

are different in their goals and perspectives: to work on the understanding of mind (to use an inadequate term), whether with therapeutic intent or simply to understand its organization, is different from similar analytic work on literature. Maintaining the difference, as well as the relation, is important because the move from one discourse to another, the superimposition of one disciplinary model on another, ought in the best of cases to be productive of a kind of stereotypical effect. Things stand out in new relief, they are lighted in a new way. They do not merge into the same, but they are perhaps reconfigured where they are.

I want, then, to understand that "comparison" that was always understood to characterize our professional discipline as meaning something like the constant urge toward paradisciplinary, which in turn I want to construe as movements back and forth across that *and* between literature and other discourses in a way that asserts similarity while not attempting to abolish difference, toward an ideally stereotypical effect.

None of this, I realize, will satisfy malevolent critics of the academic humanities at the present time — nor restore Mr. Bass's \$20 million to Yale. Yet it may give us the beginnings of a basis for reasserting to the outside world that literary studies have an important mission, and that this mission does have something to do with the creation of values — not in any simple or passive sense, but through the disciplines of critical reading and paradisciplinary comparison. For ourselves within the university, it may provide terms for the endless debate about the nature of our discipline more useful than the piously bland assertions of the ACLA Report. We need a forum, and a banner, better than *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*.

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RICHARD CAVELL

"Same Difference": On the Hegemony of "Language" and "Literature" in Comparative Studies

Conceptual schemes and extent of scholarship cannot be made to balance. (Gayatri Spivak, "The Question of Cultural Studies" 258)

I want to begin (and end) with an insistence on the necessity of comparison. It appears to me that this is the essential point to be made when speaking about *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* (edited by Charles Bernheimer), the book which provides the most immediate impetus for many of my comments here, in that it encapsulates a certain moment in the current disciplinary debate, albeit one that is localized within a specific practice that does not always conform to the Canadian context (an aspect which I have considered in "Comparative Canadian Literature" as Crisis and Critique: Towards Comparative Cultural Studies," of which this article is an extension). I will also want to distinguish in this article between disciplinary and methodological aspects of comparative studies; while they overlap, there are some strategic distinctions to be made between them.

Let me state at the outset that my position on comparative studies is pluralist; indeed, it is necessarily so, since the major lesson taught to me by the history of "Comparative Literature" is that the containment of its practice, both ideologically and pragmatically, within a Eurocentric frame of reference, was, finally, counter-productive. Although the methodology of Comparative Literature was predicated upon difference, its cultural assumptions limited it to discovering similarity. As K. Anthony Appiah puts it (in his essay in the Bernheimer volume), "To insist on Newton's *Opticks* as part of the context for Goethe's *Farbenlehre* isn't to compare two distinct things: it is, rather, to enter into a world in which they were already connected" (54). To put it another way: "same difference." Yet, I take issue with Appiah's comment, insofar as it places emphasis on the "distinct things" that get compared, rather than on the act of comparison, which it takes for granted. It is precisely the nature of the "crisis" of comparative studies, however, that comparison *cannot* be taken for granted; it is that which — perforce — comparatists *must* theorize, rather than seeking to

determine a field of study — *pace* Wlad Godzich, who has argued that "the problem of field is ... absolutely central" (22) for comparatists. In fact, the "expansion" and "fragmentation" of the field of literature occasioned by the increasing entry into the academic domain of "emergent" literatures (the topic of Godzich's essay) has not diminished but increased the importance of comparative approaches within it. Indeed, Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin argue, in *Decolonising Fictions*, for the liberatory potential of a non-Eurocentric comparative methodology¹ within a postcolonial context: "A comparative approach that cuts across the imperial/colonial nexus to focus instead on cross-cultural encounters within the post-colonial orbit enables us to circumvent the Anglocentric perspective most readily" (15). Thus Susan Bassnett is both right and wrong when she says, in her 1993 book *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*, "Today, comparative literature ... is dead" (47). She is right in that the historical phenomenon of comparing European literatures and their avatars has worked itself through to its logical conclusion, at which point it has deconstructed itself (see Cavell *passim*); but Bassnett is wrong insofar as the methodology of comparison is still very much alive, and represents what I will call the reconstructive moment in the history of the discipline.

