

# Ancient Literary Traditions in Comparative Literature (An Introduction)

Blaž Zabel

The main aim of the special issue, entitled *Ancient Literary Traditions in Comparative Literature*, is to research the influence of ancient literature on the development of comparative literature and to reflect on the similarities and differences between the comparative discipline and classical studies. The articles collected here approach the topic from several perspectives: by addressing the history of both disciplines; by considering the role of ancient literature in the development of comparative literature; by discussing the multicultural aspects of antiquity; by considering the influence of comparative literature on contemporary methods in classical studies, etc. By considering these perspectives, contributors argue that ancient literature is a fundamental element in the development of key concepts and methods in comparative literature and that classical studies and comparative literature have always been in a productive dialogue. Several articles also suggest that innovative approaches to the study of antiquity can be found in comparative literature; that comparisons are necessary for a comprehensive understanding of ancient literary texts; and that antiquity must be treated as a multicultural phenomenon.

In the opening article entitled “Comparative Literature and Classics: An Introduction to History of Scholarship and Methodology,” Blaž Zabel discusses the influence of ancient literature and ancient literary criticism on the early French comparative literature, as well as the influence of comparative literature on the development of classical studies. Markus Hafner’s article “Beyond Comparison? Literary Appropriation and Its Effects on (Post-) Augustan Greco-Roman Text Production” focuses on the intricate relationship between ancient Greek literature and Latin literature, identified in Zabel’s article as a paradigmatic topic of early comparative literature. In “Debating Honor and the Fifth-Century BCE Athens: Towards a Comparative and Intradisciplinary Approach,” Andrea Giannotti discusses comparative and interdisciplinary approaches to the study of ancient tragedy and its socio-historical context. The article highlights the need for interdisciplinary collaboration

between comparative literature and classical studies in order to better understand ancient texts (*e.g.*, the concept of honor in tragedy) and to develop better methodological tools (*e.g.*, researching ancient tragedy in the context of ancient philosophy). In an article entitled “Philosophy and Tragedy: The Case of *Hercules on Oeta*, a Play Ascribed to Seneca,” Sergej Valijev also notes that it is impossible to interpret some ancient works without taking into account the comparative orientation of classical studies. Another article that considers ancient tragedy is Matic Kocijančič’s “Truly Bewept, Full of Strife: The Myth of Antigone, the Burial of Enemies, and the Ideal of Reconciliation in Ancient Greek Literature,” in which the author reflects on the difficulties of translating ancient works.

The last three contributors focus on the influence of ancient literature and classical philology on the development of comparative literature. In the article “The Old Master and an Ineffable Word: An Introduction to Cybertext Using Ancient Chinese Literature,” Aleš Vaupotič turns to world literature and university curricula. Discussing *Tao Te Ching* and *I Ching*, Vaupotič shows, first, that antiquity is a multicultural concept (for there exist other ancient traditions besides the Greco-Roman), and second, that reading and teaching non-Western pre-modern literatures can be productive for understanding contemporary concepts and questions in comparative literature and the humanities. In an article entitled “August Boeckh, Classical Philologist and Hermeneut,” Brane Senegačnik explores the work of August Böckh (or Boeckh), one of the most important philologists of the early nineteenth century. Senegačnik outlines the influence that classical philology had on the development of literary interpretation and hermeneutics. The issue concludes with an article by Krištof Jack Kozak entitled “From the Museum of Literary Archeology: Is Tragedy a Petrified Fossil or a Living Dinosaur?” in which the author examines contemporary theories of tragedy and the tragic. As Kozak convincingly demonstrates, reflections on ancient tragedy are an essential part of several influential theories in contemporary comparative literature.