

Possibilities and Limits of Comparative Literature Today

Darío Villanueva  
*University of Santiago de Compostela*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), and the [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#)

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, **Purdue University Press** selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

*CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: [<clcweb@purdue.edu>](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)

---

### Recommended Citation

Villanueva, Darío. "Possibilities and Limits of Comparative Literature Today." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 13.5 (2011): [<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1915>](https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1915)

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact [epubs@purdue.edu](mailto:epubs@purdue.edu) for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

*CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* (ISSN 1481-4374), the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series*. Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <[clcweb@purdue.edu](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)>

---

**Volume 13 Issue 5 (December 2011) Article 2**  
**Darío Villanueva,**  
**"Possibilities and Limits of Comparative Literature Today"**  
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol13/iss5/2>>

---

Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 13.5 (2011)**  
Special issue ***New Trends in Iberian Galician Comparative Literature.***  
**Ed. María Teresa Vilariño Picos and Anxo Abuín González**  
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol13/iss5/>>

---

**Abstract:** In his article "Possibilities and Limits of Comparative Literature Today" Darío Villanueva discusses the itinerary of comparative literature and its problematics and queries the discipline's adherence to literary history and its identification with the theory of literature. Villanueva's discussion is with particular reference to Spanish-language works such as by Claudio Guillén's systemic view of literature and the study of literature, as well as similar approaches to the study of literature such as by Siegfried J. Schmidt, Itamar Even-Zohar, and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek. Further, Villanueva discusses aspects of the field of cultural studies he sees relevant and useful for the study of literature comparatively.

**Darío VILLANUEVA**

### **Possibilities and Limits of Comparative Literature Today**

In an attempt to abandon the identification of genetic relationships to justify comparativist research, the last twenty-five or thirty years have seen the emergence of a new paradigm of comparative literature. A basic principle of the new paradigm is that whenever the same or a similar phenomenon appears in two separate literatures or in one literature and in another type of artistic expression, the comparative approach must include a fundamental theoretical element, that is to say, a possible or hypothetical point of departure. The immediate consequence of such an approach is comparative literature's if not exclusive, then at least preferential link with literary theory (see Fokkema 3). Thus, since the 1970s, roughly, comparative literature developed with a theoretical component and that gave the discipline its innovative character. In consequence, comparativist literary theory is constructed with the help of elements that are both general and generalizing (see, e.g., Marino 92). Claudio Guillén proposed that the comparativist's main task ought to be the discovery of analog and parallel processes of literary evolution and that could be attributed to historical and social laws of universal validity, and, as a last resort, to the basic principle of unity and regularity perceptible in the evolution of humanity in general (on Guillén, see, e.g., Villanueva, "Claudio Guillén").

The above basic principle of theoretical grounding and attention to the global perspective of literature is what Earl Miner, for example, argues for: when we find in Chinese literature a type of lyric composition comparable to the medieval Romance "alba," then, indeed, we can claim that this constitutes a literary "constant" beyond the contingency of the purely local and historical. It seems evident that we cannot construct a solid theory of literary genres based solely on a small number of works we identify from within European literature alone. In this vein is Florence Goyet's work in which she discusses a literary corpus in five languages and literatures: French, English, Italian, Japanese, and Russian. I wanted to highlight the same point in the title of my *El polen de ideas*, a rubric taken from William Faulkner, a writer who was often asked to address the issue of his dependence on James Joyce, since his narrative technique appeared, point for point, inspired by the technique pioneered in *Ulysses* and honed in *Finnegan's Wake*. Faulkner tended to recognize the similarities between their respective novelistic techniques while maintaining that he himself had starting writing and publishing novels before having read Joyce.

In *Valle-Inclán. Novelista del Modernismo* my objective was to show that the author of *Tirano Banderas* belonged to international modernism, that vast cosmopolitan movement which developed in the first third of the twentieth century and was at its height in the 1920s and 1930s between when Hispanic modernism was already in decline. With a historical, theoretical, and critical perspective, I applied comparativist principles to allow us to identify Valle-Inclán's literary achievements with those of other important figures of modernism such as Yeats, Gide, Romain Rolland, and Joyce, among others. I believe that the key to this type of comparative literature allows us to stop serving literary history in an exclusive and exclusionary way and, instead, to lend its services to the theory of literature. This, I argue, is because when comparativist literary theory cannot count on empirical contrast, the proposed approach becomes a sort of literary metaphysics in which the universal dominates and masks everything and when what really matters is the specific literary example — the more the better — in order to lay a solid foundation for a restructured comparativist poetics.

