

Natale Melas All the Difference in the World: Postcoloniality
and the Ends of Comparison
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Grounds for Comparison

But no sooner have they been adumbrated than all these groupings dissolve again, for the field of identity that sustains them, however limited it may be, is still too wide not to be unstable; and so the sick mind continues to infinity, creating groups then dispersing them again, heaping up diverse similarities, destroying those that seem clearest, splitting up things that are identical, superimposing different criteria, frenziedly beginning all over again, becoming more and more disturbed, and teetering finally on the brink of anxiety.

—Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*

Those affiliated with comparative literature are probably familiar with an encounter like this. At a cocktail party, a reception, or a family dinner, someone leans over and asks what you study. "Comparative literature," you answer, to which the interlocutor responds, "Oh, and what exactly do you compare?" Besides the usual discomforts of having to explain academic work, there is always a particular shock of nonrecognition associated with the sudden spotlight on the word "compare." One might answer the question simply enough by replying, "literatures" or "cultures," but one hesitates at the verb: in what sense does the act of comparing describe what one does in this discipline? The adjectival appendage has been a source of some consternation over the last eighty years or so. Lane Cooper, who balked at using the name for the program he headed at Cornell in the 1920s, took "comparative" strictly as an attribute of the object "literature" and found it a "bogus term" that no more "sense [or] syntax than say 'comparative potatoes,' or 'comparative husks.'" ¹ A few decades later, René Wellek, taking "comparative" as a characterization of the act of a practitioner, or a "method of comparison," remarked that scholars of literature do many things besides compare ("reproduce, analyze, interpret, evoke,

evaluate, generalize, etc.”), and advocated changing the discipline’s name to “general literature” or just “literature.”² But despite its insufficiencies, or out of sheer institutional inertia, the “comparative” sticks throughout the years of the discipline’s postwar consolidation. It is notable therefore that it should make such a stunning comeback in the 1993 Bernheimer report, where it supplants the term “literature” as the focal point for a discipline equal to the challenges of “the age of multiculturalism,” in the words of the title of the volume under which the report and a collection of responses to it was published. “Comparison” occurs in various guises thirteen times in this brief report. But while sheer repetition would seem to make of it the discipline’s new “standard,” its meaning is far from clear, for comparison is no longer a misplaced adjective or a method of analysis but a space:

The space of comparison today involves comparisons between artistic productions usually studied by different disciplines; between various cultural constructions of those disciplines; between Western cultural traditions, both high and popular, and those of non-Western cultures, between the pre- and postcontact cultural productions of colonized peoples; between gender constructions defined as feminine and those defined as masculine, or between sexual orientations defined as straight and those defined as gay; between racial and ethnic modes of signifying; between hermeneutic articulations of meaning and materialist analyses of production and circulation and much more.³

The “space of comparison” seems to be a synonym or a kind of toponym for this long paratactic sentence’s last words “and much more,” in the sense that comparison here above all connotes inclusiveness in the form of a potentially limitless serial extension. But if the association of the noun comparison with an inclusive space comes out clearly, the meaning of the verb “to compare” as a practice or an act is obscure. In some of the examples listed, the comparative dimension or approach seems constitutive to the point of redundancy: it is hard to imagine a study of gay sexual orientation without some comparative reference to heterosexuality, or of the construction of femininity without comparative reference to masculinity, though the precise nature of the comparison is complicated by the very particular and vexed nature of the comparability in question (masculinity and femininity are intrinsically comparative just as they are precisely not equivalent). In other examples, the elements under comparison seem at least initially to be incomparable or at least incommensurable. Is not the very point, in the practice of cultural studies for instance, of studying “low” or popular culture *not* to compare it with “high” culture, but rather

to refuse binary relation high/low and define the parameters of popular culture’s own positivity? A similar incommensurability obtains, as an initial standpoint with respect to the binary Western/non-Western, where, in addition, the very determination of equivalent categories to bring into comparison is highly problematic. If comparison as a space or an ethos of inclusiveness suggests itself to the discipline of comparative literature as a corrective, if not a kind of panacea, to the discipline’s exclusionary and elitist Eurocentric institutional past, comparison as a method or a practice presents itself as a perplexing problem.

Indeed comparison comes through most clearly as an attribute—not a practice—of a person, the “comparatist,” where it indexes the productive anxiety of “unhomeliness” or dislocation. As Charles Bernheimer puts it in his introduction (itself entitled “The Anxieties of Comparison”), “multicultural comparatism begins at home with a comparison of oneself to oneself,” in other words, with “the hybrid constitution of the comparatist subject” (Bernheimer, 11). Indeed most of those essays that embrace the multiculturalist turn (as opposed to those that lament the perceived dethroning of literature), stress the positionality of the practitioner of comparative literature.⁴ As a method, comparison for Bernheimer is defined, or undefined, as an ellipsis, the typographical equivalent for perplexity itself: “Comparison is indeed the . . . what is it?—activity, function, practice? all of these?—that assures that our field will always be unstable, shifting, insecure, and self-critical” (Bernheimer, 2). This un-definition of comparison as a kind of conduit for uncertainty and instability contrasts sharply with the supreme positivity of the comparative method that defined comparative literature at its very institutional beginnings in the United States. Compare Charles Chauncey Shackford in the first known lecture on comparative literature delivered in the United States at Cornell University in 1871:

And the method in which this study can be best pursued is that which is pursued in anatomy, in language, in mythology, and recently applied by Mr. Freeman to politics, namely the comparative. The literary productions of all ages and peoples can be classed, can be brought into comparison and contrast, can be taken out of their isolation as belonging to one nation, or one separate era, and be brought under divisions as the embodiment of the same aesthetic principles, the universal laws of mental, social and moral development: the same in India and in England; in Hellas, with its laughing sea, and Germany with its sombre forests.⁵

The intellectually estranging effect of this juxtaposition is all the more powerful when one considers that it is precisely something like Shackford’s

comparative method, a practice of comparison that classifies, differentiates and assimilates, and finally evaluates its objects in a universal field, that haunts the activity of comparison as it is described in the passage of the Bernheimer report. In giving central place to "comparison," the late twentieth-century self-definition of comparative literature unknowingly returns to its institutional origins in the comparative method, which subsist as a kind of ruin buried just below the surface of the text. The 1993 report returns to the earlier comprehensive scope of comparison, except that to Shackford's 1871 "literary productions of all ages and peoples," it would add non-literary productions (and much more), but, and this stands out in starkest relief, without his basic unifying concept, namely the "universal laws of development." Where comparison was once indissociably temporal—a matter of development through time—it now seems firmly if indistinctly associated with space. In the broadest sense, the conditions for and the ramifications of the shift of the scope of comparison from time to space will be the central concern of this chapter.

Institutional memory of early champions of the comparative method at the moment of the discipline's initial institutionalization during the last quarter of the nineteenth century seems to have faded from its dominant self-perception. With a single cursory exception, none of the contributors to *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* or its recent successor, *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization* (2006), make mention of pre-WWII origins of the discipline. In the tacitly accepted version of the story of origins, the discipline begins with the arrival on American shores of the great émigré Romance philologists fleeing fascism and persecution (Leo Spitzer, Renato Poggioli, René Wellek, et al., and of course most prominently, Erich Auerbach) in the 1930s and 1940s. The model of comparative literature they fostered generally held sway until the advent of deconstruction and the discipline's identification with literary theory. Deconstruction, in turn, is followed by the prominence of a panoply of approaches, many of them originating in other disciplines, all of them advocating various kinds of historicism or contextualization and often articulating minoritarian or oppositional positions (Marxism, postcolonialism, feminism, new historicism, etc.), more or less accommodated under the broad rubric of multiculturalism. It is not surprising that comparatists' sense of the discipline's trajectory should extend little beyond the time of their own institutional formations, as comparative literature seems to exceed the requisite amnesia for institutional reproduction. More than other

disciplines it has been almost constitutively formed around displacement.⁶ One need only consider, for instance, that (arguably) the most influential successors to Auerbach in terms of their formative impact on the discipline, Paul de Man and Edward Said, are themselves both émigrés, and that the decisive changes they brought to the discipline result, to a large extent, from their lives and educations elsewhere (for De Man the intellectual culture of Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, for Said the colonial world and in particular the fate of Palestine in the 1940s and 1950s) and are thus ultimately discontinuous with the disciplinary practice already established in U.S. universities.⁷ Nor is this particular amnesia regarding the positivist comparative method limited to this generation. In an essay from 1956, René Wellek already notes a distinct forgetfulness: "fifty and sixty years ago the concept of evolution dominated literary history; today, at least in the West, it seems to have disappeared almost completely. Histories of literature and of literary genres are being written without any allusion to the problem and apparently with no awareness of it."⁸ While he cannot in the compass of this short essay account for this fact, he speculates that it may in part have to do with the success of positivism's critics in the early decades of the twentieth century, such as Henri Bergson and Benedetto Croce, to which might add the rise of "vitalism" or "*Lebensphilosophie*" around figures such as Wilhelm Dilthey and Georg Simmel. My own interest will not be so much to explore the causes of this amnesia as to speculate on the disciplinary narrative of comparison it makes possible, particularly at the moment of the disciplines' consolidation in the postwar years. I should make clear also that the disciplinary self-definition I address here is one that has been dominant but by no means exclusive. It is overwhelmingly associated with what one might call the East Coast establishment (the authors of the four successive reports on standards for the American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA) hail from Harvard, Yale, and Penn, and were all, in addition, educated at Harvard and Yale). What I am calling amnesia is neither complete nor entirely involuntary, but rather a matter of selective omission and disregard. The growth of the discipline in the 1960s occasioned a spate of introductory handbooks, many of which included the writings of positivist precursors. These precursors were, thus, not so much strictly unknown as without echo.⁹ This has in part obviously to do with a turn at the time from historicism to formalism, but, as I will argue further on, I do not think this can by itself account for the amnesia. Furthermore, the institutional context I address is, like that of my sources, almost exclusively

American. The discipline of comparative literature has a history outside the United States, in Europe, of course, but also outside Europe, particularly in Asia and the Middle East, which most commentators on the discipline pass over in silence.¹⁰

The existence of the positivist precursors and the comprehensive comparative scope they envisioned unsettles the one "truth" about the discipline that seems universally shared amongst contemporary practitioners: that comparative literature has until now encompassed mainly European literatures. In his witty contribution to the Bernheimer volume, "Geist Stories," Anthony Appiah rightly points out that the discipline would be more accurately named "comparative European literatures" and suggests that it content itself with this historically and regionally coherent scope and leave comparably transnational assemblages to other disciplinary formations.¹¹ The name "comparative European literatures" certainly characterizes the practice of most U.S. departments, which, with few exceptions, until recently rarely offered the option of studying literatures in any language besides French, German, and English, but it does not represent the historical scope of comparison in the discipline. To assume that it does has one important consequence—namely, that calls for an inclusive multicultural scope of comparison are understood as recent innovations that develop from critiques of Eurocentrism. Such a claim is no doubt accurate in its broadest terms, since the directions for the discipline advocated in the Bernheimer report are unimaginable without the pressures of an "age of multiculturalism," if only because of the unprecedented movement and migration of peoples characteristic of the postcolonial or global moment. But while the nature of this multiculturalism and the conditions of its possibility are novel, its scope is not. By attending closely to the structures of comparison that mediated a previous era's comprehensive scope, I hope to arrive at a more precise analysis of the problem of comparison today.

