

Towards a theory of literary *tarāfud*/confluency: On the poetics and ethics of comparison

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This study starts from two observations. Firstly, there is a rupture or incompatibility between the ambition of the concept of World Literature and its corpus, on the one hand, and its methodology and methods of compilation, on the other. Clear proof of such a proposition, one might say, lies in the transformations in the concept of “world literature” as the paper will show through a quick review of the history of the concept from Goethe (1827) to Apter (2012), through Auerbach, Jameson and Moretti in particular. The second observation concerns the pitfalls of the concept of influence and its multiple connotations. The history of the concept reveals a relationship governed by the balance of power and its subsequent actions at specific historical moments, such as the colonial period, for example. As for world literature as a concept and as a record, adopting influence as a measure necessarily leads to the consideration that the text whose influence goes beyond its national or linguistic borders is the only text that merits the category of world literature. The complicity of such a yardstick with the politics and economics of literature, such as translation and market dynamics and so on, ~~is~~ is no secret.

If we define comparative literature as “the systematic study of literature in its global context,” not only in terms of sources and reception, but also in terms of being an expression of the existence of human beings, their actions and diversity as a global beings, without evaluating texts and arranging them in hierarchical order, then the study of influence becomes a process which is either useless, insufficient or obstructive, if not against nature. This is in addition to being a process that negates the historical and humanist aspirations of world and comparative literature, as we will show throughout this study.

The key question is: how can comparative literature further this ambition and overcome the abovementioned rupture and discordance? Comparatists have resorted to other concepts such as intertextuality and dialogism, which will be quickly touched on in this study. But the focal point of the study is the concept of the English term “confluence”, that is: the meeting or coming together of two or more tributaries, and the flowing, liquidity and and collective overflowing. The word also refers to the place where two or more rivers meet. However, the process of translating the word “confluence” into Arabic poses problems while simultaneously providing possibilities for expanding the Western concept. As the main Arabic dictionaries inform us, the root (*r-f-d*) refers to countless meanings, including: *rāfid*, tributary, which is a river that flows into another and amplifies it; *tarfīd* which is strengthening; and *mirfād*, pl. *marāfid*, in line with *mighzār* or *midrār*, which indicates a source of abundance and liquidity. We also find *rāfid* in the sense of an overabundance of generosity

and benefits. This paper uses the term *tarafud* in its Western (Latin) and Arabic meanings, in a mixture which simulates the meaning of a tributary or river that flows into another and expands it. From the Western term, we retain the meanings of flowing and liquidity embedded in the word “fluence”. The Arabic meaning is stretched by adding the meaning of reciprocal flowing indicated by the word “confluence”, meaning flowing *with* or *simultaneous* flowing. *Trafud*, thus conceived, refers to the meanings of mixing, reciprocal additions, alignment (*tarasuf*) and solidarity. Thus, the term in itself becomes both comparative and multilingual (in origin). A possible English translation would be confluency.

I propose *tarāfud* (confluency) as an alternative comparative approach to the relationship between literatures, including between Arabic and Western literatures, and other literary relationships wherein the question of distinctness (*tamayuz*) and hierarchy is reduced, as is the case of the literature of the so-called Global South. *Tarāfud* is also a methodology and a methodological practice for studying texts, as the study shows. It is an acknowledgment in principle of the plurality and diversity that govern the creative process itself. It also recognizes the principle of addition and accumulation regardless of the linguistic, generic or stylistic source of a text. This means that *tarāfud* is an aesthetic or poetic concept.

Concepts such as assistance, generosity and abundance (all attributed to and inherent in *tarāfud*) turn the semantic field of the Arabic word into an invitation to invent a poetics for equality, joint cooperation and communication. All of this is supported by and founded upon an ethics that believes in a humanism free from hierarchies and structures of domination and hegemony, which is what I mean by the ethical and ethetic aspect of comparison.

It is noticeable that comparative theory is hardly devoid of what I call the water metaphor in its description of the global literary movement, as we will show in due course. However, while it is inherent therein, it hardly comes to the surface except metaphorically or figuratively.

