foreign language and English departments. What emerged from those discussions, in the words of Paul Reichardt, was "more a matter of 'reality' than 'renewal'—basically, an admission that such collaborations as existed were fundamentally mergers of departments apparently motivated by administrative convenience." And the collaboration's "primary purpose" for the faculty was "to nurture and defend language and literature study in a rather indifferent, if not openly hostile, academic environment" (14).

The world has truly changed in the past two decades. I regard this conference as a wonderful opportunity to think ourselves into some new educational paradigms that reflect the new epistemological paradigms that, since 11 September, may have quickened their pace but were, in fact, already slouching toward Bethlehem to be born.

Note

[1] Although I focus in this essay on collaborations between foreign language and English departments, there are also extraordinary opportunities for collaboration now opening up between humanities disciplines and the hard sciences, whose research and discoveries have ever more substantial implications for what it means to be human. And cultural differences figure significantly in this conversation.

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The Post-English English

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The relation of English to other language-oriented departments, though dense with complexity, is rarely talked about in the open. One explanation for the lack of discussion may be the difficulty of framing a relation that is moving in two directions at once: while over the last generation or so English and the so-called foreign languages have come to resemble each other in substance, they have grown apart in material resources and institutional prestige. Many departments of English are more or less thriving, while departments of other languages and literatures in the same places are depleted and struggling. And yet, in the view of many of the people who determine our condition—administrators, legislators, and students—we are largely all of a piece; my problems will soon be yours, yours will be mine, and scholars and teachers of literature will find that they have far more joining than dividing them. To revive one of the rubrics of our New York University conference,

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we literary scholars are much better at collating the many ways we are different than identifying and leveraging the ways we are the same. How much does our declining influence in academy and society owe to an incapacity to come together and announce our identity when it matters? I take the position that we now have an ethical obligation to do what inclination and training have so badly prepared us for: to measure our sameness and difference on one scale and talk about what we can do together. How can people in English departments address this condition? What might those in other literature departments do? Having spent a career moving between these settings, I offer some reflections.

Departments of English collectively are enjoying an era of intellectual and material sufficiency unrivaled in the humanities now, and perhaps at any time since the 1960s. This prosperity comes unmixed with serious reflection on the fundamental nature and problems of the discipline: I would be surprised if anyone proposed that there is now a consensus, or even much of a discussion, about what the field of English is supposed to be. A spate of provocative books of the 1980s and 1990s about the discipline has subsided, having not generated conversation adequate to their implications for the field (Graff; Watkins; Readings; Scholes). Most of the hard questions have been postponed. Meanwhile, if English departments are not always expanding in numbers of faculty members, they are widening their reach by taking on topics and materials that used to be the exclusive property of other fields, such as Spanish and comparative literature. Nearly twenty years ago I was an oddity, a graduate student in English whose dissertation included chapters on Spanish and Latin American literature. And when I was an assistant professor, again in an English department, I was believed by my senior colleagues to have wasted two crucial summers in the run-up to tenure by learning Portuguese and cultivating a familiarity with contemporary Brazilian poetry. Now the study of English and Spanish together is an articulated subfield, with postings in the MLA Job Information List and a large conference, the Ibero-American Summit, recently concluded in Tucson. Several prominent younger scholars of contemporary American poetry, and one of my PhD students, have made themselves into Brazilianists as well. At Stanford one of our assistant professors in Spanish was hired away last year—to an English department. At this moment, any department of English that has not opened itself to a real or potential multilingualism—in fields across the departmental spectrum such as early modern British, American, Latino and Latina, Asian American, and modern literatures and cultures—has set itself against a tide of disciplinary renovation taking place in practice, though not in theory.

However, the deferral of hard questions about the nature and purposes of English comes at what will soon be a steep price. Departments have expanded their scope not out of a considered decision to do so, but out of an imperial logic—because for cultural and institutional reasons, they can. When the next wave of contractions or the next shift in paradigms comes, will these newly broadened departments have a common understanding of themselves? Seen one way, as a reflection of a now multilingual American society, the redrawing of departmental boundaries is necessary and inevitable, and surely it is. But consider that through all the changes of the last thirty or forty years, the one thing that has held together English, the discipline, is English, the language. If the multilingual English department is not reasoned but insensible—the projection of institutional power for power's sake—then it will not alter the disciplinary landscape in any decisive way. Professors and students of English will rethink the nature of that investment when they recognize a different kind of knowledge emerging from multilingual scholarship and teaching, not when they find themselves in a bigger or more powerful department. We are now coming to see the gains of a post-English English, but the imperial

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expansion of the discipline has well outpaced the conversation that should have preceded it.