Comparative Reaches Unimagined

The world was never better worth preparing for.
The panorama unrolled before the mind was
never more gorgeous: a new renaissance revealing
reaches unimagined; prophesying splendor
unimagined; unveiling mysteries of time and
space and natural law and human potency.

—Charles Mills Gayley, *Idols of Education* (1910)

If we do not take comparative literature's exclusively European scope for granted, then the relative absence of non-Western literatures and languages in the discipline's formation after WWII becomes a real question. The discipline's growth during the 1960s coincides with the final phase of a period of decolonization that by itself would suggest an extension of comparative literature's cosmopolitan scope. Indeed already in 1952, no less a figure than Erich Auerbach himself writes (however ambivalently) of the need to extend the notion of *Weltliteratur* beyond Europe's immediate vicinity.¹² Wellek too echoes such a view in passing, while emphasizing the substantial practical obstacles to it.¹³ And yet no one elaborates upon this possibility, but for the exception that proves the rule, René Etiemble, whose polemical writings advocating, in the words of one of his titles, "un comparatisme planétaire" [a planetary comparatism], seem to extract little more than faint ridicule from his American counterparts.¹⁴ Auerbach and Wellek are to a significant extent driven toward what we would call a multicultural direction as a logical extension of the historicist philology that grounds their scholarship, a historicism with roots in universal history. One might well argue that the a- or counter-historicism shared by such dominant movements as new criticism, structuralism, and deconstruction largely overwhelmed the historicist impulses that might have broadened the discipline's scope. On the other hand, nothing intrinsically prevents formalist criticism from approaching non-Western works. Institutional factors, particularly those related to cold war politics, extrinsic to the immediate intellectual history of the discipline go at least part of the way toward accounting for the discipline's exclusively European scope in its most recent incarnation.

The postwar period saw a tremendous expansion of higher education in the United States together with an increased bureaucratization of the humanities, particularly in those fields, like comparative literature, language departments, and area studies, that benefited so handsomely from the National Defense Education Act (1958), a law explicitly designed to help meet the U.S. government's expansive cold war national "security" requirements. Such exigencies also fueled the growth of area studies and perhaps, institutionally at least, account for their strict separation from a transnational discipline in the humanities like comparative literature. In addition, and perhaps most importantly, the propaganda requirements of the cold war spurred renewed interest in the Western tradition for general education. As Gerald Graff points out, the common values such an education was to inculcate in citizens were articulated quite overtly as "expression[s] of cold

war anti-Communism.”¹⁵ Though the purpose of general education is perhaps definable as a national one, that is to say, as the formation of patriotic and anti-Communist national subjects, the *content* that such influential figures as Harvard’s James Bryant Conant proposed for them was by no means limited to American works, but rather drew on the whole Western tradition. There is a sense in which, as John Guillory elegantly argues, this tradition is always called upon, particularly in public debate, to support a national agenda, which its champions accomplish by, in John Guillory’s words, “representing the ideational content of the great works as an expression of the same ideas which are realized in the current social order, with its current distribution of cultural goods.”¹⁶ In the 1950s and 1960s, thus, as the United States is consolidating its role as “leader of the free world,” and waging the cold war in part over emergent decolonizing nations, a great tradition that is specifically limited to the West is far more apposite for the purpose of justifying such key terms as “democracy” and “freedom” in the new imperial context than one that would include comparably “great” non-Western civilizations. I do not mean to claim a simple causal relationship between the United States’ strategic uses for particular configurations of internationalism during the cold war and comparative literature’s exclusively European scope. Indeed, I think that the discipline’s close association with expatriate Europeans and the practice of scholarship they brought with them, both in fact and in spirit, distanced it from the overt expressions of Americanism in other parts of the university, even as, on the whole, the major figures in the discipline tend to be markedly hostile to communism and vice versa.¹⁷ What I want to mark is a conjuncture between the exclusively European scholarly scope of the expatriate philologists that is crucial to the formation of comparative literature as we have inherited it and the particular cold war context in which the discipline flourished.

If nothing else, this scenario urges caution toward any uncomplicated opposition between cosmopolitanism and parochialism or transnationalism and nationalism in the constitution of the discipline, an opposition that is so crucial to comparative literature’s self-perception. There is no question that its prominent practitioners have articulated powerful critiques of parochial and reductive approaches to their subject or that they have elaborated comparative works that remain exemplary in their scope and sympathy. Nonetheless, the narrow parochialism that is the field’s great other seems to correspond to little in the postwar geopolitical field, which was dominated not by nationalist contests, but by the delicate maneuvering of diplomats in

a war that figured the world into two huge “blocs” and whose atomic weapons aimed west to east and east to west threatened total annihilation for everyone and everything equally, without regard to national identity. This is not to understate the strength of national identification, but simply to point out that of all the periods the discipline of comparative literature passed through in the United States from 1871 to the present, the postwar period seems to be the one during which the discipline’s “oppositional” cosmopolitan self-identification corresponded least directly to external political conditions. What I want to propose here, in a schematic and speculative mode, is that the cold war created a kind of deferral or a screen between the status of national languages and cosmopolitanism in the university’s bureaucratic arrangements and the force of those categories in the geopolitical world and so contributed to diverting the discipline from what might have been a broader comparative scope. The end of the cold war has brought a very sudden change in this ghostly survival of autonomous national units (departments) that now in many cases face dissolution or consolidation into composite disciplinary assemblages, just as it has lifted the curtain to spotlight a globalization, which, in its economic and to an extent political form, had been developing apace all along.¹⁸ From a post-cold war perspective, the nationalist parochialism comparative literature defined itself against seems to find its most direct reference in internal bureaucratic arrangements (turf battles with national literature departments and interdisciplinary programs over courses, students, funds, intellectual prominence, status). My point here is that, particularly in view of the growth of the university’s bureaucracy, internal institutional factors must seriously be taken into account in any attempt to historicize the cultural content of a discipline.

For those of us weaned on the anti-parochial view of comparative literature, it can come as something of a surprise that the discipline did not make its first appearance in the U.S. university after or in reaction to modern national literature departments, but in concert with them. Before addressing larger epistemic questions, I want to take a short detour through the institutional history of comparative literature in the United States in order to ground this reflection on comparison in the very institutional framework from which it most directly issues. This is important not only because the discipline is mediated in its relation to society and to the world by its place in an institution, but also because certain factors that barely emerge in a conceptual account loom larger and more clearly in an institutional account, most particularly in this case, gender. The decisive event for mod-

ern literatures and indeed for the very notion of disciplines governed by distinct methodologies and divided into departments was the introduction of the German model of the research university in the 1870s (Graff, 55–64). Prior to this professionalization of scholarship with its rigorous scientific practice and training, the Greek and Latin classics dominated classroom teaching while modern literatures were pursued and discussed outside the university's curriculum in literary societies and debating clubs. While the primary function of the old college had been the socialization of the elite, the primary function of the modern university was the training and certification of specialists. For Graff, the establishment of the modern or research university initiates a contest between specialists and "generalists" or scholars and humanists; that is, between a scientific or empirical approach to literature associated with philology and a generalist or interpretive approach, a split that, according to him, structures literary culture in the academy until the time of his own writing in the late 1980s. While useful as a general distinction, this polarization is often complicated and this is particularly the case with the field of comparative literature insofar as, on the one hand, the comparative method that Charles Chauncey Shackford champions in his lectures (and one must surmise as he elaborated it in his course, the first of its kind—as far as is known—in the United States) aligns with the new emphasis on rigorous method while, on the other hand, the breadth of comparative literature's scope clearly contests the *narrow* specialization associated with philology. To the distinction between generalist humanism and specialized scholarship, one must add the distinction between narrow specialization and broad systematization, both of which will lay competing claims to the mantle of scientificity. For Charles Mills Gayley, a crucial figure in the institutionalization of comparative literature at the turn of the century, the practice of comparative literature was quite explicitly a means toward wresting philology away from myopic pedantry.¹⁹ In Gayley's work, a systematic approach to literary study goes hand in hand with a general appreciation of literature, as important for maintaining the socializing function of the old college as it was for educating the general public. I focus on Gayley here because he was perhaps the most vigorous and influential proponent of a comprehensive and positivist comparatism at the moment of comparative literature's institutional consolidation as a discipline. In current discussions of the discipline that reach beyond the postwar period, Gayley is most often forgotten or erased in favor of his high humanist East Coast counterpart, George Woodberry at Columbia.

In the period between 1880–1915, the height of Gayley's activity, the U.S. university experienced substantial growth in enrollment spurred by the entrance of a broader spectrum of the middle class lured by the promise of careers in business (Graff, 105). The humanists, then as now, bemoan the new philistine students "impervious to humanistic education," in Graff's words (Graff, 106–107). Gayley sounds precisely such themes in his writings, but in his pedagogical practice he finds in comparative literature a solution both to the loss of the old college's elite socialization as well as to the problem of educating a utilitarian-minded professional managerial class. When Gayley is brought to the University of California at Berkeley in 1889 to chair the English department and reform its curriculum, he inherits a hodgepodge of course offerings including some of the old college's instruction in rhetoric, some philologically inflected courses centered on language, and others specialized in various authors and periods. Gayley's main action is to expand and systematize these offerings so that the department would offer, in his words, "a synoptical view of English literature as the outcome of, and the index to, English thought in the course of its development."²⁰ This meant not only the addition of courses in periods and genres, but more importantly in "Aesthetics of Literature, Principles of Criticism, and Comparative Literature," all of which extended the primary materials far beyond the literature of England.²¹ The national literature, in other words, was to be studied in a comparative context. I have found no record of Gayley attempting to establish a separate department of comparative literature, and it may well be that in the institutional conception of the time such strict correspondence between discipline and department was less secure than it has, until recently, been for us. Nor were scholars as intimately identified with departments during this formative period (Gayley himself graduated from the department of literature and science at the University of Michigan, where he concentrated on Greek and Latin and later underwent the requisite training in philological methods during a year's study in Germany). Comparative literature in its scientific dimension provided a model of specialized study, and in its generalist dimension a model both for a livelier version of the old college's course in rhetoric and for the courses in general education designed for the university's new middle-class entrants. Gayley offered a course on "Oral Debates upon Literary Topics" for students in the English department and his popular course on "Great Books" (which, initiated in 1901, was one of the first of its kind in the nation), for the larger college population.

