

## 3. Comparative Poetics Today: Not Global without the Middle East.

### Fomeshi Behnam Mirzababazadeh

Ph. D. Candidate of English Literature  
Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics  
College of Literature and Humanities  
Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran  
ORCID iD: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6821-9699>  
E-Mail: [behnam.mirzababazadeh@gmail.com](mailto:behnam.mirzababazadeh@gmail.com)

### Ghasemi Parvin

Professor Emeritus of English Literature  
Shiraz University, Iran  
ORCID iD: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0873-571X>  
Phone Number: +98-71-36134534 (office)  
Email: [PGhasemi@rose.shirazu.ac.ir](mailto:PGhasemi@rose.shirazu.ac.ir)

### Anushiravani Alireza

Associate Professor of Comparative Literature  
College of Literature & Humanities  
Shiraz University Shiraz Iran  
ORCID iD: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7958-9289>  
Phone Number: ++98-71-36134500 (office)  
Email Address: [anushir@shirazu.ac.ir](mailto:anushir@shirazu.ac.ir)

### Abstract:

*Two trends played a significant role in the development of Comparative poetics: a movement toward literary theory and a movement toward non-Western cultures in comparative literature studies. In the second half of the twentieth century Western scholars of comparative literature, including Étienne, Weisstein, Praver, Liu and Miner, paid attention to literary theory in comparative literary studies. Inspired by the multiculturalism of the 1990s, comparatists made efforts to broaden the canon and include non-Western literatures. Comparatists have followed Miner's anti-West-centrism and they have also failed to expand the geographical frontiers of his Comparative Poetics. While Far Eastern and Indian critical traditions have played a significant role in the field of comparative poetics, the Middle Eastern tradition and Persian literature have been neglected. The joint efforts of the scholars of Middle Eastern literatures to write in English and/or to translate their works into English will provide that critical tradition with a voice in the not yet global dialogue of comparative poetics. The emergent plurivocal conversation of a comparative poetics that includes Middle East will open new horizons to our cross-cultural perspective.*

### Keywords:

*Comparative Poetics; Earl Miner; Comparative Literature; Literary Theory; Non-Western Cultures; the Middle East; Persian Literature.*

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## Major Figures in Comparative Poetics

A German philologist, Moriz Haupt (1808–1874) promoted the idea of “comparative poetics” and a natural history of the epic in particular. He “studied the analogical development of the epic in Greece, France, Scandinavia, Germany, Serbia, and Finland” (Wellek, 1968: 20). During the second half of the twentieth century comparative poetics turned into a serious field of study in comparative literature. Even though Miner’s theoretical discussions of comparative poetics is known as the best thought through, he is not the forerunner in the field. Among those who contributed to the emergence of what we know today as “comparative poetics” four are the most influential; Étiemble, Liu, Miner and Fokkema.

René Étiemble (1909–2002) was a French scholar with expertise in Middle Eastern and Asian cultures who demanded comparative literary theory or poetics. Along with Wellek and Remak, he belonged to the discipline's golden age (Tötösy de Zepetnek, 1999: 8). He taught at Sorbonne University, Sorbonne-Nouvelle University, University of Chicago, University of Alexandria and University of Montpellier. He mentioned, numerously, the “need to purify oneself of all chauvinistic pride” (qtd. in Palumbo-Liu, 2011: 47-48). And now, following his suggestion, European students of comparative literature are advised to study also at least one non-European language (Fokkema, 2013: vi). He vigorously asserted the necessity of knowing the literatures of all cultures including African and little-studied Asian literatures. His *Comparaison n'est pas raison: La crise de la littérature compare* (1963) (The Crisis in Comparative Literature (1966)) is one of the most important texts of modern comparative literary studies. In the same book he called for recasting comparative literature to meet the demands of future demographics. Etiemble “expressed serious concerns about the displacement of the study of literature and literariness which they felt should be the focus of comparative literature following the impact of multiculturalist and cultural studies prioritization of non-literary texts” (Mukherjee, 2013: 39). He also criticized conservatism, provincialism and even nationalism in French school of comparative literature (Stallknecht and Frenz, 1961: 27). Furthermore, he challenged French school’s overemphasis on positivism; he asserted “historical method must be joined with the spirit of criticism, material research must be combined with textual interpretation, and the prudence of socialists must be associated with boldness of aestheticians. Only in this way can we endow significant topics and some appropriate approaches in our discipline” (qtd. in Cao, 2013: 35). At the triannual congress of the International Comparative Literature Association/Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée in Paris (ICLA/AILC) he delivered his lecture on the revival of comparative literature in China and predicted that the third phase in the development of comparative literature could possibly happen in China (Wang and Liu, 2011: 7). That prediction inspired the expansion of comparative poetics. He believed literary comparison paved the

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way for his better grasp of literary aesthetic (Palumbo-Liu, 2011: 49). For Etiemble to study non-western literature including Chinese, Japanese, or Indian poetry—in Hindi, Urdu, or Tamil—in Arabic and Persian poetry was not enough. To him it is “senseless to keep on ignoring the Urgo-Finnish languages that have given us the Kalevala, Mihály Vörösmarty, and Endre Ady” (Guillen, 1993: 86). He believed that comparative study must be intercultural. Two years after *Comparaison n’est pas raison: La crise de la littérature compare* was published, Wellek wrote of Etiemble that “in principle he is surely right in asking for a comparative poetics, for a genuinely universal study of world literature” (Wellek, 1965: 335). Etiemble along with René Wellek, who “fought so hard for a new, not Eurocentric but planetary comparativism” were Miner’s main sources of inspiration (Villanueva, 2013: 50).

