

PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED WELLEK LIBRARY LECTURES

- The Breaking of the Vessels*  
Harold Bloom
- In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*  
Perry Anderson
- Forms of Attention*  
Frank Kermode
- Memoires for Paul de Man*  
Jacques Derrida
- The Ethics of Reading*  
J. Hillis Miller
- Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event*  
Jean-François Lyotard
- Reopening of Closure: Organicism Against Itself*  
Murray Krieger
- Musical Elaborations*  
Edward W. Said
- Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*  
Hélène Cixous
- The Seeds of Time*  
Fredric Jameson
- Refiguring Life: Metaphors of Twentieth-Century Biology*  
Evelyn Fox Keller
- A Fateful Question of Culture*  
Geoffrey Hartman
- The Range of Interpretation*  
Wolfgang Iser
- History's Disquiet: Modernity and Everyday Life*  
Harry Harootunian
- Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*  
Judith Butler
- The Vital Illusion*  
Jean Baudrillard
- Postcolonial Melancholia*  
Paul Gilroy

DEATH OF A DISCIPLINE

GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS NEW YORK

## CHAPTER 1

### CROSSING BORDERS

Since 1992, three years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the discipline of comparative literature has been looking to renovate itself. This is presumably in response to the rising tide of multiculturalism and cultural studies. The first pages of Charles Bernheimer's *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* tell a story that those with experience of national-level professional organizations at work can flesh out in the imagination into a version of the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns:

In the summer of 1992 . . . [the] president of the American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA), asked me to appoint and chair a committee charged to write a so-called Report on Standards for submission to the association. The bylaws of the ACLA . . . mandated that such a report be prepared every ten years. The first report was submitted in 1965 by a committee chaired by my thesis director, Harry Levin; the second was submitted in 1975 by a committee chaired by Tom Greene. A third report was written ten years thereafter, but . . . the chair of that committee was so dissatisfied with the document that he exercised a pocket veto and never submitted it. . . . The first two reports . . . are impressively strong articulations of a view of comparative literature which, in my view, no longer applies to actual practices in the field. . . . A diverse group of top scholars from diverse institutions . . . felt uneasy about being asked to establish "standards" and decided to give more importance to our ideas about the intellectual mission of the discipline than to spelling out requirements (. . . the report [was renamed] the Report on the State of the Discipline).<sup>1</sup>

This is an account of the transformation of comparative literary studies. Comparative social studies, as represented by Area Studies, were undergoing their own transformation. This is well represented by a recent influential pamphlet by Toby Volkman, written while she was Program Officer at the Ford Foundation, from which I have taken my chapter title: "Crossing Borders":

Recent developments have challenged some of the premises of area studies itself. The notion, for exam-

ple, that the world can be divided into knowable, self-contained "areas" has come into question as more attention has been paid to movements between areas. Demographic shifts, diasporas, labor migrations, the movements of global capital and media, and processes of cultural circulation and hybridization have encouraged a more subtle and sensitive reading of areas' identity and composition.<sup>2</sup>

The rest of Volkman's pamphlet contains actual descriptions of institutional projects under six headings: Reconceptualization of "Area"; Borders and Diasporas; Border-Crossing Seminars and Workshops; Curricular Transformation and Integration; Collaborations with Nongovernmental Organizations, Activists, and the Media; and Rethinking Scientific Areas. There are a few examples of Ethnic Studies and Area Studies pulling together, but the only one that may touch traditional comparative literature is the project at Middlebury College, building on its already considerable resources of European language teaching. Indeed, although "popular culture" is an item often included, literature does not seem particularly important in this venture of, as Volkman's subtitle suggests, "Revitalizing Area Studies."<sup>3</sup>

If this is what may be called the current situation, the recent past of these two institutional enterprises can perhaps be recounted as follows. Area Studies were established to secure U.S. power in the Cold War. Comparative Literature was a result of European intellectuals fleeing "totalitarian" regimes. Cultural and Postcolonial Studies relate to the 500 percent increase in Asian immigration in the wake of Lyndon Johnson's reform of the Immigration Act of 1965. Whatever our view of what we do, we are made by the forces of people moving about the world.

