

Centro Internazionale
di Semiotica e di Linguistica

HIVSEN DOCT
1995

Working Papers

and pre-publications

Michael Jakob

On Comparison

Università di Urbino
Italia

245 giugno 1995

serie **D**

On Comparison

(Preliminary remarks for a theory of Comparative Literature)

*working paper*¹

«Comparaison n'est pas raison»
(Etiemble)

«Comparaison est raison»
(Roland Barthes)

«Comparer, c'est donc mouvoir,
et mouvoir, c'est agir.»
(Bonnet, *Ess. analyt.* XVII)

I

The remarks on comparison presented in this paper are the result of a theoretical and a practical unease concerning the absence of a theory of Comparative Literature, the problematic status of comparative criticism. To argue for a *theory* of Comparative Literature² implies the historical fact of the non-theoretical or pre-theoretical state of Comparative Literature. The discipline of Comparative Literature is in a state of permanent crisis³, due to a deeply felt lack of theoretical legitimation.

What makes this situation even more intolerable is the fact that other disciplines (not only history, sociology, etc., but even the national literature departments) have in the past reflected on the conditions of possibility of knowledge in their field and continue to cast a critical eye on what they are doing, while Comparative Literature has, up to now, neglected to pose the relevant questions concerning its methods, and what it can or cannot hope to achieve.

Presenting Comparative Literature in such a negative light implies the possession of a concept of *theory* and of (theoretical) *point of view* which may today seem itself problematic. After the critique of the status of theory in Wittgenstein's later philosophy, in the writings of the 'Frankfurt School' (Critical Theory), in those of the philosophers of science (Kuhn, Feyerabend, Popper), and of the poststructuralists⁴, to

insist upon the necessity of a theory of Comparative Literature may seem just another conservative move destined to construct clearly defined (metaphysical, abstract) objects such as 'comparative literature' or 'the theory of comparative literature'.

Where can we find a theory to be found which is at the same time theoretical enough to raise the relevant methodological and hermeneutical questions and flexible enough to encompass the historical, stylistic, and national diversity of Comparative Literature? Hasn't the absence of a theory of Comparative Literature generated a prolific tradition⁵, an interdisciplinary and pluralistic discipline which is precisely the result of the conscious resistance to using regulative concepts, once and for all fixed methods, and a *general* theory? Hasn't, in this century at least, the philosophical concept of theory suffered such damage that requiring a theory of Comparative Literature may seem naive and correspond to an over-optimistic ideology of the 'theoretical' linked to such questionable concepts as the progress of human sciences or the progress of human (philosophical) understanding? One could further argue that in the light of its creative independence and interdisciplinary openness Comparative Literature as praxis appears to be *art*⁶, and not *Wissenschaft* (or that the boundaries between science and art are blurred), that it has indeed benefited from *not* being scientific. Another way of looking at this problem would be to ask whether the theory I am calling for is to be situated inside or outside Comparative Literature. This however turns out to be a false problem, the important fact being only that this theory *is* developed, be it in- or outside Comparative Literature. The theory of Comparative Literature cannot – for reasons explained later on – be *only* the theory of Comparative Literature: General and Comparative Literature are linked, and thus the theory of Comparative Literature will naturally be of general relevance to all the human sciences.

I do not wish to discuss here the difficult problem of the status of critical or theoretical discourse in the human sciences and I cannot simply decide whether Comparative Literature is or should be literature (art) rather than criticism in the sense of *Wissenschaft*. This problem is however itself a theoretical one and calls again for an appropriate theory; hermeneutics (Schleiermacher) has dealt in the past with this and some of the most important discussions in the field of aesthetics have recently touched on the question (de Man, Rorty, Steiner), which proves that there is no serious argument *against* theory as long as the 'artistic' (aesthetic) character of comparative criticism⁷ has *not* been demonstrated. Even if we were to admit for a moment the intrinsically aesthetic status of comparative studies and

thus somehow approve the discipline's decision not to have worked out a theory, other aspects clearly speak for the necessity of a theory: first of all Comparative Literature claims, academically speaking, to be a *Literaturwissenschaft*, and not just the place where people gather 'artistically'. Historically speaking, Comparative Literature developed around much the same time as comparative anatomy, comparative zoology, comparative linguistics, etc. and imitated these disciplines, insisting that it was as scientific as these 'parallel' disciplines. To consider Comparative Literature (literary criticism) as art would have other more serious and more problematic implications: it would indeed neutralise the history of comparative criticism, cut off the comparative publications from their time and from their context, and offer a far too harmonious aesthetic 'house' to a corpus which is intimately linked with ideological and/or nationalistic discourse.

