Tamkang Review 45.1 (December 2014): 23-43.
DOI: 10.6184/TKR201412-2

A Comparative Frame of Mind

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Abstract

In this paper, I suggest a shift of focus from the logic of expansion and extension towards a reflective reconsideration of the very notion of comparison by way of responding to the seemingly perpetual state of disciplinary crisis in comparative literature. I argue that comparative literature ought to be viewed as a practice of engaging and realizing ideas through a comparative frame of mind. My notion of comparison is an analytics as opposed to an operation on comparable or incommensurable objects. Comparison as an analytics does not entail an act of interpreting the similarities or differences between literary or cultural objects, but recognizes instead that any work is inherently comparative. A comparative frame of mind also takes seriously the arbitrariness of the object itself, and as a result does not privilege the literary object as such. What this implies is that the practice of comparison entails situating any cultural object in relation to whatever else there is. Neither invested in the intrinsic connections between cultural or literary objects, as traditional practitioners of comparative literature aimed to accomplish, nor attempting to disclose the incommensurable differences, as postcolonial comparativists have done, a comparative frame of mind looks for meaningful patterns in whatever literary object or cultural archive one happens to study.

Keywords: comparative literature, comparison, photography, Middle East, Orientalism

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Comparative Literature departments, like many other academic units in the humanities, are facing two sets of inter-related challenges in the present moment. One set is intellectual in nature and has to do with the field's changing self-understanding in the face of radical transformations in the pursuit of literary knowledge wrought by the globalization of literary studies and information technology. The second challenge is professional, and has to do with rearticulating the place of humanities training in the 21st century academy amidst reported declines in undergraduate enrollment and what Louis Menand has called the PhD problem. These challenges were prominently in display during a recent prospectus defense of one of my graduate students at UCLA. During the committee's deliberations after the student had successfully defended her interdisciplinary and important dissertation on the relationship between literary representation (specifically novelistic fiction) and photography in the antebellum US with a focus on race and racialization, a senior member of the department voiced concerns about both her focus on a single literary tradition and her viability as a job candidate for advertised positions in comparative literature. "Although I very much admire her great prospectus," this colleague remarked, "I am not convinced that this is a true comparative literature project since it focuses only on American literature. What worries me most is the fact that she will never be employable in a comparative literature department with a dissertation on a single literary tradition." At this point, a more junior colleague intervened, reminding our more senior colleague of the paucity of job opportunities in comparative literature—for anyone. This younger colleague confessed that he now regularly trains his graduate students in comparative literature in such a way that they will be able to compete for English department jobs. As chair of the committee, I was grateful not to be obliged to voice an opinion; in all honesty, I found confused about which side to take since both colleagues seemed to be making perfectly reasonable conjectures about my student's likely professional prospects. Later, I came to appreciate how the exchange between my colleagues perfectly foregrounded the dual problems that haunt comparative literature today: the dwindling of job opportunities in comparative literature and the discipline's crisis of self-definition, if not self-justification, by its practitioners.

To be sure, the predicament of self-definition and, indeed, a sense of crisis have marked the discipline since its institutional formation in post-WW II America. (I hasten to note here that I am well aware of the complications of any attempt to fix the birth of the discipline as such in light of Natalie Melas's brilliant discussion in *All the Difference in the World: Postcoloniality and the Ends of Comparison,* to which I will return shortly). In his well-known 1958 talk at the Comparative Literature Congress in Chapel Hill, "The Crisis of Compara-

tive Literature," René Wellek remarked that, "[t]he most serious sign of the precarious state of our study is the fact that it has not been able to establish a distinct subject matter and a specific methodology" (282). And yet, in spite of an identity crisis heralded by one of its founding figures, comparative literature as a discipline grew dramatically since Wellek's remarks during the Cold War, thanks in no small measure to the support provided by the National Defense Education Act, which was passed in 1958 in response to the Soviet Union's success in the space race and the perceived need for foreign language instruction to counter the threat of communism. It is for this reason, among others, that Melas thoughtfully urges us to attend to the relationship "between the exclusively European scholarly scope of the expatriate philologists that is crucial to the formation of comparative literature as we have inherited it and the particular cold war context in which the discipline flourished" (8).

What distinguishes the current crisis of comparative literature from its historical antecedents is a disciplinary fragility that combines the disadvantages of what David Damrosch calls "the specter of amateurism" with that of the precipitous withdrawal of institutional support for comparative literature departments. As Damrosch explains, "[a]s formalist approaches have waned, scholars have found so much to learn about the full outlines of individual cultures that they have often preferred delving deeply into one time and place over pursuing broad-based comparisons" (326). In other words, the more literary traditions we come into contact with and incorporate into comparative literature as legitimate objects of study, the more we may feel compelled to move toward a singular literary tradition, largely because, as Franco Moretti confesses, even a scholar of West European narrative like him has only been able to "work on its canonical fraction, which is not even one percent of published literature" (55). The discovery of the "great unread" (Margaret Cohen) is further compounded during the past three decades by the displacement of "high theory" with "traveling theory," not to mention the discipline's late awakening from its "long Eurocentric slumber" (Damrosch), further complicating comparative literature's disciplinary raison d'être. Moreover, the tightening of the job market in the humanities, especially in comparative literature, has compounded this crisis of disciplinary identity with ever increasing professional pressure. Indeed, as my colleague during the exam observed, there has been a steady decline of job opportunities in comparative literature, leading concerned faculty to train their graduate students primarily in a single national literature to help them find job. While understandable as a survival strategy, this approach to the crisis seems only to have made it even more difficult to justify academic training in a field whose primary raison d'être, according to Moretti, is "to be a thorn in the side,

a permanent intellectual challenge to national literatures" (68).

