

we do that we will be able not only to prove the worth of comparative literature, but to create possibilities for its further growth in the future.

NOTES

1. See René Wellek, "The Crisis of Comparative Literature" (1958), in *Concepts of Criticism*, ed. Stephen G. Nichols (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1963), 282–95.
2. Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 5.
3. Aldous Huxley, *Texts and Pretexts: An Anthology with Commentaries* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1933), intro., p. 3.
4. Bassnett, *Comparative Literature*, 47. See also Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).
5. Claudio Guillén, *The Challenge of Comparative Literature*, trans. Cola Franzen (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 70–71.
6. *Ibid.*, 86, 87.
7. *Ibid.*, 70.
8. Edward Said, "Traveling Theory," in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 227.
9. Edward Said, "East Isn't East: The Impending End of the Age of Orientalism," *Times Literary Supplement*, 3 February 1995, 3. I have discussed related issues in "Postmodernism and the Return of the Native," in Zhang Longxi, *Mighty Opposites: From Dichotomies to Differences in the Comparative Study of China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), 184–212; and also in a book in Chinese, *Zouchu wenhua de fengbi quan* 走出文化的封閉圈 [Out of the Cultural Ghetto] (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 2000; 2nd and exp. ed., Beijing: Joint Publishers, 2004). See also Haun Saussy, "Postmodernism in China," in *Great Walls of Discourse and Other Adventures in Cultural China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 118–45.

Comparative Literature, at Last

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Like the linguistic sign, disciplines and departments have a differential identity: as Ferdinand de Saussure put it, "Their most precise characteristic is to be what the others are not."¹

Once upon a time, comparative literature focused on the study of sources and influence, bringing together works where there seemed to be a direct link of transmission that subtended and served to justify comparison. But then comparative literature liberated itself from the study of sources and influence and acceded to a broader regime of intertextual studies—broader but less well-defined, except differentially. In its recent history in the American academy, comparative literature has been differentiated from other modes of literary study because it did not take it for granted, as did the departments of English, French, Spanish, Italian, Chinese, that a national literature in its historical evolution was the natural and appropriate unit of literary study. Since comparative literature could not avoid the question, as the national literature departments could, of what sorts of units were most pertinent—genres? periods? themes?—it also became the site of literary theory, while national literature departments frequently resisted, or at least remained indifferent to, the sorts of theory that did not emanate from their own cultural spheres. Comparative literature was thus distinguished by its interest in addressing theoretical issues as well as knowledgeably importing and exploring "foreign" theoretical discourses. It was where those questions about the nature and methods of literary study begged in other literature departments were taken up, argued about, even made the focus of teaching and research.

If neither of these features suffices any longer to distinguish comparative literature, it is because so many people in other departments have jumped on these bandwagons or gradually come around to the views of comparatists. Even the study of American literature, once committed to exceptionalism and totalization (Americanists had to have a theory about the nature and distinctiveness of American literature), is now in

the process of reconfiguring itself as comparative American literatures. The question of comparative literature has become everybody's question or, in Haun Saussy's formulation, comparatists have been "universal donors."

Whatever the reasons for the spread of these formerly distinctive features, comparative literature has triumphed, and one might therefore expect a triumphal tone to the 2004 report on the state of comparative literature.³ But of course the triumph of what once distinguished the field leads to a lack of distinctiveness and thus a crisis of identity, and the tone of Saussy's magisterial review of the history of the discipline is scarcely a triumphant one. For good reason: departments or programs of comparative literature have not reaped the benefits of this success. (Saussy fantasizes that people in national literature departments should have to pay a small tax to comparative literature each time they cite De Man, Said, Spivak, Auerbach, and so on, which would do wonders for the field.) Programs in comparative literature are still small or struggling, and we have to tell the very smart and interesting graduate students that we admit: "Welcome to comparative literature, where we do not believe that the national literature is the logical basis of literary study, but be warned that while doing Comp. Lit. you also need to act as if you were in a national literature department so as to make yourself competitive for a job in one." Though comparative literature has triumphed, and many others are comparatists now, the jobs are still in the national language and literature departments.