How can we respond to the changes brought about by the end of the Cold War, as both the Bernheimer report and the Volkman pamphlet implicitly ask? A simple splicing of Comp. Lit. and Cultural Studies/multiculturalism will not work or will work only too well; same difference. A combination of Ethnic Studies and Area Studies bypasses the literary and the linguistic. What I am proposing is not a politicization of the discipline. We are *in* politics. I am proposing an attempt to depoliticize in order to move away from a politics of hostility, fear, and half solutions. Why, for example, as in the fairly representative passage below, appropriate Brecht to trash Ethnic Studies and Cultural Studies in order to praise a friend's book in the pages of a journal that was established in 1949, in the full flush of Area Studies development, "at a time when the strengthening of good international relations [was] of paramount importance"?

In the face of the wholesale selling-off of the German intellectual tradition by current "German Studies" and the shallowing of philosophically-informed literary theory by the conversion of comparative literature into cultural studies, *Premises* brings to mind Brecht's 1941 comment on Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History": "one thinks with horror of how small the number is of those who are ready even to misunderstand something like this."<sup>4</sup>

Compared to such an outburst, my ideas for an inclusive comparative literature are so depoliticized as to have, unlike the Bernheimer report or the Volkman pamphlet, little to do with the times. I thought Comparative Literature should be world embracing at the beginning of my career. And I continue to believe that the politics of the production of knowledge in area

studies (and also anthropology and the other "human sciences") can be touched by a new Comparative Literature, whose hallmark remains a care for language and idiom.

In 1973, when I was an associate professor, I invited Claudio Guillén to the University of Iowa to give a minicourse. Guillén was moved by my idealism about a global Comparative Literature. He put me on the Executive Committee of the International Comparative Literature Association. I went to Visegrad the following year. I wish I could regale the reader with the symptomatology of that meeting, but must confine myself to one detail.

The association was putting together new scholarly volumes on the periods of European literary history. We discussed the production details of the volume on the Renaissance, if memory serves. I offered to get contacts for scholars in the Indian languages so that we could enlarge the scope of the series. I offered to be active in setting up committees for such investigations in the other comparative clusters of the world: Korean-Chinese-Japanese; Arabic-Persian; the languages of Southeast Asia; African languages. A foolish notion, no doubt. M. Voisine of the Sorbonne, a senior member of the committee, quelled me with a glance: "My friend René Etiemble tells me," he said, "that there is a perfectly acceptable scholarly history of literatures in Chinese."

Memory has no doubt sharpened the exchange. And one person's caustic remark cannot represent an entire discipline. What the exchange does vouch for, however, is my longstanding sense that the logical consequences of our loosely defined discipline were, surely, to include the open-ended possibility of studying all literatures, with linguistic rigor and historical savvy. A level playing field, so to speak.

As it happened, I had also been speaking of what was not yet called Cultural Studies teaming up with Area Studies for

some time. Selecting one example among many, I quote myself, admonishing, in 1988: "As we in the margins try to shore up our defenses, we tend to leave untouched the politics of the specialists of the margin—area studies, anthropology, and the like."<sup>5</sup>

Even from a restricted U.S. perspective, it seems obvious that the sources of literary agency have expanded beyond the old European national literatures. For the *discipline*, the way out seems to be to acknowledge a definitive future anteriority, a "to come"-ness, a "will have happened" quality. This is a protection from self-destructive competition for dwindling resources. It is also a protection from losing the best of the old Comparative Literature: the skill of reading closely in the original. Such a philosophy of planning welcomes nonexhaustive taxonomies, provisional system making, but discourages map-making literary criticism as an end in itself because diagnostic cartography does not keep the door open to the "to come." It is in the acknowledgment of such an open future that we need to consider the resources of Area Studies, specifically geared for what lies beyond the Euro-U.S.

In spite of all the noise about "these times," if the 145 departments or programs listed in the bulletin of the ACLA form a representative sample, the general model in Comparative Literature seemed still, in 2000 when these lectures were delivered, to be Europe and the extracurricular Orient. Ten Comp. Lit. units in the United States seem to have some arrangement with either the social sciences or multiculturalism, and only two of these mention Area Studies. I have no doubt that this is now changing, but cannot keep up with the pace of that change.

Area Studies were founded in the wake of the Cold War and funded by federal grants, backed up by the great foundations, especially Ford.

