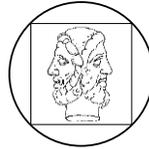




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COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AND POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES – A NEW OPENING FOR COMPARATIVISM?¹

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Abstrakt: Dorota Kołodziejczyk, LITERATURA PORÓWNAWCZA I STUDIA POSTKOLONIALNE – NOWE OTWARCIE DLA KOMPARATYSTYKI? "PORÓWNANIA" 5, 2008, Vol. V, p. 55-73, ISSN 1733-165X. Artykuł ukazuje ścisłe związki pomiędzy literaturą porównawczą a studiami postkolonialnymi. Związki z te wynikają z istoty obu dziedzin, które badają podobne zjawiska lub zbliżają się do siebie w eksploracji literatury i kultury. Postkolonializm ukazuje najpełniej swoje komparatystyczne oblicze, gdy podchodzi do świata imperializmu jako dynamicznego pola, w którym hegemonia, przymus i podporządkowanie ścierają się z formami opozycyjnymi od przewrotnej mimikry poprzez otwarty opór, aż po różnorodność parodystycznych przewartościowań i tekstualnych zawłaszczeń. Komparatystyka na gruncie studiów postkolonialnych nie tyle będzie poszukiwać dowodów na pełne odrzucenie i przewyciężenie podporządkowania kolonialnego, ile ukaże ambiwalentne pokłosie kolonializmu, i, w konsekwencji, konieczność myślenia o kulturze wychodzącego poza centralizm tożsamości narodowej, otwierającego się na perspektywę, jak ujął to Said, historiografii nomadycznej i kontrapunktowej historiografii. Jednocześnie postkolonializm wnosi zmiany w rozumieniu literatury porównawczej. Osłabia znaczenie literatury narodowej, ponieważ literatura postkolonialna jest jednocześnie literaturą post-narodową. Studia postkolonialne wymuszają na tradycyjnej komparatystyce nowe perspektywy czytania tekstów, przede wszystkim dotyczące odrębności, inności, graniczności języka, który odsłania nieznane zachodniej myśli formy egzystencji, obszary wrażliwości, konteksty kulturowe oraz ideologiczne. E. Said, T. Brennan i H. Bhabha podkreślają znaczenie przekładu i kategorii estetycznych, których nie powinno zacierać dominujące obecnie podejście kulturalistyczne.

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In other words, I have had enough of being told that imperialism gave us the novel³.

In all possible attempts to define the scope and interest of postcolonialism: as critical practice whose aim is to examine the aftermath of colonialism, or revision of significations imposed in the process of colonization on the subjugated countries and societies, development of a theory for interpreting consequences of colonial dependence within the area of language, of individual and collective consciousness, historiographic thought and artistic expression, the discipline will reveal its comparative foundations. Regardless where we locate the origins of postcolonialism— at the moment when it became an academic discipline, in anti-colonial movements, in literature written in ex-colonies or in the metropolis by émigrés from the former empire – the comparative proclivity constitutes the key feature of postcolonial thought. In fact, precisely because postcolonial thought emerged as counter-discourse in relation to the western post-Enlightenment modernity, this oppositional or even resistance dynamic founds postcolonial studies on a comparative impulse. Consequently, postcolonial studies develops as an essentially comparative discourse.

First of all, the colonizer/colonized encounter activates a comparative knowledge (albeit in the service of imperial power). The colonizer needs to get to know the colonized to an extent that allows granting the colonized the status of constitutive difference in relation to the colonizer and to contain the colonized within the category of the “Other”. Subsequently, a colonial discourse emerges legitimating colonial power as historically and ethically necessary. This is how, as Edward Said writes in his *Orientalism* (1978), the Orient – constituted as the “Other” of the West – helped define Europe “as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience”⁴. Orientalism as a discourse producing and sustaining the western vision of the Orient has an undeniably comparative character, with that important reservation that the West legitimates through this comparative program its own hegemony over the East which, as an object of knowledge, the Orient, serves to consolidate the sense of “positional superiority” of the people of

³G.i Ch. Spivak, *Komparatystyka ekstremalna*, „Recykling idei. Pismo społecznie zaangażowane” i. 10, Spring/Summer 2008, 130-135, p. 133. [abridged and trans. by D. Kołodziejczyk from G.C. Spivak: „Rethinking Comparativism”, Northwestern University lecture, 07.03.2008]

⁴E. Said, *Orientalism. Western Conceptions of the Orient*. Routledge, London 1978, p.2.

the West⁵. Orientalism was, then, an important factor mobilizing the need to relate beyond one's language and culture in the period when the notion of national literature was emerging in Europe. In turn, as Said clearly states in his work *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), in the context of the empire national culture cannot, as a source of identity, avoid creating hierarchies and divisions of a strongly valorizing, more or less excluding, or even openly xenophobic character. National culture develops within the framework of the empire through its narrative power⁶, consequently supporting the imperial project of producing and reproducing cultural differences for the purpose of legitimating the colonial enterprise: "[t]he power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them"⁷. Following the direction pointed by Said, postcolonialism as an analysis of relations between culture and imperialism sets for itself the task of revealing not only the mechanisms of constituting the hegemony of the West, not only the mechanisms of blocking voices reduced to the status of the native object of knowledge and power, but also the reverse mechanisms of resistance against processes of objectification and coercion, as indelible components of the experience of the colonized.