Taking an intellectual rather than an institutional view, one should be pleased at this triumph. And it is worth noting that the triumph of comparative literature is similar to other triumphs that do not give cause for celebration. Theory has triumphed in that it is everywhere these days—one needs only to be involved in a search to see how far job candidates have been influenced by theory, in the questions they are posing, in the references that are expected of them, even as people write books and articles declaring the passing of theory. Feminism, too, alleged to be dead, can be said to have triumphed in the academy, in that much of what feminist critics and theorists struggled for has come to be taken for granted. Gail Finney notes in chapter 8 that women students take for granted the equality sought by feminism: "They reject the label 'feminist' but have internalized . . . the goals of the ideology." This is a triumph, like the triumph of theory and the triumph of comparative literature, that one cannot *not* wish to have happened, though one still would rather that such triumphs were not so easy to identify with the death of what is triumphing or that they gave more cause for joy.

There is little joy in this ACLA report, though it is too disparate and dispersed for one to speak of any consistent tone or take. Still, one can identify some contrasts with the previous ACLA report of 1993. "Comparative Literature at the Turn of the

Century," published with sixteen responses or position statements as *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*. That report recommends two courses of action, each of which has a good deal to be said for it. On the one hand, it urges comparative literature to abandon its traditional Eurocentrism and turn global—an injunction entirely justified, both as a reflection of contemporary cultural realities and as a response to the growing understanding that Western cultures have been determined in part by their relations to non-Western others. On the other hand, the 1993 report recommends that comparative literature turn from a concentration on literature to the study of cultural productions or discourses of all sorts. This too is a course for which a good case can be made. Scholars of literature have discovered that their analytical skills can shed light on the structures and the functioning of the wide range of discursive practices that form individuals and cultures; and comparatists' contribution to the study of philosophical, psychoanalytical, political, medical, and other discourses, not to mention film, conduct books, and popular culture, has been so valuable that no one could wish to restrict literature faculties to the study of literature alone. Treating literature as one discourse among others, as the report recommends, seems an effective strategy.

Each of these turns, then, can be amply justified, but the result of both moves together, going global and going cultural, is a discipline of such overwhelming scope that it no longer sounds like an academic field at all: the study of discourses and cultural productions of all sorts throughout the entire world. If one were creating a university from scratch, one could doubtless construct a large department of comparative literature charged with global cultural studies, but then the question of differential identity raises its head: would there be any other departments in the humanities to contrast with comparative literature? Would there be a need for music and art and literature and philosophy departments, or departments to study different areas of the world, or would comparative literature in this new dispensation cover everything in the humanities and much of the social sciences?

As soon as one tries to think about the place of the new global and cultural comparative literature in the university, one wonders whether the 1993 report is less a proposal for the reform of a particular department or discipline than a recommendation for how literary and cultural studies in general should proceed. In fact, isn't this how things ought to be? Shouldn't a report on comparative literature project a future for the humanities? Comparative literature has functioned as a vanguard discipline in the humanities, open not only to various national traditions and their theoretical texts—Marx, Kierkegaard, Hegel, Nietzsche, Saussure, Freud, Durkheim, Wittgenstein—but to experimentation with modes of critical engagement and critical writing, since there was no presumption that understanding a national literary

tradition in its historical evolution was the overriding goal. Comparative literature has been the field where critical and theoretical interdisciplinary projects could be freely tried, with results that are exemplary for others and thus affect the direction of literary and cultural studies at large. But this success of comparative literature brings a loss of identity.

The most controversial topic in the Bernheimer report and the associated position papers was the role of literature in a comparative literature that was simultaneously going global and going cultural. In that report and the responses to it, those of us who defended literature, or opined that the study of literature ought to retain a central place in comparative literature, were belittled by Charlie Bernheimer—who in a fashion typical of him, disregarded everyone's comments to write just what he wished. Defenders of literature were treated as old fogies who were inexplicably resisting getting with the program. Close reading of literary texts in the original languages manifestly seemed dispensable to Bernheimer—not a necessary part of the new dispensation.

