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What is Wrong with National Literature Departments?

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This article asks what is wrong with national literature departments. Traditional literature departments, even with various politically conscious additions – women writers, authors of colour, postcolonial conditions, linguistic minorities, queer theory – assume by their very structure a romantic notion of the nation state, of borders and of linguistics as a major aspect of national identity and canonicity. The article considers the early German Romantics to see how they understood the twinning of nation and culture, and how this is baggage that Western universities still carry, even as they try to open themselves to other cultures. 'Frühromantiker' such as Friedrich Schlegel, A.W. Schlegel, Novalis and Fichte (along with Chateaubriand) idealize the Middle Ages as a time of great unity in Europe, and understand nationhood to have a divine aspect. Recently, the idea of the university and of national literature departments is being fundamentally rethought. Said, Bernheimer, Moebius, Reading, Foucault, Spivak, Bauman – to name just a few – have all worried about the place of literature in the light of globalisation, the dominance of Europe in literature departments, and the place of minority discourses. The article suggests that Comparative Literature may be the hope for the future in literary studies, because it is a field that by definition combines linguistic, cultural and political perspectives in its approach to texts. At the same time, however, comparative literature has traditionally been dominated by Eurocentrism, which has been the source of much criticism. Should the dominant languages of Europe be set aside to make room for the less known, less powerful ones? The article sees the European project of community as a source of hope, analogous to comparative literature, in facing both the challenge and cultural wealth of diversity.

To start the discussion on 'what is wrong with national literature departments', I first need to point out the double meaning of my title: what has gone wrong with the traditional national literature departments? That is the first meaning of

my title. The other is: what is wrong with having national literature departments? Aren't they a necessary part of any university, of any education? To begin exploring these issues, we need to think for a moment about nation as a concept again. It was Hanna Arendt[1] who noted, in *Men in Dark Times*, that to erase the distance 'between men' is to erase the in-betweenness which makes for dialogue, and thus for world and humanity itself. Distance means borders, boundaries, but also objectification.

In *L'absolu littéraire*, Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy[2] held that literature, criticism, theory and philosophy as we know them today (even as we refigure them) were largely put into place by the brothers Schlegel and their famous Jena circle. As David Simpson argues,[3] in some respects 'this attribution of an origin' is valid. Indeed, he adds, 'Friedrich Schlegel's *Critical Fragments* and *Athenaeum Fragments* are … histories of the postmodern by anticipation.'[4] Romanticism, Simpson concludes, contains clues about 'the residual determinations that are still in play around the postmodern' (Ref. 3, p. 137). I concur with this view, and would add that our departmental structures in today's academe are a remainder of this history. Therefore, I believe that a brief excursion into the early Romantics will prove useful here.

In his own age, Friedrich Schlegel[5,6] writes, there was a revolution afoot; one that had already manifested itself in science (he means the new physics). But 'revolution' is not an innocent term, and its political aspect must not be overlooked. Schlegel understands the Middle Ages as the time that gave birth to a national feeling in harmony with a concomitant, harmonious religious community. The nostalgia for the Middle Ages, its imagined happy unity of the Church in Rome and the notion of a medieval State, leads to a specific 19th-century political attitude (*Haltung*).

The birth of Romanticism, for the most part in Germany, also coincides with the birth of the modern nation state, the modern university and – significant in the context of this article – with the founding of Comparative Literature (*vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft*) as a discipline. At the dawn of the 19th century, within the space of a few years, four major texts appeared that idealized the Middle Ages as a heavenly period of unity in Christendom, in close connection with an imagined 'statehood' and a repositioning of the State's cultural heritage: Chateaubriand's *Le génie du Christianisme*[7]; August Wilhelm Schlegel's *Geschichte der romantischen Literatur*[8]; Tieck's *Minnelieder aus dem Schwäbischen Zeitalter*[9]; and Novalis's *Die Christenheit oder Europa*[10]. What is of interest here is the extent to which these texts posited the perceived unity (today one might say 'collaboration' in its less positive sense) between Church and State during the Middle Ages, as an ideal model to follow. The result of the politico-ecclesiastical alliance, the Romantic argument goes, was a paradise of harmony and agreement between *Lebenswelt* and the human spirit. For us, such a reductive and wildly inaccurate view of the pestilent laden, war torn, heresy obsessed, lord dominated, and serf driven Middle

Ages (to name just a few of the period's hardships) – is hard to comprehend. What, one wishes to ask, about those who were not Christian? What about foreigners? About serfs?

