

Ain Shams University
Faculty of Al-Asun
Department of English

**THE DRAMATIC TRANSFORMATION OF
LOVE LEGENDS
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ROMEO AND JULIET
AND MAJNUN LAYLA**

A Ph.D. Thesis
Presented By
Fouad Ahmed Abdulrazek

Supervised By

Prof. M. A. SHOEIB
Dean of Faculty of Al-Asun

Prof. T. A.SALEH
Professor of English Literature
Faculty of Al-Asun

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation lies in the field of comparative literature simply because it deals with two works from two different literatures i.e. Romeo and Juliet and Majnun Layla from English and Arabic literatures, and at the same time they have their points of affinities and differences. Most of the concepts of comparative literature could be applied to these two works especially in terms of influence, translation as a medium, indebtedness and originality, and sources.

The two literary works are two legends of love and the history of nations is full of love legends from which artists derive the sources of their fictional works. Arabic literature, as well as English literature, made use of such legends to produce different literary works in drama, novel, or poetry. As a student with comparative orientation I found great interest in tackling the topic of love legends in both literatures as it is represented in two famous plays written by two leading writers: Romeo and Juliet by Shakespeare and Majnun Layla by Shawqy.

Actually the study of topics, as this one of love legends, forms a rich field in literary comparative studies. It could reveal very important results in respect

of the relation between one literature and another. When the literary theme is taken from one literature to another and transformed from one form to another, it keeps most of its original characteristics, and the other characteristics are made use of in expressing new trends and ideas. Eventually the theme represents a relation between the original literature from which it is derived and the receiving literature. The topic also represents a new addition to the latter literature. The function of comparative study in this case is to show all the foreign factors and the original addition to the theme after being shifted to the receiving literature, and after being transformed so that the literary elements may be referred back to their origin, and the indebtedness and originality could be evaluated as well.

In the scope of universality and fame literary topics are not equal in degree in the different literatures. Some might be confined to one or two literatures whereas some others, for certain conditions, are circulated among quite a good number of literatures acquiring in this way a clear universal touch. Some of the prominent examples are "Don Juan" and "Faust" which have been tackled in almost all European literatures.

I think that the universality of Shakespeare's works and the importance of Shawqy's works, especially in the field of drama which is a new genre in Arabic literature, makes

this study a necessary one in a world which needs to be united through understanding of cross-cultural affinities rather than false treaties and precarious detente. This study is also an attempt to discover the phenomenon of communication between two literary characters not in its limited frame but in its general frame which is the cultural heritage or rather tradition to which each one of them belongs. The cultural tradition has a great impact on its people and in their relations to foreign cultures. This impact is taken into consideration in this study¹

The term comparative literature is a shaky term and it suffered from misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Critics up till now, and after almost a century since its introduction into literary circles can not agree on a final say about it or a clear-cut definition of comparative literature.

In practice, the term 'comparative literature' as René Wellek says, has covered and still covers rather distinct fields of study and groups of problems. Wellek stresses the importance of comparative literature in the study of oral literature, especially of folk-tale themes

¹In this thesis the comparative framework is applied and this might split the thesis into two parts. As some of my references are in Arabic I relied on my own translation unless mentioned otherwise. As for Arabic lines of poetry I depended on Professor Arberry's translation of Majnun Layla.

and their migration, of how and when they have entered higher, artistic literature. Another trend of comparative literature confines it to the study of relationships between two or more literatures. This is the concept established by the French school. This school gives attention to ^{Such} questions as the reputation and penetration, the influence and fame, of Goethe in France and England, of Carlyle and Schiller in France. Of the French school Wellek writes.

It has developed a methodology which, going beyond the collection of information concerning reviews, translations, and influences, considers carefully the image, the concept of a particular author at a particular time, such diverse factors of transmission as periodicals, translators, salons, and travellers and the receiving factor, the special atmosphere and literary situation into which the foreign author is imported¹

But this conception of comparative literature has also its peculiar difficulties as it could be applied to other branches. In fact comparative literature is a branch of literary study sharing some general characteristics with other branches but contradistinguished from them in other respects. Its distinguishing characteristics

¹René Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of literature (Penguin Books Ltd, London, 1973), p. 48.

stem from its goals and ambitions as well as from the controversies and problems to which its very nature has given rise. Comparative literature as a branch of study, originated in connection with a certain "positivism" stressing 'rapport de fait' and looking for relations between writers of different nationalities. Ever since its beginning it has shown a humanistic tendency and an interest in spiritual affinities manifested in different literatures.

Dr. Ghoneimy Hilal, the doyen of comparatists in modern Arabic criticism and the sincere follower of the French comparative school gives the following definition:

Comparative literature is the study of national literature in its historical relation to other literatures in other languages, the word comparative is not inclusive of its linguistic meaning but the historical meaning should be noted¹.

To Hilal the main conception of comparative literature is historical and he claims that the mere name of comparative literature is inadequate and it would rather be called "comparative history of literatures" or "History of comparative literatures". But the name comparative

¹Ghoneimy Hilal, Comparative Literature (Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop, Cairo, 1962), p. 6.

literature is still the most celebrated due to its brevity, easiness, and the use of it by the great French critic Sainte. Beuve in 1868.

It is the positivistic origins of comparative literature that have helped to draw it to the orbit of historical studies. For a long time, it was regarded as a branch of literary history. Comparatists were regarded as historians of literary affinities with an interest in sources, origins, intermediaries, translations, forms of influence, causalities, and thematology.

