

Theory, Period Styles, and Comparative Literature as Discipline

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Edmonton

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Slobodan Sucur,
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Abstract: In his article, "Theory, Period Styles, and Comparative Literature as Discipline," Slobodan Sucur attempts to answer the following question: Can a rapprochement be brought about between various, often antagonistic, literary-theoretical views and the concept of comparative literature itself, which requires accord, consensus, agreement, etc., for it to function as a concrete body and discipline? Sucur attempts dealing with this question in three parts of the paper: First, he establishes a relationship/link between the theoretical discord of today (humanism, formalism, deconstruction, etc.) and the high theorizing which began during the Jena-Berlin phase of Romanticism (Shelling, Hegel, F. Schlegel, etc.); secondly, he attempts linking the origin of comparative literature with later Romanticism (Virgil Nemoianu's idea of the Biedermeier) in order to account for some inconsistencies between ideas of "theory" on the one hand, and "discipline" on the other; and thirdly, he speculates on whether or not "literary history" -- an idea often neglected now -- can be the bridge where literary theory meets up with comparative literature as a disciplinary endeavor, that is, in the act of writing a comparative literary history.

Slobodan SUCUR

Theory, Period Styles, and Comparative Literature as Discipline

It is sometimes said that the origins of comparative literature are tied to debates concerning the renewal of the notion of literature, tied together because such theoretical debates on literariness, text, aesthetics, etc., and theoretical debates in general which still affect us, appear to originate with the Jena-Berlin school of Romanticism (the first phase), the approximate period from which the origins of comparative literature emanate as well. The question which looms large here is the following: Can a rapprochement be brought about between various, often antagonistic, literary-theoretical views and the concept of comparative literature itself, which requires accord, consensus, agreement, etc., for it to function as a concrete body and discipline? I will deal with the question by splitting this paper into three parts. In the first part, I will expose the antagonistic nature of theory by looking at some formalist, deconstructionist, and humanist views, views which seem to feed on each other for survival, and which pose a threat to the notion of smoothly operating disciplines such as Comparative Literature, Art History, etc.; the antagonism, inconsistency, and confusion which is present in and arises because of the polemic nature of these views will be traced back to early Romanticism. In the second part of the paper, I will use Ali Behdad's concept of "belatedness," juxtaposed onto Virgil Nemoianu's argument for a Biedermeier style, to explain why comparative literature as a discipline seems to be a product of the same Romanticism that gave birth to high theorizing but simultaneously seems to be divided and at odds with this "other," theoretical product; I will attempt to account for this supposed paradox. In the third and final part of the paper, I will attempt to reconcile theory and discipline (i.e., comparative literature) by bringing in the notion of literary history as a medium through which antagonisms can be subsumed, and perhaps even cancelled out, by larger narrative accounts of literary and theoretical development, by meta-endeavors, as it were; I will also speak of other concepts in this final section.

Theory, Discord, and Early Romanticism

It may be odd that I am beginning a discussion on theory, discord, and Romanticism by citing examples from Russian Formalism, because the latter school of thought is often said to be anti-Romantic, especially in its reaction against Symbolist poetics, as Selden says in his *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory: The Futurists*, who provided the initial impetus for Formalism, directed their artistic efforts "against 'decadent' bourgeois culture and especially against the anguished soul-searching of the Symbolist movement in poetry and the visual arts ... [and against] the mystical posturing of poets" (30). Nonetheless, certain Formalist assumptions were later attacked by post-structuralism, leading to conceptual opposition and discord, and besides, while Selden believes that Formalism was anti-Romantic owing to its avoidance of Symbolist assumptions, we may also argue that Symbolism was itself anti-Romantic owing to its elaboration on earlier, romantic tendencies, and so on.

As I have said, certain Formalist assumptions were later attacked, and this is why I mention such assumptions. One of the clearest examples of Formalism is found in Victor Shklovsky's article, "Art as Technique," where one of the major points is that the very phrase, "works of art," designates those "works created by special techniques designed to make the works as obviously artistic as possible" (17). What Shklovsky is working towards with such a comment is the idea of art, in this case poetry, as an autonomous construct, a self-sufficient entity that is set up through conscious craftsmanship: He cements the essence of his argument later by saying that what is required is a proper distinction "between the laws of practical language and the laws of poetic language" (19). Further on, Shklovsky offers a sentence that has been quoted and criticized often: "*Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important*" (20; italics in the original). Near the end of the article, he once again reaffirms his views by saying that "a strong tendency ... to create a new and properly poetic language has emerged. In the light of these developments we can define poetry as *attenuated, tortuous* speech. Poetic speech is *formed speech*. Prose is ordinary speech -- economical, easy, proper, the goddess of prose [*dea prosae*] is a goddess of the accurate, facile type, of the 'direct' expression of a child" (28). In his article,

"Linguistics and Poetics," Roman Jakobson continues with this thrust towards an autonomous definition of literature, a thrust which is representative of the earlier phase of Formalism. He speaks of how "the terminological confusion of 'literary studies' with 'criticism' tempts the student of literature to replace the description of the intrinsic values of a literary work by a subjective, censorious verdict. The label 'literary critic' applied to an investigator of literature is as erroneous as 'grammatical (or lexical) critic' would be applied to a linguist. Syntactic and morphological research cannot be supplanted by a normative grammar, and likewise no manifesto, foisting a critic's own tastes and opinions on creative literature, may act as a substitute for an objective scholarly analysis of verbal art" (33). We can see obvious formalistic tendencies in Jakobson's comments, for there is the phrase, "intrinsic values of literature," the phrase, "objective scholarly analysis of verbal art" (which foreshadows New Criticism), and more generally, the comments voice a need for a specialized and élitist grammar to deal with literature. This emphasis on the concept of pure literature and specialized study of that literature is reflected once again in Jakobson's argument when he gives a brief, but almost fetish-like analysis of Poe's "The Raven" at a linguistic level that emphasizes the "literariness" of words (particularly in poetry): "The perch of the raven, 'the pallid bust of Pallas,' is merged through the 'sonorous' paronomasia /páel*d/ -- /páel*s/ into one organic whole (similar to Shelley's molded line 'Sculptured on alabaster obelisk' /sk.lp/ -- /l.b.st/ -- /b.l.sk/). Both confronted words were blended earlier in another epithet of the same bust -- *placid* /pláesld/ -- a poetic portmanteau, and the bond between the sitter and the seat was in turn fastened by a paronomasia: 'bird or beast upon the ... bust.' The bird 'is sitting // On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door,' and the raven on his perch, despite the lover's imperative 'take thy form from off my door,' is nailed to the place by the words **st *b*v/, both of them blended in /b*st/" (50). A fascination with words is quite obvious in this description, but equally so, we can sense a strong linguistic/grammatical presence, in the sense that the thematic meaning of Poe's poem is being rejected in favor of an assessment of textual and verbal structures; in this way, we can clearly see how Formalism goes beyond the impressionistic and thematic, moral commentary of late nineteenth-century liberal humanist criticism. In Jakobson's article, there is a fascination with the mechanical nature and presence of words, and a need for ordered and structured, "objective" linguistic assessment, a need which can be felt in his other article as well, "The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles," particularly near the conclusion, when Jakobson says that "there exist ... grammatical and anti-grammatical but never agrammatical rhymes" (61).