To meet the demands of war, scholars of diverse disciplines *were forced* to pool their knowledge in frantic attempts to advise administrators and policy makers. . . . The war also showed the need for trained personnel for most foreign areas. . . . In these Army Specialized Training Programs and Civil Affairs Training Schools many professors had their first experience with curricula organized by area rather than by discipline, and many students made a real beginning in the study of foreign areas and in their languages,

says the introduction to the "national conference on the study of world areas, which was held in New York on November 28–30, 1947."<sup>6</sup> Language and Area Centers between 1959 and 1968 were authorized by Public Law 85–864, the National Defense Education Act of 1958 (as amended), Title VI.

Without the support of the humanities, Area Studies can still only transgress frontiers, in the name of crossing borders; and, without a transformed Area Studies, Comparative Literature remains imprisoned within the borders it will not cross. Area studies have resources but also built-in, restricted, but real interdisciplinarity. If one goes down the list of Comparative Literature programs and departments, the interdisciplinarity with music, philosophy, art history, and media remains less persuasive and exceptional. And, whatever we think about the relationship between Comparative Literature and Area Studies, the polarity between Area Studies and Cultural Studies is clear.

Area Studies exhibit quality and rigor (those elusive traits), combined with openly conservative or "no" politics. They are tied to the politics of power, and their connections to the power elite in the countries studied are still strong; the quality of the language learning is generally excellent, though just as generally confined to the needs of social science fieldwork; and

the data processing is sophisticated, extensive, and intensive. Academic "Cultural Studies," as a metropolitan phenomenon originating on the radical fringes of national language departments, opposes this with no more than metropolitan language-based presentist and personalist political convictions, often with visibly foregone conclusions that cannot match the implicit political cunning of Area Studies at their best; and earns itself a reputation for "lack of rigor" as well as for politicizing the academy.<sup>7</sup> The languages of the cultures of origin are invoked at best as delexicalized and fun mother tongues. The real "other" of Cultural Studies is not Area Studies but the civilization courses offered by the European national language departments, generally scorned by Comparative Literature. It is therefore a real sign of change that the Ford initiative, as reflected in the Volkman pamphlet, seems to bring together Ethnic/Cultural Studies and Area Studies. It remains to be seen if the extraordinary metropolitan enthusiasm in the former will undermine the linguistic rigor of the latter. I will discuss that question in the last chapter. Let us return to Comparative Literature.

Area Studies related to foreign "areas." Comparative Literature was made up of Western European "nations." This distinction, between "areas" and "nations," infected Comparative Literature from the start.<sup>8</sup>

If the "origin" of Area Studies was the aftermath of the Cold War, the "origin" of U.S. Comparative Literature had something of a relationship with the events that secured it: the flights of European intellectuals, including such distinguished men as Erich Auerbach, Leo Spitzer, René Wellek, Renato Poggioli, and Claudio Guillén, from "totalitarian" regimes in Europe. One might say that U.S. Comparative Literature was founded on inter-European hospitality, even as Area Studies had been spawned by interregional vigilance.

One way that the nation-region divide is already being negotiated in comparative literature is by destabilizing the "nation"(s)—introducing Francophony, Teutophony, Lusophony, Anglophony, Hispanophony within the old "national" boundaries; the biggest winner in the United States is "Global English." The effort, recalling the initial Birmingham model of Cultural Studies, is to put some black on the Union Jack or, to put a spin on Jesse Jackson's slogan, to paint the red, white, and blue in the colors of the rainbow.<sup>9</sup> This destabilization follows the lines of the old imperialisms and competes with the diversified metropolitan nationalism of Ethnic/Cultural Studies.

