

# Comparative Literature's Place Amid the Anthropause and Anthropocene

**Alexandra A. Bichara**

Teaching Fellow, PhD Comparative Literature student, University of the Philippines Diliman,  
Email: aabichara@up.edu.ph

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## Abstract

Worsening climate change, the years-long global COVID-19 pandemic, and the continuous development of the digital humanities as well as big data have led to questions about the direction comparative literature is headed and how the field might navigate these changes. At the same time, comparatists have had to consider how exactly comparative literature and world literature courses might be taught in the classroom, considering knowledge and training in comparative literature is necessary in order to rethink and problematize world literature, constituting an ethics of world literature. Using texts from the American Comparative Literature Association as well as academics such as David Damrosch, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Zhang Longxi, and Ursula Heise, this article offers a glimpse at the current state of comparative literature, the appeal comparative literature offers students by way of engagement with and appreciation of their own and others' cultures, and the future of the field amid a world seemingly in constant crisis. This essay takes into consideration two particular timespans that have shaped and could still potentially mold the field of comparative literature: the Anthropause and the Anthropocene. The former refers to the dramatic pause or extreme slowdown in human activity due to the COVID-19 pandemic, while the latter pertains to the informal epoch in the geologic time scale referring to humans' profound impact on the planet, often placed at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. This paper examines these conditions external and internal to comparative literature and ecocriticism in order to emphasize their shared mission of recognizing, if not overcoming, alterity.

**Keywords:** comparative literature, digital humanities, ecocriticism, Anthropause, Anthropocene

## Introduction

Though comparative literature has undergone what have been described as numerous shifts and sea changes over the past few decades, the field is capable of much more considering the growth of the digital humanities and amid the climate crisis and global pandemic. Currently, however, it is faced with issues such as the lack of a dedicated department for comparative literature in universities or the shrinking job market for comparatists. Literary theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2017) writes that this is understandable because of the “competition between the language departments and comparative literature” (p. 220). At the root of it all, the field’s lack of funding as part of the humanities is likely to blame.

Often and in many parts of the world, this can be traced back to higher education institutions’ inclination to STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) education under the belief that the humanities are not profitable. In Britain, the humanities have frequently fallen victim to funding cuts in favor of STEM subjects. Journalist Alex Preston wrote in *The Guardian* in 2015 that liberal education appeared to be “dying a slow and painful death” as universities were treated more and more like profit centers than centers of learning (para. 4). In February 2020, the United Kingdom government reported that the country’s creative industries contributed almost £13 million to the national economy each hour. In October 2020, it was revealed that despite this encouraging data, the country cut funding for aspiring teachers in the arts (Clifford, 2020).

In the United States, a 2013 piece on *The New Republic* illustrated how the humanities have been beholden to politicians who believe that quantitative majors are more high-skill and high-wage, offering a better “return on investment” (Caplan-Bricker, para. 7). A similar debate stands in the Philippines, with supporters of the humanities arguing for the arts. Award-winning Filipina author Cristina Pantoja-Hidalgo wrote in the *Philippine Star* in 2019, “Literature, and the humanities as a whole, are even more important now than they used to be given the kind of world we live in (para. 11).” The same can be said of comparative literature, which seems to be in a never-ending process of institutional innovation in reaction to the world around it.

This institutional innovation is, according to Eric Hayot (2017), something that needs to be institutionalized—institutionalism being the “ways in which we think about and respond to institutions as academics and university professors” (p. 13). Instead of “before the fact operating within a set of constraints” (Hayot, 2017, p. 11) and reinforcing them,

comparatists should rethink the way they write what they write and when they do it. In other words, the system underlying comparative literature should be paid attention to as it “might alter the kinds of things it is possible for us to talk about and know” (Hayot, 2017, p. 12). This paper takes into consideration two particular timespans that have shaped and could still potentially mold the field of comparative literature and prompt institutional innovation: the Anthropause and the Anthropocene.

