Comparative Literature and the New Paradigm*

Comparative literature has a long history, not only as a separate field of study, but also as an academic discipline. This long tradition accords an extra dimension to the comparative study of literature, but (at times) is also considered a liability, in particular by those who hold that any science, including the humanities, should aim at problem-solving by means of hypotheses and their testing, rather than by the accumulation of knowledge. The compilation of knowledge can be useful if it is accessible, i.e. if this knowledge has been collected in a systematic way and can thus be retrieved. No one doubts the use of encyclopaedias and other books of reference, nor does anyone challenge the view that the value of such compilations grows if they are organized systematically and are capable of answering the questions which arise in the course of scientific research. In this way, the use of accumulated information becomes evident: it serves, or should serve, to solve the problems with which the individual researcher is confronted.

One may conclude from the preceding paragraph that I attach much value to the scientific relevance of the various fields of study. Scientific relevance is determined by the degree to which a certain type of research can contribute to the solution of more or less important scientific problems and by its relation with other research in the same or cognate fields.

It is also possible, of course, to assess scientific research with respect to its social relevance. The criteria for this assessment derive from the social

* This is the text of a paper read at the universities of Groningen, Innsbruck and Louvain in 1980-81. A slightly different version was published in the Dutch journal Forum der letteren 22 (1981) 179-94.


views of the evaluator, or even from his vision of the future development of society. As a result, agreement about the criteria of judgment can hardly be expected and the assessment, if it took place exclusively within the university, would result in a time-consuming, futile discussion. In the Western world, the assessment of the social relevance of scientific research is up to the individual teacher or student who decides to study a particular topic, within the framework that has been made possible by the representative bodies which decide on the budget, from the parliament down to the faculty council. The assessment of social relevance is on the one hand an individual, and on the other an administrative and political, matter.

The judgement of scientific relevance, however, will be based on less subjective criteria and may very well show a high level of concord. This can be exemplified by the mutual relationship between comparative literature and the theoretical study of literature, which as academic disciplines are taught at all major universities in The Netherlands.

I COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AND THE THEORETICAL STUDY OF LITERATURE IN THE NETHERLANDS

All six major universities in The Netherlands offer (the equivalent of) a master's degree in the general study of literature ('algemene literatuurwetenschap'), which is divided into theoretical and comparative branches.

The theoretical study of literature examines literary phenomena in their general and systematic aspects, as well as the methodology of the study of literature and its relations with such disciplines as linguistics, semiotics, aesthetics, sociology, and psychology.

Comparative literature focuses on the historicity of the literary text, that is to say, the specific circumstances under which it is produced and received. In studying texts in different languages and from various cultures, it makes use of the results of linguistics, semiotics and the other disciplines mentioned above.

The difference between the two branches can be roughly indicated as theory vs. testing and application, abstract vs. concrete, general vs. historical. These distinctions, however, are only relatively valid. They point to characteristics that dominate one of the two branches but which are also present in the other. Of course, no discipline can do without theoretical foundations, and this also applies to comparative literature. No discipline can refrain from testing, or leave the testing of its hypotheses to another discipline, and this also applies to the theoretical study of literature. No discipline, including comparative literature, can exist without a certain degree of abstraction and generalization. Finally,
no empirical discipline can do without the study of concrete, historical phenomena, and this certainly applies to the theoretical study of literature which in recent years has acknowledged that its object of research has a historical dimension that cannot be ignored.3

Anticipating the conclusion of my argument, I should explain here that the object of the study of literature is by no means restricted to 'the literary text,' but can be conceived in at least three different ways: (1) as the text which at a certain time has been received as literature by a particular group of readers: elliptically and less accurately, 'the literary text'; (2) as the communication-situation, in which a sender communicates a text that a recipient considers to be literature: elliptically, 'the literary communication-situation'; and (3), as the code or the sign system, used by the sender and acknowledged by the recipient on the basis of which the text is received as literature: elliptically, 'the literary code.' Of course, a preference for one of these conceptions implies affinity to a particular scholarly tradition.

With due observance of the various differences between comparative literature and the theoretical study of literature mentioned above, one may venture that the objects of comparative literature and the theoretical study of literature are in principle identical. The latter, however, does not necessarily transgress the linguistic boundaries of a particular national literature, whereas comparative literature by definition deals with texts, communication-situations and codes in various literatures. It is through this international or supralingual aspect that comparative literature distinguishes itself from the study of the various national literatures.

