



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Concept of 'History' in Comparative Literary Studies

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ABSTRACT

Academic Arabic studies in comparative literature have always been closely linked to the French school of comparative literature, also known as the School of Influence and Reception, the Positivist School, and the Historical School of Comparative Literature. As the first generation of Arab comparatists were systematically and profoundly versed in foreign languages, they effortlessly engaged with foreign texts with a wide array of aesthetic perspectives. However, like other comparative methodologies that emerged over the world in the early 1940s, these approaches were predominantly shaped by the foundational ideas inherited from the French school and subsequently passed on to non-French scholars. Consequently, early Arab comparatists had no alternative but to adhere to this evolving French paradigm. This study then explores the dimensions of the concept of history and its impact on guiding comparative studies across different schools. It also aims to shed light on the status of the Arabic text and to critically examine the concept of history when this text is placed within other comparative frameworks.

INTRODUCTION

The early comparative studies in the French school were associated with the philosophy of positivism, which spread in France in the eighteenth century. This philosophy was a revolution against metaphysical philosophy and theological sciences in Europe. Consequently, the focus of scientific research transitioned to empirical reality and laboratory-validated results. This shift was further actuated by the spread of Western atheism and the denial of any authority except that of rational thought and utilitarian empiricism.

The most prominent advocate of positivism is the French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798-1857). In his works, *A System of Positive Polity* and *The Course in Positive Philosophy* (comprising eight volumes beginning in 1835), Comte attributes the cause of intellectual disorder to the dominance of religious tendencies and metaphysical philosophy. He advocates for the adoption of a new science that approaches society with a scientific methodology rooted in positivism.¹

Auguste Comte envisioned a new religion for humanity and declared himself its high priest. This religious thought stems from the application of Comte's law of the three stages to the philosophy of history. The medieval period was the theological stage, the transitional centuries were the metaphysical stage, and the future state of humanity will be the positive stage. Hence, there was a need to achieve this

¹ George Tarabishi, *معجم الفلاسفة: الفلاسفة، المناطقة، المتكلمون، اللاهوتيون، المتصوفون* [Dictionary of Philosophers: Philosophers, Logicians, Theologians, Mystics], 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 2006), 540.

final destiny through a religion capable of unifying individual wills and establishing the kingdom of the concept of humanity in place of the guardianship of God².

Philosophy gave rise to innovative methods in the humanities, rooted in the principle of engaging with its established scientific foundations, particularly history. This led to the development of the historical scientific school of historiography. Studying history as a science became a cornerstone for this type of research, especially within the humanities.

2. The French School Between Influence and History

There's no need to reiterate the well-known aspects of the French school's comparative literature, especially its early stages and current developments. Significant emphasis has been placed on its focus on international culture and the causal connections between different literatures. From the outset, the school's foundation in positivist philosophy was evident, as it grew within a broader 19th-century trend towards the historiography of sciences in France and Western Europe. Auguste Comte (1798-1857) is acknowledged as the father of positivist philosophy, and Sainte-Beuve (1804-1896) was a prominent advocate of the natural historical approach to thought and literature.

In fact, there are several reasons for the strong inclination towards history and the interest in its propositions within the comparative research trends of French, Arabic, and Slavic studies, including:

External Wars and Internal Conflicts

The prolonged and brutal wars in France with Germany, England, and Spain aroused a strong sense of chauvinism³, defending the nation's internal history by any means necessary. France suffered the ravages of Napoleon's aggressive wars against neighboring countries and the East. Additionally, the internal class conflict between workers and the bourgeoisie plunged local culture into a dark period. These ongoing conflicts shaped the nature of thinking about France's future. French culture leaned on documenting the scientific approach through positivist philosophy, which believed in the rationality of data leading to the scientific and experimental development of the country.

In the humanities and literature, too, France embraced positivist philosophy, particularly its socio-humanistic dimension, to lay the foundations for modern literary criticism. This approach sought to anchor the art of literary criticism in experimental sciences, thereby facilitating the processes of understanding, interpretation, and ultimately, the evaluation of texts.

Since comparative literature began under this philosophy, which relies on the sciences, it also depended on the established data of the new scientific school at that time. Its reliance on history was evident, as its focus on the cultural history of different countries would transform comparative studies into the science of comparative literature. The use of history, with its constants of time, place, and people, provides a three-dimensional scientific description.

The French critic and historian Philarète Euphemon Chasles (1798-1873) authored over forty volumes on literary criticism. Regarding his efforts in studying various cultures through English, Spanish, and Russian literary texts, Claudio Guillén noted that Chasles' "preferred field of study was intellectual history, which he combined with poetical history."⁽⁴⁾ Jean-Jacques Ampère also explored this idea by combining literary history and the philosophy of literature. He once told his famous physicist father, André-Marie Ampère: "Oh my father, my dear father, won't you understand my mission as I do? To Trace

² George Tarabishi, *Dictionary of Philosophers*, 542.

³ *Electronic Encyclopedia Britannica* <https://www.britannica.com/topic/chauvinism>. (31/10/2022)

⁽⁴⁾ Claudio Guillén, *The Challenge of Comparative Literature*, trans. Cola Franzen (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 33.

the panorama of the history of human imagination, discover its laws, isn't that enough to fill a man's career?⁵".

This is precisely what the French desired starting from the 19th century, as seen with Abel-François Villemain (1790-1870), who provided a definition, or rather a description, of this approach (comparative literature) as what the French spirit has received from foreign literatures and what it has given to them in order to write a comprehensive literary history of France⁶. Here, the reliance on the foundation of history is clear, as follows:

This concept delineates the geographical affiliations of the writer (regionally). When discussing the mutual influence between French literature and other literatures, it emphasizes the separation based on linguistic differences between the studied texts, which implies a cultural spatial distance. This mentioned difference underscores the principle of self-awareness, with the self in this context being distinctly French.

