

## Comparative Literature versus Comparative Cultural Studies

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**"Comparative Literature versus Comparative Cultural Studies"**

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**Abstract:** In his paper, "Comparative Literature versus Comparative Cultural Studies," Tomo Virk discusses debates of the role, essence, and the future of comparative literature as it has developed since the 1995 publication of the *Bernheimer Report*. Virk explores the situation of the discipline in its North American context: "contextualists" argue for the abandoning of comparative literature understood as the study of literature with theoretical investigations of literariness while the "non-contextualists" underscore the study of the linguistic structure(s) of the text. Virk supports comparative literature understood as the traditional concentration of the discipline with focus on the specificities of literary questions while supplementing this focus with the discoveries of new theoretical frameworks and he suggests to maintain the investigation of literariness as a standard of the discipline but that is conditioned culturally. In the second part of his paper, Virk discusses the notion of "comparative cultural studies" -- a notion proposed, among others, notably by Canadian comparatist Steven Totosy de Zepetnek -- and puts forward the argument that the drawing of cultural studies to comparative literature would evoke fatal consequences for comparative literature as a discipline. While it is clear that under the current circumstances comparative literature is in need to function pragmatically, in the last instance comparative literature would self-destruct by a striving for social relevance and institutional assertions for survival. Virk concludes by drawing attention to the possibilities of the further development of comparative literature as an independent discipline for the future.

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**Tomo Virk**

### **Comparative Literature versus Comparative Cultural Studies**

"If Comparative Literature willingly continues to change, as it has often done in the past, and shows itself open to diversity and innovation in objects and methods of inquiry, then the future is not behind us" (Dimic 7). This sober statement by Milan V. Dimic bears witness to good historical memory about the scholarly field of comparative literature, one that on the one hand has gone through many a paradigm shift while on the other hand allowing for a conjecture that the self-confidence of comparative literature, together with literary theory in general, has been in recent times time more seriously shaken than in its previous crises. In comparison with certain movements that have marked the discipline significantly in the last decade or two, its previous principal problems and dilemmas appear almost minimal if not trivial. This time it is not a question of an affiliation with this or that school of thought or methodology but, rather, it is a question of the very existence of the discipline. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the past decade has been a period of extremely intense deliberations on the essence, the sense, the foundations, the construction, and the future of the discipline.

The notion of a crisis of comparative literature is not a geographically proportionately allocated one. In terms of the institutional level in continental Europe (not to mention other regions), the crisis is somewhat less intense than in the USA, Canada, or, to certain extent, in Great Britain. The collections of essays, monographs, or scholarly meetings in the Anglo-American world which in the last decade have dealt with general as well as theoretical and methodological questions of comparative literature can hardly avoid these problems. However, Europe, too, has not remained immune to this crisis. Some more recent works, such as Peter Zima's collection *Vergleichende Wissenschaften* (2000) or Armando Gnisci's *Introduzione alla letteratura comparata* (1999), show that European -- or any other, for that matter -- comparative literature can no longer close its eyes to the questions raised by Anglo-American scholarship. By itself, that seems to be a sufficient enough reason for us to devote precise attention to them.

The mid-1990s were especially troubled for comparative literature on the Anglo-American landscape, particularly because of Susan Bassnett's *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* and the so-called *Bernheimer Report* of the ACLA: American Comparative Literature Association. Both texts, the study of the British scholar Bassnett and the US-American *Report* -- the latter in its spirit and style close to a manifesto -- contain most aspects of the current perspectives of the discipline. Moreover, they have won recognition as examples of the dissolution of comparative literature into translation studies on the one hand, and cultural studies on the other. Bassnett rejects traditional "Eurocentric" comparative literature and argues for "a post-European model of comparative literature, one that reconsiders key questions of cultural identity, literary canons, the political implication of cultural influence, periodization and literary history and firmly rejects the ahistoricity of the American school and of the formalist approach" (41) and Italian scholar Armando Gnisci formulates his views of the discipline similarly (see Gnisci 1996, 1999). Bassnett is aware of the decline of comparative literature in the West yet, simultaneously, of its rise on other continents and in Central and East Europe as well as the expansion of cultural studies (see Bassnett 41, 45; see also Tötösy 1998, 1999 <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol1/iss3/2/>>). In her chapter describing the relationship between comparative literature and cultural studies, Bassnett makes a statement that has been most frequently quoted in subsequent debates: "Today, comparative literature is in one sense dead" (47). This "in one sense" is of course aimed at "traditional" comparative literature. In its renewed form, according to Bassnett, comparative literature continues to exist under different guises such as gender studies, cultural studies, postcolonial studies, and translation studies.

