

# Comparative Literature and National Literature : Arabic-English Focus

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The present paper aims at clarifying the parameters within which comparative literature works, its premises, its major topics, the challenges it faces and its future, and to show how it helps deepen our understanding of national literatures by shedding light on their specificities and idiosyncrasies.

Forms of expression vary from culture to culture and from artist to artist, yet the medium of an art remains a special source shared by many. Every nation has its poets and songs; every continent has its novelists, bards and chronicles. Comparative literature studies literature across national and linguistic boundaries with emphasis placed on the comparison by means of textual analysis. Hence, it helps uncover the uniqueness of every national literature by seeing things beyond social and linguistic horizons. The guiding impulse for comparative studies originates with the assumption that it is fundamentally limiting to confine the interpretation of literatures within specific national or linguistic boundaries. In 1974 Francois Jost stated, "National literature can not constitute an intelligible field of study because of its arbitrarily limited perspective." In his view, it is comparative literature that:

represents more than an academic discipline. It is  
an overall view of literature, of the world of letters,  
a humanistic ecology... a vision of the cultural  
universe, inclusive and comprehensive.<sup>1</sup>

No single definition of comparative literature would satisfy any two scholars associated with the discipline. Comparatists have diverse conceptions of the kind of study they embark upon. In fact, scholars interested in the field of comparative literature are usually encountered with a plethora of definitions. Marius-Francois Guyard defines it as:

The history of international literary relations. The  
comparatist stands at the frontiers, linguistic or national,

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and surveys the exchanges of themes, ideas, books, or feelings between two or several literatures. His working method will adapt itself to the diversity of his researches. A certain equipment is indispensable to him. He must be informed of the literatures of several countries. He must read several languages. He must know where to find the indispensable bibliographies.<sup>2</sup>

I. Owen Aldridge in his *Comparative Literature: Matter and Method* sees that:

It is now generally agreed that comparative literature does not compare national literatures in the sense of setting one against the other. Instead, it provides a method of broadening one's perspective in the approach to single works of literature—a way of looking beyond the narrow boundaries of national frontiers in order to discern trends and movements in various national cultures and to see the relations between literature and other spheres of human activity.... Briefly defined, comparative literature can be considered the study of any literary phenomenon from the perspective of more than one national literature or in conjunction with another intellectual discipline or even several.<sup>3</sup>

Henry Remak in his *Comparative Literature: Method and Perspective* believes that comparative literature is:

The study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country and the study of the relationships between literature on the one hand and other areas of knowledge and belief, such as (fine) arts, philosophy, history, the social sciences, the sciences, religion, etc. on the other. In brief it is the comparison of one literature with another or others, and the comparison of literature with other spheres of human expression.<sup>4</sup>

Jan Brandt Corstius in his *Introduction to the Study of Literature* mentions that:

Western Literature forms a historical community of national literatures, which manifests itself in each of them. Each lyrical, epic, or dramatic text, no matter what its individual features, was drawn in part from common material, and in that way both confirms this community and perpetuates it. For the creator of works of literary art, literature from both the past

and the present, forms the main ideational and formal context within which he works. Literary movements and literary criticism also document this basic unity of Western Literature. Comparative Literature is based on this view of Western Literature. It is by viewing objects of literary research-texts, genres, movements, criticism – in their international perspectives that it contributes to the knowledge of literature.<sup>5</sup>

Susan Bassnett in her *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* sees that “comparative literature involves the study of texts across cultures, that it is interdisciplinary and that it is concerned with patterns of connection in literatures across both time and space”.<sup>6</sup> Generally then, one can say that comparative literature is the discipline that studies literature TRANSNATIONALITY (and sometimes even POSTNATIONALITY). It examines literary texts:

- 1-across national borders
- 2-across time periods
- 3-across languages
- 4-across genres
- 5-across disciplines: literature and history, politics, science, psychology, philosophy etc.
- 6-across the lines of demarcation between literature and the other arts (painting, music, dance, film, etc.)

