

Querying Komparatistik: Recent Books by Corbineau-Hoffmann, Konstantinovic, and O'Sullivan

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Recommended Citation

Nielsen, Wendy C. "Querying Komparatistik: Recent Books by Corbineau-Hoffmann, Konstantinovic, and O'Sullivan." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 4.1 (2002): [<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1145>](https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1145)

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PURDUE

UNIVERSITY PRESS <<http://www.thepress.purdue.edu>>

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 

ISSN 1481-4374 <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>>
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Volume 4 Issue 1 (March 2002) Book Review Article

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<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol4/iss1/6>>

Contents of ***CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 4.1 (2002)**

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol4/iss1/>>

Wendy C. NIELSEN**Querying *Komparatistik*:
Recent Books by Corbineau-Hoffmann, Konstantinovic, and O'Sullivan**

In this review article I discuss three books that reflect current work being done in comparative literature in German in the fields of translation studies, cultural critique, and children's literature. Angelika Corbineau-Hoffmann's *Einführung in die Komparatistik* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt <<http://www.erich-schmidt-verlag.de/>>, 2000. ISBN 3-503-04977-0. 259 pages, bibliography, index), Zoran Konstantinovic's *Grundlagentexte der Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft aus drei Jahrzehnten*. Ed. Beate Burtscher-Bechter, Beate Eder-Jordan, Fridrun Rinner, Martin Sexl, and Klaus Zerinschek (Innsbruck: Studien <<http://www.studienverlag.at/>>, 2000. ISBN 3-7065-1452-4. 445 pages, bibliography), and Emer O'Sullivan's *Kinderliterarische Komparatistik* (Heidelberg: Winter <<http://www.winter-verlag-hd.de/>>, 2000. 549 pages, bibliography, index) provide a complementary view of comparative literature in German. Corbineau-Hoffmann's introduction to what comparative literature means in German-speaking countries illustrates Konstantinovic's life-long work in the field, and O'Sullivan's exhaustive study of international children's literature exemplifies the breadth and depth of comparative literature scholarship in German.

Corbineau-Hoffmann's *Einführung in die Komparatistik (Introduction to Comparative Studies)* begins by defining the field for introductory readers and students. *Allgemeine- und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft* (General and Comparative Literary Studies or AVL) pertains to everyone who considers him- or herself a "Weltbürger" or so-called world citizen among books and who embraces a global understanding of literature and culture (Corbineau-Hoffmann 11). The author's inclination to define this field carefully is not without cause, since some confusion exists in German-speaking academic institutions about who can claim membership to General and who to Comparative Literary Studies. For example, while updating the *International Directory of Comparatists* for CLCWeb, I was queried frequently by German scholars whether or not their scholarship constituted "comparative literature and culture." Corbineau-Hoffmann's illustrative definition of the field should give German comparatists a sense of communal identity for the reason that she bases her categorization on a study of German literature's roots in world literature and culture. For instance, German Classicism flourished on account of its intertextual communication with foreign languages and literatures and Corbineau-Hoffmann elaborates on this relationship. It was Goethe, after all, who broadened the definition of literature to include textual studies (on this, see, for example, Hendrik Birus's article in CLCWeb 2.4 (2000): <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol2/iss4/7/>>). Moreover, Goethe, in Corbineau-Hoffmann's view, embraced literature and texts according to their relevance to contemporary issues. Romanticists like the Schlegel and the Grimm Brothers helped widen the German canon to include works of more diverse cultural value.