It is not the conflict between the middle class and the elite in the humanities that looms largest as a problem for Gayley in his institutionalization of comparative literature, but rather the contaminating presence of women and more generally of the feminine gendering of modern literature itself. In a short pamphlet, Gayley notes that "the disrepute into which the humanities have fallen" follows from what he calls "the feminization of education" (owing to low salaries for secondary school teachers). "For entrusted to women," he continues, "the languages, literature, and history have come to be regarded as feminine and ineffectual studies," partly to blame for the "undisciplined character of the rising generation of men."²² The question of women in higher education is a broad one and has been treated or analyzed in depth elsewhere.²³ General institutional histories, however, tend not to treat the question separately. Though Graff comments briefly throughout his analysis on the femininity attributed to modern literature, pointing out, for instance, that part of the attraction of philology was that it endowed the study of modern languages and literatures with "manliness" necessary to make it a respectable subject, he never treats the question in depth. Judging by the references to this subject by Gayley's biographer, his student and collaborator Benjamin P. Kurtz, one could well conclude, reading against the grain, that Gayley's greatest accomplishment with the institution of comparative literature was the defeminization of modern literature. Kurtz reports, for instance, that for "Oral Debates upon Literary Topics," Gayley had recourse to the stratagem of "setting up certain prerequisites to which he adhered with the women but he neglected for the men."²⁴ For those "fortunate" and "privileged" enough to participate, it was, Kurtz avers, an unforgettable course: "From its vivid discipline they gained a lifelong masculine interest in great literature" (Kurtz, 110). If Gayley felt it to be expedient to keep women away from "great literature" in the effete confines of the English curriculum in order to conserve a corner for the masculine interests so vital to the elite socialization of the old college, he also invited them to leave the site where great literature was made available to the unclean philistine masses, his lecture course on "Great Books." I quote Kurtz at some length:

To stimulate such reading, to rescue reading from subservience to the professional technique of a narrow scholarship, and especially to develop such reading among students in the colleges of applied sciences, he instituted a one-hour course in Great Books. . . . And there was a story of some venturesome engineers who discarded jumpers and overalls, washed the laboratory grime from their hands, and

sallied forth to a literary lecture room, *only to find it so crowded with girls, women, coeds, pelicans, old maids, and females of every other sort and description, that they fled back to their hill fastness.* As a matter of fact, to keep the new course for the students in the applied sciences and in commerce, it became necessary to limit the attendance of women. This limitation aroused such a storm of protest, in which the lecturer was repeatedly accused of being a woman-hater, that the course was given one term for the men of the University and the alternate term for all and sundry. Until this device was invented, there was trouble enough. (Kurtz, 151–152; emphasis added)

It is worth considering John Guillory's point that what is transmitted in the university is not so much a particular content, but the culture of the school itself and access to the production and distribution of "cultural capital." The social relations the university contains and reproduces must be considered alongside how it defines and organizes objects of knowledge. I have encountered no discussion, whether biographical or analytical, of women's experience in the rise of the discipline of comparative literature or in its institutional life.²⁵ The literary theory that dominated comparative literature during the 1980s has often been criticized from an institutional point of view for the full technocratization of literary studies it produced—highly specialized jargon, the successful marketing of expertise for its own stake, the star system, etc. Yet it must also be observed that, to my knowledge anyway, during its founding moment it welcomed and promoted women and a certain strain of feminism in comparative literature on an unparalleled scale, thus perhaps finally breaching the subtle and implicit cordon between the feminine (intrinsically parochial) social graces of modern national literatures and the virility of cosmopolitanism.²⁶

In Gayley's important programmatic essay "What is Comparative Literature?" (1903),²⁷ the adjective "comparative" indicates first a scientific approach that is at once systematic and historical, and second a global scope for the study of literature, a scope so all-encompassing that it depends upon broad-based collaborative work. Gayley calls for the formation of a "Society of Comparative Literature," in which he imagines each member pursuing the study of a "given type, species, movement, or theme" and collectively piecing together a "comparative investigation into the nature of literature, part by part" (Gayley, 85), in time resulting in the discovery of the "common qualities of literature, scientifically determined" (Gayley, 86), a true and universal canon of criticism. He optimistically felt that "this dream is now in a fair way to be realized" (how quaint this seems retrospectively

from this most uncollaborative of disciplines). This notion of the collaborative nature of the comparative enterprise is important in part because by aligning the academic practice of comparative literature with that of experimental science, it replaces single all-knowing humanist able to synthesize his learning through a kind of historical intuition with the limited and specialized investigator.²⁸ It is easy to caricature Gayley's propositions, but they are in fact quite nuanced. For Gayley, the comparative method has a fundamental and dynamic historical or temporal component. It is this stress on development, or (the term Gayley prefers) "permutation," that most distinguishes his scientific version of comparative literature from the high humanism of early comparatists more readily remembered today, such as George Woodberry, who held the first chair in comparative literature established in the United States, at Columbia. Gayley quotes from Woodberry's editorial comments on the purpose of the discipline of comparative literature in the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Comparative Literature* (1903): "To disclose the necessary forms, the vital moods of the beautiful soul, is the far goal of our effort, to help in this, in the bringing of those spiritual unities in which human destiny is accomplished."²⁹ Gayley comments, "with this the genuine student of literary science must agree," even as he delicately faults Woodberry for entirely ignoring the possibility of "growth" (Gayley, 101). The very discrepancy in tone and diction between the seeker after the "beautiful soul" and the student of "literary science" goes a long way toward showing the gulf that divided the humanist comparatists from the scientific practitioners. The question of "growth," a unifying and roughly evolutionary temporality, is decisive for it will underwrite Gayley's insistence on the inclusion of all literary expression "wherever found" as the proper subject matter for the discipline, a stand that will earn him the acerbic criticism of East Coast philologists and humanists alike. Indeed he defines the task of this society as "the comparative investigation of literary growths," and hesitates between "Society of Comparative Literature" and "Society of Literary Evolution" for its name. Throughout the essay Gayley stresses the comprehensive scope of comparison and its dependence upon a notion of "growth":

To repeat, the comparison is not alone between diverse national literatures, but between any elements involved in the history of literature, or any stages in the history of any element. There have been, within my own knowledge, those who would confine the word literature to the written productions of civilized peoples and consequently would exclude from consideration aboriginal attempts at verbal

art. But students nowadays increasingly recognize that the cradle of literary science is anthropology. The comparative method therefore sets civilized literatures side by side with the popular, traces folklore to folklore, and these so far as possible to the matrix in the undifferentiated art of human expression. (Gayley, 92)

For Gayley the comparative method is not limited to various interactions of European national literatures because it applies across time. A progressive or teleological temporality allows for the commensuration of a comprehensive array of verbal artifacts, the "aboriginal" and "civilized," the written and oral verbal arts. Gayley's insistence that "the cradle of literary science is anthropology" is key here. Besides giving us a glimpse into the range of interdisciplinarity possible at the moment of disciplinarity's institutionalization, this assertion reinforces the intrinsically temporal nature of the comparative method. The comparative method that dominated late-nineteenth-century anthropology applied across a single civilizational scale where all the world's cultures had their place in an evolutionary hierarchy progressing from the simple or "savage" to the complex and highly differentiated societies of "civilization." In what Johannes Fabian has critiqued as a "spatialization of time," savages were, culturally speaking, the "ancestors" of civilized man, a view that made possible the recovery of the past in the present.³⁰ Despite hesitation in some quarters about imposing upon what is visibly only a coexistence of phenomena in geographical space with the assumption of a consecutive sequence in time,³¹ comparison along the civilizational scale allowed all differences in *kind* to be measurable as differences of *degree* in development or growth.³² It is this temporalized comparison that underwrites the ubiquity of non-Western subject matter in Gayley's work on aesthetics and comparative literature. To give just two examples, when Gayley delivers a series of lectures on aesthetics at the University of California in 1890–1891, the first half are devoted to learned definitions and disquisitions in the philosophy of aesthetics, with prominent attention to Aristotle, G. W. F. Hegel, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett, while the second half introduces an application or an example of the development of the form of the lyric in the context of environmental factors over three progressive stages: (1) naïve, (2) reflective, and (3) spiritual, with examples from folk songs of Southern India and lyric from China and Japan, respectively, to illustrate each stage.³³ But this is just a sampling of Gayley's comprehensive scope. The second volume of his *An Introduction to the Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism*, subtitled "Lyric, Epic and Allied Forms of Poetry" (the first

volume is devoted to "Aesthetics and Poetics") gives the full panoply. The chapter on "Historical Development" of the lyric is divided into two main sections; the first lays out areas of analysis (e.g., "Beginnings of the Lyric," "Principles of Growth"), while the second is subheaded: "Historical Study by Nationality: Special References," and comprises thirty-three different "nationalities." I reproduce the list in full:

- The Greek Lyric
- The Roman Lyric
- The Byzantine Lyric
- Christian Greek and Latin Hymns of the Dark and Middle Ages
- Other Latin Christian Lyric Poetry from the 2d to the 14th Century
- Latin Poetry of the 15th and 16th Centuries
- The French (including Provençal) Lyric
- The Italian Lyric
- The Spanish Lyric
- The Portuguese Lyric
- The English Lyric
- The Celtic Lyric (Irish, Scottish, Welsh, etc)
- The German Lyric
- The Dutch Lyric
- The Scandinavian Lyric in General
- The Icelandic Lyric
- The Swedish Lyric
- The Danish-Norwegian Lyric
- Lyric Poetry of the Lapps and Finns
- The Russian Lyric
- Serbian, Czech, Magyar, and Polish Lyrics
- The Turkish Lyric
- The Afghan Lyric
- The Syriac and Armenian Lyric
- The Lyric of Arabia
- The Persian Lyric
- The Indian Lyric
- The Sumerian and Babylonian Lyric

- The Egyptian Lyric
- The Ancient Hebrew Lyric
- The Chinese Lyric
- The Japanese Lyric
- Lower Races
- Special Forms³⁴