That moment is clearly marked by a displacement of the "literary" model, as can be seen by reviewing the names of the contributors to *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*; all of them are comparatists, yet none is particularly associated with what I have been calling the "literary" model: Emily Apter writes on postcolonialist seductions; Charles Bernheimer's most recent book is on prostitution in nineteenth-century France; Peter Brooks's 1994 book is on *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling*; Rey Chow's forthcoming book is on Chinese Cinema; Marjorie Perloff has published on "poetry in the age of media"; Mary Louise Pratt publishes on travel writing; Mary Russo was one of the editors of *Nationalisms and Sexualities*; and so on. This move "away" from "literature" is significant in a number of ways. First of all, it reminds us that the concept of "literature" is itself historically bound; it was McLuhan, after all, who argued resoundingly over thirty years ago in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* that the hegemony of literate culture was coming to an end. Secondly, it tells us that this undermining of the hegemony of literature has been accompanied by a shift in focus to the contexts of literary production — a shift, as it were, from figure to ground, though one which is aware of the dynamic relationship between the two. I want to emphasize this point; although it may be true, as Charles Bernheimer has put it in what has come to be the most contentious statement in the 1993 report to the ACLA, that "the term 'literature' may no longer adequately describe our object of study" (42), this should not be construed as stating that we no

longer study literature. Although I may write on so-called "monster houses" in Vancouver, and although I may draw most heavily in that article on deconstructivist architectural theory, and although my frame of reference may be American horror films, and although I may cite heavily from anthropological studies, and although the article may be published in a journal of geography, it is nevertheless works of literature such as *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* that facilitate my argument, which would be greatly impoverished if it did not devolve from and through specific literary contexts. But "context" is the key word, here; one thing I definitely do not do in that article is foreground the literary work as occupying a transhistorical and transcultural space. Rather, I read the literary works as part of a discursive context which contains them but which is always greater than them — indeed, *which is greater than can be contained by any one discursive system*.

This brings me to my main point, and if not to *the* sense of what "comparison" is, then certainly to what it means to me in my own critical practices. "Comparison," for me, is the methodological response precisely to this sense that any discursive system is always inadequate to itself; this might be called the deconstructive turn of discursive systems, whereby they constantly undermine themselves through a sort of liminal incommensurability — their inability to contain the discourse they produce and which produces them. The focus here is on borderlines, and it is telling how often the word "between" crops up in the Bernheimer book: borderlines both establish a discourse and deconstruct it by showing its limits — by showing that, finally, any discourse is inadequate to itself (which I take to be Saussure's insight — that the limits of a discursive system will always be arbitrary; it both overflows its boundaries and is checked by them at the same time).

Comparison, however, is profoundly reconstructive in what I see as its function of highlighting those limits, that liminality, those borderlines — reconstructive not in that it seeks methodologically to reassert unity or a transcendent hermeneutic, but in the sense that it repairs the discursive inadequacy I have been speaking of by contextualizing it, by arguing that *no* discursive system can be understood monologically, that *all* meaning is relational. This observation emerges, perhaps more tellingly than any other, from the "multicultural" context which Bernheimer *et al.* seek to articulate. Yet as Arnold Krupat has argued in *Ethnocriticism*, "the term multiculturalism is redundant if ... culture is ... conceived in a manner analogous to Bakhtin's conception of language as a socially plural construct in which our own speech is never entirely and exclusively our own, but always heteroglossic and polyvocal, formed always in relation to the speech of others" (237). According to this model, a study of Proust in Portugal is as comparative as a study of the interfaces between racial and spatial practices.

1 Brydon and Tiffin specify that by "comparative" they mean a methodology which questions "traditional disciplinary boundaries" (16), and which is "determinedly text-centred" (144).

If literature "no longer adequately describe[s] our object of study," as the Bernheimer report would have it, comparison still does, and if I fault that report, and the Bernheimer anthology which grew up around it, it is to bemoan the lack of attention to what comprises the comparatist practice. I emphasize the word "practice" here because I want to insist that our discipline is defined not by what we study but by what we do when we study it. If this is to suggest that all critical study is, finally, comparatist — since comparatist study is not located textually but contextually — I am not worried by the suggestion. A survey of those contemporary critical practices which Susan Bassnett sees as having inherited the mantle of Comparative Literature — gender studies, cultural studies, postcolonial studies, and so on — tells us that this is in fact the case anyway, that, paradoxically, our most pressing crisis at the moment is that we have been so successful — so successful, indeed, that we appear to be losing a sense of our disciplinary integrity. This lack of focus, however, arises from the assumption that our disciplinary practice is, or must be, constituted by a certain body of texts. My position is that our practice is defined by what we do — we compare, and by doing so we make the implicit methodological argument that meaning is relational.