James J.Y. Liu (1926-1986) was a Chinese scholar who supported the idea of the comparative study of literary theories of historically unrelated critical traditions, such as the Chinese and the Western. *The Art of Chinese Poetry* (1962), *Chinese Theories of Literature* (1975) and “Toward a Synthesis of Chinese and Western Theories of Literature” (1977) indicate his theories of poetic criticism. In these works, he attempted “to describe how poetry and some of the poetic elements are able to bridge gaps across cultures”; he looked “closely at the seemingly chaotic threads of literary theories in China, makes comparisons between these theories and similar theories from the West, and then attempts to draw up some universal literary theory through such a dialogue” (Wang and Liu, 2011: 3). His thought was always upon “the nature of Chinese poetic expression, how to induce systems of literary theory from the often unsystematic and fragmentary modes of critical discourse in China” and on “how to build on the comparative study of Western and Chinese theories of literature to develop fruitful methods of practical criticism and interpretation” (Lynn qtd. in Wang and Liu, 2011: 3). Liu worked on the poetics of not only West and China, but also literary theories from other parts of the world and looked for some commonalities beyond cultural differences. He worked in the field of comparative poetics and tried to introduce Chinese aesthetics to the Western world. His creative application of Abrams’ theoretical doctrine of the four important elements—universe, work, artist and audience—approached the level of comparative poetics (Wang, 2014: 424). Miner admitted his indebtedness to Liu and dedicated his *Comparative Poetics* to him.

Douwe Fokkema (1931–2011), the ex-president of the International Comparative Literature Association (1985-1988) and the distinguished professor of Utrecht University, was a Dutch comparatist and Orientalist who published important works in the field of Chinese literature and comparative literature including *Perfect Worlds: Utopian Fiction in China and the West* (2011). As “one of the first European literary theorists who introduced the theory of cultural relativism in comparative literature studies,” he played a significant role in “the issue of canon formation and reformation by referring to non-Western literary experiences” (Wang, 2004: 172). With Elrud Kunne-Ibsch and A. J. A. van Zoest, he co-edited *Comparative Poetics* (1975). His considerable efforts



paved the way for more people to appreciate the value of non-Western literary theories. He was a major figure in the field of Chinese-Western comparative literary studies and attacked the West-centric view of world literature held by the European researchers in favor of a global view. He perceived the potential of Eastern cultures to accelerate this radical shift.

Earl Roy Miner (1927–2004) was an American scholar of Japanese poetry. He taught at Williams College, UCLA and Princeton. He also taught on a Fulbright lectureship at the Chinese University of Hong Kong both an undergraduate course on American literature and a graduate seminar on comparative poetics. He performed as the president of several societies and associations including the International Comparative Literature Association (1988–1991). Although he was not the first to study East-West poetic relations and to challenge the traditional Eurocentric or West-centric mode of comparative literature and theoretical studies, he transcended the achievements of his contemporary scholars including Étienne, Liu and Fokkema. Several years after Miner's *The Japanese tradition in British and American literature* (1958) had been published, scholars asserted that this work “has more than justified the extension of comparative studies to East-West literary relations” (Bertocci et al., 1963: 138). He developed a “comparative poetics” where “different constellations and systems of literature, genres, and fundamental constants are expressed discursively by creators and thinkers throughout history, in the East as in the West” (Villanueva, 2013: 50). In fact, his book, *Comparative Poetics* (1990) played a decisive role in developing what we know today as comparative poetics. His ambition to bring the literary traditions of the West, up next to those of the Far East for a systematic comparison has been admired (Hare, 2010: 236). He was also an influential figure in the field of world literature. Although he rarely employed the term, his studies were so close to the present studies of world literature. His global approach unlike the West-centric attitude of practitioners of comparative literature of the time provided equal opportunity for presenting Chinese and Western literary theories.

Later we would return to Miner to discuss his ideas as expressed in his works, particularly *Comparative Poetics* (1990). But, before that it is illuminating to elaborate on the context that led to the emergence of comparative poetics. Two trends played a significant role in the context: a movement toward literary theory in comparative literature studies and a movement toward non-Western cultures in comparative literature studies.

