

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AS PRACTICED IN IRAN

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RESUMO: A origem da Literatura Comparada na universidade iraniana remonta a Fatimah Sayyah (1902-1947), cuja morte prematura, aos 45 anos, foi o fim de uma era. As sementes da disciplina permaneceram adormecidas até o começo do novo milênio, quando uma ideia nacionalista estreita de Literatura Comparada fundamentou as esperanças dos agentes políticos iranianos de que a disciplina justificaria a superioridade cultural de seu país natal sobre o resto do mundo, especialmente o Ocidente. No novo período, pode-se testemunhar um rápido crescimento de estudos de Literatura Comparada no Irã. Em anos recentes, comparatistas iranianos, especialmente os mais jovens, encontraram novas definições da disciplina.

PALAVRAS CHAVES: Literatura Comparada; Irã

ABSTRACT: The origin of comparative literature in Iranian academia goes back to Fatimah Sayyah (1902-1947), whose early death at the age of forty-five brought an end to an era. The seeds of the discipline remained dormant until the beginning of the new millennium, when a narrow nationalistic idea of comparative literature supported Iranian policy makers' hope that the discipline would justify the cultural superiority of their home country over the world, especially the West. In the new period one witnesses a rapid growth of comparative literature studies in Iran. In recent years Iranian comparatists, especially the younger scholars, have found new definitions of the discipline.

KEY WORDS: Comparative Literature; Iran

Googling «ادبیات تطبیقی» (“comparative literature”) can function as a gateway to the Iranian perception of comparative literature.² Among the first results is the page on comparative literature by Tebyan.net.³ As I am preparing this manuscript this page has been viewed more than 18000 times. The page is titled «ادبیات تطبیقی چیست؟» (“what is comparative literature?”); it is an attempt to introduce this field of study. The page provides the readers with a picture, right after the title.

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² By Iranian comparative literature I mean how comparative literature is introduced and practiced by the researchers doing comparative studies inside Iran; it does not concern comparative literature as it is practiced by Iranians working outside Iran. Since there are major points of divergence between the dominant forms of practice between the two groups, the latter is not the subject of this study and it deserves a separate careful analysis.

³ Please refer to <http://www.tebyan.net/newindex.aspx?pid=122217>



<http://www.tebyan.net/newindex.aspx?pid=122217>

The picture depicts two apples with the human face looking at each other. The globular shape of the apples resembles the globe. The picture portrays two worlds/civilizations in a conversation. So far it supports the idea of dialogue among civilizations as proposed by a former Iranian president Mohammad Khatami (1997–2005). However, this is not the whole story. The two apples are in different colors; one is red, the other green. Moreover, the two apples are not in the same level; one is in a higher position, looking down at the other. A point is worth mentioning here concerning the color symbolism. Other than the meanings evoked by the colors red and green in the Western world¹ which resembles those in a modern Iranian context, the two colors have additional significance in Shi'a Iranian culture. Ta'ziya, a traditional form of religious drama, is deeply rooted in Shi'a Iranian culture. The main plot of ta'ziya concerns the suffering and martyrdom of Imam Hussein, grandson of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam. The actors of ta'ziya are called Shabihkhaans and they are divided into two groups, i. e. the "Owliya-khaan" and "Ashqiya-khaan". The former play the role of the figures related to the family of the prophet and their supporters, and the latter play the role of the wicked ruthless enemies of the family. The Owliya-khaans are clothed in green while the Ashqiya-khaans wear red. The green/red binary opposition signifies the believers/the nonbelievers, the martyrs/the oppressors, the faithful/the pagans, the good/the evil, and we/others. Those in green are the ones that people sympathize with and those in red are the hated antagonists. Having this culture specific color symbolism in mind, one can have a closer analysis of the picture on "what is comparative literature?" page. The green apple is in a higher position looking down on the red apple. Although the two apples seem to be in an interaction or a dialogue, it is not a friendly equal talking *with* one another. The two worlds stare at each other in an antagonistic manner; the green apple has the upper hand, talking maybe *at* the red counterpart. Looked in the light of this new piece of information, the picture depicts clash of civilizations rather than dialogue among civilizations.