One more qualification is necessary. The theoretician may rightly claim that his object of research consists of more than the three options mentioned. The methodology of the study of literature belongs to his

3 This position is characteristic of scholars working in the tradition of Russian Formalism and Czech structuralism, such as Jurij M. Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, trans. Ronald Vroon (Ann Arbor: Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Michigan 1977) and Janusz Sławinski, *Literatur als System und Prozess*, ed. Rolf Fieguth (München: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung 1973). But others also, more interested in linguistics and text grammar, have acknowledged the historical dimension of literature. For example, Siegfried J. Schmidt, 'On the Foundation and Research Strategies of a Science of Communication,' *Poetics*, No. 7 (1973) 28, wrote: 'Literary texts are therefore texts of a historical line of evolution, that originate in textual contexts, and are received in communicative situations.' Also, p. 29: 'Literary study ... must proceed in a context-sensitive and a situation-sensitive way and, correspondingly, adequately take into account both social and historical components.'
province as well. But the comparatist may answer this claim by extending his research to a comparative study of poetical conventions or traditional literary theories. The comparative study of poetical systems is implied in the examination of codes which have induced a literary reception.

The profiles of comparative literature and the theoretical study of literature are closely connected. The two disciplines could be practised by one person, if they did not demand of the scholar a rather different disposition and knowledge of different research methods. The task of being a good theoretician as well as a good comparatist is too onerous. Co-operation within the greater framework of the general study of literature seems a viable solution. The scientific relevance of comparative literature lies partly in the testing of the general hypotheses of the theoretical study of literature and partly in the description and explanation of phenomena which occur in more than one literature and which cannot be explained with exclusive reference to the individual national literatures. The scientific relevance of the theoretical study of literature lies in the construction of concepts and models which enable the comparatist and the researcher in the field of the various national literatures to do their job. As J.J.A. Mooij has argued, the models of the theoretician often help us to see and distinguish, to explore rather than to explain the phenomena of literature. But it remains possible that data which have been made explicit by means of a certain model will also contribute to the explanation of problems which so far have remained in the dark.


5 In his programmatic The Concept of Comparative Literature, René Wellek wrote: 'The great argument for "comparative literature" is the obvious falsity of the idea of a self-enclosed national literature. Western literature, at least, forms a unity, a whole. Not only themes and motifs, forms and genres, ideas and symbols migrate, but there is a general European (and American) development of literature,' Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature 2 (1953) 5. Similarly Wolfgang Kayser argued 'daß es keine nationalen Literaturwissenschaften gibt, daß die Kräfte, die das sprachliche Gefüge der Dichtung wie ihre Form bilden, fast überall die gleichen sind,' in Das sprachliche Kunstwerk: Eine Einführung in die Literaturwissenschaft, 14th ed. (Bern and München: Francke 1969) 6. Also Lottman, in The Structure of the Artistic Text, sees literature as a whole, viz., as a supralingu al system.

II COMPARATIVE AND GENERAL LITERATURE IN THE UNITED STATES AND ELSEWHERE

There is no clear equivalent in English for 'algemene literatuurwetenschap' (general study of literature). The content of the Dutch term (or the German 'allgemeine Literaturwissenschaft') is covered more than half by 'comparative literature' and almost completely by 'comparative and general literature.' In the latter phrase, however, the theoretical component still seems to be weaker than in the Dutch or German term. This originates less in the American designation of the discipline than in the historical fact that the study of literature in the Netherlands has been fully exposed to the development of literary theories in Germany, Eastern Europe and France. In North America, the situation was rather different. For a long time New Criticism, which made no pretence at being scientific, has remained a major school in the study of literature in the United States. Only recently has its influence begun to decline, as is admitted also by those who have defended it up to the last moment. Undoubtedly, the vitality of New Criticism has kept down the growth of the theoretical study of literature at American universities, including the Departments of Comparative Literature. Of course, interest in theoretical problems can be found in the United States,

7 In rare cases the English term 'general literature' seems to convey the meaning of the French 'littérature générale,' as defined by Paul Van Tieghem: 'un ordre de recherches qui porte sur les faits communs à plusieurs littératures, considérés comme tels, soit dans leurs dépendances réciproques, soit dans leur coïncidence,' in La Littérature comparée, 3rd ed. (Paris: Armand Colin 1946) 174. The term 'general literature' in the title of the Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature may originally have had that meaning. In agreement with Wellek's The Concept of Comparative Literature, the present editors of the Yearbook seem to interpret 'general literature' as 'poetics' or 'theory of literature.' In the same article Wellek defended the position that 'Comparative and general literature merge inevitably' (The Concept of Comparative Literature, 5).