While the early phase of Russian Formalism goes beyond the historical contextualism and obviously subjective, impressionistic commentary of nineteenth-century literary criticism, by returning to "the text" itself and to the presence of "the word" as an object, entity, and structure that defines certain things as being proper "literature," already in Mikhail Bakhtin's article, "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse," we find the beginnings of a critique that is directed at the earlier, formalistic assumptions. While Bakhtin does not go so far as to deconstruct the concept of literature per se, and of self-sustaining artforms, he does do a subtle shift on the Jakobsonian-type argument by emphasizing the need for stylistic rather than linguistically/scientifically oriented studies, especially because "the distinctive features of novelistic discourse, the stylistic *specificum* of the novel as a genre, remained as before unexplained" (126). Bakhtin's emphasis on stylistic study seems to open the floor, so to speak, to larger social and/or historical questions, as exemplified when he cites Belinsky (who called Pushkin's *Evgenij Onegin* "an encyclopedia of Russian life") and then argues against the one-sidedness of Belinsky's comment. It is best to quote most of the passage in question, because the critique against certain aspects of Formalism (Shklovsky's *defamiliarization*, linguistic emphasis, aesthetic unity, etc.) is present to a great degree:

But this is no inert encyclopedia that merely catalogues the things of everyday life. Here Russian life speaks in all its voices, in all the languages and styles of the era. Literary language is not represented in the novel as a unitary, completely finished-off and indisputable language—it is represented precisely as a living mix of varied and opposing forces [*raznorecivost'*], developing and renewing itself. The language of the author strives to overcome the superficial 'literariness' of moribund, outmoded styles and fashionable period-bound languages; it strives to renew itself by drawing on the fundamental elements of folk language ... Pushkin's

novel is a self-critique of the literary language of the era, a product of this language's various strata ... utually illuminating one another. But this interillumination is not of course accomplished at the level of linguistic abstraction: images of language are inseparable from images of various world views and from living beings who are their agents -- people who think, talk, and act in a setting that is social and historically concrete.... The stylistic structure of *Evgenij Onegin* is typical of all authentic novels. To a greater or lesser extent, every novel is a dialogized system made up of the images of 'languages,' styles and consciousness that are concrete and inseparable from language. Language in the novel not only represents, but itself serves as the object of representation. Novelistic discourse is always criticizing itself. (131) □

□

While Bakhtin appears to set up a subtle critique of Formalism in order to resurrect certain aspects of liberal humanist discourse, but in a more modern, socialized and polyphonic way, so as not to repeat the kind of humanism that Formalism had itself critiqued, it is Jacques Derrida's seminal article, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," which goes into a different grey area, so to speak, by exposing the fallacies of Lévi-Strauss' work (as a structural anthropologist). One might initially expect that Derrida, by arguing against Strauss' approach (which we might consider a modernized and refined humanism, as in Bakhtin's case), will eventually come back to some sort of neo-Formalist position (with its emphasis on linguistics and the word as a "sign"), but Derrida also critiques Formalism's position as an alternative to humanistic and structural discourse, when he speaks of how if we wish to extend "the domain or play of signification" infinitely, then we must also reject "the concept and word 'sign' itself -- which is precisely what cannot be done," since we are also caught up in the metaphysics of presence (395). Derrida becomes more specific in his argument when he speaks of two notions of "totalization," where the classical explanation of why totalization is impossible is because there are too many things to empirically circumscribe, and the new explanation of why totality is impossible is because the field of vision, the act of circumscription, is itself finite and totalization is outside the field of "play," play being a concept which Derrida explains as the "movement of supplementarity" that is "permitted by the lack or absence of a center or origin," that is "no longer turned toward the origin" (like the classical attempt at totalization) but rather is a new interpretation, "to which Nietzsche pointed the way," which "tries to pass beyond man and humanism" and does not seek the "inspiration of a new humanism" (404-08). Derrida's critique is therefore directed at the traditional concept of humanism (nineteenth-century mode), at the "new humanism" of Bakhtinian and Lévi-Strauss-like arguments (which is dispersed, polyphonic, difficult to detect, etc.), and at Formalism per se (with its love of the word-sign as a linguistic entity on which we build definitions of literariness, something that Derrida problematizes by destabilizing the Saussurian concept of sign). □□

This can-of-worms which deconstruction has opened up has of course created a larger split between theory and discipline (i.e., comparative literature) than was previously present. In fact, the literariness which Formalism was searching for, together with its division between poetry proper and other literary forms, and together with New Criticism's emphasis on the autonomous artifact (which we also sense in Shklovsky's article), was rather beneficial for the concept of institution, department, discipline, and so on. Since disciplines, especially as they grow, require stability and consensus, then Formalist and New Critical notions of literariness, which maintain the stability of the literary canon, also maintain the élitism and command-structure by which most departments and disciplines begin. In other words, the first step in destabilizing the boundaries of a discipline such as comparative literature, and even art history, etc., is to throw away such terms as artfulness and pure literature, which in turn destabilizes the boundaries of the canon (which may consist of books or paintings) and which defines the discipline in question, and is a marker by which the discipline measures itself. Needless to say, owing to deconstruction, definitions of literature have become more liberal and the canon more flexible, and yet, disciplines still exist, and many have neither collapsed nor fused with other disciplines. Part of the explanation for this anomaly is that, while deconstruction has problematized things, the very fact that deconstruction as a theoretical approach is "undefinable" in the traditional sense allows for institutionally and departmentally beneficial comments to circulate within it (however peculiar this may seem, it explains why institutions have not collapsed, but rather, deconstruction has itself become

institutionalized). □□

One of the most interesting examples of such duplicity is in Paul de Man's article, "The Resistance to Theory," where, among other things, like arguing for a built-in duplicity within theory itself, de Man also, however post-structural his comments may be, seems to maintain, in a subtle fashion of course, that literature is still an autonomous and inherently "literary" entity (which echoes Formalist and New Critical tendencies): "Literature is fiction not because it somehow refuses to acknowledge 'reality,' but because it is not *a priori* certain that language functions according to principles which are those, or which are *like* those, of the phenomenal world. It is therefore not *a priori* certain that literature is a reliable source of information about anything but its own language" (362). However inverted de Man's comment may be, it once again, like Formalism, defines literature as a primarily linguistic and syntactic entity, and nothing more; of course, in de Man's case, rather than defining literature as successful if it attains fictive and aesthetic heights, he defines literature as inevitably failing since it inevitably is fictive and aesthetic, but in turn, this inevitable failure can be looked upon as a success, because in this context, literature that thinks it records reality would be a failure. This upholding of literariness, however pessimistic and inverted it may be, still maintains the stability (however hollow) of departments and disciplines, because the presence of a canon is now maintained; since the "best" texts are inevitably literary and aesthetic (through failure), the canon will forever be rejuvenated and maintained as a healthy entity, because these failed texts will be canonized as the "best texts," and so on, and because most texts fail in being mimetic, there is no chance that second-rate encyclopedias will ever be canonized. De Man's comments are even more complex than I have indicated, because while his inverted support of literariness may echo Formalism, he does say that "no grammatical decoding, however refined, could claim to reach the determining figural dimensions of a text" (367). Such complexities in argument allow de Man to maintain the stability of disciplines and institutions at the same time that he destabilizes them, so that it becomes difficult for us to assess the precise role of theory in institutions, or as he says regarding theory at the conclusion of his article: "What remains impossible to decide is whether this flourishing is a triumph or a fall" (371).