Adrian Marino spoke of a "nouveau paradigme" for comparative literature, of the urgent need for change, of a radical turn in the sense of theory of poetics beyond the exclusive study of "rapports de fait" between literatures as a luxury accessory for national literary historiographies (9). Further, Marino defended a conception of the discipline which transcends its strictly academic borders. Comparative literature is also a sort of militant ideology, a system of ideas with a broad view of literature, humanism and history itself, although this last, in its nineteenth-century origins which are liberal, pacifist, and cosmopolitan. Guillén wrote in this same frame of mind, where time and again he declared that the attitude of a comparativist must be sensitive to tensions between the local and the universal, between the specific and the general, thus making links between the two poles but without tending too much toward either one to the detriment of the other. This is always with the desire to

overcome cultural nationalism: the use of literature for nationalist causes, narcissist instincts, and ideological purposes (*Entre lo uno* 14). Miner has developed a "comparative poetics" where different constellations and systems of literature, genres, and fundamental constants expressed discursively by creators and thinkers throughout history, in the East as in the West. It is not a coincidence that Miner cites as his main sources of inspiration: René Etiemble and René Wellek, who fought so hard for a new, not Eurocentric but planetary comparativism and he dedicates his work to James J.Y. Liu, author of *Chinese Theories of Literature*. We can see the usefulness of Miner's investigations in the fact that he came to the conclusion that the lyric-epic-dramatic generic trilogy is present in all literary systems, the only difference being that in the European-Aristotelian tradition, at first, the lyric is only implicit, while in the Chinese and Japanese traditions the exact opposite occurs, since the poetics of drama and narration derive from poetry in its purest sense.

The 2005 Spanish-language edition of Guillén's 1985 introduction to comparative literature — *Entre lo uno y lo diverso. Introducción a la Literatura Comparada (Ayer y hoy)* — includes, among other new ideas, an interesting prologue called "La Literatura comparada y la crisis de las humanidades." Guillén characterizes the then current (i.e., in 2005) atmosphere of comparativism as generalized disorder, after a forty-year period of the discipline's "golden age" 1945-1985. Guillén continues to recognize the role of the driving centers of comparative literature — France, the United States, and Germany — but he shows his concern, which I also share, for certain phenomena which have appeared primarily in US-American comparative literature. Above all, he is alarmed by the politicization of the humanities and notes the increased impact of cultural studies and postcolonial studies which have acquired prominence to the detriment of literary studies. Guillén points to a fundamental flaw in cultural studies which he sees as the blurring of distinction between the popular and the refined or between the high manifestations of human creativity and other expressions less illustrious on an aesthetic scale valued for millennia. He considers the direction of postcolonial studies richer and more fertile than that of cultural studies, for which reason he highlights in glowing terms the role of another great theoretician, Edward W. Said, whose contributions are guided by a sort of "contrapuntal thinking" which does service to peripheral or omitted literatures: "the imperial mentality is not just political; it is cultural, and ethically superior. We live in plural worlds and our great enemy is simplification. No vision has complete hegemony on the space it considers. No culture is monolithic. None of us are only one thing" ("La literatura comparada" 23). As far as Spain is concerned, neither of the two tendencies summarized above has overpowered the other, as has occurred in the United States. Nevertheless, Guillén fears that in Spain comparativism has been swallowed by theory and his observation is based on the merger of literary theory and comparative literature as a stand-alone discipline, an administrative arrangement in 1990 by the Ministry of Education.

As chair of the University of Santiago de Compostela Department of Literary Theory and Comparative Literature and as the rector of the University 1994-2002, I was able to follow the said administrative process closely and my experience was such that I do not share Guillén's pessimism. Far from constituting a danger to comparative literature, I believe that the result of this process has offered scholars and students the only possibility, at least at this time, of officially recognizing the discipline among the other fields of study in the Spanish university system. The ideal solution, that is to say, the establishment of comparative literature as its own field of study, was not feasible at the time since the Ministry of Education and the Council of Universities were not willing to enlarge list of recognized disciplines with new additions and of which there were proposals by the dozen. In this context there was no other solution but to play by the rules of the administrative system of higher education and have "literary theory and comparative literature." Since the success of achieving the objective on the administrative level — not without great difficulty — of establishing the discipline of "literary theory and comparative literature," we have seen the creation of teaching positions, for instance the chair at the University of Barcelona or tenured positions at the University of Santiago de Compostela (the latter advertised with the specific profile of "comparative literature"), as well as similar positions at other universities in Spain.