Such a list appears comprehensive: it provides panoramic perspective on all the lyric in the world. Each "nation" is certainly not treated in equal depth (English lyric at 41 pages leads the pack, whereas the Afghan, Syriac, and Armenian lyric, at a single page amongst them, bring up the rear) and the sequence of sections follows roughly three ordering principles: linguistic, racial-geographic, and evolutionary and these are discrepant, as even a cursory look at this list shows. The main tradition of the Western European lyric is presented more or less chronologically and grouped by language families (e.g., Greek, Latin, Romance, Anglo-Saxon, Germanic, etc.) followed by the margins of Caucasian Europe (Scandinavia, Russia, Eastern Europe), then, starting with Turkish lyric, come the darker races of the East, listed at first geographically, then starting with the Sumerian and Babylonian lyric, grouped by antiquity. This is followed by the Far East, which remains consistent with linguistic and geographical unities but falls off the temporal scale. The list ends with the "lower races," which include such diverse peoples as Andamanese, Veddas, Australians, Malays, Africans, Esquimaux, and North and South American Indians (Gayley and Kurtz, 369). Race, as it appears here, exists outside the boundaries implicit in all the previous rubrics, outside of unities of language, nationality, geography, and temporal progression. It stands by itself as the bare signifier for that which fails to correspond to any of the other criteria apparent in the inventory, a "none of the above," eluding even the overarching idea of "growth" itself. This inconsistency is irksome enough to warrant Gayley and Kurtz's only explicit comment on their sequence. Noting that the lyric of "the lower or so-called 'primitive' races" ought to come first since it belongs at the origin of the art, they aver without further explanation that an outline according to "nationalities" is more "perspicuous" than one ordered strictly according to "the order of development" (Gayley and Kurtz, 369). The term "nationalities" seems to refer loosely to linguistic unities rather than politico-geographic ones, since, for instance, the list includes Irish, Scottish, Welsh, etc, under the single rubric of "Celtic Lyric," but even this basic

index of consistency is foiled by developmentalism's implicit racial distinction. For what else could distinguish "Lapps and Finns," for instance, from "Lower Races"? The inventory's departure from the principle of growth so crucial to Gayley and Kurtz's conception of comparison reveals the limit of their particular positivist humanism, and that limit is the replacement of the Greek with the African at the head of any list.³⁵ In this comparative scheme, the lower races must remain fundamentally *undifferentiated*. A civilizational progress underlies the list, but it must be read backward (or from the bottom up) from the "lower races" to the modern European languages.

If a fundamental principle of temporal and (if one may say so) Euro-directional development legitimates comparison's comprehensive scope, a supreme confidence in the cumulative and progressive nature of positivist knowledge underlies the scientific comparatists' sense of the discipline's purpose. Throughout the handbook the authors offer directives for future research, in full confidence that once enough literary data has been collected, the proper categories or types will be defined and, submitted to comparison, will at last positively manifest general laws of literature. These grand plans were to be very short-lived. WWI dashed the unquestioned cosmopolitan unity of the European nations so vital to comparative literature's project both in its humanist and its scientific guises, and broke the hold of German philology on the U.S. academy. The anti-positivism of post-WWI intellectual currents, furthermore, turned humanist scholarship away from the systematic and comprehensive approach it had shared with the emergent social sciences. The discipline of comparative literature generally waned during the interwar period.³⁶

Compared to post-WWII handbooks of comparative literature, the range and diversity of nations gathered together under the rubric of a genre or, as Gayley would say, a "type" is quite remarkable. René Wellek and Austin Warren's *Theory of Literature*, a very influential handbook continuously in print since it was first published in 1942, is entirely organized around concepts and methods, with no separate heading whatsoever relating to national or cultural scope. The literature of Europe is to such an extent given as the unified field of comparative literature that it neither requires argumentation nor prompts even the shadow of a question. Gayley and Kurtz's *An Introduction to the Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism* and Wellek and Warren's *Theory of Literature* thus mark a clear shift from a geographically comprehensive or global Euro-centered comparatism to a uniquely European comparatism. Besides expanding the perspective of the

discipline's institutional history, attention to positivist comparatism has important consequences for contemporary practice. One concerns post-colonial critique. Aimed at the idealist, high humanist stance of the early comparatists, this critique indicts them for what one might call a geographical elision; that is, for excluding the better part of the globe in their comparative, general articulation of human creative endeavor. Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* faults George Woodberry, for instance, for waxing eloquent on the unity of mankind without any reference whatsoever to the high imperialism of his time and points to the exclusive focus on the European historical unity of "Romania" as the limited geographical grounding of the work of Erich Auerbach.³⁷ What is left out, Said shows, is precisely the contemporary imperial relations that carve out the globe and make it unavoidably present as a totality. The "comparative literature of imperialism" centered on an innovative "contrapuntal" reading of texts from the imperial metropolises and the former colonies that Said elaborates in this study aims to restore the historical imbrication of imperialism's geographical extent occluded in the restricted scope of a strictly European comparatism (*CI*, 18–19). As we have seen, however, the relation of positivist comparative literature to contemporary political and economic imperial hegemony is direct, no less so than that of its disciplinary "cradle," anthropology. Its methodology, furthermore, draws its authority from a particular reading of imperial history, as we shall explore further. There is, of course, no critique of imperialism in this methodology, and no attention or even mention of relations of domination and coercion. What stands out starkly, however, is that a comprehensive geographical scope is neither novel nor sufficient in and of itself as a response to Eurocentrism. Needless to say, Said's approach offers much more than such an unmediated inclusivity. Nonetheless, attention to the dimension of the comparative project that is not grounded in the representative universalism of high humanism opens a slightly different angle onto the paths a postcolonial comparatism might take, particularly because the idea of comparison as a method features so prominently in the positivist approach.

The Time of Comparison

How much will it still take before the mines of the past have rendered all the treasures they enclose? The work of modern erudition will only be accomplished when all the faces of humanity,

that is, all the nations, will have been the object of definitive studies, when India, China, Judea, Egypt will be restored, when we will definitively possess a perfect comprehension of the entire human development. Only then will the reign of criticism [*la critique*] be inaugurated. For criticism will proceed with perfect security only when it will see open before it the field of universal comparison. Comparison is the great critical instrument.

—Ernest Renan, *L'Avenir de la science: pensées de 1848*

What is the time of comparison?

—Shelley Wong

The crucial moment when a comparative approach to scholarship developed by the Romantic theorist, especially J. G. von Herder and August and Friedrich von Schlegel, becomes a comparative *method* occurs, according to Wellek around 1850, when "Romantic conceptions fell into discredit, and ideals from the natural sciences became victorious, even in the writing of literary history."³⁸ This inaugurates the reign of positivism thoroughly discredited and later forgotten in the twentieth century. Among the more extreme transfers of concepts from the natural sciences to the comparison of literature is Ferdinand Brunetière's application of Darwin's theory of evolution directly to literature, with genres treated as species evolving according to distinct laws and principles, including survival of the fittest.³⁹ From the distance of our time, particularly in the wake of the concerted critique of teleology over the last forty years or so, the distinction between what one might call the humanist historicism of the early nineteenth century and the positivist evolutionism of the later nineteenth century can seem blurred, and they do indeed share many general positions, not least of which is the idea of a basic and temporally inflected unity underlying human productions. But it is a distinction that is particularly crucial to the practice of comparison precisely because most of the great postwar émigrés would trace their intellectual descent from the former.

Scientific principles transferred from the social sciences inform the first work on comparative literature to appear in English, Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett's *Comparative Literature* (1886). Widely read and translated, this study exerted a powerful influence on Gayley, among others, who discusses Posnett alongside Hegel and Aristotle in his *Lectures*. Covering a

broad range of examples (the Hebrew, Greek, Indian, Chinese, French, and American, among others) Posnett interprets the development of literature according to the principles of Spencerian evolution and defines the discipline's task in the following manner: "We therefore adopt, with a modification hereafter to be noticed, the gradual expansion of social life, from clan to city, from city to nation, from both of these to cosmopolitan humanity, as the proper order of our studies in comparative literature."⁴⁰ Though he admits of regressions, stasis, and various indirections, the governing idea of his analysis is the "principle of growth," so central to Gayley's conception of the discipline in 1903. *Comparative Literature* treats literature primarily as a social phenomenon influenced by environmental factors, amenable to classification, and governed by large processes and general laws rather than as the product of individual genius. Curiously enough, comparison itself turns out to be a prominent measure of social progress: the more a society advances—that is, expands and specializes—the more it brings under the purview of comparison. As Posnett puts it, "the range of comparison widens from clan to national and even world-wide associations and sympathies" (Posnett, 77). Thus the ancient Greeks, despite the sophistication of their institutions, made "poor progress in comparative thinking," according to Posnett, because of their contempt for other languages (Posnett, 74). The civilizational activity of comparison is reproduced "consciously" at the yet more advanced stage where the critic, or student of literary science, himself undertakes to track these comparisons: "these external and internal evolutions of social life, take place often unconsciously, making comparisons and distinction without reflecting on their nature or limits; it is the business of reflective comparison, of the comparative method, to retrace this development *consciously*, and to seek the causes which have produced it" (Posnett, 78). The comparative method thus both recapitulates the progress of civilization and is its highest accomplishment. It follows that empires, including earlier empires (China, India, Macedonian Greece, Rome) but especially the contemporary British Empire, simply by virtue of the extent of their conquest and holdings, have entered into more extensive comparisons and have therefore advanced furthest toward cosmopolitan humanity. Comparison is indistinguishable from imperial progress.

The discovery of the New World brought this new European civilisation face to face with primitive life, and awakened men to contrasts with their own associations more striking than Byzantine or even Saracen could offer. Commerce, too, was now bringing the rising nations of Europe into rivalry with, and knowledge

of, each other. . . . Christian missionaries were bringing home the life and literature of China so vividly. . . . Then Englishmen in India learned of that ancient language . . . and soon the points of resemblance between this language and the languages of Greeks and Italians, Teutons and Celts were observed, and used like so many stepping-stones upon which men passed in imagination over the flood of time which separates the old Aryans from their modern offshoots in the West. Since those days the method of comparison has been applied to many subjects besides language; and many new influences have combined to make the mind of Europe more ready to compare and to contrast than it ever was before. The steam-engine, telegraph, daily press, now bring the local and central, the popular and the cultured, life of each European country and the general actions of the entire world face to face; and habits of comparison have arisen such as never before prevailed so widely and so vigorously. . . . [We] may call *consciously* comparative thinking the great glory of our nineteenth century. . . . (Posnett 76; emphasis in the original)

It is a bracing passage, not only for its vigorous faith in progress but because it presents comparatism as an *ineluctable* consequence of the great expansion of knowledge in history. Comparison as a "readiness" and a "habit" seems involuntary, a condition deriving from material circumstance rather than the act or the practice of a subject. Until, of course, Posnett reaches the vanguard of modernity from which he writes and then that comparison, at the apex of its glory, becomes "consciously comparative." Imperialism prods "the mind of Europe" toward ever-expanding comparison and this historical movement, once it is grasped in the comparative method, attains the consciousness needed for a privileged production of knowledge. It is difficult to read a passage like this without noting an uncanny resemblance to the current discourse on globalization in its celebratory mode; as it announces the great new age of the global village. A similar emphasis obtains on technological advancement, on an explosive growth of knowledge, on the transformative cross-cultural encounter, and perhaps above all a narrative of cumulative ineluctability that interpellates its reader into a condition rather than a possibility. There are differences, of course, but what is striking is the persistence both of a kind of deterministic configuration of progress or change and, in tandem, the inordinate claim for the novelty of the present. The euphoria of having achieved a telos, reached an acme of development, accomplished in fact what was previously only imagined, would seem to be a persistent trope of modernity. While I'm digressing here, I may as well note another uncanny parallel, this time with some comments by Homi Bhabha on the comparative method and a "new" world literature for which we might well invert Posnett's phrase

and say that *unconsciously* comparative thinking is the great glory of the late twentieth century:

