

## SPECIAL ISSUE

# BRIDGING DIVIDES VIA COMPARATIVE LITERATURE CRÉER DES PONTS PAR LA LITTÉRATURE COMPARÉE

## INTRODUCTION

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Japanese-German author Yoko Tawada's crosslingual homonyms are excellent symbols for the kind of bridges this special issue is invested in. In *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, Yasemin Yildiz discusses a few particularly original examples (133-34), including the Japanese Ramen noodles associated with the German "Rahmen" (frame), or the French "vie" (life) in the German "Klavier" (piano). These examples lay bare the extraordinary potential for storytelling to establish bridges between cultures, genres, and contexts that may not be self-evident. *Bridging Divides via Comparative Literature* combines articles that offer the same kind of leaps between communities, their languages, forms of creative expression, and disciplines such as philosophy and media studies. With two exceptions, all of the articles are based on presentations given at the 2020 annual meeting of the Canadian Comparative Literature Association/ Association Canadienne de Littérature Comparée. The meeting was intended as part of Congress 2020, to be hosted by the University of Western Ontario, but had to move online as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. The Program Chair cannot thank enough those members of the executive whose encouragement to go forward with the virtual meeting laid the groundwork for this issue. Without their technical expertise, we would have missed out on the urgent intellectual exchange, and distraction from the unfolding crisis, that included the initial introductions of the research gathered here. The selected nine articles were peer-reviewed, revised, and extended from the original conference presentations, all of them revolving around the theme, "Bridging

Divides via Comparative Literature.”

Anglophone etymology traces the term *bridge* back to the Old English word *brycg*, and dictionaries offer the general definition of a structure carrying a pathway over a depression or obstacle, before listing more specific uses in the contexts of music, dentistry, billiards, and ship construction. It is not surprising that such a practical structure, at times bearing the signature of a famous architect, has inspired a considerable amount of art as well as criticism. In literature, famous stories about bridges include Zhang Ji's (英譯唐詩) 楓橋夜泊 (*Mooring by the Maple Bridge at Night*), Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia*, Ivo Andrić's *На Дрину хыпнуја* (*Bridge on the Drina*), Markus Zusak's *Bridge of Clay*, Leos Carax's *Les Amants du Pont-Neuf*, and Ezzedine Choukri Fishere's عناق عند جسر بروكلين (*Embrace on Brooklyn Bridge*). Some of these stories revolve around existing bridges, at least to some extent; others use the concept of the bridge in more abstract ways. Paterson's tale, for instance, employs it to realize its fantastic elements. Besides valleys and rivers, bridges may

6 metaphorically cross eras and different realities.

A German group of early twentieth-century expressionists chose the name *Die Brücke* to suggest connections across time. Maybe the best-known appropriation of the symbol in cultural studies is that of Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa in their feminist anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981). Twenty years after the publication of Moraga and Anzaldúa's groundbreaking collection, which has seen four editions by four different presses, most recently the State University of New York Press in 2015, Anzaldúa wrote in the preface to the sequel *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*:

Bridges are thresholds to other realities, archetypal, primal symbols of shifting consciousness. They are passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives. Bridges span liminal (threshold) spaces between worlds, spaces I call *nepantla*, a Nahuatl word meaning *tierra entre medio*. Transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries. *Nepantla es tierra desconocida*, and living in this liminal zone means being in a constant state of displacement—an uncomfortable, even alarming feeling. Most of us dwell in *nepantla* so much of the time it's become a sort of “home.” (1)

