# Will Comparative Literature Survive The Globalization of the University and the New Regime of Telecommunications?

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## ABSTRACT

This paper will discuss the challenges to comparative literature as a discipline brought about by the globalization of economies and universities, the decline of the nation-state, the new regime of telecommunications, and the rise of cultural studies. In particular the question will be how comparative literature can avoid the Scylla of becoming "world literature" or "world cultural studies," on the one hand, and on the other hand the Charybdis of remaining blithely Eurocentric. The argument will be that the key to an answer to this question lies in maintaining linguistic, literary and cultural expertise as the center of the discipline. The difficulty, of course, will be to train teachers and scholars adept both in European languages and East Asian, subcontinental Indian or African languages. The danger, as always, is that comparative literature, with the best will in the world, will continue in spite of itself to perpetuate and extend the cultural imperialism of the United States and Europe. It has to become a two-way comparative discipline in which neither side is hegemonic. This is by no means easy to accomplish.

## KEY WORDS

comparative literature
Globalization
paradigm shift
Cultural Studies
Walter Benjamin
multiculturalism
translation
Eurocentricim
Hegel

I speak in this essay from my subject position as a United States citizen and as a professor at a Pacific Rim research university, the University of California at Irvine. I hope that my listeners or readers will detect a certain note of irony in my iteration of the phrase "make California competitive in the global economy." As the later sections of my paper I hope indicate, I think true literary study is not assimilable to that utilitarian or practical goal, however much it may be bent to seem to help fulfill it.

The obvious answer to the question in my title is, "Yes, of course." Literary study, including comparative literature, is massively institutionalized in our colleges and universities. Thousands of professors have been trained and are still being trained to study literature and to teach the study of literature. Literary study seems to be safely and solidly ensconced in the curriculum. The other, equally obvious, answer is, "No; by no means." In spite of the inertia that will keep what we have called literary study going for a few more years, the handwriting is on the wall. Literary study's time is up. Manifold changes are making it more and more obsolete, at least as it used to be organized, that is, as the study of canonical works, categorized by nationality and by chronological "periods," approached more or less thematically, without much exigent theoretical reflection, as an intimate part of the culture within which we dwell, *chez nous*, like bees in a honeycomb.

A massive paradigm shift is under way that will radically restructure literary study and make it no more than a component in new disciplinary configurations. This shift will of course occur according to different rhythms in different universities, or in different depart-

ments in the same university, or in different countries, but what is happening is irreversible. As Alan Liu observes, "literature" is "a category that has increasingly lost its distinction on the unbounded plane of cultural 'discourse,' 'textuality,' 'information,' 'phrase regimes,' and 'general literature.'" Cultural studies, as Liu puts it, "make literature seem just one of many equipollent registers of culture and multiculture—no more or less splendid, say, than the everyday practices of dressing, walking, cooking, or quilting."

Just what is bringing about these radical changes? Certain ambient factors define the placement of literary study today, just as a person's "subject position" defines the context within which he or she must act. That does not mean that we are helpless to take charge and determine the way things happen. We can devise new disciplinary configurations that will make for social amelioration, for example the empowering of women and minorities. I can choose to a considerable degree what and how I teach and do research. The circumambient changes do mean, however, that such acts will take place within the given context, in all its overdetermined, heterogeneous and fluid complexity.

What are the salient features of this new context? Some are outside the university, some within it. The development of a strong new theoretical reflection about literature, among other topics, by Bahktin, Benjamin, Blanchot, Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, de Man, Jameson, and all the rest of that bunch (we know their names) was, in part, a response to a dislocation of literature that was already taking place even before World War II with the rise of a cinema and then television-dominated culture. Instead of using literature or being used by it, unreflectively, we could now hold it at arm's length and think about it, "mention" it rather than "use" it or be used by it. In part, however, the new theoretical reflection itself brought about the displacement or marginalization of literature rather than simply mirroring it. The rise of cultural studies, impossible without that prior theoretical reflection, even though it often seems hostile to it, has delivered the second blow in the one-two punch that has knocked out old-fashioned literary study. For both theory and cultural studies literature is seen "criti-