Although she begins to present the history of comparative literature in German in a linear way, Corbineau-Hoffmann nonetheless notes the ambiguities and difficulties of characterizing AVL. Here Corbineau-Hoffmann refers to the works of Anglo- and Francophone scholars such as R.A. Sayce, Anthony Thorlby, Jean-Marie Carré, Pierre Brunel, Jeune Simon, and Paul Van Tieghem in addition to a few German-speaking writers such as Austrian Zoran Konstantinovic to trace the history of AVL in the twentieth century. Interestingly, Corbineau-Hoffmann's book is directed at a German-reading audience yet its author turns mainly to her French predecessors in order to classify comparative literature. Overall, *Einführung in die Komparatistik* serves the valuable function of reminding readers and scholars of the distinctive qualities of comparative literary studies. Corbineau-Hoffmann comes to the conclusion that while the critic of national literature approaches texts in a foreign language as different and somehow "other," for comparative critics, this distinction does not exist. This somewhat optimistic hypothesis dictates that AVL scholars have a twenty-first-century European Union and post-Cold War perspective of literature and culture: a world without borders and a hope for a new humanism based on global understanding. Backtracking a few centuries, Corbineau-Hoffmann notes the roots of *Komparatistik* in early modern times. In contrast to the happy globalism of the twentieth-first century, the first German critical scholars adhered to the theory of climactic difference to describe world literature and only with the beginning of French-

German intellectual exchange (such as Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne*) in the Romantic period did German writers begin truly to embrace world literature as their own.

From this brief historical overview of comparative literature in German-speaking lands, Corbineau-Hoffmann launches into a typology of genre, translation, and analysis. While her treatment of genre and translation is brief, the author follows the German tradition of thorough systematic categorization and attempts to classify what a text is and how it could be interpreted by scholars in comparative literature for whom a text is an "open system in which the exchange of different discourses occurs" ("ein offenes System, in dem sich der Austausch verschiedener Diskurse vollzieht" 33). The author applies this Bakhtinian model to closely analyze poetry by Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Baudelaire. In fact, much of the book and particularly the material exemplifying textual analysis and reception are based on Hofmannsthal, Baudelaire, and Oscar Wilde. In my opinion, although the author provides a slightly Eurocentric view of comparative and general literature, her explications of the mechanics of textual analysis are strong. These textual analyses would be useful for beginning scholars in our field looking for ways in which to approach texts from the Western canon comparatively. Corbineau-Hoffmann employs lists of literary characteristics to underline her examples of literary analysis frequently, which could serve literature teachers well in the classroom.

The final chapter of Corbineau-Hoffmann's book is devoted to cultural studies. Again the author often relies on English and French writers such as René Wellek and Michel Foucault to illustrate a sphere of thought not yet canonized in the German academy. The first part of this chapter examines "imagology," in Corbineau-Hoffmann's definition the intersections between picture and text. With the example of Aubray Beardsley's illustrations for Wilde's *Salome* on hand for the reader to share, the author demonstrates a gender-informed literary criticism that cuts across disciplines in art and literature. The last parts of this chapter address hotly debated issues like periodization. Turning a final time to Hofmannsthal and Baudelaire, Corbineau-Hoffmann suggests that comparatists draw authors together based on thematic, rather than temporal, affinities. Corbineau-Hoffmann's concluding epilogue presents the author at her best, for the reason that she is no longer confined to discuss a single subject or exhaustively document the history of ideas in comparative literature. The role played by thinkers and writers in comparative literature, she notes, should be central to the humanities. Since it lies at the crossroads of national literatures, comparative literature has the capacity to become the consciousness of trends in the academy, embodying the "self-reflection of literary studies" ("Selbstreflexion der Literaturwissenschaft" 239). The author concludes by making a prediction about the future of General and Comparative Literature programs in German-speaking countries and suggests that by embracing the concerns encapsulated by cultural studies and liberal concepts of text and textuality, AVL will emerge, like German Classicism, as an international entity.