## **A Movement toward Literary Theory in Comparative Literature Studies**

While literary theory in the West started with Plato and Aristotle, and continued through Longinus, the medieval thinkers and so on, critical traditions in the Far East, India and the Middle East developed independent of the Western counterpart. *Wenxin Diaolong* (The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons) by Liu Hsieh as the basic work of Chinese literary criticism approximately dates back to 465–522. Liu Hsieh along with other early Chinese literary critics dealt with issues such as the ethical function of literature, literary genres and styles and the literary language. Ruminations on

literature in Japan can be traced back to *Genji Monogatari* (The Tale of Genji) by Murasaki Shikibu of the 10th century. Other significant figures are the aesthetician, actor and playwright Zeami Motokiya (c. 1363 – c. 1443) and the haiku poet Matsuo Basho (1644–1694). Middle Eastern literary theory was indebted to Aristotle's *Poetics* in its early phases, but it chose a different path from its Western counterpart. Al Farabi (870–950), Ibn Sina (Avicenna) (980- 1037) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes) (1126–1198) are the best known literary theoreticians of the Middle East. To them, poetics belongs to the logic; the idea is in sharp contrast to the ideas of Aristotle as expressed in *Poetics*. Literary theoreticians of the Middle East discussed imagination and the ethical function of literature among other things. Literary theory in India can be traced back to Bharata's *Natya Shastra* (The Treatise on Drama), composed sometime between the 3rd century BC and the 5th century AD. The culmination of Indian literary theory belonged to the works of Anandavardhana and Abhinavagupta in the 10th and the 11th century (Gafrik, 2013: 65). Different critical traditions in various parts of the world have their own literary theory each.

Traditional literary studies fall into three categories: literary theory, literary history and literary criticism. While literary history was traditionally dominant in literary studies, literary theory was not entirely neglected. "Poetics" may signify two related concepts: theory of literature and literary theory. "Poetics" in "comparative poetics" refers to both concepts. Comparative poetics refers to the comparative study of theories from different critical traditions. In the Western academia Miner's *Comparative Poetics* is the best known work that compared literary theories of the different parts of the world. However a long time before that, Eastern scholars had started to compare literary theories. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), a Ceylonese Tamil philosopher, metaphysician, historian and philosopher of Indian art, worked on comparative poetics. His works including *Transformation of Nature in Art* (1934) and *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art* (1956) are among the first in the field. In the West, Étiemble claimed for the serious engagement of comparatists with poetics. Ulrich Weisstein, in *The Introduction to Einführung in die Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft* (1968) (*Comparative Literature and Literary Theory: Survey and Introduction* (1974)), dealt with comparative literary theory. Siegbert S. Praver (1925-2012) in his *Comparative Literary Studies: An Introduction* (1973) refers to comparative study of literary theories as a branch of comparative literary studies. James J.Y. Liu in his *The Art of Chinese Poetry* (1962) and *Chinese Theories of Literature* (1975) compared Chinese literary theories to theories from the West. While studies on the Western literary theories are based on similarities because "Western countries have a common source of literary criticism", comparisons between Eastern and Western poetics, that belong to different cultural systems, indicate strong differences and complementarities between the theories (Cao, 2013: 68).

Miner in "Some Theoretical and Methodological Topics for Comparative Literature" (1987) criticized comparative literature studies for not being comparative in any radical way. To him the results of comparative studies, such as to comparing the treatment of nature by Wordsworth and Du Fu or Matsuo Basho, are seldom impressive (Miner, 1987: 123). To Miner, there was no reason to dismiss popular literary studies, i. e. comparisons based on a common culture, generic study or



literary movements, but Western students were no longer interested in such studies. He asserted, “[p]robably the most striking development in the past fifteen years has been the inclusion of literary theory as a subject for comparative literature. But much of what passes for literary theory in the West has little that is genuinely comparative” (Miner, 1987: 123). Miner diagnoses the problem and suggests a solution. His suggestion was a theoretical topic for comparative literature studies: comparative poetics. In 1990 his *Comparative Poetics* was an attempt to elucidate the relationship between literary theory and comparative literary studies.

Comparative poetics may focus on “the literary aesthetics without factual links; thus, it provides a valid basis for the literary theory entering the field of Comparative Literature” (Cao, 2013: 68). While programs of national literature could often resist, or “at least remained indifferent to the sorts of theory that did not emanate from their own cultural spheres”, “comparative literature frequently became the site of literary theory” (Culler, 2006: 85). Culler contrasted the relationship between comparative literature department and literary theory with the relationship between other departments and literary theory.