The *Bernheimer Report* caused an even stronger reaction than Bassnett's provocative book. Despite its acclaim, some of its statements brought about intense reactions both affirmative as well as

critical. The basic informational setting of the text was obvious on the lexical level since, in comparison with the previous two reports of the ACLA, the prevalent term was in fact not "literature" but "culture." According to the authors' opinion in the *Report*, the comparing should also (if not above all) entail the comparing of different cultures. Still, the most polemically sharpened statements were the following: "the term 'literature' may no longer adequately describe our object of study ? Literary phenomena are no longer the exclusive focus of our discipline. Rather, literary texts are now being approached as one discursive practice among many others in a complex, shifting, and often contradictory field of cultural production" (42). Statements put forward so poignantly -- especially that "the term 'literature' may no longer adequately describe our object of study" -- could not stand without provoking a reaction. In the polemic following the *Report* was best documented first in Charles Bernheimer's edited volume *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* (1995) and of further interest in my discussion of the matter in the present paper are the thematic cluster *Comparative Literature: History and Contemporaneity*, edited by Milan V. Dimic and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek in the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* (1996), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *Death of a Discipline* (2003), Tötösy's edited volume *Comparative Literature and Comparative Cultural Studies* (2003) (see also Tötösy, Aoun, and Nielsen's bibliographies 2001- <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweblibrary/ccsbibliography>> and 2003). In my understanding, in the discussions the lines are drawn between "contextualists" and "non-contextualists" although between the two extremes there has always remained a space for the more conciliatory views.

In this polemic, the "contextualists" (e.g., Marie-Louise Pratt, Richard Cavell, Armando Gnisci, Manuela Mourao, Steven Tötösy, etc.) support the *Bernheimer Report* to various degrees and side with a changed comparative literature, such that corresponds to the "age of multiculturalism." Bernheimer himself, for example, substantiates the turning away from the investigation of literariness with the historical development of the field, namely that in the post-WWII period in the USA, comparative literature scholars concentrated on the "intrinsic," the immanent, and the rhetorical research of literature. However, during the 1980s, a shift occurred towards an "extrinsic" understanding of relations of literature, its placements within psychological, historical, or sociological contexts (see Hillis-Miller 102). Contextualization has become "the watchword of the most influential approaches to literature" (Bernheimer 1995, 8) and the turning away from literariness as an ontological category and the denouncing of the differences between literature and other cultural forms have become substantiated with historicism and cultural relativism: "To claim, as we do, that literature is one discursive practice among many is not to attack literature's specificity but to historicize it. Literature's identity, its difference from the nonliterary, cannot be established according to absolute standards" (Bernheimer 1995, 15). Such a view fits within the age of the prevalent paradigm of multiculturalism and is, of course, understandable. It is also the consequence of globalization, democratization, and decolonialization that necessarily demand the adaptation of comparative literature (see Pratt 59). Nevertheless, the experience shows that such an adaptation -- according to the inner logic of which the *Bernheimer Report* is also guilty -- consists of the fact that in the name of the field "comparative literature" only the "comparative" remains substantiated, whereas "literature" remains -- paradoxically and in contradiction with its grammatical value in the name -- only a coincidental attribute. Scholarship with such a discipline is not necessarily literary.

In turn, this extreme consequence has also influenced the comprehension of those statements in the *Bernheimer Report* which are themselves likely to be generally accepted; yet, in this particular light, are no longer. Such an emphasis on the contextualization of literature and the marginalization of literary scholarship (most of all the investigations of literariness) has triggered both the emotional and more poised responses predominantly by the *doyens* of the discipline such as Michael Riffaterre, Peter Brooks, Jonathan Culler, Marjorie Perloff, Milan V. Dimic, or Douwe Fokkema. They reject the contention that the investigation of literariness no longer represents a suitable object of comparative

literature while cautioning that such a viewpoint endangers the independence and, in the end, the existence of the discipline since it is threatened with being overcome by cultural studies. As a matter of fact, they do not deny the necessity of the dialogue of the comparative literature with other disciplines but maintain only that the centre of gravity should remain with the investigation of literature and of specific literary qualities (see, for example, Brooks 1995, 104).