So what is to be done? Surprisingly, contemporary comparativists have responded to the disciplinary and professional challenges facing the field in a fashion similar to our predecessors, namely through a logic of addition and expansion. As Jan Ziolkowski observes, "In each past episode of anxiety about its own viability, comparative literature has responded by enlarging its purview and self-definition" (24). As early as 1963, René Étiemble in his *Comparison n'est pas raison: La Crise de la literature compare* suggested the study of Oriental literatures such as Arabic, Chinese, and Bengali as an antidote to the crisis of the field, a solution with which even Wellek, who took issue with his "sanguine" claim "to change the direction of comparative literature," had to agree. Wellek conceded, "in principle he is surely right in asking for a comparative poetics, for a genuinely universal study of world literature" (335). A decade later, Thomas Green and the members of the 1975 Comparative Literature Association's Committee who prepared the "Report on Standards" responded to the disciplinary crisis proclaimed at that time by acknowledging, albeit ambivalently, that "[a] new vision of *global* literature is emerging, embracing all the verbal creativity during the history of our planet, a vision which will soon begin to make our comfortable European perspectives parochial" (30, emphasis in original). Several years later, as the rise of multiculturalism and cultural studies posed an even more serious crisis of disciplinary consciousness for comparativists, the ACLA leadership responded by calling for a massive expansion of "the discipline's goals and methods":

> The space of comparison today involves comparisons between artistic productions usually studied by different disciplines; between various cultural constructions of those disciplines, between Western cultural traditions, both high and popular, and those of non-Western cultures; between the pre- and post- contact cultural productions of colonized peoples, between gender constructions defined as feminine and those defined as masculine, or between sexual orientations defined as straight and those defined as gay; between racial and ethnic modes of signifying; between hermeneutic articulations of meaning and materialist analyses of its modes of production and circulations; and much more. These ways of contextualizing literature in the expanded fields of discourse, culture, ideology, race, and gender are so different from the old models of literary study according to authors, nations, and genres that term "literature" may no longer adequately describe our object of study. (Bernheimer Report, 41-42)

In the contemporary, this pattern of response through expansion continues to predominate. David Damrosch, for example, has suggested that "[c]omparative literature can thrive in the coming years . . . only through a renewed engagement with national traditions and with global contexts" as well as

by "embrac[ing] translation far more actively than it did during the past century" (327-28). Similarly, Gayatri Spivak in *Death of a Discipline* attempts to resurrect the field through a "planetary" consciousness that "supplements" comparative literature with area studies (72). This "new Comparative literature," she hopes, "will touch the older minorities: African, Asian, Hispanic. It will take in its *sweep* the new postcoloniality of the post-Soviet sector and the special place of Islam in today's breaking world" (84, emphasis added).

I have traced this repetition to underscore not only how the practitioners of the field have traditionally responded to a perpetually claimed crisis of disciplinary identity with a will to expansion, but also to point out that such a "limitless serial extension," as Melas astutely observes, leaves unexamined and "obscure" the very "meaning of the verb to 'compare.'" Now, at the risk of sounding prescriptive, I wish to suggest a shift of focus from the logic of expansion and extension towards a reflective reconsideration of the very notion of comparison by way of responding to the seemingly perpetual state of disciplinary crisis in comparative literature. Comparative literature, as Haun Saussy correctly observes, can be identified neither through its objects of study nor its methods of inquiry (340). And as an interdisciplinary enterprise, comparative literature cannot necessarily be viewed as a "discipline" that incorporates a specific form of knowledge (such as literary or linguistic knowledge), a range of expertise (such as theory or historicism), or a set of skills (such as close reading or textual analysis). Rather, I wish to suggest, comparative literature ought to be viewed as a practice of engaging and realizing ideas through a comparative frame of mind. The adjective "comparative" is key in my formulation, and to elaborate my notion of comparison, I would like to take a brief detour through the complicated relation of comparative literature with the very notion of comparison itself.

