

INTRODUCTION: GARNERING DIVERSITIES IN COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

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Diversity is a fundamental premise in the discipline of Comparative Literature, which is characterized by its emphasis on multilingualism, interdisciplinarity, transmedia, and transnational and transcultural thematic or stylistic convergences, paradoxically based on the assumption of linguistic and cultural divergence. The promotion of diversity in Comparative Literature can be traced to *la littérature comparée* in France in the eighteenth century, Goethe's *Weltliteratur* in the 1820s, Leo Spitzer and Erich Auerbach in Turkey in the early twentieth century, European intellectual refugees fleeing totalitarian regimes for North America in the mid-twentieth century, and the polarization of the Cold War era (Spivak, "Rethinking" 609). In more recent decades, this discipline's focus on diversity has been further enhanced as a response to multiculturalism, postcolonialism, and internationalism within the globalized context.

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Among the major principles of Comparative Literature are its transcendence of national and linguistic boundaries and its embracing of diversity. Its historical development, however, leads to its favouring European traditions of both literary analysis and theoretical discourses, which risks homogenization and complacency as literatures and theories from the rest of the world are studied in an undifferentiated category of the other, the so-called "non-European," as a negative counterpart of the European status quo (Chow, "The Old/New Question" 295). Such Eurocentrism is, moreover, inherently hierarchical, as some European countries have historically been more culturally or politically dominant than others (Hutcheon 161). Comparative Literature, with its expansion and focus on multiple languages, literatures, cultures, and theories from different parts of the world, may be a countermeasure against Eurocentric imperialism.

Globalization plays an important role in enabling Comparative Literature to accommodate the ideal of diversity by accelerating the mobility of information,

commodities, and people in the contemporary world, thus transcending physical, linguistic, and cultural borders. Mary Louise Pratt argues that Comparative Literature has been transformed by “globalization, democratization, and decolonization” (59), providing platforms for cross-cultural interaction. Literature from less significant geopolitical territories gains opportunities to move from the periphery to the centre in a globalized market, which gradually transforms the *bona fide* literary standard (Weninger xv). By reinforcing intercultural literary and theoretical exchanges, globalization theoretically allows Comparative Literature to pursue its goal of promoting diversity.

In practice, however, in recent decades globalization has frequently been criticized for tending toward homogeneity rather than diversity. Globalization is often associated with Americanization “in the shaping of economic and political decisions on a world scale by the perceived needs of the United States” (Saussy 25). In *Death of a Discipline*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that the anthologies of world literature published in the United States are in English translations, selected and mediated by American culture (xii). In a dialogue with Spivak, David Damrosch counter-argues that those world literature anthologies have only been published in North America because the demand elsewhere in the world is insufficient to compensate for the costs of global copyright. However, he admits that such a selection favours literature from the United States, with little or nothing from Canada (Damrosch and Spivak 457). The anthology question is an example of how, even though globalization enhances international and intercultural dialogues in Comparative Literature, more powerful cultures still often, and perhaps inevitably, dominate subalterns.

Comparative Literature continuously encourages the diversity of not only languages and cultures, but also theoretical approaches from various parts of the world and different academic and intellectual traditions. Meanwhile, literary studies of the diversity of local cultures and subcultures within regional traditions must also be supported (Damrosch 326). As Rey Chow argues, “however trivial or odd, any human being’s life story deserves to be received as an organically whole work with its self-originating, self-validating, and, as [Ivor Armstrong] Richards writes, ‘self-supporting’ value” (“Close Reading” 115). While respecting and analyzing minute differences embedded in individual narratives, comparatists formulate commonalities based on broader range of literary and theoretical discourses, as expressed in the Chinese idiom *qiutongcunyi* 求同存異 (seek common ground while retaining difference). As both a discipline and an institution, Comparative Literature has provided an interstitial space for scholars from different linguistic, cultural, and disciplinary backgrounds to contemplate and offer critical perspectives on the challenges and solutions of achieving diversity in theory and practice.

This special issue of the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature/Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* derives mainly from the annual meeting of the Canadian Comparative Literature Association, held at Ryerson University from 28 to 30 May 2017, which I organized with the support of committee members. The

following nine essays were selected, peer-reviewed, revised, and extended from the original conference presentations, all of them engaging with the conference theme “From Here to There: Diversity and Interdisciplinarity in the Practice of Comparative Literature.” Adopting various methodological and theoretical approaches, these essays analyze the juxtaposition and comparison of diverse ideas, genres, locations, cultures, and schools of thought in Comparative Literature, so as to critically engage readers in ideological boundary-crossing exchanges and negotiations in a globalized and globalizing world.

The opening essay by Paul Morris offers a thorough discussion of the critical engagement of diversity in the discipline of Comparative Literature, which lays a theoretical background for further discussion in the rest of this issue. By outlining its historical and social background, Morris claims that diversity has developed far beyond a category of theory and practice. Comparative Literature is connected to diversity, as an institution and as a discipline producing values and meanings through its organizational composition and the study of literary representation, respectively, and both share a common allegiance to heterogeneity. He further argues that although Comparative Literature may share several common ideological objectives with diversity, the discipline, like literature itself, inevitably needs to remain at a critical distance from the latest and compelling cultural turns.