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE WAS THUS DISTINGUISHED BY ITS INTEREST IN ADDRESSING THEORETICAL ISSUES, AS WELL AS KNOWLEDGABLY IMPORTING AND EXPLORING ‘FOREIGN’ THEORETICAL DISCOURSES. IT WAS THE PLACE WHERE THOSE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE NATURE AND METHODS OF LITERARY STUDY BEGGED IN OTHER LITERATURE DEPARTMENTS WERE TAKEN UP, ARGUED ABOUT, EVEN MADE THE FOCUS OF TEACHING AND RESEARCH. (CULLER, 2006: 85)

### **A Movement toward non-Western Cultures in Comparative Literature Studies**

Beginning of comparative literature can be traced back to the idea of *Weltliteratur* as expressed by Goethe (1749-1832). Near the end of his life he remarked

I am more and more convinced that poetry is the universal possession of mankind, revealing itself everywhere and at all times, in hundreds and hundreds of men. . . . I therefore like to look about in foreign nations, and advise everyone to do the same. National literature is now a rather unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach. (Qtd. in Gafrik, 2010: 164)

His idea of *Weltliteratur* was global and covered non-Western literatures including Persian and Chinese. Goethe’s *Weltliteratur* contributed to the emergence of comparative literature. Hugo Meltzel, who founded the first journal of comparative literature, followed Goethe’s idea. He was ready to accept papers in ten languages and worked with writers from the Eastern countries such as Turkey, India, Egypt and Japan (Anuhiravani, 2011: 33). But as Moretti observed comparative literature went to a wrong path from the early stages. He believes “comparative literature has not lived up to these beginnings. It’s been a much more modest intellectual enterprise, fundamentally limited to Western Europe, and mostly revolving around the river Rhine (German philologists



working on French literature). Not much more” (Moretti, 2000: 54). A factor contributing to this deviation was French school of comparative literature and its narrow-minded nationalism. However, the discipline managed to survive despite the deficiency.

Traditionally comparative literature was practiced with a very narrow view. In many cases it was nationalistic. Even when it moved the boundaries of a single nation, it was restricted to a particular region. Damrosch referred to Ernst Robert Curtius’s *Europäische Literatur und Lateinisches Mittelalter* (1948) (European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages) and Erich Auerbach’s *Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* (1946) (Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature). Although their announced focus was on Europe and on Western literature, the works were dedicated mostly to just a few countries. “So often praised for its remarkable range across Western literature, indeed, Mimesis might just as well have been subtitled *The Representation of Reality in Italy and France* —home to fifteen of the book’s twenty central texts” (Damrosch, 2008: 482). Fokkema criticized the unbalance dominating what European writers sell for world literature.

Raymond Queneau’s *Histoire des littératures* (3 vols. 1955–1958) devotes one volume to literatures in French, one to Western literatures, and one to ancient, oriental, and oral literatures. Chinese literature is allotted 130 pages and the literatures of India 140 pages, but the literatures in French are given 12 times more space. In his *Weltliteratur* (1989) Hans Mayer ignored the non-European world completely. (Fokkema, 2007: 1291)

With the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century scholar challenged the practice of comparative literature which was affected by French school. Viktor Maksimovich Zhirmunsky (1891-1971) who became the Vice-President of International Comparative Literature Association upon its establishment in 1955, repeatedly pointed to the Eurocentrism of comparative literature in the West (Maslov, 2008: 128). Werner P. Friedrich, the founder of *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, criticized the West-orientation of the discipline (Anushiravani, 2011: 35). Welles in the “Crisis of Comparative Literature” attacked the cultural grandiosity inherent the practice of comparatists. In his *Comparaison n’est pas raison: La crise de la littérature compare* (1963) Etiemble questioned the narrow-minded nationalism of comparative literature. A. Owen Aldridge in *Comparative Literature: Matter and Method* (1969) condemned the Western comparatists’ ignorance of Eastern literatures (Aldridge, 1969: 3). In 1973 Praver in his *Comparative Literary Studies: An Introduction* criticized Andre Gide’s view which was limited to Europe (Praver, 1973: 4). To him one of the duties of comparatists is to expand the geographical frontiers of comparative literature to eradicate the last traces of cultural imperialism (Ibid., 7). This ideas led to the appearance of some new studies and taking some actions including Vincent A. McCrossen’s early “What Comparative Literature Might Be and Seldom Is,” in *Proceedings of the Second Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association*, the East-West comparative conferences at Indiana

University in the 60s, Anthony Yu’s “Problems and Prospects in Chinese-Western Literary Relations” (1974) in *Yearbook of General and Comparative Literature* and Alfred Owen Aldridge’s *The Reemergence of World Literature: A Study of Asia and the West* (1986). But they “had little influence on the mainstream of Comparative Literature” and “passed mainly unheeded in their time” (André, 2003: 293).

The efforts came to some fruition in 1980s. Since the late 1980s, handbooks and general studies in the field of comparative and world literature showed an inclination toward discussion and inclusion of non-Western works. In 1987 Miner asserted “the aims of our study are too important to be left to the definitions of any single one of us or to the methods devised in any single literary tradition. Such individual or chauvinistic pride would defeat the aims of comparative study of literature” (Miner, 1987: 140). The change was slow and comparative literature had to wait for the last decade of the century to move toward its genuine global view.