After analyzing the picture, it is time to go to the text on the page. It introduces comparative literature as "basically French". It highlights influence studies and ignores almost all the other kinds of studies in the field. It focuses on the influence of Middle Eastern and Persian literatures on the Western world. To highlight the influence of Eastern literatures on the Western literatures, it puts the following text in a box:

Who can deny the influence of translation of the Eastern books on the Western literature?
The influence of translation of Holy books, *The Holy Quran* in particular, on world

¹ Please refer to <https://blog.kissmetrics.com/communicating-color-efficiently/>

literature is undeniable. One can add the global influence of the translation of ancient books such as *Avesta* to the list. Many are examples of the influence of Eastern literature on West.

Following this text the influence of Eastern literatures such as *One Thousand and One Nights*, Abul 'Ala Al-Ma'arri, *Ardaviraf Nameh*, Avicenna, *Kalile va Demne*, Khayyam, *Quran*, Hafez and Ferdowsi on Western figures such as Dante, Daniel Defoe, Jean de La Fontaine, Edward FitzGerald, Edgar Allan Poe, Goethe and Maurice Maeterlinck is referred to. This introduction to comparative literature comes to a conclusion with another text in a box: "Comparative literature is a tool to reconsider world literature. It is a window to look at the ideas and to listen to the speech of peoples of any color, race, language and nationality". This pluralistic conclusion is in direct opposition to the picture at the beginning and the emphasis on the influence of Eastern literatures on the West. This contradiction is the dominant feature of comparative literature as it is practiced in the context of Iran. What is explicitly said is often global, democratic and humanistic, while a significant form of practice is the self-centered narrow-minded comparative literature concerned with the idea of *superiority of us over the Western other*.

Wikipedia in Persian is among the first result when one googles "ادبیات تطبیقی" ("comparative literature"). This entry in Persian on comparative literature is short, imperfect and not updated. This condition of the page foreshadows the status of the discipline in Iran. How does this entry introduce and define comparative literature?

1. Comparative linguistics is considered a branch of comparative literature.
2. Interdisciplinary study is ignored.
3. Emphasis is put on influence studies.
4. The examples of literary influence indicate the influence of Persian figures on European figures.

These four points are explicit in the text. However, there is more to it. Why influence studies and why Persian poetry influencing the Western literature? Later, I will return to these important questions.

Pazhoheshkade-ye Bagher al-Olum has also provided the Iranians interested in comparative literature with a page on ادبیات تطبیقی ("comparative literature").¹ Providing the readers with an English equivalent of the term, "Comparative Literature", it defines comparative literature. It considers the following criteria necessary to comparative literature: difference in languages and influence studies. It refers to the influence of Persian poetry on European literature. Bashgah-e Andisheh plays its role in introducing comparative literature too.² Having less than 1300 words, this page on comparative literature mentions the word «تأثیر» ("influence") more than 40 times; the whole text, in fact, revolves around the concept of literary influence.

"Influence" plays an important role in the development of Iranian comparative literature. Since the emergence of comparative literature in Iranian academia in the first half of the twentieth century influence has been a key term in the field. The development of comparative literature in Iran owes significantly to the scholars studying in France, professors such as Abolhassan Najafi (1929-2016), Javad Hadidi³ (1932-2002) and Hassan Honarmandi⁴ (1928-2002). These father

¹ Please refer to <http://pajoohe.com/25514/print.php?UID=27325>

² Please refer to <http://www.bashgah.net/fa/category/show/56909>

³ He was called the father of comparative literature in Iran.

<http://www.ibna.ir/en/doc/report/168320/javad-hadidi-father-of-comparative-literature-in-iran>

⁴ For more information on Honarmandi please refer to <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/honarmandi-hasan>

figures of Iranian comparative literature were more or less influenced by the French school of comparative literature concerned with literary relations and influences.

