

**EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION**

It is not exaggerated to claim that this inaugural issue of *Cahiers ivoiriens d'études comparées (CIEC)/ Ivorian Journal of Comparative Studies (IJCS)* is way overdue considering the time it took to become a reality. In fact, the project started in early 2010 and four years later it came to fruition.

That the journal is based in an African university –namely Felix Houphouet-Boigny University at Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire– should not be a reason to frown. Rather, this needs to be construed as a bold stand. In fact, the rationale behind this undertaking is that we just did not want to be on the periphery any longer when it comes to talking about the so-called subaltern or “other” who was, most often than not, spoken for. This issue attempt in the so-called Third World to describe the current condition of comparative literature as well as its prospects in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This implies, first and foremost, exercising in definitions. And yet, defining comparative literature is a Herculean task that one may want to attempt because there has been a great deal of intense bickering and fussing about its identity. Not quite sure of what its subject and object might be, the critics of comparative literature pretended not to know if it were a field of study or a discipline. Additionally, because comparison looks like its main catchphrase, comparative literature has almost always been apprehended as a matter of comparing national literatures, as Descartes would, in order to disclose the hidden truth behind the lines and beneath the surfaces. Despite difficulties in agreeing on a stark definition, it would appear that only attempts by practitioners of comparative literature have the potential to prevail. Thus, Rey Chow's description of the discipline looks more enlightening. He writes,

More than the word *literature*, it is the interest in “comparative” which has allowed the practitioners of comparative literature to distinguish their work from that done within strictly national-linguistic boundaries and to say, with some rigor that comparative literature is not simply a matter of adding, juxtaposing one national literature to another so that its existence is simply – as many of comparative literature's hostile opponents in national literature departments would charge – redundant and superfluous. (Chow 107)

Clearly, critics with arguments of redundancy and superfluosity speak about studies with approaches present in English departments and “foreign language” departments where twists of ethnocentrism and nationalism and the search for exoticism prevail.

When the French comparatists Pierre Brunel, Claude Pichois and Andre-Michel Rousseau claimed that comparative literature was a “methodical art”, they admittedly addressed a key issue in the field: the lack of methodology and approach to the other’s literature. However, they were betrayed by the fact of wanting to “describe, understand and *sample*” other national literatures (Brunel et al, 174). Therefore, underlying this endeavor, as we can easily see, is not the genuine willingness to learn about the “other” and interact with him/her on an equal foot. It is rather a way to know this other in view of better categorizing and dominating him or her.

No wonder, Susan Bassnett wrote in 1993 that “[t]oday, comparative literature in one sense dead. The narrowness of the binary distinction, the unhelpfulness of the ahistorical approach, the complacent shortsightedness of the Literature-as-universal-civilizing-force approach have all contributed to its demise”(Bassnett 47). Clearly, the comparative literature referred to by Bassnett is that of the “founding fathers,” i.e., a Eurocentered comparative literature and one that satisfies the exoticism of Western culture samplers. It is self-referential in that it brings everything to the only Europe and its values and worldviews. We call this “old comparative literature,” and as such, there is a need to redefine the objectives and aims of the discipline.

Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Ngugi wa Thiong’O among others, who are postcolonial successors to the “founding fathers” of comparative literature, understand the “field” as being a site where mere comparison of national literatures and languages should not take hold. It is a discipline to be salvaged from the grips of Eurocentralized rationalizations of things non-European and attempts to undifferentiated that which is characteristically different from. For example, Said is of the opinion that ought to be a new comparative literature. Edward Said believes that “the new comparative style is metacritical, transnational, intertextual” (Preface to *Literature and Society*, ix).

In the same vein, Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, author of *Comparative Literature*, suggests the discipline be intercultural and inclusive. He thus speaks of Comparative Cultural Studies. This proposal better captures the concerns of postcolonial critics who seek to make comparative literature a place of interaction between cultures and peoples in the global village. That's why Ngugi speaks about moving the center. By that the critics means, first of all, "to move the centre from its assumed location in the West to a multiplicity of spheres in all the cultures of the world" (Ngugi, Preface, xvi). Secondly, he contemplates the "freeing of world cultures from the restrictive walls of nationalism, class, race and gender" (Ibid. xvii). This new comparative literature, one that appropriates the above concerns and delves deeply into bringing cultures together, resonates with *CIEC/IJCS*, thereby the name "comparative studies" for our journal.

The object of this inaugural issue of *CIEC/IJCS* is to investigate and show how comparative literature fares in the 21<sup>st</sup> century both in areas where it originated and in postcolonial spaces where it is rather apprehended as an implement of intercultural dialogue and inclusion. In sum, the first issue is an overview of old and new tendencies in comparative literature in Africa and around the world. Fundamentally, we seek to challenge the monolithic world order for the coming of age of a cosmopolitan community where linguistic, national and disciplinary barriers are diluted, less rigid and tolerant. In this regard, we are closer to *the* objective, that of jump-starting comparative literature when it revealed itself to be moribund. The point is that we have to disclaim its death.

