



Comparative Literature Today

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Comparative Literature Today

AT THE Second Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association held at Chapel Hill in September 1958, I gave a paper, "The Crisis of Comparative Literature," which excited a lot of comment, much of it dissenting.¹ It was of course designed to elicit such comment. We must imagine the situation and the circumstances. The International Association of Comparative Literature had been founded in 1954. It had held its first Congress late in September 1955 at Venice, with no American participants, since the lateness of the season prevented Americans from coming and since the topic of the Congress, "Venice in Literature" (though not devoid of American association if we think of Howells, Henry James, and even Hemingway) had no American takers. Thus the Chapel Hill Congress was the first occasion at which American comparatists were, officially, able to meet their European colleagues.

Through the generosity of the Ford Foundation and the initiative of Werner Friederich, no less than 43 scholars from Europe made the trip to North Carolina. I am not giving away secrets if I say today that several of us teachers of comparative literature in American universities were, at first, unhappy about the planned composition of the Congress. The visitors were to be largely those who had played a role in the organizing of the International Association and its functionaries; those originally invited to represent the United States were the few American members of the International Association or those who had some office in the Comparative Literature Section of the Modern Language Association. It was, I think, an act of great wis-

¹ The present paper is the text of an address delivered at the second triennial meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association at Cambridge, Mass. on Apr. 9, 1965.

dom and tolerance when the organizer of the Congress, Werner Friederich, changed the original scheme and allowed it to become not only a forum of the specialists expressly committed to the cause of comparative literature but also of a wide variety of literary scholars who had one common purpose—the study of literature beyond the confines of one national literature. It was thus appropriate that somebody should question the assumptions of the methodology which led to the original narrowing in scope and personnel and that I should be the person—since I had for years criticized this methodology in various contexts long before the founding of the International Association.

One of my critics quite correctly observed that my objections to the accepted methodology of comparative literature—an artificial demarcation of subject matter, a mechanistic concept of sources and influences, motivation by cultural nationalism—had its beginning in Europe in the 1920s. While a student at the University of Prague during that decade, I reacted strongly against the positivistic factualism of some of my teachers and one dominant tradition of scholarship. In my paper, “The Crisis of Comparative Literature,” I refer, in the very first paragraph, to Croce in Italy and Dilthey and his followers in Germany. I came to this country for the first time in 1927, to the Princeton Graduate School, where I found the same discontent become vocal in the neo-humanist movement. I paid a few visits to Paul Elmer More who lent me books by the Cambridge Platonists (I still remember Nathaniel Calderwell’s *Candle of the Lord*) and I read the writings of his friend and ally, Irving Babbitt. Babbitt’s *Literature and the American College* dates from 1908 and still remains one of the most powerful blasts against nineteenth-century erudition, which Babbitt then identified with pernicious German pedantry. He predicted that “comparative literature will prove one of the most trifling of subjects unless studied in strict subordination to humane standards” (p. 124). That Harry Levin has been named Irving Babbitt Professor of Comparative Literature is not only a tribute to Irving Babbitt but also a guarantee of a continuity of humane standards at Harvard, even though he might interpret the word “humane” differently from Babbitt’s special meaning. The right meaning of “humanism” was the issue at Chapel Hill and is still the issue in comparative literature today.

After my return to Prague in 1930 I was, for a time, a member of the Prague Linguistic Circle and thus came into contact with the teachings of the Russian formalists. Roman Jakobson, now a professor at Harvard University, then in Prague, was a witty and pungent critic

of the expansive and muddled methodology of academic literary history, of its desire to become fused and confused with the totality of cultural history, and of its lack of focus on a separate subject matter—the literary work of art. When I went to England in 1935 I had some contacts with F. R. Leavis and the *Scrutiny* group who, from different premises, voiced their dissatisfaction with academic scholarship very loudly indeed. When I emigrated to this country in 1939 to join the University of Iowa English Department, I found Norman Foerster, a staunch adherent of the new humanism, as director of the School of Letters, and Austin Warren as a colleague. Austin Warren had been a pupil of Irving Babbitt and had known Paul Elmer More in Princeton, but had since moved to a position rather similar to that of T. S. Eliot and the New Critics.