In the last decade of the twentieth century the situation of the world changed dramatically. As the Cold War ended international communication and interaction increased radically. Modern technology facilitated the accessibility of information in an unprecedented way. Increased migration made encounters and dialogues much easier. The confluence of these factors in the early 1990s led to a greater openness of the West to the wider world, hence to the emergence of multiculturalism in the global arena. The multiculturalism of the period has been manifested in the comparative literary studies in the 1990s as the title of the Bernheimer’s ACLA report, *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* (1995), indicates. The evolution of cultural diversity influenced comparative and world literature. In 1991 the 13th International Comparative Literature Association Congress was held in Tokyo, the first time that the Congress had been held outside of Europe and the Americas. Since the mid-1990s the situation of the publications changed with Caws and Prendergast’s *HarperCollins World Reader* and *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*. The former included some 475 authors from all over the world and the latter included two thousand pages of non-Western material along with four thousand pages of European and American texts (Damrosch, 2008: 482). Earl Miner, the author of *Comparative Poetics* (1990), criticized the West-centrism of the discipline. Susan Bassnett in *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* challenged the restriction of comparative literary studies to Europe and asked for a different view of the discipline (Bassnett, 1993: 17). Charles Bernheimer in his ACLA report, titled *Comparative literature in the age of Multiculturalism*, questioned the West-centrism of comparative literature; to improve the situation he suggested some solutions including translation to English and employing professors from non-Western cultures. In the following years the discipline moved from multiculturalism of the last decade of the twentieth century to the globalization of the twenty-first century.

With the beginning of the new millennium a new era began for the discipline. Comparative literature realized the necessity of the globalization, hence the discipline moved toward world





literature, or one may argue that it returned to its original idea. The view was further supported in the last ACLA report, *Comparative Literature in the Age of Globalization* (2006), prepared by Haun Saussy. "Globalization has led the traditionally elite domain of literary studies to expand and has caused comparative literature to develop into cultural studies and the field of world literature" (Wang, 2010: 9-10). Pascale Casanova in *La République mondiale des lettres* (1999) offers a global view of literature. Franco Moretti in "Conjectures on World Literature" articles (2000) (2003) and *Maps, Graphs, Trees* (2005) offers a global view of the discipline and proposes his "distant reading". David Damrosch in *What Is World Literature?* (2003) covers the literatures of non-Western world. "The dissolution of Eurocentrism is evident in Damrosch's insightful book, which primarily concerns non-Western literary works, sometimes in their original languages but often in translation, reflecting the great progress made outside the mainstream by Western comparatists" (Wang, 2010: 5). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her *Death of a Discipline* (2003) announced the inefficiency of Eurocentric comparative literature. Emily Apter in *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (2006) refers to the role of translation in developing comparative literature to its global level. John Pizer in *The Idea of World Literature* (2006), Mads Rosendahl Thomsen in *Mapping World Literature* (2008) and Theo D'haen in *The Routledge Concise History of World Literature* (2013) release comparative literature from the yoke of West-centrism and follow the new planetary direction of the discipline. Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek and Tutun Mukherjee's edited volume, *Companion to Comparative Literature, World Literatures, and Comparative Cultural Studies* (2013) and Damrosch's edited volume *World Literature in Theory* (2014) indicate this release. Significant figures not usually associated with the discipline such as Homi K. Bhabha has also shown interest in the concept of world literature.

Today comparative literature has forgotten its old West-centrism and is moving toward a global view to include non-Western cultures. The bell has tolled for the West-centric discipline as Spivak announced in her *Death of a Discipline* (2003). Nationalism and cultural superiority of the French school is replaced with multiculturalism and cultural relativism.

Cultural relativism is not a method of research, even less a theory: it refers to a moral stance which may influence the scholar in his selection of research methods and theoretical positions.... The acceptance of cultural relativity was certainly a step forward in comparison with the older claim of the superiority of European civilization. (Fokkema, 1987: 1)

World literature is the new comparative literature. It "denotes literary works with 'transnational' or 'translational' significance, common aesthetic qualities, and farreaching social and cultural influence" (Wang, 2010: 3). While literature and literary studies are losing attraction in contrast to the various forms of popular culture and consumer culture, world literature is increasingly flourishing. World literature "has more or less helped comparative literature move out of its crisis, and helped literary studies in general step into a much broader cross-cultural context" (Wang, 2011: 297). Post-colonial

thought is playing a role here. As Bassnett remarked in “Reflections on Comparative Literature in the Twenty-First Century”

Crucial here is the idea of polyphony or plurivocality, as opposed to an earlier model, promoted by the colonial powers, of univocality. Other voices can now be heard, rather than one single dominant voice. Plurivocality is at the heart of post-colonial thinking. (Bassnett, 2006: 4)

Comparative literature in its origin provided scholars with a global view of literature. The French school led it into nationalistic and Eurocentric paths. In the second half of the previous century some scholars challenged the state of the discipline; they made efforts to broaden the canon and cover non-Western literatures. In the twenty-first century the discipline has returned to its original democratic path. Goethe’s *Weltliteratur*, affected by the French school, turned into a narrow-minded comparative literature. Now, aided by post-colonial thought, multiculturalism and globalization, it is the global, democratic and plurivocal world literature that sacrifices no culture for the sake of the others.