The new step that I am proposing would go beyond this acknowledgment and this competition. It would work to make the traditional linguistic sophistication of Comparative Literature supplement Area Studies (and history, anthropology, political theory, and sociology) by approaching the language of the other not only as a "field" language. In the field of literature, we need to move from Anglophony, Lusophony, Teutophony, Francophony, et cetera. We must take the languages of the Southern Hemisphere as active cultural media rather than as objects of cultural study by the sanctioned ignorance of the metropolitan migrant. We cannot dictate a model for this from the offices of the American Comparative Literature Association. We can, however, qualify ourselves and our students to attend upon this as it happens elsewhere. Here and now, I can only caution against some stereotypes: that such an interest is antihybridist, culturally conservative, "ontopologist," "parochial."<sup>10</sup> Indeed, I am inviting the kind of language training that would disclose the irreducible hybridity of all languages. As I have said elsewhere: "The verbal text is jealous of its linguistic signature but impatient of national identity. Translation flourishes by virtue of that paradox."<sup>11</sup> Other stereotypes are correct but irrelevant: namely, that attention

to the languages of the Southern Hemisphere is inconvenient and impractical.<sup>12</sup>

Inconvenient. There are a few hegemonic European languages and innumerable Southern Hemisphere languages. The only principled answer to that is: "Too bad." The old Comparative Literature did not ask the student to learn every hegemonic language; nor will the new ask her or him to learn all the subaltern ones! Can the "native informant" ever become the subject of a "cultural study" that does not resemble metropolitan language-based work? If one asks this question, one sees that the destabilization offered by a merely metropolitan Cultural Studies must exclude much for its own convenience, for the cultural claims of the metropolitan migrant.

Jacques Derrida is the rare philosopher who thinks that philosophical "concepts [cannot] transcend idiomatic differences."<sup>13</sup> Such insights do not apply only to French and German or Greek and Latin. Engagement with the idiom of the global other(s) in the Southern Hemisphere, uninstitutionalized in the Euro-U.S. university structure except via the objectifying, discontinuous, transcoding tourist gaze of anthropology and oral history, is our lesson on displacing the discipline. This is not brought about by the reterritorialized desire of the metropolitan migrant to collaborate with the South, generally through the United Nations by way of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). As I have argued elsewhere, such collaboration is generally possible only with the class, physically "based" in the global South, increasingly produced by globalization, that is sufficiently out of touch with the idiomaticity of nonhegemonic languages.<sup>14</sup>

What I am suggesting may sound discouraging. I hate to use this word, but perhaps it gives us a certain kind of honesty. It should not paralyze us. We cannot not try to open up, from the inside, the colonialism of European national language-based

Comparative Literature and the Cold War format of Area Studies, and infect history and anthropology with the "other" as producer of knowledge. From the inside, acknowledging complicity. No accusations. No excuses. Rather, learning the protocol of those disciplines, turning them around, laboriously, not only by building institutional bridges but also by persistent curricular interventions. The most difficult thing here is to resist mere appropriation by the dominant.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, the question of the old imperialisms and the new empire is itself different if uncoupled from high-culture radicalism. While I was working on this manuscript, I was also looking at the *Report of the Mayor's Task Force on the City University of New York*, undertaken in 1998.<sup>16</sup> The question before us was "What is English? Literary Studies in a Public Urban University." The City University of New York was faulted because 87 percent of its incoming undergraduate class was in remedial English. The report separated the old minorities—giving them the code name of New York City public school graduates—from the new—emergent since Lyndon Johnson lifted the quota system in 1965: "During the 1990's, the white population of New York City declined by 19.3%, while the black, Hispanic, and Asian population have risen by 5.2%, 19.3%, and 53.5%, respectively."

If you sit in on these so-called remedial classes, you perceive the institutional incapacity to cope with the crossroads of race, gender and class—even when the teacher has the best will in the world—to come to grips with the actual play of the choice of English as tongue in the imagination of these working-class new immigrant survival artists. *Le Thé Au Harem d'Archi Ahmed*.<sup>17</sup> As a comparatist I would like to suggest that, just as no "literary studies" in New York City and no doubt in Los Angeles should forget that the answer to the question "What is English?" is that it is more than half the ingredient for producing human capital

(the other half being mathematics), so also, literary studies will have to acknowledge that the European outlines of its premise and one of its tasks—positing the idea of the universality of each of the European national languages (the jealously guarded particular domain of the old Comparative Literature)—have, in globality and in subaltern U.S. multiculturalism, altogether disappeared. There are Haitians and West Africans in those CUNY remedial classes whose imaginations are crossing and being crossed by a double aporia—the cusp of two imperialisms. I have learned something from listening to their talk about and in Creole/French/so-called pidgin and English-as-a-second-language-crossing-into-first—the chosen tongue. I have silently compared their imaginative flexibility, so remarkably and necessarily much stronger, because constantly in use for social survival and mobility, than that of the Columbia undergraduate, held up by the life-support system of a commercializing anglophone culture that trivializes the humanities. It is time, in globality, in New York, and no doubt elsewhere in the metropolis, to put the history of Francophony, Teutophony, Lusophony, Anglophony, Hispanophony *also*—not *only* (please mark the difference)—in a comparative focus.