8 René Wellek, 'The New Criticism: Pro and Contra,' Critical Inquiry 4 (1978) 618, writes: 'Actually the New Critics are enemies of science.' Also, p. 619: 'Criticism cannot be neutral scientism: it must respond to the work with the same totality of mind with which the work is created.'

9 René Wellek opens his article mentioned in Note 8 as follows: 'Today the New Criticism is considered not only superseded, obsolete and dead but somehow mistaken and wrong' (p. 611). A. Owen Aldridge writes about New Criticism: 'Until very recently English departments of most American universities emphasized the intrinsic over the extrinsic approach, bowed down to the "verbal icon", warned against the intentional and the affective fallacies, and affirmed the possibility of substituting for "romantic impressions" a type of criticism which is truly impersonal and objective,' in East-West Relations: Universal Literature, Yes; Common Poetics, No, Tamkang Review 10 (1979) 17-33; quoted from 25.
but (notwithstanding the important contributions by Wayne Booth, Morton Bloomfield, M.H. Abrams, E.D. Hirsch, Jr., and Stanley Fish) mainly among scholars who do not work in the field of English or American literature, but are engaged in, say, Slavonic, French, or Oriental studies.

New Criticism was impregnated by a concept of literature which allows for a 'total response' of the reader to the text,¹⁰ and hence for a subject that eventually loses its critical attitude with respect to its object. New Criticism considered the object of research as unique, ignored the historicity of the text and of the reader, and never came to a critical discussion of its results by means of a metalanguage. In my view, such an approach belongs to the province of literary criticism, but is alien to the scientific study of literature. In imitation of T.S. Eliot, it considers the literary text as a 'monument' that is immediately accessible and preserves its value for ever,¹¹ instead of as an assembly of signs that in differing contexts can be interpreted differently. This approach is geared towards the past; it aims to transmit the tradition and acclaims the values of an unhistorical past. Already in 1921 Fernand Baldensperger criticized the exclusive attention to the 'monuments intellectuels' and 'un Panthéon de réputations admises' as being at variance with the dynamic character of literature.¹² But this was not enough to refute Eliot's position, which had been made public two years earlier, and which Baldensperger may or may not have known. Eliot held 'that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer ... has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order,'¹³ and ignored the problem of how and by whom it is decided which texts belong to the European literary tradition and which do not.

The concept of the literary text as a monument immediately accessible to the reader was a barrier to the development of a metalanguage, in

¹⁰ Cf. Note 8.
¹² Fernand Baldensperger, 'Littérature comparée: le mot et la chose,' Revue de Littérature Comparée 1 (1921) 22, 27
¹³ Eliot, 49
New Criticism as well as in the German school of 'immanent interpretation' ('werkimmanente Interpretation'). The position of Cleanth Brooks that the interpretation of a literary work never can be more than a 'crude approximation' and that, in order to realize that crude approximation, the interpreter is bound to resort to the methods of the poem — analogy, metaphor, symbol, etc.,\textsuperscript{14} excludes the possibility of distinguishing between object-language and meta-language, even though the New Critics seem to have designed an elementary meta-language by introducing such terms as 'irony,' 'paradox' and 'coherence.'

The heavy emphasis of the New Critics on the uniqueness of the literary work, the idea of its immediate accessibility and the disregard of the historical and social conditions of literary communication, were not favourable to the development of comparative literature in the United States. In the absence of a theoretical framework for a comparative study of texts, there was no basis for comparison. The more the unique aspects of literary texts were emphasized, the less the comparison of these texts could take shape. For want of a metalanguage, the \textit{tertium comparationis} also failed.

