

# COMPARATIVE LITERATURE IN GERMANY—ASSESSMENTS AND INTERIM ASSESSMENTS OF THE STATE OF A MULTI-FACETED DISCIPLINE

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**RESUMO:** Análises e avaliações provisórias do estado de uma disciplina multifacetada

**PALAVRAS CHAVES:** Literatura Comparada; Alemanha

**ABSTRACT:** Assessments and interim assessments of the state of a multi-faceted discipline

**KEY WORDS:** Comparative Literature; Germany

## The Prehistory of Comparative Literature in Germany

The prehistory of comparative literature, which is concerned with the comparison of literatures of diverse language regions, is in important respects situated in Germany. However, the history of comparative literature as an academic discipline does not begin in Germany until the middle of the twentieth century; that is, it lags far behind in comparison with France and the United States. Studies of world literature, collections, essays and lectures by such important German authors as Johann Gottfried Herder and the brothers August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel comprise the aforesaid prehistory of comparative literature. Herder collected texts of various literatures, including those of remote lands, which he conceived of as expressions of poetry that, in principle, could be compared. In addition to the literature of antiquity, both Schlegel brothers devoted themselves to modern literature and its history. Their study of its larger contexts was always strongly characterized by comparative approaches. Furthermore, an important premise for comparative studies and theories was the complex discussion about the term “world literature,” initiated by Goethe, conducted by many nineteenth-century theoreticians, critics, and authors, and continued in the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup>

In nineteenth-century Germany, various philologists and literary historians developed and taught programs of comparative research, thus laying the foundations for individual comparisons as well as for panoramic surveys of the literatures of the world — for example, the Germanist Moritz Carrière in his study “Das Wesen und die Formen der Poesie“ [The Nature and Forms of Poetry] (1854)<sup>3</sup> or the Germanist Moritz Haupt and his colleague

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Peter Goßens: *Weltliteratur. Modelle transnationaler Literaturwahrnehmung im 19. Jahrhundert*. Stuttgart 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Moritz Carrière: *Das Wesen und die Formen der Poesie*, Leipzig 1854.

Wilhelm Scherer.<sup>4</sup> But as desirable as the expansion of German philology, which had been established at the university level in the nineteenth century, into the transnational, comparative realm seemed to them and others, commensurate chairs and seminars were not established. This came about more swiftly in Switzerland, which was multilingual and in this respect also literarily differentiated. The US-born Louis-Paul Betz was appointed to an extraordinary professorship for comparative literature in Zurich in 1902. Around the turn of the last century Betz lamented emphatically the lack of instruction of comparative literature in German-language areas, pointing out that the discourse concerning world literature that had been conducted since Goethe's time would have led to different expectations.<sup>5</sup>

To be sure, individual professorships existed in Germany since the 1920s, which *inter alia* were authorized as “Vergleichende Literaturgeschichte“ [comparative history of literature] (André Jolles, Leipzig, 1923 on) or “Vergleichende Literaturbetrachtung“ [comparative approaches to literature] (Eduard von Jans, Würzburg, 1927 on). However, whereas the history of the academic institutionalization of comparative literature studies had begun in Switzerland with Betz's appointment at the beginning of the twentieth century, it did not come about in Germany until after 1945, and namely in the French-occupied zones which were intermittently subject to various military administrations: at the universities in Mainz and Saarbrücken.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Institutionalization of German Comparative Literature**

In 1946 the first professorial chair for comparative literature, occupied by Friedrich Hirth, was established at the Johannes-Gutenberg-University of Mainz. His successor in 1959 was Horst Rüdiger, who then moved to the new chair for Vergleichende Literaturgeschichte [Comparative History of Literature] at the University of Bonn in 1962. Here the subject was also established in the post-war period under French influence. From 1949 on, comparative literary history was taught at the recently founded University of the Saarland in Saarbrücken. An autonomous course of studies, “Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft“ [comparative literature], began in

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Rüdiger Zymner/Achim Hölter (Eds.): *Handbuch Komparatistik. Theorien, Arbeitsfelder, Wissenspraxis*. Stuttgart/Weimar 2013 (hereafter: Zymner/Hölter), 36, (Rüdiger Zymner: “Deutschland und der deutsche Sprachraum“, 35-39)

<sup>5</sup> On Betz cf. Rüdiger Zymner: “Deutschland und der deutsche Sprachraum“, in Zymner/Hölter 36, 38.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Alewyn: *Comparative Literatur in Germany, 1945*: “there are no chairs of world or comparative literature at the universities in German-speaking countries“ (cited in Ulrich Weisstein: *Einführung in die Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft*. Stuttgart u.a. 1968, 47)

1951/52 with the appointment of Maurice Bémol, who was succeeded by Roger Bauer in 1962/63.