To pursue this line of thinking further would be to address the question of the thickening of class analysis itself and would take us away from the question of Comparative Literature. I place this parenthesis here so that the reader will take this postponement into account.

Outside of “Gender and Development,” the question of human rights is most often confined within trade-related political paradigms leading to military intervention, ostensibly based on game theory and rational choice as unacknowledged theoretical models. If a responsible comparativism can be of the remotest possible use in the training of the imagination, it

must approach culturally diversified ethical systems diachronically, through the history of multicultural empires, without foregone conclusions. This is the material that is used to fashion violence in the multiform global imaginary. Pedagogically speaking, such studies are much more successful through language-based literary investigation than through evidence from interested cultural informants, like East Asian capitalist men or South or West Asian fundamentalists.

Again, I am not advocating the politicization of the discipline. I am advocating a depoliticization of the politics of hostility toward a politics of friendship to come, and thinking of the role of Comparative Literature in such a responsible effort.

If we seek to supplement gender training and human rights intervention by expanding the scope of Comparative Literature, the proper study of literature may give us entry to the performativity of cultures as instantiated in narrative. Here we stand outside, but not as anthropologist; we stand rather as reader with imagination ready for the effort of othering, however imperfectly, as an end in itself. It is a peculiar end, for “It cannot be motivated . . . except in the requirement for an increase or a supplement of justice [here to the text], and so in the experience of an inadequation or an incalculable disproportion.”<sup>18</sup> This is preparation for a patient and provisional and forever deferred arrival into the performative of the other, in order not to transcode but to draw a response. Believe me, there is a world of difference between the two positions. In order to reclaim the role of teaching literature as training the imagination—the great inbuilt instrument of othering—we may, if we work as hard as old-fashioned Comp. Lit. is known to be capable of doing, come close to the irreducible work of translation, not from language to language but from body to ethical semiosis, that incessant shuttle that is a “life.”



This last sentence draws on the work of Melanie Klein, which I have elsewhere summarized as follows:<sup>19</sup>

The human infant grabs on to some one thing and then things. This grabbing (*begreifen* as in *das Begriff* or concept) of an outside indistinguishable from an inside constitutes an inside, going back and forth and coding everything into a sign-system by the thing(s) grasped. One can call this crude coding a "translation." In this never-ending shuttle, violence translates into conscience and vice versa. From birth to death this "natural" machine, programming the mind perhaps as genetic instructions program the body (where does body stop and mind begin?) is partly metapsychological and therefore outside the grasp of the mind. Thus "nature" passes and repasses into "culture," in a work or shuttling site of violence (deprivation—evil—shocks the infant system-in-the-making more than satisfaction—some say *Paradiso* is the dullest of *The Divine Comedy*—but the passage from mind to body is also violent as such): the violent production of the precarious subject of reparation and responsibility. To plot this weave, the reader—in my estimation, Klein was more a reader than an analyst in the strict Freudian sense—, translating the incessant translating shuttle into that which is read, must have the most intimate access to the rules of representation and permissible narratives which make up the substance of a culture, and must also become responsible and accountable to the writing/translating of the presupposed original.<sup>20</sup>

It is in this painstaking supplementation of the impatient bounty of human rights that we encounter the limit of that

moving frontier of Area Studies/Comparative Literature that is always a "discipline to come," through a type of language learning that fosters access to textuality. Part of this uncertain future is the growing virtualization of frontiers. What we are witnessing in the postcolonial and globalizing world is a return of the demographic, rather than territorial, frontiers that predate and are larger than capitalism. These demographic frontiers, responding to large-scale migration, are now appropriating the contemporary version of virtual reality and creating the kind of parastate collectivities that belonged to the shifting multicultural empires that preceded monopoly capitalism. The problem with the Bernheimer report was that it responded only to the unexamined culturalism of such symptomatic collectivities, the stereotyped producers and consumers of Cultural/Ethnic Studies.