Identity thrives on exclusionary economies, of course, and these four authors (two of whom, by the way, were noblemen) are prime examples of such an ostracizing demarche. It is of course easy to discount these texts from our post-postmodern perspective. But some of their aspects serve as useful symptoms of what identity vested in the nation could mean during the Romantic time that – despite our protestations to the contrary – continues to haunt, if not underpin our own time, even as we distance ourselves from many of its unselfconscious claims.[11]

The most notable aspect of August Wilhelm Schlegel's *History of Romantic Literature*[8] is that the word 'Europe' emerges as central. Christianity, Schlegel writes, is the foundation (*Grundprinzip*) of European unity. But in this text, 'Europe' above all means the German people who, in Schlegel's view, come from the 'heart' of Europe and, having wandered everywhere, have largely created its identity. Schlegel uses 'Romantic' as a synonym for 'the new Europe.' He refers to the Middle Ages as a time of 'christlicher Patriotismus,' and clearly wants the new Europe to emulate a similar patriotism. German literature, he proclaims, should henceforth look to its own past for its myths and stories – not only to resist classical models, but also to find its own identity. In short, all *Poesie* should have a mythological basis (here as elsewhere August Wilhelm follows his brother Friedrich). The 'united nationality of Europe' is meant to inspire the return to Europe's own medieval roots and legends, as well as to its imagined homogeneity of faith and nation. Of course, the nation means an imagined state of Germany, and the faith is meant to be recovered as the *Grundprinzip* of what will be the new Europe. The unity preached by A.W. Schlegel, then, is based on an unacknowledged system of exclusionary politics, religion and culture. More to the point, the notion of unity itself is the basis of Romantic poetry, but it also mirrors the 'unity' in the above-mentioned registers: politics, religion and culture are part of the *Einheit* that the elder Schlegel defends. Literature itself is metonymic for all these domains, the emphasis on the fragment notwithstanding. For the fragment, like a fraction, reminds us of its foundation in totality.

Novalis's *Die Christenheit oder Europa* (1799) had already introduced such rhetoric, even if in a more poetic and dreamy manner than in A.W. Schlegel's text. 'There was once a beautiful, shining time' Novalis begins, 'in which Europe was a Christian land, wherein all men were part of *one* Christian world, and *one* great community bound together the farthest flung provinces of this spiritual kingdom' (Ref 10, p. 389, my translation). Long before Max Weber, Novalis articulates the link between Protestantism and capitalism. For Novalis, however, these are the cause of the collapse of the unity achieved in the Middle Ages.

During the Reformation, the first damage was done, and the Enlightenment marked the final break in the harmony of the world until things become, in Novalis's words, 'unnatural'. The spirit is gone, as are mystery, obscurity and wonders. Now, everything is well scrubbed and mathematical. Church and State have been separated; everything is fractured.

But, says Novalis, the spirit will rise again like a phoenix. In fact, he argues, a nascent Germany is already slowly but surely leading the way for the other European countries, which are presently too busy with war and politics to notice, but which will eventually see the light. A new Jerusalem will come, he assures us, and it will be within a Europe without borders with Germany as the capital (a new Germany, then, as the New Jerusalem). Clearly influenced by Schleiermacher's *Über die Religion*,[12] Novalis uses 'Christus' and 'Europa ' interchangeably, magic and myth as symbols of unity, and the idea of Germany as the nation which will and must unite, in order to return the new Europe to the magic of 'true' Christianity (again, the Roman Catholic Church). Like Schlegel, Novalis begins by arguing for a Europe without boundaries, but ends up casting the new Germany as its centre and its capital, thus advocating an essentially *hierarchical* unity. Or, to misquote George Orwell: all nations are equal, but some nations are more equal than others.