Even if the necessity of a theory of Comparative Literature has been proved, such a theory still needs to be illustrated. Given that a theory of Comparative Literature cannot dogmatically define what Comparative Literature is or should be, and given the multifaceted and widely diversified character of comparative criticism, the theory we are seeking can only be the *final result* of our inquiry. Our starting point is therefore theoretical only in defining our object – Comparative Literature as a *whole* in its historical and critical diversity – and in adopting a critical, self-reflexive point of view. This critical aspect is of crucial importance for the theory of Comparative Literature, the theory we are looking for being the place where comparative studies (roughly 200 years of work in the field of Comparative Literature) need finally to be criticised.

In undertaking a critical analysis of the comparative corpus we are confronted with the fundamentally problematic state of Comparative Literature (this is the practical unease concerning Comparative Literature mentioned at the beginning of this paper). The *Comparative Literature library* as the place where the discipline has materialised contains three different types of works:

– 1. The so-called 'highlights' of the discipline, the works of Auerbach, Curtius, or Praz, to cite only a few. Not only are these canonical books not representative of Comparative Literature, but they result from research developed in the respective national literatures. They are often written by non-comparatists and their comparative character is simply due to the fact that these books speak about literary works written in different languages. It is assumed that the internationality gives these works the status of 'comparative studies' without any further methodological implications.

- 2. Comparative publications of the sort *x*, *y*, *z*, literary comparisons in which after many (hundred) pages the reader is faced with the surprising result that there is some identity and some difference between *x*, *y*, and *z*. (These works could be called statistical or mechanical.)

- 3. Publications touching on such different and wide-ranging fields as influence or source studies, discourse theory, reception theory, history of ideas, motif and symbol studies, history of mentalities, sociology, literature and fine arts, etc.

What this brief overview clearly shows is an extreme variety and diversity of research doubled by an extreme absence of *unity* in Comparative Literature. The discipline Comparative Literature thus turns out to be an 'everything goes' domain, the place where all the methods are tolerated, where the openness towards the *other* and the readiness to use every possible other way acts as a credo. Few are those who ever cared about what Comparative Literature really produced in its history and even fewer ever asked: "What do comparatists actually do today?"⁸ Instead of developing even preliminary elements of a theory of Comparative Literature concerning the identity, the name, the unity, the method(s) of the discipline, Comparative Literature surprisingly and paradoxically opened up to "theory"⁹ and proudly displays its "theoretical" interests¹⁰. Comparative Literature departments indeed teach "theory", but if we look at what this really means we are confronted with the puzzling fact that comparatists deal today with all possible theories (philosophical, psychoanalytical, hermeneutical, sociological, etc.) with the sole exception of the theory of Comparative Literature itself.

II.

A *theory* of Comparative Literature cannot start out as a general theory of the entire discipline; it aims to touch gradually on ever widening circles encompassing the greatest variety of pertinent aspects. In presenting the theory of Comparative Literature as a theory of *comparison* I do not intend to define the whole discipline as obligatorily comparative. Nevertheless the theory of at least one aspect of Comparative Literature needs to have a starting point; further, in dealing with comparison one touches on an element which has been historically of prime relevance for the development of Comparative Literature and which the name of the discipline ("Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft", "littérature comparée") indicates.

Such famous formulas as Etiemble's "Comparaison n'est pas raison"

[Etiemble (1963)], or Carré's "La littérature comparée n'est pas la comparaison littéraire" [Guyard (1948), 5] polemically point at a problem concerning the state of comparison, which has never been discussed thoroughly¹¹. Not having ever inquired about what (comparative) comparison really is, in which context it functions, not having ever seriously looked into the obvious and hidden implications of comparison, Comparative Literature has 'forgotten' its methodological obligations. Even a moment's thought concerning the official name of the discipline raises serious problems: why does the discipline still call itself 'Comparative Literature'? What has historically given birth to the discipline as a 'comparative' one? At what moment did the term 'comparative' start to become problematic? What is the relation between 'comparative' (referring to an activity) and 'compared' (referring to a result)?¹² etc.