In my own response to the Bernheimer report, I argued that as national literature departments have increasingly given a role to theory—or, perhaps more accurately, allowed literary and cultural studies to reorganize themselves around questions that have emerged from theoretical debates rather than the conventional literary-historical periods—and as these departments have increasingly brought a wider range of cultural productions into their purview—not just film and popular culture but discourses of sexuality, the construction of the body, and the formation of national and cultural identities, for instance—they became in effect departments of national cultural studies: English and American Studies, French Studies, German Studies, Hispanic Studies. The turn to culture makes sense for national literature departments: the division of literature by national or linguistic boundaries was always rather dubious, but such divisions as these are a very reasonable way of organizing the study of culture. Perhaps, as German literature departments turn to German cultural studies, French literature departments to French studies, the national names will finally represent fields that are more intellectually coherent. And as the national literature departments turn to culture, they will leave comparative literature with a distinctive role. If, having in large measure made possible the expansion of literary studies into cultural studies, comparative literature does not insist on claiming that field for its own, it might find itself with a new identity, as the site of literary study in its broadest dimensions—the study of literature as a transnational phenomenon. The devolution of other fields would have left it with a distinctive and valuable identity at last.³ As the site of the study of literature in general, comparative literature would provide a home for poetics.

This does not mean that members of comparative literature departments should be discouraged from studying literature in relation to other cultural practices, or even pursuing projects to which literature is only marginally related—far from it. As always, comparatists will participate in the most interesting methodological and theoretical developments in the humanities, wherever these take them. Since literature is not a natural kind but a historical construct, the study of literature in relation to other discourses is not only inevitable but necessary. But as opposed to the other departments of the humanities, comparative literature would have as its central responsibility the study of literature, which could be approached in the most diverse ways.

My argument that comparative literature should accept the differential possibility that the evolution of literary and cultural studies has created, as the site for the study of literature as a transnational phenomenon, did not gain many adherents; and the question of what comparative literature should be has remained as much in dispute as ever, except insofar as we agree that it is the nature of comparative literature to be the site at which the most diverse options of the humanities contend—not just a discipline in crisis, but by its very nature a site of crisis. It is striking, though, that since 1994 the sense of literature as under siege has somewhat abated. While the question of the role of literature in comparative literature was central to the 1993 report, in the 2004 report the place of literature no longer seems such a contentious issue. This might, of course, be because the proponents of cultural studies have won and so no longer need raise the issue, but then you would expect the partisans of literary study to be complaining that literature has been forced out of comparative literature, and that seems not to have happened. Haun Saussy, speaking of comparative literature as “comparisons with literature,” presumes the centrality of literature, in the sense that comparative literature involves reading texts of diverse sorts but “reading literarily.”

One could say that while the legitimacy of comparative literature projects that do not involve literature has become established, the centrality of literature is not in question as it formerly was—if only by a swing back of the pendulum. This conclusion drawn from the 2004 report seems to me confirmed by observation: there is manifestly an increasing interest in aesthetics, which for a while was a dirty word. In running a very broad search for faculty in comparative literature, which attracted applications from many candidates working in postcolonial studies, I was struck by the extent to which even dissertations that focus on social and political issues and would not need to address literature at all seem to include several chapters on Anglophone novelists—demonstrating that there has come into being a new hypercanon of Anglophone writers: Rushdie, Achebe, Walcott, and Coetzee, among others.⁴ The role of literature in comparative literature seems very robust these days, even if literary works are frequently read symptomatically.

In fact, if there is an issue that emerges from the disparate essays that make up the 2004 report, it is not whether literary or cultural studies should predominate but how comparative literature should deal with "world literature." I emphasize that term, for the question is not whether we should study all the literatures of the world, but about the stakes in the construction by comparative literature departments of "world literature," as displayed most concretely in world literature courses.