cally," as a detached object of "study," in one way or another denatured. Seen this way, literature is deprived of the power it would have if it were taken for granted as an intimate part of a single homogeneous culture within which the citizens of a given nation live. To see literature "critically" may mean to "deconstruct" it by seeing the way it exemplifies certain theoretical presuppositions, or it may mean to see, critically, the way literature reinforces and creates an ideology—sexist, racist, nationalist, or classist. This ideology is contested through the performative effects of its study.

We live now, as most people know, in the time of the end of the Cold War and the globalization of economies. All the economies of the world are intertwined in new ways that have partly to do with the way markets are global, not national, just as corporations are now often transnational, not national, partly with the way financial transactions and investments are globally intertwined. Events in world stock markets in recent years have made this clear. Globalization would also have been impossible without the new speed of communication and transportation. Now it is feasible to make something anywhere in the world, wherever labor is cheapest, and sell it anywhere else. The United States economy is dependent on the global economy. If economies around the world become depressed, then the global economy in which we want to be competitive no longer offers such clear opportunities to get rich.

The end of the Cold War means that United States colleges and universities no longer have as their primary mission to make the United States better able to defeat the "Evil Empire." This now vanished mission included not only the technological side of university teaching and research but also the humanities. The National Endowment for the Humanities was explicitly founded by Congress to make the United States better in the humanities than the Soviet Union. We must be better than they in everything. Now the United States university's mission, especially the mission of "research universities," is to help make the United States competitive in the global economy. This change is strikingly clear in statements by Pete Wilson, Governor of California, and Richard C. Atkinson, University of California's presi-

dent. In presenting his proposals for the California 1996-7 budget, Wilson said, "California universities and colleges have long been revered as the finest institutions in the world. Like the pioneers, entrepreneurs, and innovators who made California a land where any dream is possible, our institutions of higher learning are carrying on that tradition by preparing our students to compete and win in the global marketplace." Atkinson echoed Wilson almost word for word: "I applaud the governor's recognition of the important role higher education plays in preparing a skilled workforce for competition in the global marketplace and the important role UC [the nine campuses of the University of California] plays in a healthy California economy."

More recent actions by President Atkinson's office are carrying out that mission by focusing more and more on developing throughout the University of California system partnerships with technology companies, pharmaceutical companies and the like, often companies that are transnational in scope. The recently announced "UC Biotechnology STAR Project" is a good example of this. Its goals are: "To foster and support meritorious research in biotechnology that is jointly funded by Bio Star and private sponsors, and to build lasting university/industry linkages that will enhance the State's biotechnology enterprise; to position California for international competitiveness in emerging areas of biotechnology and to seek solutions to important problems; to enhance the technology transfer process in order to speed delivery of public benefits from University research; to assess and communicate the impact of biotechnology research and training in the public arena." That is what I mean by the globalization of the research university. Such universities no longer so much serve the national government through grants from the NSF or NIH, but serve more and more transnational companies that pay for the research, then develop and market the results of research. This new orientation for the research university means a shift away from the disinterested search for knowledge, what used to be called, in Germany at least, *Wissenschaft*, to research that will produce marketable products, products that will help make us competitive in the global

economy. United States universities are no longer so much covertly part of the military-industrial complex as they were during the Cold War. They are now overtly part of a global technology complex.