### **Miner and Comparative Poetics**

Three years before the publication of *Comparative Poetics* Miner published “Some Theoretical and Methodological Topics for Comparative Literature” (1987) in *Poetics Today*. To him generic study, literary movements and comparison within a common culture held no central interest to Western students. He recognized the “inclusion of literary theory as a subject of comparative literature” as “the most striking development in the past fifteen years” (Miner, 1987: 123). He added “until recently there has been little effort to incorporate non-Western evidence into Western comparative study” (Ibid.). The paper dealt with three issues. The first part dealt with literary theory and elaborated on the distinctions between lyric, narrative and drama. Miner discussed the issues not only in Western literary theory but also in non-Western traditions i. e. Chinese, Japanese and Korean. He concluded the part “Although the evidence from various cultures is not easily mastered, it does seem clear that fundamental differences occur when gifted critics initiate a critical system by defining it in terms of lyric or drama” (Ibid., 129). The second part dealt with the issue of literary collections in Western and non-Western traditions. According to Miner, Western collections are usually based on “some kind of plot, formal or thematic ordering”; Chinese collections on “compendiousness and separate categorizing”; and Japanese collections on “integration based on sequential principles other than plot, chronology or separate categories” (Ibid., 135). He ended the part with “‘collection’ must be viewed comparatively if it is to be understood as a useful literary idea with explanatory power” (Ibid.). In the last part, “Logical and Practical Criteria for Literary Comparison”, he discussed the issue of ‘grounds of comparison.’ He remarked “Perhaps the least studied issue in comparative literature is what is meant by ‘comparative’ and, more precisely, what are the principles or canons of comparability” (Ibid.). He did not employ “comparative poetics” throughout the paper. However, his concluding sentences are illuminating regarding his idea of comparative poetics.

It will always be useful to compare what history shows to have actual connection. But in the study of the basic features of lyric and narrative and, indeed, in the study of the lengthy Asian and Western traditions, we are apt to gain far richer results by approaches that do not depend solely on historical connections between Asian and Western literatures: those really began only in this century. The enormous riches of Asian literature in earlier centuries simply are too important to comparative study throughout the world for us to concern ourselves with influence or reception alone. And the aims of our study are too important to be left to the definitions of any single one of us or to the methods devised in any single literary tradition. Such individual or chauvinistic pride would defeat the aims of comparative study of literature. (Ibid., 140)

Three years after the publication of “Some Theoretical and Methodological Topics for Comparative Literature” Miner’s *Comparative Poetics: An Intercultural Essay on Theories of Literature* was published. It is an expansion of the aforementioned paper, mainly part one of the paper. It has five chapters: “Comparative Poetics”, “Drama”, “Lyric”, “Narrative” and “Relativism”. Part one of the paper is expanded into chapters two, three and four and part three is expanded to chapter one. “One may argue that many of Miner’s points have been made by other comparatists before, albeit in different terms. Yet one would have to agree that they have seldom been made in a context as general and comprehensive as his” (Ueda, 1993: 288). He dedicated the work to James J. Y. Liu and recognized Etiemble as a source of inspiration. It is the “first book-length comparative exploration of poetics conceived interculturally” (Miner, 1990: 3). He writes “My best hope lies in designating this study to be an essay, an attempt” (Ibid., 4). According to Miner the assumption of the work is that comparative poetics “is meaningful only if the evidence is intercultural and taken from a reasonably full historical range” (Ibid., 3).

He begins with the distinction between literary theory and theory of literature. Theories of literature are concerned “with the basic nature and functions of literature” and literary theories deal “with aspects of literature, such as form, genre, style, and technique” (Liu, qtd in Miner, 1990: 4). Comparative poetics is the intercultural study of theories of literature. He distinguishes between two kinds of general poetics: implicit and explicit poetics. The former is “implicit in practice, and such a poetics belongs to every culture that distinguishes literature as a distinct human activity, a distinct kind of knowledge and social practice.” The latter is “originative” or “foundational” poetics. It “develops when a critic or critics of insight defines the nature and conditions of literature in terms of the then most esteemed genre” (Ibid., 7). In his discussion he employs a triadic conception of genres (drama, narrative and lyric). To Miner, the triadic conception of genres is necessary not only for the inception of a poetic system, but also for later stages of the development of theories of literature.