During the post-war decades comparative literature programs were established at multiple sites in West Germany as a cultural policy against a clear broadly political backdrop. The same holds true for the establishment of the “Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft“ [General and Comparative Literary Studies] at the Freie Universität Berlin (in the western sector) in 1965. Rüdiger Zymner aptly formulates this as a “clear, cosmopolitan signal in the divided city.“<sup>7</sup> Since 2005 the Berlin Institute bears the name of its first professor, Peter Szondi, a holocaust-survivor and a celebrated philologist.

Further chairs and institutes for general and comparative literature studies or for general literature studies were established in the following years and decades, during a period when new universities were founded and courses of study were expanded, multiplied, and diversified. Since 1975 the subject has existed at the Ruhr-University of Bochum (first chair: Marianne Kesting) and at the University of Wuppertal (first chair: Dietrich Weber). New institutes, chairs, and courses of study with comparative programs also arose in Austria after 1945, for example, the Institut für Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft [Institute for Comparative Literature] at the University of Innsbruck in 1970 (first director: Zoran Konstantinović) and the Institut für Vergleichende Literatur at the University of Vienna in 1980. Since 2004 this institute has been integrated into the Institut für Europäische und Vergleichende Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft [Institute for European and Comparative Linguistic and Literature Studies]. – A center for comparative research in Switzerland is the Institut de Littérature générale et comparée in Fribourg.

The field of comparative literature has various names in German-language areas: “Komparatistik,“ “Allgemeine Literaturwissenschaft,“ “Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft“, “Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft“ (the last most notably in Austria), and it has various forms of institutional organization. Some universities have a separate institute for comparative literature, or general/comparative literature (model A). Other universities have special professorships for the subject but no institute devoted specifically to this subject. Here comparative literature is integrated into institutes spanning several subjects, usually German studies and comparative literature, as at the University of Bonn (model B). In contrast, at the Free University of Berlin there is an institute for general and comparative literature. The professors who teach this subject, however, are not responsible for teaching

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<sup>7</sup> Zymner: “Deutschland und der deutsche Sprachraum“, in Zymner/Hölter 37.

comparative literature exclusively. The faculty consists of Germanists, Romanists, Anglicists, Americanists, Slavists, etc., with respective additional comparative *venia legendi* (model C).

The universities in the GDR, subsequently the universities in the region of the former GDR, are a special case within the history of German-language comparative literature. Various esteemed comparatists (for example Victor Klemperer and Hans Mayer) were indeed active there but they did not teach under this subject rubric. This can be explained by the early history of the GDR, especially by the formative influence of the Soviet Union, whereby a thoroughly present comparative tradition faded into the background in the face of nationalizing, unifying biases. More simply put, for a long time transnationalism (subtly devalued as “cosmopolitanism“) and diversity did not seem politically appropriate. In later years comparative studies of German and Russian, or rather, Slavic literature did lead to strengthening the profile of comparative studies in the GDR and “general literature“ gained in importance.<sup>8</sup> A chair for comparative literature was not established in the GDR. Whereas “World Literature“ discourses, on the other hand, were of considerable importance for literary pedagogy. After all, Goethe’s intellectual legacy was being administered according to the state’s self-image. After the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) comparative literature departments were established at several German universities in the East, for example, in Leipzig.

### **University Contexts and Internal Policy Factors**

In addition to the different traditions and political concepts of the individual universities, the quite heterogenous state of affairs in terms of German university and educational policies is responsible for the fact that comparative literature as a whole is practiced and treated in various ways (if it is even offered as a subject). The authority to make university policy decisions rests with the individual federal states, which do not have a uniform policy because of different (and changing) governments. Internally the states place their bets on frequent reorganizations (especially when savings or prestige are to be gained). Rhetoric about innovations often serves as a euphemism for austerity measures affecting the existing range of courses or research support.

The situations also differ with respect to the courses of study offered by German universities. Within the framework of the degree levels (bachelor’s and master’s) introduced

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Rainer Rosenberg: “Germanistik und Komparatistik in der DDR.“ In: Hendrik Birus (Ed.): *Germanistik und Komparatistik*. Stuttgart/Weimar 1005, 28-36. Further: Zymner: “Deutschland und der deutsche Sprachraum“, in Zymner/Hölter 38.

nationwide in 2000, some, but not many, universities offer the subject of comparative literature at the bachelor's as well as the master's level. Other universities only offer the subject at the bachelor's or the master's level, that is, only for the first or the second stage of studies. Yet again other universities have developed composite or hybrid courses of study that have a comparative component and are usually offered at the master's level. The "Kulturkomparatistik" program at the University of Münster, with cultural studies and comparative literature components, is an example. At far more numerous universities the degree program is not even offered, although lectures or courses on comparative literature might be offered to students of other literatures (German studies or Romance studies). At some institutions austerity measures and the elimination of programs since the year 2000 have brought about the closure of the comparative literature program and the termination of the relevant courses of study (as in Aachen). In some instances comparative courses of study were incorporated into overarching or newly named courses of study or subjects. Occasionally specific university conditions and profiles are the reason for program mergers—for instance, the merger of comparative literature and translation studies.<sup>9</sup>

