

Originality of French School in "Comparative Literature"

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Abstract

Comparative Literature is a study of National literature in its historical relations with other foreign literatures on the scope of the languages, which are drafted for the literatures. This concept of Comparative Literature was prevalent in the literary circles since its inception. Comparative Literature is characterized by other branches of literary knowledge, particularly by history of World Literature, National Literature, General Literature, Theory of Literature and Literary Criticism. Several terms appeared to explain the key concepts of Comparative Literature in the modern age as "History of the international literary relations".

We note that there is another type of contrary impact in Comparative Literature, which is resisted by the impact of another author in the literature of another nation, which is produced from the impact of this written-resistance. Here, we show that there is a difference between the concept of the theory of World Literature and internationalization of Regional Literatures.

Keywords: 1.Comparison 2.Literatures 3.Differences 4.National literature 5.Internationalization of literatures 6.Historical links

Introduction

Comparative Literature consists of two words: (Literature) and (Comparative). The literature is called “the ideas” and its “technical forms” or “the material” and “the formula”. These two elements reside in all forms of literary productions. Whatever disagreement is between researchers in the definition of the literature, it does not matter that how long their argument was in definition of the literature, but two elements: the article and the wording are component parts of the literature, namely as the body and soul of mankind, whether we have one over the other or both of which we thought alike. The word: “Comparative” not means here the comparison in linguistic sense, but it must note the historical meaning. Thus, comparative literature is the study of national literature in the historical relations with other foreign literatures on the scope of the languages which are used for the writing of literature. This is the French concept of comparative literature, which was prevalent in the literary circles since its inception, but as the concepts are renewed according to the requirements of the time, the concept of Comparative Literature is also renewed.

There are some differences in the use of the term, "comparative literature", but ultimately chosen to continue its use because of its prevalence. In the first row of these people (Paul Van Tieghem), who recognized that “this term is not an accurate indication of the subject and there are other healthier and clearer terms than this one” [1].

There are some of the proposed names for Comparative Literature, which are mentioned as follows:

- “The modern Comparative literatures” is the official name, as it is used in the field of literary specialisations in many universities.

- “History of Comparative Literature” has been used by two pioneers in this area: Joseph Text and G. G. Amp in 1832.

- Comparative Literary History, comparative history of the literature, history of comparative literature and history of the comparison. [2]

Despite the confusion in the terms, the growth of this type of study must not hinder, although the researchers noted from the outset that there is no need to search for another term, (Marius Francois Guiar) proposed another term, which has emerged in the modern age named: (History of international literary relations)

(Paul Van Tieghem) explains the French concept of Comparative Literature saying: "Comparative Literature has been used practically in France for a century almost, as a well-known standard term, so (Villemain) began to use it in his lectures in Sorbonne since 1827, as he made it the title of his lectures since 1830. Then starting from 1840 he put it in several books ... Then this term began to spread more and more until it became today a clear and easier term for the use, even it became understood that there is no reason to replace it by another name". [3]

It is noteworthy that (Paul Van Tieghem) linked between Comparative Literature and the emergence of sciences of the comparison in the nineteenth century, pointing out that the word (Comparative) used on almost at the same time used it in the field of linguistics, anthropology and zoology, under the influence of ideas and opinions being one.[4]

This first term “Comparative Literature” has been in use for more than one hundred and fifty years. It has been proven that replacement of a new term on the place of this one is not easy.

Originally the word “Comparative Literature” is based on the wording for the explanation of the comparable effect, as it is closer to the intended meaning by French term “La Litterature Comparee” in the meaning of “compared” in English. [5]

Rather the word: (Comparative) is the most common and correct term to be used for the effect, as a result of comparison. Actually the factor in the field of comparative literature is the comparative researcher, which is used for the (Comparatise) in French. [6]

We mention here some literary trends to clarify the accurate definition of Comparative Literature.

1. Popular Literature

Comparative Literature is the study of oral literature, especially topics of popular stories and their migration from one place to other, also how and when it entered the field of professional literatures or fine arts, which is supposed to be sophisticated more than the popular stories. It is clear that the study of oral literature is an integral part of the study of the written literature, since it is not possible to separate each of them, because of the existing interaction between them -a lot or less- depending on the social and cultural circumstances of each country. There is an original one for many species and topics of popular literature, as there are many examples to prove the social origin of popular literature. There are also many examples to prove that many repeated popular literatures - from time to time - evolved from (technical) or (written) literature, the link between the popular and written literature is clear and it is often mutually exclusive.

2. Historical Literary Links

Second trend studies the links between two or more literatures and the term of Comparative Literature is often used for this basic concept since its inception.

