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A Tribute to the Tower of Babel: The Future of Comparative Studies and Multilingualism

I. The Tower of Babel as a symbol and a road sign

According to the Book of Genesis, the Tower of Babel (in Hebrew לְבַב לְדָגֵם, *migdal bavel*) was supposed to be an enormous structure “whose top may reach unto heaven” built by a united humanity in the valley of Shinar. In this way, all people would gather in one place not to be scattered, lost, isolated, and lonely. However, the mistrustful Jehovah felt threatened by this monumental work. For He thought that common effort and common language would mean that in the future “nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them”. The fear of what one people speaking one language, united and powerful, would be capable of, made Jehovah decide to thwart their plans. He replaced one with many different languages, “so that they will not understand one another’s speech” and “scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth” (Genesis 11. 6–8). As one can imagine, this act triggered an avalanche of other, indirect consequences.

Let us highlight that to “confuse the language” meant that Jehovah created many new languages (allegedly, there were seventy-two), which were very different from one another. Thus, he created multilingualism. Each group of people was given a distinct language, and in a way was trapped in it, isolated from other languages (and from them all as a whole). Consequently, each group was condemned to seek contact, means to communicate with other groups, and the foundations of a common language. Human kind was forced to compare their languages and to learn foreign languages, so that they could escape their narrow corner and once again – by facing differences and meeting otherness – realize and try rebuild the lost community.

The story of the Tower of Babel should, thus, be enlightening to practitioners of comparative studies, as it would explain their scientific and humanist calling. The symbolic depreciation of one universal human language and the replacement of it with multilingualism and a multitude of utterances in various languages caused and confirmed the need

for comparisons and revealed benefits of comparison. With the emergence of modern forms of knowledge, it motivated the development of comparative studies. Multilingualism itself prefigured their subject matter and field of study.

However, it should be noted that the story of erecting the gigantic Tower of Babel went beyond the Bible and made an international career. On the one hand, it served theologians as a symbol of disturbing the established order of humility and obedience to the deity; on the other, it became a symbol of insolent rebellion and emancipation of humanity possessing a common language and united in an inspiring effort. At the same time, it revealed the power of the deity to thwart the impudent plan by means of multilingualism. Therefore, the story of Babel was meant to be highly didactic.

The destructive and evidently (according to current ethics) treacherous behaviour of Jehovah was then strictly focused on establishing impenetrable language barriers and shattering human unity and community. Multilingualism was meant to divide humanity into smaller, weaker groups and bend them to the divine will. Also, by dividing languages into the familiar and the strange, the various groups of humanity were separated from one another. Arguably, to some extent, Jehovah did succeed. For centuries (or even millennia), multilingualism created barriers between people often unable to learn any other language than their own and to communicate with speakers of other languages.

But let us look at this biblical story from another perspective. If for a moment we assume the Bible told a true story with real consequences in human history, did Jehovah actually achieve His goal? Or perhaps by accident He actually did people a favor. In an attempt to make sure that “they [people] will not understand one another’s speech”, did he not somehow encourage people who find themselves in a difficult situation to double their efforts to communicate and look for ways to achieve mutual understanding and dialog? In the end, thanks to the multitude and diversity of languages – in a word, thanks to multilingualism and all its consequences – did Jehovah not contribute to the great development and richness of human intellect, knowledge, and culture? Therefore, knowing now about human achievements in breaking language barriers in communication, should we not regard the story of Babel as demonstrating the triumph of humanity and the ignominious defeat of the deity?

If the answer is yes, more questions come to mind, with the most crucial being as to whether we should still treat the Tower of Babel as a negative symbol of human pride. Or maybe, on the contrary, we should see the destructive act of God and the human response to it – the great effort to build bridges between languages and the persistent will to communicate – as a proof of human courage and creativity, which managed to turn the obstacle (or even punishment) into a benefit and a stimulus to development.

I believe that the Tower of Babel should, once and for all, cease to be a frightful and negative symbol. It should rather become the tower of hope that a scattered and multilingual humanity is capable of communicating and that this can be achieved not by unifying their language, but by interaction, negotiation, dialog, and transfer of languages; by the abundance of translations; by a universal focus on learning languages; by producing polyglots and creating multilingual media networks. The hope is that, as a result, humanity can expand access to experiences and worlds of thought written in various languages.

Currently, the story of Babel has become a source of ideas and inspiration for experts in comparative studies, and, to some extent, (somewhat analogically to Aristotle's *Poetics*) the centre of discussion about the nature of the discipline. The importance of the biblical symbol (and paradigm) was long ago illustrated by George Steiner in his acclaimed book *After Babel*. Steiner reminded the reader that the story indicates both the conditions which enabled the emergence and development of comparative thought (as differences between languages oblige comparing, contrasting, and translating languages, as well as commitment to a similar approach to acts of speech, utterances, and texts created in those languages), as well as suggesting the appropriate scope of comparative analyses. He, provocatively, identified it with the issues of translation. "Inside or between languages, human communication equals translation" (49). The issues of translation have also been analyzed by a comparative studies expert Susan Bassnett, who saw them as the centre of comparative studies legitimised by multilingualism¹.

It is true that it would be hard to abandon the modern openness and resourcefulness of comparative studies, which readily take advantage of other disciplines. However, we should keep in mind what is the original scope of comparative studies, retaining it as a point of reference, which helps to protect the cognitive and thematic independence and the relative identity of comparative studies as opposed to other fields of scholarship or disciplines. Understandably, this scope does not prevent comparative studies' practitioners from taking interest in other specialized discourses in philosophy, science, religion, journalism, politics, and various art forms, as well as in artefacts and popular culture or media phenomena. Yet, all those and similar phenomena are not an alternative to multilingualism. In fact, on a semiotic level, they adhere to its principles only

¹ Susan Bassnett is the author of *Translation Studies*, *Comparative Literature*, *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation* co-written with André Lefevere, and *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice* co-written with the Indian critic Harish Trivedi. In 2006, with the translator Peter Bush, she published a book *The Translator as Writer*. Bassnett stresses the cultural turn from the original towards the translation, and discusses creativity and the authorship-like role of a translator, calling his/her work *rewriting*.

via different meaning material, different means, in different situations, and through different forms of perception. Anyhow, they all interact with language and speech, and in this sense are their equivalents and continuation.

