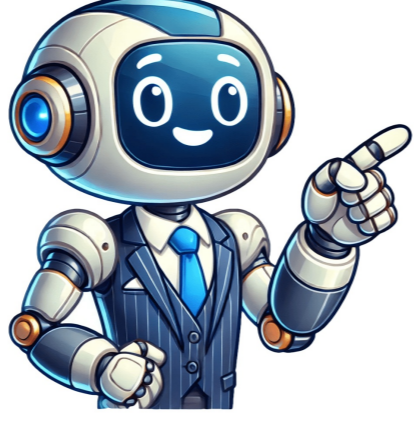


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Abstract/Summary of Susan Bassnett's A Critical Introduction to Comparative Literature ratings 0% found this document useful (0 votes) 708 views Introduction of the book Comparative Literature Save Susan Bassnett, Susan - What is Comparative Literature T... For Later 0% found this document useful, undefined ratings 0% found this document useful (0 votes) views Comparative literature is the interdisciplinary study of texts across cultures, focusing on connections in literature over time and space. The field has faced ongoing debates regarding its 'Save Save Susan Bassnett-What is CL today For Later 0% found this document useful, undefined ARTICLE Introduction: What is Comparative Literature today? Susan Bassnett Susan Bassnett's introduction to her 1993 book "Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction" offers a comprehensive examination of comparative literature as a field of study, tracing its evolution, debates, and changing significance across different cultural contexts. The chapter begins by defining comparative literature in its simplest form as "the study of texts across cultures" - an interdisciplinary approach concerned with patterns of connection in literature across time and space. Bassnett frames comparative literature as a journey that begins with the desire to transcend the boundaries of a single subject area, drawing on Matthew Arnold's 1857 Oxford lecture which emphasized that "everywhere there is connection, everywhere there is illustration." While this perspective might suggest comparative literature is merely common sense facilitated by translations, Bassnett reveals a complex history of debate dating back to the early nineteenth century that continues to this day. This ongoing discourse raises fundamental questions about the object of study in comparative literature, the methodology of comparison, the nature of a comparative canon, and whether comparative literature constitutes a discipline or simply a field of study. The chapter acknowledges what Ren Wellek defined as "the crisis of comparative literature" since the 1950s - a crisis particularly evident in Western academia. Interestingly, Bassnett notes that while comparative literature appears to be declining in the West, it is simultaneously flourishing in Eastern and postcolonial countries, often in connection with the rise of national consciousness. This dichotomy reflects the field's complex relationship with nationalism since its inception. Bassnett explores contrasting historical perspectives on comparative literature. While Benedetto Croce dismissed the term as obfuscatory in 1903, Charles Mills Gayley proclaimed it a "common institutional expression of humanity" that transcended racial, historical, and linguistic differences. Francis Jost elevated comparative literature to "a literary Weltanschauung" - an instrument of universal harmony - while Wellek and Warren viewed it as demanding "a widening of perspectives" and a suppression of local and provincial sentiments. The chapter traces how comparative literature's status has shifted within academia. Once considered a radical, transgressive subject in Western academia during the 1950s and early 1960s, it was largely abandoned by the late 1970s in favor of newer fields like Literary Theory, Women's Studies, and Cultural Studies. However, during this same period, comparative literature gained prominence in postcolonial countries - not based on universalism but precisely on the specificity of national literatures that Western comparatists had often rejected. Bassnett highlights how scholars from postcolonial contexts have reshaped comparative approaches. Swapan Majumdar and Ganesh Devy connect comparative literature in India directly to the rise of modern Indian nationalism. Homi Bhabha emphasizes "cross-cutting across sites of social significance" rather than simple cross-referencing, while African critics like Wole Soyinka have challenged Eurocentric perspectives that diminished African culture and history. Swapan Majumdar says it is because of this predilection for National Literature - much deplored by the Anglo-American critics as amethodology - that Comparative Literature has struck roots in the Third World nations and in India in particular. Ganesh Devy also suggests that comparative literature in India is directly linked to the rise of modern Indian Nationalism. Homi Bhabha sums up the new emphasis in an essay discussing the ambivalence of post-colonial culture, suggesting that instead of cross-referencing there is an effective, productive cross-cutting across sites of social significance, that erases the dialectical, disciplinary sense of 'Cultural' reference and relevance. Wole Soyinka and a whole range of African critics have exposed the pervasive influence of Hegel, who argued that African culture was 'weak' in contrast to what he claimed were higher, more developed cultures, and who effectively denied African history. The chapter examines how comparative literature offers solutions to postcolonial educational challenges, using the example of studying Shakespeare in India. Indian students must contend with Shakespeare as both a European literary figure and a representative of colonial values - a tension that comparative approaches can help navigate by studying Shakespeare's reception in Indian cultural life and comparing his work with Indian writers. Bassnett also addresses the relationship between comparative literature and translation studies. While