Perhaps it is because of such cases of undecidability that neo-humanist critics like M.H. Abrams and E.D. Hirsch Jr. have argued against deconstructive and duplicitous modes of thought. Abrams, in his article, "The Deconstructive Angel," appears to go back to a fundamentally humanist yet refined, and thematically-oriented position. He argues, with reference to Derrida, that his own "view of language, as it happens, is by and large functional and pragmatic: language, whether spoken or written, is the use of a great variety of speech-acts to accomplish a great diversity of human purposes; only one of these many purposes is to assert something about a state of affairs; and such a linguistic assertion does not mirror, but serves to direct attention to selected aspects of that state of affairs" (266). Hirsch, in his article, "Faulty Perspectives," concludes by saying that no matter how duplicitous and multi-layered one's perspective may be, there is no denying that behind such perspective rests an "empirical actuality," an actuality that is the source of perspective, maintains it, and will always "call in doubt a basic premise of hermeneutical relativism and, with it, most of the presently fashionable forms of cognitive atheism" (263). □□

This Pandora's Box -- which we call theory -- with its many antagonisms, variations, subtleties, and confusions, and with its potential to destabilize and threaten the presence of disciplines such as comparative literature, seems to have its modern origin, as it were, in the Jena-Berlin school of Romanticism, the first phase of the movement. The theorizing of the early Romantic phase also possesses inconsistencies, and antagonisms, and this discord may indeed have filtered down into modern theoretical debates between Humanism, Formalism, Deconstruction, and so on. Miroslav John Hanak, in his *A Guide to Romantic Poetry in Germany*, speaks of the high theorizing of the early Romantic school, and through his discussion, one sees the same discord and confusion that occurs when an Abrams or a Hirsch argues against a Derrida or a Paul de Man, or when a Bakhtin does a variation in thought on a Shklovsky or a Jakobson. Hanak's discussion of idealism and theory in early Romanticism can be split, I believe, into three phases, where each successive phase builds upon the discord and development of the previous phase. The three phases would be

as follows: a) Hamann and Herder versus Kant; b) Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel versus Kant and each other; and c) Friedrich Schlegel attempts a reconciliation of contradictions (and may either parallel or precede Hegel in his endeavors). The problematics of theory and philosophy which still affect us start a bit earlier than the Jena-Berlin phase of Romanticism (1796-1803), but they lead up to this culminating phase, and thus deserve attention. Herder's *Ideas for the Philosophy of History and Mankind* (1784-91), which developed a philosophy of history and ethnic psychology, greatly inspired Kant, but in a negative way, to write his own interpretation of the historic process in *An Idea for a Universal History from the Cosmopolitan Point of View* (1784) (5). This work by Herder, considered his magnum opus, "brought up to date the principle of Aristotelian entelechy, the embodiment of the highest potentiality of a species, postulating a progressive ontology of all existence toward the production of ever more perfect specimens," and Herder, like Plato, "conceived the world as an organism; but rather than a static *zoon empsychon ennoun*, a creature endowed with soul and mind, Herder's universe was actually a dynamic evolutionary process from inanimate to animate nature, culminating in a graduated scale of cultures and individuals" (9). □□

Kant reacted against his student's views in his *An Idea for a Universal History from the Cosmopolitan point of View*, because Kant, as a man of the Enlightenment, regarded past history as a spectacle of human irrationality, and looked forward to a future Utopia of rational life (Hanak 12). The problematic aspect is that, as Hanak argues, while Kant reacted against Herder's interpretation, he simultaneously foreshadowed Hegel's own work, because "Kant's view of history as noumenally grounded reason progressing towards free self-embodiment in the world is already more of a Hegelian and hence, Romantic vision, than a Kantian principle of progress according to enlightened and enlightening reason" (13). The entire chain-of-influence is problematic, because by reacting against his student, Herder, Kant himself went beyond Enlightenment principles. Herder of course had another teacher, apart from Kant, Johann Georg Hamann, who influenced his student more so than Kant. Hamann, in his *Socratic Memorabilia* (1759), argued that the archrationalist Socrates realized that conceptual knowledge cannot penetrate the ultimate questions of being, and in this way, Hamann agreed with Kant's positing of an Ultimate Reality that had to be "assumed" and could not be detected, but instead of denying "absolute conceptual knowledge of any substance" in order to "make room for faith" (like Kant), Hamann, and Herder, kept seeking absolute knowledge, not through reason, but through the "affective faculties" (5-6). As Hanak argues, Hamann and Herder problematized Kant's notions by "radicalizing" the latter's idea of "intersubjectivity" that was developed in his *Third Critique* (1791), and by "glorifying as unique the bias toward sensibility, that paralleled along generally mystic paths the vaunted rationalism of eighteenth century Enlightenment. Hamann and Herder thus legitimized the nobility and cognitive force of the affects, bringing about an era which Rousseau and Voltaire had helped to prepare: the age of Revolution, of emotional, moral and aesthetic liberalism, and of Romantic Utopias" (6-7).

The second layer of theoretical and philosophical antagonism and subtlety occurs with Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, and the variations in thought that arise between them (as a reaction to Kant). Hanak argues that Fichte departs from "Kant's fundamental premise that universal history is an unfolding of a plan," and that much like "Herder's endeavors to identify the Folk Spirit of each nation and race, Fichte sought to define the exact spirit of his own age" in works like *Doctrine of Science* (1796-98) and *The Characteristics of the Present Age* (published in 1806) (14-15). In fact, Hanak goes so far as to state that the "Fichtean metaphysics of becoming reads like a blueprint for Hegel's *Phenomenology, Logic and Encyclopedia*" (15). Schelling is considered a disciple of Fichte, and through him, however remotely, of Kant (18-19). While Schelling's *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (1797), *On the World Soul* (1798), and *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) may overlap with certain Hegelian concepts, through the use of phrases like "movement of nature," "Ultimate Truth," and "Universal Mind," Hanak is quick to point out that there is a subtle difference between Schelling's work and Hegel's: For Hegel, the point of departure is "spiritual-rationalist" while for Schelling the starting point is "aesthetical-naturalist," but this is all a matter of emphasis. For both, the Ground of Being is unconscious and universal, only for Schelling it is the Absolute as Nature, and for Hegel, the Absolute as Spirit; both agree that the real evolves through

a process of reason" (19-21). The main difference between Hegel and Schelling is that in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, "the Kantian dualism between phenomena and noumena is *aufgehoben*, overcome in the broadest sense of the word" (23). In this way, while Fichte and Schelling may anticipate Hegel's work, it is only Hegel who fully breaks away from Kantian discourse. □□

Hanak's argument is interesting, particularly the way in which he sets up the various philosophers as offering polemic or non-polemic answers to Kant (as representative of the Enlightenment). His argument emphasizes the main point which Frederick C. Beiser is making in his article, "Early Romanticism and the *Aufklärung*." Beiser argues that our difficulty in understanding the phase of early Romanticism stems from the fact that the representatives of the movement were "neither revolutionaries nor reactionaries. Rather, they were simply reformers, moderates in the classical tradition" (321). Beiser even looks upon the representatives as "nothing less than the Aufklärer of the 1790s. They seem to differ from the earlier generation of Aufklärer only in their disillusionment with enlightened absolutism and in their readiness to embrace republican ideals" (322). The main problem which the early Romantics had with the Enlightenment was that "two of its most basic ideals -- radical criticism [which the early Romantics rejected] and Bildung [which they approved of] -- were in conflict with one another. For if criticism ends in complete skepticism, then according to what moral, political, and religious principles should we educate the people" (324)? Beiser's question, which he believes the early Romantics raised, is the same question that we now raise when we look at the antagonism, rivalry, and fragmentation which contemporary theory instigates in relation to earlier, structuralist and pre-structuralist theories. The question which early Romanticism raises about the inconsistencies of the Enlightenment is the same question which we may raise about the inconsistencies in Derrida's or de Man's work (and more generally, about the end result of radical criticism). As Beiser says, the early Romantics did not solve the question through their program of "pure aesthetics," a program through which the Enlightenment was ironically "consumed by its own flames" (326), much like early Romanticism, I would add. □□