But these are matters for the next two chapters. For now I want to repeat my concern for the literary specificity of the autochthone, which, lost in the shuffle between Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature, could not appear at all in *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*. Comparative Literature and Area Studies *can* work together in the fostering not only of national literatures of the global South but also of the writing of countless indigenous languages in the world that were programmed to vanish when the maps were made. The literatures in English produced by the former British colonies in Africa and Asia should be studied and supported. And who can deny the Spanish and Portuguese literatures of Latin America? Yet the languages that were historically prevented from having a constituted readership or are now losing readership might be allowed to prosper as well, even as the writers contribute to our need for languages. We do not need to map them. Together we can offer them the solidarity of borders that are easily crossed, again and again, as a

permanent from-below interruption of a Comparative Literature to come, the irony of globalization.<sup>21</sup>

As far as I am concerned, then, there is nothing necessarily new about the new Comparative Literature. Nonetheless, I must acknowledge that the times determine how the necessary vision of "comparativity" will play out. Comparative Literature must always cross borders. And crossing borders, as Derrida never ceases reminding us via Kant, is a problematic affair.<sup>22</sup>

I have remarked above that borders are easily crossed from metropolitan countries, whereas attempts to enter from the so-called peripheral countries encounter bureaucratic and policed frontiers, altogether more difficult to penetrate. In spite of the fact that the effects of globalization can be felt all over the world, that there are satellite dishes in Nepalese villages, the opposite is never true. The everyday cultural detail, condition and effect of sedimented cultural idiom, does not come up into satellite country. Putting it this way should make it immediately obvious that the solution is not clear-cut. Let us postpone solution talk and consider a staging of such restricted permeability in Maryse Condé's first novel.

An important infrastructural problem of the restricted permeability of global culture is the lack of communication within and among the immense heterogeneity of the subaltern cultures of the world. In Maryse Condé's *Heremakbonon*, there is a moment when an undisclosed West African subaltern speaker, possibly feminine, says to the French-speaking upper-class young woman from Guadeloupe, who will later compliment herself on knowing Creole, "What strangeness that country [*quelle étrangeté ce pays*] which produced [*qui ne produisait*] neither Mandingo, nor Fulani, nor Toucouleur, nor Serer, nor Woloff, nor Toma, nor Guerze, nor Fang, nor Fon, nor Bété, nor Ewe, nor Dagbani, nor Yoruba, nor Mina, nor Ibo. And it was still Blacks who lived there [*Et c'étaient tout de même*

*des Noirs qui vivaient là!*]."<sup>23</sup> The young woman passes this by, noting only her pleasure at being complimented on her appearance: " 'Are all the women of that country as pretty as Mademoiselle?' I got a silly pleasure out of hearing this." Is this characterization or political comment? How far should literature be read as sociological evidence? We should at least note that Condé herself remarks, in the preface to the much later second French edition, "I had the idea of putting the narrative in the mouth of a negative heroine."<sup>24</sup> Where on this grid of reading literature as text and/or evidence of uneven permeability shall we put a graduate student's comment that the subaltern's remark is improbable, because only an academically educated person would know such a comprehensive list of African languages? The least sense of the shifting demographics of Africa would correct this.

Commenting after the fact on the lines of communication among countries colonized by the same power in the previous centuries, it is possible to speak of an "enabling violation." Perhaps these languages died, but they got French.<sup>25</sup> Can one make such an uninvolved judgment about changes happening in one's own time?

In Richard Philcox's brilliant translation of the passage from Condé I have cited above we read "Fulani and Toucouleur" for the French "Peul and Toucouleur" in the list of languages. Let us pause a moment on this detail of translation, which the metropolitan reader of the translation will undoubtedly pass over.