The priorities set for the subject at the different universities offering comparative literature studies vary according to the chairs and/or structures. This has to do, first, with the strong disciplinary differentiation of the subject, which, in addition to its manifold interfaces with individual philologies and the breadth of its possible historical emphases (from antiquity to the present), are also closely related to issues concerning cultural and media studies. Second, political and economic considerations have caused comparative literature programs at many German-language universities to try to present a unique, regional profile. At a time when universities facing increasing economic pressures compete for good graduates, especially for successful junior researchers, the buzzword "unique selling feature" has advanced to a key concept. New name, new design, new opportunities for financing. In general, it is easier to obtain approval and funding for a course of studies or program that a particular university is able to offer as something unique rather than to continue a program that is, in principle, offered at other universities.

Furthermore, there are additional trends that affect or may affect the fates of the various comparative literature programs: 1) the trend to integrate the so-called "smaller subjects" into

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<sup>9</sup> In Saarbrücken, one of the oldest comparative literature sites in Germany, the "Vergleichende Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft" [comparative linguistics and literature] program] was recently merged with the "Angewandte Sprachwissenschaft sowie Übersetzen und Dolmetschen" [applied linguistics as well as translation and interpretation] program. A master's program, "Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft, [general and comparative literature], continues.

the “larger“ ones in order to save on personnel and structures, that is, money; 2) the at least partially intrinsic trend to allow certain research paradigms to become lead disciplines. Where cultural studies (often labeled with that fashionable English term) enjoy the role of such a lead discipline, such concepts as “comparative cultural studies“ are close at hand. And where media studies predominate, it appears to be desirable to engage in “comparative media studies.“ In German-language areas there are multiple overlappings of subjects, themes, and methodologies, above all, of course, between German studies and comparative literature studies. The subdiscipline “intercultural German studies“ profiled at some universities shares common interests with comparative literature. To be sure, the primary emphasis is on cultural studies, but definitely with a view to literary phenomena and processes. In turn, where Romance studies cover the most important subdisciplines (French, Italian, Hispanic, and Lusitanian studies) — within the romance linguistic and cultural space it is a subject especially disposed toward comparisons — Romance comparative studies. But the same could be said of studies devoted to the various anglophone countries, regions, and cultures. The question of comparisons of linguistically homogenous spaces is currently also discussed with a view toward German-speaking countries and regions.<sup>10</sup>

### **Comparative Studies in Germany**

There are about thirty universities in German-speaking areas that offer comparative or partially comparative courses of study or programs.<sup>11</sup> The following is a survey of the most important sites with reference to founding, faculty, and organizational structure:

- Mainz: founded 1946 (under French occupation); an endowed chair from 1949 on; from 1958 on entitled: “Seminar für Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft“ [seminar for comparative literature], today the “Institut für Allgemeine und vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft“ [institute for general and comparative literature]; from 1979/80 on a second chair.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Dirk Kemper, Natalia Bakshi, Monika Schmitz-Emans (Eds.): *Komparatistik sprachhomogener Räume. Beiträge zu einer internationalen Konferenz in Moskau 2015*, in preparation (München: Fink, 2017)

<sup>11</sup> Data according to the 2013 “Handbuch Komparatistik“ by Zymner/Hölter, 38. For further information about institutes, departments, chairs, and programs: Zymner/Hölter 378 f.

- Saarbrücken: instruction from 1949 on; from 1951/52 on the curriculum “Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft“ [comparative literature]; 2008: organizational integration of comparative literature into the subject German studies.
- Berlin: 1965, founding of the „Seminar für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft“ [seminar for general and comparative literature]; from 2005 on: “Peter-Szondi-Institut.“
- Bonn: range of courses since 1965; 1994 second chair. After decades as an autonomous program, it is now combined with German studies in the “Institut für Germanistik, Vergleichende Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaft“ [institute for German studies, comparative literature and cultural studies].
- Bochum: 1975, the first time a chair for General and Comparative Literature“ within the “Germanistisches Institut“ [institute for German studies]; independent courses of study; second chair in 2003.
- Munich: 1988, founding of the “Institut für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft“ [institute for general and comparative literature]; 1994, second chair.
- Leipzig: 1991/92, establishment of a master’s program in comparative literature and a chair for “Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft“ [general and comparative literature].
- Münster: 1995, founding of an “Institut für Komparatistik“ [institute for comparative literature]; 2005, integration into the Institute for German Studies as a “Lehrstuhl für Germanistik“ [chair for German studies].
- Göttingen: 2001/02, founding of a „Zentrum für komparatistische Studien“ [center for comparative studies]; today part of the “Abteilung für komparatistische Studien“ [department of comparative studies] of the “Seminar für deutsche Philologie“ [seminar for German philology].