This returns us to the problem of comparability, to which the fate of comparative literature seems inexorably tied—testimony to the power of a name. As comparative literature liberated itself from a comparability based on attested relations of contact, thus on sources and influence, and acceded to a broader regime of intertextual studies where in principle anything could be compared with anything else, we began to hear talk of a "crisis of comparative literature," no doubt because of the difficulty of explaining the nature of the new comparability that served to structure and, in principle, to justify comparative literature as a discipline. This problem of the nature of comparability is certainly rendered more acute by the shift of comparative literature from a Eurocentric to a global discipline, though in some respects this has been concealed from us. There has been a phase, one might say, where the problem of comparability might apparently be set aside because a good deal of new work has focused on cross-cultural contacts and hybridity within postcolonial societies and within the literatures of colonizing powers. A lot of exciting work has in effect been a sophisticated modernized version of the study of sources and influences: insofar as comparative study addresses the diverse literary and cultural influences at work in Derek Walcott's *Omeros*, or Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, or Ousmane Sembène's *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu*, or Rodolpho Gonzalez's *I Am Joaquín (Yo soy Joaquín)*, comparison is based on direct cultural contacts and traceable influences. But in principle, the problem of comparability remains unsolved and more acute than ever. What, in this newly globalized space, justifies bringing texts together?

World literature courses that bring together the great books from around the world seem to base comparability on a notion of excellence that resonates, for me at least, with Bill Readings's brilliant analysis of the "University of Excellence" in *The University in Ruins*. Kant gave us the model of the modern university organized by a single regulatory ideal, the principle of Reason. Humboldt and the German Idealists replaced the notion of Reason with that of Culture, centering the university on the dual task of research and teaching, the production and inculcation of national self-knowledge. But now the model of the University of Culture, the university whose task was to produce cultured individuals, citizens imbued with a national culture, has in the West given way. Today, Readings writes, "no one of us can seriously imagine himself or herself as the hero of the story of the University, as the instantiation of the

cultured individual that the entire great machine labors day and night to produce. . . . The grand narrative of the university centered on the production of a liberal, reasoning subject, is no longer readily available to us."⁵

Similarly, while once we might have imagined the study of comparative literature as leading to the production of the immensely cultured individual—a Curtius or an Auerbach—who had mastered the literatures of Europe, now the subject is so large and so diversely specialized that no such exemplar can exist. The best we can imagine are accomplished comparatists with very different interests and ranges of knowledge, who would all be excellent in their own ways. Thus, the University of Culture gives way to the "University of Excellence."

The crucial thing about excellence, Readings points out, is that it has no content (there need be no agreement about what is excellent).⁶ In that sense, it is like the cash nexus. It has no content and thus serves to introduce comparability and bureaucratic control. As Readings explains, "its very lack of reference allows excellence to function as a principle of translatability between radically different idioms."⁷ The idea of excellence enables us to make comparable entities that have little in common as to structure or function, input or output. But that is only half of its bureaucratic usefulness. It also makes it possible to avoid substantive arguments about what teachers, students, and administrators should actually be doing. Everyone's task is to strive for excellence, however that might be defined. I am interested in the relationship between the comparability of comparative literature and the comparability instituted by excellence, which, to sum up, has the following characteristics: (1) it purports to have content but actually does not; (2) it grants groups considerable freedom (it doesn't matter what you do, so long as you do it excellently), which is crucial to bureaucratic efficiency; but (3) ultimately it is a mechanism for the reduction or exclusion of activities that do not succeed by this measure. How does the comparability of comparative literature compare with this?