Comparative Literature did not only omit to discuss the notion of comparison itself: one should rather speak of a 'Vergessenheit' or a 'Verdrängung' concerning comparison. There are several reasons for this surprising 'refusal'. First of all, in the nineteenth century – with the rise of comparative anatomy, zoology, physiology, mythology, linguistics, etc. the comparatist century par excellence – comparison as method may have seemed so overtly present and so popular that a theory presented in the specific domain of Comparative Literature may have simply been regarded as superfluous. (This manifest presence of comparison in the natural and human sciences of the last century has – this goes almost without saying – never been analysed in its historical and philosophical significance.)

A further reason for having more than neglected comparison (in the sense of not having developed its theory) may be found both in the rise and in the fall of what we could call national(ist) literary comparison. Being in the service of national ideologies and having the obligation to prove the superiority of a national literature, Comparative Literature did quite naturally not give too much weight to reflections concerning the conditions of the possibility of comparative (value) judgements. Even after the fall of these 'imperialist' comparisons (something contradictory from the beginning) and with the development of a more internationalistic comparative literature, comparatists did not want to look too deeply into the matter; the old values and national 'ideas' were still very much around¹³. Are national literary comparisons possible? Are they right or wrong? Can we distinguish good (neutral) and bad (ideological) comparisons? Or does comparison thought of as the confrontation of national literatures – something we can trace back as far as to the σύγκρισις of

antiquity or to works like Cristóbal de Villalón's *Ingeniosa comparación entre lo antiguo y lo presente* (1539), Francis Meres's *A Comparative Discourse of our English Poets with the Greek, Latin and Italian Poets* (1598) or Paolo Beni's *Comparatione di Homero, Virgilio e Torquato, et a chi di loro si debba la Palma nell'Heroico Poema* (1607) – belong to the past? All these and other questions call for an answer which Comparative Literature never cared to give. (It did not even really bother to raise these questions.)

A further reason for this neglect is most probably linked to the rhetorical origin of the concept of comparison. Aristotle suggests in Rh. IX – dealing with the material for the epideictic or encomiastic branch of Rhetoric – the use of comparison (ἀντιπαράβαλλειν) if you do not have enough to say about your hero himself (1368a)¹⁴. Comparison belongs to the rhetorical division of amplification and serves, in juxtaposing one thing to another, to increase the value of the thing in question. A relation can be traced between the specific use of comparisons and what could be called the 'comparative' style of Greek rhetorical tradition. In spite of its central role not only in the encomiastic and forensic branch of rhetoric, but in the development of literary criticism too¹⁵, σύγκρισις remains a 'tool' and does not, as is the case with the dialectic method, elucidate the truth of the things compared.

The major philosophical attack against comparison is found in Hegel. In his writings comparison is not only reduced to an universal preliminary 'tool'¹⁶ ("Vorarbeit"), but linked to the negative character of *exteriority*: "Ob etwas einem anderen Etwas gleich ist oder nicht, geht weder das eine noch das andere an; jedes derselben ist nur auf sich bezogen, ist an und für sich selbst, was es ist; die Identität oder Nichtidentität als Gleichheit und Ungleichheit ist die Rücksicht auf ein Drittes, das außer ihnen fällt." (G.W.F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, Frankfurt/Main 1970, II, 50-51) In reality, what we do when we compare two or more objects is to constitute a relation *indifferent* to the objects compared; we thus adopt a subjective point of view outside of these objects without ever touching on the internal relation existing between them, a relation found for example in contradiction ("Widerspruch"). There is in Hegel a general prejudice – but can we still call it prejudice or should we rather speak of a philosophical argument? – against the comparative method: "Solche Bemühungen [...] sind daher eine leichtere Arbeit, als sie vielleicht scheinen. Denn statt mit der Sache sich zu befassen, ist solches Tun immer über sie hinaus; statt in ihr zu verweilen und sich in ihr zu vergessen, greift solches Wissen immer nach einem