### **The German Society for Comparative Literature (DGAVL) and Comparative Literature Journals in Germany**

The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft (DGAVL) [German Society for General and Comparative Literature], founded in 1969, unites members from Germany and Austria and has regular tri-annual conferences at various universities. As a

rule, scholars from abroad also participate.<sup>12</sup> These conferences focus on specific topics of comparative research.

International interests and trends of German-language comparative literature are readily discernible in the conference topics. The topic is not decided primarily by the interest-profile of the host university, although this is an important pragmatic factor in the decision-making process. It is above all a matter of responding to international and transnational impulses and engaging with recent and new discourses and paradigms, thus offering the representatives of German-language comparative literature, with their wide-ranging research interests, the broadest possible chances at connectivity. The DGAVL conferences with the topics “Canon and Theory“ (Tübingen, 1996)<sup>13</sup>; “The New as an Aesthetically Significant Concept of Modernism“ (Heidelberg, 1999)<sup>14</sup>; and “Comparative Literature as Work on Myth,“ treating myth and theories of myth (Jena, 2002),<sup>15</sup> dealt with current issues concerning “classic“ fields of inquiry in general and comparative literature. The topic “Visual Culture“ of the 2005 DGAVL conference in Potsdam stood at the intersection of the (still) current paradigms of cultural studies and visual studies.<sup>16</sup> The theme of the 2008 DGAVL conference in Münster extended the perspective from visual-aesthetic subjects to the spectrum of artistic media and forms as a whole. Three years later (2011) German comparatists and their guests from abroad discussed “Figures of Globalism“ in Bonn,<sup>17</sup> paying greater attention to the historic, political, and cultural contexts and signifiers of literary texts. Guided by the continuing interest in the political, historic, and discursive dimension of the literary, the following conference focused on the theme of “Eco-Criticism“ (Saarbrücken, 2014). In contrast, the emphasis at the 2017 conference in Bochum is on media and aesthetic issues, linked with historical and cultural-comparative perspectives: “Writing and the Graphic in Comparison.“ A number of professional journals published in Germany and written, for the most part, in German treat topics and methods of general and comparative literature, often in conjunction with intermedial, interdiscursive, and interdisciplinary issues. For several decades this has held true for such

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The Schweizer Gesellschaft für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft, founded in 1977, likewise holds regular conferences. In accordance with Switzerland’s specific situation, the SGAVL is multilingual.

<sup>13</sup> Maria Moog-Grünwald (Ed.): *Kanon und Theorie*, Heidelberg 1997.

<sup>14</sup> Maria Moog-Grünwald (Ed.): *Das Neue. Eine Denkfigur der Moderne*. Heidelberg 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Uwe Lindemann/Monika Schmitz-Emans (Eds.): *Komparatistik als Arbeit am Mythos*. Heidelberg (Synchron) 2004.

<sup>16</sup> Monika Schmitz-Emans/Gertrud Lehnert (Eds.): *Visual Culture*. Heidelberg (Synchron) 2008

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Christian Moser/Linda Simonis (Eds.): *Figuren des Globalen. Weltbezug und Welterzeugung in Literatur, Kunst und Medien*. Göttingen (V&R unipress) 2014.



tradition-steeped journals as *Poetica* and *Arcadia*. In 1998 *Komparatistik* was established as the yearbook of the DGAVL, followed a few years later by *Comparatio*.

### **Fields of Inquiry in German Comparative Literature**

The current fields of inquiry in German-language comparative literature are numerous and strongly differentiated. Many monographs, essays, and similar forms of publication are dedicated to literary and comparative topics of the discipline in the narrower sense, such as questions of reception, influence, definition of eras, and models of literary history as well as translation problems and performances<sup>18</sup> and multilingualism.<sup>19</sup> In the field of general literature textual models and theories of interpretation, scholarly methods, and trans-subject paradigms, insofar as they influence literary research, are discussed and compared.

Topics and subjects at the intersection of research in literature, the social sciences, and historiography are of great importance in German literary studies as a whole; the field of comparative literature is not unaffected by this.<sup>20</sup> As is the case with German studies, in recent decades German comparative literature, influenced by international research, is turning increasingly to the topics of colonialism and postcolonialism,<sup>21</sup> migration, and transcultural contacts.

### **General Literature, Literary Theory, Poetics, World Literature Discourses**

Comparative working contexts and projects regularly result in descriptions of topics of general literature, thus of specific literary genres, of genre theory and its history,<sup>22</sup> of practices and

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<sup>18</sup>Cf., for example,; Doris Bachmann-Medick: *Übersetzungen als Repräsentationen fremder Kulturen*. Berlin 1997.

<sup>19</sup> Monika Schmitz-Emans (Ed.): *Literatur und Vielsprachigkeit*. Heidelberg 2004; K. Alfons Knauth (Ed.): *Translation and Multilingual Literature./Traduction et Littérature Multilingue*. Berlin (LIT Verlag) (Metzler) 2011.

