

Cosmopolitanism, Cross-cultural Negotiation and the Comparatist Mind

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Abstract / Resumen / Résumé / Riassunto

This paper addresses the persisting problem of the deficit of cross-cultural negotiation that all too often reduces the role of *public readers* to the dissemination of supposedly national or regional values, privileging a unique locus of origin—generally the reader’s birthplace and mother tongue—over the circulation and sharing, even in conflict, that reveal the mixed and impure character of any cultural formation and are constitutive of its dynamics. When “World Literature” and “Comparative Literature” are becoming synonymous or fused together, and Literary and Cultural Theory at large appear as the obligatory grounding of the study of literary texts and phenomena, a truly cosmopolitan practice, method and attitude is a precondition of any politically responsible public reading, and this cosmopolitanism, far from any established universalism, imperial or not, will be *experimental*, drawing on the readerly nature of the mixed present rather than on the writerly resources of separate traditions.

Este trabajo aborda el problema persistente del déficit de negociación intercultural que con demasiada frecuencia reduce el papel de los lectores públicos a la difusión de valores supuestamente nacionales o regionales, privilegiando un lugar de origen único—generalmente el lugar de nacimiento y la lengua materna del lector—sobre la circulación y el intercambio, incluso en conflicto, que revelan el carácter mixto e impuro de cualquier formación cultural y son constitutivos de su dinámica. Cuando “Literatura mundial” y “Literatura comparada” se convierten en sinónimo o se fusionan, y la Teoría literaria y cultural en general aparece como la base obligatoria del estudio de los textos y fenómenos literarios, una práctica, método y actitud verdaderamente cosmopolita es una condición previa de cualquier lectura pública políticamente responsable, y este cosmopolitismo, lejos de cualquier universalismo establecido, imperial o no, será *experimental*, recurriendo a la naturaleza lectora del presente mixto más que a los recursos escritos de las tradiciones separadas.

Cet article aborde le problème persistant du déficit de la négociation interculturelle qui réduit trop souvent le rôle des lecteurs publics à la diffusion de valeurs supposées nationales ou régionales, privilégiant un lieu d’origine unique—généralement le lieu de naissance et la langue maternelle du

lecteur—sur la circulation et l’échange, même en conflit, qui révèlent le caractère mixte et impur de toute formation culturelle et sont constitutifs de sa dynamique. Alors que «littérature mondiale» et «littérature comparée» deviennent synonymes ou fusionnent, et que la théorie littéraire et culturelle en général apparaît comme la base obligatoire pour l’étude des textes et des phénomènes littéraires, une pratique, méthode et attitude véritablement cosmopolites est une condition préalable à toute lecture publique politiquement responsable, et ce cosmopolitisme, loin de tout universalisme établi, impérial ou non, sera expérimental, en recourant plus à la lecture du présent mixte qu’aux ressources écrites des traditions séparées.

Questo articolo affronta il problema persistente del deficit di negoziazione interculturale che troppo spesso riduce il ruolo dei lettori pubblici alla diffusione di valori apparentemente nazionali o regionali, privilegiando un singolo luogo di origine—generalmente il luogo di nascita e la lingua madre del lettore—sulla circolazione e lo scambio, anche in conflitto, che rivelano la natura mista e impura di ogni formazione culturale e sono costitutive delle sue dinamiche. Quando “Letteratura mondiale” e “Letteratura comparata” diventano sinonimi o si fondono, e la Teoria Letteraria e Culturale in generale appaiono come la base obbligatoria dello studio dei testi e dei fenomeni letterari, una pratica, un metodo e un atteggiamento veramente cosmopolita costituiscono una precondizione per qualsiasi pubblica lettura politicamente responsabile, e questo cosmopolitismo, lontano da qualsiasi universalismo stabilito, imperiale o meno, sarà sperimentale, e ricorrerà alla natura della lettura “leggibile” (*lisibile*) del presente misto più che alle risorse “scriptbles” di tradizioni separate.

Keywords / Palabras clave / Mots-clé / Parole chiave

Cosmopolitanism, Cross-cultural Negotiation, Comparative Literature, Literary Theory

Cosmopolitismo, negociación intercultural, Literatura comparada, Teoría literaria

Cosmopolitisme, négociation interculturelle, Littérature comparée, Théorie littéraire

Cosmopolitismo, negoziazione interculturale, Letteratura comparata, Teoria Letterari

Although it is an arduous task and risky business to ponder once more on what it wants of us to define and read literature in a politically responsible way, it is one I feel an urgent need to face at a time when the rise and banalization of discriminatory, violent neo-nationalisms across the world insidiously censors and contaminates the very spirit of literary studies, turning them again into another tool of propaganda.

