111. Comparative Literature and Global Studies
3:30–4:45 p.m.
Program arranged by the Association of Departments and Programs of Comparative Literature
Presiding: Corinne Laura Scheiner, Colorado Coll.
Speakers: Caroline D. Eckhardt, Penn State Univ., University Park; Carl H. Fisher, California State Univ., Long Beach; Christopher GoGwilt, Fordham Univ., Bronx; Robert Ryle Shandley, Texas A&M Univ., College Station
Panelists discuss a range of perspectives of the institutional and curricular relations between comparative literature and global studies, specifically the effects of global studies on comparative literature and the ways in which comparative literature is shaping localized versions of global studies. How can we work together as allies and partners rather than as adversaries?

The Linguistic and Literary Priorities of Comparative Literature and Global Studies:

Opening Remarks

Christopher GoGwilt (Fordham University)

Comparative Literature at Fordham is probably anomalous, but maybe Fordham’s anomaly can open up some exemplary questions about the institutional relation between “global studies” and “comparative literature” today. To emphasize (perhaps exaggerate) the anomaly of Comparative Literature at Fordham, consider a basic question of historical priority -- which came first, Comparative Literature or Global Studies? In many respects, the answer to this question seems clear and I don't think there's anything especially unusual about the way the historical priority of Comparative Literature is presented in the opening paragraph to Fordham’s Self Study document (which I’ve circulated as a handout: see appendix I). Comparative Literature is presented as the older, more venerable, more prestigious, more philologically-based disciplinary formation; global studies (though not explicitly named) is invoked as the spirit of a newer, more interdisciplinary, post-philological formation.
And yet, whereas our document seems to presume that Comparative Literature precedes global studies, Fordham’s institutional experience reverses this chronology. The program didn't adopt the title Comparative Literature until very recently (2011); before that the undergraduate major was housed in a program (called the Literary Studies Program) founded in the mid-1990s under the twin influences of (a fairly heavily anglophone) postcolonial and cultural studies, and in the same moment when the university introduced "global studies" as requirement of its new core curriculum. So we might say that Fordham's anomaly is that Global Studies preceded Comparative Literature. Now, one question this raises is whether this is in fact an anomaly. Does Comparative Literature precede Global Studies?

Fordham's experience (anomalous or not) raises a couple of other questions. In particular, it raises questions about two things Comparative Literature traditionally gives priority to, but Global Studies typically does not -- the study of language, first; and then, too, the study of literature. Neither language nor literature is prioritized for Global Studies in quite the same way that it is for Comparative Literature.

On the question of language, I should say that when I first became director of the program (then called Literary Studies, in its very early days -- the long-ago 1990s), I was acutely aware of the anglophone bias of our curriculum -- this, despite the roughly equal representation of faculty from Modern Languages and Literatures and English. The rationale I gave then for the strength of our program may be illustrative of a certain kind of alliance and partnership between Comparative Literature and Global Studies. As I told students, faculty, and myself: I) the discipline of comp lit was moving away from its traditional reliance on European languages and literatures; and II) our two strongest
linguistic bases (in terms of curriculum and faculty) -- English and Spanish -- were simultaneously European and extra-European in their linguistic and in their literary reach. And indeed, one of the early curricular initiatives I developed with my co-director, (Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé from Modern Languages) was to tie a series of lectures and course offerings to the anniversary reflections of 1898/1998, a hundred years since the Spanish-American war.

So, in an affirmative sense, one could say that Comparative Literature at Fordham is a kind of foundational model for the partnership between global studies and comparative studies. Alternatively, in a more precarious sense, one could say that Comparative Literature has long depended, for its very survival, on an alliance between the anglophone priorities of global studies and the comparative literary imperative to study languages other than English. Both sides of this simultaneously affirmative and precarious alliance might be read in the claim from our Program Review that Comp Lit is now informed by the “imperative to address the full diversity of linguistic and literary traditions beyond Europe.”

The second time I served as director of Comp Lit at Fordham (from 2011 to 2014) was when the Literary Studies Program renamed itself the Comparative Literature Program. This Fordham anomaly might draw attention to the question of literature as a priority, one that was continually questioned, in fact, from the very beginning (and as a matter of both theory and practice). The opening paragraph of our Program Review might be read as a justification for returning to the old term “Comparative Literature” because the label (and the discipline itself) now designates a field of study fully transformed by the best of what might be called “global studies” imperatives -- informed
as it is now by the imperative not only “to address the full diversity of linguistic and literary traditions beyond Europe,” but also to address “the full range of media beyond the traditional philological focus on the texts of manuscript and print cultures.”

I think the ideal invoked by our Self Study deliberately echoes and critiques the old 19th-century ideals of Humboldt-ian humanism, comparative philology -- older models of comparative literature that may also take us back to older models of global studies, too, albeit embedded in 19th-century European colonial and imperial formations. I think this is an idealization, too, in which Comparative Literature and Global Studies, each strangely appearing historically prior to the other, also productively challenge the disciplinary priorities of the other. In that sense, I think the Fordham anomaly may be exemplary in revealing the simultaneously adversarial and collaborative, affirmative and precarious alliance between Global Studies and Comparative. This is an alliance between a Global Studies which often forgets the institutional significance of languages other than English; and which often seems impatient with the old philological model of text-based studies -- and Comparative Literature which needs to be challenged to question how and what it means to make language central to all forms of comparative study; and which needs to recognize how multiple media histories impinge on the forms of text-based study that continue to make the question of literature the basis for interdisciplinary study of just about any kind.

So, to conclude with questions: is it possible to reframe as an old alliance the conflict in priorities between Comparative Literature and Global Studies over the teaching of language and over literature? Might the potentially adversarial difference over these priorities be precisely the ground for partnership and alliance?
Appendix

Comparative Literature and Global Studies
3:30 - 4:45 p.m.
Thursday, 7 January
131st MLA Convention

First paragraph of Fordham University's Comparative Literature Program Review document

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE PROGRAM
FORDHAM UNIVERSITY
SELF-STUDY REPORT
September, 2013
(Revised & with additional corrections [1/26/14])

Program Mission and Vision

Comparative Literature, with roots in European comparative philology, is one of the most traditional fields of study within the Arts and Sciences, since it addresses the theory and practice of studying texts in the broadest of senses. It is also one of the most innovative and interdisciplinary fields of study, informed as it now is by the imperative to address the full diversity of linguistic and literary traditions beyond Europe, and the full range of media beyond the traditional philological focus on the texts of manuscript and print cultures. Fordham’s Comparative Literature Program offers a unique set of educational opportunities for its undergraduate students, for its faculty, and for communities inside and beyond Fordham University.

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