What, one might ask, will be the role in this new university of comparative literature, of literary study, or of the humanities generally, cultural studies, for example, if that is a "humanity," as opposed to a social science? (I think myself it is a hybrid, partly a humanity, partly a social science; no shame in that.) The answer, I believe, is that the utility of such study will no longer be measured so much by its contribution to ideological indoctrination in national values (our traditional version of the Arnoldian goal to take possession of the best that has been known and thought in the world) as by its utility in helping us understand our own country and all the others around the globe better so we can "be competitive in the global economy." Just how the study of *Beowulf* or Shakespeare will aid United States economic imperialism is not immediately apparent. Certainly the changes will give the study of English literature a radically different function from the older one that saw Shakespeare as part of our cultural heritage and as necessary knowledge for all good citizens of the United States so we could stand up against communism. One of the strange anomalies of literary study in the United States is that until recently at least it was focused primarily on the literature of a foreign country that happens to speak the same language many of us do, but that was a nation we defeated over two hundred years ago in a revolutionary war of independence. English literature was our basic resource for "Bildung" or education in national values. In this respect at least, we went on acting like a colony for two hundred years after we ceased to be a colony. All that is rapidly changing now.

British literature, it appears to me, will and should become gradually more marginal in United States universities. This will happen both as British literary study becomes justified as part of "European studies," that is, studies whose bottom line is helping us to understand Europe, including England, better, so we can do better business with them, and as English literature departments gradually become, as I think they should, places where world literature in English

is studied, that is, New Zealand, Australian, African, Indian, and East Asian literatures written in some version of the English language. That broadening should also take place, of course, in the context of an expansion to make literature in English part of cultural studies generally in a global context. Much of this expansion would be part of Pacific Rim Studies or African Studies or South Asian Studies.

At the same time the study of American literature in English should in my view become, as it is already fast becoming, part of a separate enterprise studying American culture generally, in all its multilingual complexity. This should include not only literature by women and minorities, but United States cultural studies generally, study of popular culture, the literature people really read, that is, romances, detective stories, and the like, the study of film, television, popular music, and so on. This new or expanded discipline would also need to study our interface or overlapping with neighboring national cultures, Canada, Mexico, Cuba, Latin America generally. The skilled workforce needed to make us competitive in the global economy will need to have a knowledge of our own culture in all its diversity, including at least some of the many languages besides English our citizens speak.

Finally, I believe that we shall in coming years have so much interaction with East Asian countries, increasingly China as it becomes the world's biggest economy, and will have in addition so many citizens who have Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Thai, Vietnamese, and the rest, as primary languages that study of one or more of these languages with their associated literatures and cultures should be a requirement in our schools and universities. If I had my life to live over again, I would make learning Chinese a high priority or would hope someone made it a high priority for me, especially if I lived in California or anywhere else on the Pacific Rim. The English-only movement is suicidal if our goal is really to make California competitive in the global economy. This study of East Asian languages and literatures would for the most part be a component of Pacific Rim Studies.

European Studies, American Studies, Pacific Rim Studies, Afri-

can Studies—literary study in a much changed mode will, it appears to me, best survive in the new globalized university as a part of such new configurations. These will seem to have pragmatic value to those scientists, technicians, and bureaucrats who, to a considerable degree, run the university and to those corporate sponsors who to a considerable degree pay for it. The present configuration of departments does not any longer have a persuasive rationale.

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Another factor is, however, also transforming literary study. This is the advent of new forms of telecommunications: computers, modems, e-mail, the Internet, the World Wide Web, satellite TV, literature on line and in databases, computerized library access. Most of us have had our work already radically affected by these new technologies. I claim, however, that the changes do more than facilitate a study of literature that can be carried on more or less according to traditional methods and goals, just with more easily available facilities. Literature itself is being changed by the new regime of telecommunications.

The transformations now being wrought by new communications technologies in shaping the postcolonial, postnational, global university are hard to define and understand, partly because we are in the midst of them. The digital revolution now going on, however, is clearly as radical and as irreversible as the move from a manuscript to a print culture. Email, faxes, computerized library catalogues, composition on the computer rather than in longhand or on the typewriter, the increasing use of computers and networks in instruction, therefore often as a commercial venture, the availability online of more and more material, the move from linear print media to multimedia hypertext, online publishing of articles and monographs that is altering the way research results are disseminated—all these are rapidly and irrevocably transforming the way teachers and students of literature (and of other humanistic disciplines) do their work.

