

Call for Papers

Proposal for Special Issue of *Critical Comparative Studies*, Edinburgh University Press **Iranian Comparative Literature: Between Chaos and Discipline**

This special issue is building on two panels organized in the XXIII Congress of International Comparative Literature Association in Tbilisi, Georgia, in July 2022. The issue seeks two aims: a historical and a methodological. First, to study the development of Comparative Literature in institutional settings during the past two decades in order to critically review the current state of the discipline as it is practiced in Persian and other Iranian languages, in Iran and diasporic locations. Second, to investigate the impact of comparative methodologies that have contributed to the formation of modern literary studies – in particular Orientalism and Eurocentric knowledge – and to examine the effects of this (comparative) literary studies as a “local” form of knowledge in Iranian academia.

Historically, the study of modern foreign literatures was part of the curriculum at the first modern Iranian university (i.e. University of Tehran) in the 1920s, but a department of Comparative Literature proper did not – and does not – exist in Iranian academia. During the past two decades, the discipline has been developed as a subfield under the department of national literature, i.e. Persian Language and Literature. It is probably in response to this change that there has been a sharp increase in the number of books on Comparative Literature translated into Persian, as well as in the number of academic journals published in Persian with “comparative” as part of their titles. Outside Iran, the majority of students and scholars who contribute to the field have conventionally been located in Area Studies departments, engaging, and oftentimes extending, the legacies of Orientalism.

On the methodological side, this issue seeks to discuss the disciplinary adjustments needed for the practice of Comparative Literature – or rather comparative literary studies – in the Iranian context. The structures of knowledge formulated during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were based on two fundamental postulates: the centrality of capitalism and secularism as the defining essence of modern culture; the history of European cultural development as the norm against which other cultural histories would be assessed. In this structure, Area Studies was created *in Europe* for introducing non-European literatures – placed outside capitalism – to European readers.

As a result, the study of modern Iranian literatures *in Iran*, positioned on the margins of capitalism, via Eurocentric knowledge would encounter deep epistemological and, subsequently, methodological problems: Orientalism places – via clichéd images constructed through romanticist interests – the “golden age” of literary creativity in the past, consistently positioning modern Persian as an outsider to *modern* literary studies; energized by romantic nationalism, it has failed to consider and incorporate the diversity of Iranian literatures beyond Persian in the body of literary knowledge; it assesses a culture that has developed in the periphery of capitalism with the norms suitable to evaluating European literature and, therefore, cannot account for formal innovations and developments, if form is understood as the literary effect of negotiations between multiple cultural forces. In short, it is not clear what methodologies would be suitable to the study of Iranian literary traditions in a comparative setting.

As a result of these concerns, in order to integrate Persian in comparative literary practices, a number of changes are needed to formulate the critical position(s) and priorities of the discipline. First, disentangling the history of Iranian cultural development from the global history of colonialism, particularly European modern history. The normative assumptions of the discipline must be dealt with as fluid frames that essentially fall short of describing the peripherality and diversity of the Iranian condition. This critical perspective must extend to a critical review of Area Studies and the Orientalist knowledge it produces. Second, the problem of a temporal lag in a context that has been on the margins of the modern world, hence a latecomer to both capitalism and disciplinary knowledge, must be tackled, too; this temporal lag is most evident in the way Comparative Literature subfields have been formed, and journals founded, without having developed a linguistic pedagogical program or a clear research method.

Approaching Comparative Literature as a transdisciplinary field, with a Eurocentric and colonial history, this special issue takes into account contemporary questions and lived experiences that engage and promote the causes of comparative literary studies within and beyond Persian – as Iran’s *lingua franca*. Given the modern history of the nation, and the academic system, can Comparative Literature be practiced at all as a discipline in the Iranian context? What new theoretical interventions are essential to render the discipline not only productive but also critically relevant? This special issue invites researchers to share their thoughts and research on the state of the discipline. Topics of interest are – but not essentially limited to – the following:

- The history of modern (foreign) literary studies at Iranian universities

- The legacies and limits of Area studies and Orientalist knowledge

- “Internal colonialism” and non-Persian Iranian languages and literary traditions
- Being/becoming World Literature: peripherality and universality
- Formulating the condition: Is combined and uneven development sufficient?
- The “literary” and comparatism: discipline building and curriculum development
- Conceptualizations of translation, imitation, and adaptation in a romanticist culture
- Disciplinarity and the question of visual cultures, digital literatures and future research.

Please send a 300-word abstract to both Omid Azadibougar omid.azadi@hunnu.edu.cn and Laetitia Nanquette l.nanquette@unsw.edu.au by 31 January 2023.

Timeline:

Abstract submission deadline: **31 January 2023**

Notification of acceptance: 28 February 2023

Paper submission deadline: 31 December 2023

Paper acceptance notification: 30 June 2024