To keep the crisis going —a vital requirement—, we find that, in the last few years, practitioners and opponents of Comparative Literature —often the same people— have had to fall back on the basic and inextricable age-old debate: “To compare or not to compare, that is the question”. As shown by various contributions to Felski & Friedman (2013). Some will always consider that comparing is an act of domination that involves value judgments from the superior point of view of self-interest, or an act of submission to the laws of the market and its limited offer, and, in both cases, it should be avoided at all cost or practiced with such timidity that it will lose any incisiveness. Others will contend that all thinking and comprehension are comparative because they rely on differentiation (of signifiers, signifieds and objects referred to), therefore making the adjective “comparative” redundant in the expressions “Comparative Literature” or “Comparative Literary Studies”. Some will see the necessity of adding “international” to the name of an academic program, since, according to them, “national” literatures should *also* be apprehended for their own sake or on their own, whatever this means. Close reading is not an unusual pretext to shoulder this awkward position. Finally, for a variety of reasons, some other scholars endorse the paradox that “Comparative Literature”, in fact, does not compare at all, whether it is because, at one extreme, every work is unique and incomparable, every poem is untranslatable, or because Literature is a pure category that we can only access in its commonality. These dangerous thoughts, that lead equally to the de-historicization and the desocialization of literary discourse, go hand in hand with certain visions of World Literature, whether it is reduced to a uniform field by high theory

or to a collection of disparate phenomena by cultural relativism. And World Literature is more than ever the order of the day.

There is no balanced view to be constructed in the framework of that rather pointless debate. My present efforts will bear on investigating what it takes, on the contrary, to develop, stimulate and maintain a *really* comparatist mind, in the sense that R.D. Laing gave to ‘really’ when he made no one in particular ask no one in particular, parenthetically, as an afterthought: “Do you (really) love me?” It must be understood that a mind, individual, intersubjective or collective, may become ‘really’ a comparatist mind only insofar as its notion of the real is at least temporarily validated by a third party, an alien, by which I mean not just another than the reading subject, or an arbiter between his/her contradictory judgments and desires, but some unexpected, outsider figure brought into the debate, on its scene, a figure that is present, but elsewhere, placed or placing itself elsewhere and thus able to speak in *aparte*. Such an understanding, in fact, subtends the bulk of a project shared with a few similar-minded literary scholars. In this project, the subject is continuously trained to become a third party to any pre-existing self, trained to be shifted and altered/others in order to at least distend the Gordian knot of identity.

I would want therefore, *a minima*, to outline the foundations, the formation and the conditions of exercise of a comparatist mind that would free itself from narrow national and institutional, short term and myopic horizon interests. “A minima” implies that it is only a first liberating step, one that must be constantly exposed to a critique of its negativity, and taken as a prerequisite to a precariously reconstructive drive. A lot has been done in the last forty or fifty years alone, but it is not enough. There is nothing more ideological, in the pejorative sense of a nasty unthought, than the supposed demise of “theory” and “ideologies,” imputed to their “excesses,” when the *votum mortis* against them actually results from the convergence of regressive, reactionary forces, often under a progressive or revolutionary mask. Terminological misuse, in this case, is flagrant: “theory” is not

metaphysics, it is not disengaged from any object in the possible world that historical subjects take to be real; without “ideologies,” organized sets of assumptions to be tested —structured discourses of ideas—, we have no means of reliance, resilience and resistance to fight back the rampant dehumanization that threatens the positive potential of centuries of knowledge accumulation and liberation struggles.

This essay is fundamentally about the responsibility of *public literary readers*, i.e. of anyone who disseminates his/her commentary, description, analysis, appreciation, translation or rewriting of an extant literary expression. A public reader, like a public scribe, an *écrivain public*, has a partly suppletive function: in a society (at whatever scale) in which some people can hardly read, are learning or have forgotten how to read, he/she is bound to read *for* others as well as *to* others —as the *écrivain public* would write a letter to the fiancée, read it aloud to the sender, and read aloud the answer, as the *licenciado* or the schoolmaster or the postmaster would read aloud the gazette to illiterate neighbors at the local café. But this suppletive function, like that of a spokesperson or that of any holder of a mandate, must be conceived and carried out in such a fashion that ‘reading for’ and ‘reading to’ should also be from the start and increasingly become, a ‘reading *with*.’ For example, there are translators who, exceeding their mission, read not only *for* but *instead of* readers who have no linguistic access to the original text —they are, in a sense, the ‘invisible’ ones denounced by Venuti (1995), and there are those who confess and highlight distance, who invite the reader to share the difficulty, the pain and joy of grappling with it. The latter, nevertheless, when they make themselves excessively visible liberators, will also fail to assist their readers in their “transreading” education, or in their navigation on the “third text”, to use the respective terminologies of Huiwen Zhang and Lily Robert-Foley, both of them contributors to this issue of *Eu-topías*.