The most dramatic and spectral effect, however, is the hardest to

see, understand, and gauge. This is the change effected in the objects of our study by their digitizing. What is the difference between reading, say, Henry James's *The Golden Bowl* in a printed copy and as a cybertext downloaded into my desktop or laptop? At first there might seem to be little difference beyond the not unimportant one of the ability to "search," extract from, and otherwise manipulate the cybertext version. I claim, on the contrary, that the difference is radical and profound, no less than a transformation of the literary object's mode of existence. Understanding, even in a preliminary way, this change may help us to see why the information model does not apply to all those literary works that are circulating through cyberspace at the speed of light, located everywhere and nowhere as so many black holes in the presumed transparency of information networks. Much is made these days of problems of security on the Internet and of the need for strong cryptography as against the government's desire to have the keys to all encrypting programs. Literary works continue to hide their secrets, however, secrets as dark as death, even if they are totally exposed and made public, universally available all over the world to anyone with a computer, a modem, and a service provider. Paradoxically, the new digitized existence only makes more evident, if we have eyes to see it, eyes to see what cannot be seen, what was perhaps more hidden in print versions, that is, the way literary works hide what I call black holes.

Walter Benjamin recognized that new media are radically transformative. He applied this insight to the analysis of photography and cinema under the name of "the age of technical reproducibility." Print too, as we perhaps tend to forget, is also a form of technical reproducibility, but the effects of reproducibility are, it may be, more evident in the instantaneous flash of the camera shutter that produces a negative giving a spectral, endlessly repeatable life to what is already dead in the instant it is preserved. What is photographed is killed and given an indefinite afterlife of survival in the act of clicking that camera shutter. Eduardo Cadava, in a brilliant book on Benjamin and photography, *Words of Light*, has identified the political and social implications of photography for Benjamin. Speaking of Benjamin's

figure of a "caesura in the movement of thought" in the "Theses on the Concept of History," Cadava says, "This caesura—whose force of immobilization not only gives way to the appearance of an image but also intervenes in the linearity of history and politics—can be understood in relation to what we might call the photograph's Medusa effect."

Our time of computers, of an unimaginable chaos of digitized images and texts accessible on the Internet, is the age of technological reproducibility with a vengeance, that age squared or cubed, hyperbolically or exponentially expanded and so transformed, taken beyond the threshold or limit of "technischen Reproduzierbarkeit." Digitizing, that melts down the distinction between image and text, produces images/texts that are much more fleeting and ubiquitous than a photograph. They bring even more into the open the other side of Benjamin's sense of the photograph as instantaneous: its way of giving a ghostly and spectral persistence, everywhere and nowhere, a life after death to what has been "shot." Literature has always had a strange connection to ghosts, to death, and to survival after death, but this has tended to be sidestepped in much literary study. To read *The Golden Bowl* is to encounter the traces of James's dictating voice, a little like Tennyson's voice or Browning's on one of those primitive phonograph records, voices that truly sound as if they were coming from the grave, voices of the shuttle weaving a shroud. The new digitized mode of existence for literary works in databases and on the Internet turns those works into an innumerable murmurous swarm of ghosts that return and can return again at our command, like those shades from the underworld that rise for Ulysses in Book Eleven of *The Odyssey*, or like the recorded sounds of Glenn Gould playing Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier* back in the 1960's, which I am listening to on my computer at this moment. (I leave it to you to establish the referent of "at this moment" and "I" in that sentence.)