Comparative literature entered Iranian academia with Fatimah Sayyah¹ (1902-1947). This was at the time of Reza Shah (1925-1941) and his nationalistic policies. Reza Shah proposed a form of Iranian nationalism which was infused with secularism. He tried to diminish the influence of religion on Iran. Since Islam was the most powerful religion in Iran and Arabic was the language of Islam, a main part of these nationalistic policies in the literary arena was to diminish the strong influence of Arabic language and literature. In this period a part of the comparative studies include a reactionary movement against that strong influence of Arabic. This kind of comparative studies concerned the influence of Persian literature on Arabic literature. Furthermore, comparative studies covered the influence of Persian literature on Western literature, particularly on French literature. France, at that time, signified the West in general and French literature represented Western literature. Therefore, the influence of Persian literature on French literature indicated the influence of Iranian culture over the West. The two previously mentioned kinds of influence studies contributed to an idea of Iranian nationalism. This situation was the dominant form of the comparative studies in almost the entire period prior to 1979 revolution.

In the post-revolutionary period, the influence study and Arabic literature remained keywords of Iranian comparative literature. With introducing the revolution as Islamic, this religion was highlighted once more. This strategy is the exact opposite of Reza Shah's anti-Arab nationalism; its literary consequences are different from those in the pre-revolutionary period. As previously mentioned in the pre-revolutionary period a part of comparative studies concerned the influence of Persian literature on Arabic literature to form a national identity independent of Arabic influences. In the post-revolutionary period, the influence of Arabic literature on Persian literature formed the bulk of comparative studies done in Iran. From 1979 to 2011 more than half of the practical works in Iran concerned the influence of Islamic literature on Persian literature (Khezri, 2011: 25). In the new period another dominant form of comparative studies is to prove the influence of Persian literature on European literatures. These two kinds of comparative studies in the post-revolutionary period form the literary tools to support the idea of the cultural superiority of Islamic Iranian culture over the West.

The first journal of comparative literature in Iran, *Quarterly Journal of Comparative Literature Studies* (فصلنامه مطالعات ادبیات تطبیقی) in its "Aims and Scope" page calls comparative literature a branch of literature and does not recognize it as an independent discipline.² This view toward comparative literature is not held only by this journal; it can be traced back to more influential sources in the country. The policy makers in the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology do not recognize comparative literature as an independent and distinct discipline, but as a sub-discipline or as a branch of Persian literature. Why do they think so? Maybe we are dealing here with the same idea of the cultural superiority of Islamic Iran over the West; they want to justify the cultural superiority of their home country over the world. They do so through studying the influence of Persian literature over other cultures. In this process Persian literature is the most significant factor and comparative literature is just a tool for the scholars of Persian literature to prove the cultural superiority of Islamic Iran over the world. With this definition and function of comparative literature it will have no better status than a branch of Persian literature. This attitude of decision makers severely limits the scope of comparative literature in Iran and blocks its

¹ For more information on Sayyah's contribution to comparative literature see "Comparative Literature in Iran."

