

The ideal reader of Hösle's book already has read some Vico. Better, this is to say, to have read at least sections of the *New Science*, to have struggled a bit with the texture and taste of it, before following Hösle's authoritative "appropriation." Arguments over Vico have shaped several key moments in the history of historical and philosophical thought—we need only think of the layered arguments on this topic between Croce, Georges Sorel, and Giovanni Gentile—and one great merit of this translation may be to open up such a debate again. Such lofty possibilities aside, Hösle's book will be an invaluable aid to anglophones studying Vico going forward. Hösle is surely justified in his belief that it will help both students and his own colleagues (x). This is not only for the depth of its erudition and the scrupulous, extraordinarily useful system of references back to Vico's texts, but also just because of its interpretive ambition.

Eric Brandom

Joep Leerssen, *Comparative Literature in Britain: National Identities, Transnational Dynamics 1800–2000*. Studies in Comparative Literature 27. Cambridge: LEGENDA (Modern Humanities Research Association), 2019. Pp. 272. £75.00.

The publication of a book by Joep Leerssen, cultural historian and scholar in comparative literature, on the nature and evolution of comparative literature in Britain (published under the broad umbrella of the Modern Humanities Research Association) is welcome news. The book is a much-revised and translated avatar of Leerssen's 1979 master's thesis completed at the University of Aachen on the subject, a work which he had reworked and published in German in 1984. It is a major contribution to our understanding of comparative literature, of the study of literature in Britain and in Europe in the larger sense, and of the history of the humanities. Analyzing British comparativism in literary studies in Britain from 1800 to 2000, Leerssen contends that, unlike in continental Europe, the study of comparative literature in Britain did not emerge from the academic study of modern philologies. He sees comparative literature emerging in a context of academic literary cosmopolitanism in continental Europe, while he finds British comparativism imperial rather than cosmopolitan in its transnationalism. He finds a broad line of literature being studied in Britain in a mode of intellectual connoisseurship and literary criticism in the nineteenth century, with the periodical review a major site for such writing. There is, however, a wealth of rich intellectual history beyond these larger lines of argumentation.

Leerssen situates the state of universities in early nineteenth-century Britain, reminds us of the far more advanced intellectual conditions in the Scottish universities compared to their English counterparts, and shows the importance of the establishment

of the University of London in 1836, a university deeply influenced by Nonconformist, Scottish, and German traditions. The book captures a wealth of currents shaping the study of literature in the nineteenth century, such as comparative philology, anthropology, history writing, and literary internationalism. Leerssen's discussion of the Llanover circle of Celticists includes the nugget that Dwarkanath Tagore, Rabindranath Tagore's grandfather, a colorful entrepreneur and one of the pioneers of the "Bengal Renaissance" in India, was invited to an eisteddfod by this circle, with Christian Karl Josias von Bunsen, Prussian diplomat with a Welsh wife, recommending the event to Tagore on the basis of common Aryan roots. By the mid-nineteenth century, Leerssen shows, while comparatist tendencies could be found in a wide variety of settings in Britain, these tendencies were usually subsidiary parts of endeavors with other dominant flavors.

Matthew Arnold is a figure that Leerssen reimbues with freshness and acknowledgment of a major role in the development of comparative literary studies. One of Leerssen's excavations is a passage from Arnold's inaugural lecture at Oxford, "On the Modern Element in Literature" (1857): "And everywhere there is connexion, everywhere there is illustration: no single event, no single literature is adequately comprehended except in its relation to other events, to other literatures" (58). Influenced by figures such as French Positivists, and by Ernest Renan, while being a committed Goethean literary cosmopolitan, Arnold sees culture as the best, in both ethical and aesthetic senses, that is known and thought in the world, while also seeing it as a disinterested concern. While Arnold has been much criticized by leftwing and Global South critics, not least because an ossified understanding of his *Culture and Anarchy* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1869) held sway in academic settings, including in colonial contexts, Leerssen in my view rightly recuperates striking elements in Arnoldian thought that feel relevant today, including an attention to comparative literatures, an ability to see the multinational ways in which literature works, and emphasis on knowledge, research, and propagation. Leerssen also makes a very suggestive analysis of Arnold's tendency to use ethnicized imagery, congruent with what are seen by Arnold as opposing but necessary and complementary cultural values—the Hellenic, the Hebraic, and the Celtic are skillfully deconstructed in this book.

The entire section of the book under review on the nineteenth century is a treasure house of insights into cross-national and comparative ways of approaching knowledge. It is a great strength of Leerssen's that he can show how intellectual movements such as positivism influenced a whole range of emerging knowledge disciplines, most notably sociology, but also the study of literature, with Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett's *Comparative Literature* (London: Paul, Trench & Co., 1886) analyzed as a work of Positivist stadialism, different to the more Goethean world literature paradigms that Leerssen identifies in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century phenomena such as Joseph Texte's scholarship in French (notably on Jean-Jacques Rousseau as a literary

cosmopolitan), the establishment of the Nobel Prize for literature, and the establishment of P.E.N. International.

Leerssen's running thread of Celtic-Indian comparisons deserves to become a major trend in postcolonial studies. Henry Maine's *Village Communities in East and West* (London: Murray, 1871), which this reviewer knows is indispensable for the evolution of images of the village in literature and political thought in India, was a key influence on Ferdinand Tönnies' now classic, and still much used, distinction between the *gemeinschaft* (the traditional microcommunity) and the *gesellschaft* (modern society), we are reminded. Reading Leerssen, one comes to understand, too, how such work as Maine's influenced Posnett and the evolution of comparative literature.

Leerssen is firm in his intellectual position that while one may pursue comparative literature as part of the larger frameworks of cultural studies and cultural history, the study of literature has its own specificity, as the textual expression of culture, and as a self-reflecting expression of culture. Comparative literature can refer both to how things are assessed relationally, in a heuristic way, as well as to a more deliberate focus on the transnational and intermedial, Leerssen argues. Methodological reflection and efforts at rigor therein are vital, he reminds us.

The Victorian period and the 1970s emerge from this book as the most productive periods for the development of comparative literature in Britain. The unreflecting Eurocentrism of much of post-1945 internationalism in Britain, manifested by projects such as the International Comparative Literature Association's project on the comparative history of literatures in the European languages, is squarely acknowledged. The transformation of an area named Commonwealth literature (very much part of the British imperial and postimperial comparative context that Leerssen sees as formative for British comparative literature) into a large, pluriform field of postcolonial studies, conversing with constantly evolving adjacent fields such as women's and gender studies, is analyzed. Leerssen captures the fresh, productively disruptive energies of a whole variety of approaches that resisted ideologically unquestioning studies of literature, from the cultural materialist turn in which Raymond Williams, with his Welsh working-class roots, was a pioneer, to postcolonial studies, which is itself a field with many internal debates, while also offering, as Leerssen rightly argues, an influential template for other power-inverting approaches such as the ecocritical. This is, all in all, a book to be heartily recommended for a wide variety of readers interested in comparative studies in the humanities and social sciences, while being of particular interest to those wishing to understand the evolution of literary and cultural studies.

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