My claim is that this new digitized existence will change literature and literary study in manifold and as yet unforeseen ways. I would go so far as to say that it will transform, is already transforming, the concept of literature or of literarity, killing literature and

giving it a new existence as the survivor of itself. Students of literature will and should remain as the guardians and surviving witnesses of previous historical epochs, just as classicists bear witness to what was the nature and function of Greek tragedy within a vanished classical culture. Literature as we know it, as Jacques Derrida has argued, is inextricably associated with democracy, that is, with freedom of speech, the freedom to say or to write anything and everything (never completely obtained, of course). Even the concept of free speech, I add, is being changed by the electronic revolution. "Literature" is also, I further assert, concomitant with industrialization prior to the electronic revolution, with the age, now coming to an end, of the printed book, and with Cartesian and post-Cartesian conceptions of selfhood, along with associated notions of representation and of "reality." All these are intertwined and mutually self-sustaining factors. Literature as a distinctive way to use language arises not from any special way of speaking or writing, but from the possibility of taking any piece of language whatsoever as fictional or, on the other hand, as possibly truth-telling, as referential in the ordinary sense. This "taking" happens according to complex historically determined conventions, codes, and protocols. That neat opposition between fiction and truth-telling is a feature of print culture. In the digitized world of the Internet the distinction breaks down or is transformed, just as it has already been transformed by television. In television advertising cannot always be distinguished from news, and wars like Somalia and the Gulf War are presented as media spectacles, not all that different from war movies.

Alan Liu's forthcoming *The Future Literary: Literary History and Postmodern Culture* is a brilliant and fascinating discussion of the influence of computer technology and its graphic layouts on the presentation of new multicultural American literary histories or anthologies such as the *Heath Anthology of American Literature*, Paul Lauter, gen. ed., 2nd ed. (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1994), and *American Mosaic: Multicultural Readings in Context*, compiled by Barbara Roche Rico and Sandra Mano (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991). Computer screen layouts also give us new models by means of which to understand literature of the past, as well as new ways to

model literary history. The computer-adept person, I am arguing, will read literature of the past differently and think of its relation to other cultural artifacts differently.

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If there were time I would exemplify this by showing how the easy availability on the Web of Whistler's *The Little White Girl* and the easy possibility of manipulating the digital image to make close-ups and show details transforms the reader's sense of Swinburne's "Before the Mirror," a poem about the painting, whose subtitle is "(Verses Written Under a Picture)." The poem is also available on the Internet to those whose universities have subscribed to Chadwick-Healey databases. But there is not time. It is not the time. This is just the point of this brief paper. There is never time any more, for example here and now in a lecture like this one, to study literature "for itself," detached from theoretical or political reflection. It would be anachronistic to do so. I doubt very much if it will ever again be time or if there will ever again be time. There is never time any more for literary study. Its time is up. This gives yet another meaning, or perhaps the same one, to Hegel's famous dictum that art is a thing of the past: "*In allen diesen Beziehungen ist und bleibt die Kunst nach der Seite ihrer höchsten Bestimmung für uns ein Vergängenes* (In all these respects art, as far as its highest determination [or calling] is concerned—is and remains for us a thing of the past [*ein Vergängenes*—a something past, a past thing [Warminski trans.])." This means too, although Hegel did not quite know it, that art, including literature as a form of art, is always also a thing of the future. It never quite successfully gets spirit into sensuous form so we can get on to the end of getting spirit into spiritual form. It is never time yet for art and literature. We dwell, as far as literature and literary study is concerned, in that perpetual in between, always too late and always too early, untimely.

To shift, on Hegel's back, so to speak, to a slightly different register, I assert that there never has been time for literary study. It

was never the right time for it. Literary study always was, is now, and always will be untimely. Literature is a name for that component in sign systems in whatever medium or mode that is incapable of being rationalized in any form of collective, institutionalized, pragmatically valuable study in the university, whether in the old Cold War university or in the new global university with new departmental configurations now coming into being. This means that "literary study" is an oxymoron. What this oxymoron names will continue to take place, whenever it does, if it does, in odd moments stolen from more practical concerns, such as making California competitive in the global economy. Literary study's time is always up. It will survive as it has always survived, as a ghostly revenant, as a somewhat embarassing or alarming spectral visitant at the feast of reason. Literature is potholes in the Information Superhighway, black holes in the Internet Galaxy. Nevertheless, though there's never time, though it's never the time, these holes, potholes or black holes, "literature" as survivor, as a feature of absolute singularity within any cultural forms in whatever medium, will continue to demand urgently to be "studied," here and now, within whatever new institutional and departmental configurations we devise and within whatever new regime of telecommunications we inhabit.