However, we should note that the symbolism of the Tower of Babel has maintained some of its negative sense even in modern interpretations. Monika Schmitz-Emans made an interesting remark in the collection she edited, *Literatur und Vielsprachigkeit*.

“Babel is a type of a mental picture (*Denkbild*), an important one still. The variety of its assessments seems wider than ever. Therefore, the idea of ‘Babel’, or multitude of languages, is somehow now more valid than ever. We are well aware that not only the humanity, dispersed all over the globe, speaks many languages, but also that many languages are in use in every country, every region, every household, every book, every text and each and every one of us. The one who speaks always does so in many languages. All things ever said or written speak to us in many languages. ...In the end, we all live within the Babel, which means that we can understand a fracture at most of what others say to us. This could even be somewhat comforting in a sense that we ourselves belong to those who – being comparative analysts or literary researchers – fall victim to multilingualism and the finite linguistic competence” (Schmitz-Emans 25).

Although Schmitz-Emans accurately indicates the vast scope of multilingualism, it is difficult fully to agree with her. It seems that she sometimes confuses multilingualism with ambiguity. By exposing the ominous aura of the Tower of Babel – the aura of “confusing languages” by Jehovah “so that they will not understand one another’s speech” – and assigning its pessimism to multilingualism as such, she loses track of the positive, innovative and optimistic potential hidden in the symbol. Actually, the Babel symbolism confronts comparative studies with an inexhaustible source of subjects. We will try to apply this perspective to the next issue of voices heralding the crisis and fall of comparative studies and joining the choir of voices declaring the death of God, humanity, the author, literature, and all other fields of knowledge.

II. Fall, rise or transformation?

This ritual and often rewritten discourse about the condition of comparative studies was initiated by René Wellek in a talk called “The Crisis of Comparative Literature” given at the 1958 Comparative Literature Congress in Chapel Hill. As could be expected, defenders of the discipline opposed the ominous vision of a fall by means of a bipolar and sustainable vision of fall-rise. However, the dispute soon became autonomous and turned into an intellectual *perpetuum mobile*. Adverse factions provoked one another. One could not be present without the other and vice versa. As a result, they became self-sufficient and slowly lost touch with reality. They formed a self-contained system

and a perfectly alienated discourse. They embodied the postmodern idea of undecidability – they resolved nothing, created a closed and self-sufficient system, and, for all the noise, they actually went nowhere.

With time, the discourse of fall-rise wore out and became trivialized, but paradoxically, developed a wondrous gift of regular rebirth. For many it became a liturgy. Minor tones and triumphant proclamations seemed to be constantly used by many authoritative analysts and in numerous discussions. They successfully covered the fact that those who blindly entered into the discourse had no substantial ideas and propositions to put forward.

A clear example of this issue can be found in an article by Ulrich Weisstein *From Ecstasy to Agony: The Rise and Fall of Comparative Literature* published in the prestigious journal “Neohelicon”. He proclaimed that the inevitable fall of the comparative approach will take place in the years 1970–1980. “Moments before the catastrophe”, wrote the author – a scientific *Götterdämmerung* of our discipline – the “permanent crisis of comparative analysis seems to give way to a complete chaos” (95–118).

As we can see, the apocalyptic tone of the statement was intensified by additional negative terms: ‘catastrophe’, the academic Twilight of the Gods, ‘permanent crisis’, and ‘complete chaos’. This sequence also implies the use of an overwhelming, hysterical and somewhat infantile rhetoric. Meanwhile, the expansive bipolar dialectics of the rise-fall topos compelled another American comparative analyst to declare that “comparative literature... is triumphant”. Both voices, the catastrophic and the triumphant one, showed glaring deficiencies in realistic description of the complexity of modern comparative literature, its determinants, and actual position.

Some arguments could be considered pragmatic. Weisstein, for instance, justified his critical, “catastrophic” diagnosis by noting, somewhat rightly, that in the period of 1970–1980 saw the emergence of other attractive theoretical, literary, and humanist movements. He argued that they had overshadowed and overthrown comparative studies and made it a bleak and dull discipline without future. He concluded his criticism with a crushing claim that “there is no... commonly accepted definition of what is regarded a *Trade*”. In other words, there is no definition of comparative studies. To him, no definition meant no discipline.

Those voices caused serious doubts. They did not give convincing explanation as to how other, “more attractive” propositions or frameworks could push the comparative method on the margins just by being present. The arguments also ignored the current dynamic and extensive development of humanist thought, where revelations and sensations were nothing unusual. However, new trends were quickly replaced by even more appealing

ones and so on, while comparative studies stood strong. This could be observed if only in the increasing number of comparative studies centres all over the world, in the interest of students, and the growing scope of theoretical works. Also the lack of a “commonly accepted definition” of the discipline turned out to be deficient. This was clearly a misunderstanding, as in times dominated by freedom of speech, pluralism, diversity, and competition, wishing for a “commonly accepted definition” is utopian.

Discussions, arguments and divergent opinions within the discipline were a proof of its vitality, rather than a “fall”. Such a model of operation is imposed on disciplines by current social and cultural conditions. It became a necessity and a norm to promote one’s own viewpoint, often mainly for the sake of publicity. In postmodern academic civilisation, to exist means to be heard, seen and read. Therefore, when Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak proclaimed the *Death of a Discipline*, it was not so much a substantial diagnosis, but rather a spectacular gesture. Analogically, Susan Bassnett’s polemic declares that Spivak’s attacks on European and Western comparative method are “cannibalistic” (vol. 3, 3–11). By exploring the fall-rise stereotype, both sides highlighted – and in this respect they were breaking the stereotype – the influence of globalization on modern transformations of comparative studies and stressed the importance of redefining its cognitive principles, terms, subject matter, tasks, and methods.

In the end, the rise-fall model says little about the actual condition of comparative studies. The truth, just as in the case of other disciplines, is that almost all areas of intellectual analysis are currently undergoing rapid transformation. Searching for new ideas and solutions, revisiting, modifying, and improving the existing ones, mapping previously unknown fields of studies, comparing results, seeking recognition and fame – these are all symptoms of “transformation fever”. In the face of tradition, this situation has profoundly changed the modern practice of comparative studies. It is only too understandable that many scholars who impose their own conservative approach on their scholarly work perceive these changes as fall, catastrophe, and chaos.