Spanish is obviously unique among the other literature departments; in many ways it already is the post-English English. What does this mean in practice? Throughout the twentieth century, as the study of literature became respectable, a mantle of inevitability has always hung over the works and norms of the native or national language (or languages, as in Canada). Today in the United States academy we witness the passing of that mantle in slow motion, from English to Spanish, until eventually it clings to both languages in different ways. The greatest challenge for Hispanists in this era, it seems to me, will be to see themselves as fluidly as they are seen by their prospective students and colleagues in other languages. Think of how evanescent the boundary between British and American literatures has come to seem in the past twenty years or so: will the line between peninsular and Spanish American literatures fade likewise, without a struggle? Will those categories themselves—peninsular and Spanish American—come apart as readily as British and American have done, seeming almost markers for a plethora of more particular standpoints? And will the rise of Spanish finally break down the notion of "foreign" language that informs academic structures of all sorts, including the MLA itself?

The attenuation of the other literature departments, especially those other than Spanish, has paralleled the reinvigoration of English in many places. Each side of this relation, English and the foreign languages, has its own critical issues on which to build a future by taking a stand—and while for English that issue has been how and why to expand to include other languages, for the foreign literatures it has been how and why to accommodate translation. Too many departments either shrink from translation by custom or embrace it too easily, without reasoning how it might be injected into a curriculum strategically, as a point of entry to more advanced work with original materials. Then there are further questions: What do we study when we study German? French? Japanese? Can these disciplines be made to reinvent themselves from the inside out, as some English departments are doing in their careful adaptation to multilingualism? Will they take their subject to include the French-speaking world, or the Chinese diaspora, or the ethnic contradictions in Germany? As with English, departments that address those kinds of hard questions will prosper and, ironically, will attract the resources necessary to maintain even those traditional approaches that might seem threatened, not enhanced, by such questions. It is worrisome to imagine what will happen to those departments that do not.

What about comparative literature, the discipline that has the office of mediating the frictions between English and the other literatures? It has now been nearly a decade since the publication of the collection entitled *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, edited by the late Charles Bernheimer, and I am struck by how little progress has been made on reframing the stark divisions depicted in that volume. Institutional comparative literature is nearly a misnomer—the discipline exists in fewer than a hundred institutions, perhaps fifty that offer graduate education—and comparatists are a notoriously individualistic lot. Still, the quiescence of many comparative literature departments during an unsettled time has been something less than encouraging, since all the foregoing issues mentioned here are long familiar to that field.

If comparative literature departments will not join these debates, should comparatists do so as individuals? Most PhDs in comparative literature are hired into national literature departments, and a substantial number of these are found in English. How many of these still think of themselves as comparatists after five or ten years in such departments? How many will contribute as comparatists to the redefinition of their departments? For several years in the 1990s I was an unwelcome member of a large state university English department—I had

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come there to direct a program in comparative literature—and in that time we hired four or five PhDs in comparative literature as assistant professors of English, all of whom are now tenured. You might think that these colleagues would be in the front ranks of a local rethinking of the meaning of English as a discipline. But in my experience, within a year or two most PhDs in comparative literature take on the disciplinary coloration of those departments in which they find themselves, becoming, say, Shakespeareans or Americanists with a vengeance. To do otherwise with some degree of subtlety—for instance, to be both a credible Shakespearean and a committed comparatist—can be one of the hardest self-inventions in the academy; its rewards tend to be intangible, while those of assimilation are everyday and immediate. So in both institutional and individual terms, comparative literature is anything but a factor in the status quo. It remains a lovely chimera in minds and places far apart from each other.

In my view, the next several years will belong to the practical interactions between English and the other language and literature departments and to the new institutional arrangements they encourage. (If comparative literature did not already exist, it might well be created now; but the comparative literature we have, which is stamped with mid-twentieth-century assumptions about both art and scholarship, is not the same as the one that we would want to establish now.) Talking to each other across the gaps of language and custom, as happened at the April conference in New York, will be indispensable. Instead of appropriating from each other, departments of English and the other literatures might identify areas that can be considered common property—transatlantic literature, for example, or Chicano and Chicana, Asian American, or postcolonial studies—and develop them together, trading the other departments' access to linguistic diversity and source materials for the platform of English. World literature is likely to be one site of such joint ventures. At present, *world literature* is a term without a concept, but its latent power in the early twenty-first century is readily imaginable. Not merely an academic slogan for literature read in translation, or for several works out of different national traditions jostling one another without an intellectual program, world literature is properly a renovative concept that might harbor the kinds of discussions I have tried to anticipate here. It would be jocular, but not quite inaccurate, to issue this warning: don't stand still while English and Spanish are on the move around you, unless you want to find yourself in a world of their making, as either proxy or object of their unself-conscious power.

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