

Comparative Literature: Its Implications for Yemeni Learners of English*

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Abstract

This paper deals with Comparative Literature (CL) as it can be employed in Teaching Literature. After surveying the importance of CL as a whole, it proposes that CL can enhance teaching literature to Yemeni learners of English. The paper is divided into four sections: 1.0 *Introduction* that shows CL as a rich source of learning.

- 1.1. *Comparative Literature: Theoretical Background* attempts to bring theory and practice together.
2. 0. *Comparative Literature In Practice* concentrates on utilising CL in teaching-cum-learning situations.
2. 1.
- 1.2. *Teaching Comparative Literature to Yemeni Learners of English* focuses on real examples from the field of teaching.
2. 2. *Examples Of Comparative Literature* are elaborated examples that can be used in teaching novel to Yemeni students.

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1.3. 3.0. *Conclusion* emphasises the possibility of intentional use of CL as a method of teaching literature that helps understanding L₂ and L₁ literature to enhance mastering L₂.

(**Keywords:** Comparative Literature, teaching literature, Yemeni students, Yemen, Sharyan.

1.0 Introduction

“Oh, East is East, and West is West,
And never the twain shall meet”

-Kipling

This line from "*The Ballad of East and West*" by Rudyard Kipling (1865- 1936) highlights the saliency of comparison which has been the time-honoured practice of examining things whether in literature, anthropology, politics, religion, linguistics or socio-linguistics and so on. Comparison involves ways of examining things by someone. It intends to bring out similarities and dissimilarities; to unite more than divide; to find unity in diversity so as to develop a sense of tolerance. In literature, comparatists seek to discover bonds and ties in the apparently dissimilar works, pertaining to two societies, two cultures across time (Sharyan, 2006). This sort of comparative survey is known as comparative literature (CL).

CL as an academic discipline is based on comparison like any other field that employs comparison. CL is concerned with the relationship between genres of literature whether they are new or old. These relationships may include two or more literatures (Chevrel, 1989). One culture may be a giver, the other a receiver (the French school of CL). This helps to understand the characteristics and development of this literature or that. It helps also in understanding the affinities between the varied kinds of literature and the foreign influence on the local literature (Al-Qamri, 1991).

Comparative studies thus attempt to demonstrate that different fields of knowledge relate to each other in one way or the other. Teachers often give assignments to compare-cum-contrast essays where students are to pinpoint the similarities and differences in the literary text/s. This is based on the assumption that one understands better the intended goal of the involved texts if one is able to compare, analyse and synthesize the piece of work. Such comparison can be on the basis of similar texts from the target language. This paper goes beyond this to compare the native with the target literature to use what is available with students to ensure self-involvement in mastering or identifying with the text they read. With

this, learners attempt the target as well as the native literature; this shows that CL is essential for teaching. And this is more demanding for the teacher who needs previous knowledge of Arabic literature as well as English to obtain fruitful results. Without such a previous knowledge, a teacher of drama for Yemeni students is to face some challenges because drama is not part of Arabic Literature till the 20th century. Being aware of the absence of the art in the students' background is of great help to the teacher to handle appropriately the building blocks of drama (e.g. the art of drama, theatre, stage direction, soliloquy, hero, tragic flaw, etc.) to ensure better understating of the text in question.

1.1 Comparative Literature: Theoretical Background

For some critics like T.S. Eliot, literature is to be seen and examined only by comparison with other literary works. He said in his well-known article "Tradition and the Individual Talent":

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetics, not merely historical, criticism.

This shows that literature is not created in isolation. The proper way of studying literature is to examine each literary text against another either in the same culture or from other culture/s. Without CL, it will be difficult to understand Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), e.g. his volume *Al Araaf*, particularly if the word *Al Araaf* is not in the English dictionary. Very often Poe used some words that sound like Arabic as titles of his poems, e.g. *Al Araaf*, *Ulalume*, *Israfel*, *Eulalie*, etc. Most of the time, these words are used to indicate his late wife. Arabesque (that attracts attention though it is not directly related to Arabic) is used in the title of Poe's collection of short stories: *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840). CL is of great help to understand such titles.

But one tends to ask 'Does CL focus on the life of the author and his relation to other writers at the same age?' This approach, if used, excludes the literary text. The opposite is to concentrate on the text- the focus of literary approaches as formalism and new criticism.

Any approach employed in analysing the literary text (say, formalistic, structuralist, archetypal, biographical, psychological, feminist, deconstructionist or comparative) is a method of teaching. CL, this paper assumes, is an efficient way of conveying, transferring and involving foreign learners of English in the literary experience. CL gets its importance from the social and scientific developments: globalisation, democracy, interaction of cultures, business transaction, and tolerance towards the other. When the Swedish Academy of Letters, for example, commented (quoted worldwide) on the work of Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006) that "*through works rich in nature- now clear-sightedly realistic, now evocatively ambiguous- has formed an Arabic narrative art that applies to all mankind.*" Mahfouz accordingly transformed the local colour of a Cairene community to a universal appeal.