Broadly defined, comparative literature is, in fact, the study of literature without borders. A comparatist may focus on:

- 1-studying literary and social change.
- 2- studying medieval epic, romance, and chronicle.
- 3-studying the connections of literature to folklore and new media.
- 4-studying colonial and post-colonial writing in various parts of the world.
- 5-Asking fundamental questions about textuality and definitions of literature.
- 6-studying trans-Atlantic, Asian, Inter-European, or African literary and cultural relations.<sup>7</sup>

However, Comparative Literature from the time of the French orthodox school of Van Tieghem and Guyard with its emphasis on historical

evidence of literary contacts, imitations, influence etc. that took place between two national literatures, to the Eastern European school, which sees Comparative Literature as a method in the wide study of history, theory and criticism of literatures of the world, the major premises on which comparatists base the scientific and pedagogical usefulness of their discipline are:

- 1- that literature is one of the basic means (if not the essential means) for the transmission and understanding of human heritage and nature; and that its study is useful over and above its cognitive function.
- 2- that the comparative approach to literature is sometimes more integrated, flexible, and open to all aspects of the question "human kind and literature" than more traditional ones.
- 3- that comparative literature provides an appropriate field of work for students and scholars and gives an excellent opportunity to understand the differences between nations, and cultures and, at the same time, to grasp the essential unity of humankind.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, there are four topics present in the studies of Comparative Literature, as Jean Bessiere asserts, and these are:

- 1-Cultural and literary identities and transfers.
- 2-Synchronous readings of various literary periods, various language areas (region), various cultures.
- 3-Literary and cultural history of various regions.
- 4-Meta-criticism.

The positions of each of these topics and their specific features are as follows:

- 1- Concerning cultural and literary identities and transfers, the focus here is not the "doubt in identities, but the mutual relations of identities. Therefore, the cross-cutting within a certain culture is just a type of an existing identity, and not

- unrecognition, as it is usually said, of identities. Thus, literature can be representing of the relations of identity.”
- 2- Concerning the synchronous readings of various literary periods, various language regions, various cultures the issue “is not to reach conclusions that will have positive or empirical character, but to create categories that will provide a common reading of those periods, these cultures.”
  - 3- As much as literary and cultural history of various regions is concerned, there is the “question and need to overcome the sharp national divisions to regions with an aim to understand literary histories as histories of regional communities. These regional communities manage the design of the new critical, cultural and sociological paradigms. These literary histories are necessary because the reality and perception of the regions had changed.” And comparative literature “is the best introduction to a really updated literary thought of these regions.”
  - 4- Concerning meta-criticism, the issue here is double: “Is there a theory that is really a transversal of various literatures? Is it possible to pay attention, within the same theory, to literary artifact and the recognition of the literary artifact?” These two questions are beyond the field of contemporary aesthetics, as it does not provide clear answers. The answers to these questions, Bessier sees, are in “various cultures and literatures, to mark the common knowledge that allows us to review various answers to these questions.”<sup>9</sup>

Having said all this, we must not forgo the fact that the discipline since the 1950's was going through what Rene Wellek defined as the “crisis of Comparative Literature.” In fact, critics now, in the age of post-modernism or post post-modernism are still wrestling with:

The same questions that were posed more than a century ago: How can comparison be the object of anything? If individual literatures have a canon, what might a comparative canon be? How does the comparatist select what to compare? Is comparative literature a discipline? Or is it simply a field of study? These and a great many other questions refuse to go away.<sup>10</sup>

In 1969 Harry Levin urged for more practical work and less concern about the theory. He complained: "We spend far too much of our energy talking... about Comparative Literature and not of it comparing the literature." But this proposal was already "out of date." In fact, by late 1970's a "new generation of high-flying graduate students in the West turned to Literary Theory, Women's Studies, Semiotics, Film and Media Studies and Cultural Studies as the radical subject choices abandoning Comparative Literature to what were increasingly seen as dinosaurs from a liberal-humanist prehistory."<sup>11</sup>

However, as enthusiasm for Comparative Literature in the West was diminishing, it was gaining ground in other parts of the world especially in Third World countries. New programmes in comparative literature started to emerge in China, in Japan, in India and many other Asian countries. In addition, the comparative studies of scholars in these countries marked a shift of interest as the focus was not on any "ideal of universalism, but on the specificity of national literature."<sup>12</sup> Commenting on this shift of interest, Swapam Majumdar mentions:

It is because of this predilection for National Literature- much deplored by the Anglo- American critics as a methodology- that Comparative Literature has struck roots in The Third World.<sup>13</sup>

Ganesh Devy sees that in India, for instance, comparative literature has been "used to assert the national cultural identity." Susan Bassnett believes that there "is no sense here of national literature and comparative being incompatible."<sup>14</sup>