Anderen und bleibt vielmehr bei sich selbst, als da es bei der Sache ist und sich ihr hingibt." (Vorrede, G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Frankfurt/Main 1970, 13)

The second important critic of comparison is Friedrich Schleiermacher. In his lectures on *hermeneutics and criticism* (*Hermeneutik und Kritik*, ed. M. Frank, Frankfurt/Main 1977), Schleiermacher distinguishes "Komparation" from "Divination". While through "Divination" the aesthetic object, or "speech" (Rede) as Schleiermacher calls it, is interpreted for itself and in its immediacy ("Unmittelbarkeit"), comparison proceeds in a roundabout way and, in relating its objects to something general, never actually grasps their individuality. For Schleiermacher too, as for Hegel, comparison privileges a third term, "ein Drittes", instead of understanding its objects individually by going back and forth from the particular to the general (of the "speech" in question) and vice versa. The comparative method is proven to be only a complementary one whilst the authentic hermeneutical approach to a text consists in understanding it for itself¹⁷.

It could easily be shown how this disregard for comparison spread throughout the human sciences and how it penetrated even the field of literature itself (Breton, Eluard). Having used a 'method' criticised by philosophy and 'borrowed' from the natural sciences, the 'Verdrängung' of *comparison* in Comparative Literature comes as less of a surprise. While retaining the name "Comparative Literature", the discipline nevertheless replaced comparison almost entirely by influence and reception studies, 'comparative' mythology and folklore studies, 'comparative' metrics and history of ideas, psychoanalytical, hermeneutical, sociological, historical, deconstructionist, systemic and many other kinds of research. I do not want to argue that, faced with this eclectic wealth of methods and subjects, Comparative Literature should necessarily find its new unity and unique happiness in comparison, but I think that comparison remains a central issue for Comparative Literature, with general relevance for the entire discipline.

Many problems concerning comparison have to be discussed. Is the comparative comparison identical to, similar to or dissimilar from the more general logical figure of comparison? What about the relation between comparison and *analogy*¹⁸? How relevant is the concept of similarity to comparative acts¹⁹? What does the concept of relation tell us about comparison? And how exactly does comparison relate to the two key concepts of *identity* and *difference*? What are the major implications of comparison? How have comparisons deve-

loped historically? All of these questions seem to be of little or no interest to comparatists, while at the same time other (ready made) theories are generously 'imported' into Comparative Literature. While other disciplines – being in a certain sense less obliged to do so – have recently investigated the subject of comparison (comparative educational science, comparative sociology, comparative law, comparative politics, comparative history²⁰, etc.), Comparative Literature goes on to neglect its central predicate. In doing so it does not only refuse to elucidate comparison, but avoids at the same time discussing its legitimisation as *Wissenschaft* different from other sciences. Opening itself up to every popular theory of the day and combining the most diverse tendencies, it certainly displays its postmodern internationality and versatility, but lacks both a theoretical and an ethical basis²¹.

The problem of *comparison* is, however, not only one of theory. It touches directly on what is *done* (and how it is done) today in Comparative Literature. Even a brief examination of the introductions to the discipline, in manuals, books and articles, reveals a profound discordance concerning the function and the relevance of comparison. Comparison (in Comparative Literature) is considered to be only instrumental (a tool), or to have on the contrary an intrinsic value in itself; it is seen as a criterion for value judgements, or as an instrument for descriptions, or one for generalisations. It is considered both to be and not to be a method; it is viewed as insecure, as necessary, secondary, superfluous, impossible, infinite, universal, etc. For some scholars comparisons in Comparative Literature have the same function as in all the other (human and natural) sciences, while for others they have a distinct specificity; for some their main focus should be the individual work, for others the generality of a wider unit, of a system or of poetics in general. The difference between languages in comparing is both seen as strictly necessary and irrelevant, etc.²².

III.