The intertextual nature of meaning—the fact that meaning lies in the differences between one text or one discourse and another—makes literary study essentially, fundamentally comparative, but it also produces a situation in which comparability depends on a cultural system, a general field that underwrites comparison. The meaning of a text depends on its relations to others within a cultural space, such as that of Western European culture, which is in part why comparative literature has been so much inclined to remain Western and European in its focus. The more sophisticated one's understanding of discourse, the harder it is to compare Western and non-Western texts, for each depends for its meaning and identity on its place within a discursive system—disparate systems that seem to make the putative comparability of texts either illusory or, at the very least, misleading. What has made possible much

recent work in comparative literature has been the identification, largely by postcolonial theory, of a general postcolonial context within which comparabilities can be generated.

What sort of comparability, then, could guide the transformation of comparative literature from a Eurocentric discipline to a more global one? There is a difficult problem here. On the one hand, as Natalie Melas argues, comparison such as justifies a discipline consolidates a standard or norm that then functions to give value to works that match up to it and to exclude those that do not, so that comparison—the principle of comparability—rather than opening new possibilities for cultural value, more often than not restricts and totalizes it.⁸ But on the other hand, as we try to avoid this imposition of particular norms, we may risk falling into the alternative practice, which Readings's account of excellence describes, where the standard is kept nonreferential—vacuous—so that it is not imposing particular requirements, but where in the end, it provides a *bureaucratic* rather than an intellectual mechanism for regulation and control. And indeed, the danger of world literature is that it will select what is regarded as excellent without regard for the particular standards and ideological factors that might have come into play in the processes of selection.⁹

The problem of comparison is that it is likely to generate a standard, or ideal type, of which the texts compared come to function as variants. Comparatists today are eager to avoid this implicit result of measuring one culture's texts by some standard extrinsic to that culture. Yet the more we try to deploy a comparability that has no implicit content, the more we risk falling into a situation like that of the University of Excellence, where an apparent lack of concern for content—your department can do what it likes provided it does it excellently—is in the end only the *alibi* for a control based on bureaucratic rather than academic and intellectual principles.

The virtue of a comparability based on specific intellectual norms or models—generic, thematic, historical—is that they are subject to investigation and argument in ways that the vacuous bureaucratic norms are not. One solution, then, is to attempt to spell out the assumptions and norms that seem to underwrite one's comparisons, so that they do not become implicit terms. A model here might be Erich Auerbach's conception of the *Ansatzpunkt*: a specific point of departure, conceived not as an external position of mastery but as a "handle" or partial vantage point that enables the critic to bring together a variety of cultural objects. "The characteristic of a good point of departure," writes Auerbach in his essay "Philology and *Weltliteratur*," "is its concreteness and its precision on the one hand, and on the other, its potential for centrifugal radiation."¹⁰ This might be a theme, a metaphor, a detail, a structural problem, or a well-defined cultural function. I can imagine basing cross-cultural comparison on linking principles whose very arbitrariness or contingency will prevent them from

giving rise to a standard or ideal type, such as comparing works by authors whose last name begins with B, or works whose numerical place in a bibliography is divisible by thirteen. I confess, though, that this is scarcely the sort of thing Auerbach had in mind and not a general or principled solution to the problem of comparability. A further possibility is to attempt to locate the comparative perspective geographically and historically: instead of imagining the comparative perspective as a global overview, one might stress the value, for instance, of comparing European literatures *from* Africa, for their relations to the cultural productions of a particular African moment. Better such points of departure that impose criteria and norms than the fear that comparisons will be odious. The danger, I repeat, is that comparatists' fear that their comparisons will impose implicit norms and standards may give rise to a vacuousness that is as difficult to combat as is the notion of excellence that administrators are using to organize and reorganize the American university.