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## Comparing Everything

The displacement of language-based theory by cultural studies is evident everywhere in humanities departments of Western universities. One place where it can be clearly seen is in the "Bernheimer Report" of the American Comparative Literature Association, "Comparative Literature at the Turn of the Century" (1993). This report proposes that a new discipline of comparative literature should replace both (1) the old-fashioned, Eurocentric, pre-1975 form of comparative literature that set canonical works from European and United States national literatures side by side to "compare" them, and also (2) the theory-based and reading-based comparative literature of the

1970s and 1980s. For these should be substituted a form of cultural studies that will compare cultures by juxtaposing many kinds of artifacts and forms of behavior—works verbal, visual, and aural, as well as dress, habits of walking, and so on. Comparative literature will now study film, popular literature, popular music, advertising, et al., alongside examples of what has traditionally been thought of as "literature." The Bernheimer Report has accepted so completely the current project of cultural studies that it might be taken as an excellent description of that project, with a slight emphasis on the comparative aspect. Comparison, however, is always a part of cultural studies, even outside comparative literature departments. Here is what the report says about "the space of comparison today":

> The space of comparison today involves comparisons between artistic productions usually studied by different disciplines; between various cultural constructions of those disciplines; between Western cultural traditions, both high and popular, and those of non-Western cultures; between the pre- and postcontact cultural productions of colonized peoples; between gender constructions defined as feminine and those defined as masculine, or between sexual orientations defined as straight and those defined as gay; between racial and ethnic modes of signifying; between hermeneutic articulations of meaning and materialist analyses of its modes of production and circulation; and much more. These ways of contextualizing literature in the expanded fields of discourse, culture, ideology, race, and gender are so different from the old models of literary study according to authors, nations, periods, and genres that the term "literature" may no longer adequately describe our object of study.

"The term 'literature' may no longer adequately describe our object of study!" You can say that again. This explosion of the discipline of comparative literature, leaving it commissioned to study just

about everything human, therefore nothing definite, parallels the similar explosion of English departments. By including everything listed here ("and much more"), the new comparative literature will marginalize literature, to say the least. It will compare everything that can be labelled "culture," in a self-enclosed circling, just as Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, in Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, was, in Carlyle's quaint spelling, a professor of *Allerley-Wissenschaft* at the University of Weissnichtwo.

What is disappearing in the new comparative literature, as in many other forms of cultural studies, is the emphasis on reading that was so important a feature in theory of the 1970s and 1980s. In place of an exigent theoretical attention to reading is put an assumption of the "translatability," without significant loss, of cultural meanings from one language to another, one medium to another, one discipline to another. A strenuous rejection of translation was a keystone of the older comparative literature. This was the case even though the rejection of translation was to a considerable degree bogus. Comparative literature as a discipline has tended to express the linguistic imperialism of one or another single language: American English, for example, in the United States, or French in the case of the comparative literature of René Tiemble in Paris. The comparatist knows many languages, but can translate them all into the dominant language he or she uses. This is the case, for example, with René Wellek's "monumental" history of modern criticism. The implicit claim is, "Trust me. I know all these languages and can translate texts from all into English for you. You can forget that they were originally written in German, Russian, Polish, Czech, or whatever. I have given the originals in a subordinate place in case you want to look them up, but problems of untranslatability have largely been circumvented by my own mastery of all these languages. I am the relay station within which all these other languages are turned into English."