After a detailed presentation of conceptual and methodological problems that highlight the human ambition and the methodological limitations of comparative practice, the study examines the interaction of translators and writers with extreme cases of difference, including how the Arabs, in the past and present, have engaged with the literary and cultural heritage of ancient Greece in general. It will then turn to the concept of “liquid text,” with reference to *One Thousand and One Nights*. The study in this respect leans towards an experimental approach aspiring to shake up calcified comparative approaches, and presents a thought experiment more than a literary theory as such, calling on comparatists and critics to interact with it through experimentation and criticism.

Between human ambition and methodical deficiency

Studies spanning the manifestations of modernity outside Europe and America see that global phenomena, such as colonialism, the national question and the novel, play a determining role. This, to an extent, has led to approach the African or the Arabic text, for instance, as if on the basis that it is knowable if not already known, considering the possibility of attributing it to a known origin or the possibility of its classification within a comprehensive field such as the national question. Such an approach may appear comfortable at first glance, but it is not convincing to assume that all national literature is exclusively related to its relationship with the concerns of the nation in which it originates. Similarly, it is no longer credible that demonstrating intertextual resemblances with a Western text necessarily means a comparative study of the literature of the so-called Third World or the South. The literature of these regions cannot be seriously interpreted if we continue to regard it as either a copy of the literature of the “First World”, a lower image of it, or a product of Western origin. The literature of the so-called Third World challenges literary theory to be truly global, malleable and capable of self-criticism. It also challenges comparative literature to be at the level of its claim that it is the field that is best prepared to approach literature on a global level. Within the framework of this new awareness, the concept of *Weltliteratur*, proposed by Goethe in the 1820s, has witnessed revival and revision at the same time. Before going through the relevant revisions, I would like first to dwell on the concept itself.ⁱ

Goethe did not provide a definitive definition of the word “*Weltliteratur*.” However, Fritz Strich devoted a book to the topic, in which he compiled the 21 passages where Goethe mentioned this word in order to define the concept. These passages contain the ideas and activities that preoccupied Goethe during the final twenty years of his life. We learn that the German poet’s practice of world literature took the form of translations and reviews of foreign literature, and in transforming his home into a meeting place for foreign writers. In this sense, the core of *Weltliteratur* revolves around respecting difference and serving a common goal. Goethe writes: “I must repeat that the goal is not for nations to think like each other but rather to become aware of one another, and that when there is no endearment among nations, at least there must be tolerance between them” (Strich 13). Dialogue and the free exchange of ideas are the basis of world literature.ⁱⁱ Strich concludes: “Goethe delineated the most sublime tasks of world literature in monitoring the development of a common humanity in its fullest form and in its universality. He undeniably pushed human civilization forward” (13).ⁱⁱⁱ However,

ⁱ “*Weltliteratur*” has a direct relationship with Arabic literature, but analyses of Goethe’s idea often overlook the role of Arabic literature and Islam in his interest in world literature, as will be discussed in due course.

ⁱⁱ “It is an intellectual barter, a traffic in ideas between peoples, a literary market to which the nations bring their intellectual treasures for exchange” (Strich 5).

ⁱⁱⁱ Goethe wrote: “It is obvious that for a considerable time the efforts of the best writers and authors of aesthetic worth in all nations have been directed to what is common to all mankind” (Strich 13).

despite acknowledging Goethe's universality of ambition, Strich completely ignores the role that Arabic literature and Islam played in formulating the concept of world literature for the German poet, stressing the European dimension alone. While Goethe himself acknowledged his familiarity with Arabic literature and went so far as to advise people to acquaint themselves with it, Strich, contrariwise, insisted, in his prejudiced language as in his analysis, that Goethe had only an ambiguous and exotic encounter with the East.^{iv}