As an academic discipline, CL has various ramifications. Some comparatists like Carre (quoted in Sarahan 1983: 30) think that it is a branch of literary history that studies the relationships among nations and writers. This is an attempt to define and throw light on the field of CL. It studies the relationship between national and international literature or vice versa (Rasheed, 1983: 50). Thus, it relates between writers who write similar things in their writings but differ in their cultures and languages. It tries to lessen the overtoning of nationalism. It looks for universalities in literature. It pays no attention to barriers of language, nation, race, ideas, and biases. It looks at literature as the product of humanity (Wazzan, 1985:15). According to *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, CL 'aims at the study of literary works and traditions of more than one nation or language' to permit fuller understating of international literary movements and affiliations. It crosses frontiers in search of cross-cultural correspondences (Drabble, 2000: 225). It can also be seen as the comparison of one literature with other spheres of human expression, e.g. science, religion, arts, music, philosophy, psychology, etc. Unlike CL, national literatures like Arabic or English are defined linguistically and nationally. Such a literature is not without a cultural

aspect. It is expressed by means of language, which is a human activity whose base is linguistic and social factors.

CL involves more than one language or culture to find out commonalities or contrasts at least between two writers. CL is associated with the mutual influence of literary trends, forms, thoughts, themes, situations and characters in more than one culture. CL is tied to cultural links that connect different nations culturally, intellectually and socially. The problem that arises is about the writers who write in the same language, say English, but belong to different backgrounds such as Arabic, British, Indian, African, Canadian, Australian, or Jewish. Others write in different local languages as in India but their culture is similar as Indians. The paper considers culture as the main criterion for CL though language is no doubt a factor. The approaches that impose themselves on the study of CL are the study of (1) themes, myths, (2) genres, forms (3) movements, eras (Wazzan, 1987: 11).

The approaches then can be seen from the point of (1) general trends, (2) direct influence (the French documentary school), or (3) historical perspective- scholarly studies. Under the general trends and movements that spread every now and then in the history of literature (e.g. Romanticism, realism, naturalism, impressionism, modernism, existentialism, and post modernism), one can think of writers who write in different languages and from different backgrounds as Nietzsche (1844-1900), Heidegger (1889-1976), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), Albert Camus (1913-1960), and Edward Said (1935-2003). A number of writers wrote in similar moods (absurd drama or naturalism) as in Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) and Harold Pinter (1930-), Dostoevsky (1821-1881) and Naguib Mahfouz, etc. Such trends and schools of thoughts spread across cultures and nations. Since CL is 'interdisciplinary' or 'trans-national', it crosses linguistic, ethnic, and political boundaries (Bassnett 1993). The reading is not within a single literature, but making associations, connections and similarities with great open space of literature with a capital L. CL has made world literature commonsense for people all over the world. People hear of *Rubaiyat* Omar Khayyam, *Arabian Nights*, Naguib Mahfouz's novels, Goethe's *Faust*, Dostoevsky's, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, *Crime and Punishment*, Cervantes *Don Quixote* (1605), Shakespeare's

tragedies, etc. This has been made easier by marketing of books, availability of translations and CL studies that promote understanding and encourage sharing commonalities.

The above examination shows CL as the field of critics, literary historians and teachers who investigate the reality of national and international literatures and their connections with each other. For teachers, it is indispensable to link the national literature with that of other nations so as to:

- (a) Promote a healthy attitude towards the alien culture,
- (b) Build trust in one's own culture as well as in the other,
- (c) Reduce intolerance, narrow-mindedness, chauvinism and biases, and
- (d) Bring out some kind of unity in diversity.

CL helps the teacher to bridge the gap between the students' previous knowledge and the target literature to allow sifting information, trust and understanding to overcome psychological resistance to foreign language-cum-literature as well the culture that it embodies. This resistance results in misunderstanding or gap of communication between teacher and students that we often hear about teachers of English Literature who have no acquaintance with Arabic literature or students' cultural background. Due to this resistance, students feel that English literature poses some threat to their national or cultural identity. The result is obvious: little learning in the absence of CL that does some kind of fine-tuning to the target language, culture and literature.

2.0 Comparative Literature in Practice

Literary texts are inherently related as the examples above show but the teaching methods in literature are not systematic as in language (e.g. grammar translation method, direct method, audio-visual method, communicative approach, etc). Due to the dearth of investigations in methods of teaching literature, this paper proposes CL as a method that can be employed in teaching foreign learners of English effectively. It relies heavily on personal experience in the field of teaching literature to Yemeni students more than theory. It is found out that this teaching

approach is more efficient and yields a better result and high achievement on the part of learners. Since CL refers to the study of texts across cultures, the paper presents some examples that can be used for comparison while teaching Arab students. This is because the original contribution of CL is in 'placing and juxtaposing texts in order to create new readings across cultures,' (Bassnett 1993). These texts are considered side by side to create a greater understanding of works, authors, and literary traditions. This is necessary not only to understand the foreign literature but even the national literature. Bassnett (1993: 24) is of the opinion that, 'We do not know ourselves when we know only ourselves'.