### **How Far the Field Has Come: The State of Comparative Literature**

It is Hayot’s mindset that has initiated various institutional steps forward, such as the Bernheimer Report of 1993, which Francine Masiello calls “a useful benchmark to situate a new vision for the discipline, identifying a broader context in which to place comparative studies in the United States and stretching the geographic focus of comparative literature beyond the usual emphasis of European literatures” (qtd. in De Ferrari, 2017, p. 179). In it, Charles Bernheimer emphasized that the field should help form and reconceive the canon. A new comparative literature was then born in the ‘90s, introducing a lasting approach to the expansion of the field and understanding of issues such as globalism and multiculturalism. According to Mads Rosendahl Thomsen (2017), the shift of American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA) reports “toward world literature was and is meaningful, emphasizing the cosmopolitan desire to read across languages and calling for new ways of thinking about comparison in a way that is less dependent on national frameworks” (p. 119).

In the 2017 ACLA State of the Discipline Report, “contributions from people located professionally outside the United States” (Hayot, p. 14) were included for the first time. Apart from including pieces from comparatists from other parts of the world, the report also featured work from assistant and associate professors, reaching yet another milestone. According to Hayot (2017), past reports only used to feature those who seemed to be “already at or near the peak of the profession” as if only those who were at the very top of institutions could speak about it. Hayot’s point in his essay revolved around how institutions go about constructing what they perceive as the truth in what he termed as “epistemological warfare” (2017, p. 15).

Through this institutional innovation, comparative literature has been moving away from Eurocentrism to cater to globalization as “the world has become a small ‘global village’” (Weifang, 2018, p. 38). In a 2011 discussion with Spivak, David Damrosch explained that “there has been a real sea change in the discipline since we of the older generation were in school when comparative literature really meant the study of a very

few, mostly Western European major literatures” (p. 455). Back then, comparatists were expected to compare various texts with each other instead of focusing on just one. Damrosch called it a “particular problem with singularity” (Damrosch & Spivak, p. 474). Quoting Werner Friedrich and Sukerhiro Hirakawa, he also explained that comparative and world literature programs typically only included literatures from NATO-nations or what Hirakawa referred to as the Greater West European Co-Prosperity Sphere. Through translation, however, “the world has opened up to a much broader set of nations” (Damrosch & Spivak, p. 456). This opening-up of the world was predicted by Thomas Greene in 1975 in response to the increase of comparative literature programs in the United States. Despite this progress, the deeper problems that hound comparative literature remain.

For one, world literature anthologies, which construct a certain vision of the world for their readers, are unable to target readers from all over the globe because “permission costs are too high” (Damrosch & Spivak, p. 457). Another problem many scholars have is the link between texts that have been translated and the field of comparative literature. Though globalization has supported an openness to other nations’ literatures and cultures, Li Weifang (2018) argues that it “is unable to eliminate the boundaries between powerful and weak nations” and, by cultivating a stronger sense of nationalism, “has not successfully brought true cosmopolitanism or internationalism” (p. 39).

The issues normally associated with world literature are more often than not associated with comparative literature as well, considering that “[o]ur work, supplementing, is para-sitical on world literature ideas” (Damrosch & Spivak, p. 466). According to Spivak (2011), comparative literature is a type of supplementation that is contingent—determining “the exact shape of a place that is empty in what is to be supplemented, zooming out, but not in competition with zooming in” (p. 468). The reason the two are so intertwined is that they, along with national literature, “exist in a dynamic interplay, and not one of these can eat the other up” (Damrosch & Spivak, p. 481). Today’s comparatists must take a good look at the institutions framing comparative literature and undo what many view as the pride of national literatures by teaching world literature well. This involves re-examining how they teach what they teach and how they construct the world for their students, allowing for more opportunities for students to thoroughly understand their own cultures as well as others, learn various languages, and start engaging with the other.