Goethe suggests that the "inner nature of the whole nation as well as the individual man works all unconsciously." When this is placed alongside his idea that the cultural life of the nation is "unconsciously" lived, then there may be a sense in which world literature could be an emergent, prefigurative category that is concerned with a form of cultural dissensus and alterity, where non-consensual terms of affiliation may be established on the grounds of historical trauma. . . . Where, once, the transmission of national traditions was the major theme of a world literature, perhaps we can now suggest that transnational histories of migrants, the colonized or political refugees—these border and frontier conditions—may be the terrains of world literature.⁴¹

For Posnett, comparison's expansion reaches its highest point in Western empires because these empires combine the greatest variety of cultural contact (one should of course write "conquest," but this aspect of empire is never mentioned in Posnett, just as those on the receiving end of conquest—precisely the dispossessed or "unhomely" who are Bhabha's new internationalists—are not counted amongst the "we" who have developed such vigorous habits of comparison) with the highest degree of individual autonomy or consciousness. Posnett's comparatism is imperial in various respects, but not as one might expect in the most obvious or instrumental sense as a pretext or justification for empire, whereby, for instance, Western literature and Western society, having reached the highest development, set out naturally as part of an impersonal process to civilize the world. His comparatism is imperial first of all conceptually in that it is intrinsically expansionist, but most important it is imperial because by definition it can only be available in its most evolved scientific or reflective form to a privileged denizen of empire. The authority to encompass comparatively all the literature in the world is thus reserved implicitly and without argument to the Western scholar because he represents comparison's highest development. It is this evolutionary, teleological unity that allows Posnett to locate all significant causes in a great impersonal evolutionary process and at the same time to gaze upon them from above.

The great innovation of the comparative method in the view of its practitioners was its subordination of the unruly and directionless similarities and differences generated by the table or chronological list of earlier attempts at universal literary histories to a meaningful and progressive temporality. Time is to such an extent the motor and frame of the comparative

method that in Posnett's view the scientific comparatist's task is not so much to compare one object to another as to "retrace the development" of comparison's progress. It's unlikely that anyone would have thought to ask Posnett (though he would have welcomed the questions, especially as he claims—quite falsely—to have invented the discipline's name), "What exactly do you compare?" since the adjective "comparative" was ubiquitous at the time in the names of fields of inquiry. But if the question had arisen he might have answered, "I compare comparisons in time." The comparative method is not ultimately directed toward the objects under comparison, but to an invisible and impalpable entity manifested through them. Positivism imputes a transparent knowability to the empirical object and a corresponding capacity to know in the subject, but the objective of its knowledge is itself obscure, as Foucault reminds us: "... there is a whole layer of phenomena given to experience whose rationality and interconnection rest upon an objective foundation which it is not possible to bring to light; it is possible to know phenomena, but not substances; laws, but not essences; regularities, but not the beings that obey them."⁴² This mode or condition of knowledge is peculiar to what Foucault calls the modern episteme, which is grounded in History. Foucault's definition of History helps situate the positivist dimensions of comparative literature in a broader modern epistemic field, particularly to the degree that it highlights the crucial link between empiricity and temporality: "History... is the fundamental mode of being of empiricities, upon the basis of which they are affirmed, posited, arranged, and distributed in the space of knowledge for the use of such disciplines or sciences as may arise" (*Order*, 219). The adjective "comparative" indexes precisely this temporal "mode of being of empiricities," the archaeological fragment of another era's positivity persisting in the discipline's name into the present.

Approached obliquely Foucault's seminal study can be read as an archaeology of comparison, since shifts in the modality of relations among objects of knowledge are crucial elements in the ruptures between the three epistemes he isolates, pre-Classical, Classical, and modern. What seems particularly useful in Foucault's almost clinical isolation of modes of knowledge from everything that might impinge on them is that it allows one to reflect on the structure of comparison itself as bounded but historically mutable. The pre-Classical world of knowledge Foucault evokes is to such an extent infused with resemblances that these can be divided into various dominant types. Foucault lists four: *convenientia*, in which sheer proximity

in space signals a hidden resemblance; *aemulatio*, the ability of things to imitate each other over great distances; *analogy*, which Foucault defines as "subtle resemblances of relations"; and *sympathy*, the tendency of likeness to assimilate things into identity, a power counterbalanced by its opposite, *antipathy* (*Order*, 18–23). What makes these multifarious similitudes (between flowers and the sky, apoplexy and tempests, stars and plants, shells and moss) possible is the presupposition of a harmonious disposition in the world between microcosm and macrocosm. This provides all investigation with an assurance that "everything will find its mirror and its macrocosmic justification on another and larger scale, ... [and], inversely, that the visible order of the highest spheres will be found reflected in the darkest depths of the earth" (*Order*, 31).

Thinkers in the Classical episteme will break utterly with this system of resemblance as a form of knowledge, consigning it to the realm of error, illusion, and the deception of the senses. Both Francis Bacon and René Descartes elaborate formal refutations of resemblance, which henceforth gives way to reason as a ground for knowledge. Comparison now emerges as the central function of thought, not in the service of tracking resemblances but rather of analyzing them "in terms of identity, difference, measurement, and order" (*Order*, 51–52). To know through comparison is thus no longer to draw things together, but to "discriminate." Measurement and ordering, and they are often indistinguishable, submit resemblance to proof by comparison, and at the same time open a new possibility for certainty based on enumeration and taxonomy. The form of Classical knowledge, as Foucault describes it in comparison with the modern episteme that follows it, is static in that it presents knowledge in its totality in the fixed form of taxonomic tables and series. But if resemblance is contained and submitted to comparative analysis in the Classical episteme, it almost vanishes altogether in Foucault's account of the modern episteme, in which "from now on the contemporaneous and simultaneously observable resemblances in space will be simply the fixed forms of a succession" (*Order*, 219) in what he calls a "mutation of Order into History." This mutation of knowledge's object from resemblances in space to successions in time underlies a crucial aspect of the idea of comparison for the comparative method of the positivist comparatists: comparison is not primarily a procedure for analyzing similarity and difference in order to determine individual units suitable to evaluation, but rather a means of determining the general laws of development ascertainable beyond objects of analysis. Comparability as such,

a prominent concern in this epistemic schema for taxonomic comparison, does not emerge as a central problem for the positivists because a unified field or totality for knowledge is given in the comprehensive process of temporal development.

The Space of Comparison

[T]he 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.

—Gayatri Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*

In a brief and very influential essay, translated as "Of Other Spaces" and first delivered as a lecture in 1967 just a year after the publication of *The Order of Things*, Foucault writes: "The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space." He continues: "We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and the far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein."⁴³ While this present "epoch of space" is clearly contrasted to a previous epoch of time, the governing terms of this essay differ sharply from those of *The Order of Things*. At issue here is space as an epoch, not an episteme; space is an object of experience, description, perception, emplacement, but not a modality for the formal production of knowledge. The simultaneity of juxtaposition or "heterochrony" emerges in "Of Other Spaces" as the primary modality of spatial comparison. To describe and analyze that spatial comparison, Foucault develops the concept of "heterotopia," which he defines in contrast to utopia as "real places . . . which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, and the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted" (*Spaces*, 24). Including such diverse instances as psychiatric hospitals, boats, fairgrounds, cemeteries, gardens, brothels, libraries, colonies, Oriental carpets, vacation villages, theaters, prisons, and museums, the heterotopia is a site that can be construed as an "elsewhere" that produces the effect of dislocating one's fundamental sense of fully inhabiting a single space. It is a parcel of the

world that at once brings the totality of the world into apprehension and destabilizes or contests its unity.

This experiential and representational emphasis of spatial heterotopia's comparative function contrasts starkly with Foucault's articulation of heterotopia in *The Order of Things*. Few readers can forget the extraordinary quotation from Jorge Luis Borges with which Foucault begins his preface to that text, the description of the Chinese encyclopedia, which reads, in part:

animals are divided into: a) belonging to the Emperor, b) embalmed, c) tame, d) sucking pigs, e) sirens, f) fabulous, g) stray dogs, h) included in the present classification, i) frenzied, j) innumerable, k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, l) *et cetera*, m) having just broken the water pitcher, n) that from a long way off look like flies (*Order*, xv).

For Foucault, the assortment of items on this list suggests there is "a worse disorder than that of the incongruous and of the inappropriate comparison; it would be the disorder that makes the fragments of a great number of possible orders sparkle in a single dimension, without law or geometry, the disorder of the heteroclite" (*Order*, xvii). Heterotopia appears in this epistemic and epistemological context as a figure for absolute incommensurability, which paralyzes the knower into aphasia if he looks too directly upon it. The taxonomic sites occupied by the disparate elements clash to the extent that it is impossible to "define beneath them a common ground [*lieu commun*]." Though the incommensurability of the heteroclite precedes and utterly confounds all the modes of knowing through comparison developed in the three epistemes, it nonetheless performs what one might call the foundational comparative function of revealing, negatively, that there *is* order. Heterotopic difference in the preface to *The Order of Things* is the other order at the limit of "our" own thought, for Foucault locates Borges' encyclopedia in a "real" place—China—at the limit of the Western imaginary. In presenting "the stark impossibility of thinking *that*," it reveals the "brute being of order," the very condition of possibility for an episteme—that is, for knowledge. In the spatial epoch sketched out in "Of Other Spaces," heterotopia, describable precisely as "fragments of a great number of possible orders [that] sparkle in a single dimension," no longer figures absolute incommensurability. The status of heterogeneity (the *hetero* in heterotopia) has shifted quite radically from that which exceeds and confounds the ordering function of comparison for knowledge

to that which, on the contrary, generates relationality. Similarly, the status of place (the *topos* in heterotopia) has undergone a marked materialization from the metaphorical "site" of taxonomic categories to the actually existing common ground underlying disparate spaces. Borges' diverse elements become less forbidding and perhaps even partly intelligible if instead of seeking a conceptual common ground for them, we attempt to think of them spatially, using, for instance, the terms with which Foucault describes the spatial epoch: simultaneity, juxtaposition, the near and the far, the side-by-side, the dispersed.