Friedrich Schlegel came closest, Hanak argues, to actually solving the contradictions which were inherent in the Enlightenment. Schlegel's speculations parallel closely the Hegelian system, but in the case of Hegel, the final solution-synthesis is expected to reveal itself as the "Absolute Spirit or Knowledge," while in Schlegel's case, the solution will come through "progressive universal poetry" (qtd. in Hanak 35). Friedrich Schlegel's attempt at resolution came in three phases. In the first phase (1795-96), he argued that the "flabbiness" and artificiality of modern literature could be rectified through an improvement on the "highest favor of nature," which, for him, was classical poetry, or in simpler terms, an improvement on classicism would simultaneously perfect the romantic program (37). In the second stage of Schlegel's speculation (1796-98), he defined the novel as the key "genre in literature" and a "Romantic life-style setter," by which the novel was viewed as a transcendently-oriented "Christian poetry," a "symbol of the absolute ideal," the "poetic ideal *qua* God" (38). In this second phase, Schlegel later modified his views of the "absolute novel" by introducing the synthetic concept of "irony," through which one could see that "infinite representation" is still embodied in an "existential and aesthetic profile of clearly determined, finite outlines," whereby eternity and time are reconciled (40). In the third stage of his speculation (1799-1800), Schlegel expanded his earlier call for a Romantic "ideal" to include the creation of a new "mythology" which would "reflect the spiritual tendencies of the times," so that classical Greek art still remains prototypical for Schlegel, but rather than merely being surpassed in its "very classicism," it now becomes the prospect for a "limitless growth of classicism," as stipulated in his 116th *Athenäum Fragment* (43). As Hanak says, Schlegel's "bid for a modern mythology gravitates toward Platonic and Christian transcendentalism, rather than Kantian transcendentalism" (44). Schlegel's metaphysical sweeps did not solve the contradictions inherent in the Enlightenment, precisely because I now find myself in a rather Schlegelian position as I go on to the next part of my paper, all the while thinking how I will reconcile theory (with its discord) and discipline (which requires consensus). □□

Belatedness, Period Styles, and the Nature of Comparative Literature □□

Why does comparative literature as a discipline seem to be a product of the same Romanticism

that gave birth to high theorizing but simultaneously seems to be divided and at odds with this "other," theoretical product? Is this an enigma? I personally do not think so. Romanticism as a movement is usually, broadly defined as extending from about 1797 to about 1840 or so, when it is overtaken by the Realist paradigm; these might be the dates for German Romanticism. In England, it is thought that Romanticism begins around the time of the French Revolution (1789), and extends to about Byron's death (1824). Examples can be given of other national literatures as well. However, it is precisely this over-generalization in period styles and literary movements which leads to ambiguities that I am attempting to elaborate on in this section of my argument. A shift in outlook, paradigm, whatever we wish to call it, seems to occur sometime within the period broadly defined as Romanticism. We can see the difference by looking at what various critics say. M.H. Abrams, in his article, "English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age," speaks of how the Romantic poet of the 1790s, in dealing with current affairs, sets up a procedure which is often panoramic, where his stage is cosmic, "his agents quasi-mythological, and his logic of events apocalyptic. Typically this mode of Romantic vision fuses history, politics, philosophy, and religion into one grand design, by asserting Providence -- or some form of natural teleology" (45-46). This is Abrams' view of the 1790s in England. Northrop Frye, in his article, "The Drunken Boat: The Revolutionary Element in Romanticism," speaks of how in "Romanticism proper a prominent place in sense experience is given to the ear, an excellent receiver of oracles but poor in locating things accurately in space ... In later poetry, beginning with *symbolisme* in France ... more emphasis is thrown on vision. In Rimbaud ... the illuminations are thought of pictorially; even the vowels must be visually colored ... Such an emphasis leads to a technique of fragmentation. Poe's attack on the long poem is not a Romantic but an anti-Romantic manifesto, as the direction of its influence indicates" (23-24).□

Ali Behdad, in his *Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution*, speaks of how a "belated reading is not an orthodox reiteration or a reapplication of a previous theory; rather, it is an interventionary articulation of a new problematic through the detour -- or, perhaps more accurately, retour -- of an earlier practice" (3). He develops the concept of belatedness and of belated readings in order to account for the late "Orientalism of travelers such as Nerval, Flaubert, Loti, and Eberhardt [which] vacillates between an insatiable search for a counter experience in the Orient and the melancholic discovery of its impossibility" (15). Regarding Flaubert's *Notes de voyages* (1849-50), Behdad says that "Flaubert abandoned the idea of writing an organized travelogue like those of his orientalist precursors," that his work was "never intended" for publishing, and that the "belated orientalist's discourse [like Flaubert's] is thus an antinarrative, a discursive constellation without a shape, an ideological practice without a doctrine" (54). While Flaubert's belated orientalist discourse is considered by Behdad as a "constellation without a shape" and an "ideological practice without a doctrine," comparative literature as a discipline, and in order to remain a discipline, requires both shape and doctrine. However, if we exempt certain assumptions of belated Orientalism (as formulated by Behdad) from this discussion, but apply the concept of "belatedness" in general to comparative literature, we create a rather concise explanation for why comparative literature seems antagonistic to the theoretical discord of Romanticism, but also seems a product of the self-same Romanticism (as a movement or broad period). Put simply, comparative literature, together with the concept of national literatures and "specialization," came late in the game, late in the period known as Romanticism, and as such, it always seems a "step removed" from the high theorizing of Jena-Berlin Romanticism, and consequently, it appears to be threatened by the conflicts of modern theoretical discourse, which may indeed be an extension of the Jena-Berlin phase, in such figures as Derrida, de Man, Hirsch, and so on (where the contradictions of the Enlightenment have yet to be solved). Robert J. Clements, in his *Comparative Literature as Academic Discipline: A Statement of Principles, Praxis, Standards*, provides an outline of the modern origins of comparative literature which is best quoted in its entirety, since it implicitly emphasizes Behdad's concept of "belatedness" in relation to this discipline: □□"Fortunately in 1832, well after the fall of the Ancien Régime, Jean-Jacques Ampère condemned chauvinism as incompatible with literary cosmopolitanism, although it remained a hydra difficult to dispatch, as French historians of

comparative literature acknowledge ... Between 1828 and 1840 the Sorbonne professor Abel-François Villetain not only employed the term 'comparative literature' in his writings, but led the pack by offering course work in this discipline. The influential Sainte-Beuve legitimized the term in the *Revue des deux mondes* (itself a comparative title) and his *Nouveaux lundis*, to be followed by an international company including Louis Betz, Max Koch, Joseph Texte, Longfellow, Georg Brandes, and others. In Italy Mazzini's *Scritti* (1865-67) declared that no literature could be nurtured by itself or could escape the influence of alien literatures ... the first occurrence of the coinage 'vergleichende Literaturgeschichte' was in Moriz Carrière's book of 1854, *Das Wesen und die Formen der Poesie.*" (3-4) □□