The adjective "comparative" in comparative literature points to the intellectual origins of the field in the nineteenth century and its affiliation with comparative philology and the "comparative method" as a means of studying the development of languages and of tracing their historical origins and relationships. Like comparative philology, comparative literature, at least in its French formation in the 19th century, arose from of a positivist will to comprehend the origins, sources, and influences of literary production in different nations. Comparison in this instance implied the consideration of more than one literary tradition and a systematic approach to locating the historical development of literary forms. Such a model of comparison, as Saussy points out, entailed a "tree-shaped" discipline "organizing historical and typological diversity into a common historical narrative with many parallel branches" (337). Developed in

era of European colonial hegemony, this model of comparison assumed the primacy, if not supremacy, of French and European literary traditions and entailed an evolutionary model of literary production. For nineteenth-century comparativists such as Philaréte Euphémon Chasles, "comparative literature contained a presumption that comparing would involve, . . . French literature as either the source or destination of the comparison," as Ziolkowski points out (20). The practice of comparison aimed at once to establish a universal poetics and to map the historical origins of all literary traditions, with Europe always positioned at the center. Likewise, in his 1886 *Comparative Literature*, Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett, one of the earliest practitioners of comparative literature in the English-speaking world, defined the "internal and external aspects of literary growth" as "the objects of comparative inquiry" (85). Claiming that "the comparison of literatures belonging to different social states" would allow the practitioners of the comparative literature to treat "literature as capable of scientific explanation," Posnett advocated an evolutionary model of the discipline in which "the gradual expansion of social form, from clan to city, from city to nation, from both of these to cosmopolitan humanity, as the proper order of our studies in comparative literature" (86).

The positivist and universalizing model of comparative literature was also embraced by early proponents of the discipline in the United States. As Melas elaborates, Charles Mills Gayley in his 1903 essay, "What is Comparative Literature?" used the notion of comparison in literary studies to mean "first a scientific approach that is at once systematic and historical, and second a global scope for the study of literature" (13). Like his European precursors, Gayley and other comparativists such as E. R. Curtius applied the comparative method to discover the common characteristics and qualities of all literary forms and productions. The comparative method enabled these scholars to fashion an evolutionary model for the study of literature that "allowed all the differences in *kind* to be measurable as differences of *degree* in development and growth," as Melas explains (15).

After what Wellek called the "revolt against Positivism," ushered by members of the Prague Linguistic Circle, the Russian formalists, and New Critics, the evolutionary comparative method was displaced with a formalist and Eurocentric notion of comparison after the WWII. Wellek, for example, who admonished comparativists to "stop being all things to all men" and to embrace once again "the old task of understanding, explaining, and transmitting literature," defined the aim of comparison as identifying the "proper interplay between a study of national literatures, their common tendencies, [and] the totality of the Western tradition" ("Comparative Literature Today," 334, 330). With the rise of multi-

culturalism and postcolonial theory in the 1980s, the formalist and Eurocentric model of comparison was deconstructed, leading to a more historical and politicized form of comparison. In *Culture and Imperialism*, for example, Edward Said drew attention for the first time to the ways in which the development of comparative literature coincided with, and was imbricated in, "the emergence of imperial geography" (50). Observing that "the field was epistemologically organized as a sort of hierarchy, with Europe and its Latin Christian literature at its center and top" (45), Said called for a politically oppositional mode of secular comparison through which "we begin to reread [the cultural archive] not univocally but *contrapuntally*, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts" (51, emphasis in original). In the contrapuntal model of comparison, Said remarked, "it becomes incumbent upon you also to reinterpret the canon in the light of texts whose place there has been insufficiently linked to, insufficiently weighted toward the expansion of Europe" (60). More recently, Melas has built on Said's contrapuntal model of comparison to develop what she calls "postcolonial comparison," which "involves a particular form of incommensurability: space offers a ground of comparison, but no given basis of equivalence" (xii). Melas's critical aim is to bring a set of diverse literary and theoretical traditions "into relation over a ground of comparison that is in common but not unified" (43).

My notion of comparative literature as a practice of engaging and realizing ideas through a comparative frame of mind differs from the other models I have sketched above in several ways. Above all, my notion of comparison designates an analytics as opposed to an operation performed on comparable or incommensurable objects. In my understanding, a comparativist is invested neither in demonstrating the intrinsic connections between cultural or literary objects as traditional practitioners of comparative literature have been, nor committed to disclosing incommensurable differences, as postcolonial comparativists have been. Instead, the comparative frame of mind is defined by the fundamental insight that any cultural production is inherently heterogeneous and hence requires no external object of comparison. Put otherwise, a comparative frame of mind does not require the co-presence of two or more cultural or literary archives in practicing comparative literature, for any single object can be read in relation to, or even against, its own context. Relatedly, a comparative frame of mind also takes seriously the arbitrariness of the divisions drawn among cultural productions, and may even make the problematization of genre categories the object of analysis itself.

To provide a concrete example of what such a mode of comparison would

look like, in what follows I wish to discuss my recent work on Orientalist photography. I should acknowledge here that my own history of scholarly engagement, moving from comparing French and British travel narratives (in *Belated Travelers*) to studying the figure of the immigrant in US political discourse (in *A Forgetful Nation*) to my current work on Orientalist photography, might understandably be viewed as evidence that I am myself a fallen comparativist. But in fact, my own intellectual trajectory is an instance of what I wish to argue here: that the practice of comparison may encompass precisely the kind of mobility and apparently single-subject analysis so often thought to define the very antithesis of comparative scholarship.