The comparative potential inherent in postcolonialism is manifest precisely in how it understands imperialism as a dynamic force field, where hegemony, coercion and subjugation are challenged by oppositional discourses ranging from sly mimicry through open resistance to a multiplicity of parodic revaluations or textual reappropriations in the strategy of rewriting. Said is right to note the paradox of the legacy of the empire: in place of the old divisions creating the hierarchies of us – the subjects of western discourse and them – the objects of knowledge and power, a space of heterogeneous and multiple border cultural connections is produced. He writes: "Partly because of empire, all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic"⁸. Orientalism has developed its own comparativism which, within the horizon of the empire, affirmed the authority of the West either programmatically or entirely unconsciously – or, rather, subconsciously and automatically. As Said pointed out, Orientalism should be perceived as a complex, interactive, material and imaginary archive whose use commands authority: "each work on the Orient affiliates itself with

⁵Ibid., p. 7.

⁶Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. London, Vintage 1993, p. xiii.

⁷Ibid., p. xiii.

⁸Ibid., p. xxix.

other works, with audiences, with institutions, with the Orient itself”⁹. Said’s critical perspective on Orientalism is itself an enormous comparative enterprise where various traditions of studying and representing the Orient are gathered and classified in order to expose Orientalism’s systematicity and its structural presence in the development of imperialism. However, Said’s most crucial impact in articulating new needs of the discipline has been in re-evaluation of the very idea of comparativism –so that in the perspective of a comparative reading of cultures and texts they produce there could emerge agents so far repressed in the supremacist imperial discourse or limited to stereotypical representations of colonial subject. New comparativism underlying postcolonial theory disrupts binarisms characteristic not only of the imperialist constructions of identity, but also of nationalism which, like imperialism, feeds on clear divisions into hierarchizing dichotomies. Comparativism operating within the horizon of postcolonial studies will not so much look for evidence of the final rejection and overcoming of colonial dependence, but will reveal the ambivalent aftermath of colonialism. Consequently, it necessitates thinking about culture going beyond centralism of national identity and opening to what Said called the nomadic and contrapuntal historiography¹⁰.

Said’s *Orientalism* does not mark some absolute beginning of postcolonialism, but it certainly is a key work delineating the scope of postcolonial comparative thought. Theoretical reflection comes after literary work which had been postcolonial long before the academic discipline qualified it as such. In this sense, postcolonialism would have its beginning when, depending on an area, literature writing was becoming a conscious act of self-affirmation through language and artistic form. This would be accompanied by a sense of an ambivalent cultural legacy, mainly the language imposed through the colonial system of education, but also literary form, such as the novel, short story or epic poem. Genealogy locating the beginnings of postcolonialism in creative work from the colonies produced with an awareness of its unique worth, which would be one’s own voice recuperated from underneath the overbearing superstructure of the imperial literary canon, should also be seen as an evidence of the comparative dimension of postcolonial studies. When writing occurs in the the language of the colonizer (the problem encompasses also the choice of form, which is borrowed and transferred onto another language and social reality), we deal with a sense of inevitable displacement and

⁹*Orientalism*, p.

¹⁰Op. cit., p. xxix.

loss of the original sense or substance in a specific kind of translation which does not seem to have an original. As Indian writer, Raja Rao, wrote: “The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one’s own the spirit that is one’s own”¹¹. Raja Rao grasps here the essence of postcolonial literature at its very onset: the “authentic” postcolonial experience is always an act of translation, where adequacy guaranteeing success of translation cannot suppress or erase incommensurability as an ineluctable effect of cultural transfer through the language. Postcolonial literature is “post” mostly in the sense that it does not privilege adequacy, or equivalence, over incommensurability. Quite the reverse, untranslatability constitutes an important element of play with autonomy in the literary text, where substantive difference resists reduction to a universalizing cultural norm implied in an unproblematically “adequate” translation. If we assume, then, that the problematic of difference as an area of linguistic/cultural untranslatability is an important aspect of the comparative dimension of postcolonialism, we should be able to note that what has been articulated at the very beginning of postcolonial reflection continues to resonate powerfully in contemporary globalization processes. A new cosmopolitanism needs to be imagined and worked out, encompassing the increasing mobility of societies, the nomadic condition of labor, the multicultural and multilingual metropolitan space.

The “origins” of postcolonial reflection, be it postcolonial literature or a group of disciplines (or a transdisciplinary area) dating back to the beginning of the 80s, always point at something prior – something that is both an origin from which postcolonial thought has to cut itself off, and an origin with which continuity cannot be avoided. Postcolonialism begins then with a lag of which it is fully aware¹², hence genealogy retains such importance in postcolonial comparative space. Its aim is to establish a strategic filiation whose main feature will be that of lack of continuity with the antecedent. But before I start analyzing the specific poetics of disjunction characteristic of postcolonial comparative thought always relating to the European comparative tradition, I want to point at the characteristic figurativeness of genealogical terminology developed in postcolonial theory. It is dominated by the metaphors of an uncertain, hypothetically multiple fatherhood and of illegitimate birth. Such genealogical poetics vindicates

¹¹R.Rao, *Kanthapura*,(1938). “New Directions Publishing” 1967, p. vii.