But comparative literature faced serious challenges from "the emergence of alternative schools of thought," particularly from what has been known in the last two decades as post-colonial criticism. Post-colonial criticism involves the study of literary works written in countries and cultures that have come under the hegemony of European colonial powers at some point in their history. In his *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said, a pioneer of this type of criticism, focused on the way in which the colonizing First World has created false images and myths that have conveniently justified Western exploitation and domination of Eastern and Middle Eastern cultures and peoples. Said's main thesis is that:

the Orient was a word, which later accrued to it a wide field of meanings, associations and connotations, and

that these did not necessarily refer to the real Orient  
but to the field surrounding the word.<sup>15</sup>

In his essay "Post colonial Criticism" (1992), Homi K. Bhabha, one of the contributors and practitioners of this type of criticism, has shown how some cultures

(mis)represent other cultures, thereby extending their political and social domination in the modern world order. However, in their book, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literature*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin write the following opening statements: "Post-colonial... is most appropriate as the term for the new cross-cultural criticism which has emerged in recent years and for the discourse through which this is constituted."<sup>16</sup> What can we describe this but "comparative literature under another name?" says Bassnett.<sup>17</sup> The other challenge comes from another rapidly expanding discipline, and one that has profound implications for the future of Comparative Literature, namely Translation Studies. Translation Studies went through a long period of search for identity and place among other disciplines. To begin with there was the problem of the name of the field itself. All over the years, diverse terms have been used refer to the field. In English, one can find such inaccurate reference as: "the art" or "the craft" of translation, and also "the principles" of translation, the "fundamentals", or even the "philosophy" of translation. There have been also some attempts to add the suffix "-ology". Roger Goffin, for example, suggested the term "translatology". But because "-ology" derives from Greek, purists rejected it. There was a time when the terms "tranlastistics" and "translistics" were suggested, but both could not take currency. In the 1960's, Eugene Nida was bold enough to suggest the term "science", but that attempt failed too, as Nida himself did not "intend the phrase for the entire field of study, but only for one aspect of the process of translating as such." This painstaking process ended in the mid-1970's when the term "translation studies" had been agreed upon as the name to designate the field.<sup>18</sup>

Then there was the problem of the status of translation. In fact, in spite of the importance of translation as a means of transmitting human knowledge and human experience, it has always been looked upon in secondary terms. Actually, it has been figured as a reproductive not productive work. All worth, naturalness, truthfulness, lawfulness is given to the original text:

**ORIGINAL**

Productive  
Natural  
Truthful  
Lawful

**TRANSLATION**

Reproductive  
Artificial  
False  
Treasonous

The use of the metaphors of feminism can clarify this conventional view of translation. The original is seen as a male and translation as a female. The original functions like a husband and translation like a wife. As in marriage, translation/wife has to be beautiful and faithful. Actually, what gives this proposition the appearance of truth is that it has “captured a cultural complicity between the issues of fidelity in translation and in marriage.” Fidelity, here, is defined by an “implied contract between translation (as woman) and original (as husband, father or author)”<sup>19</sup>. The same double standards function here as they might have in traditional marriage. Hence, this contract makes it impossible for the original/husband to be guilty of dishonesty/infidelity. Whereas the dishonest/unfaithful translation/wife is publicly prosecuted for these crimes. If translation/wife commits any act of infidelity, the offspring will be unnatural, impure, monstrous, immoral, indeed, bastard.

**ORIGINAL**

Male  
Husband

**TRANSLATION**

Female  
Wife

Marriage/Contract  
Cultural Double Standards

Incapable of infidelity

Capable of infidelity

Offspring

monstrous

immoral

unnatural

impure



Bastard



Jacques Derrida has subverted the very difference, which produces this binary opposition between original and its reproduction and makes this difference undecidable. He believes that there is always something left over that confuses the distinction between original and translation. This untranslatability according to him is a "function of the law of translation not a matter of the translation's infidelity or secondariness. Translation is governed by a double bind typified by the command 'Do not read me': the text both requires and forbids its translation."<sup>20</sup> Thus, in his attempt to overturn the binary opposition between original and translation, he implies that translation is both "original and secondary." That is why, he says in his *The Ear of the Other*: "translation is writing: that is, it is not translation in the sense of transcription. It is productive writing called forth by the original text."<sup>21</sup> Commenting on Derrida's argument, Lori Chamberlain says:

By arguing the interdependence of writing and translating, Derrida subverts the autonomy and privilege of the 'original' text, binding to an impossible but necessary contract with the translation and making each the debtor of the other.<sup>22</sup>