Like other disciplines, contemporary comparative literature tries to fit into a changeable and accelerating civilisation. Some claim that its destination is comparative literature, some that it gravitates towards comparative discourse analysis, while others believe that it is heading for the correspondence of the arts in the so-called comparative arts and media studies. Comparative analysts have turned their attention to multiculturalism, which extends beyond Europe, the USA and those communities living on other continents that speak the European languages of their colonizers. For a while now, comparative studies have also been concerned with such issues as feminism, postcolonial discourses, globalization, cultural poetics, geopoetics, and translation studies. Each of those fields

brings new ideas to the comparative method and revives it. However, none claims to be willing to become its home country. Does this mean that comparative studies are turning into a constant wanderer, whose fate is to live everywhere and nowhere?

Whatever the case, these transformations made comparative studies move away from Eurocentrism and the related “Western-centrism”, which were once believed to be indisputably “scientifically rational” and “universal”. A sense of historical and geographical relativism and of the particularism of those *a priori* European sources has shaken the foundation of the comparative model. They have undermined the dominant *comparative mind* legitimizing the idea of *Weltliteratur* – subjective thinking, scientific logic, and comparative methods established and observed in Europe. In the postcolonial age, the “old continent” has lost its hegemony. Concepts and practices developed in the once “exotic” or “peripheral” civilizations of Asia, Africa and Oceania, as well as in other universalist religions-cultures, have begun to claim equal rights. They demand accepting otherness, which is often radically contradictory to the Judaeo-Christian model and Western civilization as a whole.

European and Western comparative studies have also started to realise their own local character and their place among many equal participants of a global, internally polymorphous, comparative discourse. They have stopped aspiring to the role of the initiator, lawmaker, master, mentor, and conductor. This can be observed if only in the relatively broad acknowledgement of postcolonial discourse, initiated by Edward Said’s *Orientalism*.

The above mentioned shifts have caused a reevaluation of the comparative paradigm established in the nineteenth century. This reevaluation is demonstrated by the belief that the original field of comparative analyses lies between national languages and literatures. They are based on the idea of the nation, understood as organic, unified, indivisible, and constant. This idea was supported and solidified by the concept of national character, which maintained the comparative imagology of that time. Therefore, the meeting points, interrelations and exchanges, which comparative analysts are so interested in, applied to particular nations, languages and literatures on mutual or multilevel bases, by means of personal encounters, borrowings, influences, translations, and transfers.

In this sense, general literature constituted a collective set of distinct, isolated, intrinsically self-sufficient national literatures, each corresponding to its own national traditions and undergoing an internal evolution. Each created its own order tied by an ethnic language, literary tradition, and the principle of immanent evolution. Exceptions from the order were treated as anomalies: generally, all shifts were made within its borders. When an alien element (for instance, a linguistic or literary borrowing or “influence”)

entered the order, it had to be adjusted to its structure. This model provided continuity and purity of language, as well as development of a national literature.

Naturally, this vision permitted the comparison of distinct nations – including their languages, literatures and traditions – from the perspective of an external *principium comparationis*, but the remaining elements, *comparatum* and *comparandum*, were left intact. The assumed distinction (“individuality”) and separation of particular nations and their respective attributes, basically erased from the picture the process of mixing, osmosis and the on-going hybridization of nations. Such phenomena, not that uncommon in history after all, were regarded by a comparative analyst, bound to the national canon, as signs of anomaly, interference, an exception to the norm. They threatened the purity of the soul, character, language, literature and identity of a nation.

What has changed in this subject? Monolithic categories of nation, country, culture, language, and national literature, drawn from Romantic dreams and imagination have released comparative analysts from their power. Decolonization, migration, integration processes, urbanization, and multiculturalism have proved that ethnic or national monoliths are fictions inherited from ethnocentric utopias and myths. Spivak rightly observed that:

“demographic shifts, diasporas, labor migrations, the movements of global capital and media, and processes of cultural circulation and hybridization have encouraged a more subtle and sensitive reading of areas of identity and composition” (Spivak 3).

Hybridization has left its mark on virtually all languages, not only on the dominated, infiltrated, peripheral, or secondary ones. The same applies to literature and vast areas of culture. Ideal, unified ethnic areas have been opposed by significantly more amorphous linguistic and literary areas, as well as large cultural geographic regions.

Transformations have extended to many other areas. The cognitively worn-out term of “comparative literature” has been left behind (although it still has many passionate supporters). The rival term “comparative studies” has the advantage of not limiting itself to literature, the more so, since analyses have already been much more comprehensive. Besides, there are no reasons why the comparative framework should focus only on artistic literature or, as some suggest, on “literariness”². It would be illogical, grotesque even, because literature as such ceaselessly goes beyond literature. Consider the example of concrete poetry, ekphrasis, *carmina figurate*, Baroque emblem poems (lyrics accompanied by sketches or illustrations), as well as the vast resources of scientific, journalistic, philosophical, religious, folk, historical, and political intertexts, which shape form, content, and the social reception of literature.

² Such propositions are analysed by Marie Gil in *Foucault invente l'histoire littéraire*. “Théorie et histoire littéraire”, “Fabula LHT (Littérature, histoire, théorie)”.

III. Comparative studies, processes, conditions and contexts

The described transformation fever, understood as the rise-fall model, is enhanced considerably by factors external to comparative studies, which also act within the discipline as stimuli, motives, and imperatives, often out of the analysts' control. One example is the changing civilizational, modern, and postmodern status of science and items of culture. Those changes were brilliantly recognized by Martin Heidegger as early as in 1930s and described in his work *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* in the section called *Sätze über "die Wissenschaft"*³. He drew attention to the increasing dependence of the arts on such factors as the market, publication conditions, media, and publicity, which influence both their practice and style, as well as their structure and cognitive results.

According to Heidegger, those changes manifested themselves in the replacement of cognitive criteria – indispensable scientifically – with secondary aesthetic, publicistic, and media criteria. They are marked by innovative, fresh, or unusual form; elegance of presentation; elements of surprise or sensation; an unexpected formal solution; a rhetorical "charm" etc. The impression made on the public is a substitute for a scientific discovery and replaces a genuine breakthrough. In times of electronic civilization and the supremacy of the media, this process has spread and intensified. Modern comparative studies, like other disciplines, have fallen victim to it. This phenomenon is accurately illustrated by the already mentioned "fall and rise" logic.