For the new cultural studies form of "comparative literature," however, translation has a new meaning. It has to do not so much with finding equivalents in one language for expressions in another but rather with the carrying over of an entire other culture or disci-

pline into one's own. About turning the other into the same there would be much to say. Here is what the Bernheimer report says about translation:

> While the necessity and unique benefits of a deep knowledge of foreign languages must continue to be stressed, the old hostilities toward translation should be mitigated. In fact, translation can well be seen as a paradigm for larger problems of understanding and interpretation across different discursive traditions. Comparative Literature, it could be said, aims to explain both what is lost and what is gained in translations between the distinct value systems of different cultures, media, disciplines, and institutions. Moreover, the comparatist should accept the responsibility of locating the particular place and time at which he or she studies these practices. Where do I speak from, and from what tradition(s), or countertraditions? How do I translate Europe or South America or Africa into a North American cultural reality, or, indeed, North America into another cultural context? (44)

Just by being who and where we are, the Bernheimer report assumes, we translate all the time. Remembering vigilantly my own "subject position" will more or less handle whatever lingering problems of translation may remain.

*Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, the volume that contains the Bernheimer report and a series of essays in response to it, registers the agony, in the sense of death throes, of the traditional discipline of comparative literature as it melts into being just another form of cultural studies. I doubt if this process can or should be stopped. It constitutes a necessary moment of evolution in the United States university. It testifies to world-wide changes that prohibit a return to older forms of literary study. The old Eurocentric comparative literature, like the traditional separate study of European national literatures, will continue for a time, overlapping with the new

work in cultural studies and with the various regional studies disciplines into which cultural studies may and ought to evolve, but its death-knell is ringing. The Bernheimer report is an obituary only slightly premature. Nostalgia for the old privileged place of literature is expressed in some of the essays in the volume containing the Bernheimer report, those, for example, by Peter Brooks, Michael Riffaterre, and Jonathan Culler—all older white males, like me. Nostalgia, however, will in this case butter no parsnips.

Comparative Literature as a discipline is caught at this moment between Scylla and Charybdis, two alternatives almost equally dangerous. One is to move, as is widely happening just now, back to "world literature" as a paradigm. Many new courses are springing up with that title, usually at the undergraduate level. What begins as a trend in undergraduate courses, however, will soon begin to deflect graduate preparation. Someone with authority and training has to teach those courses in world literature. The more or less insuperable problems are easy to see. It is unlikely that anyone will ever be competent in "world literature," that is, know enough languages, literatures, and cultures to be competent in all the literatures of the world, even just the major ones. The most likely form such courses will take, even if they are taught by people who have the best will in the world, is an invidious selection of old or new chestnuts, taught in English translation by people who do not know all the original languages. To represent Chinese "literature," for example, by selections from *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (*The Story of the Stone*) and a handful of lyrics from the *Classic of Poetry* would be like representing English literature by a few scenes from *Hamlet* plus a few short poems by Wordsworth. The synecdochic ratio is too large. So much is represented by so little that it is hardly representative at all. Stephen Owen's admirable *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911* (New York: Norton, 1996) is twelve hundred pages long and is still controversial both in the choices made and in the translations themselves. Moreover, with the best will in the world, courses in "world literature," in the West at least, are almost certain to be Eurocentric or United States-centric, partly because they are taught in

English, thereby perpetuating, however inadvertently, the ideological assumption that anything can be translated, more or less without loss, into English, partly because the concepts about literature and reading that underlie courses in world literature are almost certain to be Eurocentric. The notion of "literature," as we know it in the West, is an overdetermined, historically conditioned concept, hardly more than two or three hundred years old. It is not even appropriate for so-called Renaissance literature, much less for Greek tragedy. The Chinese, it might be argued, have never had "literature" in just our sense, nor are the protocols for reading Wordsworth and the *Classic of Poetry* the same. These differences are not trivial or superficial.