<sup>20</sup>On the relationships between comparative literature and social science approaches cf., inter alia, Peter V. Zima: *Vergleichende Wissenschaften. Interdisziplinarität und Interkulturalität in den Komparatistiken*. Tübingen 2000; Peter V. Zima: *Komparatistik und Sozialwissenschaften*. In: *Komparatistik 2004/2005*, 47-61.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Zymner/Hölter 171-174 = Chapter D 9: „Kolonialismus und Komparatistik“ (Werner Nell).

<sup>22</sup> Rüdiger Zymner (Ed.): *Handbuch Gattungstheorie*. Stuttgart: Metzler 2010; Dieter Lamping (Ed.): *Handbuch Lyrik. Theorie, Analyse, Geschichte*. Stuttgart/ Weimar (Metzler) 2011.

concepts concerning the writing of literary history,<sup>23</sup> as well as the history of poetics.<sup>24</sup> Regarding these and other topics there are many convergences between comparative and other literary studies in the practice of teaching and research. In academic instruction as well as in research associations they have a correspondingly fundamental importance.

Literary studies operate on the terrain traditionally affined with comparative literature when it is concerned with concepts such as “world literature“ and its history, with the understanding of literature articulated by this term, with questions of canonicity and the valuation of literary functions that promote national or cultural identity. In recent decades the concept of world literature, first and foremost, has become the impetus for manifold historical and subject-specific discussions.<sup>25</sup>

## **Literature and Cultural Studies**

Inspired in many instances by stimuli from international comparative literature studies that are oriented toward the cultural sciences, cultural, especially comparative cultural questions and topics<sup>26</sup> such as intercultural<sup>27</sup> and multicultural<sup>28</sup> phenomena and concepts, have become the core of comparative literature. They coalesce with reflections on the inherent nature of one’s own field and on the relationship between literary and cultural studies.<sup>29</sup> Disparate relationships and hierarchies were and are being established, according to the scope of the concept of culture and the implicit or explicit understanding of literature.<sup>30</sup> In her 2013 essay, „Multikulturalität und Komparatistik,“ a survey of the different research subfields, the German

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<sup>23</sup> Matthias Buschmeier/Walter Erhart/Kai Kauffmann (Eds.): *Literaturgeschichte. Theorien – Modelle – Praktiken*. Berlin/Boston (de Gruyter) 2014.

<sup>24</sup> Monika Schmitz-Emans/Uwe Lindemann/Manfred Schmeling (Eds.): *Poetiken. Autoren - Texte - Begriffe*. Berlin/New York (De Gruyter) 2009.

<sup>25</sup> Manfred Schmeling (Eds.): *Weltliteratur heute. Konzepte und Perspektiven*. Würzburg 1995; Elke Sturm-Trigonakis: *Global playing in der Literatur. Ein Versuch über die Neue weltliteratur*. Würzburg 2007. Rev. and trans. by Athanasia Margoni and Maria Kaiser as *Comparative Cultural Studies and the New Weltliteratur*. Purdue, Indiana (U Indiana Press) 2013; Dieter Lamping: *Die Idee der Weltliteratur. Ein Konzept Goethes und seine Karriere*. Stuttgart 2010; Peter Goßens: *Weltliteratur. Modelle transnationaler Literaturwahrnehmung im 19. Jahrhundert*. Stuttgart 2011.

<sup>26</sup> Doris Bachmann-Medick: *Kultur als Text. Die anthropologische Wende in der Literaturwissenschaft*. Frankf./M. 1996, has been well received.

<sup>27</sup> On the concept of interculturality cf., inter alia, Peter V. Zima (Ed.): *Vergleichende Wissenschaften . Interdisziplinarität und Interkulturalität in den Komparaistiken*. Tübingen 2000.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Michael Kessler/Jürgen Wertheimer (Eds.): *Multikulturalität. Tendenzen, Probleme, Operperspektiven*. Tübingen 1995.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Pascal Nicklas: *Literaturwissenschaft als Kulturwissenschaft?* In: *Komparatistik. Jahrbuch der DGAVL*, 2004/2005.

<sup>30</sup> On the topic literary studies/cultural studies cf., inter alia, Reinhold Göring: *Komparatistik und/als interkulturelle Theoriebildung zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts*. Innsbruck et al. 2001, 283-296.

comparatist Elke Sturm-Trigonakis maintains that the world-wide existence of multicultural relationships has caused traditional comparative literature to open up to many new areas of inquiry and challenges.<sup>31</sup> Numerous studies in comparative literature from German-speaking areas substantiate this exemplarily and with considerable differentiation.