## **Constructing Appeal: Why Students Should Take Comparative Literature**

Students, on the other hand, should take comparative literature in order to not only learn how to read the world's literatures but learn how to “deal with the multitude of the world's literary culture” (*How to Read World Literature* 1). While many literary works are what Damrosch (2009) would call “culture-bound,” which means the works could only be truly understood by those of a specific group or by professionals, other literary works can reach beyond the time and place they were written, giving readers insight into the text's culture of origin and that specific culture's beliefs about literature and the world. Students of comparative literature are encouraged to read between what is familiar and unfamiliar, working from what is close to home and developing that “outward to a broader view” (*How to Read World Literature* 3) so that one might further understand the foreign. This way, distant worldviews are not equated to the familiar but are appreciated in terms of how certain literatures might have changed or influenced others through form or theme. According to Masiello, research like this should be done “from an equal footing of nations and cultures” (De Ferrari, 2017, p. 181), similar to a dialogue instead of having one nation's culture seem wholly dependent on another.

This appreciation by way of exposing oneself to literature from across the world, according to Zhang Longxi (2009), does not just involve surpassing Eurocentrism or placing more importance on non-Western literature rather than Western texts. The aim is to cultivate tolerance and respect for literature in various forms, views, and expressions, from one culture or from many, that are different yet connected. Students can read works by writers who “reach out to foreign literary traditions” (Longxi, 2009, p. 86) or reference other nations when creating their work, culturally translating what is foreign into the familiar for their target readers, whether they be from home or abroad. Reading world literature helps the world “reach a global vision of human creativity” (Longxi, 2009, p. 66) that recognizes similarities and differences as well as fosters a culture of “openness and sympathetic understanding...beyond the gaps of languages and cultures” (Longxi, 2009, p. 71). Marie-Therese Abdel-Messih (2013), in her piece on Comparative Literature in Arabic, argues in favor of this openness and interconnectedness in literature, writing, “Arab cultural processes cannot be studied as self-enclosed systems divided from world systems” (p. 231). In the case of Hemispheric American literature, Antonio Barrenechea (2017) suggests that in order to “engage the hemisphere without starting from the United States, American literature will have to be multinational, plurilingual, allowing for multiple points of entry between and among major and minor traditions” (p. 212). This is easier to do when students foster an appreciation for major and minor traditions early on.

Aside from growing a sympathetic appreciation for the world's literatures, students reading from a comparative perspective can determine what assumptions a culture might have about how or why literature is meant to be created. Longxi calls attention to the poetics of world literature, which points to a culture's "philosophical treatment of the nature and elements of literary representation" (2012, p. 356). By examining different cultures' view of daily life and understanding of their environment through their literature, students may formulate global concepts of ideas such as the notion of world literature itself, the origin of literature, or forms such as tragedy and comedy. For instance, Red Chan (2012) writes that East Asia's "rich and complex cultural heritage will ensure that East Asian readers' ideas of what constitutes 'world literature' will remain significantly different from those of readers of Western languages" (p. 473). Only through a global perspective of these concepts might students of comparative literature "arrive at more adequate understanding than is possible within the limits of a national or regional literary tradition" (Longxi, 2012, p. 362).

Perhaps the main reason most students would agree to study comparative literature, however, is to understand how world literature relates to themselves and their own cultures. John Burt Foster, Jr. (2009) wrote that his team of faculty members at his university were teaching "more and more first-generation American students whose parents came from every inhabited continent, foreign students who themselves had arrived from all these continents, and returning older students who had lived all over the world" (p. 156). His experience is backed by numbers gathered by the United States National Center for Education Statistics, which reported that the percentage of White students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools decreased from the year 2000 to 2017. In the fall of 2017, almost half of the 50.7 million enrollees were White. However, the rest were either Black, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian, Alaska Native, or of a combination of races ("Racial/Ethnic Enrollment", 2021). With classes becoming more diverse and universities encouraging globalization, both students and teachers are expected to nurture an awareness that "works of world literature are not windows on particular, self-enclosed cultures but are themselves sites of and embedded in larger dynamics of intercultural encounter and negotiation" (Foster, Jr., 2009, p. 159). Understanding these dynamics and cultural contacts can help students recognize how the global may have affected their local, native literature, making for a "globally conscious general education" (Foster, Jr., 2009, p. 163).