Comparative literature wavered for long between history and literary criticism. The situation of comparative literature now is a challenging one:

Comparative literature in its present situation confronts students of contemporary literature with many challenges ranging from the very nomenclature "comparative literature" to the epistemological foundations upon which it is based, as an autonomous discipline or as one that strives towards the conditions of autonomy¹

In comparative literature there are two main schools: The Traditional French school and the American school which added with its new concepts to the studies of comparative literature.

¹ Fusul : Journal of literary criticism, part I, Vol, III, April, May, June, 1983.p.5.

The French school, traditional as it is, confines comparative literature to the domain of international literary relations and the actual affinities between different literatures in the light of reception, mediation, and influence. The French comparatists look askance at the studies whose main concern is the mere comparison which stops short at revealing the similarities and dissimilarities. They prefer to concentrate on issues which could have decisive material evidence and this is why they rule out literary criticism from the field of comparative literature. Of this French school Abdulhakim Hassan Writes:

This school has come to an impasse: this shows in the lack of a clear-cut definition of the subject and the methods of comparative literature. It also shows in a certain disregard of the literary texts themselves in favour of causal laws supposed to produce a surface objectivity which turns out, in the end to be a mere mask of national tendencies¹.

The American school came into being after René Wellek's The Crisis of Comparative Literature which was an essay that exposed the methodological defects of the French school, and heralded a different trend that came to be

¹ Abdel Hakim Hassan, "Comparative literature: The American and the French Concepts", Fusul, April, May, June, 1983, p. 15.

known by this name i.e the American school. This school stresses the critical nature of comparative studies and the vast domain of possible comparisons. It ends according to Dr. Hassan in a sort of problematality as it has not drawn a sharp line of distinction between comparative literature and general literature as to subject-matter and method. Besides, its definition of comparative literature implies some kind of duality especially when the concept is made wide enough to accomodate comparisons between literature and the other arts.

In fact most of the comparatists now try to gather both schools together although the American school with its concept is more flourishing and more successful.

One can hardly find a comparative research not dealing with the concept of 'influence' as it is a major key point in comparative studies. The concept of influence is basic to all such studies assuming as it does two separate entities that can be compared: on the one hand there is the source of influence i.e. the work from which the influence proceeds; on the other there is its object. The concept does not involve a straight forward

relation of causality though it is not unrelated to it. It does not conduce to a preference of the work exercising the influence to the one showing it. Rather, it aims at putting into relief the mechanism of the manifestation of the "influencer" into the "influenced", "with a view to the revelation of the morphology of the latter. Influence is, more or less, an unconscious process, imitation or parody is, on the other hand, a conscious procedure. Ulrich Weisstein, a German comparatist tends to stress the literary character of comparative studies and endows the concept of influence with a wider significance. In his book, Comparative Literature and Literary Theory, he discusses various kinds of imitation and forms of influence. His study shows the contradistinction between these and the study of "sources", and 'reception' asserting that the process of influence implies a network of events, entangled and interpenetrating: working in a chronological succession but under conditions dictated by every single case¹

There is another kind of influence in comparative literature called "influence a rebours" the adverse influence to which Hilal refers in his book Comparative Literature. In this kind of influence the writer takes an opposite and adverse situation towards the influence of another writer

¹Ulrich Weisstein, Comparative Literature And Literary Theory (Indiana University Press, London, 1973), p. 30.

See Also: Mustafa Maher's translation of chapter Three: Influence and Imitation. Fusul (op.cit.,) pp.18-25.

in another literature and the effect of such opposition results in certain ideas in his own works. Shawqy, for example, reacts in a reverse way to the many European plays written on Cleopatra. She is depicted in these plays as a loose, indifferent whore who follows round about ways to achieve her goals. Shawqy defends her and refutes this alleged idea about her as an Egyptian queen. She is, to him, a sincere, patriotic heroine who prefers her country and duty to her love.

The study of influence is co-related to the study of Sources. The study of the latter brings one into the realm of interdisciplinary or intercultural studies and the study of major influences from various literatures and cultures. Such an investigation involves not only source-hunting , but also a consideration of how these likely sources were used by the dramatist for dramatic purposes. Certainly one measure of showing Shakespeare's and Shawqy's artistic achievement is to sit the source alongside the drama to see how they differ as will be done in the next chapter.

To study sources one should differentiate between influence and the study of sources. Both actually contain the sender-recipient or rather the influence -

influenced relationship. This relation makes both similar and leads to confusion. The main difference between both lies in the nature of the influencing subject matter and the way the writer delineates this subject - matter. The writer can make use of history or any other sources to be included in the components of his work especially the plot, henceforth the main task of those who study sources is to find out the documents, places, or the sources from which the writer has derived his material, and as soon as they find these sources their task comes to its end. Furthermore, the study of sources deals with a non-literary material though this material represents a subject or part of the subject - matter of the literary work. Hollinshed's chronicles, Bocaccio's tales, Plutarch's lives form the sources of Shakespearean plots. The Greek mythology form the sources of Homer's epics. So the concept of 'Sources' is part of the literary history and the study of sources lie in the domain of history of literature.

The studies of influence are not confined to the theme of the literary work or the non-literary details derived from a certain source but go beyond that to the evaluation of the writer's use of this raw material