**Comparative Literature Beyond the Euro-**

**American Frontiers**

Outside the boundaries of the Euro-American Schools, comparative literature has been debated at length. Consequently, more elaborated concept and other alternatives have appeared. The founding father of the subject in Russia, Veselovsky, has manifested in his academic studies an inclination towards the American School in judging the affinities between different literatures as a sign of resemblance in the general process of human psychology. (75) Agreeing with Veselovsky, the prominent comparatist Zhirmunsky has placed emphasis in the comparison not only on the processes of 'influence' and 'borrowing,' but also on the similitudes and dissimilitudes between literary phenomena and their analysis on historical grounds. Nonetheless, Konrad has disagreed with him on the French School's principle of influence, seeing it as just a way of keeping European literatures on top of all others.(76) Accordingly, he has opted for "mutual relation and influence" and "literary relation" as alternatives to "comparative literature," but they could not supplant it due to its firm establishment in Russia and the world. Perkov has wondered about the vague use of the term 'comparison': does it mean tracing the quality and quantity of differences between literatures, so as to show which is bigger or better? (77)

In a series of seminars on comparative literature, organized by the World Literature Institute in Moscow, some of the Russian comparatists have attacked what they have described as the 'formalism of the West.' In a paper on western perspectives on comparative literature, Neupokoeva has criticized the American method of criticism as being unfair in treating the text's ideology by regarding the text as an independent entity. She has also launched a no less severe criticism on the American perspective's disregard for the linguistic boundary in comparative studies, which is tantamount to ignoring geographical borders between literatures and cultural specificity. (78)

Comparative literature studies in Eastern Europe in the last three decades of the twentieth century have seen the subject evolve, in spite of differences of opinion between one study and another. For example, the Roman academician Dima has exhibited his inclination towards the French School in reconfirming the boundary of language in comparative studies and in distinguishing between "general" and "comparative" literature. (79) However, he has disavowed this statement in suggesting that there is an area of comparison between literatures of one language. (80) Finally, he has shown to take a stance between the French and American school as he stresses the independence of "comparative literature" (whose aims are figured in direct influences, borrowing and topological affinities) and the interrelation between critical and historical social studies of literary phenomena in comparative literature study.

But in Czechoslovakia the American perspective has found a huge following. Most famous among Czech comparatists is Durshin, who has stated that "comparative literature," "history of literature" and "theory of literature" are interwoven in any objective literary comparison, though each one has its own properties. Durshin has eschewed the heated polemics raised, needlessly, about definitions of the term "comparative literature," the reason for which he ascribes to the subject's confinement to the principle of influence. (81) In an avoidance of this problem Durshin refers the reader to two dimensions of the comparative literary study, namely: "literary relations" and "parallelism" between literatures – dimensions which represent external relations, different from the internal relations, represented in the reaction of a text to certain literary phenomena in other texts. (82)

In the 1970s many critics attempted to rid the comparative literary study of all its problematic aspects (historical, political or methodological). In his essay "The Name and Nature of Comparative Literature" (published in *Discriminations* in 1970), Rene Wellek saw it essentially important for the comparatist to limit his study to the literary text or texts, disregarding external factors. He maintained that the three components of "literary study - history, theory and criticism - involve each other..." (83) The reference to history in this respect is not related to the term in its broader sense but to a particular kind, namely "cultural history." This gave rise to "new Historicism in North American Criticism in the 1970s and 1980s." (84) The conferences of the International Society of Comparative Literature in Belgrade in the 1970s led to the chronicling of European literature on the basis that it comprised 'sub-national' literatures sharing certain common historical and literary traditions - an enterprise which they anticipated could be applied to other literatures (Asian, African, American, Indian... etc.). But such a general categorization of world literatures was regarded by the non-European scholars as arbitrary and questionable. For instance, the theory claiming so-called 'European Literature' is based on a common literary movement that originated within the geographical boundaries of the continent of Europe, will not work, for the roots of this literature are traced back to Homer's literary abilities in Asia. It deserves to be mentioned that Homer is a famous ancient Greek poet who wrote *The Iliad* and *Odyssey,* two epics which some of their episodes take place in Asia. But European literature is very different from Asian or African literature models not only on the basis of geographical boundaries, but also by virtue of possessing similar historical conditions, cultural and spiritual traits. (85)

In the regions which were colonized by Europe (such as India and Africa) the European "formalist approach" is entirely rejected and comparative literary study highlights "the politicization of literature." Swapan Majumdar, an Indian critic, is rigorously against the European historicity of world literatures for several reasons. Indian literature, for example, is composed of ethologically variable "sub-national literatures" that cannot be taken collectively, as is the case with European literatures which are bound together by a common ethos. It is on these grounds, Majumdar proposes, that "the comparison should take place not across individual boundaries, but on a larger scale altogether," that is, it is not right to compare Indian literature with an individual European literature (French, Italian, or German) but with the conception of all European literatures under the general heading "European" or "Western" literature. (86) The latter, in this way, paves the way for a serious reconsideration of "the old models that placed component literatures of the Western tradition in a position of international superiority." (87)