Literary expressions, as aestheticized acts of verbal communication, involve self-gratification through the required participation of other actual or virtual subjects

and thus include a rhetorical, persuasive component. They call for collaboration —be it friendly or agonistic. In other words, the non-personal entity we call ‘literature’ does not argue for the sake of arguing, in a value-free environment, it argues for profit —although more often than not, nowadays, a symbolic profit. Literary expressions, unlike ordinary, non-deferred, referential, technical statements or questions, let the means and tools of seduction come to the fore, or want their receivers to bring them to the surface: unfettered virtuosity and virtuous simplicity, carefully supported truth-saying and deceptive sooth-saying have to be valued for themselves. Literature performs and ‘shows off’ an expense and a reserve capital of knowledge and skills, all the more when it displays an unassuming manner, the know-how of modesty (minimalism, concision, ellipsis, understatement). Literary expressions are the result of a certain amount of labor, both anterior and present, and necessarily seek some return of a material and/or psychological nature. But *public* readers, especially those of the professional kind (teachers, critics, translators, editors and publishers), practice forms of literary expressions that are marked by an apparent secondariness and the resulting greater visibility of labor, capital acquisition and expenditure, all of which requires special compensation, often in the form, deviant or not, of socio-economic power, peer recognition, honors and authority over the learners.

All critical/theoretical styles, even when they are unconventional and are granted the status of dissident manifestos, are bound to depend, positively or negatively, on literary institutions in which they fulfill a role, and institutions are nothing but the weighty sediments of past thoughts and actions, deposited on a fixed site to control doubt and critique, to foreclose dialog, to repeal utopia and deter emergence.

My concern then, is with the space-time frames in which the public literary reading function can be institutionally performed in the contemporary world —insofar as there is still any place for it. Such space-time frames are largely given and coercive, we know it all too well as teachers and students, not only where the

state imposes methods, contents and syllabi, but also where autonomy on paper becomes euphemistically synonymous with increased administrative and peer pressure. However, as long as we accept that concept formation does not obey a strictly deterministic principle, the notions that articulate our public readings can also be chosen, recognized or denied, endorsed or rejected, manipulated and reinvented: here lie the responsibility and, more generally, the answerability of the comparatist mind's workings, its limitations and the opposition or reticence it meets from within and without.

In the cultural, economic and political space that we crudely call “the West,” a rough but productive simplification would allow us to record some kind of continuity of the comparative mind between ancient, medieval, pre-modern and modern times, between traditional or semi-traditional cultural configurations and their innovation-driven successors, insofar as sense and value were not always supposed to be absolutes but determined by the relationship established with a distinct intertext. This intertext could be a dominant, almost exclusive foundational reference, such as the Homeric epics, the Bible or the Gospels, or yet a more or less conflictive plurality of models and precedents. Medieval prologues and later forewords and prefaces, until the 19th century, had an important *placing* function, placing the new text in a tradition. The prologue could suggest the introduction of the new work into a canon or its supplementary addition to it; it supported self-praise, an apologetic or a deferential position, or yet gave weight and authority to a critical, polemic or satirical attitude, but, in all cases, these preliminary discourses implied that the new work had to be situated somewhere in the literary field and, for this purpose, tentatively positioned side by side with previous works, whether at their feet or towering over them. The Republic of Letters, in this sense, was only a secular version of a fraternity or an ecclesia of literary art works across the centuries. This kind of comparativism wavered between diachronic history and the atemporality of a pantheon, so that notions of progress in artistry could coexist with those of stability of the human condition and the inherent weakness of imitation.

But modernity, in its principle, shifts the emphasis from temporal to spatial, territorial parameters, from filiation to vicinity or the lack of it. This epistemological spatialization, early observed in ‘modern literature’ by Joseph Frank (1945) did not happen independently from major technological, political, economic and cultural events: new astronomical and physical knowledge, new weapons and navigation tools, the “great discoveries” and the ensuing modern colonial empires, the opening of new commercial routes, the progressive dismantling of the Latin linguistic space, etc. There happened a dual territorialization process, of assertion of national sovereignty, on the one hand, and the step by step deleting of two-way borders by globalization, on the other. What was gained —exchange and competition between separate, reputedly distinct European cultures (Italian, French, Spanish, English...)— was perhaps not greater or better than what was lost. Defensive ideologies of exclusion, not unfrequently combined with expansive supremacist ideologies, fall back on the forged continuities, autonomy and purity of each single language and culture, some having to be, of course, purer than others. This European model was unwittingly exported to the colonies and peripheries, the anxiety of liberation helped the powers-that-be of cultural territories liberated from one oppression to become oppressors of their own minorities, and the majority leaders of these minorities will in turn oppress their own minorities if they have a chance to do it: illustrations of the oppressive law of fragmentation abound from Algeria and Catalunya to Myanmar. Comparative Literature, when it is motivated by a competition for the visibility and grandeur of the ‘self,’ will negate the other *within* the self, locating it exclusively outside; it will use the supposed *difference* of the other as a lever to make the national or regional difference, its autonomy, more salient and dignified. This binary attitude is now better known in the guise of “Orientalism,” but it was and remains also pervasive in the explicit or implicit comparison of so-called ‘national’ European literatures between them and in endeavors to draft continental literary histories along mainly geographic or linguistic lines, as the ICLA still