The discipline of Comparative Literature, for better or worse, continues to reinvent and redefine itself. *Comparative Literature in Canada: Contemporary Scholarship, Pedagogy, and Publishing in Review* (2020) is an excellent testimony to the process at hand. Comparatists are cursed and blessed with the task of contributing to the resulting transformations because their discipline is the kind of *nepantla* Anzaldúa describes in the quotation above. While it is easy to welcome Jerry White's emphasis on the importance of crucial scholars for the discipline, the inactivity he laments in the closing of “The Three Cities of George Steiner” may be due more to certain parts of the globalized world, rather than to comparatists making unique contributions to it (239). To use the metaphor of the bridge, its construction does not guarantee

its general use; neither does it guarantee its safety and perseverance. The discussions gathered here, it would seem, make this a risk worth taking. The articles in this issue illustrate the crucial significance of bridges for inquiries in Comparative Literature, as well as the various kinds of divides such inquiries can attempt to overcome throughout a globalized world. There are bridges between different art forms in the articles by Elena Siemens, Shlomo Gleibman, Lee Dylan Campbell, and Ioannis Galanopoulos Papavasileiou and myself. There are bridges related to theatrical performance and mixed-cultural identities in the discussions of Mai Hussein and Jack Leong. Susan Ingram and Laurence Sylvain cross divides between disciplines, and Joseph Pivato those between languages.

Ingram outlines intersections between media and urban studies in her comprehensive analysis of the *Veronica Mars* franchise. With a focus on the fourth season, she pursues the development of both the show's protagonist and her environment along vectors of gentrification and generation throughout the TV series, the movie, and the two novels that precede Season Four. Offering a feminist angle on the famous female private detective's coming of age, Ingram investigates the changes of the fictional Californian town of Neptune that has, so far, served as setting for the show but will not do so in the future. Neptune changes in ways, Ingram argues, that prompt the mature detective's departure. The article provides crucial parallels between these changes and those of the character whose departure ends the season.

Like Ingram's, Siemens's study is concerned with the visual arts, though film plays much less of a role than photography in the latter. "It's You Plus It's...Art': The #Artselfie Debate from Douglas Coupland to Tolstoy" features an original interplay between textual criticism and the author's own photography for its investigation of viewer reception. Case studies of Alex Prager's *La Grande Sortie*, Martin Parr's *Playing to the Gallery*, Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, and Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* illustrate the various crosscultural ways in which viewers interact with art. Relying on a theoretical framework informed by Johan Idema and Michel de Certeau, Siemens entangles "interaction between art and the viewer." She argues that the collecting of artselfies leads the way to viewer introspection, and that this benefit outweighs accusations of art devaluation.

While Siemens's scope is crosscultural, Gleibman zooms in on one particular cultural context, though also intermedially, in "Bodily Citationality and Hermeneutical Sex: Text, Image, and Ritual as Tools for Queer Intimacies." Drawing on queer theories, for example those of Judith Butler and José Esteban Muñoz, Gleibman provides close analyses of traditional Jewish clothes and objects as represented in contemporary literature and visual art. Discussions of fiction by André Aciman, Michael Lowenthal, and Evan Fallenberg, as well as photography and film by Oscar Wolfman and Benyamin Reich, allow the article to illuminate the intersections of Judaism and male-male desire. Gleibman provides examples of subversive citationality "through particular modes of intertextuality and cultural translation." His study uncovers bridges between the sexual and the religious, as well as between the personal and the

collective in its careful investigation of hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics is also a key concept in the fourth contribution to this issue. Following three contributions concerned primarily with visual art, Sylvain guides readers into the more abstract realm of a philosophical inquiry of literature in its most general sense. Departing from Louis Althusser's concept of the encounter, Sylvain proposes to view literature as "downpour" in order to see it "not as an object or as a tool for interpretation, but rather, to interpret literature as a manifestation of encounters, operating an important shift in any form of hermeneutics." Reading ancient philosophers such as Plato and Epicurus alongside twentieth-century French intellectuals such as Pierre Klossowski, Sylvain concludes that the act of text interpretation itself can propose a bridge, a bridge that may engender others deliberately or accidentally. Although that process may be practical or meaningless at any given point in time, Sylvain argues, it is both unavoidable and useful in order to assess reading practices.