The conflict between literary history and criticism was very acute and even bitter at Iowa. I still remember vividly how I and Austin Warren met a highly respected member of the department, a good historical scholar, and tried to suggest to him that, in writing about Milton and the English essay in the seventeenth century, he had also written some criticism. He turned red in his face and told us that it was the worst insult anybody ever had given him. I was, by conviction and in the academic constellation of the place and time, classed as a critic and I collaborated, under Norman Foerster's editorship, in a volume, *Literary Scholarship*, published in 1941 by the University of North Carolina Press, to which I contributed the chapter on "Literary History," which in many ways was a reworking of a much older piece, "The Theory of Literary History" written in 1935 for the *Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague*. Mr. Warren and myself were somewhat dissatisfied with the volume. We felt that we sailed under false colors. We could not endorse the neo-humanistic creed of the editor, though we shared most of his objections to current academic practices and enjoyed teaching the humanities courses which he devised. Homer, the Bible, Greek tragedy, Shakespeare, and Milton were taught to freshmen and sophomores in compulsory courses long before the present vogue of far-ranging world literature courses. I myself taught a course in the European novel, which started with Stendhal and Balzac and reached Proust and Mann via Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, but I don't remember that I called it "comparative literature."

Eventually Mr. Warren and I collaborated in *Theory of Literature*, a book which was written in 1944-46 but for various reasons was not published until January 1949. The last chapter, which first appeared as "The Study of Literature in the Graduate School: Diagnosis and Prescription" in the *Sewanee Review* (October 1947), reflects the situ-

ation at the end of the war and suggests specific reforms for the study of literature in our universities—among them was the establishment of departments of comparative literature which should become, we said, “Departments of General and International Literature, or simply Literature.” We hoped that the Department of Comparative Literature might “become the center for the reform which should, however, be carried out primarily within the departments of English and the other Modern Languages, the reform which, briefly, demands a Ph.D. in literature rather than in English, French, or German Philology” (p. 297).

We were not alone. The New Critics had made the greatest practical impact on the college teaching of literature, particularly with the textbook, *Understanding Poetry* (1938), by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, which had begun to catch on in the early 1940s. In Chicago Ronald S. Crane had, since 1935 at least, advocated and institutionalized the study of criticism and its history. In 1939 the English Institute, expressly devoted to an examination of the methods of literary study, had met for the first time in New York. While also concerned with problems of bibliography and editing, the English Institute soon became a forum for the discussion of critical and aesthetic issues. In spite of its name and its original limitation to English scholars, the Institute has had a series of sessions devoted to French and German criticism. As early as 1940 the *Southern Review* and the *Kenyon Review* published a symposium on “Literature and the Professors,” to which some of the best known New Critics, J. C. Ransom, Allen Tate, and Cleanth Brooks, as well as Harry Levin, contributed trenchant criticisms and the most varied suggestions for a reform of the academic study of literature. Change was in the air and a profound change was actually effected, not overnight and not in all institutions uniformly, but gradually almost everywhere. Present-day students seem completely unable to realize the situation of the early decades of the century in most English departments. Criticism was taboo, contemporary and even American literature was not taught at all, foreign literatures were largely ignored, texts were studied only as philological documents—in short, nineteenth-century positivism reigned unchallenged and supreme.

I have reviewed these developments and my share in them not because I want to indulge in autobiographical reminiscences, but because my personal story reflects the history of literary scholarship in these decades, the whole “revolt against Positivism” which I described in my first public lecture at Yale in February 1946—Croce and German *Geistesgeschichte*, the Russian formalists, American neo-humanism

and T. S. Eliot, F. R. Leavis and the New Critics. Thus, when Mr. Friederich, in the first *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* (1952) reprinted Jean-Marie Carré's brief introduction to M.-F. Guyard's little handbook, *La Littérature comparée* (1951), I felt it as a challenge to all that had been achieved in this country. Carré, the first president of the International Comparative Literature Association, here restates, in the narrowest terms, the old concept of literary study and of comparative literature in particular; comparative literature is a branch of literary history concerned with the "factual contacts" (*rappports de fait*) between the works, the inspirations and even the lives of writers belonging to several literatures. Carré, in this preface at least, expressly excludes "general literature" from our subject and condemns all comparisons which are not justified by concrete historical contacts as mere rhetorical exercises. I severely criticized the preface and the little book by Guyard in the next *Yearbook* (1953), though I recognized the modest pretensions of a handbook for students and its dependence on a similar earlier booklet by Paul Van Tieghem (1931). Still, it seemed to me a dangerous symptom of the survival of an obsolete methodology and its restrictive legislation. The paper at the 1958 Congress at Chapel Hill merely restated my objections in the presence of the European visitors. It was, regrettably to my mind, understood as a manifesto of an American school of comparative literature and as an attack on the French school, though it was obviously not directed against a nation but against a method. I was and am aware that in France also similar criticisms of academic scholarship had been voiced for many years. One need only think of the attacks against Lanson and *la critique universitaire* before World War I. I know that there are many critics and historians in France who have struck out boldly in many directions opposed to the positivistic factualism advocated by Carré. I am also aware that many American scholars are not in agreement with my point of view, and I have never arrogated for myself the role of spokesman for American scholarship in general. Myself a European by birth, I do not relish being put into the odd position of appearing anti-French or even vaguely anti-European.