Obviously, the environment that favors literary exchange and stimulates interest in finding a continuum between literatures belonging to different languages and cultures is the peacetime environment, if not a perpetual and lasting peace, then at least a relatively stable situation. The block

politics and the Cold War that it produced were not favorable to comparativist projects either, especially insofar as they halted that impulse in some countries behind the Iron Curtain, such as Hungary or in the multilingual Soviet Union itself, which until then had been pioneers in the development of comparative literature (see, e.g., Berlina and Tötösy de Zepetnek). And it is thus that we may be justified in thinking that the historical events of the late 1980s and early 1990s give new hope to a Europe that witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall and finds itself embarking on the adventure of integration, not merely economic but political as well, for which it is essential to put all efforts into recognizing the common cultural roots of all the peoples of the continent. In this sense, aside from the political avatars that have appeared or that may appear in the future on this subject, I find some of the terms and statements in the *Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe*, signed in Rome on 29 October 2004 by the representatives of the 25 member states of the Union to be interesting and pertinent for comparative literature scholars. In the preamble to the *Treaty*, Europe is mentioned as "united in diversity," a characterization repeated in Article 1-3 among the objectives of the Union, which "shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced." This notion of unity respectful of variety is like a common thread throughout the entire text of the Constitution. Part II, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Union, declares that the Union is responsible for "the preservation and [for] the development of these common values while respecting the diversity of the cultures and traditions of the peoples of Europe," a point that is reiterated in Article II-82 and in Article III-280: "The Union shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore." Guillén's introduction to comparative literature, a work that has had considerable international influence with its translations to several languages, has the same motto in its title: *Entre lo uno y lo diverso*. Nonetheless, we know well that the discipline must support an almost utopian goal, in accordance with which it must let go of Eurocentrism once and for all and aim for Goethe's *Weltliteratur*, a task for which we must recruit students and scholars from the various universities in Spain, as well as in all of Europe (on the recent development of *Weltliteratur* we can observe in particular in the U.S. and in works published in English, see, e.g., Damrosch; D'haen; D'haen, Damrosch, Kadir; D'haen, Domínguez, Rosendahl Thomsen; Rosendahl Thomsen; see also Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári).

Edward W. Said — the Jerusalem-born, educated in Lebanon and Egypt, and U.S.-trained theorist and comparativist — was concerned, as so many of us are, by a universalist conception of all world literatures and saw in it "the foundation of what was to become the field of comparative literature" (95). But as regards the current situation of Europe, we must ask ourselves what literature should be taught to young Europeans in the immediate future. Without in any way neglecting vernacular or national languages and literatures, or remaining ignorant of non-Western literary traditions, everything seems to indicate that there will be a disciplinary space for the study of literature and this is in keeping with the historical foundations of the common culture of Europe. As long as the educational system fails to produce the corresponding reference works, which will logically be international in scope, comparative literature studies as they exist now will be the appropriate and useful point of reference for new generations to identify literature with a plurilinguistic repertory of important texts and that are closely related to each other and share similar poetic approaches. Paradoxically, at the moment where in Spain comparative literature was established as a discipline in the university system, in other geographical areas where the situation appeared to be stable, it deteriorated significantly, to the point that Susan Bassnett, in her introduction to comparative literature published in 1993, claimed that "today, comparative literature in one sense is dead" (47). The symptoms to which she alluded to justify her pessimism are, for instance, the fact that in the U.S., the study of English literature has gained ground at the cost of theory until then a domain of comparative literature, the impact of cultural studies, the decrease in professorships in comparative literature, and in general the generic damages caused by the anti-Eurocentrism of postcolonial and multicultural perspectives.

With all due respect to the thinking of Jacques Derrida and some of his English-speaking followers, or such scholars as J. Hillis Miller, I believe that the triumph of deconstruction was harmful to the situation in which the study of literature was established at U.S. universities within the model of liberal

education employing language and literature as an essential instrument in the training of future professionals in various spheres: the ethical, the expressive and communicative spheres, and the esthetic spheres. It was thus believed that literature and the study of literature signified an essential function, that literature had canonical value in terms of artistic evaluation, and that it offered a wealth of information on important issues, which were pertinent to the human condition. Deconstruction came and suggested, in contrast, that literature could lack meaning, that it was a sort of stir of echoes in which there were no real voices to the point that its meaning blurred completely. Such a position is also extreme. The book certainly means what the reader wants it to mean, but the hermeneutical relativism that phenomenology explains by the fact that a literary work is an outline whose gaps, or "places of indetermination" need to be "filled in" by the reader, is still a far cry from a "negative hermeneutics," which denies literature's ability to retransmit meaning. Unfortunately, this is what deconstruction theory has left in its wake and in my opinion it had immediate consequences on the internal scheme of universities. When it came time to distribute budgets in a way guaranteed to be profitable, the administrators said to themselves: how can we fund a discipline whose own professors maintain that it means nothing, that it models nothing, that it lends itself to superficial discussions and differences? That was a terrible moment where, to some extent, departments of literature or even departments of humanities in general committed ritual suicide by embracing deconstruction theory so enthusiastically yet so recklessly. As a logical consequence, a void was created, a charred field where something had to be sown, for example, cultural studies. On the way, we lost literary tradition and with it philological tradition, finally to end up in the situation in which we now find ourselves.