- 8 Hussein's "*Incendies* de Wajdi Mouawad: un carrefour traumatique" shares with Sylvain's inquiry the reliance on twentieth-century French philosophy. Guided by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's theory of the rhizome, Hussein analyzes the Lebanese-Canadian writer, actor, and director's *Incendies* as theatrical manifestation of trauma that results from a mixed-cultural family background. With a focus on details regarding character psychology, Hussein argues "que la mémoire mouawadienne dans *Incendies* se ramifie en de multiples directions et croît en accord avec les agencements qui se créent en fonction d'une logique non hiérarchique n'ayant ni début ni fin." Bridges in this contribution appear at their most precarious. Readers are reminded that not all obstacles allow for crossings, and that a theatre stage may appear as suitable setting to reveal insurmountable challenges.

The second article concerned with theatre, however, offers a more positive angle on the impact of cultural diversity. Leong's "Bridging Cultural Identities through Cantonese Opera in Canada" shifts not only to a different cultural context, a Chinese Diasporic one, but also to a different genre of performance. Highlighting Cantonese opera, Leong discusses the history of Chinese cultural activities in a Canadian context, and foregrounds an intercultural studies perspective. Examples from performances primarily organized for Chinese Canadian communities illustrate the bridges between locations in China and in the Diaspora, between generations of Chinese Canadians, as well as between the various culturally diverse communities in Canada. Cantonese opera in Canada becomes a site for transcultural identities, and for the transcendence of linguistic boundaries. It also serves as a marker of geographic distance.

Geographic distance plays a significant role for the subject of the seventh contribution, as Campbell takes readers into the world of Julio Cortázar in an investigation of musical elements in *Rayuela*. Argentinian-born Cortázar wrote *Hopscotch* in Spanish while living in France in the early 1960s, and even the image of the game that lends the novel its name evokes the idea of bridges, as one needs to jump between

numbered boxes when playing it. Following Cortázar's declared passion for jazz, Campbell identifies "para-audible, incantatory cadences shaped to reach the reader's 'internal ear.'" Where Sylvain's philosophical investigation of reading practices invites readers to consider literature as "downpour," as a manifestation of encounters that emphasizes our sense of touch, Campbell encourages reading as "deep listening," thus stressing our sense of hearing. His analysis succeeds in presenting literature, or at least Cortázar's texts, as primarily a rhythmical performance.

Music is also at the centre of Hambuch and Papavasileiou's study of collaborations between Bob Dylan and Martin Scorsese, but instead of connections to prose, though Dylan's memoir features prominently, this inquiry highlights connections to film. The article argues that cooperation between Dylan and Scorsese rests on a shared blurring of boundaries between fact and fiction, as well as on a resulting fascination with performative storytelling. While live concerts provide the kind of interaction essential for Dylan's sense of creativity, film versions like *No Direction Home* (2005) and *The Rolling Thunder Revue: A Bob Dylan Story by Martin Scorsese* (2019) preserve this interaction for future audiences. As they record the qualities of bridges established between a performer and an audience, these films establish potential bridges to subsequent audiences at the same time.

While Dylan and Scorsese both work in English, the current global language, Cortázar's *Rayuela* appeared first in Spanish in France before an English translation became available three years later. Mouawad's play, which Hussein discusses in this special issue, was published in one of Canada's official languages, but the opera at the centre of Leong's investigation was not. Disregarding the specific status of languages used in creative expression, many readers and viewers depend on translations. The final essay is, therefore, dedicated to literary translation as a construction hub of the most vital bridges in Comparative Literature. Tracing debates that revolve around translation in the arts over the past decade, Pivato, co-editor of *Comparative Literature for the New Century*, offers a Canadian perspective in "Untranslatable Texts and Literary Problems." To illustrate this perspective, Pivato provides case studies of Nancy Huston and Arianna Dagnino, and further touches on special challenges related to the translation of Indigenous writing.

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