For readers already familiar with the work of Zoran Konstantinovic, reading Corbineau-Hoffmann's introductory piece may not be entirely necessary. Zoran Konstantinovic's anthology, *Grundlagentexte der Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft aus drei Jahrzehnten (Foundational Texts of Comparative Literature from Three Decades)*, is a pure pleasure to read. Composed of essays from the last three decades -- from 1973 to 1998 -- of this preeminent Austro-Serbian scholar's work and occasioned by his eightieth birthday, this book manages to find a perfect balance between thorough scholarship and readability. Compiled by his students and colleagues, the editors have given one the most renowned European scholar of comparative literature -- and the general reading public -- a better birthday present than in recent decades (Konstantinovic's sixtieth and seventieth birthdays were celebrated by *Festschriften* or commemorative publications). For readers used to the jargon-laden, scientific, and dry prose of the last two decades, Konstantinovic offers a refreshing reminder about what our field should be doing: communicating across diverse cultures, literatures, and schools of thought. Both newcomers to our field and advanced scholars would delight in Konstantinovic's clear prose, cross-disciplinary insights, and profound observations.

Konstantinovic begins where Corbineau-Hoffmann's book leaves off: cultural studies. The book is divided into five distinct categories: essays on theoretical, interdisciplinary, hermeneutical, Cen-

tral European, and Austrian issues. A final sixth section presents essays that do not fit into any of the previously cited categories. The first part articulates Konstantinovic's theory of comparative literature. Like Corbineau-Hoffmann, Konstantinovic recognizes the ambivalence and uncertainty surrounding definitions of comparative literature in German-speaking countries. In the first paper of his book, in "Literary Comparison and the Comparative Reflection" ("Der literarische Vergleich und die komparatistische Reflexion" 19-32), Konstantinovic distinguishes between general comparative literature methodology and the challenges faced by scholars of German (and, in his case, Slavic) AVL. The history of Central European literature, he argues, is synonymous with a history of literary "appropriation" ("Aneignung" 22). Weimar Classicism began with the creation of a German Shakespeare, just as the Slavic literary renaissance began with an East European Schiller. Drawing from the work of the Structuralists (Jurij Tynjanov, Dionýz Duri'in), Konstantinovic argues that these critics gave comparatists the directive to investigate the aesthetic, social underpinnings of literature. The author gives examples of psychological and interdisciplinary (music and literature) comparative methodologies in order to underline his thesis that it is comparative literature's "job" to explore the larger literary systems (epochs, periods, etc.) and spheres of literary influence. In "Transformation in Change" ("Verwandlung im Wandel" 33-51), Konstantinovic argues that the self-reflexive, monitoring mandate of comparative literature is bolstered by comparatists' ability to draw on the interplay between literary historical, psychological, and sociological observations. Similar to Corbineau-Hoffmann, Konstantinovic sees a need to distinguish between national philologists who talk and write about "foreign" literature and the work done by comparative scholars. The latter, he points out, investigate difference and alterity in literature, which reveals itself to be intertextuality. In other words, only a comparative literary approach can do justice to the complex interchange between national literatures.

In contrast to Corbineau-Hoffmann, who focuses mainly on canonized authors, Konstantinovic expands the parameters of comparative studies. In "The Heuristic Point of Departure" ("Der heuristische Ausgangspunkt" 53-64), Konstantinovic recognizes that comparative literature will be responsible for broadening the field of literary study beyond the borders of *belles lettres* to include non-canonical texts. Further, he points out that comparative literature will integrate non-literary perspectives into the field, including cybernetics and information theory. While this observation might seem mundane to twenty-first-century scholars, we must remember that Konstantinovic makes these predictions in 1983, almost a decade before the birth of the internet. Comparative literature is thus given the responsibility to examine a literary work's originality and importance to world literature and culture (including technology, society, philosophy, psychology, religion, and history). Therefore, comparative literature claims a domain over not just literature, but also the self-reflective study of "nation and humanity" (Vajda, qtd. in Konstantinovic 64). In another more recent article in this first section ("On Comparative Studies Present at the Present Time" / "Zum gegenwärtigen Augenblick der Komparatistik" 77-88), Konstantinovic elucidates on this point further and declares that literary studies must be seen as a "study of cultural semiotics" ("[ein] Studium einer Kultursemiotik" 84).