An analysis of the logic of comparison in Comparative Literature can start with a simple model. Comparative Literature deals, generally speaking, with the relation between two elements *a* and *b*. The first model we can distinguish from *comparison* is what I would call the *diachronic* model. The relation of

a and *b*

is one of causality or succession where *b* is the result of *a*. This model includes the traditional *source-* and *influence-*studies, and includes at the same time even some of the most important new 'methods' such as Jaussian reception theory or Bakhtinian intertextuality. A great deal of what is published today as research in Comparative Literature corresponds to this model. Its central element is always the resultant *b* thought of as a conscience (hence the links of this model with phenomenology), while *a* is the 'material' preceding the formation of *b*.

The second or *synchronic* model consists of the symmetrical relation of two elements *a* and *b*. Instead of developing the relation between the two related terms, this comparison always interprets *a* and *b* in relation to a third element *C*. This third term *C* can be history, or the history of literature, or the literary system, or poetics, or discourse, or the identity of a motive or a theme, etc.; *a* and *b* are however only exempla and do not count for themselves (they could be replaced, in order to demonstrate the 'truth' of *C*, by *c* and *d*, or *e* and *f*, etc.). We cannot speak in these cases of a developed, living, or "active" (Marino) comparison, but only of the instrumental use of it. Of primary interest here is the background, the general *C*, and never the objects *a* or *b*.

Neither the diachronic nor the synchronic model ever actually takes into consideration (or builds up) the relation between *a* and *b*, and neither even analyses *a* or *b* individually. It is always identity – the identity of *b*, or the identity of *C* – which counts, and not difference, a metaphysical object being the result of successive idealisations.

To *compare* means to *relate*; thus the first step in comparing is to constitute a relation. This initial relation is the result of a selection: *a* and *b* are picked up in a repertory as comparable terms.

$$(1) \quad \begin{array}{ccccccc} [& a & d & e & g & & \\ & & & & & a \text{ and } b & \\ & f & c & b &] & & \end{array}$$

Having chosen *a* and *b* one states the comparability of the two terms:

$$(2) \quad a \vdash b$$

The logical formula for comparability is the following:

$$a \vdash b = \text{df } (x) (a > x \wedge b > x)$$

The third step (3) is the actual comparison thought of as an activity, as relating the two terms *a* and *b* (it is the "comparative" in Comparative Literature). The fourth step (4) corresponds to the result of the comparison (the "comparée" in "Littérature comparée").

Several important elements have to be added to this basic model. First of all we could call (1) the horizon of comparability and (2) the ground of comparability. If we analyse the relation between (1) and (2) we will immediately see how (1), the horizon of comparability, already presupposes earlier comparisons, that is (2), a ground for comparison. There exists in other words no "degré zéro" of comparison, but a circularity in comparison, which clearly reveals comparison as a hermeneutical process. The horizon of comparability gives one the possibility of comparing after having already compared.

A second observation concerns the compared objects *a* and *b*. It is important to state here that the object(s) of comparison are not logical, or psychological, or 'real' (as in the natural sciences), but aesthetic objects (literary texts). An aesthetic object is characterised as having a multifaceted, complex identity; *a* has, especially in the interpretations or readings we give of it, still to become *a*, *b* to become *b*, etc. At the same time what we have in mind with *a* or *b* are objects even more complex: not only a single text, but the work of an author, a group of works, a national literature, etc. In comparing such complex objects we actually compare entities which are already the result of preceding 'comparisons' (in order to speak about the work of the author *a*, we must already have generalised the texts *t*₁, *t*₂, *t*₃, etc., and compare them). One might therefore suggest that *individual texts* should be the basis of literary comparisons.

A third important aspect consists of the necessary analysis of the starting point of comparisons, the moment we called the horizon of comparability²³. Important sociological, historical and hermeneutical work remains to be done in order to discuss the presuppositions of comparison in Comparative Literature and to write the critical history of the discipline. We need to assess what Comparative Literature has worked out in the past before we can move to the next step of defining new tasks for the future. The fourth aspect is the most important. It concerns the praxis of Comparative Literature and deals with the problem of comparability in general and specifically with the question: "How can we optimise comparison (Comparative Literature)?" Or: "What are positive, interesting, promising ways in which to compare?"