Notwithstanding the breadth of comparative research areas and approaches, as determined by the history of the subject as well as educational policies and institutional factors, the following could be considered to be the core areas and formative trends:

### **A. Descriptions and Conceptualizations of the Field of General and/or Comparative Literature: Theories, Foundations, Introductions**

In the last decades a substantial amount of research has been published on: the theoretical foundations of the comparative literature discipline; the conceptualization of the subject, its tasks and areas of study; descriptions of its methodological differences, explanations of its “general“ and „comparative“ components, as well as comparisons among the comparative sciences as a whole. The 2004/2005 DGAVL yearbook *Komparatistik*, among others, was dedicated to various facets and concepts of comparative literature. Furthermore, quite a few introductory textbooks, usually with multiple editions, have been published in the last one and one half decades.

In the wake of various positionings of the field of comparative literature that appeared in the late twentieth century,<sup>32</sup> the following titles are documents of disciplinary self reflection that have appeared since, roughly, the turn of the century:

- Carsten Zelle (Ed.): *Allgemeine Literaturwissenschaft. Konturen und Profile im Pluralismus*. Opladen/Wiesbaden 1999.
- *Allgemeine Literaturwissenschaft. Grundfragen einer besonderen Disziplin*. Ed. Rüdiger Zymner. Berlin 1999.
- Beate Burtscher-Bechtler/Martin Sendl (Ed.): *Theory Studies? Konturen komparatistischer Theoriebildung zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts*. Innsbruck etc. 2001.

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<sup>31</sup> Elke Sturm-Trigonakis, in Zymner/Hölter 184-186, here 185.

<sup>32</sup> Ulrich Weisstein: *Einführung in die Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft*. Stuttgart et al. 1968; Hugo Dyserinck: *Komparatistik. Eine Einführung*. Bonn 1977; Zoran Konstantinović: *Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft*. Frankf./M. Et al. 1988; Hendrik Birus (Hg.): *Germanistik und Komparatistik*. Stuttgart/Weimar 1995.

- Carsten Zelle: “Komparatistik und comparatio – der Vergleich in der Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft. Skizze einer Bestandsaufnahme.“ In: *Komparatistik 2004/2005*, 13-33.
- Peter V. Zima: *Komparatistische Perspektiven. Zur Theorie der Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft*. Tübingen 2011 (a compilation of old and new essays).
- Peter V. Zima: *Komparatistik. Einführung in die Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft. Tübingen/Basel 2001 (2. ed.)*.
- Evi Zemanek/Alexander Nebrig (Eds.): *Komparatistik*. Berlin 2012.
- Angelika Corbineau-Hoffmann: *Einführung in die Komparatistik*. 3rd. rev. ed. Berlin 2013 (1. ed. 2000).
- Christiane Solte-Gresser/Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink/Manfred Schmeling (Eds.): *Zwischen Transfer und Vergleich*. Stuttgart 2013.
- Michael Eggers: *Vergleichendes Erkennen. Zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte und Epistemologie des Vergleichs und zur Genealogie der Komparatistik*. Heidelberg (Winter) 2016.

First of all, the broad range of models and theses concerning comparative literature documented here and elsewhere fits seamlessly into the overall picture of German literature studies that have been theory-happy from the beginning. In the quantitatively predominant field of German literature (German philology and especially the more recent field of German studies) there has been no lack of methodologies, introductory books, and books on basic principles. Secondly, the need for fundamental subject orientations that is especially pronounced in German-language areas can most likely be explained by the heterogeneous stimuli and influences that have shaped comparative literature there: influences of (earlier) French and US comparative literature, as well as influences of the successive or overlaying transnational and transdisciplinary research paradigms and central discourses: social science, psychology, cultural studies, media studies, visual culture; and, furthermore, more specific approaches and methods implemented in comparative literature such as gender studies, eco-criticism, and post-colonial studies.

Comparative discussion platforms are also used to incorporate diverse current research paradigms (such as the intermediality paradigm and cultural studies) related to comparative

literary approaches into constellations that are, for their part, comparative.<sup>33</sup> The recent „Handbuch zur Komparatistik“ (2013), edited by Rüdiger Zymner and Achim Hölder, to which many German comparatists as well as comparatists from abroad have contributed, responds to and currently meets the need for a new orientation—an understandable need, given the variety of discourses, methods, and projects.<sup>34</sup>

## **B. Comparative Arts, Comparative Media, Visual Culture, Intermediality Studies, Relationships between Literature and Images, Literature and Music**

Studies that compare literary works with other arts or aesthetic practices, as well those that treat literature's engagement with other arts, have traditionally occupied a large space in German-language comparative literature.<sup>35</sup> Approaches to a systematic or at least panoramic survey of the different arts have been undertaken repeatedly. Comparisons of literature with the visual arts and music focus, in part, on medial and structural aspects, but also frequently bear on literary works that themselves implicitly or explicitly compare literature with other art forms.