Without any doubt, the *Bernheimer Report* instigated legitimately such a lively dialogue and, most importantly, the basic dilemma it exposed is of fundamental importance for the future of literary scholarship in general. Yet, that said, it cannot be reduced solely to the opposition between the contextualization and decontextualization of literary scholarship, between the investigation of specific, immanent literariness and connectedness of literature with culture and society; they are not necessarily mutually exclusive possibilities. Comparative literature dodged frequently enough such extremes and was simultaneously -- in the periods when its practitioners' attention was primarily devoted to the questions of literariness and the immanent structure of the literary text -- engaged in the perspectives of the contextualization of literature. The US-American school of the discipline understood comparative literature from the outset also as scholarship that maintains a continuous dialogue with other disciplines and "cultural discourses" and Jan Walsh Hokenson asserts: "Comparatists have always been deeply engaged in cross-cultural study ... concerning method, no comparatist to my knowledge has ever staked out disciplinary claim to a delimited body of knowledge. On the contrary, infinity or the global reach has been ... both the horror and the glory of comparative literature ... comparatists have long been examining such relationships between (national) social milieux and discourses" (68-70).

Therefore, even opponents of contextualization do not in fact object a dialogue with cultural discourses and agree that the claim can be made that comparative literature cannot be limited solely to literary theory. It would be absurd to try to isolate and protect it from new currents of thought, theoretical or applied. Contemporary "extrinsic" approaches that are favored by the *Bernheimer Report* are the consequence of the episteme of thought that necessarily influences traditional literary scholarship and comparative literature together with their concepts. Doubtlessly, this view reaches also into the investigation of literariness. On this basis and given the contemporary state of theory one can without any doubt agree in principle with Walter Moser who -- among the three possible ways of defining literariness, namely the essentialist-ontological, the functionalist, and the relational -- prefers the latter. In the same vein one could also agree with the definition of the aesthetic convention (e.g., Siegfried J. Schmidt) and with the psychological or sociological investigations of the phenomenon of literature that decidedly contextualize literariness. Yet, all these "new" views do not lessen the need for the specific literary-theoretical inquiries of literary scholars and in no way require a modification of the discipline that would compel the latter to renounce literature as the central and special object of its investigation and to join the sociology of literature and culture or the cultural studies. A scientific discipline in its broadest sense is doubtlessly defined by its central object of investigation (for example biology by all that is alive, physics by physical facts, sociology by social phenomena, literary scholarship by literature) but it is still defined and justified essentially as representatives even of diametrically opposing views about the discussed problematic content, primarily by the method and the modus operandi of process (see, e.g., Cavell 30; Fokkema 1996, 52-53; Tötösy 1998, 15). Literature can thus be the object of proceedings of sundry disciplines such as literary scholarship, philosophy, sociology, the sociology of culture, psychology, psychoanalysis, or even medicine; yet that does not mean that all these disciplines may merge or that any of them -- literary scholarship for example -- should become obsolete and, therefore, superfluous. Each of them treats its object in a different way. In exploring the literariness as the specificity of literature, the key role is still played by literary scholarship (see, e.g., Fokkema 1996, 53-54) or, with Rene Wellek's formulation from his celebrated lecture on the crisis of comparative literature: "literary scholarship will not make any progress, methodologically, unless it determines to study literature as a subject distinct from other

activities and products of man. Hence we must face the problem of 'literariness' the central issue of aesthetics, the nature of art and literature" (293).

After the realization about the constructive role of the cultural, historical, ideological, etc., context in the production of literariness, the latter of course cannot be investigated any longer in the same way as by early Russian formalism. Still, the notion of the "cultural relativity" and "constructedness" of literariness does not take away the literary scholar's work nor can it bring literary scholarship down to only "one of many cultural discourses." Fokkema brings to attention the literary works that survive the primary contextualization and maintain their high literary value in diverse historical, social, and cultural contexts, and develops an interesting model of literariness as the invariant with culturally modified variants (Fokkema 1996, 53 *et passim*). According to Fokkema's thought, it is in concepts such as "literariness" and "literary quality," in addition to a particular reading perception, that structural characteristics of the text find a way to participate (Fokkema 1996, 53). There are even more such complex, non-exclusive definitions of literariness that are aware of the contextual conditionality on the one hand, and the fact that a literary work of art represents a meeting of the reader *and* the text (i.e., Kant's *Ding an sich*) on the other. Marko Juvan, for example, defines literariness as an "effect of the text" that "originates in a complex (systemic) interaction of mental processes, metatexts, actions, and activities related to texts" (Juvan 2000