It may be surprising that precisely in the United States the conditions for the development of comparative literature were unfavourable. Indeed, the Second Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA), held in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in 1958, greatly stimulated the growth of comparative literature as an academic discipline in the American universities and led to the foundation of the American Comparative Literature Association. But this development had little to do with New Criticism. The initiative for the Congress had been taken by Werner Friederich, professor at the University of North Carolina and of Swiss origin, who had studied in Paris and who, with apparent approval, had published the disputed definition of comparative literature by Jean-Marie Carré (Sorbonne) in the first issue of his \textit{Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature} (1952). In the \textit{Proceedings} of the Second Congress there are numerous contributions, also by Americans, which belong to the positivistic tradition of the French school. A striking exception is the polemical report, 'The Crisis of Comparative Literature,' by René Wellek. Wellek attacks the 'positivistic factualism,' but by subscribing to the views of Benedetto Croce and New Criticism, he weakens rather than strengthens the basis of the comparative study of literature. Wellek considers literary works as 'wholes in which raw materials derived from elsewhere cease to be inert matter and

are assimilated into a new structure,' and as 'wholes, conceived in the free imagination, whose integrity and meaning are violated if we break them up into sources and influences.' There is an obvious agreement between Wellek and Croce with respect to 'Stoffgeschichte' and the study of influences. Their subject,' Croce had written in 1903, 'is not the aesthetic genesis of the literary work, but either the external history of the work already formed ... or a fragment of the diverse material that has helped to mold it (literary tradition), ... One misses — and it is impossible not to miss — the study of the creative moment, which is what really concerns literary and artistic history.'

Like Croce, Wellek criticized the positivistic compilation of facts which, notably in France, had ushered in an unimpeded growth of comparative literature. His criticism, however, was based on conceptions which could not easily be made operative in comparative research into literary texts. In the beginning, Wellek's followers in North America were less numerous than European scholars often assume on the basis of his valuable publications. The many American comparatists who finally heeded Wellek's call to study the literary text as an organic unity, alien to any resolution into factors, soon discovered, however, that neither Wellek, nor the New Critics nor Croce whom Wellek admired so much, offered a method for comparative research. By demanding that comparatists should focus on only literary phenomena, he had restricted their field of interest without solving the problem of method. French positivism never attained the level of methodological reflection and metalingual criticism; New Criticism regarded methodological reflection as superfluous (the text was believed to be immediately accessible) and the use of a metalanguage as inadequate ('the heresy of paraphrase').

Diverted by the false dilemma of a choice between a French and an American school, many American comparatists have avoided methodological problems to which neither school attached much value.

Over the past few years some change can be noticed in this respect. Articles by Hans Robert Jauß, Gérard Genette and Jonathan Culler have appeared in *Comparative Literature* and other comparatist journals published in the United States. Of course, this has not immediately

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17 Brooks, Chapter 11, 'The Heresy of Paraphrase'
repaired the damage, for the mere idea that comparative research is impossible without a theoretical foundation does not automatically entail the ability to distinguish between the multitude of competing theories. The scarcely critical assimilation of almost any structuralist construction or post-structuralist deconstruction by some comparatists reinforces the prejudice among others that the theoretical study of literature is inimical to comparative literature. Quite the opposite is true: by providing a methodological basis, the theoretical study of literature strengthens and stimulates comparative research.

The European interest in theory has a long history. Since the publication of Saussure’s *Cours de linguistique générale* in 1955 and the achievements of Russian Formalism in the 1920’s, various structuralist schools have come into existence, which, despite differences in scientific stature and inspiration, have greatly stimulated the development of theories of literature. Of course, the anthropological structuralism of Lévi-Strauss differs from the Czech structuralism, which focused on the study of language and literature. Of course, there are differences between Saussure’s linguistic structuralism and the structuralism of Jurij Lotman, V.N. Toporov and V.V. Ivanov, which is applied to the history of literature and the typology of culture. The differences have been qualified by cross-connections: the German theory of reception was inspired by both Czech and French structuralism, by Mukařovský and Vodička as well as by Roland Barthes. American linguistics contributed to both East European and French structuralism. For these various types of structuralist research, the same scientific criterion holds: the results should be testable. A crucial point is whether the categories which serve to analyse and discuss the object of research are considered inherent to the object, or rather mental constructions with an instrumental function. Such mental constructions are designed to guide the observation, to aid the analysis and to provide a model for describing the object in terms which make comparison with other, similarly examined objects, possible and testable.

The structures detected in the object do not have an ontological character. They are discovered in the light of a certain problem, on the understanding that in the perspective of another problem, other structures will surface. Both the quality and the quantity of the structures that are distinguished depend on the problem of the researcher and also on the circumstances under which the solution must be presented.18 The

18 This position is inspired by Umberto Eco who gives the following definition of structure: "Eine Struktur ist ein Modell, das nach Vereinfachungsoperationen konstruiert ist, die es ermöglichen, verschiedene Phänomene von einem einzigen
various structures have a hypothetical character and should be tested, either directly or indirectly, within the framework of a more or less detailed argument.