Absolute *identity* makes comparisons impossible; one has therefore always to compare different objects. It is important to stress here

that *difference* should be a key concept in Comparative Literature; relating one thing to another should not, as it happens too often, cover up difference but develop it. (This is of central importance to the 'ethics' of Comparative Literature.) Absolute *difference* makes comparison impossible; our two objects should therefore obviously both have and not have certain predicates in common. The horizon of comparability can be chosen in two ways: it should be a wide or open one, if we want to contrast objects in order to grasp their individuality, and it should be narrower, if our purpose is to look for generalities. This leads us to two basic models for comparison: the *dialogic* and the *systemic* model. In comparing objects dialogically the horizon of comparability can be extremely wide; its openness 'prevents' the comparison from being subsumed under the category of external identity: *a* thus becomes *a* in contrast to or in relation with *b*, which at the same time becomes *b*. The final aim of comparing the two *relata a* and *b* is in this case the better understanding of *a* and *b* (of their individuality), and not the construction of a 'higher' object *C* encompassing both of them. The opposite, synchronic model links two or more objects chosen in a narrowly defined horizon, in order to construct a generality *C*. In this case *C* will be the *result* of successive comparisons, and not a presupposed identity. Both models follow the infinite progression of the hermeneutic process: the first one teaches us to understand the *one* through the *other*, while the second one constructs a conceptual object or generality in an immanent way.

University of Berne

Michael Jakob

Notes

¹ I wish to thank Prof. Giuseppe Paoni for the opportunity to present these outlines of my research. My gratitude goes to all those who at the universities of Geneva, Berne, Grenoble, Rome, Cosenza, and Urbino have listened to the presentation of this paper and helped me with their critical remarks.

² See Koppen (1971), 41-64; Wellek (1973); Kaiser (1980), 3. The continuous demands for a theory are part of the comparatist ritual which however never produces this theory.

³ See Etiemble (1963): "La Crise de la Littérature Comparée"; Rüdiger (1971), 2; Marino (1988), 10; Bassnett (1993): "A Critical Introduction", etc. Wellek's (1959) famous 'outcry' - "The Crisis of Comparative Literature" - has been followed by the continued pursuit of the same old 'gayà scienza'.

⁴ See Eibl (1976) for a link between Popperian theory and literary criticism.

⁵ The existence of comparative literature does not already legitimate it.

⁶ See Abrams (1972) for a critical discussion of the arguments against theory.

⁷ See Zima (1985) for the 'aesthetic' aspect of Comparative Literature.

⁸ "Qui compare quoi? Et comment? La question est loin d'être résolue; ni aux commencements du comparatisme, ni – à vrai dire – plus tard." (Marino [1988], 234).

⁹ "If 'Comparative Literature' is to be more than a name on the door of an office where someone signs enrollment forms, the curriculum will have to have something in it that *all* such students can study together, and that something has been theory." (Koelb/Noakes [1988], 10).

¹⁰ "This uncertainty of category is in itself significant. It shows perhaps a certain maturing of Comparative Literature as a discipline [...]" (*ibid.*, 11).

¹¹ "[...] si la 'littérature comparée' reste, malgré tous les éclaircissements possibles, un terme équivoque, c'est surtout à cause de la confusion que l'on ne cesse d'entretenir entre la notion de *comparaison* et la théorie et la pratique comparatiste dans son ensemble." (Marino [1988], 232).

¹² "L'emploi de ce mot paraît d'abord assez impropre en ce sens. On attendrait plutôt *comparative* ou *comparante*." (A. Lalande, *Vocab. techn. et crit. de la philos.*, Paris 1932, I, 115).

¹³ See Wellek (1959).

¹⁴ Similarly in *Rhet. ad Alex.* 35; *Cic. de Orat.* II 85 (347); *Quint. Inst. Or.* III 7. 16.

¹⁵ See Focke (1923), 347.

¹⁶ "[...] daß durch das bloße Vergleichen dem wissenschaftlichen Bedürfnis noch nicht letztlich genügt zu werden vermag und da Resultate der vorher erwähnten Art nur als (allerdings unentbehrliche) Vorarbeiten für das wahrhaft begreifende Erkennen zu betrachten sind." (G.W.F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, Frankfurt/Main 1970, I, 241).

¹⁷ See for another more technical discussion of comparison in philosophy Lambert (1782); Mach (1923); Wundt (1919).

¹⁸ See Moriarty (1972).

¹⁹ See Linner (1967).