A title such as "The Land between Emile Zola and Abd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi" is clearly comparative and rooted in the French school. This is because it encompasses three aspects derived from the historical foundation:

Race

Nationalism is embodied in Émile Zola (1840-1902), the French author who wrote the novel *The Land* "La Terre" in 1887 in French, and in Abdel Rahman Al-Sharqawi (1920-1987), the Egyptian writer of the novel *The Land*, published in Arabic in 1954, expressing a different form of nationalism from the French one

Time

The temporal dimension revealed by both authors in their respective national contexts is significant. Émile Zola discusses his peasants during the era of land division, where large estates and families were fragmented. The events of Zola's *La Terre* take place during the final years of the period known as the Second Empire⁷. Abdel Rahman Al-Sharqawi, on the other hand, addresses the struggle of the oppressed Egyptian peasant, dealing with the dominant internal classes and the controlling British colonizer.

Place

The setting of the first novel is France, while that of the second is an Egyptian village. While the three axes of historical research (race, time, and place) scientifically define the approaches to comparative historical studies, this nationalist orientation has placed the French concept in a historical, scientific and positivist framework that is concerned only with the issue of cultural influence and reception, even if the goal of comparison seems to be scientifically looking at the mutual influences between literatures.

The French definitions of comparative literature continued to follow the same pattern, with successive calls defending the same principle. Rarely did a definition appear without referencing the concept of 'history,' even among those within the French school who advocated for changes and expressed a desire

⁵ Claudio Guillen. *The challenge of comparative literature*, trans.: Cola Franze. (Harvard University Press, 1993), 34.

⁶ Danielle-Henri Bageaux. *Comparative General Literature*, translated by: Ghassan Al-Sayed (Damascus: Arab Writers Union, 1997), 13.

⁷ Second Empire Français: A Constitutional Political System Established by Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, President of the Second French Republic, on December 2, 1852, to Become Napoleon III, Emperor of the French. Historians Divided It into Two Parts: The Authoritarian Empire (1852-1860) and the Liberal Empire (1860-1870)," accessed June 20, 2022, <https://2u.pw/qe4xg>.

to embrace the views of the American school alongside the historical approach. The perspective of this school in the twentieth century can be summarized as follows:

Ferdinand Brunetière (1849-1906) argues that literary works can only be fully known by revealing the links that bind each other in their historical sequence. The relations between literature, in his view, are historical⁸. Baldensperger (1871-1958) defines comparative literature as the study of the living relations that connect multiple literatures. This definition was given in his editorial for the first issue of *Comparative Literature (RLC)* in 1921 entitled *Comparative Literature, Word and Thing*. He also argues in this article that this type of study is only part of the history of literature, and that it examines the relations that the concept of history establishes between the various literatures. This issue of the journal of comparative literature, along with that article, may have clearly and practically announced that history is an important factor in guiding the mechanism of comparison.

Two of the giants of the history of literature in France are to be briefly mentioned: Paul Van Tieghm and M.F. Guyard. For the first time, they presented two books entitled 'Comparative Literature': the first in 1931 and the second in 1951. The latter followed in the footsteps of the former by focusing on the procedures of comparison itself. Following the historical factor in their works, one may notice how both books—despite their small size—emphasized the principle of 'history.'

The most important feature of Guyard is no longer the formulation of definitions, but the addition of new critical phrases that were not used before in the first half of the twentieth century or before, such as his statement that comparative literature is not concerned with works in terms of their original value, but rather depends on the changes experienced by each nation or each writer as a result of foreign influence. His reference to the original value of works is the antithesis of the cultural-civilizational-historical content of the French school. This content is expressive only by relying on an approach committed to the axes of history.

Guyard quoted this effect on the process of comparison in the French school saying that J-M. Carré believed, as P. Hazard, and F. Baldensberger before him, that where there is no relationship between a man and a text, between an influence and an environment, or between a country and an immigrant, the common relationship in comparative literature ceases to begin, and the relationship of criticism or the relationship of rhetoric and eloquence begins⁹.

A pivotal stage in the history of the French School to test the process of the impact of history in guiding the concept occurred in the years 1957 and 1963. The first significant event was R. Etiemble's (1909-2002) essay 'Comparative Literature, or Comparison is Not a Cause,'¹⁰ and the second was the publication of his world-renowned book, *The Crisis of Comparative Literature*. Etiemble offered a dual vision to ensure that the French school entered the arena of conflict based on pluralism, rather than a desperate defense of its historical values, which had lasted for more than one hundred and fifty years. He advocated for his peers at the French school to accept both directions: the French historical and the emerging American aesthetic. This dual concept has continued in the French school to this day, especially after the expansion of linguistic and critical research in Paris post-1968.

It can be argued, then, that 'history' has remained a common factor among the concepts advanced by the French school to this day. However, it can be concluded that it was the idea of 'history' that placed the French school in the crosshairs of criticism. Critics argue that history in the French school fueled chauvinistic racism, leading the French to defend their school aggressively. This also prompted Guyard to republish his book *Comparative Literature* in 1965 in response to Etiemble's book, as if the latter

⁸J. G. Clark, *La Pensée de Ferdinand Brunetière* (Paris: Nizet, 1954).

⁹François Guillard, *Comparative Literature*, trans. Henri Zgheib (pages 7-8).

