

## Editorial

### Digital Humanities and the Interdisciplinary Perspective of Comparative Literature in Iran

It has been a long time since the field of Comparative Literature research has crossed the traditional boundaries of literary influences and entered into the new field of Cultural Studies. Culture is an amalgam of diverse discourses that are connected to each other with an invisible string despite their apparent diversity and contradictions. Literature is one of these discourses. Language, religion, rituals, myths, daily life, ideology, politics, history, national and religious ceremonies, ethics, social beliefs and norms, leisure time, entertainment, social media, gender, identity and ethnicity are all parts of the complex phenomenon called culture.

This is the spirit of NewComparative Literature, which, although literature is still its main pillar, has realized that literature cannot be properly and fully understood outside of its cultural context and relations with other humanities and arts. The paradigm shift of comparative literature in the 20th century begins here. About half a century ago, the seed of a new paradigm came to life in the womb of comparative literature. Although it was immature and crude at the beginning, despite all the difficulties and misunderstandings, superficiality and disorganization, which is one of the pitfalls any new knowledge, after a few decades it was established and found its way.

In this paradigm shift, new research fields emerged in comparative literature, among which the interdisciplinary relations of literature with philosophy, psychology, sociology, politics, translation studies, post-colonialism, migration and identity, globalization, visual and auditory arts such as cinema, radio, theater, painting, opera, music, computer and interactive games and digital arts can be observed.

Comparative literature is inclusive; it is not exclusive and, therefore, cannot be confined within any single discipline. Comparative literature is based on this principle that there is no border or limit for interaction, mutual thinking and dialogue, and this does not only include the languages and cultures of different nations, but embraces other fields of human knowledge and arts. Comparative literature, as I have said many times, is inter-linguistic, inter-cultural and inter-disciplinary. “Inter” or “between” in this context means bridge, connection, dialogue, and collective work. This intermediate characteristic of comparative literature is an opportunity to mingle with all national literatures and knowledge and make a new plan in literary studies and humanities.

Comparative literature has learned from others (meaning other cultures, languages and knowledge) and has shown that equal dialogue and understanding and respect for others leads to friendship, empathy and respect. Anyone who wants to enter this field, the door is open to her, no one and no knowledge is kept behind the door, she just has to believe in its intellectual principles, that is, interaction, understanding and human dignity in thought and speech.

In no way do I intend to limit comparative literature to elites. Comparative literature is not elitist. Undoubtedly, entering any field requires demands special scientific criteria: knowing two or three foreign languages, at least at the level of reading comprehension, familiarity with national and world literature, with literary theories and critical approaches. If we look at the accredited universities of the world, we find that the field of comparative literature does not have a bachelor degree, although the general courses of world literature in this field are very popular with students of other fields. Students of literature, humanities, and art departments can enter this field from the master level to get the necessary preparation for starting research in the doctoral course by taking basic courses in the field of theory and criticism and research methodology. From this stage onwards, the student is free to choose courses in other departments and languages based on his/her research area of interest. Thus, it is clear that any university cannot be responsible for opening a field with such diversity and extensive nature. Setting up a scientific field is subject to certain rules. First, there must be a job market and a need for that field. Second, lesson planning should be done in such a way that the student learns the knowledge and skills needed by the society. Third, the professors of this field must be trained in this broad field and have the necessary scholarly capabilities. Fourth, besides a strong department of national literature, the university conducting this field must have foreign literature, humanities and art departments. Having a humanities digital library and access to specialized international periodicals in this field are among the veto conditions of this field. Fifth and most importantly, administrators and educational planners should have trans-disciplinary and interdisciplinary insight. In the top universities of the world that have scientific independence, the faculty members of department play a key role in educational planning and offering new courses and areas of concentration. But in Iran, the final approval of a new discipline must be approved by the center, because otherwise, every university will pursue the development of postgraduate courses regardless of the necessary capabilities. It is often wrongly assumed that comparative literature, like other comparative sciences, does not require special facilities. In the past, comparative literature in Iran has been in the fringes, and, without a doubt, such a position does not accord the dignity and level of rich Persian literature. These days, the use of artificial intelligence and new technologies has attracted everyone's attention and is no longer limited to experimental, technical and business fields. Digital humanities, which is interdisciplinary in nature, is the gateway to artificial intelligence tools in the field of literary studies.