The Charybdis for the new comparative literature is almost as dangerous. This would consist of adding specialists, say, in Chinese or Japanese or Arabic or subcontinental Indian literature to those specialists in European and American languages and literatures that make up most departments of Comparative Literature. The problems with this are easy to see. The old Eurocentric Comparative Literature made sense as a discipline because graduate dissertation committees, for example, could be made up of professors all presumed to be competent in all the languages and literatures covered in the dissertation. The case is different when, as is often the case nowadays, the committee is made up, for example, of several professors who know European languages but not Chinese plus one specialist in Chinese. The latter is more likely to know European languages and methodologies than the former are likely to know Chinese, but the old rule that all the committee members have at least minimum competence in all of the work covered in the dissertation is in such cases broken. The methodologies employed in such cases, moreover, the "literary theory" presupposed, are likely to remain determinedly European or United Statesian. In the long run both the Scylla and Charybdis of the new Comparative Literature will most likely become, with the best will in the world, just one more example of United States intellectual imperialism, its domination of the new processes of globalization through making English a universal language.

What is to be done to avoid these bad alternatives? I shall, in

conclusion, make ten suggestions for a global comparative literature in the form of aphorisms, not presented in any particular causal or dialectical order, but pell-mell, though they are interconnected. Each demands an extensive commentary.

It is better to read and teach *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (*The Story of the Stone*) in translation than not to read it at all.

All texts should be read and taught in their original languages.

The question of translation is the central problematic in comparative literature.

These first three assertions mean that if there are to be courses in world literature, they should be team taught, even if entirely in translation, by those who, in each case, are expert in the language, literature, and culture of the original text. By calling attention to problems of translation such teachers can entice students, some students at least, to study the original languages. Comparative literature will therefore be more and more the guardian and justifier of foreign language study at a time when, in the United States at least, foreign language study within departments organized by nation states is conspicuously weakening, for example by being amalgamated, absurdly, into one single "Department of Foreign Languages."

Comparative literature, though it is not a social science and will destroy itself if it becomes one, should nevertheless learn from the social sciences, especially anthropology. One thing it can learn is the responsibility to acquire, by hook or by crook, the languages of the cultures studied, however exotic or out of the way they may be. The institutionalized protocols of anthropology show this can be done.

Cultural studies in the humanities is a temporary, though

necessary and inevitable, stage on the way to new forms of global comparative literature.

A major error of comparative literature as traditionally institutionalized has been to accept more or less at face value the traditional organization of literary study according to the presumed separateness and monolithic unity of nation states and their literatures. Comparative literature has, for example, compared Bulgarian with Outer Mongolian literature as though each of those were a homogeneous monolingual entity. One advance made by cultural studies has been to recognize that each nation state tends to be endlessly subdivided within itself, to be multilingual, multicultural, multiethnic, hybridized. Comparative literature must become a form of "glocalization," intranational as well as transnational. It must compare different literatures in different languages within a given nation state as well as bringing non-European countries within the space of comparison. The new American Studies is actually a branch of comparative literature.

All texts should be read on their own terms, that is, with language derived from the text itself and according to methodologies of reading and assumptions about literature derived from the culture in which the text was originally embedded. Chinese "literature" should be read in the light of Chinese "poetics," not have Western theory imposed on it, as I am doing at this moment by using the words "literature" and "poetics."

Eclecticism in methodology and critical theory is a hideous vice in comparative literature. No good work was ever done by someone pretending to be a Bakhtinian or a Marxist or a deconstructionist. The imposture will be instantly unmasked. You must do comparative literature with your whole heart. A critical methodology or particular habit of reading is

a vocation. No sane man or woman can have more than one vocation at a time, any more than he or she can have more than one beloved at a time.

Although a given critical theory or methodology is universalizable, able to be appropriated by others, institutionalized, and translated, what is most valuable in a given critic or scholar is a distinctive tone or note that is unique to him or her and cannot be successfully imitated. This means that other critics should be read as literature, with the same care, the same attention to detail. Any critic not worth such careful reading is not worth reading. It is better to spend one's time reading primary works in their original languages. In fact that is better *tout court*.