Returning to my recent work, what my comparative approach has enabled me to do, unlike much of the scholarship on the topic by art historians, is to bring into dialogue the rhetoric of the Orientalist image with a historical understanding of its emergence in the mid-nineteenth century. Organized as a series of fragmentary reflections, my work sketches a visual description of what I call the Orientalist photograph, a sketch that engages its form as much as its politics; it is at once a historical account and a formal elaboration of a particular form of iconography. My aim here is not to offer an exhaustive inventory of the features of the Orientalist photograph but only a general description of some of its discontinuous and scattered traits, situating them specifically in the historical context of their formation. An Orientalist photograph, I suggest, is an imaginary construct, always historically and aesthetically contingent; it is marked by iconic fractures and ideological fissures, yet nonetheless regulated by a visual regime that naturalizes its particular mode of representation. Put otherwise, the discontinuous representations of the "Orient" and its people, I contend, are linked and actualized through an ideology of denotative exoticism. In the Orientalist photograph, the fragmented images of the geographical region encompassing the Middle East and North Africa are unified through a system of ideological denotations, which figures it as a network of exotic signifiers. Now, in the remaining of my talk, let me provide a few examples of what a comparative frame of mind can bring to focus in studying the large archive of Orientalist photography.

Networks

A crucial link between the history of photography and Europe's knowledge about the Middle East has existed since the invention of the daguerreotype in 1839. Significantly, at the very meeting in which Louis-Jacques-Mandé

Daguerre's invention was introduced to the Chamber of Deputies, the presenter, Dominique François Arago, commented upon "the extraordinary advantages that could have been derived from so exact and rapid a means of reproduction during the expedition to Egypt" (17). He then recommended that the French government immediately equip various institutions of knowledge gathering about the Middle East, such as the Institut d'Égypte with the new technology to further the project of Orientalism. It should come as no surprise that only eighty days after this meeting, a group of French painters and scholars led by Horace Vernet, an Orientalist genre painter who had traveled to Algeria with the French Army in 1833, and the Daguerreotypist Goupil-Fesquet went to Egypt to photograph Egyptian antiquity, nor is it a coincidence that as early as 1846, Daguerre's British counterpart, William Henry Fox Talbot, published a pamphlet titled "The Talbotype Applied to hieroglyphics" which was distributed among archaeologists and Orientalists.[1] Indeed, in subsequent decades, many early European traveling photographers such as John Cramb, Francis Frith, Maxime du Camp, and Auguste Salzmann followed Arago's suggestion and traveled to the Middle East to photograph various places and monuments, making the Middle East one of the original and most popular sites for the practice of photography.

Art historians and museum curators have generally treated early amateur and expeditionary images of the Middle East either as distinct artistic expressions of individual photographers, or as documentary projects to provide European audiences, in particular archeologists and Egyptologists, with truthful images of the Holy Land and Egyptian antiquity.[2] What these approaches fail to elaborate is the network of relations that enabled the production of these images in the first place as well as the politico-cultural context, which made them so rapaciously consumable as visual and exotic objects, not to mention meaningful. That the representations of the "Orient" figured so prominently in the early history of photography, specifically in England and France, speaks to the network of aesthetic, economic, and political relations between Western Europe and the Middle East, a network that provided the logistical means and conceptual paradigms for various photographic projects. Indeed, the photographic projects of du Camp, Félix Teynard, or Auguste Salzmann would have never been realized were it not for the great interest in Middle Eastern antiquity generated by

[1] See Perez 15.

[2] For an example of the first approach, see Talbot's *Francis Frith*, which was published as part of the *Masters of Photography* series, edited by Rosemary Eakins; and for an example of the second approach see Claire L. Lyons, et al., *Antiquity & Photography: Early Views of Ancient Mediterranean Sites*.

Napoleon's 1798 expedition to Egypt and the subsequent establishment of the Institut d'Égypte, the intellectual and artistic contributions of earlier Orientalist scholars, painters and travelers, and the sponsorship of the French government and institutions. Du Camp, for instance, belonged to the Orientalist institution, Société Orientale, had a government commission from the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce to photograph historic monuments in Egypt, Palestine, and Syria, was trained prior to his journey by Gustave Le Gray and Alexis de Lagrange to produce good negatives, was accompanied by Gustave Flaubert who fancifully documented their trip, and was finally able to publish his photographs in 1851 using the printing process developed by Blanquart-Évrard—photographs which became immediately successful because of the popular and scholarly interest in Orientalism. Far from being the result of a manic obsession with photography, as Flaubert claimed, du Camp's images are products of a network of individual and institutional relationships that not only determined the content of his photographs but also provided the technical knowledge and logistical support to execute them. Du Camp's *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie* is thus impregnated by a web of textual and visual traces that inscribe it within the iconography of Orientalism. As in Frith's *Egypt and Palestine*, his photographs in the book, which became an instant success in spite of its costliness, are accompanied with texts containing verbatim extracts from eighteenth and early nineteenth century Orientalist travel narratives in order to make these images meaningful and legible. These textual precursors function not merely as explications for photographic representations of the "Orient," but they also determine what is worthy of photography in the Middle East. Put otherwise, the earlier travel narratives play a mediating role for the practice of Orientalist photography.