Foucault's analysis of space has been celebrated as a pivotal critique of chronocentrism because it offers a historicization of space and sketches a framework for considering space not as a static backdrop to social meaning but as a dynamic constituent of it. I am more interested here, however, in exploring how it might illuminate the status of space as an epistemic (or epochal) ground for comparison in the realm of knowledge. The attempt to examine the epistemic frame within which one's own discourse might be taking place is indeed an abstract and markedly hypothetical exercise, but useful in order to defamiliarize what seems given about the comparative project. Several important studies of the relation of space to knowledge from theoretical vantage points different from Foucault's arrive at a paradox quite similar to that which one might read in the cleavage between his two elaborations of heterotopia. In the first and most thoroughgoing attempt to elaborate a materialist theory of space, *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre insists on the analytical separation and disjunction between various registers of space: "logical-epistemological space, the space of social practice, the space occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination."⁴⁴ He formulates the paradox of this disjunction in the following terms: "it is not therefore as though one had global (or conceived) space to one side and fragmented (or directly experienced) space to the other—rather as one might have an intact glass here and a broken glass or mirror over there. For space 'is' whole and broken, global and fractured at one and the same time. Just as it is at once conceived, perceived and directly lived."⁴⁵ A similar disjunction attends Fredric Jameson's description of the totality of the world system in "knowable but unrepresentable."⁴⁶ Developing on the difficulties of this paradox for the aesthetic within the epochal framework of late capitalism, Fredric Jameson argues that the cultural dialectic that binds experience and knowledge is severed, detaching individuals from affective access to history. The knowability in question here is reducible to the apprehension of information: one can know that

this extensive totality exists but one cannot grasp it affectively or through the medium of representation. He poses the consequences for this waning of historical consciousness and corresponding prominence of spatial consciousness in a particularly arresting way in the sequel to that essay, *The Seeds of Time*. Reflecting on the early years of the twentieth century he remarks that it is easier today to imagine the end of the physical world in ecological catastrophe than it is to imagine an end to the (historical) capitalist mode of production.⁴⁷ In these conditions, he argues, political agency requires a new epistemic pedagogy to orient the subject in space—something he calls "cognitive mapping," a notion he approaches from a radical, indeed hyperbolic, condition of unknowing.⁴⁸ At issue is not primarily space as an object of interpretation, a fundamental constituent of meaning, but rather space as a perplexing condition of knowledge in which there is a fundamental cleavage between the possibility of conceiving a spatial totality and the impossibility of experiencing or representing it as such.

To return to our initial juxtaposition between the Bernheimer report's articulation of the "space of comparison" and Shackford's paean to the comparative method a century earlier, one might propose the following observation. Temporalizing comparison encompassed a multiplicity of cultures as objects of knowledge because the evolutionary scale allowed that comparison to discriminate; it welcomed all the difference in the world, so long as all those differences could occupy fixed places on a hierarchical scale. The space of comparison, inclusive by virtue of its transversal extensiveness, would in a first moment negate the negation of this temporal unity and withdraw the discriminating evolutionary hierarchy from the geography of the globe as one might lift a distorting temporal veil in order to reveal space as such. All cultures would thus appear as Fabian would urge—coeval, or truly "simultaneous." Simultaneity, itself a temporal category, becomes a kind of degree zero of equivalence. Comparability, in the form of a ground or a space of comparison, remains, but without discrimination. The grounds of comparison today, thus, are in a first moment, literally *ground*—that is, in a rather bewildering way, potentially the globe itself. But if space provokes comparison, it also confounds its epistemological operations.

James Clifford's seminal 1992 essay "Traveling Cultures" offers one symptomatic instance of this problem. Clifford urges the idea of traveling cultures as a "spatial chronotope" that would dislodge anthropology from its constricted locations and lingering colonial vocation, and humanist disciplines from their national and canonical grounding. This concept is directed toward a disciplinary practice where it might help "to define a

very large domain of comparative cultural studies: diverse, interconnected histories of travel and displacement in the late twentieth century."⁴⁹ The modifier "comparative" immediately undergoes a suggestive estrangement here in its association with the explicitly post- or even anti-disciplinary assemblage of "cultural studies" from its original role as the marker of "scientific" disciplinarity, *par excellence*. "Traveling Cultures" is shot through with "comparison" (the word occurs sixteen times in various grammatical guises), which points in a general way at once to the extensive scope of culture's possible travels and, as in the citation, to the diversity and interconnectedness of those itineraries. Clifford avers that "a comparative cultural studies needs to work, self-critically, with compromised, historically encumbered tools," but there is no mention of comparison's disciplinary history, though it often seems to haunt the text. The supreme teleology of the comparative method in early anthropology is implicitly reversed in a phrase like "genuinely comparative and nonteleological cultural studies" (Clifford, 29). Comparison no longer points to a method but rather to a scope and a disposition toward knowledge that clearly aims to displace the Archimedean view of the traditional comparatist with a transversal practice of comparison: "The comparative scope I'm struggling toward is not a form of overview. Rather, I'm working with a notion of comparative knowledge produced through an *itinerary*, always marked by a 'way in,' a history of locations and a location of histories. . . . The metaphor of travel, for me, has been a serious dream of mapping without going 'off earth'" (Clifford, 31). The term "comparative knowledge" suggests that comparison might not be the end or object of knowledge but intrinsic to its processes. Nonetheless, comparison persists implicitly as a perplexing problem of method, particularly in some of the examples. Clifford proposes a comparison between Alexander Von Humboldt's view of the "New World" and that of an indentured Asian laborer:

But although there is no ground of equivalence between the two "travelers," there is at least a basis for comparison and (problematic) translation. Von Humboldt became a canonical travel writer. The knowledge (predominantly scientific and aesthetic) produced in his American explorations has been enormously influential. The Asian laborer's view of the "New World," knowledge derived from displacement, was certainly quite different. I do not now, and may never, have access to it. But a comparative cultural studies would be very interested in such knowledge and in the ways it could potentially complement or critique Von Humboldt's (Clifford, 35)

What this passage so presciently grazes but never quite brings into focus is a particular form of incommensurability. Incommensurability is precisely the problem comparison reveals here and Clifford phrases it with great accuracy: there is a "basis for comparison" between the laborer and Von Humboldt, presumably the space they have in common, but "no ground of equivalence" when it comes to the production, circulation, and analysis of their knowledge.⁵⁰ When Clifford does compare cultures in motion or travel, the comparison is of the classic taxonomic variety, in which a type or category is reinforced rather than dispersed or diversified. For example, his inclusion in the cultural category "Haitian" of both those Haitians residing in Haiti and those living in New York as a kind of comparative or traveling culture, can as one of his respondents remarks, easily essentialize the cultural identity and preclude analysis of the multiple relation into which Haitianess enters in New York, Haiti, or points in between. The normative powers of taxonomic comparison here overwhelm the very incommensurability the culture's "travel" has introduced it to in the first place. The ground of comparison has become a basis of equivalence.

"Incommensurability," which denotes literally, "that which cannot be measured by comparison" is, I propose, a useful term to name that tenuous space Clifford has briefly identified between a basis for comparison and a ground of equivalence because it suspends the relation between comparison and measure. I would reverse the terms here and propose "ground for comparison and basis of equivalence," since it is the spatial chronotope's ground that brings previously separated objects into comparison, even as that ground offers no given basis of equivalence. Incommensurability is probably more familiar in its maximal, epistemological sense, as the radical absence of common ground between different orders in Foucault's initial definition of heterotopia or as the rupture between paradigms in the history of science famously described by Thomas Kuhn. With Foucault's spatial heterotopology in mind we might propose a minimal form of incommensurability, which produces a generative dislocation without silencing discourse or marking the limit of knowledge. This minimal incommensurability instead opens up the possibility of an intelligible relation at the limits of comparison.

To say that the grounds of comparison today are literally "ground" is to speak heuristically, or within the quasi-figurative language of speculation, for in the realm of knowledge we know that there is no such thing as sheer ground and that our understanding of the globe derives from

layers of overtly ideological designations for areas (East/West; North/South; West/Rest, etc.) determined by successive hegemonies and complex histories of domination that ceaselessly intertwine knowledge with power. It is also, however, to pause at an experience of estranging spatial dislocation or a disturbance of givenness in the knower's relation to a field or object of knowledge that is at once constitutive to knowledge and foreclosed in its production. The decade since the publication of "Traveling Cultures" has seen the consolidation of an important body of scholarship that elaborates a thoroughgoing critique of the disciplinary methodologies and presuppositions that divide the world's surface unevenly into areas of knowledge. On one side the European tradition in the general humanities holding the place of an exemplary, implicitly universal form from which theoretical models can be generated; on the other side all non-Western languages in the more specialized realm of area studies, holding the place of raw material, as it were, on which these theoretical models can be applied.⁵¹ From the perspective of the discipline of comparative literature, the breaching of this division has far-reaching and as yet unforeseeable consequences.

Incommensurability: Postcoloniality and the Ends of Comparison

Before, the fetishes were subject to the law of equivalence. Now equivalence itself has become a fetish.

—Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

The application of this criterion to all of our games necessarily entails a certain level of terror, whether soft or hard: be operational (that is, commensurable) or disappear.

—Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*

Les poétiques multipliées du monde ne se proposent qu'à ceux-là seuls qui tentent de les ramasser dans des équivalences qui n'unifient pas.

[The multiplied poetics of the world present themselves to those alone who attempt to gather them into equivalences that do not unify.]