Translation studies now is a discipline in its own right. Comparative literature has traditionally claimed translation as a sub-category, but this assumption is now being questioned. The relationship between them has to be re-examined because while "comparative literature in the West seems to be losing ground, even as it becomes more nebulous and loosely defined... translation studies is undergoing the opposite process."<sup>23</sup> It is establishing itself firmly as a "subject based in inter-cultural study and offering a methodology of some rigour, both in terms of theoretical and descriptive work." Hence, comparative literature appears to be: "less like a discipline and more like a branch of something else." Examined in this way, the "problem of the crisis could then be put into perspective" says Bassnett" and the long unresolved debate on whether comparative literature is not a discipline in its own right could finally and definitely be shelved."<sup>24</sup>

But this is not the end of the story. There is another paradigm which I feel will contribute, once adopted, to the enrichment and development of comparative studies, and that is the antithetical criticism of the influential contemporary critic Harold Bloom included primarily in his seminal book *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973). Bloom tackles in this book the influence some poets exert on other later poets.

He discredits the conventional notion that literary tradition is an empowering source of influence on modern poets. Instead, he argues that for poets since Milton the achievements of their great precursors are fetters to their own desire of originality. In fact, Bloom sees that a poet is

motivated to compose when his imagination is seized upon by a poem or poems of a 'precursor', or father-poet. The 'belated' poet's attitudes to his precursor, like those in Freud's analysis of Oedipal relation of son to father, are ambivalent; that is they are compounded not only of admiration but also (since a strong poet feels a compelling need to be autonomous and absolutely original) of hate, envy, and fear of the father-poet's preemption of the son's imaginative space. The belated poet unconsciously safeguards his sense of his own autonomy and priority by reading a parent poem 'defensively', in such a way to distort it beyond his own conscious recognition. Nonetheless, he cannot avoid embodying the malformed parent-poem into his own doomed attempt to write an unprecedentedly original poem; the most that even the best belated poet can achieve is to write a poem so 'strong' that it effects an illusion of priority- that is, an illusion both that it has escaped the father-poem's precedence and it exceeds it in greatness.<sup>25</sup>

Influence, as Bloom sees "is influenza-an astral disease" and to counter its threat, strong poets learn to immunize themselves by "misreading" their predecessors. Such creative misreading functions through six revisionary ratios, which form the basis for Bloom's manifesto for a new antithetical criticism<sup>26</sup>. And these revisionary ratios are as follows:

- 1- *Clinamen* or poetic misreading... This appears as a corrective movement in his own poem, which implies that the precursor poem went accurately up to a certain point, but then should have swerved, precisely in the direction that the new poem moves.
- 2- *Tessera*, which is completion and antithesis... A poet antithetically "completes" his precursor, by so reading the parent poem as to retain its terms but to mean them in another sense, as though the precursor had failed to go far enough.
- 3- *Kenosis*, which is a breaking device similar to the defense mechanism our psyches employ against repletion compulsions; *kenosis* then is a movement towards discontinuity with the precursor. The later poet, apparently

emptying himself of his own imaginative godhead, seems to humble himself as though he were ceasing to be a poet, but this ebbing is so performed in relation to a precursor's poem's-of-ebbing that the precursor is emptied out also, and so the later poem of deflation is not as absolute as it seems.

- 4- *Daemonization*, or a movement towards a personalized Counter-Sublime, in reaction to the precursor's Sublime... the later poet opens himself to what he believes to be a power in the parent-poem that does not belong to the parent proper, but to a range of being just beyond that precursor. He does this, in his poem, by so stationing its relation to the parent-poem as to generalize a way the uniqueness of the earlier work.
- 5- *Askesis* or movement of self-purgation... The later poet does not, as Kenosis (discontinuity with the father-poet), undergo a revisionary movement of emptying, but of curtailing; he yields up part of his own human and imaginative endowment, so as to separate himself from others, including the precursor, and he does this in his poem by so stationing it in regard to the parent-poems as to make that poem undergo *askesis* too; the precursor's endowment is also truncated.
- 6- *Apophrades* or the return of the dead. (The later poet, already burdened by an imaginative solitude, holds up his poem so open again to the father-poet's work, not as though the father poet were writing his poem, but as though the later poet himself had written the father-poet's characteristic work.)<sup>27</sup>

Although Bloom's theory of the anxiety of influence is meant primarily to trace the influence some poets exert on other poets inter-culturally, this method can yield very interesting results if comparatists employ it across-culturally. It can also expand its interests from poetry and go to other genres and produce even more interesting results as Bloom, himself, mentions how he in his criticism has tried to achieve his autonomy by writing defensively against other critics.