Part two of *Grundlagentexte der Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft* gives further examples of interdisciplinary approaches to literature, culture, and society. After outlining comparative literature's interdisciplinary roots in the nineteenth-century, Konstantinovic examines the intersection between photography and photographic novels (in "From the Photographic Novel to the Photosequence: Reflections on a Comparative Bordercrossing" / "Von Photroman zur Photosequenz. Überlegungen zu einer komparatistischen Grenzüberschreitung" 105-12). An article about the influence of the Bible in Polish and German literature ("The Effects of the Bible as a Problem in Comparative Literary Studies" / "Die Nachwirkungen der Bibel als Problem der Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft" 113-23) is followed by an investigation of Berlin's role in non-Germanic European literature ("Foreigner in the City: A Comparative Article on the Research of Berlin's Image" / "Fremde in der Stadt. Ein komparatistischer Beitrag zur imagologischen Erforschung Berlins" 125-38). Here, Konstantinovic's analysis foreshadows contemporary Berlin's role as a meeting place between West and East: "Perhaps no one in Germany itself ever thought enough about the fact that so many foreigners contributed to Berlin's growth as a cultural metropolis, simply be-

cause that the paths of writers from east and west met there more and more intensely" ("Vielleicht hat man in Deutschland selbst noch nicht genügend darüber nachgedacht, wieviel die Fremden dazu beigetragen haben, dass gerade Berlin zur Kulturmetropole wurde, allein schon dadurch, daß sich dort immer intensiver die Wege der Schriftsteller aus Ost und West trafen" 132). This observation rings true for observers of Berlin today, who encounter Germany's new capital as the new Paris of Central and East Europe.

The third, hermeneutical, part of Konstantinovic's book makes an overview of comparative critics (from France, Germany, Italy, Russia, and Poland) from the nineteenth century to the present, establishes a number of comparative terms through which to analyze literature and culture, and includes an authoritative bibliography of international comparative criticism. In addition, Konstantinovic discusses the ramifications of Freudian psychoanalysis and phenomenology on comparative analyses. The fourth part of *Grundlagentexte* is devoted to Central European (Austrian, Czech, Slovakian, Russian, Hungarian, and Serbian) literature, culture, and criticism and ruminates extensively on *Mitteleuropa's* relation to, exclusion from, and intersection with the Western literary tradition. In the texts of the fifth section of his book, Konstantinovic discusses Austrian literature, culture, and criticism similarly on the ambiguous position of Central European thought within mainstream Western hegemony. Apart from the illuminating and thought-provoking essays within, the most valuable part of Konstantinovic's *Grundlagentexte* is probably the final extensive bibliography (50 pages) of the author's life-long, multilingual work.

Emer O'Sullivan's voluminous book *Kinderliterarische Komparatistik (Comparative Children's Literature)* won the Award for Outstanding Research 2001 from the International Research Society for Children's Literatures and the book is certainly an important contribution to that field. And no doubt could exist about the thoroughness of O'Sullivan's research: with a bibliography of over forty pages and detailed reference notes on almost every page, this book will prove to be an important bibliographic resource for students and scholars of children's literature in German-speaking countries and for scholars who know German. Whereas Corbineau-Hoffmann and Konstantinovic seek to redress the uncertainty of what comparative literature is, O'Sullivan provides a good demonstration of how comparative approaches and texts come together. Although the book's cover promises a truly international comparative approach (with quotes of *Alice in Wonderland* featured in Arabic, Russian, French, German, English, and Swedish), *Kinderliterarische Komparatistik* focuses mainly on German and English children's literature but includes brief forays into Swedish, South African, Italian, Irish, French, and Brazilian textual examples. O'Sullivan's critical references, however, span the literary, critical globe.

Kinderliterarische Komparatistik compares European children's literature using a historically critical and philological methodology strongly informed by reader-response theory. In the first two parts of the book O'Sullivan's delineates the history of children's literature in German, French, British, and Russian criticism. Illustrative graphs are included to demonstrate a theoretical model of reader-response as it relates to "implied" and "real" authors and readers. Here O'Sullivan excels in pinpointing the major issues in comparative children's literature today: the ambiguous yet endless possibilities for dividing children's literature into distinct "categories," the status of children's literature within the academy and comparative studies, and the culturally specific traits of children's literature. The end of the second part of *Kinderliterarische Komparatistik* would be most interesting for comparative readers and scholars, since the author provides a few diverse examples of children's literature across Europe and Africa.