¹²H. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*.Routledge, London and New York 1994, pp. 191-192.

Caliban¹³. We can even venture a statement that genealogical motive becomes obsessive in postcolonial novel – racial, cultural, and linguistic “impurity,” factual or imagined, and often represented in the rich metaphor of hybridity. It opens up a dialogue with imperial legacy, which both fascinates and overwhelms and which a postcolonial writer has to grapple with in order to hear his/her own voice.

Postcolonial hypostasized genealogies radically transform the understanding of comparative literature. National literature does not provide the main frame of reference in the postcolonial perspective. By no means does it lead to a negation of the very category of nation or national literature; rather, these categories cannot comfortably relate to postcolonial literatures which emerge and develop in a specific environment of multilingualism (even if, or especially if, the hegemony of the colonizer’s language suppresses or annihilates the indigenous language). The language of postcolonial literature, no matter whether it is a so-called vernacular, or a colonizer’s language, is always, at least to a degree, an effect of translation or it manifests itself in the process of translation. So, if we could define national literature as that which cumulates the experience of a given collectivity expressing itself through history, language and culture as an imagined totality, then postcolonial literature would be transnational, never quite being national in the first place. It both affirms the nation as a key category consolidating the people¹⁴ in anti-colonial struggle, but it also contests it as an idealized form legitimating excesses and atrocities of nationalism. In this complex sense, worth investigating in itself, postcolonial literature is post-national. One reason is that postcolonial state in most cases does not fit easily in the format of nation-state, which is either too narrow, or not quite adequate. Another reason is that the very category of national literature remains complicit in imperial discourse as an ideal to aspire to. It was 19th c. comparative literature that sanctioned national literature as a comparative category; national literature constituted in this originary conceptualization the basis for dialogue between nations, but, in the colonial context, it became a category of evaluative and hierarchizing comparison. For example, in the case of the Caribbean, we do not talk about the Jamaican or Trinidadian or Haitian literature, rather, we use the more spacious categories of the Caribbean Spanish, Francophone or Anglophone literature (historically referred to as the West Indian

¹³ See: G. Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960). University of Michigan Press, 1991, and idem, *Water with Berries*. Holt, Reinhart and Winston 1972.

¹⁴ See F. Fanon, *On National Culture*, in: idem, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. by Richard Philcox. New York, Grove Press 2005.

literature). To operate the category of national literature might be in this case a symptom of a characteristic Eurocentrism ignoring the complexity of literary production occurring within the spectrum ranging from colonial languages (Spanish, French, English, Dutch) through various stages of hybridization into Creole languages. However, the same problem may look starkly different in another context – to decline the category of national literature in the case of literature from African countries might be perceived as a manifestation of Western supremacist attitude, associating African culture solely with a racial (by implication, not yet national), if not entirely tribal, consciousness.

This categorial ambiguity resulting from the necessity to operate the terms that are never quite adequate (national literature, racial/ethnic consciousness/identity, regional literature) gets even more complicated when we include into it the diasporic factor in postcolonial literature. If a large part of postcolonial literature is written in the metropolis by émigré writers, then it is necessary to ask how, and in what aesthetic and ideological form do they bring together locality with which they identify or to which they point as their roots with the characteristic postcolonial cosmopolitanism of uprootedness or of multiple rootedness. We arrive here at the key question which comparativism transcoded¹⁵ within the postcolonial perspective has to face: if comparative literature functions as a discipline within the horizon of world literature (here it is necessary to stress that world literature is a being created for the needs of comparative literature), which has its source directly in Goethe's foundational concept of *Weltliteratur*, then what is the world of this literature which more and more often is called world literature in English? How do texts circulate in the globalized world, and why is this world becoming so rapidly monolingual? This terminology, as imprecise as it is grandiose, nevertheless testifies to the need of going beyond the limitations of the category of postcolonial literature, which, after all, reduces the rich literary production in a binary polarization of colonialism/post-, or peripheries/metropolis. It can also block a certain historiographic attempt to open the critical language to new, radically modern processes, where it is necessary to talk about various manifestations of neo-imperialism, albeit in a new, dispersed (post- and supra-national) configuration of power and knowledge, where postcolonialism could make a contribution as one of many critical voices. The world of literature written in English is transnational: multilingual (hybridizing languages, haunting with

¹⁵E. Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey, p. 8.

echoes of erased or lost vernaculars), originating in the history of uprooting of enforced displacement, homelessness and dispossession, which means, in the history of imperialism. Contemporary comparativism cannot ignore the lesson offered by postcolonialism, which, in turn, symptomatically tends to include comparative literature within its field of interest. If we expect from postcolonial thought to evolve, as it does, into a critique of globalization processes (although some critics would accuse the discipline of being an active agent of globalization¹⁶), we might also expect that comparative literature will now develop precisely as a discourse aware of the fact that its history coincides with the history of globalization¹⁷. While demanding some radical alterglobalism would be too much to ask for this complicity in the imperial project, the work toward developing a critical program for comparative literature that would allow to combine the rich theoretical legacy of the discipline with the ability to read contexts without reducing them to universalist paradigms.