Comparative Literature today is, indeed, one of the most dynamic fields of study. It has defied all the negative views that see it as non-subject and lacking in rigour and methodology. Its basis of existence lies in exploring

the melting pot in which the literary and art world currently thrives. It questions literary theories and concepts while maintaining an understanding of literature's aesthetic qualities. Furthermore, it realizes the importance and value of literary research with more specific regional focus, but conceives comparative studies as a necessary complement to the study of national literatures.

In what follows, I shall elaborate on this final point and show how comparative literature is, indeed, very necessary, for instance, to the understanding of English and Arabic literatures. The story of influence between Arabic and other European literatures especially English literature is a very interesting one. Europe is indebted to the Arabs for her 'Romance' movement and the Europeans are indebted to the Arabs for most, if not all, the driving forces which turned the Middle Ages into a different world in spirit and imagination. The Arabic influence infiltrated into European literature through the inspiration and tales told by Muslims speaking Arabic and some other European languages in addition to Southern French poets. Actually, the flourishing of Arabic literature in Adalusia (present day Spain) and its legacy is a fact that can never be denied by European literary historians. Many refer to the connection of many gifted European poets such as Boccaccio, Dante, and Petrarch the Italians, the English poet Chaucer, and the Spanish Cervantes to Arabic literature. Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1349), for instance, is fashioned on the *Arabian Nights*. He compiled one hundred stories on the lines of the *Arabian Nights* and ascribed them to seven ladies and three men who had fled from the town and sought refuge in the suburbs because of a plague. Each was called upon to narrate a story every morning to pass the time. Shakespeare, by the way, borrowed from them the subject of his comedy *All's Well That Ends Well*. Chaucer, after a journey to Italy, designed his *Canterbury Tales* on the lines of Boccaccio's *Decameron* of which the story of "the Knight" was borrowed from the *Arabian Nights*. However, Dante's connection to Arabic literature is more pronounced than Boccaccio's or Chaucer's. He lived in Sicily during the reign of Frederick II who was given to the study of Arabic references on Islamic culture. Various comparatists have found similarities between the description of paradise by Mohiuddin bin Arabi and his *Divine Comedy*. Dante knew much about prophet Muhammad, and must have read the chapter about The Night Journey or the ascent of the prophet to the seven heavens. He might have also read the *Message of Absolution* by Abu El-Ela Al-Ma'ari. The influence of these Arabic sources has been passed on later on to the seventeenth-century English poet John Milton especially in

his *Paradise Lost*. Furthermore, Petrarch lived during the age of Arab culture in France and Italy. He learnt at the university of Montpellier and Paris, which were founded by the disciples of Arabs that had graduated from the Andalusian universities. Cervantes lived in Algeria for some years and wrote his *Don Quixote*. Those who read *Don Quixote* will never doubt that this comic book is wholly Andalusian in its core. In fact, this work affirms Cervantes' wide reading in Arabic and his borrowing of Arabic sayings and proverbs, which are still current among Arabs even today.<sup>28</sup>

In fact, the Arab-Islamic influence on European Literature is so wide that one can scarcely find a man of letters whose poetry and prose is devoid of an Arab-Islamic hero or anecdote. Of these literary people are Shakespeare, Addison, Byron, Southey, Coleridge, Shelley from England; Goethe, Herder, Lessing, Henine, from Germany; Voltaire, Montesquieu, Hugo and La Fontaine from France. La Fontaine admitted he had spun his fables on the lines of *Kalila and Demna*, which was introduced to the Europeans by the Muslims.<sup>29</sup>

The European story was influenced during its rise by the techniques of the Arabic novel of the Middle Ages namely, the ballad, epic, adventures of knights for romance and glory etc. Some European critics believe that Swift's *Gulliver Travels*, and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* are indebted to the *Arabian Nights* and *Message from Hai Bin Yakzan* which was written by the philosopher Ibn Tofail. The *Arabian Nights* exerted a stronger influence after its translation at the beginning of the twelfth century that had surpassed all effects of other similar literary works.

This does not mean, however, that the influence was always coming from one direction. European Literatures, in general, have also influenced Arabic Literature, especially modern Arabic literature. Arab critics, for instance, often speak of the influences of Walt Whitman on Amin Al-Rayhani; William Blake on Gibran and T.S. Eliot and Edith Sitwell on As-Sayyab. In fact, it is impossible to understand modern Arabic literature without references to such strong European influences as: Rimbaud, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Gorky, Beckett, Allan Ginsberg, Sartre and many others.