One may ask how CL can be applied to teaching English to Yemeni Learners or Arab learners for that matter. It is usual for teachers of literature to link two or more literary texts whether in the same culture (as inter-textuality implies) or with the students' culture. It is inevitable if one is to discuss the 'zeitgeist' or 'episteme' of a certain period not to find analogous relationship among various literatures and hence not to touch on CL.

The comparison can be carried out on the basis of theme, character, form, culture, style or language. Sometimes teachers find it necessary to compare similarities of characters in various literary texts on the basis of: thinking, ir/religious, in/extrovert, jealous, vulgar, stupid, oppressed, split-personality, hesitant, or wronged; strangers or gamblers. Sometimes the comparison is on the basis of profession: priest, soldier, journalist, servant, lawyer, diplomat, etc. (Jabar, 1983: 42). A literary work can be compared from the point of view of themes and motifs. Like character analysis, theme allows grouping of literary texts regardless of their background. Form of the work of literature allows comparison: ode, ballad, autobiographies, pastoral poems, adventures, comedy, tragedy, elegies, didactic stories, etc. Structural devices, sense and sound devices are almost universal. They permit comparison: myth, legend, irony, parody, burlesque, fable, parable, allegories, symbols, metaphor, simile, personification, alliteration, assonance and consonance (Jabar, 1983: 44-45).

Discussing Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* compels the teacher to think of W. B. Yeats's "The Second Coming":

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold. (Line 3)

Similar to this is the origin of the titles of Shaw's *Arms and the Man* and Hemingway's *For whom the Bell Tolls* that are allusions to some previous texts by John Donne (1572-1631) and Virgil (70-19 BC) respectively. Forster's *A Passage To India* is directly related to Whitman's "Passage to India". While Whitman's poem is optimistic, Forester's novel ends (last page) with a bleak tone: everything [horses, mountains, earth, sky, etc.] said in their hundred voices, 'No, not yet...No, not there.' One cannot help these comparisons while analysing similar or dissimilar ideas.

Comparative studies are found in examples like "a study of the impacts of Ibsen on modernist drama". One finds some relation between Ibsen and G.B. Shaw. Some would study the influence of T.S. Eliot on W.H. Auden or Pound on Eliot. Others may study the influence of Coleridge on Wordsworth. But to find direct influence which is the French-oriented school of CL is not easy to fulfil (Sarhan, 1983). It can be between *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* (Alive Son of Awake) by Ibn al-Taufil (1100?-1185; Higiya 494?-581) and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* but it needs some kind of documentation and scholarly studies to trace influence. One may study the Romantic Movement in Europe and its influence on the Arab World. The study of Puritanism and its influence on literature in Britain and America is a valid topic for CL. But these studies are not directly relevant to a teacher of literature for Arab students.

A closer topic is to investigate the relationship between an Arab writer and a foreign writer. For example, Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006) and Theodore Dreiser (1871-1945) can be compared on the basis of their naturalistic viewpoints. What binds the two is the naturalistic mode of presentation of their characters. Thus a topic can be phrased like "The naturalistic approach of Dreiser and Mahfouz as realized in their characters and environments" (Razzq, 1991). This can investigate the viewpoints of the two novelists towards environment, heredity and the gloomy aspect of life. One finds this in Mahfouz's *bidaya wa nihaya* (**The Beginning and the End**; 1945), *al-thulathiyya* (**The Trilogy** 1957) and

Sister Carrie (1900). Like Mahfouz's novels, Dreiser in *Sister Carrie* recounts the story of a small-town girl who moves to Chicago and eventually becomes a Broadway star in New York City. The novel depicts explicit treatment of sexual issues. *Khat* is a short story by Dreiser too. While passing by Hodidah (Yemen) to Russia, he noticed Yemeni life and their heavily use of khat (a plant commonly used in Yemen as a form of stimulant; Yemenis chew it usually in the afternoon till the evening indoors and outdoors. *Khat* similarly recounts a gloomy setting (Hodidah); it tells the story of a beggar who is a khat addict. He runs after money only to satisfy his basic drive for Khat. Mahfouz's novels can be compared also with Steinbeck's novels: *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Tortilla Flat*, *Zuqaq al Midaq* (1947; **Midaq Alley**), *al-liss wal kilab* (trans. **The Thief and the Dogs**) and *Miramar* (trans. **Miramar**). Mahfouz and Steinbeck delineate the extreme part of reality through their focus on the oppressed (Sharyan, 2000).