does in the 21st century. Assimilative universalism, on the other hand, is but another form of appropriative, not appropriate cognition of “the other” that negates its *raison d'être* for itself.

In all these configurations, comparison, if it is practiced at all, is performed basically from a single location, be it that of the comparatist or that of his/her ‘foreign’ object of study at the moment. Conversely, an overarching, all-embracing, supposedly non-judgmental position may well in fact exalt a place of origin instead of transcending it. In a similar fashion to international contracts that stipulate that legal disputes will be solved by the courts of one party’s country and subjected to its laws, the parity of negotiation is vitiated from the start by the one-sidedness of the frame of interpretation. Even long after WWII, and, in some cases till today, the spatiotemporal organization of the professional comparatist mind is likely to take the shape of concentric circles. With Owen Aldridge, Ulrich Weisstein, Claude Pichois, André-Marie Rousseau and later Pierre Brunel, to take just a few examples, an expansion of vistas from “one’s own” culture or from the specific core references of a work was considered both as great progress and an unsurpassable frontier. The model and the horizon remained those of encyclopedic, imperial and totalizing expansion, combined with *habeas corpus*: touch me not in my own house, don’t drive me out of it. Comparative Literature was fond of describing itself in terms of travel, if not cultural tourism. Travelogues were and still are a corpus harshly disputed between Departments or research units in Comparative Literature and those of national literatures and cultures. “Heureux qui comme Ulysse a fait un beau voyage!” Exoticism and eclecticism, however disturbing for some of the most traditionalist scholars, offer a safe-conduct to gather curiosities abroad and bring them back home, always aggrandizing home, never shrinking it to more modest proportions than an inflated ego. The world shrinks as it becomes better known. Worlds in a nutshell are valuable because you can store them on your shelves, and they are safe because you cannot live in them, having to abide by their rules. We are immediately reminded of Théophile

Gautier’s metaliterary use of the *liber mundi* metaphor in the first chapter, “At sea,” of *Constantinople*:

“Shouldn’t we leaf through the planet a little [...] until the mysterious author takes us to a new world to make us read another page of his infinite work? Don’t we commit a sin of laziness if we always spell the same word without ever turning the leaf over? [...] So, every year [...] I read another country of this vast universe that seems less big as I ride through it and it becomes more precise, free from the vague cosmographies of imagination.”

And he adds: “in order to travel in a country, you must be a foreigner: the comparison of differences produces the remarks.” (Gautier 1853, 6. My translation.)

Let us now read these few lines, full of good will:

It is now generally agreed that comparative literature does not compare national literatures in the sense of setting one against another. Instead it provides a method of *broadening* one’s perspective in the approach to *single* works of literature — a way of *looking beyond* the narrow boundaries of national frontiers in order to discern trends and movements in various national cultures and to see the relations between literature and other spheres of human activity. (Aldridge 1969, 1. Italics mine)

The divine, embodied in Creation, is no longer evoked here, but the panoptic complex, the lure of seeing it all at once, or at least as nearly whole as possible in a human life, is still very powerful and operational. Aldridge (1969, 00) saw the esthetic origin of Comparative Literature in Schlegel’s concept of *Universalpoesie*: “Certainly the study of comparative literature should embrace every subject of importance to human life that has been successfully treated in written works of the imagination [...]” We should not blame this scholar for an ambition that brings him closer to Étienne’s advocacy of a “truly general literature,” but the problem in this statement of intention is that it never says by whom and from where the importance of a subject or the success of its treatment are assessed. Presumably, this inevitable selection is left in the hands of the endowed wandering scholar, one who travels many roads, explores many countries, cities and works, but who, like