It is not a mere coincidence that each member of the triad of critics foundational for postcolonial theory – Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak – proposed in their program a new methodology of comparative reading and, subsequently, a new theory of comparativism. Said defined his writing as “worldly criticism” – a term taken from Auerbach (“Dante als Dichter der irdischen Welt”), translating into English uncomfortably and reductively, Emily Apter observes, as “secular”¹⁸. In his *The World, The Text, and the Critic*, Said cogently linked secularism and worldliness as two inseparable aspects of being a critic who is strategically skeptical of such systems of belief as nationalism and fixed identity frames imposed by nationalism and its ally, religious fundamentalism, and who is also always situated in the world, involved in history, anthropology, politics, as well as the immediate context of one’s place and time¹⁹. Homi Bhabha, in turn, drawing on Goethe’s concept of *Weltliteratur*, points out that the possibility, even necessity, of world literature was born in a particular historical context of the crisis after the Napoleonic Wars. He draws a project of contemporary comparative literature with a focus transferred from national literatures to the problem of “unhomeliness” – cultural

¹⁶For example T. Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1997.

¹⁷V. Coopan, *Ghosts in the disciplinary machine: The uncanny life of world literature*. “Comparative Literature Studies” 2004, 41/1, pp. 10-36, p. 13.

¹⁸Apter, op.cit., p. 68.

¹⁹T. Brennan, *Edward Said and Comparative Literature*. “Journal of Palestine Studies” 2004, 33/3, pp. 23-37, p. 33.

displacement that defines the “postcolonial place”²⁰. This is from such a dislocated location that new world literature could be studied: “The study of world literature might be the study of the way in which cultures recognize themselves through their projections of otherness [...] Where the transmission of ‘national’ traditions was once the major theme of a world literature, perhaps we can now suggest the transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees – these border and frontier conditions – may be the terrains of World Literature.”²¹In her reflections on the discipline of comparative literature, always linked with the translation theory she has been developing throughout her work, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak raises crucial issues of the danger of universalism in comparative studies. Her project of extreme comparativism, consistently tied up to her work on translation practiced as an act of complete surrender to the text (concomitant with giving up one’s convictions about cultural meanings and hierarchies), can be summed up in the aphorism serving as a motto to this article.

These three very different critics, included in the project of postcolonial studies either programmatically, like Spivak and Bhabha, or by critical consensus, like Said, share one basic paradigm – all three postulate the method of close reading. By no means should this method be associated with New Criticism. Quite the reverse, the reader-interpreter engages with the text to bring it out into the world, back to the world, as we should think. Such an engagement with the text will reveal the constitutive difference of text as translation, both linguistic and cultural. The translator and/or critic discovers various localities of the text, each speaking in its own voice and language. Our interest here is to see how the practice of “close reading” elaborated by each of the three critics informs the postcolonial “translation” of the tradition and paradigms of comparative literature.

Most commentators of Edward Said’s work emphasize the importance of Erich Auerbach and the whole post-WW2 tradition of comparative literature set up in the United States by Auerbach, Leo Spitzer and Robert Curtius²². But it is also worth reminding that although Said recognized the foundational significance of comparative literature for the development of a “trans-national,

²⁰H. Bhabha, *The World and the Home*. “Social text” 1992, 10, 2-3 p. 142.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 146.

²² See E. Apter, *op. cit.*; A. Mufti, “*Auerbach in Istanbul: Edward Said, Secular Criticism and the Question of Minority Culture*.” *Critical Inquiry*” Fall 1998, nr 25, pp. 95-125; T. Brennan, *op. cit.*

even trans-human perspective on literary performance”²³, he at the same time pointed out that the world of comparative literature was an idealization whose default incarnation, despite its underpinning universalism, was European literary heritage: “To speak of comparative literature therefore was to speak of the interaction of world literatures with one another, but the field was epistemologically organized as a sort of hierarchy, with Europe and its Latin Christian literatures at its center and top”²⁴.

In this sense Auerbach’s *Mimesis* is for Said a work of nostalgic idealization of European cultural and literary space in the face of the catastrophe of Nazism. Said points out that, for the author, *Mimesis* was “an act of civilizational survival”; its value cannot be overestimated for a comparatist, since it represents “a complex evolution of European literature in all its variety”²⁵. This evolution represents a vision of literature in its specifically European, dialectic historicity, whose universalism is a cunning way to reinforce the supreme position of the West: “the notion of Western literature that lies at the very core of comparative study centrally highlights, dramatizes and celebrates a certain idea of history, and at the same time obscures the fundamental geographical and political reality empowering that idea”²⁶.

