East-West Relations: Universal Literature, Yes; Common Poetics, No

A. Owen Aldridge

In the formative years of the European Enlightenment, the renowned German philosopher Leibniz proposed the establishment of a "joint Chinese-European Academy of Science." In a sense, the present East-West Comparative Literature Conference together with others here and in Hong Kong represents a similar joint effort, although in the direction of esthetics rather than science. In the seventeenth century, Leibniz argued that Chinese missionaries should be sent to Europe to teach the use and practice of natural religion (*theologia naturalis*), just as the Europeans would send their missionaries to China to teach revealed religion.[1] It is not clear whether Leibniz was referring to the Taoist or the Confucian tradition, but his references to natural religion suggest Neo-Confucianism. The Jesuits who carried on missionary work in China certainly found the teachings of Confucius more to their liking than those of the Taoists. They attempted to show their own compatibility and pliability by wearing Chinese garb in the East, while incorporating in their European publication of translations from Confucius a portrait of the Chinese sage attired in the Jesuit habit.

The theorists on both sides of the Taipei-Hong Kong axis have advocated the use of Western critical concepts in the study of Eastern literatures, thus giving new life to the process advocated by Leibniz. In a sense, they have imitated the practice of the Jesuits by attempting to clothe eastern literature in western habilements. Like the German philosopher, however, they may have failed to give sufficient attention to the ideological disparities in the alien culture. During much of the present century, critics in the western world have been separated into two major camps – variously labelled as formal and historical, structural and diachronic, or structural and hermeneutic. The antagonisms between structuralists and traditionalists in the

West are as profound as those between Confucians and Taoists in China. The words of the ancient philosopher, Chuang-tzu, in reference to the metaphysical divisions in Chinese culture are equally applicable to the critical ones in the West: "Each one of these two schools affirms what the other denies, and denies what the other affirms."[2] Paradoxically this common ideological belligerence may in itself be an indication of the psycho-social similarity between the two cultures and a demonstration of the eighteenth-century adage that men are fundamentally the same all over the world. At the same time it may serve as a caution for each of the respective cultures against adopting an intellectual system of the other without rigorous discrimination of the applicable from the irrelevant. Literary criticism in general has been compared to seeking nourishment by having someone else eat a dinner and then reciting the menu. When criteria from one culture are applied to creative work from another the process might be compared to reciting the menu in a foreign tongue.

A slight nuance separates the editorial policies of the *Tamkang Review* from those of the *New Asia Academic Bulletin.* Originally the *Tamkang Review* featured articles on Chinese literature from the point of view of "western critical methods," but it now stresses "the context of world literature." The *New Asia Academic Bulletin* welcomes studies relating Chinese literature to western or other eastern literatures and those "applying Western critical theories to Chinese literature" in the effort to elucidate a "common poetics." In practice, a large number of the articles published so far in either journal lean heavily on western methodology, primarily the schemes of New Criticism and structuralism.

Comparative literature implies by definition the treatment of works from at least two national traditions, but it has been said in defense of the application of western methods to single eastern texts that the process literally "involves a comparative dimension."[3] It has also been argued that the process is "in principle, no more inappropriate than the classical scholar's use of modern techniques and methods for his study of ancient materials."[4] It should be remembered, however, that the latter process is always considered the study of classical literature, never comparative literature. The argument for adopting western criticism rests, moreover, on the unproved assumptions that "modern" techniques are necessarily superior and that western methods are monolithic or unified. In practice, techniques as diverse as Aristotelianism and structuralism have been applied to Chinese works,

some with great success and some with very little. Also underlying the application of western critical methods are the further assumptions "that comparable features and qualities exist between Chinese and Western literatures and that comparable standards are applicable to both."[5] It is probably true that contemporary Eastern and Western literatures have more in common than those of ancient Greece and contemporary Europe, but identical criteria are not usually applied to the two latter groups. If it does not make sense to judge modern drama by the Aristotelean unities, it is no more rational to apply them to Eastern drama of any historical period.