Owing to the fact that *Kinderliterarische Komparatistik* is textually- and thematically-based, O'Sullivan's reflections on translation problems in comparative literature take on greater meaning than similar reflections in Corbineau-Hoffmann and Konstantinovic's books. O'Sullivan devotes the third part of her book to translation issues and examines the problems and unique issues associated with translating literature for children. The author classifies children's literature as a "special case" ("Sonderfall" 179) in translation studies since translation of literature for children aims to capture the imagination of younger readers within their culturally specific contexts, while satisfying parental anxieties in distinct geographical areas. This argument explains the strange alterations to original texts in their translated forms such as the omission of dangerous mushrooms from the

German version of *Pippi Longstocking* or the substitution of a pony for a horse, which the eponymous protagonist lifts above her head in the French version. Inscribed in every translation of a children's story, O'Sullivan points out, are cultural codes and norms. The examples O'Sullivan provides here stem from such well-known texts as *Winnie the Pooh* and *Pinocchio* and extend to lesser known stories and picture books.

The heart of O'Sullivan's monograph is an in-depth comparative study of Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*'s German translations and reception history during the past century. In all, O'Sullivan makes a typology of twenty-nine translations of *Alice in Wonderland* before turning to the story's place in television and animated movies. Despite its many translations, German versions of *Alice in Wonderland* did not become truly popular until Hans Magnus Enzensberger's translation in 1963. O'Sullivan attributes this long and arduous reception history to *Alice in Wonderland*'s status as "nonsense" literature. Moreover, the author takes pains to show how Carroll's tale was carefully "eingedeutscht" or "made German" over the past one hundred and thirty years. Particularly useful here are the illustrations from earlier *Alice in Wonderland* translations, some of which portray the "Mad Tea Party" as a German "Kaffeekränzchen" (coffee circle; 323). Although it is not explicitly stated in *Kinderliterarische Komparatistik*, this final section on *Alice in Wonderland* strengthens the author's implied thesis that, internationally, any given work of foreign children's literature only succeeds after it has been carefully appropriated into native cultural values by the translators. In other words, literary success on the international children's market depends on the ability of translators to make stories seem less "foreign" and to adapt stories to culturally specific pedagogical, moral, and aesthetic norms in "native" children's literature. The conclusion to *Kinderliterarische Komparatistik* points to further political implications of world children's literature. The majority of books read by children in non-Western and non-European countries, for instance, come from North America and North-Western Europe. Referencing postcolonial discourse, O'Sullivan seems dissatisfied with the natural conclusion of her hypothesis (i.e., works from non-European countries fail to appeal to European and North American children because they are not "Western" enough). The solution to this problem, she suggests, is one of canonization. In order to become a classic, the author explains through references to secondary literature, a story for children must contain explicit pedagogical value concerning "childhood." But later, the author admits that the values of "childhood" are relative. With the example of *Pinocchio*, O'Sullivan reiterates her hypothesis that only literature that can be assimilated by translators will succeed within culturally specific contexts. However, she avoids a lengthier discussion on the more elusive issue of canons and canonization in German literature and culture. Instead, O'Sullivan attributes the popularity of children's stories to the globalization of entertainment and to the growing tendency towards generic aesthetics. O'Sullivan ends her book on a sobering note, emphasizing the impact of new media and global culture on world children's literature.

O'Sullivan's final point about the bland character associated with globally-popular literature is reminiscent of Corbineau-Hoffmann and Konstantinovic's critical concern with Germany's history of literary (and cultural) "Aneignung" ("appropriation"). If these three books are indicative of the ingenuity and progress of *Allgemeine- und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft* or *Komparatistik* in German-speaking countries, then German literary history will become increasingly more global.

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