Said notices an apparently paradoxical lack of worldliness in so conceived comparative/world literature. Originating from the breakthrough in secular human sciences from Vico through Herder, Rousseau, the Schlegel brothers, and developed throughout Romanticism and later, comparative literature is framed within its dialectically structured totality and for this reason cannot be worldly enough – open to otherness and difference beyond. Said refers to Auerbach’s late essay *Philologie der Weltliteratur* (1952), written at the peak of anticolonial struggles, where the author is anxious about the emergence of “new” literatures, without considering the context of colonization and decolonization,²⁷ as if dwelling in history was an exclusively European attribute. By “worldliness” Said means criticism sensitive to overlapping and mutually dependent histories and geographies. In his project of “comparative literature of imperialism”²⁸, Said seeks to combine the reflection on the totalizing vision of the centrality of

²³Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 52.

²⁴Ibid., p. 52.

²⁵Ibid., p. 54.

²⁶Ibid., p. 54.

²⁷Ibid., p. 52-53.

²⁸Ibid., p. 19.

the West which he examined in *Orientalism* and transferred onto broadly understood cultural practice, literature (novel in particular), with the contrapuntal method as a comparative reading where correspondence and divergence often go together. Contrapuntal reading traces how other (colonial, postcolonial) histories and discourses interact with metropolitan discourse through the relation of influence and opposition. In *Culture and Imperialism* Said uses contrapuntal method to expose the immanence of the imperial venture in the culture of the West, and the cover-up role of the idealist approach within the European tradition, where culture and its products provide a transcendental sphere of escape from “secular” matters such as economics or politics. (Said plays here on the broad spectrum of cultural meanings provided by the Latin etymology of “saecularis” – worldly as opposed to eternal: immanent and temporal, of this world.) Said admits that the vision of the world as “overlapping territories and intertwined histories” was prefigured in the works of pioneers of comparative literature. However, the contrapuntal method will be instrumental in showing how a certain cultural vision was made possible by the imperial project: “we can grasp in a new and dynamic way both the idealist historicism which fuelled the comparatist ‘world literature’ scheme and the concretely imperial world map of the same moment”²⁹.

The goal of Said’s analysis of the “distinctive cultural topography”³⁰ mapping the imperial space is ultimately to recover and uncover other subjectivities and voices suppressed by the hegemony of the western subject. It will give rise to further comparative criticism, which, in a detailed, culturally and ideologically situated text analysis, projects theoretical and intellectual perspective for the investigation of conceptual and knowledge systems and their interdependencies within the horizon of “what I would call a kind of globalism in the study of texts.”³¹ The method of reading will be a contrapuntal comparison, while the intellectual horizon will be delineated by worldly (means – secular) criticism: a practice of critical cosmopolitanism which avoids both the traps of nationalism, especially where it operates the visions of a pure national history and identity, and of the temptations of cosmopolitanism, sustaining, under the masque of universalism, the dense network of imperial and post-imperial hegemonies. The most interesting aspect of Said’s work is that his method does not succumb to theorization easily – it

²⁹Ibid., p. 56.

³⁰Ibid., p. 61.

³¹Brennen, op. cit., p. 29.

can be fully appreciated in the analyses of concrete texts and cultural phenomena. Timothy Brennan, who sees in postcolonialism a major betrayal of the potential of Said's project, points out that the contrapuntal method postulates a criticism which continues the tradition of a public intellectual and was developed as an alternative to theoretically overblown categories of hybridity, multiculturalism, or marginality³². Said develops in his writings an idea of comparative literature as a politically responsible discipline based on an internally complex and often conflicting vision of history, critically inspired with both the long tradition of philology and with theoretical virtuosity of the 80s textualism (which Said often saw as an excess). Summing up in Timothy Brennan's words, Said "crafted a literary discourse that displaced texts from their textuality, recasting them in the sensual mold of the intellectual act"³³. Said managed to evince from the text, specifically narrative text as his primary object of investigation, "modalities of change" and the oppositional potential³⁴. Said powerfully shows in his works that literary text cannot be merely an object for theoretical speculations, but is a unique and individual product of culture, entangled in all kinds of worldly conditions, and at the same time a "place of refuge from the world"³⁵. A reading of such text must be both founded on a broad knowledge of theory, literature and culture, and, simultaneously, treated on a par with theory, not as its object. Said showed in his project of comparative literature a critical practice which recognizes the individuality of literary text and its irreducibility to theoretical paradigms. At the same time, he includes the concrete and local³⁶ reading in the conceptualization of the "world" – a network of narrative trajectories along which we can trace the nomadic character of thought, subjectivity and historiography in their overlapping, often mutually oppositional, boundaries, in a broader perspective of imperial hegemonies, as well as resistance sites and practices. The comparative model emerging from this locally "worldly" and "secular" criticism is a transnational literature based on an ethos of reading that opens up the text to the world; an ethos of "connecting things to each other . . . to the changes that are upon us now socioeconomically,

³²Ibid., p. 26.

³³Ibid., p. 24.

³⁴ B. Robbins, M. L. Pratt, J. Arac, R. Radhakrishnan, E. Said, "Edward Said's Culture and Imperialism: A Symposium." "Social Text" 1994, nr 40, 1994, pp. 12.

³⁵ Brennan, op.cit., p. 23.