And now let's see some practical applications. In my view, our understanding of both *Beowulf*, the English epic of 700 A. D., and *Gilgamesh*, the Iraqi epic of 7000 B.C. can be better if we read them comparatively. *Gilgamesh* is the earliest piece of literature ever recorded. *Beowulf*, on the other hand, is the literary work of medieval Europe. First let's show how *Beowulf* mirrors the structure of *Gilgamesh*:

- 1- The hero in both epics is a figure of great national or even cosmic importance. In Gilgamesh, he is the Sumerian hero Gilgamesh who has all knowledge and wisdom. He is the son of king Laybanda and Nisun (Queen of the Wild Cow), a minor goddess, two thirds of him god, with human form given by the Lady of the gods (Aruru) and perfected by (Ea). In Beowulf, he is Beowulf a mighty warrior from the land of Geats in Sweden. He is noble, courageous, bold and stronger by far than any other living mortal.
- 2- The setting of both poems is ample in scale. Gilgamesh goes to the forest of Cedar where the gods and goddesses have their secret abode and throne, he wanders in the wild and travels to Uta-napishtim at the edge of the world through the land of darkness, through the garden of gods, across the waters of death. In Beowulf the setting spans Denmark and Sweden.
- 3- The action in both epics involves superhuman deeds in battles. Gilgamesh kills the guardian of the cedar forest, the great demon Humbaba and the Bull of heavens. Beowulf kills the monster Grendel, Grendel's mother and the dragon that spreads terror across the realm of the Geats.
- 4- In these actions the gods and other supernatural beings take an interest and active part. Anu (Father of gods), Aruru (Mother goddess), Ishtar the goddess of sexual love, Humbaba and the Bull of heaven in Gilgamesh; and Grendel, his mother and the dragon in Beowulf.
- 5- Structurally, also, these two epics are divided chronologically into two sections. In Gilgamesh the first section focuses on Gilgamesh and Enkidu, the second one focuses on Gilgamesh after the death of Enkidu. Beowulf is divided also into two sections: the first one focuses on Beowulf as a young man and the second on him as an old man.

Moreover, themes in both epics parallel each other:

- 1- Actions speak louder than words.
- 2- Love of friends.
- 3- Forces of darkness-irrational, menacing- are always at work in society.
- 4- Accepting one's own mortality.
- 5- Love of adventure.
- 6- Judge the greatness of a human being by the greatness of his deeds and his noble ancestry.

Comparative Literature can provide very interesting answers that will definitely deepen our understanding of these great literary works, if we study the nature of the hero or the treatment of themes or the presence of the superhuman, for instance, in both these epics.

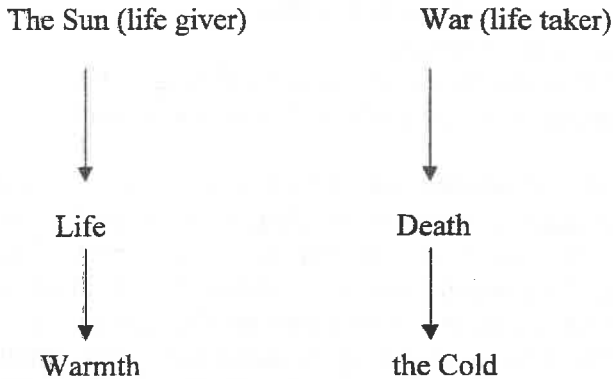
The other example I would like to cite here is between two war poets. The first is the Iraqi contemporary poet Abdul-Razaq Al-Rubaie (1961- ) and the second is the British Wilfred Owen (1893-1918). Both poets were war poets. Both experienced life in trenches and took part in hot battles. Both experienced the horrors of war and wrote about its terrifying consequences. From the first one I have selected his "Tomorrow the War Will Make a Picnic". From the second I have selected "Futility". Both poems deal with the theme of war and studying them comparatively will provide interesting insights into the nature of both of them.

Owen's "Futility" is a short poem of fourteen lines. And although it tackles war, the word war is never mentioned in the text at all. Yet, it is made conspicuous by its absence. There are two dominant ideas in the poem clashing and causing almost all the poetic tension in the poem. The first is present "the sun" which the text shows as a life giver. The other is absent, "the war", a life taker. The sun is associated with life, the harvest and life. The war is associated with death and the cold. A dead soldier is seen by the voice in the poem in the no-man zone between the fighting troops and calls upon other soldiers to:

Move him into the sun-  
Gently its touch awoke him once,  
At home, whispering of fields unsown.  
Always it awoke him, even in France,

Until this morning and this snow.