Much depends on what we call western methods. Apparently the first Chinese history of Chinese literature was not published until 1909, eight years subsequently to one in English,[6] and the pioneer history of Japanese literature in Japanese appeared in 1890, followed by one in English in 1899.[7] If we consider the writing of literary history per se a Western method there can be no argument about the need to follow the West. But if we take a more precise view and consider particular techniques such as applying Aristotelean standards or computer analysis, then many legitimate doubts arise. A pioneer comparatist, Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett, observed nearly a century ago that literary art consists in something better than an imitation of models and that models are admittedly out of place "when carried into social conditions markedly different from those under which they were produced." Unless we limit the range of our criticism, Posnett warned, "we may find ourselves applying the standards of the Athenian to the Japanese drama, or those of the Greek lyric to the *Shih King* of ancient China."

At this point I should like to digress to pay tribute to Hutcheson Posnett, from whose book entitled *Comparative Literature,* published in 1888, the preceding quotations have been taken.[8] Posnett has been accorded due recognition in histories of the discipline for his priority in transcending national boundaries, but he has also been greatly maligned because of the sociological orientation of his thought. The design of his book is to illustrate through study of literature the orderly changes which have taken place in society in the relationship of the individual to the group in a progress from the clan, to the city commonwealth, and to the nation. In keeping with much of the thought of the late nineteenth century and of that of some critics of the twentieth, Posnett believed that the study of literature could be considered a science, and his book was published in an international

scientific series immediately following the titles *Anthropoid Apes* and *The Mammalia in Their Relation to Primeval Times.* Apart from his fascination with old-fashioned sociological concepts, Posnett espoused some belletristic ones which are today considered quite modern, for example, that the function of the literary critic is to examine not only the works themselves, but also the cause of the esthetic pleasure which they arouse in human senses, emotions and intellect.[9] But what is most important in Posnett's book is the cosmopolitan range of his interests and illustrations, covering the literatures of Asia as well as the West. Today few comparatists discuss more than one western and one eastern literature, but Posnett treats extensively the Japanese, Indian and Chinese along with the major ones of Europe. His century-old treatise makes a significant contribution to the study of East-West literary relations even by today's standards.

After this tribute to Posnett, I should like to render equal homage to the most important contemporary scholar who deals with comparative literature on a worldwide scale, the renowned Etiemble of the University of Paris. In the comparatist movement after World War II, Etiemble was without doubt the first and most authoritative voice to call for serious dedication to the question of East-West relations, and he is still preeminent in Europe. A Festschrift with the title *Le Mythe d'Etiemble* is being published this year [Didier, Paris], appropriately indicating that this distinguished scholar has become a legend in his own lifetime.

There are essentially two developments in the modern world which have allowed the study of East-West relations to expand beyond the stage where Posnett left it. Neither of these is literary – the invention of jet travel and the discovery of inexpensive methods of printing. Before these mechanical innovations, only the vaguest notions of China and Japan existed in the West, and these consisted more of fantasy then reality.[10] Jet travel and mass printing methods, however, have brought the two cultures together more rapidly than centuries of patient literary scholarship could have done by itself.

By and large, literary study is divided into two main overlapping categories, one synthetic, the other analytical. In essence, literary history records what books have actually been published and circulated; literary criticism makes esthetic judgments about these books. The basis of literary history is periodization – dividing literary production into time segments which are presumably unified by stylistic and ideological characteristics. It

has been found extremely difficult to divide Chinese literature into periods which have any significance other than purely chronological[11] and impossible to coordinate the more than thirty centuries of Eastern literature with the briefer span of Western except in the relatively short modern period. Not only did no contact exist for most of these thirty centuries, but there were almost no coinciding "Golden" ages or "dark" ages, and few parallel developments in genres and themes.

Since literary history (except for the period from the seventeenth century to the present) offers little scope for drawing eastern and western literatures together, attention has been diverted to criticism. Not only have many eastern scholars advocated the almost wholesale importation of western methods, but they have enunciated a "common poetics" and assumed as a goal of comparative studies the synthesizing of eastern and western esthetic standards.