² Please refer to http://clq.iranjournals.ir/journal/aim_scope

establishment as an academic discipline.¹

As previously mentioned the bulk of the practical works in post-revolutionary Iran covers the relationship between Arabic Islamic literature and Persian literature. This movement in academia is politically motivated. The purpose behind the movement is to get Iran closer to neighboring Islamic and Arabic countries, to exit the ambit of Western countries, to create closeness between Islamic sects and to protect an Islamic integrity. Through this strategy Iran may be able to play a major role among the Islamic countries and to turn into a significant power in the global arena (Khezri, 2011: 25). Along with these political policies, the cultural policies of the country are playing an important part in this movement. The cultural policies of Iran, initially called “Iranian Cultural Revolution”, later called “Islamization of Universities” and more recently “Islamization of Knowledge” and “Domestication of Humanities”, turn the comparative studies toward Islamic Arabic literature. “The Role of Comparative Literature in Dialogue among Civilizations” by Islamic Culture and Relations Organization may function as an example of these policies.² It defines comparative literature as the study of influence between two works in different languages. It mentions the influence of Persian literature on literatures of the world and focuses on the relation between Persian and Arabic literatures. In addition to these political and cultural policies of Tehran as the reasons behind the dominance of Persian-Arabic studies in Iranian academia, one may think of some more practical reasons: the existence of Arabic departments in almost any university and institute of higher education in Iran and the Arab students studying at Iranian universities, who naturally do comparative Arabic-Persian studies (Khezri, 2011: 26). The majority of those comparatists working on Persian-Arabic literary relations, coming from Arabic departments, lack the knowledge of East-West relations and also the knowledge of a Western language. They do not have the linguistic and methodological tools to do East-West studies. Some of them believe that East-West comparative studies will shadow the Eastern literatures. In recent decades Iran has been in no close and consistent relation with International societies. Iranian comparative literature has almost confined itself to Arabic sources. Those sources are mostly outdated. They are very popular in Iranian academia, particularly among those affiliated with departments of Arabic and departments of Persian.

While the origin of comparative literature in Iranian academia can be traced back to Sayyah, Jamshid Behnam was the first Iranian author to use “Comparative Literature” in the academic sense of the term. His article, “Comparative Literature” (1952) highlighted literary influence and sources. A next article by the same author entitled “Comparative Literature: Literary Genres” dealt with literary genres and mentioned literary influence.³ In 1953 he published a book titled *Comparative Literature* whom some believe was a free translation of Guyard’s *La Littérature comparée* (1951) into Persian (Khezri, 2013: 324). As these examples indicate the birth of “Comparative Literature” in Iran was informed by the French concept of literary relations. Shadman published his article “Literary Relations and Influences” in 1953. The two authors studied in France and contributed to introducing comparative literature as a study of literary relations and influences. Shafa started his *Iran in World Literature* (1953) with the discussion of

¹ This view of comparative literature creates a major administrative problem in the country where everything in universities and institutes of higher education is centralized. Neither can a professor have his/her own chair of comparative literature, nor can a department start a program in comparative literature when comparative literature is not recognized as an independent discipline by the decision makers in the Ministry.

² Please refer to <http://manila.icro.ir/index.aspx?fkeyid=&siteid=261&pageid=32738&p=152&showitem=5398>

³ Khezri in “Comparative Investigations between Persian and Arabic: Past, Present and Future” refers to this article as the first source to use “comparative literature” in Iran and does not mention the previous article.

the influence of Persian literature on French literature. A few years later Zarrinkoub's *Introduction to Literary Criticism* was published. It defined comparative literature according to the French school. From 1960s comparative literature was taught by Honarmandi in the University of Tehran, by Hadidi in Ferdowsi University of Mashhad and by Najafi in the University of Isfahan. Courses on comparative literature were offered in the departments of foreign languages.¹ These scholars published comparative works based on the French school. Almost the same trend continued in 1970s. Due to the war with Iraq and the terrible conditions of the country in general and of the universities in particular, comparative literature in Iran was dormant in the 1980s. From the 1990s, Iranian academia showed an interest in comparative literature. Mirzadeh Shirazi translated Muhammad Ghonaymi Hilal's *Comparative Literature* (1953) into Persian (1994). Hadidi published *From Sa'di to Aragon* (1994) according to the French school and elaborated on the influence of Persian literature on French literature from the seventeenth century up to 1982.² In the post-revolutionary period, comparative studies were done not only in literature, but also in other fields to prove the superiority of Islam over other (mostly Western) ideologies.