The Fulbe are a distinct people who apparently originated [text for unpacking there] just above the Sahel between Mauritania and Mali and over the centuries migrated through the savannah of West Africa as far as the Lake Chad area. One of the areas they settled was

the mid-Senegal valley. The mid-valley people referred to themselves as Haalpulaar'en (singular Haalpulaar, speaker of pulaar), whether they were pastoralists or cultivators. It was the nineteenth century French ethnographers who divided these people into distinct groups: the largely non-Muslim pastoralists were called peuls while the mostly Muslim agriculturalists were called toucouleurs. English travelers to the Sokoto Palisades (in present day Nigeria) adopted the Hausa word for the Fulbe there—Fulani.<sup>26</sup>

These proper names of languages carry the sedimentation of the history of the movement of peoples. Strictly speaking, Fulani includes both Peul and Toucouleur, and so is not an appropriate alternative for the latter. But the implied reader of the translation is not expected to have this information. The idea of shifting demographic frontiers caught in the virtuality of the Internet and telecommunication is generally assigned to postmodern globalization. The best among the globalizers know that there may be a history here. The eminent globality theorist, Professor Saskia Sassen, for example, invokes shifting demographic frontiers and admits that she needs a historical fix.<sup>27</sup> I had quoted this passage from Condé in answer when she expressed that need, but could not complete the reading. Today, in this more appropriate context, I finish the task.

The new Comparative Literature makes visible the import of the translator's choice. In the translation from *French to English* lies the disappeared history of distinctions in another space—made by the French and withdrawn by the English—full of the movement of languages and peoples still in historical sedimentation at the bottom, waiting for the real virtuality of our imagination. If we remain confined to English language U.S. Cultural Studies, we will not be instructed either by the

staging of restricted permeability or by the disappeared text of the translation from and into the European national languages that form the basis of what we know as Comparative Literature. Cultural Studies, tied to plot summary masquerading as analysis of representation, and character analysis by a precritical model of motivation or an unearned psychoanalytic vocabulary would reduce *Heremakbonon* to a *Bildungsroman* about Veronica. The old country—an undifferentiated “Africa”—exists as a backdrop for the New World African. And for Comparative Literature it does not exist at all.

I return, then, to my general argument in this opening chapter: collaborate with and transform Area Studies. A reading of *Heremakbonon* would, for example, be strengthened by a sense of Africa that might emerge from such collaboration, for the text stages the folly of imagining an undifferentiated “Africa” as a backdrop for the New World African.

There are, of course, many institutional obstacles to such collaboration. Among them is institutional fear on both sides. Disciplinary fear. The social sciences fear the radical impulse in literary studies, and over the decades, we in the humanities have trivialized the social sciences into their rational expectation straitjackets, not recognizing that, whatever the state of the social sciences in our own institution, strong tendencies toward acknowledging the silent but central role of the humanities in the area studies paradigm are now around. Sustained and focused discussion is all the more necessary as the boundaries of disciplinary knowledge are being redrawn.

If the distaste for the social sciences and Area Studies can be overcome, there is, as we have already seen, the fear of Cultural Studies. We are afraid to let the permeability be unrestricted by our own moves. Suppose through the approved channel of Francophony, Teutophony, Lusophony, Anglophony, Hispanophony, they should begin to want to “rediscover their ‘heri-

tage' languages and cultures?"<sup>28</sup> Since, in this scenario, Area Studies are odious, we will be back in Cultural Studies, monolingual, presentist, narcissistic, not practiced enough in close reading even to understand that the mother tongue is actively divided.

In such a scenario it is hard not to read literature, sometimes, as a didactic aid. Let me invite you to compare the fear of Cultural Studies to this picture painted by the Magistrate, a benevolent imperialist, for the fearful young imperialist officer in J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*:

[The barbarians] do not doubt that one of these days we [the colonizers] will pack our carts and depart to wherever it was we came from, that our buildings will become homes for mice and lizards, that their beasts will graze on these rich fields we have planted. You smile? Shall I tell you something? Every year the lake-water grows a little more salty. There is a simple explanation—never mind what it is. The barbarians know this fact. At this very moment they are saying to themselves, "Be patient, one of these days their crops will start withering from the salt, they will not be able to feed themselves, they will go." That is what they are thinking. That they will outlast us.<sup>29</sup>

Throughout this chapter, I have, in a rather utopian manner, been repeatedly urging a joining of forces between Comparative Literature and Area Studies, because the times seem to have come up to meet me halfway. I have confessed that I am aware of the strong forces at work against the possibility of such a coalition. At first glance, I have suggested that it is disciplinary fear that seems to keep out Area Studies. But there is also the fear, I have added, that at this point, the "new" Area