So far I have concentrated on methodology; let me now put methodology back into some of its contexts of practice by examining some disciplinary aspects of what I have been arguing. The key issues that come up here occasion a turn from what I have been calling the hegemony of "literature" to that other hegemony that has defined comparative studies, "language." Here, disciplinary integrity appears to be especially at stake; one of the chief ways in which comparative studies have defined themselves disciplinarily and institutionally has been through an insistence on reading texts in the "original" language. On this issue I find myself occupying two positions simultaneously; in much the same way that Gayatri Spivak has argued for a "strategic essentialism," I would like to argue that comparative studies should insist on a strategic linguisticism, whereby it continues to assert its disciplinary status within the institution by admitting students on the basis of their ability to work in original languages, while at the same time broadening the concept of language to include such discursive practices as film, gender, nationalism, and so on. Indeed, I see a large part of the disciplinary responsibility of Comparative Literature as residing in the necessity to theorize the discursive integrity of these practices. If this would appear to inaugurate the end to the specificity² of the discipline, we should remind ourselves of our own methodological "originality": we are the ones whose

discipline provided the space in which interartistic, interdiscursive, and interdisciplinary practices were theorized. As Jonathan Culler points out, "Only as comparative literature came to lack other differentiating features did the insistence on work in the original languages come to seem so crucial" (119). It is not, then, that we are losing disciplinary integrity by a widening of our disciplinary practices beyond the linguistic; rather, our identity is being confirmed by such practices.³

This will inevitably raise the vexed issue of translation (though it appears to me that the rigidities of the first [1965] ACLA report are now a thing of the past), but what my argument has been suggesting all along is that translation is the site par excellence of the comparatist methodology. Indeed, it would appear that translation is the inescapable fact of communication, that, in the Bakhtinian sense, discourse is always othered, so that translation takes place as much (and perhaps most often) within a language as among languages. This is not however, to argue with Susan Bassnett that "translation studies" provide the logical telos of comparative studies; this argument is disciplinary rather than methodological, and, as such, amounts largely to a plea for a change in name, for a new disciplinary hegemony — "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," she writes (160). But if the topos of *translatio studii* was endemic to the Eurocentric practice of Comparative Literature, the postmodernist untranslatability celebrated by Bassnett is problematical as well. As Sarat Maharaj writes in "Perfidious Fidelity": The Untranslatability of the Other",

The notion of "untranslatability" was given a singular twist by Apartheid for its own ends. It projected the impossibility of translation, of transparency, to argue that self and other could never translate into or know each other. This sense of opacity served to underpin its doctrine of an absolute "epistemic barrier" — grounds for institutionalising a radical sense of ethnic and cultural difference and separateness. (29)

Maharaj goes on to ask how hybridity can be imbued with a greater sense of dynamism, "prised free from this oppositional coupling" (29). She suggests that "it amounts to reindexing hybridity as an unfinished, self-unthreading force, even as a concept against itself" (30). It is an argument of this sort that I am making for the comparative methodology. This argument depends on seeing hybridity "not so much as a self-standing, fixed term but as an interdependent one" (34).

Translation studies are also deeply committed to the concept of national language (as opposed to discursive systems, which includes other modes of

2 Some critics would take this proposal as inaugurating an end to the humanistic basis of comparative studies, but as Rey Chow remarks in the Bernheimer volume, "just as multilingualism does not necessarily prevent one from becoming an intellectual bigot, so monolingualism does not have to mean that one's mind is closed" (114).

3 Like "literature," "language" is in any case not a stable category, as Deleuze and Guattari indicate in a comment they make in "What is a Minor Literature?": "A minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language" (59).

signification), whereas the comparatist methodology assumes that (in the words of Dionne Brand and Derek Walcott) "no language is neutral,"⁴ that language and translation are coterminous, and that what gets translated is not just text but context as well — what the Bernheimer report refers to as "the significant differences *within* any national culture" (43; it is this point which is of crucial significance in the Canadian context, and differentiates the history of comparatist practice here from that in the United States). It is on this particular aspect of comparatism that postcolonial studies have drawn; in doing so, they have enacted a "shift in perspective from metropolitan values to local ones" (16), as Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin put it in *Decolonising Fictions*, a shift which "value[s] the local above the fiction of the universal."