One may doubt first of all the possibility of synthesizing the diverse, mutually contradictory, and incommensurable concepts which comprise western criticism alone at the present time. Bringing these concepts together would not result in a synthesis, but in a clash of conflicting ideologies.[12] One may also raise the question of whether comparative literature depends on synthesis at all and argue that common poetics in literature are no more necessary than a common system of worship in religion. In other words, significant conclusions in comparative literature may be reached in the future, as in the present, by the use of a plurality of critical methods. Despite the antagonism between Taoism and Confucianism, the East has already set an example in rational eclecticism in regard to the diversity of religion. The Chinese and the Japanese are apparently able to accept two or three religious faiths equally and concurrently, if not completely. This is in contrast to the notion of toleration in the West, according to which most people believe that their particular single religion is the only true one, while extending to other people the right to have the same attitude toward some other theology. If it is possible to attain eclecticism in religion, why should a similar pluralism in critical theory not be accepted, or even welcomed? To accept pluralism, however, is not the same thing as to assume that all schools of criticism have equal validity, but rather that some methods are efficacious for certain problems and irrelevant to others.

One of the great advantages of pluralism is that it rejects the notion which has existed in the West in some form or another for over a hundred

years that the study of literature can and should approach scientific exactitude. There are, of course, many significations attached to the notion of science. I am using the term in the broad sense of a discipline professing to comprise knowledge which is precise and undeviating. In the nineteenth century, German universities established a mode of literary research which, its exponents felt, embodied the methodology of science. This mode consisted, according to an eminent French critic, in all types of detail, including "meticulous erudition, narrow philology, dry monographs, statistics and mechanical scrutinies, painstaking collation of manuscripts, [and] positive investigation of sources."[13] The critic whom I am quoting is Gustave Lanson. The term "positive," which he uses has since acquired derogatory connotations, and it is sometimes applied to Lanson himself. In France, the term Lansonism is used as the equivalent of positivism, the terms being considered equally disparaging by some exponents of later critical methods. Yet Lanson himself particularly denied the existence of a universal scientific method, admitting merely a universal scientific attitude. The literary historian, he explained, cannot experiment, but merely observe, and the facts which he observes cannot be measured or weighed – and they do not repeat themselves.[14] Science, moreover, according to Lanson, concerns itself with the general, and excludes from consideration everything which is "particular, individual, and consequently the concrete, the sensitive, in short, vitality."[15] In specific reference to French literature, Lanson summarized as follows his notions of literary history: "Our principal operations consist in understanding literary texts, in comparing them in order to distinguish the individual from the collective and the original from the traditional, in grouping them by genres, schools and movements, in determining finally the relationship of these groups with the intellectual, moral and social life of our country as well as with the development of European literature and civilization."[16] Although Lanson has recently been accused of ontological confusion between literary works as dead historical things or objects and as vital organisms which are still living and giving pleasure,[17] he particularly affirmed that "each generation reads its thought or its ideal in the masterpieces of literature, each century remakes them into its own image; and none of these interpretations has the right of excluding the others."[18] Lanson's method was obviously oriented particularly toward French literature, but some of its features could be expanded to encompass East-West relations without encountering the barrier of periodization or the alleged narrowness of pos-

itivism.

Other groups of critics use the language of science without making it clear, as Lanson has done, that literature cannot be subsumed under the disciplines which affirm unchanging and undeviating principles, illusory as some of the certainty of these disciplines has been shown to be. Some of the critics who use scientific vocabulary admit the presence of the esthetic element in style and form, but suggest that this esthetic element can be measured objectively or explained mechanically. As far back as the eighteenth century the twin theories were enunciated that literary works bear the imprint of the soil upon which they were produced (in Latin-America called the telluric influence) and that literary works are the expression of the society and social conditions from which they emerged. The most famous exponent of the social evolutionary theory is the Frenchman Hippolyte Taine, but the pioneer critic in comparative literature with this orientation is Posnett, the scholar to whom we have previously paid tribute. Posnett, although embracing the concept of science as his guiding principle, nevertheless, declared himself firmly opposed to the notion that there exists "some universal human nature which unaffected by differences of language, social organisation, sex, climate, and similar causes, has been at all times and in all places the keystone of literary architecture."[19] It seems to be merely by chance that Posnett chose to speak of "literary architecture," rather than using the more modern term "structure." Posnett also categorically denied the existence of literary models, beyond those of actual texts, "but innate in the human heart or intellect as a kind of literary conscience."[20] While denying that science itself consists of a body of universal truths, Posnett declared that literature may be understood as a collection of limited truths, some of which are static influences such as the climate, soil, animal and plant life of various countries and others are dynamic forces causing social evolution from communal to individual life.[21] He set out, therefore, to show the "effects of social evolution on literature."[22] The precise evolution in literature which Posnett attempted to trace in both Eastern and Western cultures consisted of a development in spirit, portraying originally the clan, next the city commonwealth and finally the individual. This concept of stages is an early and drastic type of literary periodization. In defending his hypothesis, Posnett collected a significant body of documents, his achievement flawed only by the determinism of the evolutionary hypothesis from which he worked. Although rejecting this determinism, I am