Politics plays an important role in Iranian comparative literature; political relations of Iran with other countries and its political aspirations affect the situation of comparative literature studies in the country. To put it very roughly, the political relations of Iran with other countries can be divided into four categories: in good terms, wanting to improve, not so much antagonistic, and antagonistic. The political relation of Iran is in good terms with Russia. Therefore, comparative literature meetings are held to discuss the literary relations between Iran and Russia. Iran wants to improve its relations with Arab world. Therefore, comparative literature meetings and conferences are held to discuss the literary relations between Persian and Arabic literatures. While the political relation of Iran with France is not among the best, it is not so antagonistic. Therefore, comparative literature meetings and conferences are held to discuss the literary relations between Persian and French literatures. Concerning the political attitude of Iran (or to put it more carefully those in power in Iran)³ toward UK and US I should mention that these two are among the enemies in Iran.⁴ Therefore, no conferences are organized to discuss the literary relations between Iran and the two.⁵

A glance at the situation of comparative literature in Iranian universities can help one to have a better appreciation of the practice of comparative literature in the country. The University of Tehran and the University of Isfahan offer Ph.D. in French literature with a concentration on comparative studies. In 2009, Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman started to admit M.A. students in comparative literature. In this case "comparative" signified Persian-Arabic literary influences and analogies. The Department of Persian Language and Literature was in charge of the program and collaborated closely with the Department of Arabic Language and Literature

¹ Here departments of foreign languages refer to the departments of English and departments of French.

² This book was awarded "The Book of the Year" in 1995 by the ministry of Islamic culture and guidance.

³ The attitude of Iranians toward other countries does not always correspond with the attitude of the official power toward other countries.

⁴ "Down with US" and "Down with UK" along with "Down with Israel" form an integral part of many political events in Iran including Bahman 22nd parade.

⁵ "Those in power" have, of course, power to organize or stop some events. However, it does not mean that individual scholars and independent academic groups have no agency at all. They can organize some meetings of their own, but such activities, when not supporting the cultural policies of those in power, are often frowned upon or, at best, ignored. Another point worth mentioning is that while to study the influence of Persian literature on the English and American literatures is most welcome in Iran, no conferences are held to discuss literary relations between Iran and UK or those between Iran and US because in those cases the influence of the "enemies" on the Persian literature will be discussed too.

(Anushiravani, 2012: 488). The program included courses such as the comparative study of Persian and Arabic grammar, comparative study of Persian and Arabic prose and poetry, comparative literary history and comparative Persian-Arabic translation. I could find a file of the teaching of a comparative literature course at Payam Noor University.¹ The professor defines comparative literature as the study of influence. A two-unit course on comparative literature is offered to the students of Arabic literature (BA, MA and PhD) while students of Persian literature are deprived of the same course. The BA students of English and French are offered the same course. Arak university is going to start the Major “world literature and comparative literature” at MA.² Tarbiat Modarres University³ and Islamic Azad University⁴ are trying to start Ph.D. programs and Shiraz University is trying to start MA program in comparative literature. This last program is different from the others; it is aimed at introducing comparative literature as an interdisciplinary field. So far none of these programs have been established.

During recent years, several comparative literature journals have been published by different universities and academic centers in Iran. While traditional Persian-Arabic similarity and influence studies form the bulk of the papers published, *Comparative Literature* published by the Academy of Persian Language and Literature publishes papers on new areas of research such as translation studies, interdisciplinary studies, and world literature. *فصلنامه پژوهش‌های تطبیقی زبان و ادبیات ملی* (*Comparative Researches of Nations, Language and Literature*), which is the most recent Iranian journal in the field, realized the problem of limited Persian-Arabic studies and claimed to publish papers in seven languages: Persian, Arabic, Turkish, English, Spanish, Russian and French. This is a promising start. However, when one goes through the first issue, one finds something shocking. All the papers are in Persian and all (except for one) of them concern Arabic and/or Persian literatures. In addition to journals devoted to comparative literature, there are some other journals that publish comparative papers. These papers deal with major theoretical and methodological problems. Lack of knowledge in theory and incompetency in applying theory are two major problems in the practical papers in Iran (Khojastehpour and Mirzababazadeh Fomeshi 2014). And the significant point is that this is not limited to comparative literature studies; it is the case with all literary studies in Iran.⁵