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol2/iss2/1/>> and 2003, 92). At the same time, it is also defined in the "physiognomy of the text itself" and understood "as a convention rising from the immanent characteristics of certain literary (classical, canonized, paradigmatic) texts" (Juvan 1997, 222). Yet, it is worth drawing attention to Dionyz Durisin's concept of interliterariness, which today is revitalized by Marián Gálík and meets with similar responses by other scholars such as Amiya Dev. These approaches showcase contemporary and scientifically grounded approaches that take fully into consideration new theoretical findings and include them successfully into literary scholarship without endangering its independence or existence. In my opinion, this conciliatory attitude appears today to be the most suitable answer to the essential professional dilemma introduced by the *Bernheimer Report* and an answer that places literary scholarship before new tasks, thereby defining its future. In this way, it has not yet depleted its internal resources. As in previous transformations of paradigms of thought, new theories and methods do not eliminate literary scholarship; rather, they supplement its "traditional" theoretical-methodological repertoire. Therefore, the real danger of these shifts does not threaten literary scholarship, as it seems, from the "the thing in itself" but, instead, from a heterogeneous source.

In such an open discipline as is comparative literature, the notion of crisis does not have a meaning that is defined in advance but, instead, the one ascribed to it by Paul de Man in his *Blindness and Insight*: crisis as the engine that propels the development of criticism. Consequently, this means that the questions posited in the *Bernheimer Report* may be understood as a positive impulse for the self-reflection of the discipline from which it appears stronger and, most of all, updated. The realization of a permanent crisis diminishes the momentous significance of some tendencies of the Anglo-American comparative literature from the *Bernheimer Report*. Even those authors who are most in favour of the modification of traditional comparative literature and suggest its soft transition, be it either into translation studies or into cultural studies, caution that from their perspective such a change is needed or occurs only in the traditional centres of the discipline (and even so more in the USA, Canada, and Great Britain than in continental Europe) but not elsewhere (in Central, East, or South Europe, in Asia, Africa, and in Australia) where comparative literature is in fullest bloom (see Bassnett, 5, 8, 37-38; Tötösy 1998, 14-15; 1999 <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol1/iss3/2/>>). In my opinion and perceived on the whole, comparative literature as a discipline is therefore not endangered. The shift into the dangerous vicinity of other disciplines is one of a more pragmatic nature, a tactical move of the "traditional centres" of the discipline, which they are forced into on the basis of their own social legitimization. Yet such a local restriction of the key contemporary problem of the discipline in a time

of general globalization is not only questionable but also, from the perspective of the "out-of-centre" or "peripheral" areas problematic. If one takes into consideration everything comparative literature has learned from theories of postcolonialism, multiculturalism, feminist theories, etc., then out of this emerges one of the deeper quandaries of the discipline that operates within the framework of the new paradigm and encourages -- as do the *Bernheimer Report*, Gnisci, Bassnett, Spivak, Tötösy, and many others -- its "decentralization" and "de-Europeanization." The division along the "centre in crisis" and the "fringes in bloom" seems (especially for thought schooled in multiculturalism and postcolonialism or feminist theory) only seemingly advantageous for the periphery but in reality arousing a well-founded suspicion that it is all about an internally contradictory reflex of multicultural ideology. By attributing a different status to the "centre" (itself) than to the "margin" (the Other, the periphery), by seeing itself as "truly problematic" in contrast to an almost idyllic picture of prosperity on the fringes, it will ascribe itself a higher level of reflection and thus naturally only strengthen its dominant position together with the Eurocentric discourse that it nominally rejects self-critically. The inner self-destructive quandary of this discourse shows distinctly that in order to follow the paradigmatic changes the "ideological-critical" readiness alone is not enough but it must be supplemented by a hermeneutic self-reflection, which is being in general demonstratively rejected by this orientation (see, for example, Manfred Schmelling about the damaging lack of consideration of the hermeneutic perspective in the discussion of intercultural questions).

The questions opened up by the *Bernheimer Report* are therefore in no way a privilege of only the traditional hubs of the discipline but are more of a principled nature, important for the self-reflection of comparative literature in general, and thus at the "fringes" as well. Namely, they pertain to the "inner" foundation of the discipline, its identity, and not only its institutionalization and its image in the eyes of the others. It is known on the basis of political praxis -- if not otherwise -- that an external enemy strengthens the inner firmness of a community. However, the problem with the *Bernheimer Report* or, more accurately, with the tendency it formulates, is that under the tensions of "outside" factors it tackles comparative literature "from the inside." It is with this intent that under the surface of a contemporary, lively, youthfully audacious comparatist discourse standing behind an ambiguous rhetoric hides a small attempt at the life of comparative literature -- one in favour of cultural studies.