obviously not objecting to the related concept of social influences upon literature, particularly after my previous reference to the instrumentality of jet travel and mass reproductions.

Theories similar to Posnett's were propounded soon after by a professor at the University of Kentucky, A. S. MacKenzie, who, although holding the title of Head of the Department of English and Comparative Literature as early as 1911, has been completely ignored by historians of the discipline. MacKenzie describes his book, *The Evolution of Literature* (New York, 1911), as an anthropological study designed to elucidate "the organic unity of literary evolution."[23] In his terminology, MacKenzie makes a basic distinction between the historical method and the comparative method. According to his dichotomy, the investigation of similar ethnic facts not related by continuity or contact represents the comparative method, and the quest for causes of ethnic facts by showing their relation to anterior facts is the historical method. Here we have an early version of the distinction between synchronic and diachronic criticism which has become an obsession in much contemporary writing. MacKenzie's stages in literary evolution are essentially the same as Posnett's, except that he divides the clan into a primitive period in which man hunts for his sustenance and a barbaric one in which he domesticates and cultivates. MacKenzie draws his examples not only from China, India and the West, but also from Africa and Oceana (New Zealand and Australia). In his conclusion, MacKenzie derives three provisional laws of literary evolution, which he casts in the shape of formulae, as he says, to make them "more luminous to some readers."[24] In one of these which he calls "the law of progress," A equals average literary advance, S equals self-consciousness, and W equals world consciousness. The formula, therefore, reads A = S + W. To those who find this formulation absurd, I suggest that a similar reaction might be appropriate to many of the graphs and protomathematical formulae which have proliferated in recent criticism. In regard to both nineteenth and twentieth century criticism, the warning of Lanson is pertinent: science tends constantly to reduce itself to mathematics, to the abstract, and the general; but art and literature concern themselves with the individual qualities of things and beings.[25]

Both Posnett and MacKenzie stress the importance of the individual in both social change and in the development of literature, particularly in the most advanced stages. MacKenzie, in particular, accepts the role of genius in literary creativity, explaining it as an indication of superior in-

ventiveness or imagination.[26] This humanistic theory goes completely contrary to historical "vulgar" Marxism which believes in the all-embracing dominance of social-economic forces over the individual. A militant anti-humanism is to be found also in many structuralists of both Marxist and anti-Marxist persuasions, who deny "that man (or human consciousness) is an intelligible entity or field of study in himself."[27]

A third group of critics has sought to demonstrate scientific objectivity by concentrating on the literary text – viewing it as an object in itself. Contrary to the emphasis of Posnett on the relativity of literature, these critics assume that the text has an absolute existence or that it may be hypostatized into a distinct reality. One of the most important sectors of this group is the American New Critics, whose influence has been felt in both the East and the West. Until very recently English departments of most American universities emphasized the intrinsic over the extrinsic approach, bowed down to the 'verbal icon," warned against the intentional and the affective fallacies, and affirmed the possibility of substituting for "romantic impressionism" a type of criticism which is truly impersonal and objective. Although they did not use the word "scientific," they made strong pretensions toward approaching the essence of literature and discerning universal standards.