The use of the first person plural in my paragraph above signifies an expression of solidarity on my part with US-American colleagues, no small number of whom will likely second our diagnosis, severe as it may seem. As, for example, Said did in his last book. He was not ashamed to admit, with the credibility lent him by his privileged position of a scholar recognized globally that postcolonialism, cultural studies, and other similar fields ended up side-tracking "the humanities from its rightful concern with the critical investigation of values, history, and freedom, turning it, it would seem, into a whole factory of word-spinning and insouciant specialities, many of them identity-based, that in their jargon and special pleading address only like-minded people, acolytes, and other academics" (14). Additionally, he was convinced that "those varieties of deconstructive Derridean readings" end "in undecidability and uncertainty" (66). We should not be surprised, therefore, by the only solution Said proposes, namely "a return to a philological-interpretative model that is older and more widely based than the one that has prevailed in America since the introduction of humanistic study in the American university 150 years ago" (34; see also Holquist).

In contrast to the problematical US-American scene, in "Old Europe" a solid theory had already started to spring up, based on the concept of literature as system and that had lent its name to an influential work by Guillén, published in 1971, precursor to one of the basic principles of Siegfried J. Schmidt's *Empirische Literaturwissenschaft* developed in Germany in the 1970s and 1980s (see, e.g., Schmidt, *Foundations, Literary Studies*"; for a list of Schmidt's publications see Lisiak and Tötösy de Zepetnek). In Schmidt's *Empirische Literaturwissenschaft* literature is considered in the context of communicative and thus social actions, which include the production of texts and their mediation texts undergo in distribution, their reception by the reading public or theater or film audience without forgetting the final phase of what Götz Wienold called *Textverarbeitung*, which has been translated as "post-processing," a term I consider less accurate than "re-creation" (lately it has also been spoken of as "transduction"), that is, the transformative reading that is carried out in the form of criticism and scholarship, interpretation, commentary, parody, summary, adaptation, paraphrase, film, theater or television versions, etc. Schmidt's conception of the literary system constitutes a framework of conditioning factors in which each element, phase, or agent works with, depends on, and interacts in several processes. Thus the literary system has the following categories mediated in processes: 1) the producer is the agent whose action(s) result(s) in 2) the product, i.e., the artistic work which undergoes 3) mediation whereby mediators — including the producer, the publishing industry, etc. — transmit ("mediate") the product of creative action to other agents including the product's audience, and 4) in post-production the product, its mediation, and the producer undergo a process whereby other products are created and processed relative to the original product (see Schmidt, *Foundations,*

"Literary Studies"). Schmidt's framework has affinities with other contextual frameworks such as Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory, Juri Lotman's semiotics of culture, Pierre Bourdieu's *champ littéraire*, Niklas Luhmann's notion of social systems, Dionýz Ďurišin's concept of the interliterary process with the distinction of the "empirical," a concept that is not positivist or neo-positivist:

we tried to reach the following objectives: theoreticity, empiricity, and applicability. We held the view that literary studies should be performed on the basis of explicit theories, e.g., semantic theories, reception theories, theories of personality or identity, theories of text analysis, etc. The second objective, empiricity, was surely the most problematic one. Because of the concentration on more or less isolated texts, literary studies in the past had gathered nearly no experience in empirical research and, until the advent of ESL [Empirical Study of Literature], they had had no interest in empirical questions in the field of literature either. Consequently, one of the most difficult tasks of ESL was to raise the interest of literary scholars in empirical questions related to the research domain literary system which traditionally had been outsourced to literary sociology and psychology as a marginal aspect and apart from the core of literary studies, i.e., interpretation. A further task was to convince other literary scholars that empiricity had nothing to do with positivism or materialism. This task required a concept of empirical research centered on the notion of methodical constructions of facts (= *facta*, not data; and not positivism) which could be checked in an interdisciplinary way. We underlined again and again that empiricity should not be misread as search for objectivity or truth. Instead, the claim for empiricity signaled the intention to concentrate on social processes which resulted in literary phenomena through the activities of literary agents and to realize this concentration in an empirically intersubjective way. (Schmidt, "Literary Studies" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol12/iss1/1/>>)