I have learned from Harry Levin that Mirabeau is the author of the aphorism that an audience of foreigners constitutes "a living posterity." I can make only melancholy reflections about posterity from the amount of misunderstanding and distortion this polemical paper had to suffer abroad. It was apparently interpreted as a manifesto of American hostility to scholarship, since, after I gave an erudite historical paper on the word "criticism" at the Utrecht Congress in 1961, I was congratulated for being less ignorant and less a defender of ignorance

than I had seemed at Chapel Hill. Marcel Bataillon, in a conciliatory review of the Chapel Hill *Proceedings*, entitled "Nouvelle Jeunesse de la philologie à Chapel Hill" (in *RCL*, XXXV, 1961, 290-298) while admitting the justice of some criticisms against the established theories, misunderstood my position as being inimical to all literary history and deplored the fact that Renato Poggioli, Claudio Guillén, and myself, though Europeans by birth, had ceased to be interested in the relations between the rival European nations which the old cosmopolitanism tried to revive after the war. Bataillon regretted the passing of such a "cosmopolitanism, suspect of bourgeois idealism by a pseudo-Marxist philosophy of history, or convicted of historic vanity by triumphant structuralism" (p. 296). It was my mistake not to have sufficiently guarded in the Chapel Hill speech against such misapprehensions and to have assumed that it would be known that I had defended literary history, for instance in the last chapter of *Theory of Literature*, against the antihistorical tendencies of the New Critics and that I had for years advocated a proper interplay between a study of national literatures, their common tendencies, the totality of the Western tradition—which for me always includes the Slavic world—and the ultimate ideal of a comparative study of all literatures, including those of the Farthest East.

Far stranger misreadings were made in Russia, where "comparative literature" was simply a forbidden subject under Stalin. With the Thaw its necessity was again recognized and there was a conference in Moscow in January 1960 which formally rehabilitated the subject. (Cf. *Vzaimosvyazi i vzaimodeistvie natsionalnykh literatur*. Akademiya Nauk SSSR, Moscow, 1961). The Russians pride themselves on having solved all questions on the basis of Marxism, and the speakers at that conference discussed us all as poor erring sheep who have not discovered the light of truth. Friederich, who as the organizer of the Chapel Hill Congress assumes in their eyes the role of a "leader," gets a heavy dose of abuse for supposedly making the Congress a "political enterprise" (p. 106), apparently because Gleb Struve gave a well-informed account of the situation in the Soviet Union. My paper is quoted when it seems to serve as a weapon in the polemics against all Western scholarship, but I am severely taken to task for two sins, formalism and cosmopolitanism. In all the papers it is assumed that I have never heard of the historical and social implications of literature, that I uphold an abstract formalism, and that my objections to nationalistic literary history mean advocating the abolishment of national literatures in favor of a colorless superliterature which would serve the aims of American imperialism. I am accustomed to the rigidity of Commu-

nist ideology but am often surprised at their complete lack of perspective and understanding of personalities and institutional conditions in this country. They assume that there is, e.g., an Institute of Comparative Literature at North Carolina, that at Yale I plot moves in the cultural cold war, assigning topics and coordinating efforts with my accomplices. Deep designs are seen in the gaps or the chance constellations of papers at the Chapel Hill Congress or in the journal *Comparative Literature*. Even the fact that my paper on "The Crisis of Comparative Literature" was translated into German by Sigurd Burckhardt and published in a West German periodical, *Wirkendes Wort*, seems to J. S. Pavlova most ominous (p. 298). There would be no point in trying to explain to them that we operate quite differently, that Sigurd Burckhardt, whom I did not then know personally, happened to be struck by my paper and felt like translating it.