Gautier, must remain a foreigner wherever he will compare differences, dwelling only in one place, the place of origin or, at best, a second literary fatherland. This is the key difference between the unbearable lightness of globe-trotting and the committed cosmopolitanism of those who, rather than ‘doing’ Istanbul one year and Angkor Vat the next, rather than browsing sites on the WW Library, inhabit now there now here, now elsewhere. The true cosmopolitan is one who changes his current address every time and who, having more than one permanent address, tries to become a foreign observer, not of a place that he is visiting, but of that or those where he does not reside at this time. Arthur Koestler places in the mouth of one of his key fictional characters in *Arrival and Departure*, the Jewish psychoanalyst Sonia Bolgar, a self-description that I would accept to depict a committed and sensitive cosmopolitan, a ‘really’ comparatist mind. She says that her roots are aerial, she takes them with her wherever she happens to stay. Presently she lives in Lisbon, in transit between the Central European country she fled, ruled by the Nazis, and the USA, but she is not less rooted, she says, than anyone who has never moved from her hometown. Barbara Cassin (2013, 130), quoting Günther Anders, who was himself reminiscing or not about Sonia Bolgar, displays the same metaphor, adding that it applies when our only estate (*patrimoine*) is “the language”. But, if it is because of his use of language that “man has the privilege of not being tied to the ground by roots,” is it not because language is no land and not of the land, because the definite article is not the right determinant?

François Julien (2008, 2010) whose key figures are not errant, exiled or migrant, pleads rather convincingly nevertheless against ‘cultural identities’ on ethical grounds. However his line of attack is a conceptual proposition and demonstration that they do not exist, in which case it would be useless to attack them: murderous illusions people live by do exist. At the same time Julien’s ‘third position’, rejecting uniformization (universal standardization) as well as the sterile partition of identities, in favor of a healthy dynamic commonality of “écart” (one more ‘untranslatable’, a separation that

relates, not a gap, a rift, perhaps a divergence or distinction rather than a difference) still presupposes that cultures are identifiable as separate entities, localized, territorialized commonwealths, blocks of ‘resources’. When he compares the formalization of thought between China and Europe, these two entities are defined by a single binary criterion: monolingualism vs. a multiplicity of languages. “Travelling more freely between cultures” (Julien 2008, 258) unfortunately involves no residence other than a home logos. No surprise then, that the word “cosmopolitanism” is altogether absent from this thinker’s vocabulary.

Cosmopolitanism, with few exceptions, has mostly had bad (local) press since the origins of the word in Ancient Greece. It may be because of its oppositional nature or for its ambiguity. Depending on whether *κόσμος* is terrestrial and territorial or ideal, not-located, dislocated, cosmopolitanism will be seen as an expanded belonging, belonging to a world that would be like one city (the city of all cities or the global village), or then it will be essentially negative, implying the rejection of belonging to any one actual place or space or possessing any home. On the whole, cosmopolitanism (the wish or will to be a citizen of the world—or universe—, living in *any* place of this world) has too often worked as an empty signifier, a symbol of distinction, or to cover up a conquering, domineering, imperialist and colonialist drive and its strategies. With the further perversion that consists in placing claims to the gratitude of the populations whose cultures are ‘discovered’ or ‘recovered from oblivion’ and included by the generous comparatist in his/her scope or even his canon. This is, once more, the comparatist as a pseudo-humanist collector of ethnographic data, in the manner of the old Musée de l’Homme; “embracing” is the word of the trade, and this embrace is fatal. Lately, in a mechanically symmetric, echoing fashion, some well-known “radical” theorists, such as Walter Dignolo and his “decolonial” sect, rewriting history in omissions, have enrolled cosmopolitanism in the service of absolute cultural relativism, communitarianism (religious or otherwise) and a (fortunately impossible) regression to a historical

condition of untranslatability, non-communication and deliberate ignorance of the other. They forbid translation as dialog at the same time as they do nothing but translating as repetition.

Let us see briefly why Mignolo's "critical cosmopolitanism" is no cosmopolitanism at all, since its historical grounding is extremely limited and partial and his perspective is just as Eurocentric, if not more than that of Arnoldian criticism or Lansonian literary history.