Steinbeck portrayed the socio-economic changes in America during 1930s. He is similar to the Yemeni fiction writer Mohammed Abdulwali (1941-1973). Abdulwali's *They Die a Stranger* portrays a Yemeni who migrated to Ethiopia, running away from the socio-political situation that was characterised by poverty and political oppression. He opens a small shop in Addis Ababa and dreams of one day returning to his wife and children in his village back home. But he is unconcerned about the fate of his many illegitimate children in Ethiopia, as well as about the political activities of his fellow Yemeni exiles who are plotting the overthrow of the monarchy in Northern Yemen. In *Wish He Doesn't Return*, Abdulwali deals with a common scene in Yemen during the Imamate period. Here an immigrant comes back to his home but as a sick man. He returns sick, carried on the shoulders of some villagers. He is a dying body without any movement. His children hear about him but they do not know him for he was making money outside the country. He appears as a ghost for he is of no use. His return is a kind of burden on the family. His best days are gone abroad and what is left for his country, children and wife is only the butt end of his life. When he left he was strong but when he came he is almost a wreck: no power, youth or sweet days and his children are unable to recognise him. 'Steinbeck's and Mohammed Abdulwali's presentation of migration as realized in their

novels' is another topic in CL. The former presented America during the Great Depression (the end of 1929 until the early 1940s), the latter presented the migration of Yemenis particularly during the Imamate Period- this is the period when Yemen was under a royal family (Imamate Period) that ruled Yemen from its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1911 till the 1962 Revolution.

Adultery and sacred marital commitments as a theme can be found in the writings of different backgrounds such as Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880), Hawthorne (1804-1864), Tolstoy (1828-1910) and Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006). A comparative study would examine adultery in the four cultural backgrounds. Flaubert, the father of realistic fiction in France, portrays the dissatisfaction of Emma in *Madame Bovary* (1857). He depicts the specific reality of the main characters and the historical period. Emma the heroine felt disappointed by the Charles Bovary as a dull husband. She was charmed by Rodolphe and Léon with whom she had affairs. Emma commits suicide by swallowing arsenic and dies a horrible death. Tolstoy, the Russian novelist, presents a similar case. Like Emma, Anna in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1875-1877) is torn between her dull marriage and a passionate affair with Vronsky, a dashing soldier for whom she gives up everything. In the end, Anna suffers a tragic fate. Extramarital affairs figure also in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), set in the Puritan Boston of 1600s. The heroine Hester was exiled for adultery. She must wear a red "A" on her dress. Her lover remained silent about their passion. Hester atones for her sin through service to others. Mahfouz's *Zuqaq al midaq* (1947; Midaq Alley) depicts the misery of Hamida, the heroine, who went to the brothel instead of marrying Abbas, the barber. For a comparatist, these novels offer an extraordinary insight into the norms and behaviours of varied societies. Nevertheless, these norms, though varied, are universal.

Such studies represent a particular worldview with specific local colours though different- linguistically, geographically, historically, aesthetically. But 'similarities and commonalities' are what bind these types of studies. Interdisciplinary attempts are to cope with a rapidly-moving world in which ideas of culture, language, nation, history and identity change fast.

2.1 Teaching Comparative Literature to Yemeni Learners of English

As a way of teaching, it is tempting for any teacher who is familiar with Arabic literature to utilise it in conveying his ideas. Eliot's Prufrock compares himself to Hamlet and Polonius:

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;

Am an attendant lord, one that will do

To swell a progress, start a scene or two... (Line 111-113)

Any teacher who deals with these lines from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915) will not do justice if no reference is made to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. One cannot do justice to Eliot's poetry if he does not refer to the source of the allusions that varies from one culture to another or from a literary work to another. This is because Eliot believes a poet is to reflect in his writing the dead poets. This is not the only example. This kind of comparison is undoubtedly necessary, particularly when dealing with literary trends and movements as Renaissance Literature, Restoration Comedies, Neo-classical Literature, Romanticism, the Victorian novel, Realism, Expressionism, Naturalism, Absurd and Existentialism. The teacher has no choice but to compare relevant concepts. Emerson, for instance, met Wordsworth and Coleridge. He adopted the German philosophy of Transcendentalism, not the Wordsworthian pantheism. Such movements tempt the teacher to touch on different topics while dealing with a literary text due to their relevance. Themes and motifs that are recurrent in many of the literary works compel the teacher to refer to them. Elements of parallelism, not influence, can be used as a method of analysis (el-Messari, 1983). Parallelism, in this context, involves both similarities and dissimilarities, formal and thematic structures. The binary opposites of Cain/ Abel, good/evil, Adam/Eve, male/female, war/peace, love/hatred are universal phenomena. To mention one in one culture is to mention the other in the other culture.

The use of comparison is used always to draw learners' attention to some phenomena as the greedy Jew who is a moneylender. While teaching Shakespeare's *The Merchant Of Venice* (1600), one cannot help

but refer to the moneylender, who is a Jew. The same motif appears in Dostoyevsky's psychological novel *Crime and Punishment* (1866); the moneylender (a woman) who was killed with her sister by Raskolnikov is a Jew. Fagin (the Jew) in Dickens' *Oliver Twist* plays the role of a convincing career criminal to make money instead of interest. These are not much different from the legend of the Wandering Jew, and Marlowe's *The Jew Of Malta* (1623). Barabas, the wealthy Maltese Jew, is not so much different from Shylock. In both cases the Jews' fortune was confiscated because Shylock conspired against a Venetian citizen and Barabas refused to pay a tax to buy off the attacking Turks. As a kind of revenge, Barabas carries out a series of murders and then betrays the island to the Turks. Finally, he plots the destruction of the Turks but he falls victim to his own scheme and dies in a boiling cauldron.

