

## Book Review

Albert Russo: *Zulu Zapy Wins the Rainbow Nation*, Hardcover published by Cyberwit.net (India), 2010, 230 pages, US\$ 25, ISBN 978-81-8253-168. Softcover published by Poets Printery (South Africa), ISBN 13-978-0-620-46995-1.

Review by: David Alexander

Authors who, like Shakespeare, make wisdom come out of the mouths of fools are nothing new. In addition to fools, juveniles, curmudgeons and ingenues have all been created by authors to speak truths that would otherwise be hard to take or impossible to *fathom*. The technique may be as old as literature itself, but the distinction of having done it exceedingly well has been won by only a few. Voltaire, in creating *Candide*, was among these select few writers. Mark Twain, in *Huckleberry Finn* was another. Dickens was a master of the art. Albert Russo is also a master of this art, and a modern master at that. His hand is sure and his store of bon mots, exiting with irrepressible verve from his continuing character Zapinette, seems inexhaustible, as does Zapinette's supply of malapropisms attuned to the trend-consciousness of 21st century global society. Indeed while the word malapropism refers to the Dickensian character Mrs. Malaprop, whose pronouncements were the direct opposite of apropos, I suggest that the new coinage of *zapropisms* should be used to denote the deliberate misuse of trendy, hip or globalist catchwords of this century, just as Ms. Malaprop made a cleverly ambiguous mockery of those of the 19th by her locutions, for Zapy is a veritable *zapropotamus* of zapropisms that help make the book a delight to read. (And I use the word "delight" advisedly, reflecting back along the turned tides of decades to the moment in a college class on the Romantic poets with British poet Elizabeth Sewell, who remarked when I stated that the purpose of literature was to entertain that, no, literature's purpose was to "delight, not entertain." Sewell used the word delight in the same sense 19th century critic Matthew Arnold used it. Steeped in Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley and the like, she'd had a very precise gamut of meaning for the word, as I do, here.)

The novel's plot takes Zappinette, in the company of her usual foil, or straight-man, her Uncle Berky (variously called Unky Berky or Uncle Bonka), to visit family in South Africa, a trip resulting from a contest run by the French government, the fine print of whose terms required the travelers to act as unofficial ambassadors of goodwill on what, according to contest rules, is a "humanitarian" journey in which they'll have to complete "fieldwork" and report back to the French government. Here it should be noted that our 12-year-old heroine Zapy is a personification of global culture not only by her world wide webbish patter and blogospheric quips, but via a family heritage as diversified as a multinational corporation, with branches in major countries around the

world. The South African part of this multicultural franchise is represented by "three distant cousins ... whose Huguenot forebears had fled France during the religious wars." The first of these kin we encounter is cousin Kif and his "barrel-like" wife Maatje (pronounced, we are helpfully informed Maa-tcha) who live on a ranch near Gravelotte, which is a town outside Pretoria, and which Zapy and Uncle Berky plan to spend a week at before moving on to Durban, their next stop, where yet more family will make them their guests.

Their first stop, though, is Johannesburg, where the second part of the title referring to the Rainbow Nation, makes its presence manifest. Through the eyes and the voice of Russo's effervescent ingenue's rollicking first person narrative, we're given a grim picture of the realities of South Africa today, that emerge through the thin sugar coating like the awful taste of the inside of an M 'n M when the chocolate's been left sitting in the sun too long and you first bite down through the candy shell. Rainbows are, after all, illusions, as are the pots of gold at their end, and when the word, or words like it, is used to describe a social milieu it's generally self-mockery. Just as the so-called Gorgeous Mosaic that Mayor David Dinkens would have liked New York City to have been when he occupied Gracie Mansion was the very opposite of gorgeous and, if a mosaic, a shattered and contentious one, so the rainbow of this Rainbow Nation arches over a land of suffering and disparities which has become more rather than less divided and troubled since the end of Apartheid.