Many research projects that could not be done or were time-consuming two decades ago are now at our fingertips with the help of new technologies. Instead of books, students in the digital age take their computers and smartphones out of their bags in class. If the teacher is not familiar with these new technologies, it will be difficult for him to catch up with his students. Teaching a student who is connected to an ocean of information demands its own technological methods.

In Iran, literary fields are less inclined to benefit from innovative and technological tools. Many still prefer to work with traditional methods, and those who want to work in these technological fields have either not learned it properly or do not have the basic facilities. Nowadays, the interdisciplinary access of the researcher to the huge mass of unstructured data, plays an important role in literary analysis and provides the information needed by the researcher in the shortest time. It is necessary for higher education institutions in Iran to invest in the systematic expansion of digital humanities so that literary researchers can have a voice at the international level.

So we have to change our teaching and research methods. Digital humanities teach us that literature is a cultural phenomenon that incorporates multiple systems. Deep knowledge of literature without knowledge of other systems that have shaped it is impossible. Comparative literature is not a simple or isolated field; it is a new knowledge and philosophy in literary studies and humanities. Comparative literature is a set of disciplines in which different humanities departments gather together to enhance their communication and produce new collaborative knowledge.

Higher education in the world's academic environments is constantly changing because the needs of society are changing and universities are obliged to redefine their missions. Universities with several million students around the world, international professors and libraries with several millions of digital volumes is a dream that has come true. In such a situation, universities must constantly update their curricula so that they can attract better customers.

The secret of the university's survival lies in this innovation and skill training. Curriculum change is not limited to adding a few new textbooks. Any field of study that has no scientific or cultural application is removed. In this way the emerging disciplines find an opportunity to develop in accordance with the needs of the society, which ultimately leads to entrepreneurship.

What I want to say is the necessity of launching comparative literature as a discipline with an independent scientific field but under the broad umbrella of Persian literature in order to provide a cultural platform for interaction with other cultures so that we both know ourselves and others. I hope in near future comparative literature will have a chance to flourish.

The journal of *Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature, Art and Humanities* of Birjand University was formed based on this firm belief. Now, based on the articles published in the past four years and the feedback we have received, we are proud to

announce that we have moved towards the set goals in a purposeful and systematic way. The published articles indicate the efforts of the specialized editors and the editorial board of the publication. So far, this journal has published 180 articles in several fields of comparative literature such as Imagery, thematics, literary schools, literature and cinema, literature and psychology and psychoanalysis, literature and philosophy, translation studies, minority literature, diasporic literature, post-colonial literature, reception and literary fame, world literature, literature and painting, children's literature, literature and mythology, literature and linguistics, comparative epic literature, comparative genre, literature and semiotics, literature and sociology, literature and computer games, literature and politics, literature and clothing design, Literature and music, trauma studies, literature and environment, literature and animal rights and literature and religious studies. In order to internationalize the journal, we have published one issue in English which will continue.

With the unceasing effort and support of the staff of Birjand University and the Association for the Promotion of Persian Language and Literature of Iran, we have chosen the right path and have tried our best to be influential in the field of comparative literature and its specialized fields, i.e. interdisciplinary studies. It goes without saying that the unparalleled reception of the authors who have chosen this magazine to publish their articles has been our best encouragement and supporter in this way. Comparative literature, without any doubt, does not take place without working groups and scientific cooperation. We thank the almighty God that with the dedication and hard work of the editors of the magazine, we have been able to gain a noteworthy position among the magazines of our country.

**Editor-in-Chief**

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