Teaching literature remains an issue in the current practices of literary criticism. Some consider the text an autonomous entity- no need for a reference to the life of the author. The psychoanalytic school looks for the employment of psychological terms and techniques in analysing the fictional character's motives. It attempts to find out the relationship between the text and its author. Some teach literature by focusing on the ideological aspects as the school of Marxism and New Historicism. Others opt for an amalgamation of varied schools and develop their own eclectic method to compare or contrast ideas. One resorts to CL as an outlet from hazy literature teaching methods. Teaching language in comparison is more systematic (Sharyan, 2003: 387).

Using CL proves that students feel more confident to deal with the target literary texts, especially when they are exposed to English literature for the first time at the university. Some students ask "cannot we find something better than this text in English literature that is similar to our belief and culture?" To overcome the alien culture, this paper suggests that one can begin with the familiar, i.e. native culture, and then move to the target culture. Moreover, CL is used to widen students' views on other cultures. If literature is used as a window on the world, CL is a window that allows two views: inside and outside. Al-Qamri (1991: 9) is of the opinion that literature is the product of a civilization that reflects in its development a constructive interaction between cultures. Knowing the literature in the other culture broadens one's views of the world. It

promotes tolerance and understanding of the otherness. Narrow-minded views as the following do not get their way to students' minds:

“I have never found one among them (Orientalists) who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole nation literature of India and Arabia. I have certainly never met with any Orientalist who ventured to maintain that the Arabic and Sanskrit poetry could be compared to that of the great European nation.”

Macaulay (1835; quoted in Bassnett, 1993: 17).

This superiority complex does not lead to building confidence across cultures. This is not only a rare case but it has its base in the literature of the west itself. It is recurrent in Congreve's *The Way of the World*:

Let Mahometan fools

Live by heathenish rules,

And be damned over tea-cups and coffee. (Act IV, Scene XI)

It is further illustrated in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* who says to Xury 'if you [Xury] will be faithful to me, I'll make you a great man; but if you will not stroke your face to be true to me' - that is, swear by Mahomet and his father's beard - "I must throw you into the sea too," (Defoe, (ed) 2007:111). But the moment he heard the boy calling "Master, master, a ship with a sail!" Robinson thought of Xury as a "foolish boy" (ibid: 117). Then he sold Xury after this promise when he met the Portuguese Captain who offered him a free journey to Brazil. Xury can be free on the condition that he has to convert to Christianity and that is after serving ten years as a slave. When Crusoe met Friday after a long time of loneliness, he thought of him as a slave. The first word Friday was taught after 'Yes and No' is 'Master' to the extent that he thought it is the name of Crusoe (ibid: 240). This slave-master relationship of Crusoe and Xury and Friday makes one think of the superiority complex that was expressed above. This intolerance makes

students feel detached from English literature. Such a view is what led thinkers as Edward Said (1935-2003) to study the east in the western literature. His famous work *Orientalism* (1978) set out the ways in which Europe saw and sneered at the Orient. Orientalism in Said's terms is a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in Western Experience. It constitutes the attitudes held by 19th-century Western scholars that created fundamental misperceptions in their works on the works of the Eastern countries. These literary works were used by the West in building a rationale for imperialism. For the West, the East (Orient) is depicted as either charming or frightening. In both cases the West takes arms against the East. They want to invade the east because it is the source of charm, wealth, raw material, tradition, and mild climate. They look at the East as frightening and they also want to invade it to protect themselves from the danger of the East (Rasheed, 1983: 51). This is what is happening during the days of colonisation for most part of the East- the case of Iraq in 2007 is a case in point.

But the paper attempts to overlook such views and tries to bring together diversities, particularly in the area of teaching for idealistic and pragmatic purposes. This makes students read from their perspective- not necessarily to boast or claim superiority over other cultures.

This does not mean the Orient was not mentioned in a positive sense. Lady Macbeth, for example, refers to Arabia as a source of best perfume, "all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this [her] little hand" (Act 5, Scene 1). Wordsworth in *The Solitary Reaper* admires the nightingale that sings for a group of "travellers in ...Among Arabian sands" (Line 10-11). Sergius in Shaw's *Arms and the Man* bets his "best charger against an Arab mare for Raina that Nicola finds the coat in the blue closet." And Catherine stresses the value of an Arab mare, saying to her husband "Dont be foolish, Paul. An Arabian mare will cost you 50,000 levas," (Act II). This shows they refer to Arabs in a positive sense.

A teacher of literature would make use of comparison even if the course was not a comparative one. For example to teach figures of speech (e.g. simile, personification, metonymy, synecdoche, etc.) for first level students at the Department of English is not easy unless one gets the help of students' native literature (e.g. أنا البحر في أحشائه الدر كامن فهل سألوا).