¹⁰ *Annales de l'Université de Paris*, no. April-July (1957).

offered nothing that could challenge the concept of 'history' in the French orientation. The points of criticism directed at the French school were:

French comparative literature turned literature into a collection of documents and publications, transforming it into comparative history. This critical point is frequently found in the works of René Wellek.

The French concern for their nationalism through their influential literature on the literature of the world is a concern for the general history of the country. However, their preservation of this value fostered racism and evoked jealousy among other races.

The French school created a barrier similar to the Maginot Line to maintain the link between history and literature, aiming to give comparative studies a scientific basis. However, global cultural exchanges forced them to accept other perspectives.

Once translated, terms such as Comparative History, Literary History, and Historical Comparative Literature may lose their precise meanings due to the inclusion of the word history in each. However, Historical Comparative Literature is the term that most accurately reflects the approach of French comparative studies.

3. The Challenges of Positivism and History: The Arab Achievements

The time gaps between real comparative research in the Arab world vary, but the evaluation mechanism for this research does not deviate from the idea of transmission frequency rather than mentality. This is clearly apparent in comparative research and among graduate students who write in foreign languages in the Arab world. A digital search for research titles in universities reveals that most of these titles employ words and terms related to history and its synonyms. Arabic studies have been concerned with the study of writers as individuals or with some pioneering or famous works that are influenced by different literatures, such as:

- *Research on multiple French influences on Al-Manfalouti literature.*
- *Research on multiple influences on the literature of Mahmoud Taymour.*
- *Research on the various influences of Western Romanticism on Arabic Romanticism.*
- *The impact of Western poetic currents on the development of Arabic poetry.*

The impact of these research initiatives was a major factor in directing Arab efforts towards the science of history. This positive scientific approach, based on the study of history through its three key elements (time, place, and personality), became a dominant orientation in research from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century in France.

It is useful here to present part of the first integrated scientific study based on positivist philosophy and history in the Arab world, namely Muhammad Ghoneimi Hilal's book *Comparative Literature* (1917-1968)¹¹, which was first published in 1952. Regarding history and its comparative relationship, he mentions that the meaning of comparative literature is historical, for it examines the areas of convergence between literature in its different languages, its many complex connections, in its present or in its past, and the influence and reception of these historical connections, both in the present and the past, and the influence and reception of these historical connections. This influence can manifest in various ways: whether through the general artistic origins of literary genres, doctrines, or intellectual currents; the nature of topics, attitudes, and people depicted or imitated in literature; issues of artistic

¹¹ Ali Ashri Zayid, *Pioneer of Comparative Literary Studies in the Arab World* (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi, 1996), 144-148; and Abd al-Latif Abd al-Halim, "Mohammad Ghuneimi Hilal wa-Juhuduhu fi al-Adab al-Muqaran wa-al-Naqd al-Adabi," *Majallat Fusul*, no. 70 (2007): 384-392.

formulation and partial ideas in literary works; or the different images of countries. It also reflects the ethics of other nations, serving as an artistic hypothesis that links peoples and states through human relations that vary according to images and books¹².

This historical significance is what the French comparative vision is based on. All this provides proof that Ghoneimi was considered the interpreter and direct interpreter of the French school in the Arab world, and that he adhered to its terminological parameters to the end. It is important to note that before this date, two books had been published at the French school entitled *Comparative Literature*, by Paul-van Tieghem and M. F. Guyard. This was the beginning of the first integrated formation of the French school. The terms referred to in Ghoneimi Hilal's concept are: historical, areas of convergence, intellectual currents, and images of the country... etc. These terms, then, form the basis of the scientific vision established by positivist philosophy.

Throughout Ghoneimi Hilal's book, he weaves the features of the French School into some of the pioneering applications he presented, which continue to be taught in Arab universities today. One significant aspect of his work is the chapter on studying the image, a type of study that reveals the impact of historical depth on the formation of national images or stereotypes. He states that it is known that literature records the feelings and opinions of a nation, and these opinions are related to the relations of this nation with others¹³, and the images it forms of itself, providing examples such as Gérard de Nerval's and Victor Hugo's portrayals of Egypt.

The explanation for the phenomenon of Mohamed Ghoneimi Hilal, and his awareness of the importance of history stems from the fact that he was a young researcher who obtained a Doctorate of State from the University of Paris in 1952, after World War II. This is the stage of establishing a new history for the modern world, especially in France itself, which had just emerged from the tragedy of Germany. On the other side of the Mediterranean, Egypt, like some countries in the Arab world such as Iraq and Syria, experiences intense political movements. In particular, Egypt, Palestine, and Syria are significantly impacted by the ongoing political changes. The influence of the Jewish presence in the heart of the Arab world continues to create frameworks of political corruption, leading each Arab country to find its own path in the world of political change. This trend began with M. F. Guyard's book *La Littérature Comparée* in 1951. In the first pages of this work, the author asserts that after a brief glimpse of the roots, he will turn to the historical methods of comparative literature that are both effective and humanistic¹⁴. Within these historical methods, Guyard presents a number of research approaches.

Folkloric Models: The author suggests that while understanding folklore is crucial for a comparatist, it is equally important to grasp historical concepts to thoroughly analyze texts by authors like Voltaire or Byron.

Situations: The study of dramatic, epic, or romantic situations is primarily a part of literary history. Identifying personal or national differences in handling a common theme, like the adulterer or unwilling criminal seen in Greek traditions with Oedipus, is both intriguing and significant¹⁵.