It should be remembered that Fichte's *Reden an die deutsche Nation*[13] were delivered in the winter of 1807/8, in French-occupied Berlin, and are considered seminal texts for the philosophy of nationalism. For this later, reactionary, Fichte, everything about a state is connected to the divine order. Thus, the first 'true and original' boundaries for a state are in fact internal – that which binds them together as a people, precisely by divine order. People, Fichte argues, 'belong together and are by nature one and an inseparable whole'. Moreover, if such a whole 'wishes to absorb and mingle with itself any other people of differing descent and language, [it] cannot do so without becoming confused'. For the internal boundary, creating a people is 'drawn by the spiritual nature of man himself'. And if a people are lucky, they will be separated from others by mountains and rivers, as is the case with Germany; 'in the middle of Europe, as a wall to separate races not akin'. Individuals must develop within this notion of 'people', and cannot exist meaningfully otherwise. Any fusion of different peoples 'will bring about common destruction', and any man disagreeing or interfering with this fact is going against 'the highest law in the spiritual world'. External state boundaries are the spiritual manifestation of the internal ones, and they in turn are divinely ordered by the notion of a 'pure' people. Fichte too then, wants an alliance of religion (not Rome in this case) and state. On a political level, the reactionary and exclusionary aspects of his argument are clearly dangerous, and these have been much discussed by scholars.

But note that here the argument is not only for unity, but simultaneously and paradoxically against any 'mixture' of races or language – even of landscape:

'confusion' looms as an inevitable, foreboding consequence. The philosopher who in his Wissenschaftslehre[14] gave us the *Ich* and the *Nicht-Ich* – the subject that understands itself by determining what it is not – and who delineated an *Absolutes Ich* which synthesizes the dialectic posed by the first two – models his articulation of the future German state on the structure of his philosophy of mind. The future German state will be determined by recognizing what it is not, by distancing (literally as well as conceptually) any alterity, including any language, which is not its own. The absolute will come in the form of the 'spiritual world' which will consecrate the borders and obstacles necessarily (and *naturally)* erected 'to separate races not akin.' The internal boundaries drawn by 'the spiritual nature of man' are to be made manifest by the natural/political boundaries that will separate nation from nation, race from race, language from language. No confusion, in other words, need be feared.

The privileging of unity that underlies the German Romantic project is continually undercut by a concomitant insistence on identity politics. The repercussions for the modern university are inevitable. The Human Sciences are organized into departments of national literatures, with languages sometimes covering different nations in cases of ambiguity (American and British literature, for example, are usually in the same 'English' department). As there is a longing for national unity, bolstered by a transcendental idealism (a label which F. Schlegel considered redundant), the very idea of a University in itself reflects such imaginaries. In the middle of the 19th century, for instance, Cardinal Newman famously understood the University to be the embodiment of the unity of knowledge. A university, Newman argued, is grounded in the principle 'that all Knowledge is a whole and the separate Sciences parts of one…'.[15] All branches of knowledge are connected, he continues, 'because the subject-matter of knowledge is intimately united in itself, as being the acts and the work of the Creator'. Let us leave aside the slight resonance with Fichte in Newman's otherwise rather liberal discourse. Rather, let us focus on the European persistence for unity in the age of Romanticism – first for national unity (particularly of course for the Germans, who had no state in the early days of Romanticism), which necessitates 'natural' as well as ethnic borders, and will produce a state within the imaginary of the community. In the 19th century, there was at the same time a prevalent argument for the transcendental oneness of knowledge, which conversely wanted everything to be united under one idea, only deceptively delimited and fragmented. The appearance of the world, as Shelley put it, was, despite its multifariousness, the result of a single divine force: 'one bright light'. Fichte summarized the same idea in a metaphor: just as our eyes are a prism, so too the delineation between the divine and the manifold is a prism We are on the side where everything appears refracted, but this should not prevent us from realizing that the source of light that shines on the prism's other side and

through it, to us, is one single source. Reverse the prism, Fichte writes, and you return to 'total knowledge'.[16]

Does this mean the divine aspect of nationhood? The unity of all knowledge as emanating from the Creator? A resulting, effortless fashioning of natural borders of nation and thought reflected in the geographical configurations of the state? As Western Europeans of the 21st century, we might confidently assume that we are mostly no longer in that Romantic place. In 1882, Ernest Renan argued in *Qu-est-ce qu'une nation?* that ancestry may be the most legitimate foundation for nation.[17] He noted that 'the nation' is a fairly new notion – having been around only for approximately 200 years – its modern version inspired to a large extent by the German Romantics discussed earlier. However, Renan remarks that ethnicity cannot be the basis for nation, in part because there is no such thing as a pure race (the still current problems of the state of Israel might serve as a demonstration of the extent to which Renan was prescient). Maybe, Renan concludes, a nation is the result of a daily plebiscite, depending not on borders, but on agreement only.