Among European (and Canadian) comparatists, the reservations vis-à-vis methodological innovation have been less great than among their American colleagues. This is apparent in the Proceedings of the Congresses of the ICLA since 1970. At these Congresses, a relatively large amount of attention was devoted to general problems, such as the sociology of literature (6th Congress, Bordeaux 1970), structuralism and the problems of periodization and evaluation (7th Congress, Montreal-Ottawa, 1973), semiotics (8th Congress, Budapest, 1976), reception theory (9th Congress, Innsbruck, 1979). Methodological innovation was a central issue precisely in those countries where comparative literature was institutionalized as an academic discipline at a rather late stage, or where it received a belated social recognition by the foundation of associations which formally aimed at the systematic advancement of the discipline (Great Britain, Spain, Eastern Europe). Here, too, the law that backwardness may turn into its opposite seems to apply.

The various justifications of the comparative method, the literary status of the object of research, and the relation between theory and text analysis, receive different emphasis in the numerous definitions of comparative literature. As a summary of the present state of the discipline, it is useful to look at some of these definitions. In 1968 René Wellek describes comparative literature as follows: 'It will study all literature from an international perspective, with a consciousness of the unity of all literary creation and experience. In this conception ... comparative literature is identical with the study of literature independent of linguistic, ethnic, and political boundaries. It cannot be confined to a single method: description, characterization, interpretation, narration, explanation, evaluation, are used in its discourse just as much as comparison.' Wellek also deals with the problem of whether comparative literature should be restricted to the study of actual historical contacts, or should pay attention to 'typological affinities' as well. Like Viktor Žirmunskij, Herbert Seidler and Dionyz Durišin, Wellek regards


19 Wellek, Discriminations, 19

20 For the position of Viktor Žirmunskij, see Adrian Marino, ‘Étiemble, les “invariants” et la littérature comparée,’ in Le Mythe d’Étiemble: hommages, études et recherches (Paris: Didier 1979) 160, as well as the publications by Durišin; Herbert Seidler, Was ist vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft? in Sitzungsberichte der Öster-
typological similarities as part of the object of the comparatist, and in
doing so, he distinguishes himself from older comparatists who wished to
restrict themselves to the study of 'rapports de fait.' Paul Van Tieghem
belonged to those who represented this more restricted position. 21 Like
Baldensperger, he was more interested in dependence as a result of in-
fluence than in independent analogous developments, or, in Đurišin's ter-
minology, more in contact relations than in typological affinities.
In the polemics between the supporters of the 'positivistic' method and
those of 'intrinsic' research, the questions of 'rapports de fait' (contact
relations) and the role of comparison are recurrent issues. The aesthetic
experience and the creative moment also play a role in the discussion.
The function of theory, brought up on several occasions by Wellek, was
less frequently discussed. 22 However, the role of theory was mentioned
in the definition of comparative literature which was included in 1979 in
the statutes of the ICLA (9th Congress, Innsbruck): 'l'étude de la
littérature comparée' was defined as l'étude de l'histoire littéraire, de la
théorie de la littérature et de l'interprétation des textes, entreprise d'un
point de vue comparatif international.' 23 As happens in such cases, the
formula is the result of a compromise. The word 'comparatif' is
superfluous and produces a circularity which sharply reduces the
usefulness of the definition.

III COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AND THE NEW PARADIGM
Comparison being only one method of investigation occurring in all
sciences, René Wellek considers it a mistake to overemphasize its value.
For Wellek, literary creation forms a unity. Comparative literature
should not narrow its interest to phenomena that cross national or
linguistic boundaries; it should rather ignore these boundaries. Inspired
by the Russian Formalists, Wellek advocated in 1958 the study of
literature as a subject distinct from other activities and products of man.

\[\text{reichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse (Wien) 284 (1973), 4. Abh., 3-18; }\]
\[\text{Dionýz Đurišin, Vergleichende Literaturforschung: Versuch eines methodischtheoretischen Grundrisses (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag 1972),}\]
\[\text{and Sources and Systematics of Comparative Literature (Bratislava: Slovart 1974).}\]

21 Van Tieghem, 57: 'l'object de la littérature comparée ... est essentiellement
d'étudier les œuvres des diverses littératures dans leur rapports les unes avec les
autres.'