This tendency requires a more precise reflection. The *Report* itself may serve, of course, as a point of departure in this quest although it is more of a programmatic and not really of an argumentative nature. It does not demonstrate the obsolescence of "traditional" comparative literature, which has literature as its central object of investigation, along with its inner powerlessness, exhaustion, unsuitability, but declares the obsolescence with abstract and heterogeneous criteria. The *Report*, out of the desire for acceptance and under embarrassing circumstances, somehow makes compromises in its formulations, which evidently enough expresses its central tendency, yet through blurring and also inconsequence remove any persuasiveness to the discourse itself. This can be demonstrated clearly enough with the close reading of the formulations of its program (see Brooks 1995; Virk 2001).

A misleading ambiguity of the *Bernheimer Report* that on occasion may have triggered too harsh a criticism is decidedly not a consequence of a conspiracy against comparative literature but rather an expression of the institutional distress in which comparative literature in North America has found itself. This distress is particularly serious because the external pressures assert obviously a destructive influence on the inner firmness of the discipline and, in the final consequence, may even do away with it completely. A good example of this is the work of Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, in my opinion one of the most active and insightful contemporary comparatists (see his publications in "Steven Totosy de Zepetnek, Long Curriculum Vitae" at <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweblibrary/totosycv>>). Still in 1996, for example, he agreed in part with Brooks's criticism of the *Bernheimer Report* and shared the opinion that the center of gravity of comparative literature (in opposition to the cultural studies) must stay with literature (7-8, 11) and that literary scholarship as an independent discipline is justifiable. But a few years later he practically rechristened comparative literature into "comparative cultural

studies" (1999, 2001, 2002, 2003).

In Tötösy's work it is particularly obvious that such a development cannot be ascribed to a hostile disposition towards comparative literature. On the contrary, Tötösy has been for more than a decade actively striving for the prosperity of the discipline and, above all, its social legitimization. His efforts have been distinctly practice oriented; in striving for the institutional preservation of comparative literature he has underscored the necessity of taking into account pragmatic and political/ideological contexts (1996, 11; 1998, 21). The pragmatic viewpoint is also a decisive motive in his suggestion of the "new comparative literature": "My basic premise is that in the current situation an approach that promises innovation and where the results of study may have an opportunity to persuade the taxpayer, the politician, indeed, the general public -- not to speak of university administration -- to recognize the importance of the study of literature as a socially constructive and necessary educational and life force should be paid serious attention to" (1998, 19). From the context it is evident that "the current situation" Tötösy is talking about is not primarily the inner shortcoming of the discipline that had generated previous crises. Rather, the necessity of its renewal is stimulated by the external and utterly pragmatic circumstances to which Tötösy eloquently and convincingly draws attention. Yet the question poses itself how far can such a pragmatic perspective reach without overshadowing or fatally modifying the inner, the professional-disciplinary side? And furthermore, can the "permanent crisis" still be productive for the scholarship even if in reality it does not result from its inner difficulties but is, primarily, the consequence of an external pressure?

The answer cannot be aprioristic nor is it a simple one. At least on the North American continent the commotion, which comparative literature has experienced in the last years, is surely to a high degree cultural-specific conditioned, ideologically and institutionally. This doubtlessly requires the discipline to be more pragmatic, and this is, per se, is nothing bad. According to this view, comparative literature best fulfills claims of pragmatism by withdrawing either into national literary history or by shifting towards cultural studies. Tötösy himself suggests moving towards cultural studies; yet with this he exposes himself to a grave accusation to liquidate the discipline, one that in past decades in the field of literary scholarship has played a central role if only for pragmatic reasons. This reproach may look like too hasty and unsubstantiated. Tötösy stresses the importance of not only the social legitimacy of comparative literature -- along with the humanities as a whole -- but also of its scientific credibility. Accordingly, his outline of the "new comparative literature" offers the answer to the question of the discipline's pragmatism as well as to the problem of its consolidation. However, it becomes obvious that for him the consolidation of the discipline does not mean the striving for the development of specific criteria and theoretical and applied models valid especially in literary scholarship and related disciplines but rather the accepting of the model where social legitimacy is not questionable. Hence, in the last consequence, his decision is pragmatic. In his opinion, and in terms of professional consolidation, comparative literature is best legitimized by becoming "scientific," which for Tötösy means that it will "adopt some of the methods, exactitude, replicability, and objectivity -- as questionable and difficult that may be -- used in the natural sciences" (1998, 22), thus all those relieved of any suspicion of improvisation on basis of their "exactitude." In this way, comparative literature will get rid of the most founded reproaches of not being a serious discipline resting only on intuitionism, speculation, and metaphoric description. Tötösy finds a theoretical and methodological model for this in a "systemic and empirical approach to literature and culture" (1998, 23).