Circulation

The relation between Orientalist painting and photography is not that of a linear influence but of a circular reciprocity. Even a cursory glance at early Orientalist photography reveals its indebtedness to the conventions of Orientalist romantic paintings: Jacques Moulin's erotic and ethnographic photographs of the Orient explicitly borrow from the works of Romantic painters, Auguste, Bonington, and Delacroix, just as Wilhelm Hammerschmidt's and Francis Frith's photographs of Egyptian antiquity and the monuments of the Holy Land relied on the topographical works of English painters such as David Roberts. That Orientalist photography's subject matters and formal concerns were mediated

by a particular painterly tradition should come as no surprise since some of the early photographers of the Orient, such as Roger Fenton, Auguste Salzmann, and Horace Vernet were accomplished painters or began their careers as (Orientalist) painters, but switched to photography as the new medium provided them with a more efficient means of realistic representation. More surprisingly, however, are the ways in which photography altered Orientalist genre painting, transforming its techniques and turning its romantic reveries into realist fantasies. As was predicted by Daguerre in 1839, since the mid-nineteenth century, Orientalist painters such as Léon Belly, Ludwig Deutsch, Jean-Léon Gérôme and William Holman Hunt became increasingly dependent on the works of amateur and professional photographers of the Orient such as Henri Béchard, G. Lékégian, Abdullah Frères, and Pascal Sebah to create what is considered documentary realism. That Théophile Gautier compared the new documentary realism and its precise techniques to the objective precision of photography points to the crucial mediating role of the Orientalist photograph.[3]

The complicity between Orientalist painting and photography at once complicates notions of artistic influence, originality, and origin, compelling us to consider Orientalist representation as a network of artistic and discursive relations. The critical attitude among art historians and museum curators toward Edward Said's discussion of Orientalism as a discourse of colonial power has been at the cost of ignoring the crucial nodes and ties that bind artists, archeologists, writers, and travelers, which are productive of a distinctly exotic vision of the region. Francis Frith's *Egypt and Palestine* provides an early example of the idea of Orientalism as a network. The juxtaposition of his photographs with their descriptions after each image points to the supplementarity of textuality and visuality in the field of Orientalism. Frith's texts are peppered with references to the works of other travelers, archeologists, and Orientalists. Consider the following quotation from Albert Smith, an accomplished traveler at the time, which Frith offers by way of describing the role of photography in providing truthful images of other worlds:

> Artists and writers will study effect, rather than graphic truth. The florid description of some modern book of travel is as different from the actual impressions of ninety-nine people out of a hundred, allowing all these persons to possess average education, perception, and intellect, when painting in their minds the same subject, as the artfully tinted lithograph, or picturesque engraving of the portfolio, or annual, is from the faithful photograph.

Frith responds to this claim by pointing out,

[3] See Gautier, *Les Beaux-Arts en Europe*.

> Yet it does not follow, O Albert Smith, that a photograph, because it is not "over-coloured," is therefore *faithful*. I am all too deeply enamoured of the gorgeous, sunny East, to feign that my insipid, colourless pictures are by any means *just* to her spiritual charms. But indeed, I hold it to be impossible, by any means, fully and truthfully to inform the mind of scenes which are wholly foreign to the eye. There is no effectual substitute for actual travel, but it is my ambition to provide for those to whom circumstances forbid that luxury, *faithful* representations of the scenes I have witnessed, and I shall endeavour to make the simple truthfulness of the Camera, a guide for my Pen. (Vol.1, n. pag.)

The passage provides an example of how early photographic projects were in dialogue with travel writing and other Orientalist representations. Frith's response foregrounds the complementary relationship between the camera and the pen, photography and witnessing. On the one hand, the supplementary relation between the photographer, archeologists, and earlier travelers to the region, suggests that what became worthy of photographing in the Orient was mediated through earlier descriptions and interests in holy sites and antiquity. On the other hand, by photographically re-presenting these sites, Frith provides further evidence for their studies while at the same time popularizing Orientalism as a discourse. While reaffirming the value of travel and first-hand observation, Frith points to the value of photography as a substitute for the Orientalist journey. For him, the Orientalist photograph has a supplementary function, providing the viewer with a visual experience of the Orient, otherwise unavailable for most people. Orientalist photography, therefore, neither displaced its painterly counterpart nor did it outdate its textual precursor, but joined them in making Orientalism thrive as a dominant mode of representation.