The trouble with the theory that a poem may be analyzed in itself as something with an independent existence is that no literary work can properly be said to exist in itself. The work in itself is nothing but a manually inscribed or printed series of marks on paper. To have any meaning whatsoever, these marks must be interpreted as symbols by a reader, who adds his own previous experience and knowledge to the esthetic and intellectual sensation communicated by what he sees. The text itself possesses the qualities attributed to it only as they are perceived by the reader, and each reader has his own individual response. That there can be no single valid interpretation for any literary work is demonstrated by the truism that interpretations of masterpieces change from century to centruy. As someone has said, "there are as many *Divine Comedies* as there are readers." The New Critics are far more susceptible than traditional historical criticism to the charge of treating literary works as museum pieces; whereas these works are in actuality still living, still developing, and still giving pleasure.

The advocates of the historical method have always resisted or remained lukewarm in their acceptance of New Criticism, and in recent years

its privileged status has been withdrawn in American universities. This type of analysis has been replaced by new techniques which for the most part treat the complexities of literature as mechanical in nature. Not without reason they have been labelled the technocracies of literature.[28] The new fashions are commonly subsumed under the rubric of structuralism – although the term in its general application is almost impossible to define. Narrowly the term applies only to analyses of a text in which elements of the vocabulary are given such labels as signifiers and signifieds or in which precise patterns of metaphor/metonymy and other binary relations are noted. In a much broader sense structures have been perceived in theme and ideology, and in psychological and sociological overtones. Although the exponents of the various structuralist methods do not specifically claim, or admit, that they are, like the New Critics, hypostatizing the works which they treat, the question has been asked "whether structures are perennially present in a Platonic sort of sense, and impose themselves to the creator and through the work of art to the historian; or whether in a manner more consonant with nominalism they are forms imposed by the beholder upon reality as he perceives it."[29] If structures are considered like Platonic essences as something inherent in the text, the structural method is subject to the objection that a literary work cannot have independent existence but depends on the mediation of the reader or series of readers; if structures are interpreted in the nominalist sense as based on the perception of the individual beholder, all pretentions by the method to scientific precision are rendered invalid.

As part of the new fashion, structures or linguistic or semantic relationships within a literary work are frequently portrayed by graphs, mathematical formulae or other diagrams. For the most part these post-construction architectural blue-prints merely impart a pseudo-aura of scientific exactitude, adding nothing to the exposition beyond that which the critic provides in ordinary language.

To label a word a "sign" or a group of words an "esthetic sign" does little to explain the meaning of the words or their effect upon a readership. Semiotic interpretations are perhaps valid in showing how a square of paper bearing the number ten which is affixed to an apple is related to the sentence "An apple costs ten cents." But they are unable on their own terms to do more with such semantically rich affirmations as "The wages of sin is death" than with "An apple costs ten cents." Linguistics and literature are

fundamentally separate disciplines – literature comprises idea, emotion and esthetic pleasure; linguistics consists of the mechanism by which these qualities are conveyed.

Another form of literary study depending on mechanical assistance and, therefore, presumably carrying scientific overtones is that of computerized statistical analysis. This method may have limited value, for example, in the studying of the utilization of particular words or ideas in a particular author. One must keep in mind, however, that something which is done by a machine is not necessarily any more scientific than the same process done by hand. Computer analysis together with any of the forms of structuralism remains a process which is dependent upon the subjective choice of the analyzer.

A final fashionable method is that of submitting a questionnaire on a text to a group of readers to obtain an opinion sampling, a method which has been considered "the single objective indication" of the esthetic functioning of the text. It is hard to see how a series of individual subjective responses can add up to a single objective indication. Indeed all that this kind of sampling does is to provide information about the group of readers involved in the sampling, not about the inherent elements of the text or about its esthetic appeal to all potential readers.