The sunbeams toil becomes futile because of War. This is the conclusion, which readers infer from their answers to the three rhetorical questions at the end of the poem.



Are limbs, so dear-achieved, are sides,  
 Full-nerved- still warm – Too hard to stir?  
 Was it for this the clay grew tall?  
 - O what made fatuous sunbeams toil  
 To break earth's sleep at all?

↓

War

Al-Rubaiee's "Tomorrow the War Will Have a Picnic" is relatively longer. Here the war is present from the title of the poem till the last line. The central idea of the poem is that war will take place tomorrow and what people should do in preparation for this terrifying event. A refrain dominates the entire text of the poem: "Tomorrow the War Will Have a Picnic" and generates all the poetic energy in the poem. This refrain is repeated thirteen times in the text to intensify the ominous news, which the text attempts to convey, i.e., war will take place tomorrow. The war will bring nothing but the destruction of human life and death. However, unlike *Futility*, it does not describe things that have actually happened in



war, it foretells of things that may happen if war takes place. And perhaps it is reminiscent of all previous wars. Furthermore, the poem takes a circular movement. It ends where it begins. Probably this is an attempt by the poet to refer to the vicious circle that we might find ourselves in if indeed tomorrow the war will have a picnic.

### Tomorrow the War Will Have a Picnic

*Tomorrow the War Will Have a Picnic*



Ornament ....  
Sweep ....  
Brush ....  
Prepare ....  
Close ....  
Remove ....  
Plant ....  
Leave.....

·  
·

circular movement.



The vicious circle of war

Comparative Literature is a lively discipline today. Indeed, it, with its overall view of human literature, can provide interesting insights into the nature of national literatures as the sole study of these cannot provide a complete understanding of the literary phenomena because of their narrow perspective.

## NOTES

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2. Robert J. Clement, *Comparative Literature as Academic Discipline* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1976), p.5.
3. Ibid, p.5.
4. Ibid, p.5.
5. Ibid, p.5-6.
6. Bassnett, p.1.
7. Internet Material, "Comparative Literature"[www.complit.la.psu.edu](http://www.complit.la.psu.edu).
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9. Internet Material, Jean Bessiere, "Words on Comparative Literature or on the Survival of a Discipline Today", [www.belosk.com.mk](http://www.belosk.com.mk).
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15. Ibid, p.7.
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17. Ibid, p.10.
18. See James S. Holmes, "The Name and Nature of Translation Studies" in Lawrence Venuti (ED.) *The Translation Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.174-176.
19. Lori Chamberlain "Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation" in Lawrence Venuti (Ed.) *The Translation studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 315.
20. Ibid, p. 325.
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25. M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publisher, 1993), "Influence and Anxiety of Influence".

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## APPENDIX

### Futility

Move him into the sun –  
Gently its touch awoke him once,  
At home, whispering of fields unsown.  
Always it woke him, even in France,  
Until this morning and this snow.  
If anything might rouse him now  
The kind old sun will know.

Think how it wakes the seeds, -  
Woke, once, the clays of a cold star.  
Are limbs, so dear achieved, are sides,  
Full-nerved – still warm – too hard to stir?  
Was it for this the clay grew tall?  
- O what made fatuous sunbeams toil  
To break earth's sleep at all?

Wilfred Owen (1893-1919)

عبد الرزاق الربيعي

غدا تخرج الحرب للنزهة

غدا تخرج الحرب للنزهة  
افطروا قلوب الامهات  
لكي لا تتمدد الدموع بالحرارة  
وتنفجر قشرة الارض  
فتثور البراكين النائمة  
في الصدور

غدا تخرج الحرب للنزهة  
اطفئوا القمر النابت فوق السطوح  
لكي لا يؤثر على بريق  
قنابل التتوير  
التي تنير لها الطريق  
لنحصل على موت جميل  
ومريح كمخدة من ريش الملائكة

غدا تخرج الحرب للنزهة  
فلننقل المنتزهات  
والحدائق  
والشرفات  
لكي تتمشى على راحتها  
ازيحوامن السماء الغيوم  
لكي لا تتبلل اجنحة الطائرات  
وتحيدها عن اهدافها المرسومة  
بدقة

غدا تخرج الحرب للنزهة  
ازرعوا الزهور  
فالمقابر ستتمو  
وتفاصيل كهذه ضرورية  
لرفع معنويات  
الموتى  
المعلقين في رقابنا  
الى يوم يبعثون