Studies might lead us back to the fear of the loss of quality control seething under the surface of the original Bernheimer report. The ominous humor of Mary Louise Pratt's invocation of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* reflects that general unease:

Let us imagine . . . that we CompLit types are the animals in the coops and pens. The farmer no longer exists. He has retired to Florida, and before he left, he opened all the doors and gates. What do we want to do? The foxes now have access to the henhouse; the hens, however, are free to go somewhere else. Animals will move from pasture to pasture and pen to pen; strange matings will occur and new creatures [be] born. The manure pile will be invaded and its winter warmth enjoyed by all. It will be a while till new order and new leadership emerge. But the farmer won't be back.<sup>30</sup>

In fact, the farmer did not go far. Today the backlash is on the rise. There is a demand for humanism, with a nod toward Asia; for universalism, however ambiguous; for quality control; to fight terrorism.

For a way out, in the new Comparative Literature, I turn again to Coetzee's novel. *Waiting for the Barbarians* is, perhaps like all qualitative rather than quantitative texts, also a staging of what may be called logic and rhetoric—assuming that they can be so neatly distinguished. There are passages that resemble the one I have quoted above, where the protocol may be called "logical" when placed in distinction from what I am going to call "rhetorical." These logical passages are often accounts of the fruits of imperial experience, as above, with some historical generalizability within the loose outlines of the narrative. Over against these are the many passages where the Magistrate tries to grasp the barbarian in an embrace that is

both singular and responsible. The exemplary singularity is "the girl," a young barbarian woman whose name we never learn, whose name perhaps neither the Magistrate nor the writer figure knows. The staging of rhetoricity in the novel is the Magistrate's attempt to decipher her. This is quite different from the staging of the logical Magistrate, a capable and experienced senior official who is able to summarize the characteristics of empire. A series of dreams may be one account of this deciphering effort. To have sex with the girl is another.

The Magistrate, usually a promiscuous man, is generally unable to perform what would be recognizable as an act of sex with this young barbarian woman. What comes through in his efforts to do so is his repeated generalization that the meaning of his own acts is not clear if he tries to imagine her perspective: "I feed her, shelter her, use her body, if that is what I am doing, in this foreign way."<sup>31</sup> I cannot forget that Freud urges us to investigate the uncanny because we are ourselves *Fremd-sprächig*, "foreign speakers."<sup>32</sup> What can it mean but seeing the other as placed, native?

The girl is returned to her people. In a surprising example of characterological asyndeton or *recusatio*, the Magistrate intervenes on behalf of tortured barbarian prisoners and is himself tortured brutally and systematically. His imprisonment, which comes before this, reduces him to nothing. Coetzee describes him describing his deciphering effort thus: "So I continue to swoop and circle around the irreducible figure of the girl, casting one net of meaning after another over her. . . . What does she see? The protecting wings of a guardian albatross or the black shape of a coward crow afraid to strike while its prey yet breathes?"

The passage begins with a paradox. The logic of noncontradiction requires that what is irreducible is truth, not figure. The passage continues with a figuring of the undecidability of

meaning. Web after web is thrown. But the meaning that is sought is the meaning of the Magistrate as subject, as perceived by the barbarian as other. This meaning is undecidable in at least two ways. First, there is no stable declaration of meaning. And second, the alternative possibilities of the meaning of the dominant self in the eyes of the barbarian other are given as questions. It is possible to suggest that two alternatives are standing in for an indefinite structure of possibilities here.

Of course, the literary is not a blueprint to be followed in unmediated social action. But if as teachers of literature we teach reading, literature can be our teacher as well as our object of investigation. And, since we are imprisoned in the vicious circle of our stakes in institutional power, the Magistrate's researches in extremis can perhaps rearrange our desires. With team teaching and institutional goodwill, we can continue to supplement Area Studies with this lesson in view. Our own undecidable meaning is in the irreducible figure that stands in for the eyes of the other. This is the effortful task: to displace the fear of our faceless students, behind whom are the eyes of the global others.

Otherwise, who crawls into the place of the "human" of "humanism" at the end of the day, even in the name of diversity? We must consider "Collectivities."