

INTRODUCTION: LANGUAGE, LITERATURE, AND HUMAN SUSTAINABILITY

Djelal Kadir

Department of Comparative Literature, Pennsylvania State University, USA

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Summary

In the five essays collected in this section the authors explore the nature of language and its relationship to culture (See: *Languages and Cultural Dialogues*), theoretical and historical perspectives on literary uses of language (See: *Historical And Theoretical Perspectives Of Literature*), interpretation and the need for comparing literary artifacts and their interpretations (See: *Hermeneutics Need and the Inevitability of Comparing*), unity and diversity, or fragments and the impulse for unitary wholeness in dealing with correlative legacies from the past (See: *The Notion of Comparing and the Meeting of the Fragments*), and the disciplinary history of comparative literature as evolving field that frames the endeavor of literary scholars concerned with investigating and understanding human cultures and their linguistic productions in relational terms (See: *Comparative Literature and the Plural Vision of Discourse*).

Our aim is to document the basic concepts and terms of a discourse concerned with the literary uses of language in diverse human contexts and explore the contribution of a field called Comparative Literature to the store of sustainable human knowledges that enhance human sustainability in its global diversity.

1. The Nature of Knowledge

The cultivation and sharing of knowledge poses a number of basic questions: What is knowledge? How do we know? How are we known? What are the consequences of knowledge? These are defining questions. Epistemology is the technical term for the issues indicated by these questions, which define who we are, how we survive, and what our survival signifies for the life world we occupy. When we connect epistemology to survival, we are speaking of sustainability. Since we are concerned with human knowledge and the survival of the human, the focus of our concerns falls on how the human is differentiated from other forms of life.

2. Language and the Specificity of the Human

In many cultures through history, language and its uses have traditionally been identified as a defining factor that distinguishes the human from other species. Human knowledge, be it functional, instrumental, or symbolic, is attained through language. Literature in its diverse forms, as described in the essays in this section, has been among the most intricate uses made of language. Comparative Literature is one of the most advanced modes of reflection on and assessment of this linguistic phenomenon and its distinct manifestations in different human traditions and in different eras of human history around the world.

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Biographical Sketch

Djelal Kadir is the Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of Comparative Literature at the Pennsylvania State University. He is the Founding President of the International American Studies Association and former Editor of the international quarterly *World Literature Today*. He has also served on the editorial board of *PMLA* and continues to serve on the editorial board of a number of scholarly journals, including *Comparative Literature Studies*, *Comparative American Studies*, *Modern Fiction Studies*, *CR: Centennial Review*, *Revue Française d'Études Américaines*, *Comparative Critical Studies: The Journal of the British Comparative Literature Association*, and *Dedalus: Revista Portuguesa de Literatura Comparada*. He is the Co-Editor of *Literary Cultures of Latin America: A Comparative History*, 3 vols. (Oxford UP, 2004), of the *Longman Anthology of World Literature*, 6 vols. (2003), of *Other Modernisms in An Age of Globalization* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2002), and editor of a special issue of *PMLA* on "America: The Idea, the Literature" (January 2003). Some of the books he has authored include: *Columbus and the Ends of the Earth: Europe's Prophetic Rhetoric As Conquering Ideology* (University of California Press, 1992); *The Other Writing: Postcolonial Essays in Latin America's Writing Culture* (Purdue University Press, 1993); *Questing Fictions: Latin America's Family Romance* (University of Minnesota Press, 1987). He has authored numerous articles, essays, and reviews in the field of American Studies, globalization, and comparative cultural studies. He is a member of the international board of *Synopsis: The European School of Comparative Studies*, as well as an elected member of the Governing Board of the American Comparative Literature Association.