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Moving from theoretical discussion to pedagogical exploration, Eleanor Ty’s essay argues that the Web and digital technology have provided readers with hypertext for both creative writing and research materials. Ty explores several ways in which the Internet and digital technology have helped to diversify the production, circulation, and consumption of literature. She also contends that digital technology has promoted innovative interaction between textual and visual works. Analyzing the popular reception of these works can, furthermore, enhance thematic, ethnic, and generic diversity in literary and cultural discourses and therefore enrich the design of pedagogical strategies and curriculum.

Applying the theories of diversity in practice, contributors to this issue examine how literatures from different cultures and media interact with each other, thus making dialogues with established discourses from a critical distance. Focusing on the diversity of modern Chinese drama, Kwok-kan Tam’s essay compares various theatrical productions of Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* in mainland China between the 1950s and the 2010s. During the socialist regime in China, *A Doll’s House* was adapted into model plays in social and political experimentations for social propaganda on women’s independence and the quest for the female self. The 2014 Beijing production of *A Doll’s House*, however, not only represents Nora in China’s new social reality, but also returns to the basics, focusing more on human nature and less on theory. The subtle details of performing the body, nonetheless, help to present Nora as an awakened woman who finally takes command. Tam argues that in post-socialist China, this approach goes beyond socialism, because “being apolitical is a political attitude.”

Walid El Khachab's essay investigates the diversified cinematic and photographic representations of the veil in Middle Eastern culture. Neither an exclusive Islamic paradigm nor an entirely feminine issue, the veil is defined in this essay as fabric embodying the human body in order to intensify or regulate its eroticism, to supervise the social space, to manufacture a Palestinian national identity, or to stimulate a particular experience of the subject of knowledge, both as the sacred and as a post-colonial identity.

Lambert Barthélémy's essay analyzes the "vernacular narrations" of the public space in an Italian collective, *Stalker*, originally formed by architects. From social, ethical, and aesthetic perspectives, Barthélémy argues that *Stalker* organizes free walks through marginal areas of Rome, Milan, Paris, or Miami in order to rediscover the cities, to shift the relations between centre and periphery, and to collect testimonies of migrants who occupy those marginal places. He focuses on *Stalker's* special project, *Via Egnatia*, which presents migrants' narrations of displacement, particularly from Rome to Constantinople.

In addition to multilingual and multicultural studies, the diversity of subcultures within regional traditions also deserves considerable attention in Comparative Literature for their celebration of the vitality in locality. Terry Siu-han Yip's essay, for example, analyzes the multifaceted representations of the self in modern Chinese literature in the beginning of the twentieth century. Using the examples of such literary works as *The Rebirth of the Goddesses*, *The Nirvana of the Phoenixes*, *Tragedy on the Lake*, *The Diary of Miss Sophie*, *Family*, and *The Autobiography of a Girl Soldier*, Yip investigates the sociohistorical forces that shape Chinese writers' aspiration and frustration in the construction of their new selves. She further argues that the Chinese quest for a modern self is quite different from the traditional Confucian self, due to Chinese interaction with foreign literatures in the early twentieth century.

In terms of sexuality, ethnic and racial studies, my paper analyzes the diversified sexual orientations and multiple heritages in Yi Shu's *A Complicated Story* (2006), a Chinese Canadian novel, and its film adaptation by Kiwi Chow (2013). I argue that these works portray the female body as the battleground of both exploitative capitalism and alternative liberation, which simultaneously reflect heterosexual norms and homosexual desires in the face of commercial surrogacy. As both a mother and lesbian lover, Yazi, the protagonist of the novel and film, negotiates between the heterosexual and homosexual spheres, and eventually asserts her sexual identity as a lesbian. Her union with a Chinese British female partner in Canada celebrates multiple heritages and deconstructs the conventional biological paradigm of the nuclear heterosexual family model.

Albert Braz's essay discusses a selection of texts describing Canadian sexual adventures in Mexico. While most Canadians travel to Mexico and other tropical countries for the sun and beaches in resort locations, a substantial number seek more carnal satisfaction. Braz argues that the eroticism of sexual emancipation is often intertwined with the politics of race, gender, and particularly class. Nevertheless,

these Canadian travellers experience psychological transformation through their cultural encounters with local Mexicans and their gradual appreciation of the values of different cultures.

Pouneh Saeedi's essay examines the marginality of the "female malady" in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907). Saeedi argues that the murder that takes place in Conrad's story is an example of the victimization and subsequent manifestation of madness in a Victorian woman. She discusses the context of the "female malady" in a period in which psychiatry was a male-dominated discipline and women were relegated to the role of the patient.

This collection of essays explores diversity in Comparative Literature in the context of intercultural, interdisciplinary and methodological negotiations. Shown in the cover photo of this special issue, the stream nurtures a diversity of life, and in return the biodiversity revitalizes the stream. In a similar vein, as paradoxically an interdisciplinary discipline and an interstitial institution, Comparative Literature continues to advocate diverse methodologies and practices in ever-changing circumstances. As a result, comparatists adopt diverse methodologies and theories to analyze literatures from different languages, cultures, and locations to incessantly redefine Comparative Literature in a way that exhibits its vigorous performativity.

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