comparative literature has traditionally claimed translation as a subcategory, this assumption is increasingly questioned as translation studies establishes itself as a rigorous discipline focused on intercultural study. Itamar Even-Zohar's observation that extensive translation activity occurs during periods of cultural transition, expansion, and renewal provides insight into the changing status of translation across different cultural contexts and time periods. Evan-Zohar says that a lot of translation happens when a culture is changing; when it's growing, needs new ideas, or is about to undergo major changes. During these times, translation becomes really important. But when a culture feels strong and dominant, like it doesn't need outside influence, translation becomes less valued. For example, when English became the main language for international relations and business in the 1900s, there wasn't much need to translate foreign works into English. That's why there were fewer translations into English compared to other languages. When translation isn't seen as necessary, it becomes poorly respected, badly paid, and overlooked. Comparative literature has always included translation as one of its parts. But now that translation studies has developed into its own field focused on studying interactions between cultures, with solid methods for both theory and practice, comparative literature looks less like a separate discipline and more like just one branch of a larger field. Looking at it this way helps us understand the "crisis" in comparative literature and might finally end the ongoing argument about whether comparative literature should be considered its own separate discipline. The chapter concludes by suggesting that as translation studies continue to develop as a discipline with methodological rigor, comparative literature may need to reposition itself. Bassnett implies that resolving comparative literature's relationship to translation studies could help address the field's long-standing "crisis" and finally settle the debate about whether comparative literature constitutes a discipline in its own right. Description This major new work ensures the field's continued relevance and vitality. 8. Analysis of Arguments Comparative Literature involves the study of texts across cultures, that its interdisciplinary and that it is concerned with patterns of connection in literatures across both time and space. (Bassnett) Most people do not start with comparative literature, they end up with it in some way or other, travelling towards it from different points of departure. Sometimes the journey begins with a desire to move beyond the boundaries of a single subject area that might appear to be too constraining, at other times a reader may be impelled to follow up what appear to be similarities between texts or authors from different cultural contexts. And some readers may simply be following the view propounded by Matthew Arnold in his Inaugural Lecture at Oxford in 1857 when he said: Everywhere there is connection, everywhere there is illustration. No single event, nosingle literature is adequately comprehended except in relation to other events, to other literatures." 9. Goethe gave the term World Literature (Weltliteratur) to comparative literature because comparative literature removes the all borders and brings nearer to all literatures and spread harmony. Critics at the end of the twentieth century, in the age of postmodernism, still wrestle with the same questions that were posed more than a century ago: What is the object of study in comparative literature? How can comparison be the objective of anything? If individual literatures have a canon, what might a comparative canon be? How does the comparatist select what to compare? Is comparative literature a discipline? Or is it simply a field of study? These and a great many other questions refuse to go away, and since the 1950s we have been hearing all too frequently about what Ren Wellek defined as 'the crisis of Comparative Literature. (Damrosch et al.) As early as 1903, Benedetto Croce argued that comparative literature was a non-subject, contemptuously dismissing the suggestion that it might be seen as a separate discipline. He suggested that the proper object of study should be literary history: 10. The comparative history of literature is history understood in its true sense as a complete explanation of the literary work, encompassed in all its its relationships, disposed in the composite whole of universal literary history (where else could it ever be placed)?, seen in those connections and preparations that are its raison d'être Croce's argument was that the term 'comparative literature' was obfuscatory, disguising the obvious, that is, the fact that the true object of study was literary history. Considering the pronouncements on comparative literature made by scholars such as Max Koch, founder and editor of the two German comparative journals, Zeitschrift für vergleichende Literatur (1887-1910) and Studien zur vergleichenden Literaturgeschichte (1901-9), Croce claimed he could not distinguish between literary history pure and simple and comparative literary history. But other scholars made grandiose claims for comparative literature. Charles Mills Gayley, one of the founders of North American comparative literature, proclaimed in the same year as Croce's attack that the working premise of the student of comparative literature was: 11. 