The phrase "Greek tradition" itself serves as clear evidence of describing a historical period over a known time. This applies even when it involves literary symbolism in depicting a landmark related to a situation or a folkloric model, such as those presented in Greek plays or other Greek theater: the model of the adulterer, the epidemic, intrigues, etc.

¹² Mohammed Ghoneimi Hilal. *Comparative Literature* (Cairo: Nahdet Misr for Printing and Publishing, 9th Edition, 2008) 13.

¹³ Mohamed Ghoneimi Hilal. *Comparative Literature*, 331.

¹⁴ François Guillard, *Comparative Literature*, trans. Henri Zgheib (Beirut-Paris: Awadid Publications, 2nd ed., 1988), 9.

¹⁵ François Guillard. *Comparative Literature*, (55-64).

The clear evidence for drawing specific historical landmarks is based even on the construction of some popular myths and models, such as the character of Faustus and his demon, his attitudes, and the model presented by the play. This includes Goethe in Germany, as well as the English writer Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593) who presented his play *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*. It was first published in 1604 and translated into Arabic by Dr. Abdul Wahid Lulua. It is a play that reveals the intellectual and philosophical atmosphere surrounding determinism and fatalism in the cultural circles of England and at the University of Cambridge at that time.

The German writer Klaus Mann (1906-1949), son of the author Thomas Mann, wrote the novel *Mephisto* in 1936, in which he dealt with the conditions in Germany during the 1930s as the Nazi Party rose to power. The main character of the play is the stage actor Hendrik Höfgen, who devoted himself physically and spiritually to his art, and was subsequently influenced by the situation in Germany during the Nazi Party's ascent.

In addition, some other elements mentioned by Guyard include general, mythical, historical models, and literary halos. All of these fall under the category of 'history' from various perspectives. In this case, the comparatist seeks to prove several points, including: First, at each stage, the historical background of the time of composition must be emphasized. French comparatists insisted on this value until 1963, when Etiemble introduced critical comparisons. Second, the influence that the comparatist himself seeks to prove is also within the framework of the history of the transmission of the work or its reference to a specific period.

In the history of ancient Arabic literature, there are many texts that deal with periods of time at the historical and intellectual levels. This is a well-trodden path in research. In the modern era, statistics show that the number of texts translated from Arabic to French, for example, does not exceed ten per year. Besides, publishing houses deliberately publish only two kinds of works, i.e. those that generate significant media attention or literary impact, such as that of Alaa Al Aswany's *The Yacoubian Building*, which sold no more than 200.000 copies though being the best-selling Arabic novel in the West, and those sponsored works financed by specific entities or individuals. With the shift from institutional to individual or commercial roles, the translation of Arabic works has declined. As a result, Arab culture now often follows Western trends instead of fostering the rich cultural exchange seen during the Umayyad and Abbasid eras. One of the important studies that illustrate this institutional Arab deficiency is the study of the Moroccan researcher Fatiha Tayeb "Translation in the Time of the Other, Translations of the Moroccan Novel into French as a Model" (2009), which contains a lot of information on this point.

4. Overview

The conflict between Arabic studies and their application in Arab contexts can be related to the continuous, and often wide, leaps to apply Western methodologies to texts. The research problem with this approach can be enclosed in one question, for which we seek effective solutions by examining the efforts of both Western and Arab scholars in the field of comparative studies. The main questions raised are:

- Have different comparative methodologies abandoned the concept of "history"?
- What approach can enrich both the comparatist and comparative studies in the Arab world?

The relationship between literary studies and history is evident across various critical approaches. Some approaches rely directly on historical sources to clarify the literary qualities of a text, while others start from the literary aspects to uncover the historical meanings within. When Remak expanded the concept of comparison to be closer to interdisciplinary studies, he did not intend to divert scholars'

attention from history itself. Instead, he aimed to transform it into a broader icon that encompasses different disciplines, and thus advocating for comparing literature with other arts¹⁶.

Until the 1950s, the dominant approach to comparative studies was confined to comparing different literatures. This approach continues to be applied in the few scattered studies in the Arab world in recent years. Even in foreign languages, applied research often revisits what the pioneering generation of comparatists in the Arab world has presented, from Mohamed Ghoneim Hilal to Ahmed Abdel Aziz, who might be considered one of the last fighters in this field with his book *Towards a New Theory of Comparative Literature: Part One - The Search for Theory*, and Part Two - *Strategies of Comparison*, 2002.

This situation persisted in Arabic studies, and only Hossam al-Khatib, Ahmed Abdel Aziz, and the author of this article came out of this field of research. This is due to a number of reasons:

- The study of Arabic comparative literature has been closely linked with the history of literature because aesthetic critical comparison was already present in classical Arabic studies.
- After the French historical school invaded the scientific field in the East, especially with the integrated book by Mohamed Ghoneimi Hilal, researchers found a new approach to deal with literary texts. This approach, however, was different and scientific, emphasizing the importance of history in its social and political dimensions.
- Despite the ongoing research in the field of comparative literature in the Arab world, and the contributions of Said Alloush in his book *Components of Comparative Literature in the Arab World* (1987) regarding the evaluation of comparative literature in the Arab world, the number of works translated into Arabic on comparative theory, which hold theoretical significance, remains very limited.

Indeed, the developments within the French school of comparative literature have not been fully transmitted to the Arab world. University students and their professors often still refer to René Etiemble's *Crisis of Comparative Literature* (1963) as a significant marker of change within the French historical school, following the Chapel Hill Conference in the United States in 1958.

Some might mistakenly believe that this shift marked the end of the matter and that transformations within the French empire of comparative literature stopped with Etiemble. However, the field has continued to evolve, and there are ongoing discussions and advancements beyond Etiemble's work.