The idea of the university and its own national literature departments is being rethought these days. Many theorists and scholars believe that national literature departments should no longer stand as if mimetic of the unquestioned sovereignty of nation, complete with language and ethnicity. As Edward Said noted, '… if the body of objects we study – the corpus formed by works of literature – belongs to, gains coherence from, and in a sense emanates out of, the concepts of nation, nationality, and even of race, there is very little in contemporary critical discourse making these actualities possible as subjects of discussion.'[18] And yet we are not so far from our Romantic forbears, as what Said laments is in many ways precisely what national literature departments cultivate and sustain: the body of texts that we study does indeed more often than not gain coherence from the concepts of nation, nationality and race. Examples include not only the various national literature departments in contemporary universities, but also (particularly in the Anglophone world) those focused on Gender Studies, African-American Studies, Irish Studies, and so on.

Indeed, at some level we seem very much to *want* boundaries. As the poet Robert Frost noted: good fences make good neighbours. The world is in everyone's 'backyard' now: the plight or success of any single country affects all others. We are, for example, continually 'warned' that China and India are the new economic giants, and told that the Middle East needs brokering from the West. At the same time, however, we constantly bump into the linguistic, ethnic and religious divides in the world, and in Europe itself, which provide obstacles to community even as they enrich its imaginary. Novalis's dream of unity, not to mention Fichte's idea of geographic isolation mirroring spiritual nationhood, are even less possible today than ever – and anyway, who wants them? Yet we do not seem to break free from these paradigms, even as we critique them (the 'unity of

Europe' is a constant call; but the opposing belief in the necessary preservation of cultural differences is touted just as loudly). Globalisation is overarching, but it does not of necessity lead to unity – except maybe to an international solidarity among the moneyed, which is another dimension (and problem) – not as entirely unrelated as we might hope. As if, using Jean-François Lyotard's model (but differently), borders will become the routes and scope of the control of information (technological information, as against 'pure' intellectual knowledge) – and thus, of power.[19] As many have noted, there is real danger when the market economy is politicized. In other words, the hesitation to allow Turkey to become a member of the European Union, to take but one example, is not limited to ethical concerns about the death penalty. On what ground does one stand when declaring, as so many have in the last few years, that 'Turkey is not part of Europe'? What did we assume 'Old Europe' means, when we listened to Bulgaria, for example, supporting the American war in Iraq? What kind of ancestry are we visualising to give gravitas to our construction of community?

In *Death of a Discipline*, Gayatri Spivak[20] writes that demography has replaced territoriality. And Andrew Abbott has argued that self-similarity is the fundamental modality of structure in human affairs.[21] Susan Stewart, in an admirable attempt at 'saving' the Humanities, has pleaded for seeing them as a continuation from the Renaissance in order to deepen the context for judgement.[22] Monika Fludernik urges us to take a stand against 'the collective egotism of global economy', and further demands that science and the humanities reach out to each other in the university on 'a common platform of fairness, human decency, and ecological respect.'[23] What is the role of literature in cultural identity? Is there a common European space? Is it reflected in the literary canon? What is the value system imposed by literature for European academics? Does such a value system reflect our notion of nations, border and Europe? On the most obvious level, of course, it must. Indeed, many have argued of late that, in the words of Simon During, 'it is becoming a commonplace that the institution of literature works to nationalist ends.'[24]

Today in many European academies, translation is at the centre, not at the margins of the curriculum in the Humanities. To what extent can teaching literature be read as sociological evidence? Spivak talks[20] of language teaching to 'disclose the irreducible hybridity of all language'. But how do we negotiate between the conflicting desires for a united Europe on the one hand, and the respect for difference on the other, such that small languages do not disappear, and their cultures along with them? How do we ensure that, as more than one critic worries, the global and multicultural do not turn into ideologically privileged discourses cultivated by the academy, even as they continue to be considered non-lucrative and impractical?