His ideas are far from chauvinism. He believes “Intercultural comparative study does not imply addition of alien “new” ideas to a familiar stock but rather large sets of alternative stocks. As we shall see, the Western shop is the one whose wares are most idiosyncratic and unusual” (Ibid., 4). He challenges the idea of universality of Western theory; “We have yet to awaken, and perhaps never will, from the dream of pantascopic poetics, even while our theories have come to be based on ever

smaller selections of the increasingly available evidence" (Ibid., 5). To him the intercultural study of theories of literature is a must; "Necessity in the guise of curiosity is one parent of comparative literature" (Ibid.). He criticizes the common practice of comparatists; "In existing practice, comparison is dominantly *intracultural*, even *intranational*. ... *Comparative* literature clearly involves something more than comparing two great German poets, and something different from a Chinese studying French or a Russian studying Italian literature" (Ibid.). He adds "the practice is still often honored in practice, that the field of comparative literature should be restricted to national literatures related to each other within a single culture, which somehow seems to mean European and North American" (Ibid., 20). He asks "Why, however, should our 'comparative literature' lack an eastern and a southern hemisphere?" (Ibid.). He believes "In any event, as with given poems and poets, so with poetics: to consider those of but one cultural tradition is to investigate only a single conceptual cosmos, however intricate, subtle, or rich that may be" (Ibid., 7). His examination of the issue of "foundational" poetics in Eastern and Western traditions reveals "something very curious: all other examples of poetics are founded not on drama, but on lyric. Western literature with its many familiar suppositions is a minority of one, the odd one out. It has no claim to be normative" (Ibid., 8). He calls the Western poetics "mimetic" and believes that "Only Eurocentrism allows one to term the other poetics—those of the world besides—nonmimetic; if any, western poetics is the true *nonentity*" (Ibid., 24). He calls for the end of Western domination on comparative literature. "Just as the feminist argument rests on the unshakable rock that justice be done to that half of the race that bears us, so consideration of the other three-quarters or four-fifths of the race must enter into any literary study denominating itself comparative" (Ibid., 11). He refers to a thought-provoking statement by J. Y. Liu.

I believe that comparative studies of historically unrelated critical traditions, such as the Chinese and Western, will be more fruitful if conducted on the theoretical rather than practical level, since criticism of particular writers and works will have little meaning to those who cannot read them in the original language, and critical standards derived from one literature may not be applicable to another, whereas comparisons of what writers and critics belonging to different cultural traditions have thought about literature may reveal what critical concepts are universal, what concepts are confined to certain cultural traditions, and what concepts are unique to a particular tradition. This in turn may help us discover (since critical concepts are often based on actual literary works) what features are common to all languages, what features are confined to literature written in certain languages or produced in certain cultures, and what features are unique to a particular literature. Thus a comparative study of theories of literature may lead to a better understanding of all literature. (qtd. in Miner, 1990: 5-6).

Miner adds "To consider the other varieties of poetics is by definition to inquire into the full heterocosmic range, the full argument from design, of literature. And to do so comparatively is to establish the principles and the relations of those many poetic worlds" (Ibid. 7). He believes to propose a single definition of comparative poetics is not his aim. He writes:

Nothing in the preceding, nothing in what follows, is meant to argue for a single conception of comparative poetics. All that is argued, and it is quite enough, is that comparative poetics requires two things: a satisfactory conception and practice of comparisons along with an attention to poetics (conceptions of literature) that rests on historically sound evidence. (Ibid., 32)

## Comparative Poetics and Middle Eastern Literary Tradition

Rene Etiemble believes that “By combining the two methods that consider themselves enemies but that, in reality complement each other—[the putatively French] historical inquiry and [the putatively American] critical or aesthetic reflection— comparative literature would then be irresistibly drawn to comparative poetics” (qtd. in Miner, 1990: 32-33). What is comparative poetics? To answer this question it is necessary to define “poetics.” “Poetics” refers to theory of literature and literary theory. “Poetics” in “comparative poetics” refers to both concepts. Comparative poetics refers to the comparative study of theories from different critical traditions. Thus comparative poetics leads to a better understanding of literature as a cultural heritage of humanity.

Comparative poetics has brought attention to non-Western literary traditions. The inclusion of non-Western theories in the discourse of world literary studies, and particularly in issues such as nature and function of literature is inevitable. Major figures of comparative poetics who produced applied works in the field almost entirely ignored the Middle East. Etiemble predicted that the third phase in the development of comparative literature could possibly happen in China; that prediction inspired the expansion of Chinese-oriented comparative poetics. Liu in his applied works such as *Chinese Theories of Literature* (1975) dealt with comparative poetics and tried to introduce Chinese aesthetics to the Western world. Fokkema, another a major figure in the field of comparative poetics, mainly dealt with Chinese-Western comparative literary studies. In the West, Miner’s book has brought attention to non-western literary theories. It has broken through the tyranny of a long-lasting West-centrism in literary theory. He was a japanologist and dealt with *Far eastern* and *Indian* theories of literature and paved the way for future scholars to explore non-Western critical traditions. Later scholars followed his work on Indian and Far Eastern critical traditions. Eoyang in *The Transparent Eye Reflections on Translation, Chinese Literature, and Comparative Poetics* (1993) covers Chinese critical tradition. Ye Weilian in *Comparative Poetics: A Discussion of Theoretic Framework* covered Western and Chinese literary theories. Cai, a student of Miner, compared Chinese and Western theories of ancient and modern times in *Configurations of Comparative Poetics: Three Perspectives on Western and Chinese Literary Criticism* (2002). Gafrik in “Literary Theory and Reading World Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism” (2010) and “World Literature and Comparative Poetics: Cultural Equality, Relativism, or Incommensurability?” (2013) focuses on Sanskrit literary studies and literary critical discourse in India. The papers in *Comparative Literature: Essays in Honour of Professor M.Q. Khan* (2000) analyze different aspects of Indian and Western theories through a comparative approach. Panda, one of the contributors to the volume, believes that similar