Katharina Mommsen, on the other hand, believes that the German poet's relationship with Arabic literature and Islam was more profound and important in his life than the critics wished to admit.^v This relationship provided him with inspiration and reinvigorated his poetic activity, and also helped him expand his horizon beyond Europe, especially during the years in which he devoted himself to developing the concept of *Weltliteratur*. In doing so, Mommsen traces the presence of topics, forms and ideas from Arabic poetry, the Qur'an and other Islamic sources throughout Goethe's writings. Mommsen also reveals his readings, conversations, and his attempts at learning Arabic as well as his attraction to Arabic literature and Islam.^{vi} Goethe indicated that he found in Arabic a special case for achieving unity between language and thinking, as stated in his letter dated January 23, 1815: "in Arabic, as in no other language, 'Geist', the spirit, the mind that forms the ideas behind words, the words of the language themselves, and the signs with which they are written were constituted as a single entity from the language's very origin" (Mommsen 50). Goethe also spoke of an Arabic poetic talent, which he described as follows: "the comprehensive vision of things, the ease of writing (poetry), the enjoyment, the natural tendency for the nation to resort to symbols and metaphors, and their ability to tackle generalisations" (Mommsen 104).

In short, Goethe practiced in his writings (*West-Eastern Divan*, for example), as well as in his life, a kind of world literature based on mutual respect, recognition of the other, and dialogue.

^{iv} Of Goethe, Strich says: "He was the last Westerner to be affected by the East, na yet to remain intact." He adds, "Goethe was by nature far too noble, indeed too positive, to have betrayed the European spirit to the East. He is the best example of how one can retain one's quality nad yet remain absorptive" (Strich 150).

^v Mommsen found that (Herder) had a wide influence at that time, as he wrote: "No people encouraged poetry and developed it to the level that the Arabs reached during their golden ages" (Mommsen, 3). The critic points out that Goethe's idea that every translator is a prophet for readers of his language is inspired by the Qur'an, which mentions that God sent every people a prophet in their own language.

^{vi} Note that Goethe's admiration for Islam has been exploited in recent years by some preachers. In 1995, Sheikh Abd al-Qadir al-Murabit issued a Fatwa supported by the Emir of the Muslim community in Weimar declaring that Goethe was a Muslim based on evidence from his writings and work. See islamicweb.com/begin/newmuslims/converts_goethe.htm.

In recent years, many theorists have recalled Goethe's ideas from different angles and in a different world, including in particular Erich Auerbach in the 1950s in the field of philology, and Fredric Jameson and Armando Gnisci in the context of comparative literature. It is also worth mentioning that the current momentum in what is called World Literature has followed the path set by Goethe.

Auerbach adhered to the supreme goal of the early implications of the concept of *Weltliteratur* which can be summarized as the dialogue between cultures and writers. Yet he admitted that something fundamental happened after Goethe's time, warranting a review of the concept itself. Auerbach explained that the concept of *Weltliteratur* does not necessarily call for changing or influencing what happens on the ground. The current concept accepts the irreversible truth that the culture of the world is steadily moving towards standardization and uniformity.^{vii} Auerbach also admitted that "our philological home is the earth; it can no longer be the nation" (17). Globalization has reached a tipping point such that "we must return, in admittedly altered circumstances, to the knowledge that prenational medieval culture already possessed: the knowledge that the spirit [*Geist*] is not national" (17). On the research front, Auerbach called for a philology of world literature, that is; a survey of human history which has become possible thanks to the changes taking place in the world and the availability of sufficient resources and references. Auerbach admitted that this practice is not as revolutionary, practical, or political as Goethe's project. In this sense, what was viewed as an opportunity by Goethe, became a threat and a danger in Auerbach's eyes. He believed that the prevalence of uniformity (whether that be in line with the Euro-American or the Russian model) will eventually mean that "herewith the notion of *Weltliteratur* would be at once realized and destroyed" (3). The danger is that the diversity that led to the formation of our humanity is no longer possible.

Since Auerbach, revising and reinterpreting Goethe's concept has been a topic of debate in the fields of comparative and world literature. Jameson, for instance, acknowledged the necessity of including so-called third world literature in any practice or revision in these two fields: "any conception of world literature necessarily demands some specific engagement with the question of third world literature," and as such it should acknowledge and express "the radical difference of non-canonical texts."^{viii} Jameson's desire to preserve the comprehensiveness of theory and what I would call "the fairness/justice of the concept" is no secret. Just like Goethe before him, he does not present *Weltliteratur* as an approach to world literature, but rather as a politics for literary studies, and in so doing, adopts both a mediatory as well as a critical stance simultaneously, in an attempt to revive the social and political aspect of what Karl Marx had previously articulated with regard to world literature.