The approximate dates for the origin of comparative literature, which Clements cites, become more significant when we turn to Virgil Nemoianu's *The Taming of Romanticism: European Literature and the Age of Biedermeier*, a work in which Nemoianu elaborates on the concept of a period called Biedermeier, which lasted from approximately 1815 to 1848 (1). Before giving characteristics of the Biedermeier, Nemoianu outlines the various scholarly endeavors which attempted to define this as a post-Romantic period over the years. The concept of Biedermeier as a literary-historical period was put forward in the 1920s by Paul Kluckhohn, Julius Wiegand, and others, but more systematically after 1931 by Günther Weydt and Wilhelm Bietak, who triggered an important scholarly debate in the 1930s (3-4). The participants agreed that the writings of the period they were discussing were marked by certain common features, such as an "inclination toward morality, a mixture of realism and idealism, peaceful domestic values, idyllic intimacy, lack of passion, coziness, contentedness, innocent drollery, conservatism, resignation," and so on (4). "The term 'Biedermeier' had originally been derogatory because of the character Gottlieb Biedermeier, who was invented by Adolf Kussmaul and Ludwig Eichrodt, and introduced to the public in the Munich *Fliegende Blätter* in 1855: "This smug and cozy philistine was a caricature of the old-fashioned petty bourgeois of southern Germany and Austria" (4). Already by 1900, art historians and fashion historians were using the term Biedermeier to describe the intimate, pretty, and quiet paintings of the 1815 to 1848 period (Carl Spitzweg, Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller, etc.) or even the furniture and dress styles (4). The term was also used to evoke the tone and color of an entire age by the nostalgic-ironic novelists Georg Hermann, in his *Jettchen Gebert* (1906), and Thomas Mann, in his *Buddenbrooks* (1901) (4). The debates of the 1930s concerning the Biedermeier did have their problems, among which is the contemporary suspicion that the reappraisal of the 1820s and 1830s was nationalistically motivated: Adolf Bartels, an anti-Semitic populist, tried using Austrian Biedermeier writers as a weapon against "degenerate" modernist writing of the pre-World War One period (4). The other suspicion was that the term Biedermeier is just a tedious concoction, a fruit of, as Nemoianu says, "the tireless *geistesgeschichtlich* urge to invent periodizations, define the spirit of an age, and multiply the breed of historical types" (5). The third objection was that the really important and dynamic force of the 1830s and 1840s is *Das junge Deutschland* (with figures like Karl Gutzkow, Heinrich Heine, Heinrich Laube, Ludwig Börne, etc.), which, like similar contemporary movements (*La giovine Italia*, etc.), represented national and radical tendencies, while the Biedermeier is merely a provincial and epigonic movement, limited to writers like Eduard Mörike, Franz Grillparzer, Jeremias Gotthelf, Anette von Droste-Hülshoff, and so on (5). Nonetheless, there were attempts to rescue the Biedermeier from such restrictions in scope; Hermann Pongs found that demonic and grotesque characters and situations abound in these writings, Rudolf Majut claimed that the Biedermeier could only be understood as a dialectical whole, covering "all the writing" of the period, and most importantly, Friedrich Sengle wrote his monumental three-volume *Biedermeierzeit*, in which he argued that the shifts in social psychology of the time, the objective historical conditions, and the agglomeration of contrasting literary developments, when combined, created a cultural climate that was different from both the early and high Romantic periods and from the post-1850 Realist age (5-6). According to Sengle, the term Biedermeier worked best as a traditional description of a particular "current" in German literature of the time, while "Biedermeierzeit" could be applied to the entire, Metternichian-Restoration period so as to accommodate even opposing literary trends, broadly united by a framework of socio-historical events (6). □□

It is within the framework of a Biedermeier, or should I say Biedermeierzeit paradigm, to use Sengle's term, that we can place the origins of comparative literature, if we remember the dates which Clements gives us for the beginning of the discipline. Behdad's concept of "belatedness" can in this way be seen as an explanation of how the Biedermeier arose in relation to Romanticism proper (which begins with the Jena-Berlin school around 1796 or 1797 and terminates around 1815, coinciding with Napoleon's defeat). The Biedermeier, together with its products (i.e., comparative literature, specializations, national literatures), was, to reintroduce Behdad's terminology again, not an orthodox reiteration or a reapplication of a previous theory, but rather, an interventionary articulation of a new problematic through the detour or, perhaps more accurately, retour, of an earlier practice. Comparative literature, as a belated product of what was once a high Jena-Berlin Romanticism, could not, at the moment of its modern inception, catch up historically and existentially with the discursive, theoretical components of Romanticism proper. As such, comparative literature, because it is a discipline, and more generally, the nature of disciplines per se, as Biedermeier products, would always be naturally and historically threatened by theory and the destabilizing character of such discourse, which, owing to the fact that the Jena-Berlin school preceded the Biedermeier by nearly a quarter-century, itself precedes the inception of disciplines per se, and thus, discipline follows theory, and is not necessarily Behdad's interventionary articulation of a new problematic, but is certainly Behdad's detour or retour around an earlier practice. With this notion in mind, that disciplines are created after theory and "detour" around earlier events, we can see how comparative literature absorbs, for better or worse, destabilizing elements that come before its inception (i.e. theory), but simultaneously, we can see it always maintaining a perhaps not-so-safe distance from the destabilizations inherent in theory, precisely by being historically tied to the Biedermeier period, which faces Romanticism proper, and can even be interpreted as sharing a "door" with Romanticism, through which, if the door is left open, theory will seep into discipline, and inevitably so. □□

Nemoianu seems well aware of this contamination that in part defines the Biedermeier, for when he defines its nature, its constitution, we can see the Biedermeier absorbing certain Romantic tendencies, but we can also see it struggling to define itself as an autonomous entity in relation to its "loftier" predecessor. The disciples of Friedrich Schiller, after 1815, as Nemoianu says, are "rare birds: few were inclined to accept play and aesthetic creation as privileged areas of humaneness" (6-7). The aesthetician J.F. Herbart was typical of the Biedermeier, because he was anti-Kantian and anti-Hegelian, a pragmatic idealist, who believed that art has some autonomy, but that it should not be regarded as a salvation and should be adapted to reality to "provide service" (7). Such utilitarian tendencies are represented by the first, modern network of "popularization," as well, as Nemoianu calls it (7). In the 1820s, 30s, and 40s, there were massive extensions of publishing houses, collections, libraries, and newspapers; Emile Girardin's *La Presse* (1836) is considered the first modern newspaper (7). In Germany, the number of publications hardly rose from 1800 to 1821, but tripled in the next two decades (7). Sensational literature and fairy tales flourished as never before; collections of the brothers Grimm appeared between 1812 and 1826, and England was hit slightly later, by translations of Hans Christian Andersen in 1846, and of F.E. Paget's *The Hope of the Katzekopfs*, in 1844 (8). Even in science, the lofty and visionary theories of earlier times were now empirically tested and directed toward practical application; André-Marie Ampère, Jöns Berzelius, Justus Liebig, Hans Christian Oersted, Georg Ohm, Faraday, and others, were characteristic of the age (8). There is even a Biedermeier age of medicine, characterized by an uneasy empiricism that tried to accommodate James Mill's empirical views with echoes of the earlier "organic vitality" theory; Samuel Hahnemann took the mystical principles of earlier Romanticism and gave them a practical twist by starting a curative industry, homeopathy (8-9). In historical study, the universal syntheses of Schelling and Hegel were replaced by the scruples of Barthold Niebuhr and Leopold von Ranke, and by Friedrich Karl von Savigny's attempts at objectivity; the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, directed by Georg Heinrich Pertz, got underway in 1823, August Böckh began the *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecorum* in 1828, and Georg Grotefend and Jean-François Champollion deciphered the texts of Persian and Egyptian civilization in the 1820s (9). The range of terms in the dictionary of the *Académie*

Française was expanded, and dictionaries with 110,000 to 170,000 entries became popular (9). Eight of the major German museums (including the Glyptothek and what is now called the Alte Pinakothek in Munich) were initiated between 1815 and 1855 (10). The Biedermeier was also an age of caricature and ironic art, like that of the post-Hogarthians (George Cruikshank, Thomas Rowlandson, James Gillray, etc.) (10). □□

Nemoianu's description of the Biedermeier age, or more broadly, of a Biedermeierzeit, takes into account the characteristics which were fruitful for the rise of comparative literature as a discipline, because the age's need for compartmentalization, orderliness, and concretization, as exemplified via the publishing of anthologies of literature, the proliferation of dictionaries and encyclopedias, the creation of museums, and more generally, the need for stability, can in itself be taken as a definition of the nature of disciplines per se, and of their common features, features which distinguish disciplinary endeavors from purely theoretical ones, which appear to gravitate toward meta-syntheses, panoramic, Schlegelian sweeps, and ideal, Platonic models. Nemoianu is not alone in his argument for a distinct Biedermeier age (that differs from early and high Romanticism and the post-1850 Realist period), and his views are echoed in the comments of others. On the website, *Bidermajer u Hrvatskoj (Biedermeier in Croatia)*, Vladimir Malekovic, in his introductory article of the same title, gives the etymology for Biedermeier style as follows: □□"Its roots are in English Rococo furniture (Chippendale), in 'Gothic forms' which will experience their revival at the end of the eighteenth century, especially in Germanic lands; in classicism, from which it takes, among certain decorative elements, a tendency toward the functional; in the Empire style, to which it owes something that G. Semper describes as 'antike Formalismus.' Without a doubt the Biedermeier owes most to England, where already in the second half of the eighteenth century there was a search for unity between technology and art, and the beginnings of industrial technology use, especially in craft manufacture ... Cultural differences aided the transition of classicism and Empire to Biedermeier, and the conflict of interest between countries which decisively influenced that process (England, France, Austria, Germanic lands), if anything, gave an ironic context to things ... The doors to the Empire style were opened across Europe by Napoleon's victories, the doors to the Biedermeier were opened by his defeat ... The history of art has already shown that those places receptive to classicism, particularly the Empire style, were ideal places for the development of a new style -- Biedermeier. Among such places is Croatia, where classicist and Empire cultures penetrated directly: from the Sava in the north to the Adriatic in the south during the time of Napoleon's Illyria, notably, 'French Croatia'." (see Malekovic <<http://www.tel.hr/muo/bider/hrv/hmalek.htm>>; my translation)□□