One of Albert Russo's greatest strengths as a writer is the clear-seeing eye he casts on the inequities and injustices of life, including those glaring breaches of the social contract that we all have to put up with but really shouldn't, and here he is also reminiscent of that earlier paragon of big-hearted social conscience, Charles Dickens. Although the narrative cycle of which Zulu Zapy is a part bears a subtitle which refers to Zapy's "hilarious adventures around the world" this, as all other Zapiquette novels (*hilarious* though they may be) are works that don't shrink from the responsibility of all the best literature to fulfill one of an author's chief goals, which is to tell us (or if not tell *us*, then show *us*) that seemingly mundane and unremarkable yet so very often implausible and vagrant thing: the truth.



Prof. Anand B. Patil: *Literary into Comparative Culture Criticism*, Ambala: Associate Publishers, 2011, pp.425.

Pre-Review by: Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek  
August 2010, Liverpool and Boston

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Professor Anand B. Patil's book, *Literary into Comparative Culture Criticism* - he uses in the title of his book the British term "culture criticism" instead of the US-American "cultural studies," i.e., "cultural criticism" - is a welcome addition to the emerging field of "comparative cultural studies," a field that, as he points out, is, in the West, a field "in-between." This is because comparative literature scholars in the U.S., Canada, and Europe in general often object to cultural studies owing to the perception of a lack of theoretical framework(s) and its ideological nature, while cultural studies scholars object - in my opinion rightly so - to comparative literature's (still and ongoing) adherence to the national approach and its Eurocentrism. Following an in-depth discussion of the state of affairs of comparative literature and cultural studies - theoretical and in practice - Professor Patil's book applies his ideas to the situation of India, a multi-lingual and multi-cultural space where, clearly, the global and interdisciplinary approach of comparative culture criticism makes perfect sense. A further perspective Professor Patil's book offers is the view and workings of scholarship by a scholar and creative author: this perspective is important because it provides for a combined view of the two areas of creative activity and scholarship. To me, one of the many important issues raised in the book is Professor Patil's discussion of the dependence of Indian scholarship on Western theories: this dependence, while understandable, does a disservice to scholarship. India and China - where the situation is similar - are ancient cultures with substantial theoretical thinking embedded in both scholarship and creative works and it is high time that scholars in India and China develop "home-grown" frameworks and Professor Patil's book represents a welcome start in this direction. Of course, here I, too, am "guilty," as it were, since my own sources and work remain Western based and thus it comes that Professor Patil's book represents a relevant and important contribution to global comparativism. Here, I present a brief outline of the current state of affairs of comparative literature and its recent corollary, world literature, a framework emanating (again) from the U.S. mostly, an attempt to revive comparative literature under the concept of "world literature" and that underlines Professor Patil's thought.

The perspective and use of comparison in scholarship have been and are widely employed in various disciplines and perhaps one of the best argumentation for the relevance of comparativism in the humanities and social sciences is put forward by Marcel Detienne in his *Comparer l'incomparable* (36-39; see also Fredrickson's *The Comparative Imagination*). Yet, in the humanities, the discipline of comparative