Based on similar concepts of system, communication, society, and literature Even-Zohar presented a diagram different from but complementary to Schmidt's. Even-Zohar's framework of the literary system is based, among others, on what Roman Jakobson established for language in general and includes the following processes and actants: 1) producer: addresser, writer, 2) consumer: addressee, reader, spectator, 3) product: message, 4) market: contact/channel, 5) repertoire: code, and 6) institution: context (see Even-Zohar, *Polysystem Studies*, "Factors"). The third framework with specific attention to literature and similar to Schmidt's and Even-Zohar's frameworks is Ďurišin's concept of interliterariness while Lotman's, Bourdieu's, and Luhmann's frameworks are designed with regard to culture and thus in a wider conceptualization: they are with less focus on literature per se although they are applied in the study of literature (on Ďurišin's work, see, e.g., Domínguez; for a bibliography of work in the above mentioned approaches see Tötösy de Zepetnek, "Bibliography of Contextual").

For some time now, apocalyptic winds have been blowing among the sharpest of the seers interested in the concept of the literary system and this perception became especially virulent in the areas where deconstruction damaged the academic status of the study of literature after spreading the idea that creative writing, far from being "eminent" writing — full of "real presences" (Steiner), of meanings with operative scope for our society and our civilization — had been broken to pieces resulting in no more than disembodied echoes. Like Said, Harold Bloom and George Steiner shared this pessimism on US-American campuses, as did Northrop Frye years before them and who expressed his concern about the power of electronic media distorting the processes of education by offering a torrent of information and experiences with, at best, a remote possibility of fostering a genuine understanding of what should concern us all, that is, the very myths of the human condition which speak to our main preoccupations — primal urges from food to sex, even to freedom — as well as our ideological preoccupations. J. Hillis Miller also heralded, literally, the fact that "literary study's time is up," due firstly to deconstruction and secondly to the growing influence of cultural studies. Literature is a category that appears to have lost its specificity in the un-differentiated field of cultural "discourse," "textuality," and "information" or other technologies. Hillis Miller does not attempt to shield certain critical schools from taking their share of the blame for this debacle, in keeping with Steiner's sensible, although hyperbolic judgment on academic culture in which he notes the scandalous predominance of the secondary and the parasitic (7). His phraseology cracks like a whip: "it is the universities, the research institutes, the academic presses, which are our Byzantium" (30), "Our talk is about talk, and Polonius is master" (40), "Criticism, meta-criticism, dia-criticism, the criticism of criticism, pullulate" (48). Steiner only appears to admit, before any given work of art, "criticism put into action": Dalí's criticism on Ingres, Picasso's on Velázquez, Joyce's on Homer. Add to all this, in honor of cultural relativism and anti-Eurocentrism, the destruction of the canon, and the

eradication of programs of study and of authors until now considered classic, against which Bloom — new knight errant versus the giants or the windmills of the so-called school of resentment — lifted an angry voice and pen. Of course, according to Gerald Gillespie, the polysystem theory as conceived by Even-Zohar could well contribute to a non-Manichean approach to international literary relations and the neutralization of anti-Eurocentrism and the ritual of condemnation of the European contribution to human affairs that multiculturalists have been advocating. Opinions of this character have been spreading among Spanish comparativists, too, convinced as I am that the study of literary polysystems is a meeting place and a space for interaction and indispensable between comparative literature and the best of cultural studies.

On the current landscape of literary studies in particular and the humanities in general, we must recover the sense of responsibility for the function of the critic and scholar, for which Terry Eagleton expressed nostalgia, when recalling the beginnings in eighteenth-century England. Instead of the obligatory implication of Addison and Steele in the configuration of the public sphere in society to which they belonged at the end of the twentieth century, literary criticism was either a purely academic affair, as Steiner scoffed, or — which is even worse — it belonged to the publicity division of the cultural industry of book production, thus contributing, despicably, to their confirmation as literary products that were in fact not this, but were mere shells of a writing that has rejected from the start that yearning described by the poet Antonio Machado, that is, the "essential word in the moment. It is likely that we will not recover the dignity and the responsibility of critical and scholarly exercise by the struggle against the bourgeois state, as Eagleton proposes, but by the restoration of esthetic value, the denunciation of the imposture of pseudoliterary writings and the inclusionary rehabilitation of this chain of obligatory artistic pinnacles made up of classics from all languages, where we find, implicitly, literary values worthy of the concept. In the same way, in his specific field of comparative literature, Said championed in the last years of his life a revitalization of the most militant aspects of the discipline, which beyond its purely academic outlines have always existed: convinced that scholarly humanism had to add a noticeable presence as an "ongoing practice" to its status as a "theoretical territory" (6), he proposed, namely that we comparativists insist on contributing to "a different kind of humanism that was cosmopolitan and text-and-language-bound in ways that absorbed the great lessons of the past" (11).