The 2004 report, as I say, makes world literature a central problem of comparative literature. The teaching of what Djelal Kadir calls the "abstracted construct of world literature" is ably championed by David Damrosch in "World Literature in a Post-canonical, Hypercanonical Age" (chap. 2) and by Katie Trumpener in her response, entitled "A Geopolitical View" (chap. 13).¹¹ And the reservations expressed in this report by both Haun Saussy and Emily Apter are pursued most vigorously by Kadir in "Comparative Literature in an Age of Terrorism" (chap. 5). The charge, of course, is that world literature is constructed from the perspective of a hegemonic power, which admits representatives on the terms that it establishes in order to compose and compare, and that this a McDonaldization, in which globalizing America colonizes various cultures, representing them by a bit of local flavor. Kadir cites the "risk of instrumentalizing the literature of the world as objects of neocolonial usurpation and imperial subsumption." However, Katie Trumpener, describing a Yale world literature course to which a lot of thought and a lot of faculty expertise has obviously been devoted, argues that one can avoid "a thematically driven, aesthetically and culturally flattened view of global texts" by focusing in a well-constructed course on, for instance, "questions of foundational violence, of the logic of feud, massacre, terror, and genocide as well as the quasi-theological role of literature in mediating ideological shifts and historical crisis, enacting conversions and convergence." Concentrating on a number of major narratives, one can also focus on questions of genre; temporality; and narrative technique, consciousness, and perspective, and thus prevent such a course from becoming an imperialistic sampling of national thematic flavors.

One can add that world literature is not just a construct of comparative literature departments, important though our role may be in articulating, for a public of students

and former students, a world literature. Pascale Casanova's *La république mondiale des lettres*, recently translated as *The World Republic of Letters*, describes a world literary system as a set of discursive practices, a system of power/knowledge, in which literary works from around the world come to engage—with reviews, translation, prizes, cinematic adaptation—a system in which innovation has frequently come from the periphery and recognition emanates from various centers (especially, in her view, Paris).¹² So before we comparatists spend too much time and effort castigating ourselves for imperfectly and imperialistically homogenizing the literatures of the world into world literature, we should recall that such processes already take place in the world of literature and have done so for a long time. If we prefer, we can think of ourselves as engaging critically, as Casanova thinks of herself as doing, with the world system of literature. Undertaking a critique of “world literature” may suit some of us more than constructing it. I should say that I have not been a partisan of world literature, but I do find Katie Trumpener's “Geopolitical View” compelling; and at any rate, I think we should bear in mind her concluding questions. Acknowledging that in some respects world literature remains a daunting, perhaps impossible project, she asks: “But if not us, who? If not now, when?”

Why not now? If America has forfeited any possibility of claiming to survey judiciously the riches of world culture, our horrific role in the world gives us all the more reason to try to see to it that new generations of Americans have some knowledge of the complexity of the products of some foreign cultures. This is a teaching project more than a research project, though research in comparative literature can focus on theoretical questions about possible approaches to world literature, their dangers and virtues. But if it looks as though the field may in the coming years be in part defined by the problem of world literature, comparative literature should also be defined by those features that draw people to the field. And I will guess that this is not “world literature.”

The attraction of the field for students and teachers has been tied, I believe, either to a polyglot experience or to an idea of cosmopolitanism. Some people who have lived multilingual, multicultural lives become comparatists because other choices would foreclose possibilities already available to them. American comparatists without a polyglot experience have been driven by a desire to avoid American parochialism, by an interest in other languages and cultures, especially European, both in relation to our own and in relation to the theoretical questions that arise in transnational literary or cultural study.

It is possible to take an interest in the literature of the world as a repertoire of possibilities, forms, themes, discursive practices: comparative literature, I have argued, is the right place, especially today, for the study of literature as a discursive practice.

a set of formal possibilities, thus poetics. But it is scarcely possible to take an interest in all the literatures *and* cultures of the world, so comparative projects are likely to remain driven by particular interests, animated on the one hand by singular knowledge, interests, and languages, and on the other by the general theoretical questions that arise when one reflects on one's interest in multiple kinds of texts. In his essay in this report, “Indiscipline” (chap. 6), David Ferris remarks that comparative literature always seeks to incorporate what remains other to it; and it is the combination of that comparative, lateral move, with the *meta* move, that is most distinctive of the discipline and that makes it, as Haun Saussy puts it, the “test bed for reconceiving of the order of knowledge.” As such reconceiving occurs, this should count as the triumph of comparative literature, but once again this will not allow comparative literature to feel triumphant. As with theory, so with comparative literature: our triumphs seem destined to be triumphs without triumph.