studies in literary theory will result in the discovery of further universals of poetics. “It is hoped that such an undertaking will not only establish an inventory of common aspects or universals, but will be of immense consequence for the growth of a coherent literary theory and method of applied criticism” (Panda, 2000: 33).

But there will be no ‘immense consequence for the growth of a coherent literary theory and method of applied criticism’ unless all critical traditions are included in the dissuasion of comparative poetics. As previously mentioned, China, Japan, India and the Middle East have produced literature accompanied by a rich critical output. While Far Eastern and Indian critical traditions have played a significant role in the field of comparative poetics, the Middle Eastern tradition (including Persian, Arabic and Turkish literatures) has been neglected. Works that cover the Middle Eastern tradition, such as Hogan’s *Philosophical Approaches to the Study of Literature* (2000), has devoted a limited space to that. While Islamic philosophers, including Al Farabi, Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd provide scholars with interesting philosophical views of literature, they have not been much discussed by Hogan. And this has been the case with the comparative poetics studies in general. The scholars of the current global context released comparative literary studies from the previous Eurocentrism and included non-Western theories in the dialogue of literary studies. They have followed Miner’s anti-West-centrism and they have also failed to expand the geographical frontiers of his *Comparative Poetics*. “To achieve new advances in literary studies, our era requires a comparative perspective and an international view” (Wang, 2010: 3) which covers all critical traditions including that of the Middle East, particularly Persian literature. This requires the effort of scholars of Middle Eastern literatures. Some of these scholars live in the West and write in English. They need to pay special attention to the critical tradition of Middle East to improve its status in comparative poetics studies. Majority of the scholars of Middle Eastern literatures live and work in the region and write their works in native tongues. They need to either write in English or have their works translated into English. English as a lingua franca is vital in the process. Writing in English would significantly contribute to the process. “Douwe Fokkema, who comes from a minor nation but who has become internationally known by writing in English” (Wang, 2012: 109). Translation is also a significant factor for these scholars. “The same is true of many scholars or theorists writing in languages other than English. For instance, Derrida’s wide influence in the world largely stems from the English translations of his important works” (Wang, 2010: 9). Lefevere explains the vitality of translation to comparative poetics.

At that time, and as long as comparative literature limited itself to the literatures of Europe, it was quite possible to find scholars with a command of three, four, or five ancient and modern languages. As soon as comparative literature tried to go beyond Europe, however, translations became necessary. Or, to put it differently: as soon as comparative literature tried to compare different kinds of poetics, and not just different variants of European poetics in its historical evolution, it could no longer avoid confronting translation. It could, and did, try to play down that confrontation for as long as possible. (Lefevere, 1995: 3)

Through English language, scholars of Middle Eastern literatures including Persian poetry can improve the position of Middle Eastern theories in the discussions of comparative poetics. As Wang remarks “any theory produced in a non-Western context, if it hopes to move from a peripheral to a central position, must first be ‘discovered’ by Western academe and reconstituted in English” (Wang, 2010: 10). The reason behind the obscurity of Middle Eastern tradition and its almost exclusion from comparative poetics study, despite its rich critical output, is lack of scholarly works in English. Such works will grant Middle East a position it deserves in the comparative poetics discussions. It is not to support “Middle Easternness” or “Persianness” in comparative poetics; that “makes no sense because, in our view, the importance and relevance of the humanities — and especially of comparative poetics — is to study and explore different cultures and literatures, thus maintaining and transferring knowledge” (Wang and Liu, 2011: 7). The point is that the joint efforts of the scholars of Middle Eastern literatures (including Persian, Arabic and Turkish literatures) to write in English and/or to translate their works into English and other major world languages will provide that critical tradition with a voice in the global dialogue of comparative poetics. This, in turn, will contribute to the development of a more democratic comparative poetics where different players can perform their roles. “Perhaps, after all, Posnett's notion that, the ultimate basis for literary judgment is not aesthetic universals but rather a concrete notion of what a democratic, just, and interconnected global society would look like is more promising” (During, 2004: 321). As Middle Eastern literary tradition, Persian poetry in particular, contributed significantly to the development of Goethe's *Weltliteratur*, it deserves to have a voice in the global discussion of twenty-first comparative poetics. The emergent plurivocal conversation of a global comparative poetics that includes Middle East will open new horizons to our cross-cultural perspective.

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