Mediation

If early and mid-nineteenth century European travelogues and Orientalist genre paintings defined what was worthy of photographing in the Orient, the Orientalist photograph in turn powerfully mediated the vision of every traveler who went to the Orient. Evelyn Waugh's description of the scene of his arrival to Constantinople offers a salient example of this mediation:

> It was getting dark by the time that we came back to the mouth of the Golden Horn. A low sea mist was hanging about the town, drifting and mingling with the smoke from the chimneys. The domes and towers stood out indistinctly, but even in their obscurity formed a tremendous prospect; just as the sun was on the horizon, it broke through the clouds, and, in the most dramatic way, possible, threw out a great splash of golden light over the minarets of St. Sophia. At least, I think it was St. Sophia.

> It is one of the delights of one's first arrival by sea at Constantinople to attempt to identify this great church from the photographs among which we have all been nurtured. (Waugh 140)

European travelers were nurtured as early as the 1850s by images of Constantinople, Jerusalem, and Egypt by pioneer photographers such as James Robertson, du Camp, Teynard, and Salzmann. The Orientalist photograph democratized the access to Orientalist representation by liberating it from its elite confinement in the Salon. The Orientalist photograph was thus not merely an expression of a European desire for the Orient, but *productive* of the lure of the East. Unlike the phantasmagoric image repertoire of the *Arabian Night* that had mediated and then disillusioned earlier travelers like Nerval and Flaubert, the Orientalist photograph was constitutive of the Oriental real that made the traveler's encounter with the reality of the Orient more meaningful, albeit somewhat déjà-vu. Unlike the intertext of the *Arabian Night* or the romantic paintings of Delacroix, the Orientalist photograph does not counter the traveler's own experience of the Oriental real by making it seem banal, but rather enhances it through the pleasure of identification. The photographic image is not merely an indexical reference point for the Orientalist traveler, but the mediator of his or her desire for the Orient. The Orientalist photograph thus "nurtured" the desire for the Orient, helping its development as a cultural phenomenon throughout the West.

Photography's potential for the development of Orientalism was widely acknowledged early on. For example, in a review of Maxime du Camp's *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*, Louis de Cormenin wrote,

> A daguerrian excursion is thus fortuitous from the dual points of view of eternal art and the written voyage (*voyage cursif*), above all when this excursion is undertaken in little known, unique, and strange countries of which science possesses only insufficient data. Nor is it rash to say that the publication of Maxime du Camp completes, in brief and comprehensible fashion, the works of Denon and des Champollion-Figeac, and opens a new way of investigation to Orientalists, just as it offers a horizon particular to artists' studies. Art, as much as science, can gain precious information from [such photographs]. The intellectual movement directed towards the Orient can, from now on, take it as the helping hand (*vade mecum*) of its research, and the most intelligent and the most definitive of guides.[4] (*La Lumière* 26)

[4] "C'est donc une bonne fortune au double point de vue de l'art éternel et du voyage cursif, qu'une excursion daguerrienne, surtout quand cette excursion est entreprise dans des pays peu connus, singuliers, curieux, sur lesquels la science ne posséde que d'insuffisantes données. Aussi n'est-il pas téméraire de dire que la publication de M. Maxime Du Camp compléte, sous une forme brève et compréhensible, l'ourvrage des Denon et des Champollion-Figeac, et ouvre une voie nouvelle à l'investigation des orientalistes, comme un horizon particulier aux études des artistes. L'art, à l'égal de la science, y pourra puiser de précieux, renseignements. Le movement intellectual dirigé vers l'Orient peut désormais le prendre comme le vade-mecum de ses recherches et le manuel le plus certain et le plus intelligent" (*La*

In this paragraph, Cormenin underscores the importance of photography not just to the project of Orientalism, but more broadly to the production of "scientific" knowledge about non-European societies. As well, the new medium of photography, which is viewed as a smart "helping hand," is valued both for its potential contribution to arts and sciences. In other words, photographic works such as Du Camp's were valued not only for completing the research and artistic projects of earlier Orientalists, but they also paved the way for new ways to explore and represent the Orient and other non-Western societies visually, thus perpetuating the Orientalist desire for knowledge and power.

Excessive Anchorage

The Orientalist image is marked by excessive textual anchorage. In principle, the Orientalist photograph has the potential to be polysemous like any other image, but its potential for the "floating chain" of signifieds it carries is undermined by the almost ever presence of the title in the frame, and the repetition or translation of the title in the album. In this sense, the Orientalist photograph is excessively anchored, demonstrating a profound anxiety about the potential for the plurality of signifieds in it. Put otherwise, the Orientalist photograph aims to name its meaning or content in a monolithic fashion by excessively naming what it depicts. The title in the image is not simply a denoted description of what is portrayed, but an expression of a profound desire to fix the meaning of the image, to deprive it of any symbolic message or alternative meaning. The denotative title empties the image of all its connotative signs. The title in the Orientalist photograph is therefore never a means of elucidation, but rather a means of selective interpolation to limit the totality and plurality of the iconic message. The title in the Orientalist image has thus a pedantically ideological function in that it directs the reader to exclude his or her own interpretation. The title chooses the meaning of the photograph in advance; it fixes the signified of its iconography in a repressive fashion that precludes any other viewing but a guided identification. The title counters the terror of uncertainty, the possibility of any intrusion by the Oriental other into the life of the European viewer. In this way, the Orientalist photograph freezes the Oriental other twice: once through an exotic staging of his or her reality, and a second time through an ideological labeling of his appearance in the image.