In 1960 in Moscow the Russians were among themselves. The three papers on comparative literature in the West by R. M. Samarin, I. G. Neupokoeva, and N. S. Pavlova were wholesale condemnations of all that we were doing. In October 1962 there was another congress at Budapest on comparative literature in Eastern Europe, which was attended by W. P. Smit, the then president of the International Association of Comparative Literature, by Etiemble, the successor of Carré at the Sorbonne, and by three other Western members of the association (Mortier, Rousset, and Voisine). Madame Neupokoeva repeated there her attack on my paper, accusing me of wanting to "denationalize" literature and linking me and American comparative literature with the reactionary philosophy of history of Arnold Toynbee, apparently only because E. R. Curtius had professed admiration for Toynbee (I never have). Luckily some of the other participants knew better and tried to correct the Russians: Etiemble, e.g., distanced himself from the view of Guyard and Carré and protested that we are not all adherents of Toynbee. A Polish woman scholar, Maria Janion, saw that I never advocated "denationalization" or rejected all history, and an East German professor, Werner Krauss, who severely criticized our journal *Comparative Literature* for willful and bad contributions, recognized that American comparativism is deeply committed to the task of reconciling the nations ("Die amerikanische Komparatistik ist zutiefst von ihrer völkerverbindenden Sendung durchdrungen," *La Littérature comparée en Europe orientale*, Budapest, 1963, p. 303). Since then the Hungarian Academy has edited a collective volume of its own, *Littérature hongroise: Littérature européenne* (Budapest, 1964), presented to the Fribourg Congress of the International Association in the summer of 1964. It contains, along with

many valuable unpolemical papers, one by Lajos Nyirö ("Problèmes de littérature comparée et théorie de la littérature") which ascribes to me a "metaphysics of the dissociation of content and form" (p. 511), whatever that may be, a rejection of history, and a confusion between comparative literature and theory of literature. In all my writings I have argued for the unity of form and content, have defended literary history, and have made elaborate distinctions between theory, history, and criticism. A chapter of *Theory of Literature* is expressly devoted to "Comparative, General, and National Literature" and their differences. It is really another world where words mean the opposite of what they mean to us.

In the Netherlands, Cornelius de Deugd, in a pamphlet, *De Eenheid van het Comparatisme* (Utrecht, 1962), saw the situation correctly. He knows that my position is not specifically American, that Carré has adherents in the United States, and that American comparative literature scholars are by no means "anti-historical New Critics, irrespective of what they may have learned from them. They are literary historians, but touched by the new ideas . . . they demand an aesthetic and critical approach to literature, that is to the literary work *an sich*" (p. 69-70).

But this is precisely what is being questioned everywhere in the United States today. To give a striking example, a recent article by Ihab Hassan of Wesleyan University in the valuable series on contemporary criticism published in the new *Comparative Literature Studies* (edited by A. Owen Aldridge) is called "Beyond a Theory of Literature." There I, and surprisingly enough Northrop Frye, are treated as two old-timers, survivors from an earlier age who have not understood the new revelation: "The self-destructive element of literature, its need for self-annulment." "Perhaps the function of literature, after all," we are told, "is not to clarify the world but to help create a world in which literature becomes superfluous. And perhaps the function of criticism . . . is to attain to the difficult wisdom of perceiving how literature is finally, and only finally, inconsequential" (*CLS*, I, 1964, 266). Ihab Hassan concludes by quoting D. H. Lawrence: "O lovely green dragon of the new day, the undawned day, *come come* in touch, and release us from the horrible grip of the evil-smelling old Logos! Come in silence and say nothing." It would be easy to dismiss Hassan's gospel of silence, which still allows him to write books and articles, and to dub him a ferocious antirationalist, an obscurantist who reflects the mood of our time—its apocalyptic forebodings, its sense of the absurd, its "willing suspension of aesthetic judgment in the interest of right action" (p. 264). But I believe that his extremism

is a symptom of something very serious endangering any meaningful literary study. It spells the doom of art and aesthetics.