This issue comprises ten (10) article contributions and a review essay by authors of diverse background and origins. Not only do the papers cut across disciplines (literature, linguistics, cultural studies, philosophy, among others) thereby dealing with the merits of intercultural exchange in the age of globalization, but also they come in different languages including English, French, German and Spanish in order to espouse the new spirit of comparatism both in terms of the linguistic diversity and the content-based considerations that address comparative studies in our age.

There are mainly two categories of texts featured by this inaugural issue. The first category deals the state of the field of comparative literature and interculturality in the 21<sup>st</sup>

century. The second attempt to show how intercultural and intertextual strategies deploy to show that after all we are in a world with more commonalities than ever realized. Thus, Nisrine Malli's contribution suggests that those with interest in comparative studies contemplate a critical and nuanced reflection on the stakes and merits of the field in our age. Her reflection bases itself on writing practices and strategies (translation and intertextuality) that locate the text in a luminal space where there is interplay between alterity, the individual and the latter's language and culture as well as the act of writing itself.

Ekoungoun Jean-Francis centers his paper on African texts which lie in need of interpretive vitality through genetic criticism, an archeological process of sorts whereby the critic researches the different states and shapes that a given text traversed before coming to be. He thus seeks to push back the boundaries of comparative studies in order for the field to be resonant with our time.

Katherine Fry examines the cleavage that has emerged in the field between scholars who envisage a ground of comparison and move embrace towards cultural studies –which emphasizes ontological and epistemological difference – and those who want to retain the 'literariness' of the discipline, which necessitates articulating some underlying form of universality shared by all literary artifacts.

Lacina Yéo believes that, more than ever, globalization intensified intercultural contacts which become more and more complexified. Here the task of scholars is to examine these complex cultural imbrications. He therefore attempts to shed some light on cultural transfer between three continents: Africa, Europe and America. Yeo's survey of this trilateral cultural transfer is an interdisciplinary approach seeking to unravel common cultural foci that need to be explored in order to rid of world of self-seclusion and fear of difference.

Robert Fotsing Mangoua's piece brings together Africa and Ancient Greece. The author wonders how and why the Sisyphus myth has been appropriated in Africa. Using texts by such African authors as Mongo Beti, Andre Brink, Célestin Monga and Alioune Fantoure, among others, Fotsing Mangoua explores the forms and meanings that these writers bestowed on Homer's story.

El Hadji Cheikh Kandji's three-part study is an intercultural approach to pre-burial practices throughout human history. Cheikh Kandji first surveys pre-burial practices and customs among selected peoples and pauses particularly on those practices during European Middle Ages. Lastly, Kandji compares monotheist funeral practices with those in currency in Ancient Greece using Sir Thomas Browne's *Hydrotaphia* as basis of his exemplification.

Karen Yaworski's study deals with Danny Laferrière's novel *Comment faire l'amour avec un Nègre sans se fatiguer* (*How to Make Love to a Negro Without Getting Tired* in English). The author shows how Laferrière's work is a parody of a pedagogical genre interacts with his parodic pedagogy of identity stereotypes. Karen takes the reader to discover how the Haitian-born Canadian author treats identity stereotypes to instantiate performativity and connects to pedagogy, perspective, and power.

M. Charles Desiré Ndré surveys in "De Senghor à Gates: Prolégomènes à une esthétique et ontologie nègre" thoughts on aesthetics and ontology by Black Africans from the Yoruba in Africa to the Diaspora in the Americas. Ndré contrasts African understanding of interindividual relationship –"being-force"– with the human condition in contexts where the otherized individual is reduced to an incommunicable substance.

In "*El Cid en la escuela*," an article in Spanish, Yao Nguettia looks at how school children are socialized in the hopes that they imitate the "great men" in Spain's history through textbooks on the medieval hero, democracy and the Franco system. Ultimately, Richard Taye Olayekin intends to show in "On Quine's Methodological Infirmity of Ethics: The Third Way" that attempts to falsify Quine's argument and show ethics as sharing common characteristics with science are either going to mutilate ethics beyond repair or be doomed to failure.

At last, in order to be complete this issue is inclusive of a book review seeking, through the Internet medium, to make local and inter-national scholarship known on the global level. The review of Abdehman Beggar's 2012 *Ethique et rupture bouraouiennes* is an essay that attempts to legitimize comparison between authors of different worlds – the developed and enlightened world and those deemed formerly uncultured and savage. Apparently, comparison between Nietzsche and Bouraoui may reasonably sound paradoxical and even unbecoming because of

their differences in many regards. And yet, Beggar shows that comparison is sometimes right. Hedi Bouraoui, as a Tunisian-born French-educated and Canadian scholar, is brought on the comparison table where Nietzsche lies open to assessment.

As can be seen all these contributions, one way or the other, not only are exercises in comparison but also they all inscribe in the new spirit of comparatism or comparative studies. Clearly, comparative literature is not dead. It is faring well and proving itself very necessary, and even indispensable, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *CIEC/IJCS* thus aims to bring diversity forth to a wider readership and partake in the dynamic and changing world of comparative studies. We therefore invite readers, editors and writers to join with us and break the walls of mistrust, distrust, extremism and intolerance towards difference in our world.

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