Lumière 26).

Harem

"The first question invariably addressed to every traveller on his return from the East," wrote Théophile Gautier, "is: 'Well, and the women?' to which each responds by a smile, more or less mysterious and significant, according to this degree of fatuity, and the character of its inquirer; but always implying, with more or less distinctness, that he has encountered more of romantic adventures than he thinks fit to recount to everybody" (*Constantinople of To-Day* 195).[5] The Orientalist photograph at once perpetuated the eroticization of the Oriental woman and excised the mystery and curiosity surrounding the topos of the harem. No other figure was as frequent a topic in Orientalist photography as the Oriental woman. Women of all ethnic and religious types were photographed in every possible pose by residential studios throughout the Middle East. European albums of "Souvenirs of Constantinople" almost always devoted a large section to representation of "Dame turque," while the most widely collected images by tourists to Algeria and Egypt were those of "*femme arabe*." Although these images had their genealogical beginnings in Orientalist paintings of the odalisque, photography, especially in the form of the carte-de-visite, "democratized" the possibility of possessing the eroticized other, making the iconography of the Oriental woman a cultural cliché. The increasing availability of such images neither made the pictorial tradition of the odalisque obsolete nor did it dampen the desire for the eroticized other. Just as photographs of Oriental women provided European painters like William Holman Hunt, Jean-Léon Gérôme, John Frederick Lewis, and Pierre-Auguste Renoir, with infinite samples to choose from as their models, the excess of representation protracted the longevity of Oriental eroticism by introducing it to the middle class through inexpensive and accessible cartes-de-visite. Photographs of Oriental women may have turned the iconography of the harem and its female occupants into kitsch, but in doing so, it also naturalized the mythology of Oriental eroticism.

Studium

An historian of photography ends his essay on the erotic photographs of Lehnert & Landrock, one of the most prolific studios in North Africa during

[5] "La première question que l'on adresse à tout voyageur qui revient d'Orient est celle-ci:—'Et les femmes?'—Chacun y répond avec un sourire plus ou moins mystérieux selon son degree de fatuité, de manière à faire sous-entendre un respectable nombre de bonnes fortunes" (*Constantinople* 195).

the first two decades of twentieth century, with the following question: "Is the correct paradigm for interpreting this kind of work one of politics and power, or one of imagination and inspiration?"[6] The question is disingenuously suggestive, at once gesturing toward an acknowledgment of how the large archive of erotic images of the Orient can be viewed as a record of exploitation, while calling for an appreciative reading of such representations. Such commonly expressed ambivalence among historians of photography studying European images of the Orient reduces the politics of photographic iconography to mere exploitation and valorizes their formal concerns to pure aestheticism. And yet, the aesthetics of the Orientalist photograph is paramount to an understanding of what Barthes called the *stadium*; that is, what endows a photograph with such functions as "to inform, to represent, to surprise, to cause to signify, to provoke desire" (28). What made the photographs of Lehnert & Landrock so compelling and desirable as a souvenir among Europeans, especially French soldiers and colonial settlers, was precisely their emphasis on form, their deployment of classical composition techniques, their self-conscious dramatization of Oriental spaces, their attention to lighting, sartorial detail, and composed background. The politics of the Orientalist photograph is located neither in the message it conveys about the people of the Middle East nor in its depiction of its sociocultural state, but in the very distance it assumes with regard to these functions through aesthetics. The Orientalist photograph reconfigures the relation between subjects and objects, spatiality and temporality in such a way that renders the very division of politics and aesthetics impossible.

Conclusion

Rejecting Werner P. Friederich's "view that comparatists 'cannot and dare not encroach upon other territories,'" Wellek wrote, "Everybody has the right to study any question even if it is confined to a single work in a single language and everybody has the right to study even history or philosophy or any other topic. He runs of course the risk of criticism from the specialists, but is a risk he has to take" (290-91). The notion of comparison I have elaborated here is not only in accordance with Wellek's observation that as comprativists we have every right to study any question even if it is confined to a single work, but also suggests that infringing upon others' specialized territories can actually enable

[6] Geraci 297.