²⁰ See for comparative aspects in sociology: Parsons (1975); Sartori (1991); Berthoud/Busino (1986); in history: Rossi (1990); Veyne (1979); Ranki (1974); in the behavioral sciences: Leyhausen (1979); Lorenz (1978); in educational sciences: Schriewer (1990); Alberti/Ziglio (1986); in Chomskyan linguistics: Rizzi (1980); in the study of religion: Whaling (1983); in anthropology: Evans-Pritchard (1971); in political sciences: Beyme (1988), Seiler (1985).

²¹ Not only the theory and ethics of Comparative Literature are lacking, but its *history* too; its pre-pre-history (from antique *synkrisis* to the Renaissance), its pre-history (with Herder, Lessing, etc.), its early history (with Noel-Laplace; Pougens; Ville-main; Ampère; Villiers; Schlegel) is still to be written.

²² Few articles – and no book-length study! – have been dedicated to the question of comparison. For Elster (1901) comparative comparison is no new method (42); it serves mainly to trace "die große historische Entwicklung" (40) and functions at the same time as an instrument for historical evaluations. Following the positivistic philology of the time, comparisons had mainly to analyse influences, causal relations. In an important contribution Malone (1954) stands up for the key role of comparison, given that "[...] the individual text cannot be evaluated on its own

terms [...] (19). Therefore "[...] the fullest meaning and the final evaluation of a piece of literature can only result from comparison" (17). Malone's call for a reevaluation of comparison – "examining and illuminating one text by a comparative reading of it and other texts" (19) – in the human sciences (and not in Comparative Literature) has found no response, which comes as quite a surprise given his provocative arguments against the *autonomy* of the aesthetic object (text). Linnér's (1967) critical analysis considers comparison to be an universal method; it stresses the "[...] basic uncertainty in literary comparisons" (172) and discusses at some length the concept of *similarity*. As similarities are perceived immediately (170) and as they lack an objective basis, comparisons have to count on the "[...] consensus of qualified readers." (173) Linnér gives comparison a major role in defining and describing "[...] a new literary kind" (174), and underlines the complexity of comparisons. He pays most attention to *causal* relations focusing on "[...] the creative process in the writer's mind" (179), without differentiating between strictly synchronic and diachronic comparisons. It is of some significance that the most important remarks ever related to *comparison* are to be found only in the tenth and last part of the chapter "Une méthode comparatiste" (Techniques et circuits herméneutiques) in Marino's *Comparatisme et théorie de la littérature* (1988). Marino calls for a careful rehabilitation of *comparison* after having underlined at the beginning of his analysis its marginality (232) and universality (233). After having insisted on the importance of a strict *tertium comparationis* and raised the problem of comparability (236), Marino clearly endorses a systemic use of comparisons. The contrastive "comparaison différentielle" has therefore far less weight in his presentation of comparison as the "comparaison unificatrice". It is through these "comparaisons généralisantes" that we develop literary invariants and the system of "poetics" in general. Marino touches on many other aspects of comparison, raising essential questions; nevertheless the continuous introduction of new categories (genetic and typological comparisons, absolute, autonomous, reflective comparisons) does not contribute to the coherence and unity of his argument.

²³ See the important considerations concerning the field of Comparative Literature in Godzich (1988).

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A

Semiotica, linguistica, semantica
 Sémiotique, linguistique, sémantique
 Semiotics, Linguistics, Semantics

B

Semiotica narrativa e discorsiva, Retorica
 Sémiotique narrative et discursive,
 Rhétorique,
 Semiotics of narrative and discourse,
 Rhetoric

C

Socio-semiotica (socio- ed etno-linguistica)
 Socio-sémiotique
 (socio- et ethno-linguistique)
 Socio-Semiotics (Socio- and Ethno-
 Linguistics)

D

Semiotica letteraria; mitologia e folklore;
 poetica
 Sémiotique littéraire; mythologie et folklore;
 poétique,
 Literary Semiotics;
 Mythology and Folkloristics; Poetics

E

Semiotiche auditive
 Sémiotiques auditives
 Audio Semiotics

F

Semiotiche visive e audio-visive
 Sémiotiques visuelles et audio-visuelles
 Visual and audio-visual Semiotics