This approach has been developed and grounded by Tötösy with impressive vitality for more than a decade in subsequent and current publications, which have introduced into comparative literature a suitable freshness and have become part of successful investigations that have all met with varied responses. Nevertheless, in the offered form, that is as a complete and only socially valid, legitimate, scientific method of comparative literature, it gives rise to some hesitations. Literary scholarship has been frequently exposed -- because of its special and complex nature acknowledged by both contextualists and non-contextualists -- to the danger of too advanced an essayization, explanatory

impressionism, and also charlatanism. It is questionable whether this danger presents a sufficient reason for renouncing established methodological approaches and agreeing with models from the natural or social sciences. The demand for objective "scientificity" in literary science is of course utterly legitimate and well founded. Still, this does not justify an a priori adherence to the measures of the so-called "exact" sciences. The humanities, in an effort that includes a good portion of philosophical and literary hermeneutics at least from Dilthey onwards, strived for its own autonomous status of the "scientificity" different from that of the natural sciences. This special status includes the characteristics referred to by Tötösy -- "exactitude, replicability, and objectivity" -- it possesses in the humanities a different value than in the natural sciences. Tötösy's argumentation reflects his own awareness of this issue although he does not draw any principled conclusions from it. This is why such an effort within comparative literature proves in fact to be self-destructive. The request for the strengthening of trustworthy "scientificity" arises, as we have seen, from the desire for the legitimization of comparative literature and its justification; yet, if literary scholarship does not keep its autonomous methodological status -- its characteristic of the "how" -- the manner of investigation is essential in defining the profession not only in Fokkema's and Cavell's etc., opinion but also in Tötösy's own (1998, 15) -- of dealing with literature, if it renounces the modes of credibility that are characteristic for the humanities, and agrees only with the concept of "objectivity" that is valid for natural sciences or even for the social sciences, it abolishes itself automatically since its justification, its special viewing angle of investigation fitting its object, becomes blurred. Hence, as Siegfried J. Schmidt, the founder of the empirical study of literature suggests to abandon the study of literature as an independent discipline and instead to include it in the realm of the social sciences: in Tötösy's case comparative literature thus dissolves into comparative cultural studies.

In my understanding, the process of the scientific consolidation of the discipline in conjunction with the introduction of a systemic and empirical approach a legitimate and scientific framework brings Tötösy in his work to the dissolution of comparative literature. In the same way, the explicit pragmatic endeavours to reach social legitimacy join with the process of nearing to the realm of cultural studies. Such a result would not be indispensable per se. The cooperation with cultural studies (which is logical) contains -- apart from reasons of content -- also tactical-pragmatic reasons that are worthy of consideration and might prove useful for comparative literature. Yet, that would be only in the case where cultural studies would have similar status as all the others -- and for literary scholarship itself only as subsidiary field -- disciplines with which comparative literature is also connected. In the case of an over-dimensioning of significance of those disciplines a real danger exists that comparative literature would completely lose its independence and cross over into cultural studies. Many a scholar, Tötösy being one of them, declared this danger as exaggerated. Nevertheless, it is exactly Tötösy himself who, with his suggestion of comparative cultural studies fulfills some of the most desperate announcements of his adversaries.