³⁶Brennan points out how important the notion of locality in literature was for Said, who derived it from Mikhail Bakhtin's essay "Time and the chronotope in the novel"; for postcolonial theory Bakhtin's theory of the novel constitutes an important source of reference and inspiration, see: H. Bhabha "Dissemination: Time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation, in: *The Location of Culture*, pp. 139-170.

politically, and imaginatively through such things as television, migrations, demographic shifts, refugees, transnational finance”³⁷.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, whose spectacular translation of Derrida’s *De la grammatologie* launched her academic career, consistently combines theoretical reflection with translation practice. Translation constitutes for Spivak a field of being with the text (she deliberately uses the erotic references – “surrender to the text”, “translation is the most intimate act of reading”³⁸) which makes it possible to transgress the limitations of one’s subjectivity and enter the intersubjective space of the language: “It is a simple miming of the responsibility to the trace of the other in the self”³⁹. For Spivak, who defines her position as that of a Marxist-feminist critic, postcolonialism is not so much a theory to elaborate, as it is a terrain of critical practice. Her work on translation and her vision of comparative literature after what I would provisionally call here the post-colonial breakthrough (the advent of postcolonial literatures to the curricula of Western universities) demonstrated powerfully how durable and difficult to eradicate is the tendency to introduce cultural material, including literature in translation from the Third World, onto the Western market (art, publishing, academia) as a passive object: the material processed through theoretical commentary. Similarly to Said, Spivak calls for resistance against such form of theoretical authority which is articulated solely in the voice of Western critic claiming universal knowledge. The ethos of surrendering to the text in translation, urging to recognize and respect rhetoricity of the text, makes it possible for us to see the text first as an individual product of specific cultural, class, and social contexts, which together are not reducible to the totalizing concept of “Third World literature”, and, second, as the terrain of an active work of language: “I want to consider the role played by language for the *agent*, the person who acts . . . The task of the feminist translator is to consider language as a clue to the working of gendered agency”⁴⁰. Translation is, then, an ethical project in the sense that its task is to create a model for another language which will comprise the work of language in the text as completely as possible, especially its refractory rhetoricity. It cannot be limited solely to the dictionary adequacy, as is often the case of translations of non-western literatures into English. Spivak considers such

³⁷ Robbins, Pratt, ea., op. cit., p. 23.

³⁸ G. Ch. Spivak: *The Politics of Translation*, in: Spivak: *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. Routledge, New York and London 1993, pp. 183.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

translation as incomplete in the first place, and, also, as inscribed within the imperial tendency to even out difference in simplifying classificatory systems: “This happens when all the literature of the Third World gets translated into a sort of with-it translatese, so that the literature by a woman in Palestine begins to resemble, in the feel of its prose, something by a man from Taiwan”⁴¹.

Spivak demonstrates on examples how translation can neutralize specificity of the original and deprive it of its substance, delivering to the reader a text without an artistic and linguistic individuality. She points out that literary production branded “Third World literature” is too easily treated in western academia as a tool of opposition against western hegemony, or, in other words, against neoimperialism. In the context of her translation of women’s literature, Spivak postulates that “the person who is translating must have a tough sense of the specific terrain of the original, so that she can fight the racist assumption that all third world women’s writing is good”⁴². She is critical of applying different standards to the Third World literature and western literature. As a result, postcolonial literature is often treated as oppositional *par excellence*, while critical insight should examine rhetoricity of the text and reveal the areas of persisting conflict and tension (e.g. gender/national identity; class/gender etc.). The area of conflict delineates in fact the text’s political sphere, but this sphere, commensurate with the function of the agent, has to be an effect of an in-depth – intimate, in Spivak’s idiom – knowledge of the original’s specificity, and of a critical approach that will not limit the text to the standard of Third-Worldliness, even less so to the standards of cosmopolitan Third-worldliness⁴³, which may be understood as a repository of figures of identity and belonging, or stubbornly recurring categories of nativeness, ethnicity, as well as mechanistically reproduced cultural quasi-hybrids. In this context Spivak asserts that “ways of constructing objects of knowledge . . . should not have national names either”⁴⁴, in the sense that, for example, the category of Indian literature does not relate to any totality, but more often than not functions as a trade mark branding a slightly exoticised literature in English from India, equipped in an easy-to-absorb dose of cultural otherness. Reducing a postcolonial text to national or ethnic categories in a situation when they often and conflictually overlap with other social and cultural issues, results

⁴¹Ibid., p. 182.

⁴²Ibid., p. 188.

⁴³T. Brennan writes critically about commodified Third-World writers’ cosmopolitanism in *At Home in the World*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, London 1997.

⁴⁴ Spivak, op. cit., p. 188-189.

in eliminating from critical insight the sub- and transnational sphere, especially the sphere of subalternity. Here Spivak agrees with said that the category of national literature, originally meant as a ready comparative unit, contained in its very idea a trace of hierarchy⁴⁵. The archetypal method, which Spivak's generation was discovering in the 60s of the 20th c., was nothing less than looking for similarities without worrying about such problems as cultural, social, political and aesthetic contexts of the text. The Bakhtinian category of locality of the text, including its area of disjunctiveness, is not recognized as an analytical category in such seemingly trans-cultural comparative readings. In Spivak's project of comparative literature it is necessary to go beyond the established methods and reach down to where language opens up the space of subalternity.