Looked at the other way around, a reader's education, ethnicity, religion, or other beliefs might make them resistant to learning certain texts. This could even be compounded by recent or current events similar to how the September 11 attacks proliferated a culture



of fear and anger against Islam, Muslims, and the Quran. According to Eric Sterling (2009), it is important for students to not only be exposed to spiritual literatures that feature other perspectives, but also learn to “not dismiss a text before reading and understanding it” (p. 391). A resistance to certain literatures of the world might indicate a resistance to otherness, which Masiello says “requires a study of archive and book in order to make sense of the distance that separates the observer from her object of study” (De Ferrari, 2017, p. 180). One must examine this sense of otherness and establish where and how it came to be.

All of this knowledge and training in comparative literature is necessary in order to rethink and problematize world literature, constituting an ethics of world literature. Peter Hitchcock (2012) suggests that a turn to ethics in either literature or philosophy is “a rethinking that has taken place within important philosophical and historical debates” (p. 366). However, no amount of world literature anthologies can result in a solid ethics considering that “an ethics of world literature can be proposed as a problem of methodology rather than as a system of proofs and demonstrations largely self-evident by restatement” (Hitchcock, 2012, p. 367). Instead of being a set of standards one must follow or a list of values one must tick off when reading world literature, an ethics of world literature is a method of constant questioning. In fact, Caroline D. Eckhardt (2009) writes that one point students need to understand is that their very engagement with world literature both “represents an ethical posture” and “is a conceptual and ideological practice” (p. 171). This kind of questioning and problematization is exhibited by the Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages project, which has begun to rethink concepts such as “Europe,” European languages” and other themes and structures that play across national boundaries. Margaret R. Higonnet said, “The possibilities seem open-ended” (qtd. in Dominguez, 2017, p. 47). That is especially true today in the age of the Anthropocene, which has been shaped by digital technology and marked by climate change.

### **A Shared Mission: The Digital, Environmental, and Comparative**

The Anthropocene, the informal epoch in the geologic time scale referring to humans’ profound impact on the planet, is a term that’s been in use since the year 2000. The official epoch the world is currently in is the Holocene, which began over 11,000 years ago and which was classified based on the Earth’s rock strata. Most scholars, however, agree that the Anthropocene began at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, forming the early years of when “human beings for the first time have become a ‘global geophysical force’” (Jonsson, 2012, p. 679).

In the same timeline and in a world where “power over archives and the knowledge they deliver becomes, in the global game, a condition of speaking with one’s own voice” (Kola, 2017, p. 51), the Internet—a perpetually alive and widely available archive—has shaped and continues to shape comparative literature as well as the Anthropocene as a whole. The Internet allows for the creation and preservation of records that are of great value to individuals and nations. While comparative literature was built to be a field of study connecting literatures and crossing the boundaries of nations and cultures, that practice has become “the normative practice of the Internet age” (Edmond, 2017, p. 240). It is now the norm to be faced with texts and users from different parts of the world. Writers can upload content onto the Internet based on the language of their target readers as well as combine their text with images and sounds, creating an intermedial experience. All of this allows users to navigate the transnational space for themselves every moment they are online. Put simply, “[t]he world wide web is the natural venue in which to find, to interact with, and to get to know ‘the other’” (Boruszko and de Zepetnek, 2015, para. 1).

For all its advantages, the Internet is also a “highly skewed and partial archive, subject to corporate and state control” (Edmond, 2017, p. 239). Quoting Jacques Derrida, Jacob Edmond (2017) explains that the archive is one that selects, filters, censors, and represses. Some scholars may feel suspicious of digital texts, believing them to be inferior to print texts and manipulated by what they do not understand. However, that does not mean that comparative literature is in any way dead. The Internet has only proven that “texts live multiple and changeable lives across space and time” (p. 243), and it is now comparatists’ job to act as archivists and explore, expand, and act in this relatively new field. Steven Totosy de Zepetnek and Graciela Boruszko (2015) write that, in response to the rise of digital humanities, “today’s academia needs to reorganize itself in order to evaluate online sources rather than disregard such as a ‘secondary’ level of scholarship (at best) (para. 9).”