Tötösy's example is particularly illustrative since his development can be traced clearly enough. Still in his 1996 article "Perspectives of Comparative Literature Today" in explicit reference to the *Bernheimer Report* he writes that "while Cultural Studies is concerned with literature as one of many cultural activities and cultural production, Comparative Literature maintains a focus on literature proper. This, in my opinion, is a significant difference which justifies my insistence that the study of literature as a distinct field of study is a legitimate and needed -- socially relevant -- function of social discourse" (1996, 7-8). He also agrees with "Brooks's criticism of the Bernheimer report's apologetic tone and his plea for retaining the focus on literature and literariness" (1996, 11). Both pronouncements are almost repeated verbatim in his *Comparative Literature: Theory, Method, Application* (1998) with two minute yet important addenda: to the "focus on literature proper" Tötösy adds "the widest possible definition of 'literature'" (1998, 31). What this "widest possible definition" is has not been clarified in detail; nevertheless, it is obvious from its later applications on the concrete examples that it is the closest to Bernheimer's concept of literature as "one of many discursive

practices." The second addendum refers to the legitimacy and necessity of comparative literature: it is "socially relevant, if performed in the context of my arguments" (31), that is on the basis of the systemic and empirical approach to literature in the framework of the ten principles of the "new comparative literature" offered in the book. Of note is that in addition to the field of comparative literature, Tötösy has applied his framework to the study of Central and East European literature and culture in his edited volume *Comparative Central European Culture*.

It is exactly on the basis of these ten principles of comparative literature that it becomes possible to demonstrate the inner developmental logic of Tötösy's argument in executing Bernheimer's program. These are the postulates that stand for the "General Principles of Comparative Literature" (1998, 15) and appear in a virtually unchanged form in many of the author's texts (Tötösy 1997, 1998, 1999, 2002, 2003). In all of these cases the principles remain literally the same with only one but essential change: in the last publications the word "literature" is substituted by the word "culture." This swap reveals symptomatically the developmental tendency of "the merger of comparative literature and cultural studies into new approach I designate as 'comparative cultural studies'" (1999, 86). This "new approach" in fact does away with the legitimacy of comparative literature as an independent discipline -- in obvious opposition to Tötösy's endeavours for its legitimization. Emotionally, Tötösy favors comparative literature. He acknowledges sympathetically that it causes him unease to see how cultural studies take over as innovations something that comparative literature has been doing since its inception in the early nineteenth century (1999, 1). Nevertheless, with the substitution of the word "literature" with "culture" in the ten general principles of comparative literature -- that is, comparative cultural studies -- Tötösy in fact signs the death sentence for comparative literature (I should note here that Tötösy's own Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Alberta where he taught for seventeen years has been dissolved as of July 2003. Tötösy left the University of Alberta already in 2000 and teaches now comparative media and culture studies at the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg in Germany, a parallel move to his work in the last few years Tötösy, in his theoretical as well as applied work and in his projects and publications in "comparative culture and media studies." This is similar to his colleague Siegfried J. Schmidt, the founder of the University of Siegen Siegen School of the Empirical Study of Literature, who is now professor of *Medienwissenschaft* at the University of Münster).

In his work in comparative literature, Tötösy supports the notion -- as do for example Fokkema, Cavell, etc. -- that the discipline is defined by its particular mode of investigation and its method. This is even the content of his First General Principle. And since the principles, the mode of investigation, the method, and finally the object itself are absolutely the same for both disciplines, their overlap ensues and, therefore, one becomes superfluous. The chronological developmental logic, also corroborated terminologically, results in the redundancy of comparative literature. Hence, the pragmatic aspiration for the legitimization of comparative literature paradoxically -- in this case of coming in the orbit of cultural studies -- increasingly leads into the (self)destruction of the discipline. Let us with one viewpoint illustrate the needlessness of such a reduction. Tötösy's himself defines the essence of comparative literature as "the recognition of and the engagement with the 'Other'" (1996, 7). Regardless of an eventual pragmatic initiative -- linked to a concrete Canadian policy of multiculturalism -- this is not only sympathetic but also very relevant and important. It offers, to be precise, a perfect opportunity for the definition of a culturally conditioned variant of the invariant literariness, if we may borrow Fokkema's turn of phrase. Such a definition of literariness may be based upon the influential mental currents of the twentieth century. If we name only two: Gadamer and Jauss, while dealing with the concept of "self-understanding in the Other," realized that the eminent space of the unveiling of the Other is precisely in literature. A similar thought has been implied in Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia and dialogicality which most clearly reveal themselves in literature. This may be exactly one of the relevant subjects of the comparatist's research today: the research of the literary otherness that is obviously the model for the otherness in general and not merely one of

the characteristics of a discursive practice comparable with similar characteristics of other practices. The research of a specifically literary functional structure of this otherness cannot be, of course, the subject matter of the sociology of literature or cultural studies but only of literary science and, in its realm, a particularly comparative literature that traditionally connects the "literary-theoretical invariant" with the context of culture. Only the outcome of this particular discipline can be used later by (inter)cultural studies as well.

