality. While doing this, Ewa Łukaszyk expects to arrive at some generalisable conclusions on the importance of comparative literature as a strategy, not only of reading, but also of intellectual survival in peripheral contexts. And that is precisely one of the main aims of the volume—to show that comparative literature is more than a discipline: it is a way of thinking, if not a way of life.

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