In his book on the Serbian Biedermeier poet, Jovan Sterija Popovic, who is described as a "humorist and parodist," Dragisa Zivkovic defines the Biedermeier as follows:□□"The main characteristic of this epoch is the mixture of directions and trends, so that the Biedermeier appears as a stylistic complex in which come together Byronists, late classicists, and late Romantic epigones, young German, liberally oriented revolutionaries and formalistically oriented novelists. And these 'feuding brothers' of the Biedermeier, so similar in general worldly feeling and in melancholic mood, but then again so different in their literary orientations, use parody as a general offensive tool. Parodied are the classicist epic and Baroque novel, Romantic idealism and sentimental pathos, enlightened treatises and moralistic writings. At the basis of all this lies a strengthening of traditional consciousness and conservative thoughts tied together with an ever growing historicism. Pushed out of politics, the Biedermeier citizen turns to literature and cultural works, hoping to become the equal of the nobility not only through monetary wealth but also through cultivation and style of life. That aristocratic-civic culture ('transforming of nobility to bourgeois' and 'aristocratization of civilians') slowly erases and dulls class boundaries; the satire which is intensively nursed in this period is directed more toward human imperfections than toward social-class oppositions. From there, in that genre, we come upon a caricaturing of banal and trivial occurrences in human behavior." (*Bidermajerski Usamljenik Sterija* 10-11; my translation.) □□

Such observations allow us to see comparative literature, as a discipline, and the nature of disciplines per se, within the framework of a socio-historical milieu from which the origins of

disciplinarity emanate. As I mentioned earlier, when we speak of Romanticism in overly broad terms, we come to view comparative literature as being some sort of "paradoxical" product of the self-same Romanticism which also gave birth to modern theoretical debates that still affect us, and which threaten to destabilize the concept of disciplinary studies in general, to break down the boundaries, as it were. Behdad's concept of "belatedness," when coupled with Nemoianu's argument for a Biedermeier milieu that comes after early and high Romanticism but before the later turbulence of a post-1850 Realism, becomes a rather elaborate, but I believe satisfactory explanation for why comparative literature is not a parallel product of Jena-Berlin theorizing on literature, literariness, aesthetics, and the contradictions of Enlightenment discourse (radical criticism versus Bildung), but is a belated product of the concerns and problems which marked this earlier, more idealistic and philosophical phase of Romanticism. When we think in terms of a bi-part model, where Romanticism is followed by a Biedermeier phase that attempts to put thought and idea into a practical, and serviceable context, via the creation of disciplinary studies, the building of museums, the inception of national literatures, the making of specializations, and so on, we realize that comparative literature is not paradoxically tied to the potentially destabilizing discourse of Hegelian and Schlegelian sweeps, and more recently, Derridian discursiveness, but is a "step removed" from theory. Why do I say this? By "step removed," I mean to say that comparative literature, as a product of the Biedermeierzeit, is itself historically and spatially removed from theory originating around Jena and Berlin, or rather, separated by time and context (about a quarter-century). This removal, rather than cementing the impossibility of a reconciliation between theory and discipline-praxis, has its good points. By being a "step removed" from high theory in its own origin, comparative literature is guaranteed autonomy through historical and existential facts, and precisely because of this, because of its Biedermeier-originated existence as a "discipline," it can attempt to reconcile itself with the revolutionary and destabilizing nature of theory, because by looking at theory and theoretical concerns, it does not need to "fear consuming itself in its own flames," a phrase that Beiser uses to explain the collapse of the Enlightenment/early Romantic project. It does not need to fear that by looking at and trying to understand theory, it will recreate the Hegelian and Schlegelian attempt to understand and transcend Kant, an attempt that turns into a Phoenix. As Nemoianu says, wrapped around Biedermeier events was "Metternich's system, not the repressive ogre-like enclosure it was made out to be by partisan commentators, but rather a dialectical and sophisticated framework that could preserve stability by absorbing and particularly by expecting opposition from within and without" (12). There is no destructive paradox enacted when comparative literature glances at its preceding, Romantic period, because, to use Behdad's terminology again, it retours around earlier events, and, I will add, allows earlier events to pass through it, thereby maintaining the potential for reconciliation between theory and discipline. □□

Reconciliation through Literary History and Other Things □□

I mentioned in the introduction that in this final part of the paper, I would attempt reconciling theory and discipline (i.e., comparative literature) by bringing in the notion of literary history as a medium through which antagonisms can be subsumed, and perhaps even cancelled out, by larger narrative accounts of literary and theoretical development, by meta-endeavors, as it were. To view literary history as a possible salvation, where theoretical destabilizations and disciplinary cohesions come together, is problematic in this day and age, to say the least. □□

David Perkins, in his work, *Is Literary History Possible?*, voices serious reservations about the possibility and accuracy of literary history, to do anything. Literary history, of the narrative type, was rather popular during the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century, and was guided by three main assumptions: a) that literary works are formed by their historical context b) that change in literature takes place developmentally c) that this change is the unfolding of an idea, principle, or suprapersonal entity (1-2). The assault on literary history was already evident by the end of the nineteenth century, with its *fin de siècle* aestheticism, because such critics as Edmond Scherer and Emile Faguet pointed out that historical contextualism can explain everything except what one most wants to explain, literary "genius" (7). Russian Formalism did not question the possibility of writing literary history, but argued that historical contextualism was ineffective, and

that traces of development were to be found in the text itself (8). New Criticism programmatically rejected literary history, and eventually, deconstruction, by exposing the aporias of periods, movements, genres, classifications, and so on, made it difficult, probably impossible to generalize texts and frame them within meta-historical discussions (8-9). Perkins remains unconvinced that literary history can be written, because future criteria will demand different literary histories, and so on, but he still believes that it is a necessary endeavor (17). He remains unimpressed by the obvious artificiality of literary history; the chosen starting point of discussion in literary history has a strong impact on the way the past is represented, so that quite often, a phase of synthesis and homogeneity is said to precede the period which is the subject of the book, as in one article by Marshall Brown on nineteenth-century Realism, which stipulates that the eighteenth century was "more unified," or in the work of Ian Watt, where the divisions of the eighteenth century are juxtaposed to the homogenous Renaissance and seventeenth century, or in the work of Victorian specialists, who speak of Romanticism as the lost age of "universals" (36-37). Perkins argues that the ending of a literary history is equally artificial, set up for reasons of climax, as in Wilhelm Scherer's *History of German Literature* from 1883, which concludes with Goethe, saying that the latest 50 years will not be dealt with, since they will "spoil the study" (37). As far as the postmodern, "encyclopedic" literary history is concerned (examples of which are the *Columbia Literary History of the United States* from 1987 and *A New History of French Literature* from 1989), Perkins dismisses it as not being literary history per se because it establishes diversity and contradiction as structural principles, foregoes closure and consensus, and most importantly, does not organize the past into an entity (56-60). □□