Is it possible to overlook history or the history of literature in comparative studies?

Practically, it is only possible to overlook history or the history of literature in comparative studies to a very limited extent. When this happens, comparative work turns into purely linguistic literary criticism. The issue is complex and cannot be practically resolved in Arab universities without genuine intentions and continuous efforts to reform the teaching approach. Comparative literature studies in Arabic departments have become supplementary, while world literature studies are now optional.

We have overlooked that the first generation of scholars studied comparative literature without naming it as such. The early professors' exposure to foreign languages and their reading of literature in its original language or translations was an integral part of their work. Today, just as criticism has become a burden, or a distortion of features subject to misrepresentation, our claim to be well-read lacks self-assessment.

- The American School:

¹⁶ César Dominguez et al., *Introducing Comparative Literature*, New Trends and Applications, trans. Fouad Abdul Muttalib (Kuwait: The World of Knowledge Series, no. 451, 2017), 69.

The American school aimed to undermine the French school by dismantling its scientific framework: history, influence, and language. This effort successfully shook the French approach from within, leading the French school to evolve its research methods and reduce its chauvinism and subjectivity. However, where does history fit in aesthetic comparative procedures?

- The Slavic School and History:

One of the most important points of accusation against the French approach to comparative literature was the historical issue, and this accusation was evident from its beginning in 1958 with the study of René Wellek. This criticism was echoed in many subsequent writings, even within the French comparative field itself.

History in the Slavic school is an important driver in enriching the process of comparison, because the humanities emerged under philosophical ideas that dominated both literature and criticism, and whoever deviated from this imposed framework went beyond the limits of the imposed theory. What is meant here is dialectical materialism. The reference here is to dialectical materialism, which offers a comprehensive view of different literatures. In this context, literature is seen as a minor unit within the broader scope of social and historical development.

Dialectical materialism focuses on the realities of the world, emphasizing social and economic interactions. It is within this framework that the concept of literature is understood as part of the process of reconstructing and organizing societies from their foundations. The Slavic school of comparative studies adopted this philosophy, especially after Joseph Stalin's *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*¹⁷.

This contrasts with the French school's view of history within the causal contexts of literary connections, practiced under positivist philosophy. The Slavic school in Russia and Eastern Europe aimed to create a scientific field rooted in their history, culture, and ideas, addressing and defending their reality with a revolutionary vision. This vision sought to challenge the French centrality, which had established a known history and production. Similarly, the Slavic comparative research approach was entirely opposed to the American comparative approach, which focused on aesthetic details, treating history as a secondary aspect of analysis.

Indeed, the application of socialist principles, focusing on both the infrastructure and superstructure, suggests that similarities in literary themes stem from similarities in the societal structures to which these literatures belong. This approach intersects with the French school in its strong emphasis on history during analysis. However, the key difference is that the Slavic school does not require a proven causal influence for comparison. They allow for comparative analysis even in the absence of a direct causal relationship.

According to Istif, the pioneer of the Slavic school in the Arab world, the Slavic school interprets the similarities observed between various national literatures through the material understanding of human history and its laws of development. Since literature, as a beautiful art, is part of the superstructure of any human society and is determined by the material base of that society, the similarities between literatures can be traced back to the underlying structures of the societies that produce them, based on the unity of the socio-historical development process of humanity¹⁸.

The recognition of the social and human dimensions that intersect between the French and Slavic schools is clear. Both schools focus on interpreting historical phenomena within the structure of any society, which can involve societal or individual issues. In the social approach, literature is viewed as a

¹⁷ Joseph Stalin, *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* (Damascus: Damascus Printing and Publishing House, n.d.).

¹⁸ Abd al-Nabi Astif, "Slavic School and Comparative Literature," *Journal of al-Mawqif al-Adabi: Studies* (2007): 433, 8.

reflection of the realities of the societies it addresses. This concept gained traction in Russia after the 1917 revolution, which brought significant changes and shaped a new intellectual history, integrating history into the humanities and philosophies

Jeromonsky, as cited by Istif¹⁹, argued that literature serves as a tool for societal reconstruction. This perspective differs from the French school's approach, which treats literature as a sequence of causal relationships. Filman famously remarked that the goal was to write a comprehensive literary history of France²⁰, indicating that early comparative studies were intended to enhance French literature's status in regional, linguistic, and cultural contexts.

This raises a question for scholars in the Arab world: why do the French, and Westerners in general, invest millions of dollars in establishing comparative literature departments, expanding their specializations through scientific journals, and funding conferences? Additionally, some Eastern European countries seek to attract attention by hosting the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA) conference, such as the one planned in Tbilisi, Georgia, on July 24, 2022²¹.

The Slavic assertion that "literature is a tool for rebuilding society" highlights how word choice reflects the philosophical foundations of each school. The primary goal of Marxist philosophy is social, focusing on societal change. Accordingly, the objective becomes broadly societal, unlike the French school, which used the concept of history to create a sense of academic fragmentation while simultaneously elevating French writers and scholars.

In this context, history represents a continuous cycle. In the French school, history is a fundamental prerequisite for comparative studies, even lending its name to the field. In the Slavic school, history becomes operational during the interpretative phase, forming part of the "deep infrastructure" against which the pattern derived from the text is measured. In the American school, history may emerge as a result of certain aspects of aesthetic critical analysis of texts or methods of expressing any historical subject, but it is not presented at any stage of the analytical process.

In Arab applications, history has been a constant in comparative literature²² studies. A compiled list, which needs updating, suggests that over 99% of the studies surveyed follow the historical approach, with few exceptions such as the works of Hossam Al-Khatib, Abdel Nabi Istif, Ahmed Abdel Aziz, and Mahrous Al-Qallali, as well as other studies that could not be reviewed.