الغواص عن صدقاتي One has no choice when teaching the romantic movement in Britain but to talk about the movement in other parts of Europe or America. Sometimes one refers to the movement in modern Arabic literature. Neo-classical thoughts are not too far from the traditionalists in the 20th century Arabic literature. To explain proverbs like 'Time is Money' is not easily digested because it connotes materialism. For an Arab 'Time is Gold' that is both valuable and durable; or "time is like a double-edged sword unless you cut it cuts you". An English simile, in Robert Burns' *A Red Rose*, goes like this,

'My Love is like a red, red rose

That newly sprang in June.' (Line 1-2)

For an Arab a "woman is like a moon". She is remote, more durable and more valuable unlike the one in the previous example who is probably to be enjoyed and thrown. This reveals the distinctive worldview of an Arabic speaker. Not to care for this conceptual differences results in misunderstanding and a breakdown of communication between the sender and the receiver of the information. CL, the paper believes, may solve the problem. Those who do not know the students' mother-tongue literature meet challenges of disagreement.

These examples demonstrate the importance of students' national literature and culture in teaching a foreign literature. An English teacher, for example, spends a long time explaining the word 'fable' for students but in vain. One example of Ibn al-Muqaffa's fables makes the point clear. Other non-Arab teachers find it difficult to teach *The Way of the World* due to derogatory view mentioned above.

In teaching poetry, one has a wider scope than novel or drama. A number of lines in the national or foreign literature echo each other. The conflict in the mind of the ancient mariner in Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* resembles the trouble condition of the knight in Keats's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* for the two are seen as ballads. The old lonely man who holds the wedding guest with his glittering eyes is a strange old man with powerful eyesight in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. To discuss poetry that is heavily loaded with religious implications is likely to cause some kind of mistrust in the target literature and its

ideology, particularly in Yemen. Experience in the field shows that poems like Blake's *The Lamb* or *The Tyger*, Wordsworth's *The World Is Too Much With Us*, Milton's *Paradise Lost* are likely to cause some kind of misunderstanding if taught without comparisons to mother tongue literature and ideology. The religious aspect can be dealt with easily if compared to students' religion. It reflects some kind of solidarity with the other more than difference if used judiciously. As an example of using students' culture, examine the following lines from John Milton's *On His Blindness* when they are compared to some lines from the **Holy Qura'an**:

Thousands at his bidding speed

And post o'er land and ocean without rest:

They also serve who only stand and wait. (Line 12-14)

They are easy to teach if compared to this verse from the **Holy Qura'an**:

قال الله تعالى: [وله من في السموات والأرض ومن عنده لا يستكبرون عن عبادته ولا يستحسرون. يسبحون الليل والنهار لا يفترون]. (الأنبياء 19-20).

19. To Him belongs whosoever is in the heavens and on earth. And those who are near Him (i.e. the angels) are not too proud to worship Him, nor are they weary (of His worship).

20. They (i.e. the angels) glorify His Praises night and day, (and) they never slacken (to do so).

(Translation of the **Holy Qura'an** issued by the Presidency of Islamic Researchers, Ifta, Call and Guidance, Riyadh).

Similarly *Paradise Lost* would not be easy to teach to Yemeni students unless it is compared to the fall of man in Islam. I tried teaching it with comparison of verses from *Surat AL-Ara'f* (verses 12-27). Some points can be discussed like Adam was misled by her to have the forbidden fruit and to go with her. She is the culprit, i.e. 'woman'. Perhaps Hamlet alludes to that when he says 'Frailty, thy name is

woman!' (*Hamlet*, ACT I, SCENE II). Thus she is the source of all mankind's suffering and the loss of the Garden of Eden. But this is not the way it was presented in Islam. In the Islamic view Adam and Eve are equally guilty:

قال الله تعالى: [ويا آدم اسكن أنت وزوجك الجنة فكلا من حيث
سنتما ولا تقربا هذه الشجرة فتكونا من الظالمين (19)]. فوسوس لهما
الشيطان ليبيدي لهما ما وري عنهما من سواتهما وقال ما نهاكما
ربكما عن هذه الشجرة إلا أن تكونا ملكين أو تكونا من الخالدين
(2) [الأعراف 19-20].

This is an interpretation of the verses (*Ibid*):

19. "And O Adam! Dwell you and your wife in Paradise, and eat thereof as you both wish, but approach not this tree otherwise you both will be of the *Zdlimun* (unjust and wrong-doers)."

20. Then *Shaitan* (Satan) whispered suggestions to them both in order to uncover that which was hidden from them of their private parts (before); he said: "Your Lord did not forbid you this tree save that you should become angels or become of the immortals." *Surat AL-Ara'f* (verses 19-20).

The second interesting point is that Milton said Christ is a man:

...With loss of Eden, till one greater Man...

This is similar to the Islamic view that Christ is a great Prophet but he is a man after all not a God or Son of God. Understanding seems better than teaching it without referring to the students' culture.

Like poetry that can be supported from Arabic, Western drama that employs myth finds its echo, particularly in the 20th century. Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1913) that describes the transformation of a Cockney flower girl into a fine lady at the hands of a cynical and slightly misanthropic phonetician has an equivalent in Arabic literature. Tawfiq Al-Hakim treated the same theme in his play *Pygmalion* (1942). The two

playwrights base their plays on the Greek legend of Pygmalion and Galatea: The myth of a sculptor who fell in love with a statue of the beautiful woman and eventually fell madly in love with it. Similar to Pygmalion, *Oedipus Rex* has fascinated some 20th century Arab playwrights. Ali Ahmad Bakathir's¹ *Oedipus Tragedy* (1949) and Tawfiq Al-Hakim's *Oedipus the King* (1978) are under the influence of Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* (Wazzan, 1985: 113-131).

