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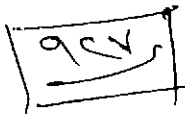
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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

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SYMBOLISM
IN THE NOVELS OF
TAWFIQ AL-HAKIM
AND
V. S. NAIPAUL

A Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the M. A. Degree

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For what remains of all those sacred, awesome things which have such prestige in our mortal lives when we remove their symbolism so that nought remains before our casual, heedless gaze except a thing of gross matter _ stone or block of wood of no meaning and no worth? What, after all, is the fate of life and what is its value when its symbol departs _ that symbol which exists and yet has no existence, which is at once nothing and everything in human life? This nothing on which we build our lives is all that we possess of higher vision, to distinguish us from the lower animals.

Tawfiq al-Hakim, *Diary of a Country Prosecutor*. Trans. Abba Eban.
London: Saqi, 1989: 84

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Introduction

Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies:

One of the definitions of Comparative Literature is that it is the transnational, cosmopolitan and multicultural study of the construction and function of literature in different cultures (Bernheimer, 16). Such study crosses linguistic boundaries and considers the transmission of texts across cultures. It is interdisciplinary since it frequently makes use of comparative anthropology, literary criticism and theory, literary movements and forms, translation, gender, race and cultural studies, as well as social and media models. Comparative literature may also tackle the relationship between national literature and other literary systems (Payne, 114). Furthermore, it may tackle other cultural or non-literary productions that are essentially aesthetic and rhetorical. Comparative literature came under the influence of ideological, political, Formalist, feminist, cultural and Post-colonial trends.

The relationship between comparative literature and cultural studies springs from the dialectic of 'text-context' which informs the main debate of comparative literature. The current debate raises the question: Should comparative literature be informed by 'contextualization' or should the best postulate be 'decontextualization' of literature and focussing on its textual, aesthetic and rhetorical aspects? (Riffaterre, 66). In other words, should the approach be extrinsic or intrinsic, or an amalgam of both? It is noteworthy that contextualization, the recreation of the original cultural conditions of a verbal art, is the postulate that underpins cultural studies (Riffaterre, 69). There is an oscillation between the view of literature as a universal civilizing force, regardless of cultural contexts, and as a representational model reflecting cultural distinction and racial subjectivity. Bernheimer suggests as ideal that 'contexts' should be

“textually mediated” (16), and advocates the “Bubble Model” proposed by Gates: “the culturalist model imagines its constituents as cultural bubbles that may collide but that could, in principle, exist in splendid isolation from one another” (Bernheimer, 9). The comparatist’s dilemma is whether to break down this isolation or to bring bubbles into collision; should comparative literature unify our sense of the essential nature and function of literature cross-culturally or highlight the diverse constructions of literature in different cultures? (Bernheimer, 10). Significantly, Tawfiq al-Hakim was a pioneer in using the “bubble image” in *Bird of the East* (89) to connote multiculturalism and the anxiety of influence, later to be propounded by Harold Bloom in the Seventies.

Comparative Literature and Multiculturalism:

Early European and North American comparatists are accused of being “anxiogenic”, to use Bernheimer’s word (12), about the genesis of and influences on Western culture, hence the resistance to the notion of hybridity and multicultural conjuncture. The Western focus was limited to “canonical” texts which came to be regarded as “universal”, thus prioritizing European and North American literature and “excluding” what they called Third-world primitive and incoherent experiences. In opposition to this, a reactionary movement evolved. This seeks to “include” and contextualize Third-world literature and that of minorities in diaspora as a step towards redefining “exilic consciousness” (Apter, 86). One of the main tasks of comparative literature nowadays is to unsettle the West-East binarism and to undo the colonial psycho-dynamics of dependency and paternalistic authority. Bernheimer believes that it is the comparatist’s task to decode the “elliptical” approach derived from the myth of the exotic native, of the centre and the margin, and to adopt a

“dynamic relational model” “overlapping ellipses” resulting from the “exclusion” of other cultures (13).

I am suggesting that multiculturalist comparatism begins at home with a comparison of oneself to oneself. This process precludes the cultural essentialism of identity politics, while it sensitizes the comparatist to the extremely difficult issues involved in evaluating cultural differences (Bernheimer, 11).

The complexity of multiculturalism is crystallized in, for example, the hybridity of Trinidadians, being brought up on an island where French and English cultures intersect with African and Indian traditions. Such pluralism of heritage naturally produces a multiplicity of narratives and history as well as, what Bakhtin terms, “polyphony” (124). Essential to reflecting this polyphony is a “carnavalesque dialogue” between discourses (Holquist, 89). This in itself undermines the oversimplified Occidental-Oriental dichotomy. Oddly enough, it is from this juxtaposition, as Edward Said asserts, that the West forms its self-concept (*Orientalism*, 1).

The authenticity of European and American literatures as touchstones, the great unsurpassed ‘masterpieces’, is now unsettled by undermining the “Us-Them” dichotomy, originating in the European Enlightenment discourse. The rubric of ‘area’ and ‘period’ studies is nowadays shown to be elliptical if it excludes Third-world literatures from the research field. Furthermore, the idea of ‘master’ nations and ‘master’ cultures has been revealed as Eurocentrism underlying the Western academic practice of comparative literature as informed by the power structures, hierarchies and discrimination of the ‘Other’ discourse (Chow, 111). Siebers ironically notes that the ‘multiple’ points of view of comparatism remains thus ‘singular’ (198). Moreover, the taboos of personal and religious interpretations of students in the field and the

educational 'recitation' system make multiculturalism a singular form that derives from European Enlightenment (Siebers, 199). "Multiculturalism is fine as long as it is the right kind of multiculturalism", Siebers wonders (199). In fact, multiculturalism should mean undermining the paradigms of colonial dependency and inferiority and unsettling the 'pyramidal array of cultures'. According to Mary Pratt, three historical processes are transforming the way literature and culture are conceived of and studied in the academy: 'globalization', 'democratization' and 'decolonization' (59).

Comparative Literature, Globalization and Post-Colonialism:

"Globalization" is defined by Pratt as the increased integration of the planet and the changes of consciousness which result (59). This process involves five types of global rapid flows: 'ethnoscapes', 'mediascapes', 'technoscapes', 'finanscapes' and 'ideoscapes' (Brewster, 23). The universal issues of migrancy, transnationality and decolonization will inevitably lead to a rewriting of history and a refiguring of identity not only for the marginalized diasporas in exile but also for the dominant cultural groups (Brewster, 27). On the other hand, "democratization" means the "opening up of higher education and the professoriate to groups traditionally excluded", particularly women and coloured races, and the "resultant diversification of both personnel and intellectual agendas" (Pratt, 59). 'Democratization', therefore, is the challenge to the exclusion principle formerly taken for-granted in the academy and other institutions. On the other hand, on the intellectual level, "decolonization" refers to the entry of the Third World into dialogue with the First, and the latter's recognition of itself as constituted by relations of contact beyond its borders (Pratt, 59). The idea here is for the Third world to attain