Those revaluations were signalled by breakdowns of such doctrines as scientism, neopositivism, logical empiricism, and the critical rationalism of Karl Popper. Consequently, methodological control was abolished or weakened, which effectively impoverished comparative studies. It confirmed Thomas Kuhn's suggestion that the cognitive value of a particular approach should be judged not by facts or their compliance with any given theory, but by its structural coherence; not a uniform, precise and explicit language, but the place within the established paradigm and the subjective perception of the analyst or research team, accepted by the scientific crowd. Therefore, epistemological principles were replaced by social and historical relativism. This was accurately put in Karl Popper's idea of falsification. He concluded that an infallible and definite verification of hypotheses is utopian, and a thesis is true only until it is invalidated by another thesis, which will probably soon go the same road. It is impossible to miss the resemblance between Heidegger's investigation into the anesthetization of disciplines, relativist consequences of falsification studied by Popper, and the paradigm imperative described by Kuhn.

³ Translated into English by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly as *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, Indiana University Press, 1999 [translator's note].

Various and complex factors and revaluations in the arts had a direct or indirect influence on comparative studies. They often increased the pace and extent of transformations, which, admittedly, often led nowhere. For instance, they stimulated a turn towards hermeneutics, which naturally led to a loosening of control, rather than a consolidation of it. Another dubious direction was the so called negative comparative method, which strove for originality by confirming negative theses (what is *not* similar to what), even though it had been long established that such practices were of little or no importance. Comparative disputes were somewhat enlivened by the concept of *incommensurability*, recently popularized by Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend. This was a reminder that it is not only futile to compare everything with everything, but also that random comparisons rarely reveal anything more than arbitrary features and relations. Moreover, the concept posed an important question as to what conditions are to be met, if at all, in order to be substantial and cognitively sufficient.

One result of modern and postmodern changes was a relative levelling of standards, levels, and qualitative differences in comparative studies. To some extent, they affected the phenomena studied as well, which – especially in the course of changes in methods of interpretation, analysis, description, and explanation – lost their constancy, definite character, and clarity.

Such was the fate of artistic literature, presented as an alternative to popular, trivial and “low” writing, once identified in terms of devices, form, structure, literariness, language, and poetic function. As a result of postmodern levelling movements, the term “literature” lost clarity, while the once flaunted “inherent literary qualities” became blurred and hardly noticeable. They were traced everywhere, which meant also beyond the literature aspiring to the title of a selfless “literary art of words”. Depreciation of literariness made traditional comparative literature lose its particular, internally diverse range of phenomena, comprising types of literature which were distinct in terms of hierarchy, genre, and function. This range became essentially invalid and was put away among historical facts of little consequence to the present.

The emergence of new phenomena (internet, media, globalization, multiculturalism etc.) called for their inclusion in comparative analyses and an acceptance of the analytical, theoretical, and methodological challenge. This is especially the case, when old standards and methods failed, and once popular phenomena lost importance, were marginalized, or simply disappeared and sank into oblivion. They were replaced by the already mentioned gender, postcolonial, translation, media, inter- or multicultural, cognitive, ecological, geopolitical studies, the American area studies, and many others.

They all hit an “up-and-coming” note, tempting the comparative analyst-wanderer to study them and incorporate elements of them.

Postmodern, post-structural, deconstructive, cognitive, or hermeneutic comparative analysts – and not only they – were often ready to welcome the latest arrivals to other disciplines as revelations and, without much thought, identify them with “the modern comparative studies”⁴. However, other questions arose as to whether the subject of those revelations actually falls within the scope of comparative studies; whether the fascination they cause would upset or even destroy the autonomy of comparative studies; whether they would turn comparative studies into an anonymous, universal inter-discipline dealing with everything (feminism, postcolonialism, geopoetics, globalisation, cultural differences, relations between disciplines etc.) and nothing in particular. There was a threat that the blind desire to keep up with somebody else’s innovations and to imitate them could cause confusion of substance, in a word – a hotchpotch. Thus, a concern for finding and describing the comparative promised land – in order to avoid the fate of a constant wanderer and an insolvent debtor – is exceptionally pressing. I will return to this issue in the last part of this paper⁵.

Shifting their attention to trends and popular movements, comparative analysts tried to avoid isolation and remain visible. This attempt could explain the peculiar and rather pretentious titles of their works, such as an article about the issues of contemporary comparative studies by Haun Saussy – *Exquisite Corpses from Fresh Nightmares: Of Memer, Hives and Selfish Genes*. Similarly, Spivak seconded her French masters in proclaiming the demise of comparative studies (*Death of a Discipline*).

The case of Spivak seems slightly more complicated. She questioned imposing European and American principles of comparative reasoning and categories on the Third World. She contested liberal practices of evaluating cultural differences between the West and the Third World, as well as recognizing and qualifying otherness, which were in opposition to prejudiced ethnocentric and Eurocentric approaches. Despite liberal declarations and methods of production, arrangement, and gathering data, the categories of otherness were defined and analyses were still mainly conducted by Western analysts, who represented their own civilization and classification codes. According to Spivak, these

⁴ In Poland, this advertising nonsense of “modernity” (these being the postmodern times...) is used by many comparative analysts (See: the title of an anthology by Tomasz Bilczewski – *Incommensurability. Perspectives of Modern Comparative Studies* [pl. *Niewspółmierność. Perspektywy nowoczesnej komparatystyki*]).

⁵ It should also be noted that transformations and changes shaped a particular feature of comparative studies, which seemed to partly neutralise risks connected with the condition of the constant wanderer. It manifested itself in hyperbolization, universalization, and a certain type of globalization of comparative terms, subjects, fields and methods. The phenomenon revealed the expansive side of modern comparative studies. This issue probably requires a more comprehensive, or even separate, treatment.

were considerably different from those used by Asian or African bearers of the said otherness; therefore, Western analyses were bound to be one-sided and distort the perceived ethnic or cultural phenomena.

Significantly, Western comparative methods themselves were not relative. In fact, they were disguised tools for appropriating identity and otherness by Western comparative analysts. Thus, declarations of equality did not correspond to reality. The liberal approach turned out to be a phony generosity, which only superficially broke down barriers between the Western world and the world it once colonized. Theoretical patterns preserved traditional divisions and hierarchy.

