Review Article

Weisstein, Ulrich. *Comparative Literature and Literary Theory*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973: A Review Article

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Abstract: Ulrich Weisstein is considered one the pillars of comparative literature. He has a Ph.D. in comparative literature (1954) from IU. He was one of the first to do so from the IU Comparative Literature Program. In his famous book, *Comparative Literature and Literary Theory*, He attempts to draw the line between different concepts like comparative, national, and world literatures. He dedicates long chapters to explain genres throughout histories as well as movements. He belongs the French school of comparative literature in which he believes that there is transference of impact between the influencer and the influenced by. In this article, Weisstein is not only a writer, but also, a historian who traces back concepts like stof, motif, genre, movement, and school. He differentiates, compares and presents his viewpoint of World Literature (WL), National Literature (NL) and Comparative Literature (CL).
Keywords: Comparative literature, National Literature, World Literature, and Genre.

INTRODUCTION

In beginning of his essay under the title of *Definition*, Ulrich Weisstein tries to review the views of French school of comparative literature with reference to authorities like: Carre, Baldensperger, and Van Tieghem. Carre sees that CL is a branch of literary history (emphasis on rapports de fait). Baldensperger excludes folklore from the realm of CL. Van Tieghem points out that comparative literature studies the actions and influences exerted by individuals. However, he excludes the anonymous tradition of ancient and medieval literature.

Weisstein differentiates between four central terminologies: *Comparative literature, National literature, General literature, World literature*. National literature forms the basis of CL discipline, and it should be defined through linguistic criteria rather than political-historical criteria. Weisstein sees that the divison between GL and CL is an artificial one. GL bears on the facts common to several literatures.

Remak defines Cl as the study of literature beyond the confined of one particular country, and the study of the relationships between literature on the one hand and other areas of knowledge and belief, such as the art, philosophy, religion and the social sciences. Goethe shows out that WL stands for various nations that should notice and understand each other. However, the national literatures would be preserved in the process of mutual exchange and recognition. It denotes the importance of these worldwide contacts; a harmonization was to ensue within the individual literatures. The writer concerns himself with pure of literature and excludes what he calls semi-literary genres such as the screenplay and painting.

As far as the second section entitled *Influence and Imitation*, Weisstein tackles how the notion of influence is crucial concept in CL studies, since it shows the work from which the influence precedes and that at which it is directed. He introduces nomenclatures: emitter, intermediaries and receiver. In a sense, intermediaries or transmitters such as translators, reviewers, critics and scholars are linked between the emitter and the receiver. J.T. Shaw talks about direct

influence/indirect influence. For instance, Mikhail Lermontov is a Russian poet borrowed from Pushkin the model of the Byronic verse tale, but he went back to Byron's own work unconsciously. Shaw says that influence cannot be quantitatively measured, but it must be sought in different manifestations. A different of form influence is plagiarism, which is defined as imitation on the sly or quotation without reference to the source.

Weisstein introduces a term of stylization, which is sort of imitation based on the style of a single poet, like asking students to write a poem in the style of a romantic poet. Under this umbrella of stylization, Weisstein burlesque, parody, satire, caricature (negative influence, counter-design). For instance Pastiche, which is not humorous, related to subject matter extracted from different works are loosely but not ludicrously mixed. On the contrary, if the imitation pokes fun, it means parody in strict sense. Regarding influence and reception, Van Tieghem explains affinities or false influences in which one can mark out plausible affinities and attribute it to an influence, but a comprehensive investigation shows that there is none. He gives an example of Henrik Ibsen, stating that he is not original; all his ideas are found in George Sand though Ibsen never read Sand. Ihab Hassan differentiates between affinity and influence:

> When we say that A has influenced B, we mean that after literary or aesthetic analysis we can discern a number of significant similarities between the works of A and B. We may also mean that historical, social, and perhaps psychological analyses of the data available about A and B reveal similarities, points of contact, between the "lives" or "minds" of the two writers. So far we have established no influence; we have only documented what I shall call an affinity. For influence presupposes some manner of causality.

Guillen assigns all factually attributable influences to the realm of literary tradition and convention. By these terms, he means the shared forms, types, subjects or technique which cannot be credited to a specific writer, but in manner of speaking become public property. Guillen raises a question; did a Renaissance poet have to have read Petrarch in order to write a Petrarchan sonnet? The answer is clearly negative. That is why he concludes that literary conventions are not only technical prerequisite, but also basic, collective shared influences. Guillen diverts the point of influence to psychological phenomenon and based his argument upon unstable and demarcated concepts like inspiration, tradition and convention.

Weisstein counter-reads Guillen and propounds his theorizing of separating the influence from the reception. Weisstein believes that influence should be used to denote the relations existing between finished literary products, while "reception" serves to designate a wider range of subjects, namely, the relations between these works and their ambience, including authors, readers, reviewers, publishers and the surrounding milieu. Weisstein points out a very important point concerning invisible influence. He talks about spiritual affinity (psychological reception) the kinship of the two writers as a psychological and emotional one which cannot be proved. He gives example of Flaubert influence on Kafka. He states no one can prove a literary (stylistic or thematic) influence of Flaubert on Kafka because the kinship was primarily psychological and emotional one.