5. History in Arabic Comparative Studies

The process of aesthetic and artistic comparison in the Arab cultural field began long ago, often involving highly precise critical comparisons. This approach is now academically referred to as the contemporary American direction in comparisons. The work of René Wellek and the New Critics in America closely resembles the literary criticism found in ancient Arabic criticism. This is not merely a claim to establish an Arab dimension; for instance, Abu al-Qasim al-Hasan ibn Bishr al-Amidi (d. 371 AH) was an exceptional aesthetic comparatist. He wrote two important sections: "The Faults of the Two Poets" and "The Merits of the Two Poets," concluding his book with a comparison of the meanings of the two poets.

This comparison is considered aesthetic because it was based on factors other than history. Al-Amidi juxtaposed two artistic schools from the third century: the Badi' (innovative) and the Sana'a (craftsmanship) schools. He attempted to remain neutral, although he was known to favor al-Buhturi,

¹⁹ Abd al-Nabi Astif, "Slavic School and Comparative Literature," 8.

²⁰ Daniel-Henri Pageaux, *Comparative General Literature*, trans. Ghassan al-Sayyid (Damascus: Union of Arab Writers, 1997), 13.

²¹ <https://icla2022-tbilisi.ge/post/item/72/en>

²² Available at: <http://staff.du.edu.eg/826> (accessed May 30, 2022).

as noted in critical literature. Such early studies document a literary (critical) history rather than a history of literature.

As the saying goes: "We are not makers of history. We are made by history." (Martin Luther King Jr). There is a clear and evident scientific repression in Arab universities. Some of these institutions spend billions on the educational process, yet there is always a ceiling on the freedom of inquiry, especially when it comes to changing the existing scientific paradigm that influences both current and historical consciousness. Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) also said, "It is fine to learn from others, but imitation does not guarantee the same results."

What is meant by these words is that the scientific institutions in the Arab world need a figure like Martin Luther King Jr. or an inspired leader with a magical touch like Moses. King himself noted that the story of Moses and the struggle of his faithful followers shares a common element with the story of any people who have fought for freedom²³.

The modern Arab approach to comparative literary studies can become a distinct Arab school of comparative literature if it follows the French model. This model, which lasted over a century until Paul Van Tieghem's book *Comparative Literature* in 1931, could be adapted and developed through new visions from specialized comparative study departments. This method might fit well with the scientific progress in both old and new Arab universities, as well as in literary departments that have dismissed the entire Arab historical and cultural heritage as unproductive.

These critics have gone astray by applying fragmented philosophical theories to Arabic texts without considering the cultural context of students and professors. This doesn't mean that the theories and sciences they present are useless, but the way they are fragmented and presented through slides and scientific presentations makes them ineffective. Working with some of these critics who dismiss the value of Arabic textual and critical heritage reveals a significant gap in their knowledge. They struggle to read primary sources of Arabic literature or accurately recite verses from the Quran. Their language has essentially become foreign to them. They even deny what they do not know.

The concept of history, which appears to be influential, is fundamentally the true gateway to developing the Arab mind into a genuinely advanced Arab intellect, akin to the Japanese, Chinese, French, Spanish, or German minds. These nations do not adopt ignorantly, nor do they develop without an objective reason. None of these countries have abandoned their history to be influenced by the vast advancements in contemporary American data. Instead, they develop their institutions through adaptation, translation, and application, making them globally interactive and updated. The people of these cultures have not called for abandoning their history or their cultural practices in dress and food, nor have they become linguistic hybrids stuck halfway. This is the issue frequently faced in Arab academic environments.

The concept of "history" is the fundamental gateway to comparative historical research. Comparative literary research cannot continue to be solely French, American, or Slavic. Arab universities must chart their own course, rather than merely echoing what is found in translated books on literary genres, without considering the rich history of authorship in the Arab world, which possesses elements that cannot be ignored.

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²³ Ghayda Muhammed, trans., *Fragments and Sayings of Martin Luther King* (Manama: Masaa for Publishing and Distribution, 1st ed., 2014), 9.

There is no Arab theory of genres, not due to a lack of history of authorship or the absence of Arab textual, critical, and intellectual history. This underscores the necessity for Arab academic institutions to create their own frameworks and methodologies, rooted in their distinct historical and cultural contexts.

The major issue lies in the absorption of foreign theoretical texts in the few translated books on literary theory available in Arabic. Colleagues in courses such as Modern Literature, Criticism, and Literary Theory often present the information from these books without critically adopting or examining its relevance to the history of Arabic texts. For instance, they claim that Jean de La Fontaine is the creator of the fable genre after Aesop's Greek tales, leading to a flood of foreign texts in literary theory books that define the genre of the fable in literary and symbolic terms.

There was great optimism when significant Arab conferences were held to explore the theory of genres, but unfortunately, no substantial impact has been observed. This highlights the need for a more critical and contextually relevant approach in Arab academic institutions. However, where is the concept of "history" in what is being presented here?

The concept is reflected in several key points that begin by placing the Arabic text in its rightful position, making it a central pillar within literary theory on both historical and critical levels. When presenting original Arabic texts in the field of fables, for example, we find the following list:

- Some pre-Islamic poetry and subsequent works.
- Some comprehensive Arabic prose texts.
- Some Arabic texts of Indian origin.

Among these, we focus on certain Arabic narrative texts:

1. *The eighth epistle of the Brethren of Purity*, titled "On the Natural Bodies and the Formation of Animals and Their Species" (late 3rd century and early 4th century AH).