غدا تخرج الحرب للنزهة  
خزنوا المياه والخبز  
والهواء

غدا تخرج الحرب للنزهة  
زينوا المستشفيات بالادوية  
والضمادات  
والمشارط الباشطة

غدا تخرج الحرب للنزهة  
نظفوا القبور من الاتربة والادغال  
واحفروا اخرى للحديقة  
اكراما لانفها من روائح الجيف  
النتنة

نظفوا الاوحال من الاوحال  
نظفوا اسنانكم جيدا  
لكي تتضح اكثر  
في العتمة التي تحف بموكبها  
المهيب

نظفوا قلوبكم من الافراح العابرة  
لان الحرب  
لا تحب البالونات والفقاعات  
الهوائية

غدا تخرج الحرب للنزهة  
هينوا اجسادكم للالام  
واعضاتكم للبتير

لان الحرب  
ستعيب معكم  
انها تحب اللعب بالعبارة الثقيل

غدا تخرج الحرب للنزهة  
اتركوا النعومة  
والضحك

انها لا تحب الشوكولاتة  
وتبادل القبل في الطرقات  
وامور كهذه تضر بصحة القلب  
حسب مزاج الحرب  
التي ستخرج غدا للنزهة

فالحرب- تجوع بين  
حين وآخر  
وإذا لم تجد ماتاكله  
من اجساد أذنة  
وشقاوات وبراءة واحلام طازجة  
ستضطر الى اكل البنائيات  
والجثث النائمة في القبور  
والكتب والشوارع والبسكويت  
ستضطر لاكل الجبال الراسيات

افرغوا صنادير الأميون  
من حملتها المالحة  
فالحرب تعاني من ارتفاع الضغط  
وتكلس الهواء في  
الشرابين  
وتبعاً لهذا  
فانها لا تحب الاملاح  
في الزاد.. والخدود  
والناس والحجارة  
فهي بحاجة لشيء يجعلها  
على قيد الدخان  
والرصاص والشظايا

غدا تخرج الحرب للنزهة  
وعلينا ان نخرج لملاقاتها  
من غرف النوم  
والمدارس ، وصالونات الحلاقة،  
والمكتبات العامة، والمساجد  
والملاجيء ، والف ليلة وليلة ،  
والكهوف ، وبطاقات التهنئة ،  
والحقول ، والقبور ، ومواضع  
الاشخاص ، واكياس الخبز ، وقناني  
المياه الغازية ، واشارات التوحيدى ،  
وفرشاة الاسنان ، والفيية ابن مالك ،  
والاقمطة ، ونشرات الاخبار .

علينا ان نخرج لملاقاتها  
من جلودنا واسماننا اللبينة  
وننظم الى موكبها السائر  
الى مقبرة السلام

غدا تخرج الحرب، للنزهة  
اتركوا النعومة  
والضحك  
والرقص  
والطفولة  
والنساء  
والاسرة  
واكواب الشاي بالحليب

ومقاعد الدرس  
وماتبقى من احلام  
متناثرة في الزوايا  
انها لاتحب الشوكولاتة  
وتبادل القبل في الطرقات  
وامور كهذه تضر بصحة الحرب  
التي ستخرج غدا للنزهة ..

Ts s f s f s s f "Tw WWII Rtc "f lf f  
s w Ac

Tomorrow the War Will Have a Picnic

Tomorrow the war will have a picnic  
Ornament hospitals with medicines, bandages  
And sharp lancets

Tomorrow the war will have a picnic  
Sweep dust and weeds from graves  
Dig new ones  
As it detests the smells of rotten corpses

Remove mud from mud  
Brush your teeth well so that you can be  
Seen in the darkness that'll accompany its pompous entourage

Remove transient joys from your hearts  
As it does not like bubbles or balloons

Tomorrow the war will have a picnic  
Prepare your bodies for pain and amputation  
As it will trifle with you  
It loves heavyweight trifling

Tomorrow the war will have a picnic  
Abandon delicacy  
And laughter  
It does not like chocolate  
And kissing in the roads  
And things like these are not good for the health of the heart  
According to the mood of the war  
Which will have a picnic tomorrow  
.....

Tomorrow the war will have a picnic  
Break mothers' hearts  
So that tears won't expand  
By heat.....

Tomorrow the war will have a picnic



Abandon delicacy,  
Laughter,  
Dancing,  
Childhood,  
Women,  
Beds,  
Cups of tea and milk,  
Classrooms' desks  
And what is left of dreams  
Splintered in corners  
It does not like chocolate  
And kissing in the roads  
And things like these are not good for the health of the war  
Which will have a picnic tomorrow.