By analogy to the colonial past, otherness and differences were rooted in a biased view. They were equivalent to a typical logocentric interpretation. Western theoretical categories were still in control of the reception of the Third World. Therefore it was clear that a comparative “reading the Other” requires not only attention, openness, and intimacy, but also a change in the attitude of the reader and his or her method of interpretation. Spivak wrote that reading the other should unsettle the agency of reading. For the way of reading determined the process of constructing identity and difference, which was not fully conscious but had a significant, long-term influence on society.

Alternative comparative studies demanded that otherness is not transferred to the subjective circle (idiom) of one’s own self or one’s own ethnic group, but rather from the familiar to the external, idiomatic sphere of otherness, adapted and adjusted to it⁶. Would it be possible? Is such “altruism” conceivable? Would it not be a reversal of colonial domination and subjugation? Would it not mean to colonize a European by an Asian, African, or a Polynesian?

The strategy of being visible and maintaining the centre of current media and public attention had pros and cons. It was to fulfil the need to focus on current public issues, attract wider attention, and distance comparative studies from familiar and worn-out subject matters. However, does interest in psychology of reception and mechanisms of perception⁷, as well as the desire to gain public recognition and commercial success, justify slackening or rejecting scholarly precision, advocated by methodological anarchists and nihilists? Are external arguments and aims sufficient to abandon thorough scientific criticism and profound analyses of cognitively significant phenomena? In order

⁶ “Rather than translating difference into the idiom of the self, the goal of translation in this case is to translate oneself into the idiom of the Other” – with these accurate words Matt Waggoner sums up in a review the book by Spivak *Death of a Discipline* (6(2), 140).

⁷ In literary criticism, such factors were recognized and taken into consideration by the Russian Formalists, who introduced Bergson’s principle of mechanistic methodology and used it to explain literary changes. The significance of such processes in the disciplines of 1960s was recognized by Thomas Kuhn and analyzed in his work *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

to keep up with postmodern times and to feel like a VIP, does a comparative analyst have first to turn into a celebrity, businessman, or a trickster?

IV. How to resolve the postmodern deadlock?

Internal transformations, shifting interests, and kaleidoscopic changes of the fields of analyses – common, and possibly dominant, tendencies in contemporary comparative studies – should not suggest that this state of affairs is by any means satisfactory. Indeed, it could lead to turning comparative studies into another Babel, but in the negative sense of the symbol: a swarm of scholars, each speaking a different language, and on a different subject, while the construction is abandoned or gradually falls apart.

What can be done in these circumstances? First of all, we should look for solutions which correspond to the premises and characteristics of comparative studies and which define their distinctive nature and scientific autonomy⁸. This is by far the most important and pressing matter. Comparative studies can develop and flourish not only by means of participating in the current and ever changing discourse *universum*, but mainly because they are concerned with their key issues, which are also basic, interesting, and important to other disciplines. Therefore, what is significant is not only what the comparative method borrows from other disciplines, but primarily what it can offer back, and to what extent it can become indispensable to them. Otherwise, it would be merely an imitation or exploitation of its predecessors' work or of work initiated by others. This is my outlook on the strategic direction comparative studies should take, which is infinitely far from either triumphant or despairing cries.

What criteria should be applied in order to achieved this solution? Above all, they have to observe contemporary cultural conditions and civilizational transformations, as well as current scientific standards. Therefore, it is crucial incessantly to revisit language, terminology, theoretical principles, and methodologies. For comparative studies do not exist in a vacuum, but are subject to influences and pressures of contemporaneity, which accepts and supports only those who participate in it and speak its language.

It is not enough to refer to past authorities in comparative studies, ready-made models and traditions. Authorities, models, and traditions were shaped by entirely different circumstances, experiences, and needs, which are now, to a large extent, invalid or outdated. Such was the case of connecting comparative studies to the history of literature, practiced in France in the first half of the twentieth century. Another example is the unfortunate alliance of comparative studies and literary theory at German

⁸ This course of action is advised by Gerald Ernst Paul Gillespie. See: Gillespie, *By Way of Comparison: Reflections on the Theory and Practice of Comparative Literature*.

universities, which formed under particular political circumstances after World War II and the fall of the Nazi regime, which forbade teaching comparative studies as they supposedly undermined the notion of the Nazis' being the "race of masters", circumstances exceptional and incomparable to those of any other nation. Despite its obvious fallacy, the alliance is still nourished by departments called *Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft* (AVL) and fuelled by numerous educational and scientific papers and books.

The very support comparative studies granted literary criticism (*Literaturwissenschaft*) seems anachronistic. Meanwhile, contemporary comparative studies have broadened their area of interest and have embraced many new phenomena, which had been previously ignored, underestimated, unknown, or did not yet exist. These last are film, television, digital and audio-visual media, the Internet, as well as the linguistic, literary, and cultural effects and results of decolonization or globalization, and finally new languages, types of texts and forms, and new means of communication. The list includes types of non-literary discourses which were previously rejected. Even the most remote art forms are being compared, regardless of their links to literature. Non-literary relations and non-art forms of culture are being studied, as well as different means of communication and perception. Comparisons are drawn between languages and disciplines (so-called interdisciplinary comparative studies).

The list itself proves that comparative studies have gone far beyond the old formulas of *littérature comparée* or *Literaturwissenschaft*, and that these are both anachronistic to what contemporary comparative analysts are concerned with. Along with the civilizational changes, also the characteristics, functions, and placing of literature in culture have changed, and so has literature itself. This dynamic process, more or less (usually less) adequately called postmodernism, has led to modifications in the tools, methods, and language used in comparative studies. Such changes and revaluations can be illustrated only in the neutral and broader term "comparative studies", which is replacing all those names suggesting "literature" as the traditional subject-matter related attribute of the discipline.

It should be noted that shifts of interests also caused internal diversification and stratification. The extent and the radical character of the changes activated and consolidated even more moderate and cautious tendencies, which manifested their attachment to the traditional name "comparative literature" and, be it for the sake of educational background or methodological habits, remained interested in maintaining a close relationship with literary criticism. There were objections – somewhat justified – stating that criticizing either connected, equal terms such as AVL (theory plus

comparative literature), or the primacy of history of literature over comparative studies, or the idea of incorporating comparative studies in innovative feminist, postcolonial, or geocultural projects (such as area studies), should not impede or exclude broader interdisciplinary contacts, even beyond literary criticism, and should not mean ignoring ideas and solutions coming from other disciplines.