Indian, African, Asian as well as Latin American critics refuse to accept European "critical tools" in their countries, as "it is illogical and dangerous to obtrude European conceptions upon non-European visions of the world." (88) European critics looked down on, for example, the Indian and African literatures because of their being products of lower nations, colonized by Europe. In this power was an absolute touchstone for evaluating literatures. Apropos of Euro-centrism, Sri Aurobindo ironically supposes that if the Indians colonized Europe, they would then gauge the European literary works (starting with the *Iliad* and *The Divine Comedy* through the plays of Shakespeare and the Spanish works up to the modern French poetry and fiction) as "a mass of bad ethics and violent horrors... a succession of bald and tawdry rhetorical exercises... a tainted and immoral thing." (89) It is hardly surprising, after all this, to observe the Indian comparatists focusing their attention on reexamining Indian literary fortunes across time and history and testing them against the European models, with the primary intention of regaining the solid bases of native culture and literary tradition, which found their various ways into Europe. Comparative literature study in India (as in Asia, Africa and Latin America) is directed "to start with the home culture and to look outwards, rather than to start with the European model of literary excellence and to look inwards."(90) This trend prepared for the emergence of the Indian Comparative Literature Association in 1981, whose primary goal was to prove the grandeur of the Indian literary and cultural heritage in all times and histories. With equal interest and fervor, African scholars have taken up arms against the so-called literary and cultural influence of Europe on Africa, as stressed in many a comparative literary study. Chidi Amuta sees the latter as "one of the ruses in the trick bag of those critics who see European culture as having had a civilizing impact on 'primitive' African writing." (91) Amuta also agrees with Chinua Achebe's 1975 term 'universalism,' which European critics have tried to disseminate in different parts of the world within the last few years, "as a synonym for the narrow, self-serving parochialism of Europe." (92)

The process of re-examining European literary models in India or Africa during the post-colonial period has created the need for translating these models. But translation comes face-to-face with the problem of "interculturality" (which Enani defines as the translator's opting for "a word, a construction, an idiom which must refer the reader to his or her own literary tradition, and whose significance cannot be grasped except through his or her own culture"), (93) particularly when translation is not accurate or honest. It is most likely then that the translated text becomes open to various readings or interpretations, which cannot lead to any accurate judgment on the original text.

In a kind of reaction, perhaps, against spending too much time and effort on arguing about obsolete methods of comparative literature, Western comparatists have started to concern themselves primarily with studying and developing 'literary theory' in the 1990s. Consequently, a post-European model of comparative literature has come into being in other parts of the world. This model is described as "dynamic," in that it "can effectively be compared to the earliest appearance of the subject in revolutionary Europe in the early nineteenth century." (94) Paying no attention to "the historicity of the American School and of the formalist approach," the new model is set on reconsidering literary fortunes and histories (like translation) with a view to reconfirming "national literary and cultural identity." (95)

This discussion would not be complete without a mention of how the dissolution of the ex-Soviet Union has affected the evolution of comparative literature. In Britain, for example, the pendulum seems to be swinging between the French and American school. All the comparative studies which have been made in the Modern Languages departments evinced their propensity for the French tradition, while the ones made in English departments have favored the American approach. However, British comparatists have provided the object with a "genuine" method called "placing," which Siegbert Prawer simply defines as the placing "side by side" of many a literary text, artist or tradition, so as to compare them for reaching a full understanding of various cultures. A rich field for comparative literature is our increasing reliance upon the English translations, especially of texts written in classical languages (Latin or Greek) or in unfamiliar ones. (96) As translated texts are possibly made 'intercultural, 'comparative literature becomes indirectly involved with an old and unresolved key problem, which is the politicization of literature.

In conclusion, the long journey pursued so far in exploring the murky areas of comparative literature demonstrates the evolution of the subject's methodology or theory, which seems to take a straightforward direction (from 'influence' through 'parallelism' to 'juxtaposition' principles). But this journey ends where it begins. That is, the linear movement of comparative literature turns out to be cyclic: recent approaches to the subject have failed, despite many serious attempts, to free it from the political and national shackles with which the earliest approaches began. Thus we come back to the field of corroborating the national identity in literature, particularly in the postcolonial world, moving thereby far away from the desired 'universalism,' or that 'universalism' sought by those who were, from the start, at variance with the concept and methodology of 'influence.'