2. *The Epistle of the Horse and the Mule* by Abu al-Ala al-Ma'arri (363-449 AH).

3. *The Epistle of the Nightingale and the Crow* by Ibn al-Habbariyah (414-509 AH).

4. *The Consolations, Consolation of the Obedient in the Aggression of Followers* by Ibn Zafar al-Siqilli (497-568 AH).

5. *Unveiling the Secrets in the Judgments of Birds and Flowers* by Ibn Ghanim al-Maqdisi (d. 678 AH).

The importance of the concept of "history" in the field of Arab comparative cultural studies becomes evident when we read any of these texts or compare them with others on a cultural content level. For example, the symbol of the snake in *The First Consolation - Delegation*²⁴ by Ibn Zafar al-Siqilli, where the snake takes over the fox's den (the fox named "Zalim" or "Oppressor"). The fox then seeks refuge with another fox named "Mufawwid" (meaning "Delegator") to help him reclaim his den (his place of residence, country, or status). However, "Zalim" deceives "Mufawwid" to take over his comfortable

²⁴ Abdullah bin Muhammad Ibn Zafar al-Siqilli, who was prevented under the pretext of religion. He was born in Sicily in 497 AH, and he moved from Mecca, where he grew up in his youth, to Egypt, then to Mahdia in North Africa, then to Aleppo, and then settled in the city of Hama, and worked in the Diwan. He was an in-depth scholar in the sciences of religion, jurisprudence and literature, and he wrote many books in them. He died in 570 AH. See the author's translation in: Ibn Zafar al-Siqilli. *Silwanat, Silwan obedient in the aggression of the followers*. Presented and investigated by: Ayman Abdel Jaber Al-Buhairi, 1st Edition, Beirut: Dar Al-Afaq Al-Arabiya, 1st Edition, 2001, 8, 9.

home and even plans to kill him. The story ends with "Zalim" burning in "Mufawwid's" den, while the snake survives²⁵.

6. Embodiment of the concept of "history" in the text of *The Consolations*:

Time of authorship: The 6th century AH.

Theme of this consolation: Delegation.

Title of the book: *Consolation of the Obedient*: The title, being in the passive form, indicates that it is directed towards consoling the one to whom it is addressed. Here, the addressed is the "obedient" one, meaning the ruler or king. This king faces the aggression of followers and lives amidst intrigues and conspiracies²⁶.

The symbolism in this title, and through the content of the book, refers us to real historical figures such as Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (26-86 AH) and Al-Walid ibn Yazid ibn Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (90-126 AH), among others.

The concept of "history" is evident in Ibn Zafar's declaration of his sources for composing this book. He relied on the Holy Quran, the Hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him), prose and poetry of wisdom, and the masterpieces of literature. These sources represent the textual dimension in the history of Arabic sources, including the Quran and other texts, which cast their extensive shadows over successive stages of Arab history.

In this story, the narrated-to character is Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, and the narrator is the sheikh he met upon his return to reclaim his kingdom, which had been taken by Amr ibn Sa'id (d. 70 AH), whom he had trusted. Therefore, the character of the "oppressor" is Amr, and the character of the "delegate" is Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan. The role of the "occupying snake" is to seize the opportunity to occupy this empty house, as it usually occupies the burrow of others. Here, it symbolizes the character of Amr ibn Sa'id, who deceived Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan. He was with him in his army to Mecca, then returned to seize Damascus and incite the people there against Abd al-Malik.

The layered structure of the story is indicative of the time, place, and characters (the situational educational dimension):

The meeting of Al-Walid ibn Yazid ibn Abd al-Malik with the old man, seeking advice from him after learning that his cousin Yazid ibn al-Walid ibn Abd al-Malik had incited people against him, turned hearts away from him²⁷, rallied Yemen against him, and contested his throne, seeking his downfall.

This old man tells another story involving Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan and another sheikh. Abd al-Malik consulted his ministers when Amr ibn Sa'id ibn al-As (d. 70 AH) deceitfully occupied Damascus, causing some emirates to secede. These ministers failed to provide advice.

The story of Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan meeting the elderly sheikh and seeking his advice to facilitate meeting the prince whose kingdom had disintegrated. The sheikh tried to dissuade him, unaware that he was the prince. When Abd al-Malik insisted, the sheikh devised a clever plan to facilitate the meeting. Abd al-Malik was uncertain whether to head towards Ibn al-Zubayr in Mecca or return to Ibn Abi al-As in Damascus to reclaim it. He saw both options as equal. However, the sheikh believed that if Abd al-Malik went to fight Ibn al-Zubayr, he would appear as the oppressor, but if he returned to fight Ibn Abi al-As, he would appear as the oppressed, since Ibn Abi al-As had previously pledged allegiance to him. The sheikh²⁸ then narrated the story of "the snake that attacked and occupied the fox's burrow.

²⁵ Ibn Zafar al- al-Siqilli. *The Consolations*, 32-37.

²⁶ Ibn Zafar al- al-Siqilli. *The Consolations*, 6-7.

²⁷ Ibn Zafar al- al-Siqilli. *The Consolations*, 26.

²⁸ Ibn Zafar al- al-Siqilli. *Silwanat, Silwan al-Muta'a fi Adwan al-Ta'abiyya*, 27-30.

They claimed that a fox named Zalim (unjust)²⁹ had a burrow he took refuge in and was content with, not seeking to leave it. One day, he went out to find food and returned to find a snake in it. He waited for it to leave, but it did not, and he realized it had settled there... His wandering led him to a burrow that appeared good and secure... He was informed that the burrow belonged to a fox named Mufawwad, who had inherited it from his father... Mufawwad felt compassion for him and said: It is a matter of honor not to stop pursuing your enemy and to exert all your effort in seeking to drive him away and destroy him... My advice is that you come with me to your abode that was taken from you by force.