Roland Champagne, in his work, *Literary History in the Wake of Roland Barthes*, echoes certain aspects of Perkins' comments, particularly the opinion that the concept of literary history has been problematized in our own day and age. Barthes in fact played a key role in bringing theoretical concerns into the arena of literary history, and through that gesture, he foreshadows what I may be said to be doing here, namely, setting up literary history as a bridge on which theoretical, meta-literary concerns meet up with disciplinary and empirically oriented concerns regarding the integrity of national literatures, specific genres, styles, and so on. Barthes enlarged the empirical-scientific view of literary history developed by Gustave Lanson to include "that 'impressionism' which Lanson had easily relegated to an activity called 'criticism.'" By introducing the subject into history, Barthes advocated a new era for literary history wherein texts of previous historical moments would be re-examined in order to account for the complex threads of the subjective investigator in the assumptions of established literary traditions" (3). Barthes refuted the systematic ordering of what he called "classical texts" by literary history into a linear and temporal succession of one tradition after another, by advocating the "modern text" (like the works of Flaubert), as having an "historical self-awareness" that paradoxically makes it "ahistorical," whereby we can, by reading the modern text, understand the problematics of literary history through our contemplation of how these new texts generate meaning, rather than how they can be grouped into convenient literary movements (5). It is interesting that Barthes should define the modern text, which invites interpretation rather than periodization, as originating around 1850, and as having something to do with Flaubert, because, as we remember, Ali Behdad applies his concept of "belatedness" to the orientalism which operates in Flaubert's *Notes de voyages* of 1850, this being a concept which I found easily explains and parallels the relationship of the Biedermeier to Romanticism, even though Behdad and Barthes seem to be speaking of a post-Biedermeier, post-1850 phase. It is entirely possible that they may not even have a Biedermeier context or paradigm in mind, but are, however implicitly, elaborating their arguments in terms of the more traditional, simpler, and cleaner Romanticism-Realism "break" in literary periods. □□

Barthes's approach, which brought the "subject" into the question of literary history, seems to have rubbed off on Mario J. Valdés' article, "Rethinking Literary History -- Comparatively," because here, Valdés, while attempting to break the confines of typical, national literary histories, advises caution. He believes that a shift has occurred from "validation to signification," whereby literary historians must now "reconceptualize historical process to include the relations between texts and the contexts of production and reception ... The Foucaultian linking of power and knowledge points

here ... to an awareness that, while events did occur in the past, we give meaning to [them] ... This is not a defeatist invalidation of the process of history-writing; it is merely a frank acknowledgment of a hermeneutic reality" (6). Valdés further speaks of how in order for a "comparative literary history" to take such things into account, it would have to "foreground ... methodological frameworks (hermeneutic, post-structuralist, post-colonial, feminist, and so on) and directly address its own theoretical assumptions regarding both texts and contexts (socio-cultural, economic, political, aesthetic). How this might work *in practice* [remains to be seen]." (6). □□ Valdés's concept of the "comparative literary history," which I believe would have a greater chance of reconciling theoretical discord with comparative literature as a coherent body and disciplinary effort, precisely because of the comparative thrust of such a history, is more difficult to set up than a merely national literary history, that functions within smaller boundaries, and that does not offer as great a promise of reconciliation. Even the current *Comparative Literary History Series* (initiated and sponsored by the International Comparative Literature Association) which is published under the directorship of Valdés, is not set up as a full and comprehensive analysis of literary and meta-literary concerns; *Romantic Irony*, edited by Frederick Garber, gravitates (with most of the articles) toward German literature and there are no articles on Romantic Irony in Far Eastern literatures; in the case of *Symbolist Movement*, edited by Anna Balakian, most articles gravitate towards France, and so on. An assessment of literary movements is usually tied to their country of origin, so to speak, and besides, comparative literary histories, like the series just mentioned, are limited by practical concerns as well (they would be thousands of pages long if they dealt with literary periods in a fully international fashion, and there is always the risk that a "forced internationalism" of certain movements would result, creating an artificial and false assessment). We should also remember that the above mentioned series is published as individual collections of separate articles, in "postmodern encyclopedic" style (to use Perkins's phrase), on certain topics and movements, so that the very form gravitates toward fragmentation. An example of a comparative literary history that functions as a narrative, putting movements into chapters, would be Werner P. Friederich's *Outline of Comparative Literature from Dante Alighieri to Eugene O'Neill*, published in 1954, but such a format also has its limitations, and may be accused of being forced, overly general, and artificial. Indeed, such ultra-comprehensive endeavors do have an amateurish air about them. Valdés's point is thus well taken, that comparative literary histories would be difficult to set up, because both methodological frameworks and theoretical assumptions would have to be taken into account.

In his *An Analytical Approach to Comparative Literature*, Jintaro Kataoka also speculates on the potential for comparative, and world literary histories. Among several interesting points that he makes are three which stood out in my mind, and which seem crucial if one is to develop a truly comparative literary history: a) for a comparative literary history to emerge, dimensional restrictions need to be overcome b) for such a history to emerge, the intuitive factor of literary creation needs to be accommodated for c) for this history to emerge, the literary historian must recognize as his true audience the writers who are spoken of. The first point, of overcoming dimensional restrictions, Kataoka appears to derive from John Drinkwater's *The Outlines of Literature and Art* (1924), which attempted to give form to a history of world literature, and Kataoka elaborates by saying that if "there could exist a legitimate history of world literature very well adapted to the life [political, economic, cultural, climactic, etc.] in these two different worlds [East and West], then and then only would there be able to appear a real history of the Western Literature and a valid history of the Eastern Literature" (16). Regarding the second point, of accommodating intuition, which Kataoka also calls the "impetus of life" and the "feeling of existence," it is said that intuition, being our thought at some primordial level, "is not yet intellect and as such it is not concerned with the relations between things: it cannot err, as intellect can, by referring *things* to the wrong *concepts*" (65); Kataoka argues that such a purely aesthetic, unerring idea (which he seems to manufacture by mixing the ideas of Kant, Schelling, Bergson, and others) must be accommodated for in world literary histories, primarily because art, that is to say, literature, is being dealt with, and he offers an equation which would accommodate for this creative principle, that is evocative of Keats's "Truth and Beauty": $(L \text{ times } S) L = S L^2$,

where S stands for scientific factors which endorse intuition through experiment, and L is literature, and where S corresponds with Keats's "Truth" and L with his "Beauty" (65). Regarding the third point, Kataoka argues that for "a literary historian, the aim and the interest he seeks to find are just those the author tries to embody ... In creation the author should, either consciously or unconsciously, appreciate the position of the literary historian, in whose work the former is to be represented exclusively by his own productions" (83). The reason I mention Kataoka's points is because they demonstrate how a comparative literary history, particularly in order somehow to reconcile and intermesh high theory with the disciplinary endeavor of writing a literary history, would have to juggle several concepts and needs simultaneously. Kataoka's proposition is a perfect example of the difficulty of such an endeavor, because while his first point is well taken, that dimensional restrictions need to be broken for such a literary history to emerge (which echoes Valdés's point in his article), the second point, dealing with intuition as a pure, unerring, and Keatsian principle that must be interwoven into a comparative literary history, while it sounds pretty, threatens, much like the early Romantic endeavor to solve Enlightenment contradictions, "to consume itself in its own flames." Kataoka's final point, that literary historians should write for authors as their true audience, I am sure, would be attacked for leaning too closely on Formalist principles (i.e., that readers when reading, and writing, should put themselves into the mind of a writer). □□

Setting up a comparative literary history that would somehow be aware of its own theoretical limitations and fallacies, but would simultaneously offer an effective and understandable assessment of the topic at hand (literary influence, period styles, revolutionary trends, etc.), and thereby, would reconcile the dangerous, and cautionary aspects of theory, with the need to maintain a disciplinary endeavor (the very writing of a literary history), is not simple. Valdés's comments, Perkins's grudges, and Kataoka's all-too-lofty machinations are obvious examples of the difficult position I find myself in: offering literary history as a salvation, where theory and discipline meet. I believe the best way to ensure for success in this venture is to remain modest, and aware of the subtleties that are involved in the very process of writing, which becomes a meta-writing when literary history is involved. Earl Miner, in his *Comparative Poetics: An Intercultural Essay on Theories of Literature*, almost seems to be apologizing for writing his work, when he concludes the first chapter by saying the following: "Nothing in the preceding, nothing in what follows, is meant to argue for a single conception of comparative poetics. All that is argued, and it is quite enough, is that comparative poetics requires two things: a satisfactory conception and practice of comparison along with an attention to poetics (conceptions of literature) that rest on historically sound evidence" (32).