The theoretical papers on comparative literature published in Iran also suffer from serious problems. The major problem is the lack of familiarity with the recent trends in the field. In 2010 the *Journal of Comparative Literature* published an article entitled «ادبیات تطبیقی: تعریف و زمینه های «Comparative Literature: Definition and Scope»». It focuses mainly on the French school and mentions the American school and some of the developments in the second half of the twentieth century and ignores the most recent developments, including world literature. The author is a professor of Arabic language and literature and his sources are either in Persian (all outdated) or in Arabic (mostly influenced by the older French comparative literature). There is not even a

¹http://s3.picofile.com/file/8218041684/%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A8%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%AA_%D8%AA%D8%B7%D8%A8%DB%8C%D9%82%DB%8C_90_%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%87_2_%D8%AA%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1_%D9%88_%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B1_%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%87_%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%B3.mp3.html

² http://araku.ac.ir/~a_radjaie/L/pe.html

³ <http://www.modares.ac.ir/Schools/hum/grp/all>

⁴ <http://www.khorasannews.com/News.aspx?id=4322136&type=1&year=1391&month=3&day=25>

⁵ “Demystifying New Historicism through a Critical Look at the Papers Applying the Approach in Iran” can provide examples for such problems in practical papers published in Iran. Please refer to http://lcq.modares.ac.ir/?_action=articleInfo&article=5930&vol=1283%20

single major recent source among the works cited. A year later «درآمدی توصیفی-تحلیلی بر چیستی و ماهیت ادبیات تطبیقی» (A Descriptive-Analytical Introduction to the Nature of Comparative Literature) was published.¹ The paper cites secondhand sources; there is not even a quick mention of the major figures in the recent development of the discipline. The paper claims to analyze the “subject, purpose and method” of comparative literature while it does not even touch ideas of Bernheimer, Guillén, Pizer, Moretti, Bassnett, Casanova, Tötösy de Zepetnek, Spivak, Saussy, Apter or Damrosch.²

In recent years, several books by Arab comparatists have been translated into Persian. Among them are the works by Muhammad Ghonaymi Hilal (1953), Abdulsalam Kafafi (1971) and Taha Nada (1973).³ Translation of these Arab authors contributed to introducing comparative literature as the study of literary influences and international literary history (Khojastehpour and Mirzababazadeh Fomeshi 2014). Sometimes the Arabic books on comparative literature are ruined with poor translations. Some of these translated books are so hastily prepared that reviewers do not suggest them even as textbooks for students (Zekavat, 2011; Ghandilzadeh, 2015). Guyard's *La Littérature comparée* (1951), Jeune's *Littérature Générale et Littérature Comparee* (1968), Praver's *Comparative Literary Studies: An Introduction* (1973), Yohannan's *Persian Poetry in England and America: A 200-Year History* (1977), Chevrel's *La Litterature Comparée* (1989) and Casanova's *La République mondiale des Lettres* (1999) have been translated into Persian. Bassnett's *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (1993) is being translated and Javadi is translating his *Persian Literary Influence on English Literature: With Special Reference to the Nineteenth Century* (2005) into Persian. Other than translating sources into Persian, Iranians are authoring books on comparative literature. Elmira Dadvar wrote *Initiation a la Littérature Comparée* (2009) and Ebrahim Mohammadi authored *The Theoretical Bases of Comparative Literature (Persian-Arabic)* (2010). The latter is aimed at introducing the discipline's theoretical and methodological bases, but what is lacking in the book is the inclusion of recent theories (Khojastehpour, 2013: 218). Ahmad Ezzatiparvar's *Comparative Literature in Iran* (2012) defines comparative literature as a branch of the “history of literature.” Sabzianpoor published *A Collection of Literary Criticism Papers with the Comparative Literature Approach* (مجموعه مقالات نقد ادبی با رویکرد ادبیات تطبیقی) (2013). The most important common characteristic of the papers in this book is the influence of Iranian culture and literature on Arabic literature. Almost all of the books translated or authored in Iran have ignored the recent trends of comparative literature; they deal mainly with the French school and in a few instances may touch upon recent issues such as globalization, multiculturalism, translation studies, etc. Anushiravani is writing *Comparative Literature: Theory and Methodologies* in Persian. It is an attempt to provide the Iranian audience with recent trends of comparative literature studies.