However, it is important to remember that the hegemony of literary disciplines sometimes produces surprising developments. In 2006, Haun Saussy, American sinologist and comparative analyst from the Yale University, wrote “[...] it makes perfect sense for a cosmopolitan discipline like comparative literature to search out and describe it [literariness] in all its contexts”⁹. (16)

However, I believe that this kind of attitude blurs or wipes out significant differences between comparative studies and disciplines based on extremely different theoretical directives. It would be difficult to make a cohesive and logical connection between the comparative (and fundamentally transgressive, focused on all irregularities) attitude of comparative studies with the immanentism and ergocentrism of phenomenology, formalism, structuralism, or New Criticism. They, indeed, were all involved in disputes with positivism and psychology, especially genetic experiments, atomism, the idea of monomethodology, historical records, and descriptive statistics, and consequently they were often biased.

Immanent and ergocentric studies tend to miss or altogether exclude the principles which are the foundation of the comparative method, as well as theories and research methods deriving from it. The reason for this is that they prefer phenomena (artefacts, creations, systems) with clear divisions, separate from their surroundings, independent, self-contained, cohesive, coherent, and structured. They search for a key to the understanding of their organization and function. Comparative studies, on principle, step beyond such uniform, cohesive formations. Contrary to immanentism and ergocentrism, they do not highlight those elements of phenomena that are intrinsic, self-sufficient, auto-referential, self-motivated, capable of existing in a fixed shape and within fixed boundaries, and capable of extensive and relatively continuous self-reproduction¹⁰. Actually, from the point of view of comparative studies, such (*a priori*) ontological premises – that

⁹ Texts by Saussy, as well as a few others in the relevant anthology, are a rare mixture of opposing opinions and definitions. It would be justified to present it, on the one hand, as the effect of the infantilization of American comparative studies, and on the other – as an illustration of the thesis of the fall of comparative literature, which strives to be up to date in the twentieth century. It is possible to agree with Saussy on one thing only: the suggested “comparative literature” is truly what his sketch calls it – “exquisite cadavers”.

¹⁰ Examples of such, largely dubious, research methods are monographic and diachronic literary genres (structure and history of the sonnet separately, and so of the hymn, the ballad, etc.).

is the assumption that phenomena can be intrinsic, self-motivated, self-reproducing, undergo “immanent evolution” etc. – are false.

Therefore, the theoretical and cognitive attitude of the comparative method is very different in this respect. When studying particular phenomena or systems, it looks at events, relations, and processes in which they are involved with other phenomena or systems. As a result, comparative analysts observe how they influence or complement one another, interact or compete with one another, how they create brand new or hybrid forms. Once canonical in literary criticism, the modernist term of autonomy and postmodern self-referencing become obsolete. It becomes obvious that the comparative approach requires a completely different imagination, research logic, and theory than doctrinal immanentism, structuralism, autotelism, or autonomism. The same could be said about post-structuralism or deconstruction, which were formed by means of polemic contestation, reversal, or revision of the said disciplines.

Demanding that comparative studies preserve their independence and methodological, theoretical and subject-matter related identity, is by all means justified. At the same time, this should not limit their open character, their outside-the-box cognitive initiatives and ventures. The demands should constitute a critical or self-critical point of reference and a stabilizing and renewing factor. As the area of interest and activity of comparative studies currently seems exceptionally – to some extent even dangerously – vast, heterogeneous, and unstable, the question of what should be the native territory and tool repository of contemporary comparative studies becomes particularly current and significant. Lack of discussion or propositions could lead to a disintegration of comparative discourse. Claims of either rise or fall of the discipline cannot replace this discussion. They merely imply going round in circles.

V. Where is the comparative promised land?

The original, native land of contemporary comparative studies lies in multilingualism, pointed out at the beginning of this paper. It is made up from many languages connected with one another by means of existing or potential relations stemming from co-existence, exchange and interaction. The result of their existence is an infinite multitude and variety of utterances, texts, literature, and discourses, created both within each language and through interactions between languages. Those creations – more or less independent – remain in their specific fields and areas (in literature, science, philosophy, art, law, religion etc.) in a relation to one another which is analogical to the primary multilingualism. What is important, is that they give rise to their own, specialized languages and consequently expand the sphere of multilingualism. Multilingualism – contrary

to the suggestion of the cited biblical story of Babel – is not closed, finite, and countable, but rather creative and changeable. It generates new languages, and mothballs others. It functions according to the principle *Omne symbolum de symbolo* indicated by Charles Sanders Peirce¹¹.

Unlike other models which emphasize the closed, intrinsic, systemic, and uniform character of each language and analyze its structure, comparative studies focus mainly on the phenomenon and consequences of their multitude, diversity, active co-existence, their relations and impact on one another. The same applies to sets of utterances and texts. In this respect, the comparative method follows the footsteps of Wilhelm von Humboldt, who claimed that language as such is a mobile energy (ἐνέργεια) rather than a fixed state (ἔργον). He also stressed that a particular language is not an object independent of its surroundings, subject to systemic self-regulation, existing in itself and for itself, but rather that it remains in an organic relationship with human thought, which saturates it, permeates it, and together they create a whole (Aarsleff 197–206). Thus, a language exists and functions in the form of spread discourses, which are constantly reborn, updated and blend into one another. They determine the elasticity, power, and expansion of a language, and make it cross its boundaries, infiltrate and influence other languages.

This creative power, cultural expansiveness, and prime mover of discourses are not formed and do not burn and rise from ashes in the closed “furnace” of a single language. Nor do they function as *perpetuum mobile*, but pour over various types of speech within each ethnic language, as well as between many such languages and their discourses. In this respect, each language is aware of its own diversity and the existence of other languages. It is marked by an ability to use their resources and to share its resources with them. This is where comparative studies choose to operate. By no means are they limited to mechanical comparisons between isolated, static, and closed languages or discourse units. Such practice can only be justified as an exercise.

It has to be stressed that comparative studies are not concerned with abstract languages or discourses, regarded as passively co-existing “for their own sake” and indifferent to one another. They are also not interested in similar utterances, texts (literature), any signs other than linguistic ones or – in the broadest perspective – acts, actions and products of culture.