By "subalternity" Spivak understands a subjectivity devoid of a possibility to speak due to the "epistemic violence" performed by hegemonic power/knowledge⁴⁶. In order to draw a project of new comparativism, Spivak juxtaposes subalternity and globality, defining the latter as "the need to establish the same system of exchange all over the world"⁴⁷. Global literature would be, then, a system of rapid data exchange alike global finance flow. In Spivak's opinion, the discipline of comparative literature which announces its global status as the "World Republic of Letters"⁴⁸ is nothing else than a continuation of the hierarchizing universalism under the cover of a new opening and inclusiveness. Spivak founds her new, extreme comparativism on a paradoxical postulate to think how comparative literature should not compare. It should definitely not assume a transcendental position of the critical authority, because it is always a position of privilege – the perspective from an artificial prime meridian echoing imperial legacies. The method and ethos of new comparativism is determined by translation as a practice of reading: comparative literature must assume "language equivalence"⁴⁹, and bring the language of the original and of translation to the stage before translation where in the space between the

⁴⁵ Spivak, *Rethinking Comparativism*, p. 130.

⁴⁶ See Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, in: Eds. C. Nelson, L. Grossberg, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Macmillan Education, Basingstoke 1988, pp. 271-313; and *A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: A Woman's Text from the Third World*, in: Spivak, *In Other Worlds. Essays in Cultural Politics*. Routledge 1988, pp. 241-268.

⁴⁷ Spivak, op. cit., p. 131.

⁴⁸ Spivak, *ibid.*, refers here critically to P. Casanova's book *The World Republic of Letters*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2007, trans. M.B. Debevoise. Casanova proposes to establish a literary equivalent of prime meridian as point of reference for measuring innovation and modernity of the world of letters.

⁴⁹ Spivak, *ibid.*, p. 134.

subject and the place assigned by the language difference as civilizational and historical content gets obliterated. This is, for Spivak, the right comparative space. Spivak realizes an absolute equivalence will never be achieved, that is why comparative literature functions in a certain language simulacrum where the irreducibility of style and, in general, the level of untranslatability, gets activated in translation process as the effort to represent the world. The irreducible worldliness of the text (and its always excessive wordiness) is a point of departure for comparative literature, whose goal it is to grasp how the text, demonstrating its idiom, transgresses its national branding toward an active, performative comparativism of interconnected languages.

Homi Bhabha, alongside Spivak and Said one of the key theoreticians of postcolonialism, rests his concept of comparative literature on the postcolonial imperative of engagement in difference, which, in place of the pluralist and relativist discourse of multiculturalism has a chance to contribute the alternative critical potential of “translationality”⁵⁰. Developing the idea (and metaphor) of nation and narration in the eponymous anthology⁵¹, Bhabha explores border and liminal spaces in literature, imprinted with traces of defamiliarizing otherness which he derives from postcolonial contexts such as cultural displacement, migration, uprooting, marginality of minority vis-à-vis the nation, etc. Difference as agency, that is, the possibility of action for the subject, is “constitutive for translation as a form of the transnational”⁵², and enables, or, rather, necessitates, the performative becoming of culture. Postcolonial reading should elicit translatability by dedication to the locality of the text, which comprises also its contingency and what Bhabha calls its “agonistic” aspect within culture as survival⁵³. It is important to notice parallels between Bhabha’s metaphor of the nation as narrative space opening up (and enhanced by) onto borders and liminal areas of otherness, Spivak’s postulate to investigate the opposition between logic and rhetoricity of the text, and Said’s contrapuntal reading. In all three critics, the postcolonial project introduces the themes, narratives and histories of displacement and heterogeneity, alternative forms of identity and history, and the overall disrupting otherness into the text of culture.

⁵⁰H. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 38.

⁵¹Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration*. Routledge, London and New York 1990.

⁵²G. Farred in an interview with H. Bhabha in R. Ghosh ed.: *(In)fusion Approach: Theory, Contestation, Limits; (in)Fusioning a Few Indian English Novels*. University Press of America 2006, p. 35.

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 51.

In the process of translation, which disturbs our apparently natural sense of belonging to the native language, the text reveals the areas of not so much untranslatability, as of the break-up of its mimetic/representational function. Bhabha uses here an image of making oneself at home in the language, and with it, building up for oneself a sense of belonging to the world, contrasting it with the specifically postcolonial experience of “unhomely homeliness” borne of historical and cultural displacement and uprooting (e.g. through the process of imperial acculturation). This “unhomely” being in the home of the world is experienced as a violent manifestation of the world in consciousness: “it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed place. [. . .] The unhomely is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world”⁵⁴. The defamiliarizing concept of unhomeliness which Bhabha builds translating Freud’s *das Unheimliche* catachrestically, rests on a fair dose of uncanniness, since it is not the lack of home, but the paradigmatic, as Bhabha stresses, postcolonial experience of incommensurability of form imposed by the language. It means a way of inhabiting the common home of the language, narration (as a form of national becoming), and fiction (as literary form co-creating the narrative consolidation of the nation) which disrupts the mimetic character of fictional narrative⁵⁵. The cultural effect of postcolonial unhomeliness is a space of the unspeakability present in the “house of fiction” – the novel understood as a process of subject’s settling down in the world. Bhabha draws here on the figure of the ghost from Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. The ghost of the murdered daughter haunting her mother’s house in the material, bodily form, locates the “house of fiction” within the space of unspeakability, echoing with the “uncanny voice of memory”⁵⁶. The ghost herself, a figure of repression, of removal into deep recesses of memory, an object of silence from those who survived, a mark of historical trauma, and so on – is a sign of a belated advent of the postcolonial subject who “haunts” with its familiar unfamiliarity.