2.2 Examples of Comparative Literature

To give an example of exploiting CL in classroom learning situations, the paper gives the following example from the novel to illustrate the function and usefulness of this field.

2.2.1 Mahfouz's *bidaya wa nihaia* (trans. **The Beginning and the End**) and Hardy's *The Return of the Native*

Through teaching Yemeni students the 19th century novel, the researcher finds it useful to choose a text like *The Return of the Native* (1878) by Thomas Hardy (1840-1928). This novel is easily compared with Mahfouz's *bidaya wa nihaia* (1949; trans **The Beginning and the End**). This tells the story of a lower middle-class family- a mother and her four children. The protagonists are Nafissa and Hassanein. Hassanein is the youngest son who gets his feet into a War College. He struggles climbing the social ladder. He becomes an officer. He suffers from this inner guilt of how his poverty-stricken past might threaten his chance of marrying the Bey's daughter. Nafissa is seduced by the grocer's son who played with her emotions and misused her sexually, hoping to marry her someday. Towards the end of the novel, Hassanein is called to the police station to be informed that his sister has been found in a brothel. Her brother forces her to commit suicide by drowning herself in the Nile. He also drowns out of shame. The story lasts about three to four years. The gloomy atmosphere and in-depth delineation of characters make this novel similar to *The Return of the Native*. The tragic lives of Clym

¹ Ali Ahmad Bakathir (1910-1069) is a Yemeni poet and dramatist. He was born in Indonesia and lived most of his life in Egypt. Because he masters both Arabic and English, he translated a number of works into Arabic. He is a leading figure in free verse and historical drama.

Yeobright, Eustacia Vye, Hassanein and Nafissa are vividly presented. Eustacia and Nafissa are drowned at the end of the two novels out of shame. The depiction of a pitiable human struggle is expressed both in the description of Egdon Heath and the Cairene backward allies of Cairo. Hassanein suffers greatly in trying to keep his family together. But he fails. Similarly Clym Yeobright, who returns to settle in his community and educate them, fails eventually. The four characters are helpless towards the end of the two novels.

2.2.2 Mahfouz's *al-thulathiyya* (trans. **The Trilogy**) and Dickens' *David Copperfield*

al-thulathiyya (trans. **The Trilogy** 1957) is by Mahfouz (1911-2006) who was compared to Dostoyevsky and Franz Kafka (Myers, 1986). There are a lot of similarities in *al-thulathiyya* and Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* (1849-50). *al-thulathiyya*, as a saga, is of three novels: '*Bahyan al Qasryan*' (1956; **Palace of Walk**), '*Qasr al Shaoq*' (1957; **Palace of Desire**), and '*al Sukariyya*' (1957; **Sugar Street**). The saga conveys a panorama of colourful evocations of events in the lives of several generations of a middle-class Cairo family. The events evolve around al-Sayyid, the main character in the three novels, and his family. Changes take place in their lives and reflect the transformations in all walks of life. *The Trilogy* portrays the transformations of the Egyptian society from different viewpoints: political, economic and cultural. In addition, the saga covers a wide range of topics as the Egyptian Revolution, the effects of modernisation on cultural and religious values and the changing attitudes towards women, education and science. It also throws light on similar issues in other Arab countries. These narratives exhibit and comment on these issues through the significant experiences. *The Trilogy* portrays this middle class Cairo family from 1917 to 1944. The background presents Egypt in transition, as we have the USA in transition in Dos Passos and Steinbeck's fiction or as we have the Victorian period in *David Copperfield*.

David Copperfield is a semi-autobiographical novel like *al-thulathiyya*. Both reflect a realistic description of a historical period that span over fifty years. The main characters in both works are similar. In *David Copperfield*, the hero is an orphan. David is rescued from his cruel

stepfather, the headmaster. He had to work as a boy labourer in London. As Mahfouz depicts Egypt before and during the revolution, Dickens records the Victorian England through the description of David's experiences: abusive treatment of children. Al-Sayyid is in a way similar to Mr. Murdstone, the stepfather of David. The brutal environment they create is common for both works. The two stories trace the early childhood and ill-treatment of David and Kamal.

2.2.3 *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* and *Robinson Crusoe*

Hayy ibn Yaqzan and *Robinson Crusoe* reflect CL in practice. *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* is written by Ibn al-Taufil (1100?-1185; Higeria 494?-581). (*Hayy* means the mind that is conscious). *Ibn Yaqzan* (Son of Awake) is a metonymy for God who does not sleep. As an allegory, *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* shows how one can discover Almighty without a prophet or community. Through rational and critical inquiry into what surrounds him, he is able to reason the driving force that moves animate and inanimate things in the cosmos.