"French School of scholars in the comparative studies, which flourished in the late nineteenth century, has been hardened in limiting comparative literature in this field. (Paul Van Tieghem) defined Comparative Literature as it "studies the effects of different literatures according to their relations to each other, "as (Jean-Marie Carré) has differentiated heavily among the literary comparisons non-existing links and relationships, and the comparative literature, which relies on the concept of vulnerability and impact through the real relations between the arts or writers from different countries, as he (Carré) refused the idea of congruence between the General literature and Comparative Literature. As well (M. F. Guiar) has also counted the (World Literature) and (General Literature) two unseen (metaphysical) coveted objects. He preferred to designate a new label for the comparative literature with a more accurate indication of the subject, which is: (history of international literary relations)." [7]

With regard to the Western literature, (Paul Van Tieghem) thinks that comparative literature must be included: the relations between Greek and Latin literatures with each other, then what the modern literatures owe to the ancient literatures since the Middle Ages. [8]

(Fernand Baldensperger) was a French scholar who founded this concept, which was described by a magazine (Comparative Literature): (La Revue de la Litterature Comparee).

Many books had been written about the bases of this French concept for the comparison, which had dominated the Western stage until the mid-twentieth century at least and it was the only concept remained in the field of Arab Comparative Studies until the end of the seventies of this century. Therefore, we have to focus on the concept of Comparative Literature at the French school, which is as follows:

- Comparative Literature studies places of meeting among the literatures in their different languages and links in their present or past.

- The boundaries among different literatures are their languages, which separate each other. Therefore, the languages of the literatures are important to Comparative Literature in the study of the mutual impact and influence among them.
- Comparative Literature is essential to the history of literature and criticism in their contemporary meaning, because it discloses the trends of artistic and intellectual sources for the National Literature.
- The comparisons among the authors from different literatures have no historical links can not be counted from Comparative Literature.
- It will not be right to put in the standards of Comparative Literature just a presentation of texts or facts related to the literature and criticism, to look for similarity or convergence, without any attention to the links among them. This kind of comparison may be useful to make the observation strengthened and to give much information, but it has no any historical value.
- As well as the comparisons inside a single National Literature can not be counted from Comparative Literature, whether there are historical links among the compared texts or not, because Comparative Literature has an international field of linking between two or more than two different literatures.
- The internal comparisons inside the only one literature are less fertile, less benefit and have a narrower field than comparative studies, because they often run on a single frequency and within narrow boundaries.

The scholars of Comparative Literature believe that any literature cannot live alone in isolation from the pack of other literatures, without being weak and fading. They believe that the most beautiful aspects of the National Literature may be that which is adopted in its sources a vaccine from foreign help for the prosperity of those areas in the National Literature. This branch of Comparative Literature helps the nation to understand itself and see its image in the mirror of other literatures. These are the main points of Comparative Literature at the French school. [9]

There are some scholars who do not see any need to a particular methodology like the French theory in comparative literature and they want to expand the scope of Comparative Literature. [10] They know very well that if they pull the comparative literature out of its own characteristic circle destroy its building, which is built by the immortal theories of French Scholars only.

3. World Literature and General Literature

World literature: (Weltliteratur) is a term introduced by the German poet Goethe. It includes a theory implies that the literature should be considered as a breadth of all five continents. However, Goethe used this term to preach that a time will come when all literatures in the world will be incorporated in one literary global coalition. [11]

This idea was impossible to accomplish, because the literatures grow in response to the intellectual and social needs of the nations and nationalism. Therefore, the literatures are regional and national at first. The immortality of the literary works does not come from a global point of its significance, but it is resulted from its sincerity, artistic originality and deep national and historical awareness. [12]

Later on, Henry Gifford also followed the idea of Goethe, but he presented it in a new form to absorb all of the small literatures in a literary category or a great literary unit. He thought that English and American with their links can take the nucleus of the idea that unites with each other and creates a united English literature, acceding to all small literatures written in English language. In this way, a great literary unit can be established. It works on this pattern in relation to those literatures, which are written in French or German language, and hereby a large unit can be established for French or German literature. [13]

Actually, ignoring some political and economical issues, this idea was better than previous one, because this literary unit was based on the language, but the literature is not only the language. However, it was acceptable to the English speaker countries, which are seen united in the “Common-Wealth” and to the French speaker countries, which are united in the “Francophone”. Here we also should record our observation that the “Common-Wealth” presently, changed into a political Organization more than a linguistic and literary movement, but the “Francophone” is based on a relationship for the Global understanding among the nations, which is still not far away from its literary discipline. Its message is still useful and fruitful for all of the nations in the field of humanitarianism.

After the cradle of many researchers in literary criticism and history of literature in Europe as a long prelude been the birth of this type of study called a comparative study or Comparative Literature. Hence, if multiple languages and literatures are not found throughout the world, then from where could there be a possibility of comparative study? If English language and literature has its importance in the period of Globalization, the Originality and Immortality of rich French literature, including the theory and philosophy must not be ignored in the field of literary studies and especially, in the Francophone studies.