Along with the opportunities made possible by the Internet, comparative literature has similarly benefited from digitization and big data as tools to acquire knowledge from the vast array of world literatures, constituting yet another shift in the discipline “as the digital format not only modifies the structure of the text but also creates new comparative structures” (de Zepetnek and Boruszko). This is not a bane to comparatists as Thomsen (2017) writes that “comparative literature, more than any other discipline, treats texts not just as sources or means to explain something else, but invests them with aesthetic value in and of themselves” (p. 121). Digital technology is not meant to



overshadow or take over comparatists' study but supplement the supplementing. Unfortunately, it still has a long way to go before more of the world makes use of it.

Franco Moretti, in a conversation with Ursula K. Heise (2017), explained that the digital humanities in the United States still lacks global approaches. According to him, "95% of the work on digital humanities is on English and American things," and Heise said the same is true for ecocriticism and the environmental humanities. She describes it as a challenge, and "[i]n ecocriticism, too, comparative literature was a latecomer – the field developed British and American approaches first and the global perspective later" (p. 274). Ecocriticism emerged in the '90s and expanded its scope from British and American literature, specifically British Romantic poetry and American nature writing, to "earlier periods of literature as well as to the literatures of Australia, East Asia, continental Europe, and Latin America" (Heise, 2013, p. 637). Like comparative literature and the digital humanities, ecocriticism and the environmental humanities tend to engage with the other. The difference is that the other in ecocriticism is "never purely human," as "alterity is always also defined by the nonhuman other" (Heise, 2013, p. 638). According to Heise, "ecocriticism brings a distinctly spatial imagination to bear on the question of alterity," focusing on the relationship between culture and nation (Heise, 2013, p. 638).

This shared mission toward globality and the other seems particularly evident and urgent throughout the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic: the Anthropause.

### **Not the Great Equalizer: Climate Change and the Global Pandemic**

Climate change appears to be accelerating and worsening every year. 2020 was one of the hottest years on record, setting off wildfires in places like California, Brazil, Siberia, and Australia. While parts of the world experienced extremely dry conditions, others experienced wet weather including storms and hurricanes. All of these disasters led not only to the death and destruction of humans, animals, and the environment but loss of livelihood and a decrease in agricultural output. According to *TIME*, "Scientists have proven that many of the events that took place in 2020 would have been far less likely, or even impossible, without changes to the climate that are being driven by the warming of the Earth" (Nugent, 2020, para. 3).

Because the damage and destruction caused by climate change are a global problem, many believe that the climate crisis is the great equalizer, placing all nations and cultures on an equal playing field against one great villain: the end of the world. This

cannot be further from the truth. Recent studies have shown that while “European, North American, and the more industrialized Asian countries such as Japan and China pollute more, less industrial countries will bear the brunt of first-world pollution almost on their own” (Grigoriadis, 2018, para. 4). This means numerous third-world or developing countries from Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia are expected to feel greater effects of climate change as a result of the actions of wealthier countries. Developing countries typically depend on their natural resources to grow their economies, so disasters such as wildfires and droughts will probably affect their nations financially as well as in terms of quality of life. This difference in impact is addressed by postcolonial ecocriticism, which “opposes the global North, where most of the planet’s economic wealth and political power is concentrated, with the global South, where human populations and natural systems disproportionately suffer the consequences of economic exploitation, toxification, and climate change” (Heise, 2013, p. 639).

What is interesting is that the rise and spread of ecocriticism have also called attention to the beginnings of the relatively new interdisciplinary field of animal studies, which has moved the animal and the sometimes metaphorical oppression of the human and non-human to the forefront in much the same way the global COVID-19 pandemic has exposed people’s prejudices against certain races and practices. The novel coronavirus, which was detected at the end of 2019, was initially traced back to a wet market in Wuhan, China. Wet markets, which are markets that sell fresh meat, seafood, and produce, are differentiated from dry markets which sell durable products. Apart from selling fresh and live animals, however, wet markets are also known for selling wild animals (sometimes, illegally). Wet markets are fairly common in China, and the market perceived as COVID-19 ground zero in Wuhan is said to have sold wild animals such as crocodiles, snakes, and porcupines (Maron, 2020).