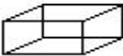
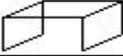
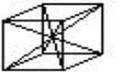
Post-structuralism would of course ask the question, What is "historically sound evidence"?, so that Miner's comment itself falls apart, once again undermining the purpose behind literary history. As I have said, comparative literary history may reconcile theory and discipline, but only through a cautionary and modest approach. My proposal for success requires that we write a conceptual literary history, which is a sub-branch of narrative literary history, but is a more interesting variant, because it organizes and interconnects events in a powerful way, by exhibiting the interrelation of events as the logical relations of ideas; a possible example would be to view only a "section" of the eighteenth century as the "Age of Reason," and then to display certain texts as being not completely representative, but only representative of particular "sides" of the idea in question (Perkins 49). We would have to keep in mind two things while writing such a subtle and cautionary history. First, we would have to acknowledge Barthes' conception of the "subject" as being an active factor in the construction of a literary history, whereby we would have to argue that our analysis of certain literary-historical periods, rather than extracting the "essence" of a period, is juxtaposing our own notion of the "essence of a period" onto the period in question in order to attempt explaining our own contemporary period, in the act of "hypothetically" explaining an earlier historical period, whereby the "hypotheticality" of this latter maneuver, rather than being cancelled out through the act of bestowing significance on our own period (echoing the Hegelian dialectic), would itself be recognized as significant, in the sense that certain hypothetical explanations are useful (practical and beneficial). The second thing we would have to keep in mind

(which is required for the above mechanism to work) while writing a conceptual, comparative literary history, is a comment uttered by Dilthey, that while he cannot accept the teleological/mystical ideas of Hegel in unmodified form, he is willing to accept that because of complex and specific circumstances, an idea may indeed have an historical moment of prevalence (qtd. in Perkins 134).

The other, perhaps final way to attempt reconciling theory and comparative literature as a discipline, which may be accommodated for most appropriately in a conceptual literary history, by the way, is through the use of geometrical models of discourse. However unusual or perverse it may sound, I was inspired to propose this as a possible solution by a section of Paul de Man's article, "The Resistance to Theory," where he mentions the following: "Seventeenth-century epistemology, for instance, at the moment when the relationship between philosophy and mathematics is particularly close, holds up the language of what it calls geometry (*mos geometricus*), and which in fact includes the homogenous concatenation between space, time and number, as the sole model of coherence and economy. Reasoning *more geometrico* is said to be almost the only mode of reasoning that is infallible, because it is the only one to adhere to the true method, whereas all other ones are by natural necessity in a degree of confusion of which only geometrical minds can be aware" (364-65). Geometrical models, precisely because of their three-dimensional nature of representation, whether they be on paper or contemplated in the mind, allow for a spatial analogy with the external world, outside of the "subject," and thereby, such models allow for bonding between theoretical concepts, literary/aesthetic styles, and architectural figures. This may be a possible solution that brings together theory and comparative literature (as a discipline requiring cohesion), via the representation of a conceptual-stylistic-figural continuum, through the three-dimensionality of geometrical models. I should mention a rather important point here, that while these geometrical models which I am proposing do evoke and should evoke spatial constructs (architecture, etc.), they are nonetheless and necessarily toned-down, by being *only* models, and as such, they are subtle and fluid enough to function within a discipline, such as ours, that deals with discourse, text, and the very notion of medium.

These geometrical models of discourse would, in their final stage, best work within a conceptual, comparative literary history, because they themselves, through their spatial analogy with the world, stand as comparative concepts/constructs. The models would probably emerge from a subtle and historically self-conscious analysis, that may deal with literature per se, or certain textual features, or even the notion and nature of medium and communication. The models might even emerge initially within the context of a rather limited discussion, that may only deal with a few writers, or a few theoreticians, but would eventually, gradually, and cautiously, be verified or disproved within larger contexts (literary histories, New Historical readings, political-ideological discussions, etc.). It may be the case that a certain number of these proposed models of discourse would be rejected as inaccurate or incomplete, but that a few would be found to be rather effective in their potential for explanation within our discipline. To use the example of myself, I began playing with the concept of these geometrical models through my reading of the Lacan-Derrida-Johnson-Irwin debate on Poe's "The Purloined Letter," which is a rather focused topic, but gradually, after becoming acquainted with hermeneutics, I was further able to develop my views on geometrical models, and their potential to reconcile antagonisms, by looking at Gadamer's disapproval of Cartesian and Hegelian models of subjectivity, and his preference for Aristotle, who, unlike Plato, does not separate theory from praxis (qtd. in Hoy 60). This Platonic separation of theory from praxis is, at some fundamental level, what I have been contemplating throughout this paper. The geometrical models which I am proposing, that might crop up anywhere but would probably be used as tools in conceptual literary histories, are possible solutions to discord and fragmentation, and I assume, as with any such unusual proposal, modifications are both required and welcome. □

Models of Discourse

Type	Value	Shape
Socratic-Platonic discourse	2 or 4	
Sophoclean-Aristotelian dialectic	1 or 3	
Rococo chatoyante-broderie	1 ^{1/2}	
Hegelian dialectic	3	
Poesque-Borgesian discourse	4	
Derridian discursive dialectic	3 ^{1/2}	
Hegelian dialectic doubled and self-framed	7	
Hegelian dialectic multiplied infinitely	n	

The table is my own attempt at these geometrical (and numerical) models, and is merely offered to illustrate what I have been saying. In the table are various models that I have associated with certain types of discourse, and certain period styles. In the case of the Rococo model, I have left one side open, to emphasize that the Rococo was a "play of surfaces," via *chinoiserie* and other features, and not a closed system like Romanticism, which Frye compares to Greek architecture and says, citing Melville, that both showed "reverence for the Archetype" (25). In the case of the Hegelian dialectic, I set the model up as doubling the Aristotelian dialectic (which Gadamer prefers for its emphasis on "phronesis," i.e. practical wisdom, the recognition of man's finitude and historicity) (qtd. in Hoy 60). In this way, my model for the Hegelian dialectic accommodates for Romantic reflexivity, and for the Hegelian idea of "coming-to-self-consciousness," which gradually translates historical experience into a false absolute, giving the individual a sense of "being in a center," and other similar things. Such were the thoughts which went through my mind as I set these models up. In the case of the Derridian model, I set it up as framing the Hegelian model for reflexivity, because Derrida argues against "logocentrism" but is still forced to use the language he disdains. In the case of the Poe-Borges model, I set it up as framing the Platonic notion of an "ideal truth beyond reality," in order to account for the "dream within a dream" quality that is found in the work of these two writers. The last two models, the doubled, self-framed Hegelian dialectic and the infinitely multiplied one, have not yet been attained in discourse, and are my speculation on "future models," that might crop up in future literary-historical periods, and so on.

Even though these models require further elaboration, more discussion as to why particular geometrical shapes were chosen and as to how exactly such shapes would be used as disciplinary tools, a lengthy speech on these and similar issues would go beyond the immediate topic of this paper. Once again, I must stress that the views, particularly of the third part of this paper, are only possible solutions, and require further analysis, but I will venture to say that at least some of my opinions may be relevant. It is already evident in these models, even at a primarily visual

level, that some faint reconciliation between literary theory and our discipline seems to have taken place. The models are, through their simple, reduced, and elegant lines, simultaneously reverential toward the Biedermeier smugness of disciplines and caricatural of the high Romantic endeavors of Derrida and company.

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