In March of 2007, 44 major francophone writers signed a manifesto in which they defended the right(!) to express themselves in French.[25] It is only when

nation is equated with language, they write (as it was in Fichte let us recall) that 'francophone' remains as the last avatar of colonialism. The emergence of a world literature in French, a literature 'ouverte sur le monde, transnationale', for these writers issues the death warrant of the *Francophonie* which, they add, 'nobody speaks anyway'. Thus did the politically correct work to stunt, rather than to help, these writers who have refused the side effects of such an agenda: re-marginalization on the altar of difference. Things are not easy.

Immigration is radically changing the 'European character' – which was in itself a chimera, as Zygmunt Bauman notes in *Europe: An Unfinished Adventure*.[26] Bauman argues that in an age of territoriality and territorial sovereignty, all realities are presumed to be spatially defined and territorially linked. Others, such as Simpson, have pointed to a new emphasis on 'localism' or to what Lyotard[19] calls local determinism and 'institutions in patches' in his *Postmodern Condition* (Ref. 19, p. 66). But localism is at best a fraught notion for Europe. Despite the emphasis on smaller groups (the Basques, for example, or Catalans), demography and the European Union have trumped territory, or so it would seem. The borders of Europe are anything but stable – indeed, Bauman argues that they never were, and that Europe is a civilization of transgression. And we do not need Bauman to remind us (as he often does) that there has never really been a European 'essence', nor such a thing as a stable 'European identity'. So how can we worry about teaching literature in the European context if ultimately we do not know what 'European' stands for?

One might argue that Europe is still reeling from having lost the colonies, and I think there may be some truth to this. And Etienne Balibar[27] may be right that Europe has finally 'learned the lesson of tragedy' (unlike the United States, apparently, which seems to thrive on amnesia). The point is, however, that there needs to be an imagined community that means 'Europe' if there is to be a community at all, which in turn could offer some ground to talk about how we understand literature, and whose literature we are understanding. But who is fashioning the imago for the word 'Europe'?

Post-revolutionary France has provided us with an example of a state preceding the nation, with the need to forge a sense of national identity for an imagined community of citizens who had little in common. This nation could draw upon three different strands for its imaginary: the Franks, the Celts and the Romans. The Germanic roots of the Franks, the name of the French nation notwithstanding, quickly took them out of the running. Napoleon, as we all know, chose ancient Rome as the iconic model for his empire. In the case of providing a community for Europe, the choice seems to be the Celts. In the last hundred years or so, and particularly since the 1970s and its early discourse on Europe, there has been a growing interest in the Celtic roots of Europe as another model for establishing the new imagined community in question. Anthropologists such as Michael Dietler have recently pointed out how establishing

authenticity through links to Celtic antiquity is serving this newest and largest imagined community we call the European Union.[28]

Since 1980, over a dozen major exhibitions on 'Celtic' archaeology have been mounted all over Europe. Clearly the purpose of these expositions by the European states is to help to form a unified hegemony by insisting on the cultural background and memory these disparate countries share. The logic here is that unity will follow once the shared identity strands are in place. Given that relatively few people in 'Celtic' Europe would describe themselves as Celts, we can see in these exhibits the attempt to impose (indeed, invent) cultural memory, even to create a European 'race' through the a posteriori fabrication of race memory. '*Nos ancêtres les gaullois*', becomes 'our ancestors the Celts', and the sense of 'our' has been expanded.

At the same time, however, even as we are urged to unite, we are seeing a rise of individual nationalisms in the more dominant European states (both France and Germany have new leaders who move in this direction: Nicolas Sarkozy has promised to return France to its former 'glory'; Angela Merkel has made similar remarks). But as Habermas reminds us, a nation state is not going to regain its old strength by retreating into its shell. One does not expect France or Germany, for example, to melt into a homogenised chorus of *e pluribus unum*. Interestingly enough, the nationalistic discourses *within* present-day France also turn to Celtic roots to forge a cultural 'unity'. The Celts serve as a form of 'Frenchness' for the right-wing agenda, in that, like the Celts, the French are now seen as fighting against occupying forces from within (those internal alien forces being, from this perspective, immigrants of course). So it is worth noting that three sites in France have been established as a type of holy Celtic trinity, representing heroism in the face of occupation: Alésia and Bibracte in Burgundy, and Gergovie in the Auvergne. In these pilgrimage sites, Vercingétorix is shown as being to Roman-occupied Gaul what De Gaulle was to German-occupied France. It is a highly politicized process of cultural production that uses shared memory (or the invention thereof) as its currency. It is a move reminiscent of erecting, as the French did, a statue of Joan of Arc in the French colonies to remind the 'natives' of their glorious 'roots' – an irony if ever there was one, given Joan's status as the heroine who got rid of the occupying forces in France. Such statues even won the indignant attention of the philosopher Simone Weil.