'Literature as a distinct and integral medium of thought, a common institutional expression of humanity; differentiated, to be sure, by the social conditions of the individual, by racial, historical, cultural and linguistic influences, opportunities, and restrictions, but, irrespective of age or guise, prompted by the common needs and aspirations of man, sprung from common faculties, psychological and physiological, and obeying common laws of material and mode, of the individual and social humanity. Remarkably similar sentiments to those expressed in 1974 by Francis Jost, when he claimed that 'national literature' cannot constitute an intelligible field of study because of its 'arbitrarily limited perspective', and that comparative literature: Represents more than an academic discipline. It is an overall view of literature, of the world of letters, a humanistic ecology, a literary Weltanschauung, a vision of the cultural universe, inclusive and comprehensive. 12. Yet even as that process was underway in the West, comparative literature began to gain ground in the rest of the world. New programmes in comparative literature began to emerge in China, in Taiwan, in Japan and other Asian countries, based, however, not on any ideal of universalism but on the very aspect of literary study that many western comparatists had sought to deny: the specificity of national literatures. As Swapan Majumdar puts it: it is because of this predilection for National Literature - much deplored by the Anglo-American critics as a methodology that Comparative Literature has struck roots in the Third World nations and in India in particular. Homi Bhabha sums up the new emphasis in an essay discussing the ambivalence of post-colonial culture, suggesting that instead of cross-referencing there is an effective, productive cross-cutting across sites of social significance, that erases the dialectical, disciplinary sense of 'Cultural' reference and relevance. Wole Soyinka and a whole range of African critics have exposed the pervasive influence of Hegel, who argued that African culture was 'weak' in contrast to what he claimed were higher, more developed cultures, and who effectively denied Africa a history. James Snead, in an essay attacking Hegel, points out that: The outstanding fact of late twentieth-century European culture is its ongoing reconciliation with black culture. The mystery may be that it took so long to discern the elements of black culture already there in latent form, and to realize that the separation between the cultures was perhaps all along not one of nature, but one of force. Terry Eagleton has argued that literature, in the meaning of the word we have inherited, is an ideology, and he discusses the way in which the emergence of English as an academic subject in the nineteenth century had quite clear political implications. The establishment of the subject in the universities, he maintains, followed the vast social changes brought about in the aftermath of the first World War: 14. The Great War, with its carnage of ruling class rhetoric, put paid to some of the more strident forms of chauvinism in which English had previously thrived... English Literature rode to power on the back of wartime nationalism; but it also represented a search for spiritual solutions on the part of the English ruling class whose sense of identity had been profoundly shaken... Literature would be at once solace and reaffirmation, a familiar ground on which Englishmen could regroup both to explore, and to find some alternative to, the nightmare of history. Ganesh Devy's argument that comparative literature in India coincides with the rise of modern Indian nationalism is important, because it serves to remind us of the origins of the term 'Comparative Literature' in Europe, a term that first appeared in an age of national struggles, when new boundaries were being erected and the whole question of national culture and national identity was under discussion throughout Europe and the expanding United States of America. David Damrosch published his book What Is World Literature?, in which he not only emphasizes the intervention of comparative literature but also elaborates the unique role played by translation. (Damrosch) 15. Evan-Zohar argues that extensive translation activity takes place when a culture is in a period of transition: when it is expanding, when it needs renewal, when it is in a pre-revolutionary phase, then translation plays a vital part. In contrast, when a culture is solidly established, when it is in an imperialist stage, when it believes itself to be dominant, then translation is less important. (Evan-Zohar) According to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Comparative Literature and Area Studies can work together in the fostering not only of national literatures of the global South but also of the writing of China. Academic Journal Electronic Publishing House. All rights reserved. of countless indigenous languages in the world that are programmed to vanish when the maps were made... Then, there is nothing necessarily new about the new Comparative Literature. Nonetheless, I must acknowledge that the times determine how the necessary vision of 'comparativity' will play out. Comparative Literature must always cross borders" (Spivak) 16. Conclusion Comparative literature is not a single discipline, but rather a "complex and contested field". There are many different ways to define comparative literature, and the field has been influenced by a variety of different theoretical and methodological approaches. Comparative literature has a long and rich history, dating back to the early 19th century. In the 20th century, comparative