¹¹ “Symbols grow. They come into being by development out of other signs, particularly from likenesses or from mixed signs partaking of the nature of likenesses and symbols. We think only in signs. These mental signs are of mixed nature; the symbol-parts of them are called concepts. If a man makes a new symbol, it is by thoughts involving concepts. So it is only out of symbols that a new symbol can grow. *Omne symbolum de symbolo*. A symbol, once in being, spreads among the peoples. In use and in experience, its meaning grows”, Charles S. Peirce, *What Is a Sign?*.

Quite the contrary. Comparative studies explore endless journeys, exchanges, and transformations of languages, discourses, signs, and cultures, as well as everything that was and is created during those journeys, exchanges and transformations. To be precise, those processes entail both a transfer of certain entities from one setting (context or constituency) to another, as well as a modification of qualities, structure of functions of elements, which change their location and previous attributes, but still have an impact on a new setting.

An example of this phenomenon is the translation process. In a new ethnic and linguistic setting, translations often acquire slightly different meanings and connotations than the ones they have in their original environment. Consider the controversial reception of the translation of Henryk Sienkiewicz's *With Fire and Sword* in Ukraine, and on the other hand a similar Polish reaction to *Taras Bulba* by Nikolai Gogol or *Haidamaky* by Taras Shevchenko¹². The crucial issue in such clashes of contexts between the translation and the source text are sensitive and conflicting imagological interpretations. The same applied to the way Sienkiewicz called Ukrainian insurgents "black" in *With Fire and Sword*.

Comparative studies focus on what is happening in the space between languages and different types of speech and discourses. It examines events and processes both in the said "in-between" field, as well as within each phenomenon. Those events and processes drive all the interconnected phenomena, determine their identity and borders, and, to some extent, permeate their foundations, shape their structure, and influence their reception.

By rejecting the method of pre-establishing invariables and constants, the primary focus of comparative studies is on what is happening on the peripheries, in the vicinity, and in corpuses of certain phenomena. The discipline pays attention to transfers, crossings, and metamorphoses that take place in those areas. It observes and records events, products, and relations resulting from collisions, connections, immersion, contacts, and interaction between existing phenomena. It is interested in the expansion of languages, speech, and discourses, which for some reason leave their current "setting", territories, and borders, move somewhere else, and expand their estates. Analogically, it might study the shrinking of phenomena, which means losing properties, relations, and influence. Such processes – transfer of phenomena, their internal shifts, and restructuring, correspondence and translation, interconnections, blending, implantation, creation of new relations, entities and forms, as well as destruction, death,

¹² I wrote about *Taras Bulba* and the difficult placement of Gogol on the Ukrainian-Russian-Polish borderland in my article *W groteskowym tyglu. O pisarstwie Mikołaja Gogola – z perspektywy XXI wieku* (en. "Grotesque Melting Pot. Works of Nikolai Gogol from the Perspective of the Twenty-first Century". [translator's note]) (29).

and disappearance of exhausted or outdated forms – they define a vast and, to a large extent, unexplored field of comparative research.

It is important to note, that, in this perspective, a comparative analyst's perception of multilingualism is essentially different from that of a linguist, a sociologist of language, a semiotics analyst, or a literary critic, who are also concerned with some of the described issues. This applies in particular to the widely known input of Bakhtin, one of the founding fathers of the discipline in question, who, however, limited his research area to multilingualism and polyphony in the novel¹⁵. As we observed, modern and postmodern comparative studies take a much broader theoretic and cognitive perspective, reaching beyond the selected, privileged literary genre.

Immersed in a dispute with Russian Formalists and structuralists, Bakhtin wanted to elevate the polyphonic novel onto a multilingual pedestal and thus create an alternative and counterbalance to poetry, which was regarded by the first Formalists as an elite laboratory of literariness and the essence of literature. The dispute somewhat narrowed Bakhtin's perception of multilingualism¹⁴. Another reason was the idealization of dialog and dialog relations, as well as the now obsolete Neo-Idealism and Neo-Kantianism, which influenced Bakhtin's works. Thus, historical circumstances and trends in literary criticism impeded his innovative, multilingual initiative. The same applied to the comparative concepts that he promoted.

By stressing the connection between a phenomenon (*comparandum*) and the context, comparative analysts, unlike Bakhtin, do not isolate subjects (works, literary genres, speech genres, or discourses) from the existing historical context. Nor do they examine them in terms of trans-historical properties, structure, endurance, or immanent evolution¹⁵. That is why they do not value any genre more than the others. At this point, comparative analysts part ways with Bakhtin, who granted the polyphonic novel the status of a leading meta-genre, elevated above other genres, which incorporates, parodies, and deconstructs them. Such solutions basically draw from an elite and imperial axiology. They miss the mark of a mobile, transgressive, contextual, and heterogeneous comparative imagination. To some extent, they disagree with the fundamentally egalitarian idea of multilingualism.

It should also be emphasised that it is not relations – as was the case according to Bakhtin, within one internally diverse language, nor, as comparative analysts used

¹⁵ In this respect, Bakhtin's work *The Word in the Novel* was pioneering.

¹⁴ A broader perspective of multilingualism can be found in Bakhtin's work *Rabelais and His World*.

¹⁵ According to Bakhtin, who in this case followed the example of Bergson, a genre can endure thanks to its "internal memory".

to claim, relations of two or more languages – which are the central focus of the above model of comparative studies. The potential focal point and field of exploration is the entirety of discourses and the whole culture in terms of the correspondence between its elements: similarities, differences, contrasts, cooperation and competition, mixing and mutual influences. Only from this perspective – that is by leaning towards otherness and the ability to assimilate it, by openness and decentralisation of one's own position, accepting the non-exclusive status and spreading to foreign surroundings – comparative theories and methods can be used properly and be justified.

The featured, somewhat experimental, field of comparative studies is developing, expansive multilingual literature. It is a blend of two or more languages in one literary text, which achieves "avant-garde", experimental or cross-cultural effects. This intratextual multi- or mixed-lingualism (polyglossia) is currently accompanied by intertextual multilingualism, for instance works by bilingual authors, such as Samuel Beckett, who wrote novels and plays in English and in French¹⁶.

Such multilingual communication or works were known as early as the Middle Ages (the duality of high and learned Latin as opposed to local colloquial language) or the Baroque. They were widely used in genres deriving from *silva rerum*, blends of the low and the comic. They were also a part of a significant, historical movement of carnival literature, which can be found in many forms throughout the centuries, and gave birth to such phenomena as disglossia, macaronic language, polyglossia, hybridization, and many others.