The whole enterprise of aesthetics and art is being challenged today; the distinction between the good, the true, the beautiful, and the useful known to the Greeks but most clearly elaborated by Kant, the whole concept of art as one of the distinct activities of man, as the subject matter of our discipline, is on trial. The breakup of aesthetics began in the late nineteenth century when the German aesthetics of empathy (known in English through Vernon Lee and Bernard Berenson) reduced aesthetic experience to physiological processes of inner mimicry, of feeling into the object. It is implicit in Croce's theory of intuition, in which aesthetic experience becomes identified with every act of perception of individual quality. The intuition of *this* glass of water, for Croce, does not differ qualitatively from that embodied in a great work of art. John Dewey's *Art as Experience* (1934) denies all qualitative distinction between the aesthetic and the intellectual in favor of unity of experience, which is simply heightened vitality. In the writings of I. A. Richards, more specifically concerned with literary criticism, the distinction between aesthetic and other emotions is abolished, and art and poetry are reduced to means of "patterning our impulses," to tools of mental therapy. Similarly, Kenneth Burke and Richard Blackmur dissolve the concept of literature into action or gesture. More recently has come the onslaught on aesthetics by the analytical philosophers, who dismiss as "non-sense" all traditional problems of beauty and aesthetics. Ihab Hassan echoes this whole trend when he deplores the separation of art "from the continuum of felt life" as the source of the mind's alienation, of what he calls "the Cartesian madness of the West."

Whatever the merits of these criticisms of the great tradition of aesthetics may be—and I am willing to grant much to the critics of its obscurities, verbalisms, and tautologies—the main conclusion, the abolition of art as a category, seems to me deplorable in its consequences both for art itself and for the study of art and literature. We see the consequences today at every step; the new sculptor displays heaps of scrapmetal or assembles large grocery boxes, Rauschenberg exhibits clean white canvasses as his early works, and an enthusiastic critic, John Cage, praises them as "landing-places for lights and shadows." The composer of "concrete" music produces the noises of machines and the streets, and I hear that there is even a music of silence—three musicians appear on the podium, stand there, and do nothing at all. The dramatist produces the noises of a boys' school lavatory and displays its obscene scribblings. More seriously Marc Saporta pro-

duces a "shuffle novel," *No. 1*, where the pages are loose and unnumbered and can be read in any order. All distinctions between art and reality have fallen. All arts tend toward self-abolition. Some of these acts or works obviously need not be taken seriously. They are elaborate hoaxes as old as Dada or as Marcel Duchamp, who submitted under the title "Fountain" a hospital urinal to the Independent Show in New York in 1917. I hope I am not suspected of lack of sympathy with modern art, the avant-garde, or experimentation when I judge that art, in these symptoms, has reached the zero point and is about to commit suicide.

It is time for us to return to an understanding of the nature of art. A work of art is an object or a process of some shape and unity which sets it off from life in the raw. But such a conception must apparently be guarded against the misunderstanding of being "art for art's sake," the ivory tower, or asserting the irrelevancy of art to life. All great aestheticians have claimed a role for art in society and thought that art flourishes best in a good society. They knew that art humanizes man, that man becomes fully human only through art. It seems to me time that literary study again recognize the realm of art and stop being all things to all men, that it return to its old task of understanding, explaining, and transmitting literature. Otherwise it will dissolve into the study of all history and all life. I know that students—and not only young students—are often restive with such apparent limitations. Literature for them is simply an occasion or a pretext for the solution of their personal problems and the general problems of our civilization. But literary scholarship, as organized knowledge, needs such limitation. Every branch of knowledge must have a subject matter. Only through the singling out—which does not mean complete isolation—of the object can there be advance in understanding and penetration. The complaints of narrowing are belied by the manifold possibilities of expansion in our chosen field which have increased enormously in the last decades. Recent comments in the *TLS* and the *New York Times*, assuming an exhaustion of dissertation topics, ridiculing the trivialities of literary research which solemnly record W. B. Yeats' liking for parsnips, are wide of the mark.

Just comparative literature offers an almost limitless number of new topics and new problems. We have today—looking back only to the last war—an incomparably greater number of excellent guidebooks, bibliographies, dictionaries, and surveys of literary history which should make it inexcusable for anybody to plead ignorance of authors, names, and problems. Think of the bibliographies beginning with Baldensperger-Friederich and ending with the annual MLA bibliography which listed 16,089 items for the year 1963. Think of the growing