Hayy ibn Yaqzan was translated into different European languages since the early fourteenth century (Hilal, 1973). It is of two parts: introduction and the main text. This famous philosophical narrative deals with a child who was left alone on a desolate island. A deer fed him till he was about seven years. Then it died. He did not know the meaning of death. He thought it would wake up. After waiting for a long time, he concluded that it would never come back to life. When he (*Hayy*) became 22, he began to investigate the natural scenes. He observed the ability of animate things, and the inability of inanimate things, to move. But some inanimate things make some movements as plants and fire. Unlike stones, they also grow and die. He concludes that objects have soul and matter. Then he began to think about heavenly objects. When he becomes around 30 years old, he meditates on the sky that stretches in an unlimited area. Such an analytic inquiry into the arrangement of objects and concepts into a unified system allows him to speculate on the nature of planets that rise, set and move together in a circular way.

Hayy developed his thinking from the particular to the general till he began to think about the cosmos as a whole. He started to think if every action exists because of someone or something that caused it, then

the cosmos exists because something or someone has caused it. It cannot exist without a creator. One can see that *Hayy* began to think about the physical before the metaphysical.

He infers things not only by his senses but also by some invisible ability: soul. Since the soul is not concrete it must live forever. It cannot vanish because it does not have physical being. He construes that the *soul* does not know God as long as it is in the dying body. Having left the body, the virtuous soul realises God. Then he deduces that the soul does not realise God in the hereafter unless it recognises Him in its earthly existence. Here *Hayy* begins to practise some kind of worship to acquaint himself with the Creator before the death of his soul. For this, he attempts to approach the state of his death.

Whenever he needed food, he found other creatures look for basic needs but unaware of the ultimate self, self-actualization or the spiritual nature of existence. He thought of himself as different. He spends long time meditating over his existence, the existence of other creatures- animate and inanimate and the difference between them. When reflecting, he sees invisible things that cannot be described: the happiness obtained by the end of the narrative.

The account of *Hayy* ends with another person *Asalan*, a friend of the governor of a neighbouring island. *Asalan* is a pious person who prefers to be alone and worship God. He decides to migrate to a neighbouring isolated island where *Hayy* is living. When *Asalan* saw *Hayy*, he thought *Hayy* is a hermit on this island like him. *Hayy* was surprised for this is the first time to see the shape of human beings. *Asalan* was surprised to find a man like *Hayy* who does not know anything. *Asalan* tried to teach *Hayy* human language. Both were happy about the end they arrived at- with regard to the creator. After *Hayy* knew language, *Asalan* told him about the neighbouring island and the situation of people there. *Hayy* had a desire to preach those people. The two friends went to the neighbouring island and started to preach the elite who were furious about what they heard from *Hayy* and *Asalan*. The two preachers were convinced that there was no hope of teaching the laity if the elite did not understand those teachings. *Asalan* left with *Hayy* and that was their way of teaching; *Asalan* followed the method of *Hayy* till they died (Farukh, 1982: 8-30).

Robinson Crusoe is not very different from *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. The two stories begin as autobiographical narration of some real story. *Robinson Crusoe* was claimed to be based on some real story of a sailor according to Defoe. Similarly *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* begins with an assumption that a woman who had married secretly gave birth to a child. Because she was afraid of her brother, the king, she put the child in a box and threw him to the water till he found his way to an isolated island to be cared for by a deer. Unlike *Hayy*, Robinson came to the island when he was more than twenty years old. On the island he began to think quite a lot of repentance and the original sin. This religious aspect brings him closer to *Hayy*. The spiritual quest is the base for both characters that can be classified as stories of spiritual development for *Hayy* and Robinson. The successful attempt to care for themselves and to adjust to the surrounding environment is a common feature in both. Both spent long time on the isolated island (Robinson 28 years and *Hayy* about fifty years). Loneliness and isolation dominate the two narratives that seem to neglect the role of women. The presence of women is limited in *Robinson Crusoe* for they were mentioned only in passing (Robinson's mother, sister or wife). The two stories end in different tones. Though both characters came back to land, each took a different direction. While Robinson began another story about the further adventures of Robinson Crusoe, *Hayy* confined himself to his island.

This comparison provokes students to have an innovative reading due to the full participation because of the story they know. And hence their literature and the foreign literatures are reinforced.

3.0 Conclusion

The paper has discussed CL from the perspective of its use as a means of teaching English literature for EFL. It gives numerous references to literary works that can be compared or referred to when teaching English literature to Yemeni Learners of English. The paper suggests that CL be offered as an independent course for students of the Faculty of Education who are not exposed to translation, literary history or literary criticism, at least at Sana'a University. As a conclusion one can find that using CL in teaching literature widens the scope of learners to avoid misunderstanding that results in breaking down of communication

between teachers and students in most cases; records at our Department reflect that. CL creates a healthy attitude to learning a foreign language that is rooted in its culture. CL, as described above, raises students' awareness of the relationship between Arabic and English literature. It sharpens their critical thinking to weigh the pros and cons, develop independent learning on the long run and enhance learning in L₂.

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