Compared with the "great tradition" of classical Humanities and their correlative wide historical scope, Mignolo displaces the locus of origin (in time and space), the origin of everything including cosmopolitanism, from the 5th and 4th centuries BC to the 16th century CE and from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. According to 'decolonial' thinking, the colonial turn of human history, synonymous with hated modernity, is *the* central, founding event. A single (tragic) *Urnarrativ* is imposed on us. Mignolo's writings are full of counterfactuals, as they are bound to multiply in any grand narrative of the story of human kind. I will mention only one from a recent book. Following the 'story' and 'predictions' of a certain Carl Schmitt in the 1950s, Mignolo (2011, 77-78) proclaims that "*there is no* ontological reality such as modernity or tradition. Modernity and tradition are *both Western and modern concepts* by means of which 'West' and 'modernity' became the very definition of the enunciation that invented 'tradition' and the 'Orient.'" If we managed to disentangle this crooked sentence, we could probably translate it as the description of a performative utterance by which the West defined itself as the seat of modernity, in opposition to an invented Orient defined as the seat of tradition (so far so good), although there was no substance to either West, modernity, tradition or Orient... but how then can something (modernity) that lacks substance be constantly equated with coloniality, which is pure substance, materiality in the flesh? Another couple of questions are still gaping: how is it possible to impose the notion that there was no such thing as tradition, Eastern or Western, in the early 16th century: weren't, for example, the Latin commentaries and imitations of Greek texts a form of tra-

dition? When the Pope himself, it is said, founded international law by distributing the newly discovered lands between the Spanish and Portuguese crowns, did not the 'mission' conferred on Spain and Portugal rely on biblical exegesis, and wasn't that a tradition? In the eyes of many theologians, it was rather the customs and uncivilized behavior of the 'savages' that had no tradition for lack of a certain origin and for lack of (holy) history and its tools? Moreover, had the very same navigators and soldiers who had crossed the Atlantic forgotten all about India, China and the Northern half of Africa that had been known to geographers and Western rulers and merchants since high Antiquity? Certainly not. It was business as usual with the rest of the world. The combined land and sea routes from the West and Egypt to South Western India and back, for example, did not go unused in the 16th century.

I maintain that a sustainable cosmopolitan project cannot result from a single foundation, whether good or evil, irenic or satanic. Denying multiple histories, multiple temporalities and spatialities, one forgets that any community exists at least as much as a metonym of its actual or imaginary neighbours, as it does as a concrete synecdoche or an abstract metaphor of human kind. From the big bang of an expansionist myth, or a concentric and centrifugal reading of texts, there can be only two roads: one that would conduce to the hegemony of a single universalist model, typically exemplified by "European universalis" (although there were many) and one that will turn its back to anthropological unity, exalting definitive untranslatables, mystifying the autochthonous, privileging defensive cultural closure over miscegenation, sedentarity, land and landscape property over mobility and exchange, archeocracy over creativity and transgressive imagination. The end result would usually amount to infinite pride in European/Western civilizational leadership, as it did for one German historian of the cosmopolitan idea (Coulmas 1995), while Mignolo advocates the 'negotiability' of human rights, certainly not in our sense of negotiation. Would it not be wiser and perhaps at once more 'epistemic' to com-*pare*, consider on the same footing and

judge on their own merits several universalisms and cosmopolitanisms, of the past and the present, similar or dissimilar, parallel or not? What I call experimental cosmopolitanism is the geocritical equivalent of methodological eclecticism. It goes well beyond sabbatical outings and airings in the heart of darkness. Addressing any historically imposed locus of origin, it says: “let me out,” and, knocking on doors painted a different colour, speaking another language, for example, it says: “I have come a long way, please let me in to spend the night.”

Shifting centres back or forth between two poles, or unconvincingly trying to substitute one for another is severely limiting, and decentering altogether is either impossible, for here and now follow me like my shadow, or a clumsy pretence: impartiality —indifference, not taking part— amounts to flattening the world and forsaking cognition. Nevertheless, as some theorists, and a growing number of practitioners of literary production, are now realizing it, there might be other ways of being/acting cosmopolitan that can at once acknowledge and preserve anthropological unity and sense-making differentiation, or “gaping”. It will become clearer in the linguistic field.

It is equally wrong to believe that any one language can say everything, that it can say only something different from another language (the ‘foreign’ language), and that it can say nothing. All this becomes rapidly obvious if we care to think about the translational aspects of language and discourse: how, for example, what a language thinks becomes only perceivable through the prism of another language or, better, of other languages: the blessing of Babel. Radical untranslatability signifies that only God can understand himself in his one eternal language. Smooth, unlimited, simultaneous, automated translatability, on the other hand, would imply that all languages are reducible to one common denominator. Limited, difficult, hesitant, successive, delayed, insufficient and excessive as translation may be, its *Durcharbeitung*, (perlaboration, working through, mediation and negotiation), is essential to the production of meaning, however temporary, and to the removal or attenuation of neurosis. The fetishization of origin, of

the mouth we want to come from in order to be named and spoken, and know what to do, the narrative of home-coming in guise of success-story, the thick-skin barriers maintained between me and other, community and barbarians, believers and doubters, faithful and infidel, are all manifestations of an irrational fear. Cosmopolitanism is fundamentally secular and opposed to any god-fearing totalization or homage, *ecclesia* or *ummah*. Cosmopolitans do not care to be representative, neither do they care to speak *their* mind and *their* mind only. What they care about is to experiment with the strange voices of others, make them sound suddenly familiar, recognizing in them a same strangeness with which their voices resound to other ears.

