

Global Comparative Literature: An Introduction

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There is general agreement that the modern discipline of Comparative Literature was founded in the United States after World War Two and that its most prominent early practitioners were political exiles who were comfortable in reading and often writing in two or more European languages as well as engaging the English literature of their host nation. The second generation of Comparative Literature scholars tried to follow in their footsteps, especially so far as the emphasis on languages was concerned, but they also tried to break away from the heavy emphasis on the classics of European literature which had been a feature of the work of the first generation. As that second generation now trains its successors, the world is a very different place both in terms of the literature studied and the approaches that are used to study it. National economies, while they have a local importance, are now part of a global flow of capital, raw materials and finished goods. In literary studies in English, postcolonial studies opened the way for the margins to write back to the center. In the global literary world, the margins have become part of the center. This year at Purdue University for the first time in its history, students from Indiana are a minority in terms of total numbers enrolled, the new majority coming from other parts of the United States and from overseas. These global flows are reflected in the way Comparative Literature is practiced here, and this module of essays by faculty and graduate students in Comparative Literature and English, though neither comprehensive nor paradigmatic, is a glimpse into how some of this research from a global perspective is being carried out.

The opening essay by Charles Ross begins by acknowledging the changes that a global literary imagination implies although the essay itself can be seen as operating within the parameters of traditional comparative Literature scholarship. The same can be said of the essay by Russell Keck on Charles Dickens which follows. They remind us that whatever innovations there are in terms of subject matters and interpretive approaches, there is always room for scholarship that the founding practitioners of

Comparative Literature would have recognized by those who comfortable in working in multiple languages and literary periods. The essays by Natalia Oliviera on Clarice Lispector and Carolina de Jesus and on Xu Jinglei's film *Go Lala Go!* by Jinua Li, are examples of the global approach to Comparative literature referred to above, in which the study of literature and film is fully internationalized. Dana Roder's essay on Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* takes us back to sixteenth-century England as seen from a twenty-first century perspective. The concluding two essays address each in its own way the changing nature of "literature" in the contemporary world. Bryan Nakawaki considers one aspect of the new digital reality by investigating the nature of a text when it is marketed as an audio-book and arguing that this presentation too is to be considered a performance. And the final essay by Sharon Solwitz studies how a conventional print author attempts to achieve a fusion between the linear presentation of a literary text and the visual and aural realities of the contemporary world which are sometimes seen as a threat to the culture of print.

This then is the face of Global Comparative Literature. And since English is now truly a global language, English is the language most widely chosen the research in this area, although this does not have to be, as there are flourishing traditions of Comparative Literature, conferences, journals, blogs, in any number of national languages. Finally the "comparative" part of Comparative Literature is not just confined to traditional print media, but also embraces the modern information producing technologies which are part of our contemporary experience.