So one thing that's wrong with national literature departments is that they can (wittingly or not) collaborate in just this sort of invented memory, to forge a falsely unified identity for the purpose of having clarity and a trajectory. This may be a necessary ploy for the sake of order, professionalism, expertise (in Foucault's sense), and the efficient management of money and power. Admittedly, there is something to be said for teaching Mallarmé to students of French literature, for example. Or Pushkin in Russian to students of Slavic languages.

In my view, however, even if national literature departments persist (or survive), a larger and more institutionally supported and recognized place should be made in the European university for comparative literature. At least that field has always had to deal with multicultural and national difficulties as well as riches, and so raises – even as it mirrors – the challenges we face as 'Europe'.

From the beginning, comparative literature has been a response to immigration. As Guyard[29] points out in his little book *La littérature comparée* (first published in 1951), comparative literature began in France largely because of the panicked immigration from 1789–1815, from France and into the rest of Europe (Chateaubriand, Staël, Constant and others).[24] In other words, these 'immigrants' (largely political exiles) discovered other literatures (principally English and German, it should be noted, with some Spanish). Meanwhile, as he searched for new myths, Friedrich Schlegel began studying Sanskrit and founded the first chair of Comparative Literature in Europe. More than 150 years after Schlegel, however, Guyard's notion of comparative literature did not bring fascinating possibilities into a new mix. It mainly examined such rather uninspiring topics as 'Goethe in England' or 'Nietzsche in France'. Guyard admirably puts up an argument for juxtaposition, not outright comparison; but such projects (happily) no longer drive the agenda of most comparative literature programs today. Guyard does, however, insist on reading in the original language – a stance that seems fairly steady in most comparative literature desiderata.

We should remember that comparative literature in the United States was also largely started by immigrants – the refugees who fled Nazi Germany (principal among them Auerbach, Spitzer, Poggolio and Wellek). They could not be put into English departments – their heavily accented English used as the excuse to cover over pervasive anti-Semitism and more general Cold War xenophobia.[30] That generation of immigrants (refugees), trained as they were in many languages and their literatures, started modern comparative literature in the US. Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*,[31] famously written in exile in Istanbul, remains the Bible of comparative literature even today. So too, Edward Said's paradigm-shifting work *Orientalism* (1978)[32] inaugurated the entire field of postcolonial studies in a comparative literature context (Said was himself, of course, a Palestinian refugee). However, *Orientalism* also brought to the fore the extent to which the 'exotic' evidences an entire thought system in the West, revealing how alterity has remained unquestioned in the elitist eyes of the West, and how the 'First World' has taken not only its self-imposed status as 'first' for granted, but in doing so has acted as a demonstration (unneeded no doubt, but nevertheless) of the overwhelming if unacknowledged power of logocentrism.

The end of European colonial imperialism produced a wave of immigrants all over Europe, with well-known political, cultural, linguistic and literary consequences. It is this last wave that has brought Gayatri Spivak to say in

The Death of a Discipline,[20] that comparative literature as it was once understood is dead. A new comparative literature should be fashioned, she argues, joining the perspective of Charles Bernheimer's *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multi-Culturalism*.[33] They both argue that we need to prevent comparative literature from being appropriated and defined by the market; and they are both worried about 'area studies', with their ties to political power and the elite, taking over. Spivak and Bernheimer, however, are looking at comparative literature from an American perspective. For Spivak, the European presence is a cultural albatross, an obstacle to be overcome. We have expanded, she writes, 'beyond old European literatures.' The European language comparative literature programs, she adds, must be phased out. In her view, Europe obviously is exhausted, uninteresting, ready to leap into the imperialist mode at the drop of a hat. We need to save the small languages, she argues – the ones that will otherwise be lost with what she anticipates will be the rapid demise of French and German; the ones, she adds, 'that do not need borders'. We must stop thinking of the native as the other, Spivak tells us. But of course, who is the native in Europe? Interestingly, Spivak still holds to the philological principle of comparative literature: works should be read in the original.