The Department of Comparative Literature of the Academy of Persian Language and Literature is the only independent department of comparative literature in Iran. It was founded in 2000 under the supervision of Hadidi, but had no activity until four years later when it was restarted

¹ The paper is significant because it is published by a scholarly journal devoted to comparative literature; the journal is published by an important state university in Iran; it is indexed in the most highly ranked databases in Iran; the author is a full professor at a prestigious university in Iran; and he has been awarded as a researcher, translator and author.

² I had written a review on the paper and sent it to different journals. But it was not published anywhere. Why? Because some people prefer to keep silent and not to bother themselves and their colleagues with criticism. In the meantime I have uploaded it on academia.edu and it has been already viewed more than 500 times.

³ There are four different translations of *Comparative Literature* by Nada. These three authors are among the most frequently cited in the comparative literature papers published in Iran.

under the supervision of Najafi. It has published a journal on comparative literature from 2010. This journal has published Persian translations of scholarly works by Praver, Wellek, Remak, Bassnett, Ghazoul and Damrosch, among others. It also provides readers with book reviews and reports that inform them of new developments in comparative literature around the world. In 2012 the department organized a two-day workshop on comparative literature theory and methodology. David Damrosch was also invited to give a lecture on World Literature.

One may observe some theoretical endeavors in comparative literature in Iran. In “Iranian School of Comparative Literature: From Idea to Theory” the author claims that criticizing West-centrism and imperialistic intentions of other schools Iranian school aims at introducing an Islamic-Iranian approach to comparative literature which is against national prejudices and cultural megalomania.¹ The author refers to the fact that in this school difference in language is not important. He is so obsessed with the Arabic sources that he believes this factor is still a determining factor in comparative literature studies.² The characteristic the author counts for the school are so general that they can be applied in any country to create its own “school” of comparative literature. In addition to claiming a school of comparative literature, a number of researchers including Mahdi Mohaqeq point to early examples of comparisons between Persian and Arabic and consider them as the pioneer of comparative studies in the world. Mohaqeq refers to Al-Biruni (973–1048) and his comparative study of Arabic and Sanskrit poetry and metrics as a pioneering instance of comparative literary study.³ These theoretical endeavors have not proved very successful so far. To create its own school, Iranian comparative literature needs to get familiar with the details of the emergence of the discipline and its most recent developments in different countries and the contexts that contributed to those developments. Otherwise, no domestic school of comparative literature would be complete.

While the replacement of the old-fashioned nationalist comparative literature by a more multicultural World Literature with a global focus has almost happened with the forerunners of the field, the history of comparative literature in Iran is not actually moving toward such a multicultural point. I should sadly confess Iranian comparative literature, although improving in some aspects (i.e. interdisciplinarity), is not moving toward some more multicultural or less nationalistic directions. The policy makers want to have power in the global arena and to exert that power. But they are not aware of the real power in 21st century. They try to convince themselves and others that “we influenced the West (as the present power of the world!) so we are powerful/superior.”

Although comparative literature is moving toward world literature, there are comparatists that still, either knowingly or unknowingly, reinforce the idea of cultural superiority, which is against the developments of the discipline. This practice does not contribute to the understanding of the other and elimination of terror and violence as a necessity in the present situation of the world in general and the Middle East in particular. In my own country one can find papers that trace the influence of a Persian poet on a Western figure to prove the cultural superiority of Persian culture. As the first step, comparatists themselves should get familiar with the new developments of comparative literature and change their attitude toward the field. Then they will be able to get much closer to the ideal state of freedom from cultural and national prejudices and misunderstandings. After taking all these actions we can hope comparative literature will

¹ http://www.civilica.com/Paper-LRC06-LRC06_127.html

² Arab comparatists do not consider research on the relations between literatures of Arabic countries comparative literature study because those literatures are in the same language.