In this context I should also like mention Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak's recent book, *Death of a Discipline* (2003). Similarly to Tötösy, Spivak attempts a definition of a "new comparative literature" and deals with the question of the relationship between comparative literature, cultural studies, and area studies yet lays a different emphasis on those relations (interestingly, Spivak does not appear to be aware of Tötösy's work). However, unlike Tötösy who supports expressly "the merger of comparative literature and cultural studies" (1999, 86), Spivak argues that "a simple splicing of CompLit and Cultural Studies/multiculturalism will not work or will work only too well; same difference" (4). Then, throughout the entire book, she discusses consistently the necessity of the supplementing of comparative literature with cultural studies and area studies. Spivak shows with many an example possibilities for the "new comparative literature" that "goes rather toward the other" (84). All that is done in such a way by allowing itself to be enabled by literary scholarship together with its specificity and not the related disciplines. Despite a clear association with cultural and area studies, Spivak's point here is clear enough: "If we seek to supplement gender training and human rights intervention by expanding the scope of Comparative Literature, the proper study of literature may give us entry to the performativity of cultures as instantiated in narrative. Here we stand outside, but not as antropologists; we stand rather as reader with imagination ready for the effort of othering, however imperfectly, as an end in itself ... This is preparation for a patient and provisional and forever deferred arrival into the performative of the other, in order not to transcode but to draw a response ... In order to reclaim the role of teaching literature as training the imagination -- the great inbuilt instrument of othering -- we may, if we work as hard as old-fashioned Comp. Lit. is known to be capable of doing, come close to the irreducible work of translation, not from language but from body to ethical semiosis, that incessant shuttle that is a 'life'" (12). Spivak's view of the "scientificness" of comparative literature is different from Tötösy's. The "legitimizing the humanities by making them scientific" is in her opinion a failed exercise: "If we want to compete with the hard 'science'(s) and the social sciences at their hardest as 'human science,' we have already lost, as one loses institutional competition. In the arena of the humanities as the uncoercive rearrangement of desire, he who wins loses. If this sounds vague, what we learn (to imagine what we know) rather than know in the humanities remains vague, unverifiable, iterable. You don't put it aside in order to be literary critical" (101).

A logical consequence of the dissolution of comparative literature, as I have tried to deduce with Tötösy's example, is not necessarily consistent with his intention and actual practice. The framework of comparative cultural studies, one can read in Tötösy's most recent article, is not a "master theory," but rather "one framework among several" (2003, 2) -- that is, they do not exclude comparative literature. After taking a look of some more recent publications written and edited by Tötösy such as work in this online journal -- *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* -- and the two volumes in his new series for Comparative Cultural Studies, both published by Purdue University Press, it becomes obvious that these are the publications from the field that, until now, we have been used to calling comparative literature. Sometimes, the debate surrounding the *Bernheimer Report* may really appear, much in line with the "Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns" in Spivak's book (1) only a tempest in a teacup. However, one cannot overlook that comparative literature is by virtue of many reasons -- socially, culturally, *geistes-geschichtlich*, institutionally-pragmatic, etc. -- in fact subject to change. Nevertheless, these changes are necessary for all disciplines. The sole nature of such a process is that the changes are more visible than all that which remains unaltered. Still, an

undiminished flow of works that keep taking up "traditional problems" of the discipline, the opening of the new perspectives and research possibilities within those problems, and lastly -- if we touch upon the institutional plane -- an undiminished attention that the International Comparative Literature Association devotes for example to literary theory (which is subject to most attacks and obituaries from contextualists), are in no case the sign of old-age exhaustion. Despite a partial pessimism or exaggerated pragmatism, comparative literature has good prospects for the future under certain conditions as formulated by Dimic introduced at the beginning of my treatise. There is no doubt that as a discipline it will have to take into account the new views advocated by contextualists. Of course, it will not benefit from doing so non-selectively and superficially since this only can lead to simplifications that are the real danger of the discipline. In a time of "multiculturalism," "globalization," and "democratization," this danger seems to loom larger than anytime before.

Translated from the Slovenian by Kristof Jacek Kozak <[kjkozak@ualberta.net](mailto:kjkozak@ualberta.net)>

Note: The above article is an updated and translated version of Tomo Virk, "Primerjalna književnost danes -- in jutri?" *Primerjalna književnost* 24 (2001): 9-31.

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