It should be stressed that the rapid development of multilingual forms – both intratextual and intertextual – took place in modern times, along with the decline of classicist linguistic purism and the emergence of various types of modernism, which broke away from traditional social and generic linguistic restrictions. Discovering languages from the Far and Middle East, Africa, tribes of both Americas, Australia etc., stimulated this process. Multilingualism in Europe and the Western world was, in turn, spurred by – apart from the Romantic revolution – the emergence of cultural syncretism at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century, as well as that of many avant-garde movements, which built their literary identity by means of linguistic experiments, for instance 'zaum' and the words-in-freedom of the Futurists, Dada experiments, the automatic writing of the neorealists, and visual poetry.

The limits of those experiments, from a typological point of view, were, on the one hand, Pan-lingualism, and, on the other, radical nihilism. The former intended

¹⁶ | analysed Beckett's works in my article *Samuel Beckett: w gnoju czy w śmietniku?* (in English, Samuel Beckett: in manure or in the trash? [Translator's note] (17–34).

to saturate a text with all possible languages (including hypothetical outer-space or mystical languages), based on the so-called miracle of Pentecost. The latter, inspired by philosophies and negative viewpoints, referred to silence as the equivalent of “betrayal”, “emptiness”, and “the death of language”.

However, a significant, historical turn in the attitude towards multilingualism took place fairly recently. In the twentieth century, multilingual works were promoted to the rank of a serious competitor for monolingual works, which were dominant in the history of Greek and Roman ancient literature¹⁷. They were actually in the majority also in modern times. Even Voltaire’s idea of *littérature universelle* and Goethe’s *Weltliteratur* were essentially monolingual concepts, respecting the national patriotism and imperial aspirations of certain countries in order to impose, like the leading colonizer, England, their language on conquered lands. At that time, foreign languages manifested their presence mainly via translations.

Multilingual literature, being a counterbalance to an established rhetorical purism and monolingualism, is stimulated by globalization and is a result of an intense international circulation of signs, languages, utterance, texts, discourses, messages, and information. Those phenomena more or less freely escape enclaves and “travel the world” thanks to the Internet, radio, television, audio-visual forms, and publications. They shape the growing co-existence, co-awareness, simultaneity and spontaneous mixing of languages, literature and cultures. This process has become one of the landmarks of an unstoppable globalization. It also justifies the conclusion of this paper. If modern comparative studies are to escape the vicious circle of “meta-disputes”, such as “fall or triumph”, the suggested areas of multilingualism are waiting to be reclaimed. The only “fallen” ones are those comparative analysts who do not know what to do with themselves and what to examine, and the triumphant are those who believe that everything is done, and it is time to celebrate.

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The mythical heritage of the Tower of Babel¹⁸ demonstrates that the multilingualism presented in the Bible as repression and a burden forced on humanity, with time becomes a blessing, because it contributes to prosperity and diversity of thought,

¹⁷ Knauth K. A., “Literary Multilingualism I: General Outlines and Western World”, *Comparative Literature: Sharing Knowledge for Preserving Cultural Diversity*, 2007; <http://www.eolss.net>

¹⁸ Contemporary methodology opposes scientist rigour and purism, and rightly claims that even the most modern scientific ideas are based on archaic mythical and religious intuitions. This was recognized as early as in the eighteenth century by Giambattista Vico. The image of the Tower of Babel was popularized in the context of comparative studies by George Steiner’s *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (1975), 3rd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press 1978.

to intellectual exchange, translations, and the development of culture. It encourages one to go beyond a mother tongue, learn other languages, and use their resources. It inspires efforts to bring languages together and exchange the information and ideas they carry.

If we are to consider the above phenomenon in terms of a myth, it is worth noting that the New Testament was trying to alleviate a negative attitude toward it. Such an attempt can be observed in the scene of Pentecost from the Acts of the Apostles (Acts. 2: 1–11), called in Greek *pentekostē* (πεντηκοστή), describing the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the twelve apostles. It depicts a grand image of apostles filled with the Holy Spirit and suddenly able to speak other languages.

“And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other languages, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts. 2: 1–6).

According to the Bible, the people of Jerusalem were so stirred by the fact that their countrymen were speaking foreign languages that they managed to calm down only after a charismatic speech given by Saint Paul. But what we should find the most interesting, is obviously a more profound, symbolic significance of the event. We might see it as a bold, evangelical elevation of foreign languages (*xenolalia*), or even granting them the same right and rank as those enjoyed by native languages.

This scene also illustrates the fact that each “foreign language” is a native language for some community, and the other way round. Such detachment – being either native or foreign, depending on the point of view – is true for each language which is aware of itself as one element in a vast multilingualism. Such is the attitude of comparative studies towards languages, which is a result of regarding language in terms of multilingualism and not as a singular, self-sufficient system.

The pentecostal utopia offers a somewhat fantastic story about the gift of speaking other languages (the apostles received it for free, without any effort), but it also included a notable anthropological point and moral. The ability to speak foreign languages meant that if you could speak Greek, you could (if only for a moment) become a Greek, or a Jew when speaking Hebrew, a Roman when speaking Latin, an Arab when speaking Arabic, and a Chinese when speaking Chinese etc. Therefore, multilingualism verified a thesis that human beings are polyphonic creatures. The ancient idea of unchangeable human identity was questioned in the world of the experimental thought of early Christianity. In this respect, the polyphonic apostles from the Acts of the Apostles are more like contemporary elastic and multilingual postmodernists, rather than theologians bound by dogmas.

The conclusion that can be drawn from all the cited holy books seems obvious. By creating various languages and authoritatively imposing them on humanity, Jehovah unintentionally created a comparative analyst's workplace. Undoubtedly, modern comparative studies are there to examine His tremendous creation thoroughly and comprehensively.

Anyhow, it is the domain of multilingualism, the significance of which was recognized in the earliest human traditions, that is the native land and the cradle of modern comparative studies. Their mission is to embrace and confront different languages, speech acts, and discourses; to break the ice of otherness and bring languages together; to examine contacts and all forms of interactions; to break the barrier of multilingualism by means of communication and dialog, but also – last but not least – by learning foreign languages. This mission includes the world of signs and culture. The comparative method can be also usefully applied to studying those kinds of phenomena.

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