22 René Wellek, 'Literary Theory, Criticism, and History,' in Concepts of Criticism, 1-20

23 ICLA Bulletin 2 (1979), No. 1, 3
Hence we must face the problem of "literariness," the central issue of aesthetics, the nature of art and literature.\textsuperscript{24}

Had the time been ripe for it, the attention paid to the problem of 'literariness' could have been the beginning of a new chapter in the history of comparative literature, but the examination of the literary aspects of texts has led only very slowly to a change in the object of research. When it became apparent that the literariness of texts could not be established without taking the recipient and the reception context into consideration, the object of research had to be broadened to the 'literary communication-situation.' The acknowledgement that literature is a language construction which must be experienced by readers as a construction was pronounced as long ago as 1924 by Jurij Tynjanov and still earlier by Viktor Šklovskij.\textsuperscript{25} As a result of reception theory and experimental research,\textsuperscript{26} this insight was confirmed and disseminated, but it has still not been widely accepted with all its consequences.

The implications of the role of the recipient and his context were not immediately clearly seen. In 1935 Jan Mukařovský argued that 'any object or action, regardless of how it is organized' can fulfil an aesthetic function.\textsuperscript{27} Almost forty years later, Götz Wienold came to the extreme conclusion that it was no longer necessary to interest oneself in the received text, and that one should rather focus on forms of text-processing ("Textverarbeitung"). The immediate study of artefacts was considered superfluous.\textsuperscript{28} Wienold, however, overlooked the possibility that under certain conditions certain texts with some degree of predictability are

\textsuperscript{24} Wellek, Concepts of Criticism, 293


\textsuperscript{27} Jan Mukařovský, Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts, trans. Mark E. Suino (Ann Arbor; Department of Slavic Languages and Literature, University of Michigan 1970) 28

\textsuperscript{28} 'Objektbereich sind hier nicht mehr Texte, schon gar nicht Texte in Buchform. Objektbereich ist das Gesamt der Verarbeitungsprozesse über Texte': Götz Wienold, Semiotik der Literatur (Frankfurt; Athenäum 1972) 184.
received as literary, whereas other texts will not be accepted as literature by the same reading public. Obviously, under certain conditions, there is a certain correlation between the quality of the text and its reception by a particular group of readers. It is probably impossible to define literariness in universal terms, but it may be possible to define it in relatively general terms which have limited validity within a certain period and cultural community. Wellek's claim that there is 'a common feature in all art' appears to be untenable, as well as Étiemble's assumption that 'invariants littéraires', which should occur in all literatures, can be discovered. The anomaly has also come to light of the assertion that texts, once classified as literature, will retain their value for ever; whereas, time and again, it has seemed to be impossible to establish that value in a reliable, empirical way. This, however, has not meant that the literary text could no longer be an object of research, nor has it meant the end of the study of literature. But it has meant the beginning of a new paradigm (Thomas S. Kuhn), as shaped through the various efforts of Jan Mukařovský, Felix Vodička, Hans Robert Jauß, Jurij Lotman, Nortbert Groeben, and, with respect to comparative literature, Itamar Even-Zohar, José Lambert, and many others.

The new paradigm is made up of (a) a new conception of the object of literary scholarship, (b) the introduction of new methods, (c) a new vi-

29 Wellek, 'Literary Theory, Criticism, and History,' in Concepts of Criticism, 19
31 Here only one anomaly is mentioned, which coincides with the third one in the series of anomalies analysed by Elrud Ibsch in her article 'Receptietheorie: Een positiebepaling ten aanzien van methodologische vraagstukken en nieuwe ontwikkelingen,' Forum der letteren 21 (1980) 44-55.
sion of the scientific relevance of the study of literature, and (d) a new vision of the social justification of the study of literature.