Continuing in the older research tradition of comparing the arts, in the years since the millenium there have appeared various further positionings of a comparative literature that regards itself as intermedial and is primarily interested in comparing the arts and their medialities.<sup>36</sup> They deal partly with the overall field of comparison of the arts,<sup>37</sup> partly with programmatic case studies,<sup>38</sup> partly with the comparison with specific arts such as music<sup>39</sup> or

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<sup>33</sup>Cf. Annette Simonis (Ed.): *Intermedialität und Kulturaustausch: Beobachtungen im Spannungsfeld von Künsten und Medien*. Bielefeld 2009.

<sup>34</sup> Rüdiger Zymner/Achim Hölder (Eds.): *Handbuch Komparatistik. Theorien, Arbeitsfelder, Wissenspraxis*. Stuttgart/Weimar 2013, here, especially Abteilung E („Ansätze der literaturwissenschaftlichen Komparatistik,“ 227-261).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Monika Schmitz-Emans: *Literaturwissenschaft und Intermedialität*. In: *Komparatistik. Jahrbuch der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft 2004/2005*. Eds. Monika Schmitz-Emans und Uwe Lindemann. Heidelberg 2005, 103-115.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Steven Paul Scher (Ed.): *Literatur und Musik. Ein Handbuch zur Theorie und Praxis eines komparatistischen Grenzgebietes*. Berlin 1984.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Ulrich Weisstein (Ed.): *Literatur und bildende Kunst. Ein Handbuch zur Theorie und Praxis eines komparatistischen Grenzgebietes*. Berlin 1992.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Maria Moog-Grünwald/Christoph Rodiek (Eds.): *Dialog der Künste – Intermediale Fallstudien zur Literatur des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*. Bern et al. 1989.

<sup>39</sup> Albert Gier/Gerold W. Gruber (Eds.) *Musik und Literatur. Komparatistische Studien zur Strukturverwandtschaft*. Frankfurt/M. u.a. 1995; Walter Bernhart / Steven Paul Scher / Werner Wolf: *Word and Music Studies. Defining the Field. Proceedings of the First International Conference on Word and Music Studies at Graz 1997*. Amsterdam/Atlanta 1999; Joachim Grage (Ed.): *Literatur und Musik in der klassischen Moderne. Mediale Konzeptionen und intermediale Poetologien*. Würzburg 2006; Winfried Eckel: *Ut musica Poesis. Die Literatur der Moderne aus dem Geist der Musik*. Paderborn 2015.

the visual arts.<sup>40</sup> They are also partly a sign of the intermediality paradigm that has serious consequences beyond comparative literature.<sup>41</sup>

The topic of the 2008 DGAVL conference on “Comparative Arts“ held in Münster is exemplary for recent responses to the tradition of comparing the arts. Compare: Achim Hölder, Ed. *Comparative Arts. Universelle Ästhetik im Fokus der Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft*. Heidelberg (Synchron) 2011. Achim Hölder, then president of the DGAVL, conference organizer, and editor of the conference proceedings, maintains in his introduction that currently comparative literature has become one of the arenas of research and debate that aims to clarify or define aesthetic categories and practices, exceeding by far their application in written-text-based arts (XI). In the course of the twentieth century the arts as well as the disciplines concerned with aesthetic phenomena have moved increasingly closer to each other; that is, they have formed new constellations. The concept of text has expanded. Precisely comparative literature has attended to the comparison of the arts for quite some time, and consequently the concept “comparative arts“ has evolved into a program complementary to the concept “comparative literature“ (XI). Not only the thematically variegated studies collected in the volume “Comparative Arts“ but also a considerable amount of more recent comparative studies confirm the trend sketched out by Hölder.<sup>42</sup>

A special area of research that recently has drawn closer attention are the medially and stylistically dissimilar forms of visualization in literature and literary history. Profiling comparisons are invited not only by illustrations of literary works and autonomous works of the visual arts depicting literary figures, episodes, and motifs, but also by portraits of authors; pictures of authors surrounded by their works and colleagues; popular media images of “the literary“ (in the broader and the narrower sense); photographs of writers, literary objects, and sites; and films and comics based on literature.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. Claus Clüver: *Inter textus / Inter artes / Inter media*. In: *Komparatistik. Jahrbuch der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft* 2000/2001, 14-50.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Peter V. Zima (Ed): *Literatur Intermedial. Musik - Malerei - Photographie - Film*. Darmstadt 1995; Jörg Helbig (Ed.): *Intermedialität: Theorie und Praxis eines interdisziplinären Forschungsgebiets*. Berlin 1998. Here, inter alia, Werner Wolf: “‘The musicalisation of fiction’: Versuche intermedialer Grenzüberschreitung zwischen Musik und Literatur im englischen Erzählen des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts. 133-164; Herbert Foltinek/Christoph Leitgeb (Eds.): *Literaturwissenschaft: intermedial – interdisziplinär*. Vienna 2002.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. also Maria Moog-Grünwald: *Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft. Überlegungen zu einer Erneuerung der ‘comparative arts’ im Anschluss an Max Dessoir*. In: *Comparatio* 2 (2010), 101-107.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Achim Hölder/Monika Schmitz/Emans (Eds.): *Literaturgeschichte und Bildmedien*. Heidelberg 2015.