I consider some empirical demands as pre-conditions for the good practice of Comparative Literature that I like to call cross-cultural negotiation, or, more exactly, the public reading of cross-cultural negotiation. One of these demands, as I have already indicated, is that of a plural residence, along one’s mental life, rather than mere travelling; another one is affective investment in the various cultures concerned. None of these necessary cosmopolitan experiences and experiments can be seriously carried out without a deeply committed practice of heteroglossia, in three different forms: living at times in a language that is not supposed to be one’s original language, living in more than one language at any period of one’s mental life, and perceiving the essential otherness of any language practiced, including any supposed mother tongue or native language. The non-coincidence of any language with its objects or with itself is why languages evolve in their syntax, borrow, abandon and sometimes restore lexically, etc. All these acts are obviously negotiative and negotiated, as all translations should be, their accounts cannot be closed, the balances are never final. Etymologically, negotiation, means the negation or rejection of *otium*, idleness, laziness. In a dialogic framework, it consists in tirelessly pursuing the togetherness of conversation and interpretation.

In parallel to its modalities in acts of literary communication, cross-cultural negotiation should also be

observed in non-literary real-life situations, from diplomacy to “mixed” international marriages, how they succeed and how they break down. Such situations may appear between remote territories as well as within a single society, among usages of structurally different languages, or yet very similar, as in the case of intralingual translation between sociolects or historical states of the one idiom. Whether the confronted forces of identitarian affirmation are manifested in a polemical or consensual way, they always rely on a minimal shared code, however equivocal it may be, and they pursue the possibility of developing it. Negotiation takes place with oneself and the real, virtual or imagined interlocutor, that is, with opposite, incompatible, debatable or confusing facets of one’s mind and the alien mind. It ceaselessly reconfigures otherness, the otherness of the other, of the self and of the exclusive “us.” Questioning the intelligibility and the unintelligibility of what the other has or may have to say, of what I, as another to this other, may actually mean, is a long-term labor of alternate and simultaneous familiarization and defamiliarization. And this is the way in which the work of art that is imitation of another, but not its mere mechanical reproduction produces delayed/deferred meaning and pleasure without exhausting or consuming itself once and for all.

Contrary to the deceptive transparency of the non-negotiated regime of the legible/readerly, contrary to its supposedly unequivocal dictionary of symbols and syllogistic rules to produce valid assertions, cosmopolitan cross-cultural negotiation, obliged or chosen, actual or simulated, will uncover presuppositions and implications that were sometimes hidden, deeply embedded, withdrawn from sight and sale, but also, like the famous “purloined letter,” too blatantly exhibited in/on ‘common ground’ to attract ordinary attention, or not to distract from the distinctive inner features of which they are not a symptom. Odysseus’ scar is probably of the second kind. This is why, in the business of navigating across an archipelago of wandering islands, I would trust memory less than Anthony Appiah (2006) when he takes as a prototype of cosmopolitanism the

exemplarily happy experience of mixed cultural environments he enjoyed in his childhood. Experience, unlike experiment, is something inherited, even from your past self and that therefore you cannot entirely trust, especially as the pre-figuration of a possible future. Experience marks points of origin and ties us to them. The cosmopolitan negotiation required of the comparatist mind to carry out its task cannot proceed from the safety of anything or anywhere you would be inclined to call a first, a native home. Contrary to Appiah (2007, 165), I would say that our basic obligations must *not* be “consistent with our being, [...] partial to those closest to us: to our families, our friends, our nations; to the many groups that call upon us through our identities, chosen and unchosen.” Statelessness, or rather the more precise condition of *apatride*, in the French lexicon is the precondition to apply for temporary adoption/co-optation into the texts, discourses and mores in which my in-betweenness seeks a refuge.

I shall propose, to conclude, just a few practical examples of this esthetic and ethical line of behavior, strangely similar, at first sight, to an awareness of psychic bisexuality or perhaps multi-sexuality. How could we go about it in the classroom? A classroom that I will take to be minimally equipped linguistically, that is with some notions of the grammar, phonetics and lexicon of more than one language. Since not all students are migrants and most of those habitually considered healthy would maintain a strong, dominant attachment to one language and one culture, the simulations of cross-cultural negotiation that can be carried out will mainly consist of role-playing through acts of (public) reading.