After that, the fox "Zalim" occupies the burrow of the fox "Mufawwad" through cunning, and the sheikh comments:

This is like Amr ibn Sa'id, in his tyranny and deceit against Abd al-Malik, and his opposition to his kingdom and fortification within it. Abd al-Malik, in his campaign against Ibn al-Zubayr, was working for the glory of Amr ibn Sa'id and the continuity of the kingdom in his family, and his departure from Ibn al-Zubayr, as the glory of Amr ibn Sa'id was the glory of Abd al-Malik, and his kingdom was his kingdom. But Amr ibn Sa'id was not satisfied and did not assist him in his own interest, acting like Zalim with Mufawwad."³⁰

Before starting the hypothetical comparative procedures based on the historical lesson, the comparatist must equip themselves with the following about this text (*Al-Sulwanat*) if we want to compare it with a non-Arabic text within the framework of influence and interaction or the frame story:

The author (Ibn Zafar) dedicated the book *Al-Sulwanat* to the Quraysh leader in Cyprus. The author lived during the sixth century AH, experiencing the issue of the conquest of Tunisia in 1148 AD, witnessing the conflict between Sunnis and Shiites in Aleppo, and suffering from the divisions between Arabs and Turks³¹. This is a primary "historical" entry point for interpreting this text before comparing it with any other foreign text.

The snake is an occupier of any place that lacks someone to defend it, and it caused a dispute between two brothers of the same kind, the two foxes. One even thought of killing the other, as Amr ibn Sa'id did in the Umayyad era.

Since this book was dedicated to the Quraysh leader in Cyprus³², the embedded message was directed at him to be vigilant in facing the seditions surrounding him.

The characteristics formed in our imagination about the snake in the fable stem from a deep historical context that intertextualizes with a hypothetical event around it in all eras: the snake of evil, the snake of Moses. The events involving the snake give it a human-like quality; it defends its territory by attacking, it returned to familiarity in pre-Islamic poetry, and in Aesop's fables, it is the deceitful snake in religious heritage that tempted Eve, it seized the plant of immortality in Gilgamesh, and it psychologically embodies a purely human construct to the extent that the wise snake's character merges with any human character when it shows compassion for its prey in *The Brethren of Purity*, and when it occupies what is not its own in the fox's burrow in *Al-Sulwanat*, etc.

In each of the previous stages, the snake symbolizes, as does each of the two foxes, a human character and the reaction of that character, whether it relates to Al-Walid ibn Yazid ibn Abd al-Malik and his cousin, or Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan and Sa'id ibn Abi al-As later on. It also symbolizes any projection of a story involving such delegation as Ibn Zafar al-Siqilli referred to in the title of *The First Consolation*.

²⁹ Ibn Zafar al-Siqilli. *Silwanat, Silwan al-Muta'a fi Adwan al-Ta'abiyya*, 36.

³⁰ Ibn Zafar al-Siqilli. *Silwanat, Silwan al-Muta'a fi Adwan al-Ta'abiyya*, 36.

³¹ Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil*, vol. 9, 23.

³² Ibn Zafar al-Siqilli. *The Consolations*, 15.

The concept of "history" is active at the first level of French comparative studies in the view of any title of classical Arabic books mentioned in this article, especially under the term "nucleus story," where there are clear extensions of the dimensions of the fable in Arabic literature. The concept of history is also active at the deep level of Slovak text analysis, which is the second level of analysis that can globally elevate the value of studied Arabic texts.

CONCLUSION:

The French school's interest in the concept of history led to a multiplicity of terms in comparative literature studies. Among these terms is comparative literary history, which first appeared in Paul Van Tieghem's book *Comparative Literature* in 1931. Some later terms emerged to discuss comparative studies and emphasize the idea of history, such as the term introduced by the comparatist Claudio Guillén in his notable book *The Challenge of Comparative Literature* in 1993. This term is "historiology," which can be translated as "the science of historicity" or "the study of history."³³

Based on this, comparative aesthetic critical reading of Arabic texts is not the right path to global recognition for Arabic literature. Analyzing the text itself to explore its aesthetics requires more attention to understanding the construction of other languages' texts, which rarely happens. Adding to this, Western scholars of Arabic literature do not often focus on the aesthetic achievements of Arabic literature. Most of them lack the basic reading tools in Arabic rhetoric and grammar. Therefore, they tend to avoid such readings except in limited cases. This is evident in the statements of awards granted to Arabic texts in the West, where the important aspects of these texts are the controversial topics they raise in cultural circles or the questions the author's personality provokes. The award committees cannot assess the literary quality of the Arabic texts submitted for these awards.

However, history and its analytical extensions, along with the historical background of each Arabic text presented for comparison, provide a direct and profound entry point for enriching the comparatist's knowledge with a panoramic cultural history. This also enriches the other reader with all these data and factors. Consequently, this approach can contribute to creating a comprehensive literary history of Arabic literature by updating it with the data from non-Arabic texts.

The reading procedure for a sample from Ibn Zafar al-Siqilli's *Al-Sulwanat* (*The Consolations*) has shown that the comparative scholar's historical perspective enriches both the comparatist's and the reader's knowledge. Moreover, it updates Arabic literature and nourishes it with new topics and valuable artistic methods.

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³³ Claudio Guillén. *The Challenge of Comparative Literature*, 288.

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