The fact that certain critical methods hold objectivity in esteem or adopt the vocabulary of science should not necessarily be held against them. Most methods which seek primarily to measure and analyze, however, almost inevitably concentrate upon single texts and are, therefore, irrelevant to comparative studies, which by definition require at least two works in separate literatures for consideration. Studies of structural elements, moreover, whether syntactical, phonic or semantic, cannot be accepted as paradigms for all potential readers or even for the best informed and esthetically acute ones, no matter how much satisfaction these studies afford to those who carry them out. There is much to be said for the advice of a European comparatist who advises literary scholars in general to take gastronomy rather than chemistry as a model – to enjoy and savour literature rather than to analyze or dissect it.[30] Another European, Hans Robert Jauss, in a delightful work, which unfortunately has not yet been translated into English, speaks of *Genuss* or the pure enjoyment of reading.[31]

Some recent criticism has recognized that the understanding of literature requires an appreciation of the reader's reaction to a text as well as of the inherent nature of that text. A new triad has, therefore, become

important to literary theory, not to replace, but to coexist with the traditional one reflected in the bibliography of Baldensperger and Friederich and associated with the study of sources and influence, the classic triad of Emitter, Intermediary, and Receiver. The new triad, which concerns itself with individual texts, consists of Author, Text, and Reader, or, as it has otherwise been expressed, Emitter, Esthetic Function, and Receiver.[32] When we deal with East-West relations and must rely on translations, another element is added to this process: we now have Author, Text (comprising the setting and general context), Translation (comprising the interpretive process which is inevitable) and Reader. Critics who are aware of the importance of reader reaction in the interpretation of the work are fully cognizant that interpretation is a continuous process – that the meaning and significance of a work change from generation to generation or from century to century. Recognition of this principle gives support and validity to East-West studies. Some scholars have objected that readers in one hemisphere are unable fully to understand intellectually or appreciate esthetically works from the other hemisphere because of the radical differences in culture and, consequently, esthetic concepts. The obstacles are, of course, increased if the works are read in translation rather than in the original language. To this, one may reply that the variations in perception caused by cultural differences are probably no greater than those caused by chronological gaps between two widely-separated periods in the cultures of either East or West.

The preceding views concerning reader response bear close resemblance to what is called reader criticism or transactional theory, the latter concept stemming ultimately from the American philosopher John Dewey. In an epistemological sense, a transaction is a single event comparable to an ecological process in which organism and environment engage in mutual interaction.[33] The literary work may be compared to an element in a business transaction, consisting of a buyer, a seller, and a commodity. The text is the commodity mediating between the author and the reader. A considerable body of European and American criticism is now stressing this point of view. It is fitting to indicate once more that Posnett observed a century ago that "when men first began to ask themselves why it was that the poet's works pleased them, they sought to find the cause not in human senses, emotions, intellect, but in analyses of the works themselves" and that Posnett approved of investigation of human reactions rather than the contrary process.[34]

When a scholar chooses a particular method of investigation, he is

selecting for attention certain elements in the text or texts he is dealing with. Before proceeding with his work he should ask himself why he has selected these particular elements for analysis, what they are likely to contribute to the understanding or the enjoyment of the text, and, if he is concerned with East-West relations, how they reveal parallels between various cultures.

One of the oldest forms of western criticism is that known as the "beauties and faults" method. Derived from Longinus, and practised extensively in the eighteenth century by Addison in England and Diderot in France, it consists primarily in pointing out passages which give particular pleasure, making personal observations about them, and backing up these observations by rules or authorities to make them appear to be the reflection of common sense or general opinion. Matthew Arnold in the nineteenth century devised a variant of the method by selecting a group of lines of "high poetic quality" from various authors and presenting them as "touchstones" of poetic excellence. W. L. Wong (黃維樑) in a recent article has shown parallels between Arnold's method and that of Chinese Poetry – talk, criticism, which, like the older "beauties and faults" criticism selects lines for their intrinsic attractiveness.[35] Wong's exposition not only indicates certain aspects of impressionistic criticism, but also provides a basis by which a reader unfamiliar with Chinese prosody may understand other Chinese poems as well as those treated in the article itself. Although intuitions and impressions are inimical to formal scientific method, they still have a place in the process of inter-cultural awareness.