Next I address a proposal for comparative literature that Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek has been developing since the 1990s, in conjunction with the development of empirical and systemic literary theories formulated in Europe and Israel prior to that period. Tötösy de Zepetnek's initiative bears the broad title "The Systemic and Empirical Approach to Literature and Culture." At the time when the "pensiero debole" of deconstruction was spreading in the United States, being hailed, paradoxically, as the new a-systematic/systemic method that would redeem U.S. universities from the aftereffects of poststructuralism, in Europe the foundations of thinking about literature were being laid, based in a broad theoretical tradition that included the Marxist sociology of literature, the Frankfurt School, as well as the semiology of Tartu School, the Konstanz School, and the functionalism of the Prague School. Without detriment to critical pluralism and that includes integrating different methods and schools of thought, as well as combining the three perspectives for approaching works of literature that are necessary for a successful exegesis of the works — the author's perspective, the text's perspective, and the reader's perspective — it is legitimate to pursue the integration of research practices into the broadest, most rigorous, and most coherent theoretical framework possible. This battle front might be the one that can harden that new comparative literature proposed by Tötösy de Zepetnek, who over the course of the many years has not only completed the general formulation of his objectives and outlines and presented in the form of a "Manifesto" but has also carried its application to several fields including the comparative study of Central European culture (see, e.g., "Comparative Cultural Studies and the Study of Central European Culture," "The New Humanities"). We can see an evolution in Tötösy de Zepetnek's perspective, which started off linked preferentially to comparative literature but which later moved closer and closer to comparative cultural studies.

The "Manifesto" is comprised of ten general principles, which I summarize here. First, "what" is being studied is less important than "how" the study is carried out. The comparative — i.e., contextual — method is thus fundamental and the objects of comparison do not undergo a hierarchical appraisal:



all are recognized as having the same value from the start. In the same way, the second principle of what for Tötösy de Zepetnek was "comparative literature" in 1998 and "comparative cultural studies" in 2002 is the theoretical and methodological emphasis on connecting and opening dialogue between cultures, languages, literatures, and disciplines. Because, in essence, the aim is to study culture in each one of its component parts and as a unified whole, to relate, for example, literature and other forms of artistic expression such as visual arts, music, cinema, etc., to other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences such as history, anthropology, philosophy, sociology, or psychology. In the fifth principle of his "Manifiesto," Tötösy de Zepetnek does not hesitate to declare that the new comparativism he proposes is best performed in publishing scholarship in English in order to reach the widest possible readership. He argues, without special proof, that this proposal should not be taken as "Euro-American-centricity." To me, on the other hand, the sixth principle seems more convincing, since it links the development of the new comparativism — based on Schmidt's *Empirische Literaturwissenschaft* — to the contextual (empirical and systemic) framework and methodology as the supplier of analytical procedures based on evidence. Another field which is part of Tötösy de Zepetnek's framework of comparative cultural studies is translation studies as based on Even-Zohar's polysystem theory (see, e.g., "Taxonomy"). The study of literature and culture in this new paradigm would focus on the general consideration of culture and its development and performed in interdisciplinarity and even teamwork, toward which humanists have traditionally been little inclined. In the context of the debate provoked by globalization, this new comparative dimension of literature and cultures rejects any tendency toward becoming a globalizing discipline (*Comparative Literature* 18, see also "The New Humanities"). Its practitioners will need to possess, along with theoretical and methodological rigor, a certain militant attitude focused now towards better understanding all that relates to Otherness and persistent in vindicating in the eyes of their technocratic or economicist detractors the social relevance of studies in the humanities.

Some of the principles would have been endorsed by the such as Wellek and Étiemble; however, it is true that comparative literature was unable to respond satisfactorily to their suggestions. Perhaps now, with the help of the relevant theoretical foundations, Tötösy de Zepetnek's project of renewal would arrive at fruition. And I subscribe to the project in accordance with regard to the philosophical, theoretical, and methodological disorientation of what Rodríguez Magda calls "transmodernity" and we might find a particularly recommendable option in the study not only of the "text in itself": "text is defined here as any cultural product — but roles of action within the system(s) of culture, namely, the production, distribution, reception, and the processing of culture products" (Tötösy de Zepetnek, "Comparative Cultural Studies and the Study of Central European Culture" 7).