a. Within the new paradigm the exclusiveness of the 'literary text' as the only object of the study of literature has been abandoned (the same has happened with the exclusiveness of the relations between texts in different literatures as the only object of comparative literature). The object of literary scholarship consists in the first place of the 'literary communication-situation.' (Hence, the object of comparative literature includes the international aspects of the literary communication-situation.) Since under certain conditions certain texts are more often received as literature by a given reading public than others, it must be concluded that, other things being equal, it is on the basis of textual features that the judgements of a given group of readers can be predicted. The examination of the signs in the text which obtain within certain semiotic communities that are to be defined in historical, geographical and sociological terms, leads to an investigation of the production and acknowledgement of 'literary codes.' In this way literary codes become part of the object of literary scholarship. (Hence, the object of comparative literature also comprises literary codes as far as their validity extends beyond national and linguistic boundaries.) Let me emphasize that the study of literary codes cannot replace the study of the literary communication-situation. Rather, they should complement each other. Likewise, the literary text remains an object of literary scholarship, provided that the text is related to a particular communication-situation and is conceived as a product of coding to be decoded by one or more recipients.

b. The study of the literary communication-situation and the literary code, that is to say, the conventions which have guided the production and reception of texts which under certain conditions have been accepted as literature, involves the introduction of new methods. For instance, psychological research is necessary to trace the relation between the aesthetic component of the reception of literature and the general cognitive and emotional functions of the recipient. Sociological research is necessary in order to establish which groups of recipients possess a sufficiently similar interest and level of development to expect that under given conditions they will react similarly to given texts. Sociology can contribute to the establishment of the criteria by means of which the semiotic communities can be described that are, in fact, the makers of literary history. The appeal to psychology and sociology leads to designing tests and questionnaires, as far as problems of contemporary literature are at issue. This opens the way to the experimental study of literature.
Research with respect to older literature necessitates the reconstruction of the historical communication-situation. Of course, such reconstructions have been undertaken in the past, although the role of the recipient was often underestimated. The lack of reliable sources is usually a problem. The attention paid to the historical reader leads to the analysis of literary criticism at the time of the text-production and after, but also to the examination of historical documents.\(^{33}\)

The reconstruction of historical communication-situations should be geared towards the discovery of recurrent readers' reactions which point to specific conventions partly represented in the texts. In this way, research into readers' behaviour would contribute to the reconstruction of the codes which have induced readers to accept certain texts as literature.

Semiotics will have to offer the framework for describing the codes of literature, but at this moment the semiotic apparatus can hardly complete that task. The method of analysis and description of literary codes cannot be discussed here. Suffice to say that one should resort to structural semantics, including the description of semantic fields and their mutual relations, as well as to the examination of text coherence, including the description of narratological and other compositional principles. In view of the aesthetic effect achieved by literary texts, the codes of literature should be compared and contrasted with non-literary codes, or codes that were once accepted as literary but have since been denied that function. This stage of research is pre-eminentlly comparative. It elaborates on a concept first described by the Russian Formalists, viz., the succession of literary systems.

c. The extension and specification of the object of literary scholarship leads to a new vision of the scientific relevance of the study of literature. As a result of the intensified attention given to various reading publics and to reception-contexts, a sharp distinction is made between reader and researcher, between the historical reception of texts and one's own interpretation and evaluation. Different from New Criticism or its British counterpart, practical criticism, the scientific study of literature does not aim at the handing down of literary values, nor at the creation and preservation of a literary tradition. However, within the new study of literature the handing down of literary values and the creation of literary traditions are objects of research. Within the new paradigm the scientific

study of literature on the one hand, and literary criticism and the teaching of literature on the other, are strictly differentiated. In my view this will benefit the scientific study as well as the criticism and teaching of literature. If one accepts the distinction between pure and applied science, literary criticism and the didactics of literature which utilize the results of literary scholarship can be considered forms of applied science.

Since it is not directed exclusively at the investigation of the historical series of existing texts, but it involves also the examination of the structure, and the acceptance and rejection of literary codes, the new study of literature has implications for both the present and the future. Eliot’s idea that the appearance of a new work changes only slightly the existing tradition 34 may need qualification. Parts of the historical series can be refuted almost completely by the appearance of new texts and thereupon be relegated to oblivion. The knowledge of particular literary codes, possibly not more than a hundred years old (e.g. Symbolism), can be lost by large parts of the reading public and may not be acquired by new groups of readers. Nowadays, the interpretation of the main texts is no longer in the hands of a couple of experts who aim at the approximation of the one adequate interpretation, but differing interpretations are justified by differences in interest and reception-context. In this way the new study of literature has emancipated itself from the traditional conception of the preservation of literary and cultural values.