Bhabha proposes to complement our notion of world literature with this familiar, but unhomely/uncannily defamiliarized otherness. Reaching back to Goethe’s concept of *Weltliteratur* as the originary moment, Bhabha points out that it comprises an active space of the uncanny, which is, following the trajectory of his thinking, of unhomeliness. Reminding that

⁵⁴H. Bhabha, *The World and the Home*, p. 141.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 142.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 146.

Goethe developed his vision of comparative literature as the necessary space of dialogue between nations after war ravages, Bhabha postulates seeking a comparative method which would relate to the “un-homely” condition of the contemporary world: “What of the more complex cultural situation where ‘previously unrecognized spiritual and intellectual needs’ emerge from the ‘imposition’ of ‘foreign ideas’, cultural representations, and structures of power?”⁵⁷. Bhabha brings forth a concept of world literature – comparative by default – which will supplant the dominance of the category of national literature, implicating cultural hierarchy and historical injustices, with the idea of the transnational comparative sensibility and solidarity: “literature haunts History’s more public face, forcing it to reflect on itself in the displacing, even distorting image of Art . . . This is a story to pass on; to pass through the world of literature on its thither side and discover those who live in the unhomely house of Fiction”⁵⁸. In this way comparative literature would become a tool for examining how in culture and literary text otherness is projected and how culturally determined text – as a national, ethnic, regional or other comparative unit contains (or, following Bhabha’s metaphor, hosts in its house) a multiplicity of other texts exerting influence on text’s meaning: “postcolonial reading always reveals an influence of other texts”⁵⁹. In this sense comparative literature with a postcolonial inflection will always be aware of its condition of becoming and incompleteness in the situation of the permanent transition; of being haunted with the unspoken and that which is lost in memory and translation.

By way of conclusion it is worth emphasizing that the value of the postcolonial reflection for comparative literature rests in a subtle maneuvering between the necessity of close reading of a literary text, where formalism plays an important role, and the need to place the literary text in the “ – in the “world” – within the network of intervening cultural and ideological contexts. All the three critics share the conviction about the prime importance of literary text and recognize translation as a process of erasing the authority position in the text. This crucial awareness that comparison and translation occur as a process of establishing commensurabilities as much as revealing disjunctiveness guarantees that the new comparative perspective proposed by the three postcolonial critics will not allow a development of a globally functioning exchange

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 145.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 146.

⁵⁹Farred, op.cit., p. 35.

system of analytical categories. The postcolonial inflection in comparative literature permits to operate comparative units only if their perfect adequacy will be finally exposed as the myth of the discipline. Additionally, it is worth pointing out that comparative literature as a discipline sensitive to the status of language and the status of another culture in translation resists surrendering to a culturalist approach in which literature is a social-cultural, not nearly aesthetic and artistic, phenomenon, and, as such, becomes a part of a post-literary culture.

For some critics, however, postcolonial studies cannot contribute much more than another salutary, however largely utopian, vision, especially that it is a crucial player on the market of global English. Timothy Brennan, for example, critically evaluates the new cosmopolitanism of what could be provisionally called post-postcolonialism. Brennan warns that this critical practice projects the phenomenon of the “world literature in English” onto the idea of comparative literature as such. He writes: “Very much unlike the multilingual philological setting of high European scholarship where many of the great theorists of translation operated (Heidegger, Benjamin, Steiner), contemporary North Americans are witness to a commercially defined writing where it is possible for literature to be read and reviewed entirely in English while registering as foreign”⁶⁰. Indeed, as a result of shunning the reflection on the literary work as an artistic and aesthetic form the understanding of literature has been reduced to some politico-exotic formula. Said postulated a comparative literature directed at promoting agency in Third World Literature; Brennan is afraid that the potential of literatures that emerged from the efforts to reject the empire, including their capacity to bring in new aesthetic and political values, has been neutralized by criticism from the metropolis. This global critical center he brands “cosmo-theory” is nothing more than the march of monolingualism in the guise of polyphonic inclusiveness. To what degree postcolonial studies blocks or encourages this danger of eradicating languages (and, with it, difference in equivalence) from globalized circulation of letters is an object of many critical discussions⁶¹.

Transl. Dorota Kołodziejczyk

⁶⁰T. Brennan, *Wars of Position: The Cultural Politics of Left and Right*. Columbia University Press, New York 2006, pp. 60-61.

⁶¹See, among others, G. Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. Routledge, London and New York 2001.