—Édouard Glissant, *Le Discours Antillais*

Future scholars of comparative literature looking back at this time may well see in it a formative moment equal to if not surpassing the two periods examined in this chapter, the turn into the last century when Gayley was active in the initial consolidation of the discipline and the period of postwar expansion during the 1950s and 1960s. Over the turn into the twenty-first century, a remarkable number of innovative studies have addressed the problems of studying literature in an expanded geographical scope as well as, explicitly or implicitly, the question of comparison. Unlike the two previous formative moments, however, the present conversation does not emerge principally from within the discipline of comparative literature and its main thrust, therefore, is not necessarily to establish methods and approaches proper to a discipline nor is it primarily aimed at specific institutional change or consolidation.⁵² Indeed all of these works are conspicuously transdisciplinary in various ways. One of the most startling developments is the reemergence of systematic approaches based on sociological and scientific models. Preeminent among these is a set of essays on world literature by Franco Moretti, which seek to apply various models from the social sciences and the natural sciences to the elaboration of a comprehensive theory of the novel on a world scale. Comprehensive and systematic, Moretti's approach is startlingly reminiscent of Gayley's, though by all appearances unknowingly. In the first of these essays, "Conjectures on World Literature," Moretti adapts Emanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory with its uneven divisions between center and periphery to the worldwide dissemination of the novel. As a way of dealing with the enormous practical problem of the multiplicity of languages and traditions, he provocatively proposes a methodology of "distant reading," the abandonment of close textual analysis in favor of "a patchwork of other people's research . . . the ambition is now directly proportional to the distance from the text: the more ambitious the project, the greater must the distance be."⁵³ The vast collaborative endeavor thus required is uncannily close to the one envisioned in Gayley's call for a "Society of Literary Evolution." Though lacking Gayley's positivist certainty (for Moretti, world literature is a problem requiring conjecture and hypothesis, not a given requiring simple data collection), his exhaustive scope (the world-inclusive comprehensiveness is limited to one genre, the novel), and his primary temporal unity of development, Moretti shares the basic idea that study of the entirety of world literature can only be pursued as a collaborative project in which specialists in the various areas all contribute to elaborating literature's general laws.⁵⁴ Moretti's tone, particularly in the first of these essays, the shortest and the

most ambitious of the series, is authoritative and provocative whereas the substance of the argument is tentative and conjectural (by the looks of it, the volume of text in the footnotes, occupied with qualifications and hesitations, is at least double that of the essay proper), a discrepancy that casts a distinct ambiguity on the transparency of the systematic application of the world systems model to the novel. Perhaps distant reading cannot quite overcome the estrangements of spatial dislocation, even as the impressive charts and graphs cannot completely occlude the inherent problems in determining comparable units for quantitative analysis from fictional forms over so vast and diverse a field. Another study that takes a systemic approach to world literature is Pascale Casanova's *La république mondiale des lettres*, where she undertakes a sociological analysis, inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's notion of structure rather than Wallerstein's of system, of the complex distribution of cultural capital in what she argues is a single, semi-autonomous "world republic of letters."⁵⁵

Overlapping with Moretti's essays as they appeared in the *New Left Review* between 2000 and 2004, a sequence of essays by Benedict Anderson elaborates a contrasting, nonsystematic approach to world literature, or perhaps more accurately to the global network of literature in history. Digressive and narrative in form and method, these essays begin with the objective of elucidating a few specific puzzles in a single novel from the periphery, José Rizal's *El Filibusterismo*, and in the process they trace an astounding historical network of global intersections involving "Bismarck and Vera Zasulich, Yankee manipulations and Cuban insurrections, Meiji Japan and the British Museum, Huysmans and Mallarmé, Catalonia and the Carolines, Kropotkin and Salvador Santiago," to name but a few.⁵⁶ Considering that Rizal's other novel *Noli Me Tangere*, held a central place in Anderson's *Imagined Communities* as an example of the nation's investment in print culture, these essays, more than his intriguingly but ultimately deceptively titled book, *Specters of Comparison*, constitute a rigorous account of the comparative underpinnings of what would normally be categorized as national literature.⁵⁷ The disciplinary frame of these essays oscillates between history and literature; they offer a historical account of the late nineteenth century finely attuned to the fictional probabilities of historical narrative and a literary history of influence grounded in world-historical events. The method approaches that of ethnography's "thick description," but on a world scale. Extensive, but in no way comprehensive, the scope of the study takes the form of the intersecting itineraries of the

kind Clifford describes. Comparison inheres on the one hand in the multiplicity of overlapping encounters, irreducible to any single organizing concept or national ground, and on the other hand in the world picture all the essays together produce, which is that of a specific period in world history as experienced and perceived from the perspective of the periphery and as rendered by a particular scholarly eye. For the scholar here is present as a singular persona throughout, a move that both underlines the stupefying erudition of this particular investigator and implicitly limits the generalizability of his stance into a model. In contrast to Moretti's abstract and hypothetical theoretical model for world literature as a "planetary system," Anderson describes a particular trajectory through, in his words, a "global landscape" at a particular moment in time. Both studies are fundamentally historical, but Moretti's on a "macro" register of a materialist formalism first developed in Georg Lukacs, and Anderson's on the "micro" register of a branching, open-ended narrative, dense with empirical detail. Another eclectic, nonsystematic, recent approach to world literature, David Damrosch's *What is World Literature?* offers a disarmingly pragmatic and democratic criterion for world literature (any work that has crossed the boundaries of its place of origin) with wide-ranging consequences.⁵⁸ To this brief sampling one would have to add the work of Naoki Sakai on translation and national "co-figuration," a crucial intervention on the comparative constitution of discrete and equivalent cultural units; that of Walter Dignolo on a postcolonial epistemology grounded in "border gnosis"; that of Emily Apter on the forgotten "global *translatio*" that some of the central figures for comparative literature undertook during their time of exile in WWII; that of Marcel Detienne in his brief manifesto, *Comparer l'incomparable* [Comparing the incomparable], which advocates the active construction of "comparabilities" as a dynamic and collaborative task for cross-disciplinary analysis; finally, that of Gayatri Spivak on a "planetary comparative literature" that would combine the linguistic breadth and rigor of area studies with philological close reading, and to which I shall return subsequently.⁵⁹ Other works could be added to this selective inventory, but I hope this will suffice to indicate that the central concerns of comparative literature have made a robust entrance into the twenty-first century.

The present study differs from these approaches without standing in antagonistic opposition to them. The challenges of reconceptualizing the comparative project for an expanded geographical scope are great and certainly cannot be met by a single method or a single set of presuppositions.

I seek to do so from the standpoint of postcolonial critique, which entails several distinct emphases. The first involves a particular inflection of the spatial ground of comparison, which, as Edward Said elaborates in *Culture and Imperialism*, corresponds in a first moment with the imperial geography of the world and hence with a history of domination and presumes, in its imperial form, the sovereign authority of a single perspective. Once a postcolonial literature emerges—that is, a body of texts that occupies sites of enunciation, to use Mignolo's term—outside the metropolitan centers, that unique perspective becomes untenable. This does not necessarily give onto a relativistic enclosure into particularism, but rather, as Glissant puts it, onto a relational and necessarily comparative “degeneralized universal,” in which worldliness does not inhere in exemplary representativity; that is, in standing for the world, but rather in standing *in* the world, in multiple relation with its unsystematizable extensiveness. Glissant's elaboration of Relation and the *Tout-monde*, or world-totality, to which I will return in greater detail in chapter three, bears a striking affinity with the kind of epistemological disjuncture Lefebvre and Jameson associate with space, particularly in his insistence on the necessary imbrications of any given particular site with the whole, but he arrives at it from a different direction, that of the master narrative of colonial conquest. For Glissant the spatial imperative of imperial conquest necessarily gives onto an intrinsically incommensurable relationality.

The second emphasis is a critical stance with respect to disciplinary norms of legitimacy and authority, or, to put it another way, a stance that fully registers the disturbance of givenness in the knower's relation to a field or object of knowledge that the imbrications of knowledge in colonial domination implies. Comparison is overdetermined at both ends of colonialism's culture. Western supremacy was discursively consolidated in a binary and evaluative comparison in which the West produced itself as the standard and model of humankind. Archly asserting culture as a discriminating civilizational value, the coercive comparison of the colonial cultural project conflated the ground of comparison with the basis of equivalence. Just as it was in large part the immense wealth produced in the colonies that provided Western modernity's conditions of possibility, so too the formation of the exemplary autonomous subject of modern humanism both assumes as its other and disavows from its narrative the partial and insufficient figures of racial and gender difference. The widespread dissemination of Western modernity's principal forms, from the nation-state to the subject as individual and citizen to the predominance

of the written word and a certain idea of literature itself, in turn produce their own multiple forms of comparatism in which these forms interact in various ways with local conditions or pre-colonial forms. A substantial body of scholarship explores many facets of this constellation. Postcolonial studies offer a great number of avenues toward an analysis of colonialism and comparison. I have chosen to focus my analysis on ideas or figures of comparison in a set of colonial and postcolonial texts. The advantage of this approach is that it doesn't presuppose a given unit or standard of comparison (genre, nation, gender, or period, to name the most obvious) but attends as closely as possible to how postcoloniality and comparison are construed in particular instances. Comparison is, in practice, a normative and generalizing activity, and through one medium or another, it nears what Rodolphe Gasché calls the “Hegelian temptation” of mediating or subsuming contradiction, or of assimilating the singular.⁶⁰ Instead of actually comparing one text or region or theme to another, I seek to forestall this assimilatory tendency by foregrounding figures of comparison. As such, this study is a ground-clearing exercise that aims to investigate those forms of equivalence that do not unify, which Glissant suggests must underlie the “multiplied poetics of the world.” The idea of postcoloniality subtending this analysis is ultimately beholden to his elaboration of Relation, in which, to put it briefly, the overarching commensuration of imperialism's cultural comparison is overturned and also relayed in the postcolonial condition as cultures come into constant contact without a unifying standard, thus engaging in ubiquitous processes of comparison that are no longer bound to commensuration.

Given the saturation of colonial others in discourses that purport to fix and decode them, my approach to postcolonial literary texts doesn't assume that they transparently represent a culture or can be reduced to a discernible chain of historical causes and effects or to a set of material conditions. I endeavor as far as possible to read texts off the page, as it were, presupposing them ultimately to ground their own authority and to possess the opacity, to use Glissant's term, expressive culture usually presumes. This approaches a formalism quite different from the materialist formalism that informs Moretti's planetary system of world literature, but also distinct, I want to argue from the radical high formalism we associate with the New Criticism, in which a work of art is approached in strict isolation from all its conditions of production. A postcolonial formalist criticism takes extrinsic conditions as its point of departure and as its analytical frame and thus, in the present case, locates its historical engagements most acutely in

an attempt to trace the conditions of its own production. The history of the discipline of comparative literature and its practices of comparison are at least as important to framing the postcolonial incommensurability in, for instance, Derek Walcott's *Omeros*, as Derek Walcott's biography or the history of St. Lucia. This postcolonial formalism is also inflected by the particular history of the postcolonial literature under consideration here. The Caribbean islands of St. Lucia, Martinique, and Guadeloupe, from which the principal postcolonial authors in this study hail, are small places and nationalism played a very small part in their postcolonial trajectory, particularly for the latter two, which entered the postcolonial era as dependencies of the former colonial metropole. This alone complicates the task of locating this literature with respect to a discrete political-economic territory. It is a literature that could not meet any criteria for inclusion in Gayley's comprehensive list, since it will not slot into the categories of peoples, races, language groups, or nations, or in Moretti's planetary system, since it does not possess a longstanding and distinct history of the novel. These factors already detach it from any obvious conditions of production. In addition and perhaps most importantly, it is ultimately the privileged repository of slavery's violent history of dispossession so that its relation to history is not simply mimetic, or ascertainable as one aspect of a particular political project such as national liberation, but memorializing in its attempt to figure an erased collective history and utopian in its attempt to maintain emancipatory hopes.⁶¹ In this sense the very autonomy of this expressive culture has intrinsically political ramifications similar to those Paul Gilroy claims for the diasporan modernity of the black Atlantic as a counterculture of Western modernity in which, paradoxically, "the bounds of politics are extended precisely because this tradition of expression refuses to accept that the political is a readily separable domain."⁶² Despite its temptation to aesthetic fetishism and its tendency toward philosophical nominalism, close reading offers an important approach to cross-cultural engagement, because it points toward an open model of interlocution rather than mastery. Gayatri Spivak elaborates this point eloquently in *Death of a Discipline*. Opposing the "disciplinary politics of distant reading and the scopic ambitions of mapping the world's literature and bringing it under Euro-U.S. rational control," she advocates a notion of reading over distance, *teleopoiesis*, in which the aim is not to master or transcode a text as representative of a culture, but rather "to affect the distant in a *poiesis*—an imaginative making—without guarantees."⁶³ This ethic of reading fore-

grounds the "unverifiable" quality of literary textuality as a crucial, if unpredictable and unsystematic, access to collectivities.