Seeking of parallels between East and West in this way does not depend upon the existence of a common poetics, but upon the notion of a universal literature – not to be confused with the concept of absolutes. I have suggested elsewhere that universal literature should be understood in the broadest sense as the sum total of all texts and works throughout the world, or a combination of all national literatures.[36] John Deeney in calling for a "Chinese" School of Comparative Literature similarly suggests that Chinese scholars should progress "from *national* self-identification, to a broader *regional* cultural awareness, to a *'Third World'* association with neglected or emerging literatures, to a *world-wide* comprehensiveness in scope and, finally – however idealistically – to a *universal* integration of all literatures in their complex relationships."[37] 1) In the purely quantitative sense, since universal literature comprises all the works which exist in the world,

no single literature, whether French in the West or Chinese in the East, can be considered as superior to the others. 2) In a narrower, qualitative sense, universal literature may be considered in the light of Friedrich Schlegel's notion of *Universalpoesie,* that is, as a synthesis of both prose and poetry, artistic and popular, embracing every possible facet of human experience. 3) From the perspective of content, universal literature may refer to any work which reflects attitudes, situations or experiences which are felt or understood by human beings in all cultures, for example, respect for parents or revolt from them, success in a career or failure in one. 4) From the perspective of the reader's response, universal literature refers to any work which contains elements broad enough to appeal to the average person in any literate culture. Universal literature, yes; common poetics, no.

A superior work of art does not hold its privileged position because it contains some quintessential element within it, but because it succeeds in arousing a favorable response in a reader or a series of readers. In my opinion, the only universally valid criterion for artistic worth is still the *consensus gentium* or "the general and perpetual voice of men," whether measured by the endurance of a text over a wide period of time, by the number of its editions or copies in circulation, or by computerized questionnaires about it, in descending order of reliability. In the areas of East-West relations, a major consideration is the capacity of a work to transcend cultural differences. As critics we may evaluate texts from any set of criteria or standards we find compatible, but the only certain method of avoiding critical anarchy is to rely on the quality of universal appeal. We may seek the universal without assuming esthetic absolutes. We may also study subject matter which is of universal interest, for example, hunger, sex, crime, parental relations or love and marriage, and even draw literary conclusions from texts which are not outstanding in literary merit. I am referring here in part to what is known in German as *Trivialliteratur,* but which in English encompasses not really the trivial, but merely that which is not recognized by the Establishment – including such works as *Dracula, Jeeves,* and *Papillon.* In the United States, works of this kind are often studied under the rubric of popular culture.

When literature is considered as a medium for producing response in the reader, it may be said to have three primary functions; to convey meaning, to convey emotion, and to convey esthetic pleasure. Since these functions exist in all periods of time and in all geographical areas, it would

be a valid process to show significant parallels in any of these three functions in any literatures. This is a much more simple process of study than the traditional methods used for western literatures, which reveal parallels in styles, in cultural-intellectual movements and in genres. The history of the western nations so closely involves one literature with the other that parallels of this kind may be easily perceived, and they represent, moreover, significant relationships. The histories of the nations of the West and those of the East, however, are not homogeneous, nor have they been closely entwined until very recent times. For this reason the study of East-West literary relations does not adapt itself to the quest for parallels in historical development. Basic linguistic differences, moreover, severely limit the possibilities of parallels in the purely esthetic realm, with the exception of elements which are capable of being transposed through translation. Even with the aid of translation, esthetic pleasures depending upon sound together with many other poetic effects cannot be transmitted. In a large sense, this is true also of parallels among the western literatures. The major areas of investigation which remain, therefore, are those of meaning and emotion.

Probably the most influential writings of an ideological nature in both the East and the West are those associated with religion. Christian thought has been relayed to the East, and Confucian and Buddhist concepts have been carried to the West. Writings in both parts of the world which communicate feeling or emotional attitudes are chiefly in prose fiction and drama. Many plots and themes in the East resemble those in the West and vice versa. Some works, moreover, convey both meaning and emotion in almost equal amounts, for example, the autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, which is today studied as a school text in both Japan and China. In my opinion, concentration upon meaning, plot, and theme together with the narrative and dramatic devices by which these elements are conveyed represents the most feasible and useful method of studying East-West relations. Emphasis should be placed, moreover, not on the intricacies of plot, but on the relationship of plot and character to real life. For the proper exercise of this function, the critic must of course have some understanding of the historical and cultural backgrounds of the works with which he is dealing. Finally, a large number of western poets from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present have sought to translate or imitate the poetic masterpieces of China and Japan. Their activities represent a rich field for investigation both from the perspective of cross-cultural