new insights and ideas. Indeed, one of the critical motivations behind my current project has been the problematic claims by some art historians and literary scholars that Orientalism no longer provides a viable conceptual framework to study nineteenth-century representations of the Middle East by European writers, travelers, and photographers. Michelle L. Woodward, to cite an example, has argued that "[i]n contemporary writing about nineteenth-century photography of the Middle East, it has become almost a cliché to describe many of these images as 'Orientalist'—that is, reflecting or propagating a system of representation that creates an essentialized difference between the 'Orient' and the 'West'" (363). This claim captures the anti-Saidian sentiment prominent among art historians and curators who work on representations of the Middle East produced by both European and indigenous painters and photographers. To be sure, responses to Said's discussion of Orientalism as a discourse of colonial power among art historians and museum curators span the critical spectrum, from more rigorous and subtle critiques articulated from the left to the sometimes facile and reactionary from those of an opposing political orientation. On one side are art historians such as Zeynep Çelik, Mary Roberts, and Woodward who argue that "the trend to extend Said's analysis to apply equally to visual representations has . . . been used too broadly, obscuring nuances and inconsistencies, not only between different photographers' bodies of work but also within them" (363). These scholars typically aim to constructively revise Orientalism to encompass "a disparate and disputed set of discursive constructions" while at the same time acknowledging "Orientals" as "participants in the production of counternarratives or resistant images" (Beaulieu and Roberts 3). On the other side are writers, such as John MacKenzie and Ken Jacobson, who betray a marked suspicion of "theory" and seek to return the term Orientalism to its prior usage as an art historical term, which can be deployed without suggestion of a broader political or ideological critique. In *Orientalism: History, theory, and the arts*, MacKenzie argues against Linda Nochlin that, "there is little evidence of a necessary coherence between the imposition of direct imperial rule and the visual arts," claiming that "Orientalism celebrates cultural proximity, historical parallelism and religious familiarity [with the Middle East and North Africa] rather than true 'Otherness'" (51). Given such perceived "misconceptions inherent in postcolonialist analysis," Jacobson similarly suggests that "a return to more traditional methods is desirable for the study of nineteenth and early twentieth century photography in North Africa and the Near East," urging commentators to focus more single-mindedly on the "notable aesthetic, as well as documentary and historical merit" when analyzing visual representations (88).

My comparative approach to Orientalist photography has enabled me

to critique both the postcolonial understanding of Orientalism as merely an ideological discourse of power, as well as the neutral art historical definition of the term as a particular artistic genre, and to posit a notion of Orientalism as a network of aesthetic, economic, and political relationships that cross national and historical boundaries. Understood in this way, I argue that Orientalism is indispensible to the understanding of nineteenth-century photography of the Middle East. Whether considered in the context of their production and dissemination in the nineteenth century or in relation to their current afterlives as collectable objects or archives, photographs of the "Orient" become meaningful and legible only if they are considered in terms of the geo-political distinctions, economic interests, and cultural assumptions about the Middle East and its people. While insisting that Orientalism offers a crucial perspective from which to comprehend the meaning and significance of photographic representations of the Middle East, I do not mean to suggest that such images should be understood merely as a reflection of Europeans' racial prejudice against "Orientals," nor that these images simply validate European, imperial dominance over the region. I also would not argue that Orientalist photography entails a binary visual structure between the Europeans as active agents and "Orientals" as passive objects of representation. Rather, I aim to provide an alternative view of Orientalist photography that focuses on nodes and ties that bind artists, collectors, and museums across historical and national boundaries, all of which are productive of a distinctly exotic vision of the region; a vision at once embraced and perpetuated by the elite in the Middle East. Indigenous photography in and of itself, I maintain, does not constitute an oppositional locus or resistant iconography, for it too belongs to the Orientalist network that mediates its vocabulary and thematics of representation.[7] A network theory of Orientalism concerns itself neither with the motivations of individual artists nor with the attributes of art objects, but instead studies the symmetric and asymmetric relations between discrete objects, specific individuals, and concrete practices.

[7] I have demonstrated elsewhere, for example, that the indigenous practices of photography in the Middle East were more indebted to Orientalism's aesthetic values and ideological assumptions than to local and Islamic traditions of pictorial representation; see my essay.

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相對的思維框架

摘 要

表面上看來，比較文學似乎永遠處於學科危機之中，但在本篇論文裡，藉由回應這個危機，我認爲應該將焦點轉移，焦點不應放在擴張與開拓的邏輯，而應重新反思「比較」此一概念。我主張比較文學應被視爲一項實踐，透過一個相對的思維框架，將不同想法納入並予以實現；我認爲的「比較」這個概念是分析性，而非操作可比較或不可比較的物品；作爲一種分析，「比較」不會衍生出詮釋的行爲，亦即詮釋文學作品或文化物件之間的相似處或差異，反而可以指出任何物品都具有本質上的相對性。相對的思維框架也認眞考量物品本身的獨斷任意性，因此不獨厚文學作品；這意味著，比較此一實踐將文化物件放置在相對的情境，無論情境中其他物品爲何；此一實踐不再強調文化物件與文學作品之間是否具有內在關連，如同傳統比較文學學者意圖完成的目標，也不再企圖揭露無法相容的差異，如同後殖民比較學學者做的事。相對的思維框架將尋找有意義的圖像，無論研究的對象是文學作品或文化檔案。

關鍵字：比較文學，比較，照相術，中東，東方主義