This link between the virus that caused the pandemic and wet markets brought about a newfound interest in wildlife markets, which sell wild animals either to be eaten or cared for as pets. Because illegal, unregulated wildlife markets are rampant in China and parts of Southeast Asia, most of the attention remained on them in spite of markets in Africa, Latin America, and India also selling wild animal meat. While there was widespread outrage over wildlife and wet markets following the discovery of the virus, China refused to close its wet markets. Almost three years later, many continue to criticize China for its choice of cuisine, but others have also taken a closer look at their own habit of eating animals. Many have realized that viral pathogens can spread among animals slaughtered and sold, no matter if they are wild or bred for food. A one-liner spread by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, better-known as PETA, to

convince the public to go vegan is impossible to dispute: “Tofu never caused a pandemic.”

The role of comparative literature at a time when entire nations were mandated to quarantine and practice social distancing, preventing them from traveling to other countries and connecting with others outside their own homes, is difficult to disentangle from the digital humanities. The two fields allow ordinary people to cross national boundaries without taking a train or getting on a plane. All the earlier aforementioned reasons students should take comparative literature still stand, but the most likely way comparative literature will survive possible future pandemics is by responding to the main issues posed by it: the world’s treatment of animals and the role climate change plays in pandemics.

One could look at how animals are depicted in various world literatures in comparison with current practices in the texts’ cultures of origin or similar practices in other countries and cultures. Studies like this are crucial considering that “[t]o depict animals is to take stock of difference, the differences among the animals depicted, but also the differences obtaining between the animals depicted and those that depict them” (Robles, 2017, p. 304). According to Heise, the depiction of the exploitation of animals often points to “humans’ oppression of humans, as the frequent assimilation of indigenous peoples, colonized populations, and more generally racial others with animal existence highlights.” The fact that humans depict themselves in texts as separate from non-human animals also suggests that “humans’ willingness to assume a categorical difference between themselves and other kinds of animals enables discrimination against other persons” (Heise, 2013, p. 640).

A study published in 2019 on the link between speciesism and prejudice reported that psychological studies show that speciesism might rely on “similar psychological processes and motivations as those underlying other prejudices” such as racism and sexism (Everett et al., 2009, p. 785). This is proven by how coverage of Chinese wet markets and eating practices at the start of the pandemic fueled racism and xenophobia against Asians worldwide—an attitude that is still common one year later. While politicians such as United States President Donald Trump called the novel coronavirus the “Chinese virus,” others like the governor of Veneto referenced the “Chinese eating mice alive” (“Covid-19 Fueling Anti-Asian Racism,” para.6 ). Rats and mice may not be delicacies in Italy, but they are still commonly eaten in places like India, Africa, and Thailand. There is also the question of whether eating cows, pigs, and chickens is any better than eating rats and mice, especially in the wake of studies suggesting that the

latter possess a higher intelligence than previously thought. Comparative literature can help the world address these questions by encouraging an openness to and respect for the other, human or non-human.

In the same vein, comparatists can examine how literature and cultures were affected by the Anthropause, also known as the dramatic pause or extreme slowdown in human activity due to the pandemic. With millions of people on lockdown in an effort to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus, the planet experienced the effects of situations such as a decline in tourism and the non-use of automobiles. According to Jeff Goodell of the *Rolling Stone*, the Anthropause allowed scientists to observe and conduct natural experiments, through which they could compare the changes in nonhuman animal behavior before, during, and perhaps even after the pandemic (2020). Scientists from the International Bio-Logging Society, for example, are investigating how the lack of boat, aircraft, and vehicle traffic has changed animals' movement patterns. Francesca Cagnacci of the Edmund Mach Foundation's Research and Innovation Centre even found that animals that would not wander around forests during the daytime suddenly were during the Anthropause. If scientists from other fields could launch studies looking at the world and animals before, during, and after the Anthropause, comparatists can, too. Though the circumstances surrounding the Anthropause are tragic, the chance to study the literatures of the world depicting the result of a time when human activity on Earth was extremely limited is a remarkable opportunity. In theory, any literature created before, during, or after the Anthropause is worth studying in this way because, according to Robert Kern, "all texts are at least potentially environmental (and therefore susceptible to ecocriticism or ecologically informed reading) in the sense that all texts are literally or imaginatively situated in a place, and in the sense that their authors, consciously or not, inscribe within them a certain relation to their place" (qtd. in "Globality, Difference, and the International Turn in Ecocriticism" 640).