influence and of esthetic analysis. Everybody has heard of Voltaire and Pound, whether reading them or not, but it is generally unknown that many other major authors reveal a substantial debt to the East. Until literary history concerns itself systematically with these matters, however, handbooks of comparative literature will continue to make such unfounded pronouncements as that "there has hardly been *any* influence of Asian literature on European."[38]

In conclusion, a variety of approaches to the study of East-West relations may be taken conjointly without falling into the trap of pseudo-scientism. It is also possible to be eclectic without being torn asunder by a "battle between conflicting ideologies." To paraphrase a well-known saying, let the ancient blend with the modern, and the alien serve China and Japan.

Notes

1. *Novissima Sinica* 1699. English translation 2d. ed., 1724, Preface.
2. Quoted by Wai-lim Yip (葉維廉), *New Asia Academic Bulletin*, I (1978), 31.
3. James J. Y. Liu (劉若愚), *Journal of Asian Studies*, 35 (1975) 28.
4. Antony C. Yu, *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, 23 (1974), 50.
5. Liu p. 28; Yu op cit, gives some examples of satisfactory results of the method, p. 51.
6. Tak-wai Wong (黃德偉), *New Asia Academic Bulletin*, I (1978), 54.
7. I am indebted for this information to Professor Yukinori Iwaki, Vice Dean of Nihon University in Japan, with whom I have recently had the pleasure of discussing many of the principles of this paper.
8. Ibid., pp. 11-12.
9. Ibid., p. 10.
10. The attitude of America toward the East up to 1950 is strikingly parallel to that of France toward America in 1912 as portrayed by Gustave Lanson, *Trois mois d'enseignement aux Etats-unis* (Paris, 1912), p. 51.
11. Tak-wai Wong, *New Asia Academic Bulletin*, I (1978), 45-68.
12. Lefevere, *New Asia Bulletin*, I (1978), 12-13.
13. Gustave Lanson, *Trois mois d'enseignement aux Etats-unis* (Paris, 1912), p. 162.
14. *Méthodes de l'histoire littéraire* (Paris, 1925), pp. 25-27.
15. Lanson, *Essais de méthode, de critique, et d'histoire littéraire*, ed. Henri Peyre (Paris, 1965), p. 102.
16. Peyre ed., p. 43.
17. Eva Kushner, "Diachrony and Structure: Thoughts on Renewals in the Theory of Literary History," in *Synthesis*, V (1978), 38.

18. *Méthodes de l'histoire littéraire,* p. 47. See also pp. 41-42.
19. Ibid., p. 21.
20. Ibid., p. 43.
21. Ibid., p. 20.
22. Ibid., p. 82.
23. Ibid., p. vii.
24. Ibid., p. 415
25. Peyre ed., p. 102.
26. Ibid., p. 404.
27. Frederic Jameson, *Prison House of Language,* pp. 139-40.
28. Georges Mounin, *La Littérature et ses technocraties* (Paris, 1978).
29. Eva Kushner, "Diachrony and Structure," p. 48.
30. Andre Stegman, "Problèmes méthodologiques et terminologiques pour une périodisation en littérature," *Neohelicon,* I (1973), 285.
31. *Asthetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik, Band I: Versuche im Feld der ästhetischen Erfahrung* (Munich, 1977).
32. Mounin, p. 154.
33. Louise M. Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem* (Carbondale, Illinois, 1978), pp. 15-17.
34. Ibid., p. 10.
35. *New Asia Academic Bulletin,* I (1978), 33-44.
36. *Hikaku Bungaku* (Tokyo, 1979).
37. *Tamkang Review,* VIII (1977), 233.
38. Arthur E. Kunst, in Stallknecht and Frenz eds., *Comparative Literature Method and Perspective,* 2d ed., (Carbondale, Il., 1971), p. 318.