³ <http://www.ettelaat.com/etiran/?p=123032>

contribute to peace in the world.

A scholar writes about the polemics of similitude and the polemics of difference and calls for the elimination of superiority/inferiority binary opposition which will lead to a better understanding of the other (Cai, 2002). And thinking about Iranian comparative literature I need to write about the polemics of influence/reception and call for the elimination of superiority/inferiority binary opposition in Iranian comparative studies. Reception, if not more important, is at least as significant as influence. Understanding the significance of reception study may contribute (to a small part) to the elimination of the cultural superiority in the practice of comparative literature in Iran. It will also lead to a better understanding of the other and the self and this understanding in its turn (I hope) may contribute to a peaceful coexistence of equal but different individuals and peoples on this lonely planet.

The practice of comparative literature in Iran is heavily under the influence of the 19th century French practice of influence studies. Although there are excellent examples of such comparative studies, the Iranian researchers in many instances proved unable to apply the same old theory. They juxtapose similarities without historical facts supporting the influence and claim the influence of one figure on another. Many of the works cited are Persian translations of the Arabic sources which are themselves rewriting of French ideas, hence two steps away from the original source. Furthermore, the geographical scope of comparative literature in Iran is limited. Comparative studies on Far East, Eastern Europe, Africa and South America are almost entirely overlooked. Even modern Persian literature in other Persian speaking countries is not properly studied.¹ Linguistic variety in Iran has significant potentiality; comparative studies on the literatures produced in different languages of the country can enrich Iranian comparative literature.² Concerning Western literatures, Iranian comparative literature has limited itself to France, Germany, Russia, US and Britain. However, the Islamic Arab world is the focus of comparative studies in Iran. As previously mentioned Persian-Arabic literary relations form the bulk of scholarly work in Iran. These binary East-East studies can be a contribution of Iranian comparative literature to the practice of comparative literature in the world, where the dominant forms of study are West-West relations or in some cases, East-West.

One of the developments of Iranian comparative literature in recent years is the move toward interdisciplinary studies. The journal published by the Academy devoted one of its previous issues to interdisciplinary studies and it continues to publish such kind of studies.³ Furthermore, workshops are being organized in the country in recent years. They are aimed at familiarizing the participants with the recent trends of comparative literature in the world.⁴ Moreover, the most recent issue of the journal published by Razi University is devoted to critical reviews of comparative literature studies and ideas. It is a promising sign in a country where review and challenge are not much appreciated. More significant than any of the positive signs previously

¹ As I am preparing this manuscript a cfp of a comparative conference, "Cultural Dialogue between Iran and Afghanistan", is published.

² Gilaki, Mazandarani, Azerbaijani, Qashqai, Turkmen, Kurdish, Luri, Arabic, Balochi, Tati, Talysh, Armenian, Georgian, Neo-Aramaic, Circassian, Hebrew and Assyrian are among the languages spoken in Iran. Literatures written in these languages are often ignored in mainstream literary studies. Researchers interested in this field of study may refer to the experience of comparative literature in India. It can serve as an example of how the study of the inter-relationship between the many languages and literatures within a country can contribute to the development of comparative literature as a discipline.

³ Three papers in the most recent issue concern the interdisciplinary field of literature and cinema.

⁴ One can find workshops on imagology and adaptation studies among others.

mentioned is the emergence of a generation of graduate students and young scholars whose works in the near future (hopefully less than a decade) will change Iranian comparative literature.¹ The close collaboration of the Iranian comparatists working inside the country synergized through the cooperation with the scholars of comparative literature working outside the country can accelerate the process.

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Recebido: 13/01/2017

Aprovado: 15/04/2017

¹ I know graduate students who have translated but not yet published *Comparative Literature: Theory, Methods, Application, Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction, Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization, Introducing Comparative Literature: New Trends and Applications, The Challenge of the Comparative Literature and The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature*. Publication of these works and emergence of similar young prolific scholars will open new horizons to Iranian comparative literature.