The loose academic disciplinary assemblage of postcolonial studies, with its ambiguous and inadequate central term, "postcolonial," has been the object of concerted critique, the most stringent of which comes from sociologically minded critics who fault the discipline for an aesthetic depoliticization and deradicalization of political movements as well as for an occlusion of the discipline's own historical origins.⁶⁴ From the perspective of actually existing social movements and of a measurable effect upon the political and economic conditions they address, these judgments are certainly accurate. As an intellectual project, postcolonial studies is not organically linked to a social movement, nor is its entrance into the curriculum reflective of a broader historical mandate. But to dismiss the intellectual project of postcolonial studies as apolitical ignores the force and value of a specifically *cultural* politics within the restricted and separate sphere of the academic humanities. One aspect of this cultural politics is a concerted attention to the aesthetic value of postcolonized expressive culture within the remaining disciplinary frameworks that produce cultural capital. Another aspect of this cultural politics is the concerted transdisciplinary academic project of what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls the deprovincialization of the non-West, a disciplinary alignment that challenges the centrality of European forms as exclusive models of historical and aesthetic experience and scholarship.⁶⁵ Barely begun and of uncertain outcome, the colossal task of reducing European racio-cultural predominance and privilege in the forms of knowledge produced in the university remains a central project of postcolonial studies.⁶⁶ That this project should be undertaken with reference to colonial and anticolonial legacies that have an ambiguous and uncertain bearing upon the politics of the present is the patent paradox I take to be expressed in the ungainly term "postcoloniality" in this book's title. A certain hint of mustiness hangs about the term these days that cannot entirely be accounted for by the aura of inbuilt obsolescence that affects academic trends like anything else in consumer culture. David Scott makes a cogent argument for criticism's need to look toward what comes after the postcolonial on the grounds of a non-teleological periodization built around what he calls "problem spaces." The anticolonial moment culminating in the Bandung conference of 1955 was one such problem space centered on the urgency of developing a politics of liberation. The postcolonial problem space, which he interestingly locates not after colonialism, but after

anticolonialism, is centered in the "North Atlantic academy," and addresses "the demand for the decolonization of representation, the decolonization of the West's theory of the non-West."⁶⁷ Partly for internal reasons (it has exhausted its capacity to produce new objects of knowledge) and partly in response to the exigencies of the post-cold war period, Scott argues, "the critical investigation of colonialism" in the present must open onto a new problem space, whose exact outlines are as yet uncertain. While sympathetic with the general tenor of his argument, I am wary of the strict demarcations he draws between the various problem spaces. These may hold for sociological investigations directed at empirically grounded objects, but it seems to me that postcolonial literature often articulates a more disjunctive relation to time in which what is at stake is precisely giving expression to all that is left over, forgotten, or unaccomplished in history's rapid march. In a subsequent study, Scott himself seems to come closer to articulating the contemporary problem space of colonialism precisely in a disjunctive refusal of the "normalization of the present."⁶⁸ Postcolonial studies has been successful in garnering intellectual prestige, and perhaps in normalizing a certain rhetoric of inclusion, but it has been far less successful in establishing new institutional forms and marshalling institutional resources. We thus inhabit institutional and disciplinary forms with a sense of their inadequacy but without any indication of the ways in which they might be changed or indeed if the historical circumstances obtain under which they will or can be changed. The danger of neutralization arises for postcolonial criticism also from conditions internal to the culture produced in the university.

Critiques of an instrumental or otherwise inadequate pluralist multiculturalism are perhaps broadly familiar by now,⁶⁹ but the problem arises most acutely for academic comparatism because of the conjuncture between the entrance of multiculturalism into the academy and the increasing hegemony of the commodity form in late capitalism. In his analysis of the impact of a generalized exchange value on the contemporary U.S. university, Bill Readings argues that, as an increasingly transnational economy no longer requires of the university the cultural function of forming national subjects, the university itself becomes corporatized and the culture it distributes therefore is increasingly "dereferentialized"—that is to say, indifferent as to content as long as, like the commodity, it can be successfully marketed.⁷⁰ This explains, Readings thinks, the rapid success during the 1980s and 1990s of a whole set of para- or interdisciplinary studies

(women's studies, ethnic studies, cultural studies, postcolonial studies, etc) whose self-definition is overtly marginal and oppositional. The novel form of such disciplines can be exchanged for the value of status and renown, regardless of their oppositional content. Commentators have rightly drawn attention to the exaggerations and reductions in Readings' position.⁷¹ All the same, the crux of Readings' argument, namely that in the corporate university the commodity form within a generalized model of exchange ultimately determines the value of academic humanities, seems to me largely accurate. It also suggests that the institutional considerations, which, I argued, largely informed comparative literature's exclusively European orientation in the postwar period, have, then, only become more acute after the end of the cold war. For the financial crisis provoked by the withdrawal of government funding only exacerbates competition among disciplines and intensifies the institutional determination of their intellectual orientation. An extreme institutional and disciplinary self-consciousness, however, curiously coexists with a marked lack of awareness of the disciplinary past. Even as constructivism or social and historical determination are everywhere emphasized, the possibilities that open up before the researcher and, implicitly, her capacity to master them seem boundless and at any moment exchangeable. From one point of view, one postcolonial view, this can amount to an extraordinary and salutary dismantling of the unitary construction of the object and the subject of knowledge. Ideally, this differentiation would reorient learning toward a kind of knowledge grounded in dissensual communities, to use Readings' term, or pursued as a collaborative endeavor rather than the supreme accomplishment of a single great mind's mastery. That this community of comparatists no longer has a general high culture in common, or reads the same books, or attends the same lectures is, from this point of view, an occasion for celebration, not lament, a welcome challenge to invent new forms of collaboration and interchange, to elaborate ways in which cultures that are not held in common can make a difference, and to forge links and cultivate affinities between the intellectual projects developed in the university and cognate endeavors in other institutional and political locations.

Comparison makes its comeback not as a method but as a space, where it signifies inclusiveness and a non-hierarchical transversality. But the age of multiculturalism's impulse not to discriminate easily verges into the indiscriminate and the spatial scope of comparison can open on a limitless horizon of interchangeable objects. In large part this particular temptation

to equivalence has to do with the increasing hegemony of the commodity form in our moment of late capitalism. Detached from the imbrications of context or what Marx called use value, the commodity is a *form* theoretically amenable to any content because what determines its value is an abstract equivalence derived from a system of exchange. There are no limits to commensurability on this model insofar as it can hypothetically bring all objects into relation on the basis of equivalence. The commensurability of the commodity is a comparison in which the comparability of form is already given and the comparability of content is moot. In the exchange of commodities, equivalence is subordinated to commensuration. As commodification increasingly permeates all aspects of social life, at the extreme we approach what John Guillory calls "the condition of the absolute commensurability of everything" (Guillory, 322–323). A previous era's normativity gives way to a generalized equivalence and the commodity form subordinates normative comparison to its laws of exchange. A generalized basis of equivalence trumps the grounds of comparison. This is something akin to what Spivak has in mind with the notion of the "global commensurability of value" as a massive countervailing force to *teleopoiesis*, a kind of pall expressed in the title, *Death of a Discipline*, which hangs over the projection of a utopian hope for a planetary comparatism.⁷²

This study is located in the perplexity between these two perspectives on the renewed scope of comparison. On the one hand the space of comparison fulfills a postcolonial cultural promise in which the "fragments of a great number of possible orders sparkle in a single dimension," a dimension that neither reduces those fragments to equivalent forms nor induces a paralyzing incommensurability. It is a mode of cultural relation (if not an inclusiveness) that contrasts with academic comparison's institutional past, the one remembered and the one forgotten, the cosmopolitan discrimination of comparative European literatures, and the positivist discrimination of an evolutionary hierarchy of races and nations. On the other hand, this space coincides with what is variously called late capitalism or globalization whose generalization of exchange value neutralizes the ideological resistance and the political consequence claimed for the culture produced and circulated in the university. I qualify this culture by its institutional location, as I have throughout, for other forms of culture may well constitute sites of significant contestation in the global order, by no means an even system whose forms therefore differ according to location.⁷³ But the invitation or taunt, "Dare to Compare!" blares from the pages of computer

catalogs, from storefront roadside banners and drugstore windows, forming an inescapable backdrop for anyone musing on the modest resurgence of comparison in academic inquiry. Perhaps the darkest evocation of this generalization of commensurability is Jean-François Lyotard, who argues in *The Differend* that capitalism and what he calls its "economic genre" inflicts the ultimate injury upon the incommensurability produced in the clash among heterogeneous genres because it subordinates all differends to the genre of exchange in such a way as to render them indifferent. Ultimately for Lyotard it strikes the fatal blow both to culture and philosophy.⁷⁴ I do not attempt to resolve or conflate these discrepant contexts for comparison; rather, I articulate figures of postcolonial incommensurability in their ambiguous interaction.

This sequence of chapters describes a postcolonial itinerary that proceeds from the breakdown of imperial comparison in the colonial narratives of Joseph Conrad, to the moment of postcolonial response or "writing back," and from there to adumbrations of the possibility of intercultural community beyond domination. This arc of the postcolonial comparatist's desire for an emancipated comparatism is qualified and undercut by a focus on the incursion of contrary and incommensurable forces upon it, especially the effects on culture, particularly literature, of the rapidly evolving demands of globalization in its neocolonial dimensions and the disruptive silence around the intercommunal difference of gender. Postcoloniality, and comparison itself, both centrally involve a meditation on community and collectivity as literature represents its aspirations, and often, indeed, its failures. As will be clear by now this book does not develop a single continuous argument about postcolonial comparison. The texts addressed hail from diverse traditions and have no necessary or intrinsic connection; the point of postcolonial comparatism here, thus, is precisely to bring them into relation over a ground of comparison that is in common but not unified.