In her article, "Influence and Literary Fortune," Anna Balakian talks about Baudelaire's translations of Poe and Gide's recasting of Blake 's poems as examples to show that creative possibilities are inherent in the distortion of a model undertaken by the poet-translator.

In the fourth section, *Epoch, period, generation and movement* , Weisstein defines epoch the larger segment of the history of mankind. Epochs are determined by an "event or time of an event marking the beginning of a relatively new development." Wellek sets his definition of period a time section dominated by a system of norms, whose introduction, spread and diversification, integration and disappearance can be traced. After 1870, the periods are replaced by movements and avant-garde groups, and immediately before World War I the waves follow each other in rapid succession that are faced with programs and manifestos. The Label of Pre-Romanticism represents a grand scale attempt, undertaken largely by Van Tieghem to summarize the irrationalist undercurrents in the Age of Enlightenment and to view Rousseau, Diderot, Stern, and Richardson as the vanguard of Romanticism.

In determining the length of periods in literary history, Weisstein says about generation should be around thirty years, the lowest temporal limit of a period. He states his argument about movement when he says movement: represents a fresh group of youths, seldom lasts for an entire generation. However, movements are founded partly to struggle with a counter- movement or to triumph over opponents.

Movements are different from school in the sense that is usually constituted by coevals, so than no teacher-student relationship exists. A movement has a distinct personality as its leader, but not necessarily as a master. The school implies a longer duration , since the disciplines usually represent the younger generation and regard it as their mission to preach the ideas of their master.

Weisstein dedicates an entire section to talk about literary *history, historiography, and periodization*, believing the history concepts are essential tools to strengthen CL as a scholarly disciple. However, it would be foolish to employ terms like era, age, movement or period statically and mechanically instead of dynamically and flexibly.

In fifth section, Genre, Weisstein cites Van Tieghem's division of genre: classical tragedy, romantic drama, the sonnet, rustic novel, pastoral poetry, sentimental novel. Tieghem restricts the survey to modern literature, avoiding the tricky question regarding the survival of ancient genres. Weisstein states that difficulties in tracking Greek and Roman genres are myth. The existence of models is hypothetical; a genre cultivated in antiquity vanished, but its name persists and serves for a modern genre. He introduces his term, contamination. Which is the essential difference between two genres or even kinds of literature is obscured by the presence of terms that are similarly spelled or pronounced. He gives a classic example of Satire/satyr play.

Weisstein compares the concept of genre from past perspective with reference to modern time. The modern writer is not as much concerned with adhering to the conventions of a well-defined genre. The notion of genre fades in light of the notion of technique. Such collisions between genre and technique are fairly common in post-modern period. As for the genre relations between the East and West, European and American fascinated the Oriental models such as Japanese haiku, Noh play. Their imitations instigates the readers to wonder to what extent such re-creations are compatible with their models and whether the pressure exerted by Western tradition has caused a distortion. Such a critical question is answered by Etiemble who suggests that it is impossible to transplant a genre, which is firmly anchored in a specific historio-geographical context. However, pure analogy studies in comparative genology are likely to benefit the Oriental and Occidental literature. There are many arguments concerning genre classification presented from the time of Aristotle, Wolfgang Kayser, Goethe…etc. They were debatable because the criteria are different. However, the most frequently used methods of classifications are those oriented towards form and content.

Weisstein compares, in fifth chapter, what is meant by Thematology. Historically speaking, he starts with Goethe who distinguished between the subject matter (content) meaning, and form. He maintained that only the shaping of the form is aesthetic act. His viewpoint is akin to Curtius but with a difference which he names as *thema*:
> The theme is everything, which concerns the individual's unique attitude toward the world. The theme is in the subjective realm and it is a psychological constant.

In the elevation of problem and idea to the level of meaning, the subject matter is developed and mirrored through images, symbol, and motif. Thus, Stoff, motif and symbol are regarded as components of that structural element of literature, which pertains to subject matter and content. Themes have a much narrower scope than motifs. This is especially true of historical subjects who relevance is geographically limited and whose comprehension requires a specific awareness of time and place. According to Trousson, certain motifs never develop to the point where they turn into themes. They are arrested at a stage in their evolution which might call that of the type. Trousson divides themes into two sorts: heroic themes and situational theme. The former focuses on the character on the hero who lends dignity to the *stoff* as in Orpheus, Prometheus and Faust, and the second the attention is centered on the actin resulting from the interplay of the figures.

However, completeness can and must be achieved in the history of situational themes, which involve specific milieus and confrontations within a specific framework. Trousson exemplifies Antigone and Oedipus for situational themes. He maintains that when we hear these names we do not think of their bearers as of the events to which there are linked.

CONCLUSIONS
Ulrich Weisstein adopts a historical-critical approach in which he takes each aspect, genre, style, and form whatsoever historically and compares it with modern time. The rational is to see how this aspect develops throughout and what are the nuances are being added. What gains Ulrich Weisstein a good reputation is that he knows well how to employ history as evidence to trace back and comment CL and WL and draw the dividing boundary between two concepts.

REFERENCES
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