It is also worth studying how climate change could have had a hand in causing the pandemic and all future pandemics. Experts like Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, have proposed that the climate crisis is one of the reasons the COVID-19 pandemic came about. There are several reasons this may be true: Arctic permafrost containing ancient pathogens are thawing, some bacteria are thriving in warmer climates, and animals forced to migrate due to climate change or human activity are exchanging pathogens with other humans and animals in faraway places. In an interview, Fauci said humans "need to be prepared – both from a public-health standpoint as well as from a scientific standpoint" because

current interactions between humans and the environment “will have a great effect on vector-borne diseases” (qtd. in Goodell, 2020, para. 12). Comparatists can shed light on various nations’ treatment of the environment to encourage the “preparedness” Fauci is promoting. With hurricanes and storms expected to become more destructive, warm temperatures predicted to stay, and the Arctic Ocean projected to be ice-free by 2035, there is more urgency to the field than ever before.

### **Comparative Literature Years From Today**

There is no telling what is in store for comparative literature long past the pandemic because “[w]orld literature as a concept and as a body of literary works is still growing, and so is world poetics, which promises to provide us with critical perspectives more expansive than ever before” (“The Poetics of World Literature” 363). However, whether the field will have to respond to yet another pandemic or even more groundbreaking digital advancements, it might still benefit from suggestions already put forth by today’s comparatists.

S. Shankar (2017), in his essay “The vernacular,” wrote that “the vernacular is still a horizon of possibility” for the field (p. 223). By exploring a vantage point separate from the national and the transnational in terms of texts written in the vernacular and with a vernacular sensibility, comparative literature is bound to grow and further understand “literary texts in terms of locality” (Shankar, 2017, p. 223), creating a more inclusive field. This can be achieved by learning vernaculars, which calls to mind Spivak’s (2017) call for more language study considering that “the emphasis on languages is getting less and less important as the corporatized university goes toward globalized uniformity” (p. 220). To make language study more appealing to potential comparatists, Spivak (2017) suggests publishing a volume featuring the careers comparatists can have, “including the development of comparative literature in lesser-known languages” (p. 221). A similar project would likely help comparatists working with dialects and vernaculars as well.

A shift from mostly intuition to scientific methodology could also enhance studies in the field. In an attempt to solve the flawed methods of comparative literature and its lack of systemic study, de Zepetnek proposed an outline of comparative literature in the form of a manifesto. Approaching comparative work from a scientific lens and coming to conclusions based on a methodology instead of feeling can lend more credibility to the field. Another aspect of the sciences comparatists should adopt is the tendency to collaborate with other professionals, either from comparative literature or other fields. Having the expertise of others in a team can enhance a study’s “understanding of the

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interplay between global and local, national and transnational, challenging the lingering construction of a unidirectional world system that relays advanced Western multimedia technologies to non-Western and postcolonial peripheries” (Dominguez, 2017, p. 38).

Comparatists of the future might still be interested in the digital and environmental humanities. Speaking with Heise, Moretti referenced Fernand Braudel’s concept of *longue durée* and how Braudel thought “the historian of the future will be a programmer or nothing else” (Heise, 2017, p. 275). Though Moretti explained he believed the digital humanities had yet to bring a significant change to the historical landscape, it is not out of the question. Meanwhile, there is still much to study and a multitude of concepts to challenge in the *longue durée* of nations, the planet, and comparative literature.

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