In conclusion, together with Tötösy de Zepetnek's framework of comparative cultural studies I find the exhortations Said left us as his legacy to be valid. In his posthumous book Said dedicates an entire chapter to advocating "the return to philology" as a necessary route for the strengthening, in our turbulent century, of an "idea of humanistic culture as coexistence and sharing" (*Humanism* xvi). In order to achieve that objective, reading remains fundamental and it can be learned and taught. Reading, obviously, in the sense of "reading for meaning" (70). This includes reading not only texts which are linguistically and culturally close, but also those that seem farther removed, for which, as Etienne in his time was already claiming, translation as a cultural practice and even as an object of research for comparatists is essential. Next to catastrophic horizons like that suggested by Samuel Huntington's concept of the clash of civilizations, Said reminds us that the word *Qur'an* means "reading" in Arabic and that the practice of *ijtihad* — personal and lingering reading, a sort of close reading — in the context of Islamic humanism shares the same goal as an unrenounceable humanist engagement to which comparative literature has much to contribute: teaching how to read well, which in our times means being a member of one's own literary tradition while remaining an eager visitor to the culture of the Other.

## Works Cited

- Bassnett, Susan. *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993.  
Berlina, Alexandra, and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek. "Comparative Literature in Russian and in Central and East Europe." *The Cambridge Companion to Comparative Literature and Comparative Cultural Studies*. Ed. Steven

- Tötösy de Zepetnek and Tutun Mukherjee. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012. Forthcoming.
- Bloom, Harold. *The Western Canon: The Books and Schools of the Ages*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994.
- Bourdieu, P. *The Rules of the Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*. 1992. Trans. Susan Emanuel. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996.
- Damrosch, David. *What Is World Literature?* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003.
- D'haen, Theo. *The Routledge Concise History of World Literature*. London: Routledge, 2011.
- D'haen, Theo, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir, eds. *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*. London: Routledge, 2012.
- D'haen, Theo, César Domínguez, and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, eds. *World Literature: A Reader*. London: Routledge, 2012.
- Domínguez, César. "Dionýz Ďurišín and a Systemic Theory of World Literature." *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*. Ed. Theo D'haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir. London: Routledge, 2012. 99-107.
- Ďurišín, Dionýz. *Theory of Interliterary Process*. Trans. Jessie Kocmanová and Zdenek Pistek. Bratislava: Slovak Academy of Sciences, 1989.
- Eagleton, Terry. *The Function of Criticism*. London, 1984.
- Etiemble, René. *Comparaison n'est pas raison. La crise de la littérature comparée*. Paris: Gallimard, 1963.
- Etiemble, René. *Ouverture(s) sur un comparatisme planétaire*. Paris: C. Bourgois, 1988.
- Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2004.
- Even-Zohar, Itamar. "Factors and Dependencies of Culture: A Revised Outline for Polysystem Culture Research." *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* 24.1 (1997): 15-34.
- Even-Zohar, Itamar. *Polysystem Studies*. Special Issue *Poetics Today* 11.1 (1990): 1-268.
- Fokkema, Douwe W. "Comparative Literature and the New Paradigm." *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* 1 (1982): 1-18.
- Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957.
- Frye, Northrop. "The Responsibilities of the Critic." *Modern Language Notes* 91 (1976): 797-813.
- Gillespie, Gerald. *By Way of Comparison: Reflections on the Theory and Practice of Comparative Literature*. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004.
- Goyet, Florence. *La Nouvelle. 1870-1925*. Paris: PU de France, 1993.
- Guillén, Claudio. *Entre lo uno y lo diverso. Introducción a la literatura comparada*. Barcelona: Crítica, 1985.
- Guillén, Claudio. *Literature as System: Toward the Theory of Literary History*. Trans. Cola Franzen. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971.
- Guillén, Claudio. "La Literatura Comparada y la crisis de las humanidades." *Entre lo uno y lo diverso. Introducción a la Literatura Comparada (Ayer y hoy)*. By Claudio Guillén. Barcelona: Tusquets, 2005. 3-24.
- Guillén, Claudio. *The Challenge of Comparative Literature*. Trans. Cola Franzen. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993.
- Hillis Miller, J. "¿Sobrevivirán los estudios literarios a la globalización de la Universidad y al nuevo régimen de las telecomunicaciones?" *Prosopopeya: Revista de Crítica Contemporánea* 1 (1999): 71-90.
- Holquist, Michael. "The Place of Philology in an Age of World Literature." *neohelicon: acta comparationis litterarum universarum* 38 (2011): 267-87.
- Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996.
- Lisiak, Agata Anna, and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek. "Bibliography of Siegfried J. Schmidt's Publications." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 12.1 (2010): <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol12/iss1/9>>.
- Lotman, Juri. *Culture and Explosion*. Ed. and trans. Marina Grishakova. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2009.
- Lotman, Juri. *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*. Trans. Ann Shukman. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2001.
- Liu, James Y. *Chinese Theories of Literature*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1975.
- Luhmann, Niklas. *Social Systems*. Trans. John Bednarz, Jr. and Dirk Baecker. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995.
- Marino, Adrian. *Comparatisme et théorie de la littérature*. Paris: PU de France, 1988.
- Miner, Earl. *Comparative Poetics: An Intercultural Essay on Theories of Literature*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990.
- Rodríguez Magda, Rosa María. "La globalización como totalidad transmoderna." *Claves de Razón Práctica* 134 (2003): 22-30.
- Rosendahl Thomsen, Mads. *Mapping World Literature: International Canonization and Transnational Literatures*. London: Continuum, 2010.
- Said, Edward W. *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- Schmidt, Siegfried J. *Foundations for the Empirical Study of Literature: The Components of a Basic Theory*. Trans. Robert de Beaugrande. Hamburg: Buske, 1982.
- Schmidt, Siegfried J. "Literary Studies from Hermeneutics to Media Culture Studies." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 12.1 (2010): <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol12/iss1/1/>>.
- Steiner, George. *Real Presences: Is There Anything in What We Say?* London: Faber and Faber, 1989.
- Tötösy de Zepetnek, Steven. "Bibliography of Contextual (Systemic and Empirical) Approaches in the Study of Literature and Culture (to 1998)." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 3.3 (2001): <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol3/iss3/7>>.
- Tötösy de Zepetnek, Steven. "Comparative Cultural Studies and the Study of Central European Culture." *Comparative Central European Culture*. Ed. Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek. West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2002. 1-32.
- Tötösy de Zepetnek, Steven. *Comparative Literature: Theory, Method, Application*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998.
- Tötösy de Zepetnek, Steven. "From Comparative Literature Today toward Comparative Cultural Studies." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 1.3 (1999): <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol1/iss3/2>>.
- Tötösy de Zepetnek, Steven. "Taxonomy for the Study of Translation in Comparative Cultural Studies." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture (Library)* (2002):

