

Norms and Standards of Comparative Literary Studies

It is not only the current restructuring of German universities that contributes to the necessity for comparative literary studies to reconsider itself. In Germany, comparative literary studies have existed only since 1946. It bears different names at different universities and encompasses different concepts. In contrast to other philologies, comparative literary studies is not combined with linguistics or regional studies. It focuses on literature and generally employs a specific concept of literature as world literature. Literature is understood as an international concept that includes a common set of forms, practices and topics. Research interests focus on concrete interrelations between specific texts and aim towards a systematic theory of literature. Since this is an ambitious goal, individual projects generally are more modest. Additionally, there are research questions guided by thematic interests that relate to our reality of life, adopting aspects of cultural and media studies.

A basic operation of comparative literary studies obviously is comparison, but also analysis, interpretation and generalization. Standard competences include reading abilities in two, more usually three literary languages. This is why it is so hard to adapt comparative literary studies for B.A. students with a six semester curriculum. The fact that literature is no longer a privileged medium also has consequences for an academic subject that does not educate future teachers, but this should not lead to a rush into interdisciplinary compensations with media or cultures studies.

Comparative literary studies should keep focusing on being literary studies, which does not preclude collaborations, even with neurological sciences. It will remain indispensable for analyzing aspects of literary internationality, which include translation, literary mediation, poetic reception, and aspects of exile and migration.

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