The essentialist aspect of my argument, then, is that, as comparatists, we should insist that our practice involves working in original languages; the strategic part of my argument is that by expanding what we have traditionally meant by "language," we can re-articulate that highly problematical notion of "original" — whose ambiguities have rarely been conveyed better than by Annie Lennox's assertion that she was "born an original sinner" ("Missionary Man") — by translating it as "difference," as that aspect of discursivity on which the concept of translation is precisely dependent. What would be jettisoned with the concept of originality would be that of mastery, of course — but that any one individual could be said to have mastered a language is in practice absurd. "Comparative Literature" was for so long defined by such mastery, however, in its insistence on the mastery of numerous languages "in the original"; the decline of this model thus has acute — acutely *positive* — disciplinary implications, perhaps the most significant of which is the move toward collaborative work. As Bernheimer puts it,

collaboration could well reach beyond literary fields to include interested colleagues in such departments as history, anthropology, sociology, music, art history, folklore, media studies, philosophy, architecture, and political science. The search for more cosmopolitan, transcultural approaches is being actively pursued by innovative thinkers in all these domains, many of whom share a common set of theoretical readings. To encourage such collaborations is not to abandon literature as an object of study ... but rather to suggest a fundamentally relational and dynamic approach to cultural forms, including literary texts. (13)

The most telling index of what I have been calling the necessity of comparison goes beyond Bernheimer's parameters, however, into the sciences, where the comparative approach is becoming "increasingly significant" (17) according to a recent article in *Society and Space* by David Livingstone. Citing such examples

as the essays in *The Rise of Scientific Europe*, Yves Conry's *L'Introduction du Darwinisme en France au XIX^e Siècle*, and the essays in *Western Science in the Pacific*, Livingstone notes that "the conviction that scientific styles are regionally differentiated has been long acknowledged by students of the history and sociology of science" (16). Beyond even the discursive field of literature, then, these examples of comparative science illustrate the crucial importance of a comparative methodology ever more necessary in a historical moment of increasing disciplinary interdiscursivity.

I began thinking about writing this paper at the end of March. For me, the problem is coming up with a title; everything else seems to follow from that. "Same Difference" was the phrase I hit upon almost immediately, one of its attractions being that it derived from an idiom, and thus embodied that decolonization of "language" that I knew I would be arguing. What I wanted, however, was a linguist's reading of the phrase, and so I turned to my colleague Mava-Jo Powell, who very kindly wrote an analysis for me, which reads in part:

The locution is a fixed expression whose phrasal meaning is not precisely derivable from its constituents. It is an oral rejoinder used in response to an exception/corrective/revision (it never occurs as an opener); its function is evaluative; and typically, it represents opinion and not fact. Its meaning is something like this: "I don't think the difference you have just made/pointed out in response to what I have said is significant."

I think that it's time in the history of our discipline to insist on significant differences, which is to insist, in my view, on the necessity of comparison.

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4 *No Language is Neutral* is the title of a book of poems by Brand; the line is from Derek Walcott's *Midsummer*.

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LINDA HUTCHEON

Comparative Literature's "Anxiogenic" State

It is no secret that the state (and the state of health) of the discipline called "Comparative Literature" has been the topic of much discussion in recent years.¹ This concern can be read as a sign of either institutional anxiety or intellectual excitement, depending on your perspective and temperament. Books with titles like *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, *Borderwork: Feminist Engagements with Comparative Literature*, *Building a Profession*, *The Comparative Perspective on Literature*, *The Challenge of Comparative Literature* or *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* are some indication of the urgency felt by comparativists these days to rethink and even to reconfigure their affiliations in the light of recent intellectual and institutional realignments. The American Comparative Literature Association's 1993 Bernheimer Report entitled "Comparative Literature at the Turn of the Century" was one of the first in a series of documents to have contributed to what has been called this "anxiogenic" state of Comparative Literature in the North American academy — in Canada as much as in the United States.

This state of anxiety is not new to our discipline, of course: René Wellek had already expressed it in 1958 in the essay, "The Crisis of Comparative Literature." There, he worried about the lack of both subject matter and methodology in Comparative Literature. Indeed, the various shifts in the discipline's focus since World War II have been viewed as a series of attempts to "cure, contain, or exploit" this anxiety of comparison (Bernheimer 3). The most recent in this series of attempts has been brought about by that new ACLA document: just like the Levin Report of 1965 and the Greene Report of 1975, the 1993 Bernheimer Report is unavoidably the product of a particular generation of comparativists (see Greene). There has clearly been a generational shift from the North Americanization of the work of those post-war European émigré philologists and literary historians through to the domestication of what was called "theory" when

¹ This piece was written primarily in response to the American Comparative Literature Association's 1993 "Bernheimer" Report entitled "Comparative Literature at the Turn of the Century" and to the book of replies to it, *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, which I have reviewed in more detail in *World Literature Today* 69.2 (1995): 299-303.