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweblibrary/ccstranlationstudies>>.

- Tötösy de Zepetnek, Steven. "The New Humanities: The Intercultural, the Comparative, and the Interdisciplinary." *Globalization and the Futures of Comparative Literature*. Ed. Jan M. Ziolkowski and Alfred J. López. Thematic Section *The Global South* 1.2 (2007): 45-68.
- Tötösy de Zepetnek, Steven, and Louise O. Vasvári. "The Comparative and Contextual Study of Literature and Culture and Globalization." *The Cambridge Companion to Comparative Literature and Comparative Cultural Studies*. Ed. Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek and Tutun Mukherjee. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012. Forthcoming.
- Villanueva, Darío. "Claudio Guillén: (World) Literature as System." *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*. Ed. Theo D'haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir. London: Routledge, 2012. 108-16.
- Villanueva, Darío. *Valle-Inclán, novelista del Modernismo*. Valencia: Tirant lo Blanch, 2005.
- Wellek, René. "The Crisis of Comparative Literature." *Concepts of Criticism*. By René Wellek. New Haven: Yale UP, 1963. 282-95.
- Wienold, Götz. "Vorüberlungen zur Rolle des Konzepts der Textverarbeitung beim Aufbau einer Empirischen Sprachtheorie." *Text Processing / Textverarbeitung*. Ed. Wolfgang Burghardt and Klaus Hölker. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1979. 20-48.

Author's profile: Darío Villanueva teaches literary theory and comparative literature at the University of Santiago de Compostela. In addition to numerous articles in Spanish, Galician, and English, his book publications include *El polen de ideas* (1991), *Teorías del realismo literario* (1992) *Theories of Literary Realism* (1997), *La poética de la lectura en Quevedo* (1995), *Valle-Inclán, novelista del Modernismo* (2005), and *Imágenes de la ciudad. Poesía y cine de Whitman a Lorca* (2008). E-mail: <[dario.villanueva@usc.es](mailto:dario.villanueva@usc.es)>