If some people consider this a loss, there is a clear gain in the possible insight into general problems of aesthetics. Knowledge of the co-existence and succession of different literary systems will bring us closer to the solution of the problem of the aesthetic effect of texts. This problem may belong largely to the province of psychology, but it is of crucial importance for the explanation of the development of literary history. Hypotheses about the rise and decline of literary codes in different cultures will be very useful for experimental aesthetics. 35 If only because of this perspective, comparative literature should not restrict itself to the study of contact relations. Experimental aesthetics would profit precisely from data concerning developments which have occurred completely independently of each other, with the result that the general aspects of the acceptance and rejection of literary codes become visible.

34 Eliot, 50

Apart from its relevance for the study of aesthetics, literary scholarship may provide data that can be utilized by cultural history, cognitive psychology, sociology, communication theory, and various other disciplines. As the scientific study of literature becomes more strictly distinguished from the criticism and didactics of literature, the reliability of its results will grow accordingly.

d. As a result of the blending of the scientific study of all literature and the handing down of valuable texts, of analysis and evaluative interpretation, the scientific relevance of literary scholarship and its social justification have in the past been confused. Until the present moment the preservation, extension and reshaping of the canon has been a major factor in the social legitimization of the study of literature, including comparative literature, in particular if the latter is engaged in the definition of a canon of 'world literature'.

In other respects the social legitimization of comparative literature has also been rather explicit. Baldensperger believed that comparative literature could lead towards a 'nouvel humanisme'. Others saw comparative literature as an instrument for arousing admiration of the spiritual products of other peoples and, therefore, as a contribution to world peace.

Whatever the value of these legitimizations, new ones have sprung up. In agreement with the new paradigm, the study of literature as a successful form of human communication appears to be of great social relevance in a society that is characterized by misunderstanding and noise. More insight into the way in which knowledge is being transmitted in fiction that appeals to a reading public which wishes to seclude itself from similar information in other media, could induce governments to improve the conditions of the production and consumption of literature. (As to the consumption of literature, a prime factor would be the improvement of the teaching of literature in secondary schools.) Literary scholarship which restricted itself to the study of the text and only the text could never determine the relation between the cognitive function of literary texts and the transmission of knowledge in non-literary texts. Comparative literature can play a crucial role here, because it may

36 J.C. Brandt Corstius, 'De ontwikkeling van het begrip wereldderaturuur,' De Vlaamse Gids 43 (1957) 582-600; cf. also Wellek's summarizing definition: Today world literature may mean simply all literature, as in the title of many books, such as Otto Hauser's, or it may mean a canon of excellent works from many languages, as when one says that this or that book or author belongs to world literature' in Discriminations, 15.

37 Baldensperger, 28
elucidate the relation between the poetic and the referential functions (Roman Jakobson) in texts of different cultures. It may provide a spectrum of social functions of literature, enriching our own views on the social justification of literature.

Since the new paradigm in the study of literature has shown certain problems which can be solved by comparative literature, the future for comparative literature seems bright. The method of immanent interpretation, New Criticism, and other schools that emphasized the autonomy of the text were in principle incompatible with the comparative method. This is confirmed by the history of comparative literature in Italy, where Croce and his fellows have managed to reduce comparative literature to a marginal discipline.38

Some scholars have misinterpreted the new paradigm as a return to the old positivism.39 The misunderstanding follows from the failure to acknowledge the historical perspective and to appreciate the methodological reflection in the new paradigm. Many of the achievements of the immanent method, such as the concentration on the creative moment (Croce, Wellek) and the attention to the significance of formal features (Cleanth Brooks) remain unimpaired and should be assimilated by the new programme, based on semiotics and communication theory.

If comparative literature does not accept the challenge of the new paradigm and does not contribute to the solution of the problems that are discussed now in the borderland between the study of literature on the one hand, and psychology, sociology, cultural history, communication theory and aesthetics on the other, it will not have much chance of surviving as an academic discipline. The recent congresses of the ICLA, which all gave considerable space to theoretical issues, warrant a moderate optimism.40 But at many universities the curricula of comparative literature are about the same as they were twenty or thirty years ago. Of course, there are great differences, locally and nationally. The discussion of the various conceptions of our discipline has now gained some momentum and will certainly be continued with vivacity.

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38 Cf. Franco Meregalli, 'Per la letteratura comparata,' Nuova antologia 528 (September 1976), No. 2109, 54
39 E.g., Hugo Dyserinck, Komparatistik: Eine Einführung (Bonn: Bouvier 1977), in particular 173-4