NOTES

1. *Cours de linguistique générale* (Paris: Payot, 1972), 162.
2. The bylaws of the American Comparative Literature Association mandate that a report be prepared every ten years. The 1993 report, “Comparative Literature at the Turn of the Century,” was a collective document (though largely written by Charles Bernheimer) and was published as *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, ed. Charles Bernheimer (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995). The 2004 report avoids the appearance of consensus.
3. My comments are published in *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, 117–21.
4. See David Damrosch, “World Literature in a Postcanonical, Hypercanonical Age,” in chapter 2 of this volume.
5. Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 9.
6. When Readings was working on this book, I was able to provide him with the example of Cornell's Department of Transportation Services (responsible for campus buses and parking), which had received an award for excellence from its professional organization, whatever that is—apparently for its success in discouraging parking on campus (success in “demand reduction,” they called it), by increasing fees for parking permits and progressively eliminating convenient parking spaces. But it is not utterly impossible to imagine that excellence here might have been assigned precisely the opposite content: excellence might consist of making it easier for faculty to park on campus, though I agree that this is not very likely.
7. *Ibid.*, 24.
8. Natalie Melas, “Versions of Incommensurability,” *World Literature Today* 69:2 (Spring 1995): 275–80.
9. In his superb book, *In the Context of No Context*, which deserves to be better known as a guide to our condition, George W. S. Trow identifies as a crucial though unrecognized watershed in the history of American modernity: “the moment when a man named Richard Dawson.

the host of a program called *Family Feud*, asked contestants to guess what a poll of a hundred people had guessed would be the height of the average American woman. Guess what they've guessed. Guess what they've guessed the average is" (*In the Context of No Context* [Boston: Little Brown, 1981], 58).

10. Erich Auerbach, "Philology and *Weltliteratur*," *Centennial Review* 13:1 (Winter 1969): 15. I owe this reference to David Chioni Moore's stimulating discussion in "Comparative Literature to *Weltkulturwissenschaft*: Remediating a Failed Transition," a paper for the Twentieth Southern Comparative Literature Association meeting, Raleigh, North Carolina, October 1994.

11. Damrosch, be it noted, is the editor of the leading anthology of world literature (Longmans) and author of a judicious discussion of the problems, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003).

12. Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

Multum in Parvo; or, Comparison in Lilliput

MARSHALL BROWN

Auch kleine Dinge können uns entzücken,
Auch kleine Dinge können teuer sein —Paul Heyse

Jeder Mensch ist seiner Natur nach auf bestimmte, mitunter sehr, sehr
kleine Dinge gestellt, Dinge, die, trotzdem sie klein sind, für ihn das
Leben oder doch des Lebens Bestes bedeuten.

—Botho von Rienacker

When I sat down belatedly—or, actually, lay down—to read this report, I doubted I would have anything of weight or moment to contribute. Rightly so. After all, who am I to pronounce on the future of a discipline? I have spent a career contentedly plowing a smaller vineyard than most of the original authors, extending a few hundred miles around, say, Strasbourg, and a hundred years more or less (mostly less) around 1800. I admire much of what goes on in the larger world of the ACLA, occasionally adapt or debate a bit, practice too little of what I hear being preached in this volume and outside it. Sure, there are singularities of the decade that I would like to notice: the subordination of time to place and of history to geography (or "cartography," as Emily Apter designates it); the growing centrality of margins; the presentism that several contributors bewail (though the Yale course Katie Trumpener describes corrects it with manifest success). These are tendencies much in evidence, not needing me to point them out; they can be heartily welcomed to the extent that they serve as remedies but are rightly suspected when they turn counter-hegemonic. We should foster debate and not inflict our creeds on others, not even on the others whose offices are next door. Who could argue? No one needs me to praise apple pie, nor do I have any special credentials for doing so. If I have anything to contribute, it will have to be lighter in weight, more