How different this is from William Moebius,[34] who argues (in 1997, thus before 9/11) that without closures (boundaries), there can be no disciplines ('Lines in the Sand.') Moebius deplores the *decline* of French and German in US comparative literature programmes; indeed, he feels that these literary traditions may be endangered. One then wonders, if they are endangered, whether those who uphold the Spivak argument will then 'turn back' to support French and German, as she does Swahili and other 'small languages', which risk becoming extinct? This question is more than a scholastic exercise: to what extent are German and French, Spivak's examples of overly dominant linguistic codes, of value *despite* their tradition of dominance, empire and elitism?

Moebius, meantime, makes a good, practical point: unlike comparative literature, every national literature department holds cultural capital from the history of nations or communities they represent. This is a hard fact and impacts the marketability of professionalism. The implied vicious circle notwithstanding (traditional universities seek out graduates trained in a similar track), the hireability of our students is a problem that, in its European context, needs to be addressed. But Moebius also has another worry, namely that the link between literary studies and the format for a model citizen has been broken. Universities used to provide the study of European literature to produce cultivated people housing the 'vital principle of national spirit', Readings notes in his *The University in Ruins*.[35] The nation state is still at the centre of things, but within the global flow of capital, not that of cultural capital. In Readings' view, the university should avoid a corporate structure targeted at maximising profit as much as it should avoid

a Romantic nostalgia for unity. So here we have two writers, Moebius and Readings, who worry that the decline of the nation state in the face of globalisation will destroy literary studies in general. Then, literature will become merely decorative. The whole European tradition, for example, of getting a degree in literature for the purpose of becoming cultivated, educated, and so on, will implode. Europe is particularly at danger here, since there are so few jobs for students with doctorates. If nothing else, comparative literature represents the multifaceted aspects of Western culture today – precisely in its French, German, Spanish, Portuguese and other 'domineering' languages. But they may precisely no longer truly be domineering… Ahearn and Weinstein write that '[n]othing is more constructed than national literature departments, not only because "nationality" is something of a fiction, tuning out far more voices than it tunes in, but also because literature itself is irrepressibly mixed, stereophonic, porous, marked by exchanges and influences, international' (Ref. 33, p. 79).

The deconstruction of the nation state is accompanied by the dismantling of the subject, in an evolution that is equally complex. In *Age of the World Picture*, Heidegger[36] noted that with the advent of the subject, there would always be the objectification of that same subject; and this is the case whether we are speaking of a single subject or of a community. 'It makes no difference,' the philosopher says. And in *The Subject and Power* Foucault[37] warns that maybe we have come to the end of *homo cultivus*.

Like Bauman, I too fear that the Western way of life is no longer legitimized. And I do not believe that the answer is to be apologetic all the time – about having Eurocentric interests, research projects and ideas; about being in literature in the first place (the rush to history, or cultural studies, or anthropology – not that there's anything wrong with them – to make amends for 'just' being in literature). After all, as Paul Ricoeur once noted, consciousness is just as complicated as the unconscious. By this, I do not mean that Europe is all that is rational and brought to the light, while everybody else is the unconscious 'dark continent', to use Freud's unhappy phrase. Too many essays render the West, and Europe in general, quite monolithic (as against the usually very nuanced and subtle presentation of what is not 'first' world). Perhaps a stronger commitment to comparative literature programs in European universities will allow for the questioning of sovereign nation statehood, of borders as stable, of one language as more significant than another. A comparative literature program, in other words, is less likely to render (or to be seen as rendering) any tradition as monolithic or reductive. Perhaps such a commitment will help to stave off what others see as the built-in obsolescence of literary studies as a whole. But such a commitment to comparative literature can be a commitment to the culture of Europe as well – what it has been, what it is becoming, and where it might be going.

Just as we no longer take a static literary canon for granted, so we can reject national literature departments if they remain static themselves; if they assume an inevitable transparency between the literary text (or any cultural object) and sovereign statehood, and if they become entrenched in any status quo – including that which passes at the moment for 'politically correct'. I would add that my hope for comparative literature in the future is inextricably connected to my hope for Europe. United as we may be learning, or trying to learn, to become in the new Europe, we are also particularly well-placed to recognize – on the ground, quite literally – the richness of variety in language, culture, and literary distinctiveness. This diversity is our cultural wealth, but it is also our greatest challenge.

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