number of well-planned dictionaries of terms and authors. I have just turned the pages of the impressive Alex Preminger *Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, published by the Princeton University Press. I hear that an English version of the two-volume *Lexikon der Weltliteratur*, published by Herder in Freiburg im Breisgau in 1960-61, is being prepared under the editorship of W. B. Fleischmann. The International Comparative Literature Association is preparing a French-English *Dictionary of Literary Terms*, for which it set up elaborate machinery at Bordeaux and Utrecht and for which a long series of papers at the Utrecht and Fribourg congresses were written as preliminary exercises. The older Shipley *Dictionary of World Literature* (1943), in spite of many poor articles, the *Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literatures* (1947), edited by the late Horatio Smith, and particularly the enormous *Dizionario Letterario Bompiani* (1946-57), which runs to twelve stout volumes in small print, are inexhaustible mines of information. We have worldwide surveys of literary history, including the older and incomplete but generally excellent *Handbuch der Literaturwissenschaft*, edited by Oskar Walzel, and more recently the three volumes of the Pléiade *Histoire des littératures*.

I have reviewed some of these books and am quite aware of their mistakes, lacunae, and disproportions. For example, the second volume of the Pléiade literary history, *Littératures occidentales* (1956), has some excellent chapters by Gaëtan Picon on the main trends of Western literature, but includes also shoddy and willful surveys of individual literatures. German literature is very ill served and Czech literature is discussed by an author, Cyril Wilczkowski, who seems not to know the language and certainly gets many names and all proportions wrong. He spreads such nonsense as that no Czech book appeared between 1620 and the last third of the eighteenth century (p. 1231), that Jaroslav Vrchlický was a Jew (p. 1239), and that Alois Jirásek was president of the Czech government during World War I (p. 1241). But, whatever the shortcomings of such collective enterprises may be, they allow us to look at something like a map of literature on an international scale. They suggest that the smaller literatures of Europe and the great wide world of the Orient invite exploration and study. Etiemble in his pamphlet, *Comparaison n'est pas raison: La Crise de la littérature comparée* (1963), may be too sanguine in wanting to change the direction of comparative literature. He wants us all to study Chinese, Bengali, or Arabic. He underrates our inertia, the obstacles to an advanced mastery of Oriental tongues for most of us, but in principle he is surely right in asking for a comparative poetics, for a genuinely universal study of world literature.

But it would be, I think, a mistake to think of our studies only in terms of these vistas, of the multiplication of newly accessible documents and unexplored interrelationships. There is another way for many of us, the way into the interior, "der Weg nach Innen," into a fuller and deeper understanding of the great works of art. Here too the last decades have brought about an accumulation of new tools. Methods of analyzing euphony, meter, diction, style, the technique of the novel, metaphor and symbol have been refined enormously. We all can learn also from the discoveries of neighboring disciplines: from psychology, philosophy, the history of art, sociology, and many others. Great practitioners of literary analysis such as Erich Auerbach and Leo Spitzer, Marcel Raymond, Emil Staiger, and Cleanth Brooks offer a choice of methods which allow us to grapple with what to my mind still matters most in literary study—the great work which must have moved us and spoken to us before we ever engage in the professional study of literature.

We have, I conclude, to keep a balance between expansion and concentration, nationalism and cosmopolitanism, the study of literature as art and the study of literature in history and society. The choice will vary with each individual. The variety of methods and views in the Western world is enormous and undoubtedly baffling. The image of the Tower of Babel obtrudes itself insistently. But I do not believe that the dire predictions of exhaustion or the admonitions to silence are justified. Nor can I agree with the criticism coming from the East—e.g., in Robert Weimann's most unfair book, *New Criticism und die Entwicklung bürgerlicher Literaturwissenschaft* (Halle, 1962)—that Western literary scholarship is in a state of complete disarray and decadence. On the basis of thirty-eight years of experience I can say, I hope quite soberly, that literary studies in this country have come a long way from the factualism, dreary antiquarianism, romantic nationalism, and general provincialism of the 1920s to a much greater awareness of the world around and within us. If we were not suspicious of the word, we could speak of progress, not only in quantity and range but also in quality—in refinement, subtlety, and penetration. Comparative literature has played a crucial role as a crystallizing subject for the reform. We must recognize the importance of comparative literature from an organizational point of view and emphasize the function and value of our different common enterprises—associations, periodicals, news letters, and conferences like this one. But we must not, on the other hand, overrate the mere machinery and expect too much from departments, programs, and all the other devices. The men or women struggling in solitude at their desks with their texts and their writings

matter most in the long run. But the feeling of a community of scholars is a great stimulus to morale. Such a conference can encourage us—send us, as I hope this one will, “tomorrow to fresh woods, and pastures new.”

Yale University