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The Geography of Comparative Literature

This essay compares the geographic norms of contemporary comparative literature to those operative in the related disciplines of history and area studies. Surveying the standard anthologies in the field, especially the recently revised *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (2010), it asks why the discipline of comparative literature continues to look most frequently to Europe, even and especially when positioning itself within postcolonial frameworks, while historical studies evince greater institutional and empirical openness to non-European archives. Particular

attention is paid to the contributions Arabic and Persian literary critics and theorists from ʿAbd al-Qahir al-Jurjani (d. 1078) to Muhamad Ghunaymi Hilal (d. 1968) have made to comparative literary studies and to contributions that might emerge from these regions in the near future as contemporary Arab and Persian authors critically engage with European legacies. The reflections of Franco Moretti and David Damrosch concerning the past and future world literature are employed to critically engage the programs for comparative literature proposed by Gayatri Spivak, Emily Apter, and Stanley Corngold, which conceptually privilege the untranslatable dimension of literary knowledge without fully realizing this ideal in practice. This essay concludes with two proposals. First, for a differentiated geography of the disciplines more attuned to the spatial provenance of literary theories. Second, for greater attentiveness to the cultural, temporal, and political inflections of the varying literary objects that constitute the discipline's archive. Discipline-specific challenges to the globalization of comparative literature are examined in conjunction with the barriers to global inquiry intrinsic to modernity.

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