In fact, the current era is going to encourage severe local and global extreme, so its culture is like a large and well coordinated garden, but it is varied greatly. There is another meaning of the term (World Literature), which is called the great master piece, which combines the works of Homer, Dante, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Goethe, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Tagore, García Lorca and Marks. These literary works are recognized all over the world because of their artistic and intellectual value, which makes up the concept of world literature to many people. These literatures were written in different local languages, but they all have their shares in presenting a real picture of the human desires and explaining the soul of that era deeply.

It is clear that Comparative Literature means something else, not the whole theory of world literature or the world literary masterpieces. The same words can also be used for the term "General Literature", which means theory of the literature and its principles originally. Such research often exceeds the national and regional limits and does not mean to accept the ideas and literary styles that could go beyond the local boundaries of global horizon, which is exactly what was made (Paul Van Tieghem) to consider the concept of general literature contrary to the concept of Comparative Literature. The area of general literature to him is the world's broadness and exceeded the limits, while the area of Comparative Literature is the relationship between one literature and another, namely, the relationship between two literary parties [14].

Therefore, the differentiation between General Literature and Comparative Literature given by (P. V. Tieghem) sometimes looks closer to the formal and digital. According to him, Comparative Literature is dual, while the General Literature exceeds dual.

He says: “We mean by the history of general literature, or briefly general literature, a range of researches deal with the joint events between several literatures, either in their mutual relations or in their matching. General Literature is different to various national literatures and comparative literature.”

In spite of the difference, the General Literature is a "natural complement" for the Comparative Literature and in other cases we find him deciding that the term "History of World Literature is a better explanation than the term of the General Literature” [15].

4. Contemporary trends in Comparative Literature

We see the American school moving today to the massive expansion in this concept to include the comparison among different literatures exceeding the condition of a mutual relation between them.

For example, H. H. H. Remak is one of those Americans who defined Comparative Literature saying: "It is a comparison between a particular literature and another literature or a comparison between the literature and other parts of human explanation." [16]

Their demand is to expand the theory of Comparative Literature to include the search for the similarities between the literary ideas and aesthetic taste. They do not require the existence of a historical relationship or the impact of a literature on another literature in the area of Comparative Literature, but they consider the similarity in the aesthetic taste and the common elements on the level of humanity.

He also mentioned the most popular of French leftists (Rene Etiemble) who gives the priority to the literary element in the comparison and not vice versa." [17].

He announced clearly: "The first required concept from the scholars of Comparative Literature is to set aside every chauvinistic and regional form, and recognize the human civilization, which took place in context of the exchange of values after passing thousands of the years" [18].

Now, we can say that we have to recognize that the French scholars were the first pioneers of a new literary knowledge and they had their legitimate scientific enthusiasm as well. Thus, the historical stage in which their comparative thinking grew was the stage of full sovereignty to the world of Europeanization, while the world (third) was mired in underdevelopment and there was no basis for the cultural exchange.

It was natural to the French Scholars to start the comparisons from their own (European) literature, which was known to them before other literatures. It at least indicates that they were in the theoretical side, and were not oblivious to the message of Comparative Literature in opening the way for the humanitarian and in dissipating the national and local narcissism, which was -and still is- dominated the minds of people in each country and tastes as hereby (Guiar) writes in the end of his book (Comparative Literature):

"In fact, everyone feels that the cultural exchanges are one of the current humanitarian desires. Thus, the comparison - when it will write the history of the international literary relations - will show that any literature could not ever become isolated and without weakening and that the most beautiful of all national progress has been adopted, depending always on the imported material from foreign resources, whether those materials were digested by the national progress or it stood against them and preferred to highlight them in a more visible picture..." [19].

No doubt, that the literary picture of the nations as it is reflected in the mirror of its literature, have a profound impact on their relations to each other, regardless of the type of relationships and also have an impact on the minds of the leaders of the nation's politicians and intellectuals in the formation of public opinion may result in a particular direction in its relations with others. These aspects are counted from the literary activities in the international literary field. It is important to Comparative Literature to disclose these aspects from the historical side and state its various manifestations over the generations. Comparative Literature paves for every nation to know its position with the other nations and to see its picture in a mirror of the etiquette of other nations, thus it provides for the nations to know itself as the right knowledge and try to correct their situations or to defence itself. Thus, there is a chance of the real understanding and genuine cooperation among the nations.

Finally, we can say that some unacceptable objections were also noted against the French School, which were focussed only from one side to take Comparative Literature to the direction of flexibility and expansion in its region and logic, and try to discover the wider human horizon serving the values of understanding between nations. We must not seek to destroy such building of Comparative Literature that studies the variants among the literatures and does not care of the apparent value of similarities among them, but the wider humanitarian goal for the understanding among the nations must not be used as a cover for the globalization of the literatures in the sense of World Literature.

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