The “prompted transreading” method, both investigative and pedagogical, proposed by Huiwen Helen Zhang (...) goes a good part of the way in this direction as it “recognizes the simultaneity and interdependence of close reading, literary translation, creative writing and cultural hermeneutics”. A number of other interesting proposals by both junior and senior active academics clearly stem from their refusal to situate themselves constantly in one or two cultural locations

only. Some of them work mainly in a minority linguistic and cultural environment and shuttle from it to other minority environments and located Englishes, others work in a dominant cultural environment but refuse to consider it as central: they de-center and provincialize it while knowing full well its weight in globalization and its discontents. All of them are doing their best to help their students realize that, whatever culture they think or wish to belong to, is circumstantial and transient in its specificity.

The theory and philosophy of translation can be remodeled by the comparatist's experimental cosmopolitanism, and, at the same time, they should provide a parallel model for the workings of the comparatist mind. Let us dare to make French students read Proust in the canonical Scott Moncrieff translation first and then treat Proust's "original" French text as a virtual translation of Moncrieff's *Remembrance of Things Past*. It works. Especially when Moncrieff is also summoned to be the primary author of *The Red and the Black*, Proust the author of *Sesame and Lilies*, K.M. Sandars the author of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and James Morier a faithful translator of the Persian *Adventures of Haji Baba*. Denouncing the paradox of authenticity on which positivist and religious histories are based can be liberating, without needing to proclaim any shameless historical counterfactuals. Cosmopolitan reading is a parodic experiment carried out in an ongoing process of theorization.

"For a long time I used to go to bed early." "Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure." Close reading of the English version as an autonomous textual product, even in the rather wider context of the three and a half thousand subsequent pages will not take us very far from the information that a patient, now suffering from insomnia, could give his doctor to determine what treatment of this nervous ailment would likely be more efficient. Separate close reading of the French parallel version, "Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure," might be slightly richer — because of the overtones of "bonne heure" (*bonheur*, happiness) and "couché" (*coucher avec*, to make love)—, but not much. It is still a story that the narrator/pa-

tient could tell his doctor without calling for any further interpretation, unless the said doctor happens to be a psychoanalyst. Now, if we alternately treat the two sentences as translations of each other, in different cultural contexts, the most salient, enigmatic feature that comes to the fore is the comma and the corresponding pause in the French text, and its absence in the English text; the indeterminate, potentially infinite gap the comma opens in time, the very same gap that *La Recherche* will try to fill. Then every cliché about British and French cultures turns into a potential positive interpretant in the cross-cultural negotiation: to take one, how practically minded the British are, versus French reverie, that would become *farniente* in Italy, etc. The clichés do not become true, it is not their function, but they emerge as tokens of exchange that facilitate communication rather than just generating misunderstandings.

I insist that what I am talking about is cosmopolitan reading, not cosmopolitan literature, in the sense of Beecroft (2015, 101-144), for example, that is the production of a corpus that inscribes itself into a set of complex, heterogeneous cultural worlds through its choice of a language, a rhetoric and a system of reference that do not coincide. Another avenue opened by experimental cosmopolitanism is that provided by alternate identification of the public reader with the several, culturally heterogeneous voices that vie for a place in these fictional or poetic conversations that Bakhtin would call dialogic or plurilingual. These voices — especially in the poetic text— that do not quite fit but sometimes overlap in a semi-discordant way until, as in many opera duets or jazz jam sessions, the chord is found or not, may be but are not necessarily assigned a quasi-personal enunciator; at times, they will be identified at the level of sound or optics. In narrative prose, the figuration of cross-cultural negotiation by which the unity of the world of reference is either painstakingly built or slowly disintegrates, knows many modalities. Teaching South Asian fiction from the 19th century to the present is highly rewarding because of the almost constant tension between linguistically and/or culturally heterogeneous discourses that come to play in it,

along with the shifting barriers between differently gendered discourses, and all those that are differently marked in terms of class, caste and religion. This is as true of Bankimchandra as of Tagore or Saratchandra and as obvious in Premchand as it can be in the most recent Indian English fiction, such as *Babyji* by Abha Dawesar, Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*, or Rukmini Bhaya Nair's *Mad Girl's Love Song*. From the most metafictional to the least self-referring, all these Indian English novels are sites of intense cross-cultural negotiation that offer the public reader exceptional opportunities for diverse, dialogical role-playing, and thus become a real experimental cosmopolitan within and without the Indian world. The reader is heavily incited to speak languages that he never knew could be his own, and to hear his "own" language as a foreign/*frangi* tongue.

Yet, if we want to be true to the cosmopolitan vital adventure, we should never forget to inhabit at times the tribal villages of those—philosophers, sociologists, historians or linguists—for whom literature remains a strange, fascinating neighbor, one with different feeding habits: you can invite her at times to share a meal without caring for the menu, and she might even try to have an affair with a member of your family.

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