literature became more focused on the study of literary texts from different cultures, and it also began to incorporate insights from other disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and linguistics. In recent years, comparative literature has been influenced by post-structuralist and postcolonial theory, which has led to a greater focus on the politics of representation and the role of literature in the construction of cultural identity. Comparative literature is now more diverse and open-ended than ever before, and it has the potential to provide new insights into the world around us. 17. References Bassnett, Susan. Comparative literature : a critical introduction. Blackwell, 1993. Damrosch, David, et al., editors. The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature: From the European Enlightenment to the Global Present. Princeton University Press, 2009. (Damrosch et al.) Even-Zohar, Itamar. POLYSYSTEM STUDIES. POETICS TODAY International Journal for Theory and Analysis of Literature and Communication, vol. 11, no. 1, 1990, pp. 73-78. Tel Aviv University. Itamar's works/books/Evan-Zohar_1990_Polysystem%20Studies.pdf. Accessed 11 January 2024. 18. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. Death of a Discipline (The Wellek Library Lectures). Columbia University Press, 2005. Tsy de Zepetnek, Steven. Comparative literature : theory, method, application. Rodopi, 1998. WANG, Ning. The Crisis of Comparative Literature and the Rise of World Literature. Comparative Literature: East & West, vol. 12, no. 1, 2010, pp. 28-32. Taylor & Francis Online, Accessed 11 January 2024. This blog is a response to a task assigned by Dr. Dilip Barad Sir. The syllabus of the Department of English, MKBU includes paper no. -208 Comparative Literature and Translation studies which includes around 9 articles. We (students) are assigned a task of classroom presentation of assigned articles in a pair. In this blog we are supposed to write abstract, key points / arguments and concluding remarks on all two articles of Unit 2 of paper Comparative Literatures and Translation Studies. It also includes the recording of class presentations presented by respective students. Blogger and her partner have made a presentation on the third article, presentation and a video of a particular article is embedded (as per the task). ARTICLE I Introduction: What is Comparative Literature today? Susan Bassnett This article is an Introduction chapter of Susan Bassnett's book Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction, 1993. The article begins with the simple answer to What is Comparative literature? The study of texts across cultures, that it is interdisciplinary and that it is concerned with the patterns of connection in literature across both time and space. The journey of comparative studies begins with the desire to move beyond the boundaries of a single subject area or may be impelled to follow up what appear to be similarities between texts or authors from different cultural contexts. And some readers may simply be following the view propounded by Matthew Arnold in his Inaugural Lecture at Oxford in 1857 when he said: Everywhere there is connection, everywhere there is illustration. No single event, nosingle literature is adequately comprehended except in relation to other events, to other literatures." 9. Goethe gave the term World Literature (Weltliteratur) to comparative literature because comparative literature removes the all borders and brings nearer to all literatures and spread harmony. Critics at the end of the twentieth century, in the age of postmodernism, still wrestle with these same questions that were posed more than a century ago: What is the object of study in comparative literature? How can comparison be the objective of anything? If individual literatures have a canon, what might a comparative canon be? How does the comparatist select what to compare? Is comparative literature a discipline? Or is it simply a field of study? Since the 1950s, we frequently hear about what Rene Wellek defined as the crisis of comparative literature. (And the crisis of comparative literature in the West pushes Susan Bassnett to write this article. Comparative Literature began with the rise of National consciousness/ nationalism now it seems to be dying in the West but is increasing in the East, post-colonial countries.) In 1903, Benedetto Croce argued that the term Comparative Literature was obfuscatory, disguising the obvious and the true object of study of Literary history. He claimed that he could not distinguish between Literary history pure and simple and comparative Literary History. But in the same ear of Croces attack Charles Mills Gayley proclaimed working premise of the working student of Comparative Literature was: Literature as a distinct and integral medium of thought, a common institutional expression of humanity; differentiated, to be sure, by the social conditions of the individual, by racial, historical, cultural and linguistic influences, opportunities, and restrictions, but, irrespective of age or guise, prompted by the common needs and aspirations of man, sprung from common faculties, psychological and physiological, and obeying common laws of material and mode, of the individual and social humanity. Francis Jost claimed that comparative literature is an overall view of literature, of the world of letters, a humanistic ecology, a literary Weltanschauung, a vision of the cultural universe, inclusive and comprehensive. 12. 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