literature has a history of insecurity and battles with regard to its lack of definition and the lack of a theoretical framework and methodology. These lacunae — acknowledged repeatedly in the discipline since its inception in the nineteenth century — are a result of the discipline's interdisciplinary construction and its borrowing from other disciplines for the analysis of literature and other kinds of cultural production, which, in my view ought to be perceived as positive rather than negative. In terms of institutional presence, the discipline gained currency most successfully in the U.S. and in Europe (albeit in the latter to a lesser extent) and there it is undergoing a diminishing presence since the interest in and adoption of literary and culture theory in departments of English and because of the discipline's Eurocentrism (see, e.g., Pireddu; Tötösy de Zepetnek, *Comparative Literature*, "The New Humanities"; Witt). This shortcoming is augmented by its construction (theoretical and applied) as based on national literatures at a time when the paradigm of the global has gained currency in many disciplines and approaches. Since the 1980s the discipline has been under pressure to justify its institutional validity owing to the arrival of cultural studies. Despite these developments, with regard to the U.S., Haun Saussy claims that "Comparative Literature has, in a sense, won its battles. It has never been better received in the American university. ... Our conclusions have become other people's assumptions" (3). While Saussy's analysis that comparative literature's aims and scope have gained currency in literary study is well argued and a welcome positive view, what is missing in his assessment is attention to the discipline's institutional constriction in the U.S. (which happens to be the case also in Europe). His positive view of the new status quo is contrary to the pronouncements of, for example, Susan Bassnett in her *Introduction to Comparative Literature* that the discipline is dead (3), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's suggestion with the title of her book *Death of a Discipline* (i.e., comparative literature), or such as the entry "Comparative Literature" in the *Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms* (GMH). Altogether the two opposing views - that the idea of comparative literature conquered literary study and that the discipline is dead - refer to the U.S. and Europe and while both may be correct assessments depending on whether one considers the discipline's intellectual content or its institutional status, they suggest a Euro-US-American-centric worldview and do not take into account the emergence of the discipline in Asia (Mainland China, India, the Arab World) and Latin America, or even developments in countries such as Spain, Italy, Greece, etc. While the humanities have a difficult stand with regard to funding and social relevance everywhere and historically so, since the arrival of new media and the internet and thus the development of the frequency and expansion of communication new possibilities emerge for scholarship. And while the humanities in general are slow in the incorporation of new media in their use in scholarship and pedagogy, comparative literature - because of its intrinsic character of inter-disciplinarity - would be a natural locus of contravening the trend of

constriction and diminishing presence. The adoption of digital humanities would serve the discipline well if the new generation of scholars has the opportunity to gain faculty positions in comparative literature.

The concept of "world literature" originates in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's proposal of *Weltliteratur* where he developed, among others, the relevance and importance of translation and argued against the national conception of literature (for examples on the current understanding of the relevance of Goethe's concept, see, e.g., Birus; Sturm-Trigonakis). While the concept did not gain presence as a structure in institutional settings (i.e., university departments of world literature), the concept has always been a standard in comparative literature, the structure that gained, instead, currency as an intellectual and pedagogical concept and as an institutional unit and academic degree designation. Early texts adopting the concept with specific naming include books such as Walter Blair's *The History of World Literature* (1940) or Wilhelm E. Mühlmann's *Pfade in die Weltliteratur* (1984). In recent years perhaps against the shortfalls of comparative literature - Eurocentrism, the loss of its locus of literary and culture theory, and its insistence on the national approach - the concept has gained renewed interest not only as a theoretical concept but also as an institutional structure as in university degree granting departments. Recent texts adopting the concept of world literature promoting a global understanding of literature, as well as the study and teaching of literature include David Damrosch's *What is World Literature?* (2003) and *How to Read World Literature* (2009), Mary Gallagher's *World Writing: Poetics, Ethics, Globalization* (Ed., 2008), John Pizer's *The Idea of World Literature: History and Pedagogical Practice* (2006), Christopher Prendergast's *Debating World Literature* (2004), Karen-Margarethe Simonsen's and Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen's *World Literature Culture: History, Theory, Analysis* (2008), Elke Sturm-Trigonakis's *Global Playing in der Literatur. Ein Versuch über die Neue Weltliteratur* (2007), and Suman Gupta's *Globalization and Literature* (2009), and the forthcoming volume *The Routledge Companion to World Literature* (Ed. Theo D'haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir (2011) (for bibliographies of comparative literature and culture, see Tötösy de Zepetnek, "Selected Shortlist of (Text)Books in Comparative Literature," "Bibliography for Work in Comparative Literature and Culture").

Although in the U.S. and Canada there is a slight and occasional development towards the establishing of departments and professorships specifically designated as in "world literature," it remains to be seen whether the concept would indeed develop as degree granting units, thus according it an institutional base. Courses in world literature exist everywhere, but the difference is that while such courses are taught, there are few and in-between departments of such. Regardless of the diminishing university presence of comparative literature as a degree granting field in the West and its emergence,