### C. Literature, History of Knowledge, and Poetics of Knowledge

In recent decades there has been much research, with multiple emphases, on the close intertwining of literary history and the history of knowledge (inter alia, under the keyword “poetology of knowledge”).<sup>44</sup> The interest in the constellation of literature, knowledge, and the sciences led to a research paradigm that is not completely new but previously was not as fully developed. This interest is reflected in competing theoretical propositions, surveys, and handbooks, as well as in manifold monographs on authors, works, and special topics.<sup>45</sup> Comparative literature and cultural studies involve, with various accentuations, the connection between knowledge and literature. As a whole, one can observe a sustained examination of knowledge-historical and knowledge-poetological topics in German-language literary studies applied to many individual areas of research as well as to surveys and fundamentals of the poetics of knowledge. In order to facilitate comparisons, the gaze is often drawn across national-literary boundaries.<sup>46</sup>

The double keyword “literature and knowledge,” with its diverse options for explication, suggests, overall, comparative methods. “Knowledge about literature,” as manifest in aesthetics, rhetorics, and poetics, calls for a historical comparison. Content of extra-literary knowledge disciplines represented in and mediated by literature (that is, literary knowledge) suggests, among other things, a comparison of literary and non-literary forms of representation and diction. The constructive-“poetic“ (creative) dimension of the representation of knowledge in general ought to be seen in relation to constructive-creative processes in the field of fictional representation. This addresses in the first instance comparative narratology that, since Hayden White’s thesis of the narrative construction of history, has found many reasons to compare the configuration of historical and fictional worlds and thus has made narration a core subject of transdisciplinary and transdiscursive studies.

In their contribution to the “Handbuch Komparatistik,” Bernadette Malinowski und Michael Ostheimer concisely recapitulate fundamental questions confronting “comparative

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<sup>44</sup> On the topic history and poetics of knowledge cf. Bernadette Malinowski/Michael Ostheimer: “Komparatistik und Wissenspoetik“ in: Zymner/Hölter, 256-261.

<sup>45</sup> Especially useful as a survey is: Roland Borgards, Harald Neumeyer, Nicolas Pethes, Yvonne Wübben (Eds.): *Literatur und Wissen. Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch*. Stuttgart/Weimar 2013.; Nicolas Pethes: *Literatur- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte. Ein Forschungsbericht*. In *IASL* 28, 2003, 181-231; Further: Monika Schmitz-Emans, Kai Lars Fischer, Christoph Benjamin Schulz (Eds.): *Alphabet, Lexikographik und Enzyklopädistik. Historische Konzepte und literarisch-künstlerische Verfahren*. Hildesheim/Zürich/New York (Olms) 2012, 7-26.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Marcus Krause/Nicolas Pethes (Eds.): *Literarische Experimentalkulturen. Poetologien des Experiments im 19. Jahrhundert*. Würzburg 2005; Cf. Michael Gamper (Ed.): *Experiment und Literatur. Themen, Methoden, Theorien*. Göttingen 2010.

literature as a poetics of knowledge,“ “that on the one hand involve all forms of literary poetics of knowledge (poetics written by authors and those by scholars; manifestations of poetry and modes of thought intrinsic to poetry) but on the other also take into account poetic-narrative structures and methods of literary studies“: What concept of knowledge is suitable for the subject-area orientation? How may the “exchange relationships between literature and knowledge/scholarship“ be conceptualized? What topics comprise a “comparative literature oriented to the history of knowledge?“ Above all, “is there a specific knowledge of literature?“ (Handbuch Zymer/Hölter 256). By now German-language theoretical outlines of comparative literature, surveys, and introductions include the paradigm of knowledge poetics. A whole series of monographs substantiate and concentrate on the leading issues.<sup>47</sup>

### **Approach to an (interim) assessment**

The distinction between “large“ and „small“ subjects is firmly anchored in discussions about the German university landscape. “Small“ subjects (meaning those with fewer personnel) stand with their back against the wall far more frequently and quickly than the “large“ ones when it comes to defending one’s own employment opportunities or even the survival of the subject of study. In the German-language areas comparative literature is a “small“ but well-networked subject with many options for profiling itself that are deployed diversely at different universities. In that respect the field is doing quite well. One can only hope, however, that given its various, sometimes close alliances with other disciplines and its often fruitful orientation to new knowledge paradigms and current discourses of knowledge, it will remain what it is: a study of literature.

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. inter alia. Pascal Nicklas: Die Beständigkeit des Wandels. Metamorphosen in Literatur und Wissenschaft. Hildesheim 2002; Annette Simonis/Linda Simonis (Eds.): Kulturen des Vergleichs. Beiträge zur Literaturtheorie und Wissenspoetik Vol. 7. Heidelberg (Winter) 2016.