^{vii} Auerbach, Eric. 'Philology and *Weltliteratur*,' *The Centennial Review* 13, Winter (1969): pp.1-17.

^{viii} Jameson, Fredric. 'Third World Literature in the Age Multinational capitalism,' *Social Text* 15 (1986): 65-88.

Ambition, justice and inclusiveness, while recognizing uniqueness and difference, are the main aspirations of modern comparative and world literature theories, and this is what they are measured against, as I will show through a quick critical overview.^{ix} It is noticeable, to begin with, that definitions of world literature are more concerned with defining “world” than with defining “literature.” In addition, the main test of some theories in world literature remains their ability to be truly global when approached from the standpoint of local literatures (as I mentioned earlier in the case of Arabic literature). In her study of Indian literature from this perspective, Francesca Orsini points to two basic deficiencies, the first of which is the language while the second is the distinction (tamayuz) between regions, cultures, and castes in India. This made English-speaking literature occupy a privileged position due to the English language controlling the global market for literature, the British colonial history in the region and the adoption of English as a preferred language among the urban middle class (327).^x On the other hand, the symbolic and cultural capital is more related to the linguistic state of India, where official institutions support local languages, especially Hindi. This led to absencing good and important experiences written in local languages, while Salman Rushdie, for example, occupied a special position due to writing directly in English and being marketed on that basis.

In the last decades, a number of approaches have emerged in an attempt to seriously deal with non-Western literatures, perhaps the most important of which are global literature (Jameson), cosmopolitanism (Bruce Robbins and Timothy Brennan), world literature (Damrosch and Moretti), literary transnationalism (Spivak) and post-colonial and comparative diaspora studies (Said and Bhabha) (Apter 78). It is worth going into some detail about Moretti’s attempt to develop an approach to world literature that takes into account the intellectual legacy of Marxist analysis in Jameson’s work, for example, while also trying to transcend the linguistic issue.

In response to the concept of “close reading,” Moretti proposes the concept of “distant reading”, in an attempt to delineate paradigms of global significance (for example, the concept of the “uncomfortable narrator,” as defined by Henry Zhao) as an expression of “the interpretative diversity between the West and the East.” Moretti links the study of world literature to distant reading: “the ambition is now directly proportional to the distance from the text: the more ambitious the project, the greater must be

^{ix} What is the role of philology in the event the world become standardised? Is it saving the past by demonstrating differences and similarities across literatures in order to serve the memory of future generations? And should literature, as it senses the end of difference, forge areas and methods of difference and individuation? What are the mechanisms and sources of such a difference?

^x Orsini, Francesca. “India in the mirror of world fiction,” in *Debating World Literature* (2004): pp. 318-333.

the distance” (133).^{xi} In the art of the novel, for example, the rule becomes “a structural compromise” everywhere, reconciling between the foreign form and the local material, as Jameson shows, or between “the abstract formal patterns of Western novel construction” and “the raw material of [the local] social experience”, that is, between form and content. Moretti adds another element to this duality, which is the local form (136), so the equation becomes a “foreign plot” with local characters and a local narrator. The original historical condition appears as a kind of a “crack” in the form, that is, “a faultline running between story and discourse, world and worldview” (136).

Moretti starts from his formalist approach which requires linguistic ability, and yet he does not see the need for the scholar of comparative literature to acquire such an ability, but rather calls for a division of labour between specialists in national languages and comparatists. He also discusses two movements in the study of world literature, the first expressed in the term tree, and the second in the image of a wave, referring to the overlap between languages in other areas of human history. Comparative philology has specialised in the ethnic tree in order to demarcate linguistic families, while the wave image has been used to express the overlap between languages and other areas of human history. “The tree describes the passage from unity to diversity,” while the wave “observes uniformity engulfing an initial diversity” (138), such as the swallowing of other languages by English. “Trees need geographical *discontinuity*,” while “waves dislike barriers” (138, emphasis in the original). In the literary field, Moretti sees the novel as a wave, but “a wave that runs into the branches of local traditions” (138). “National literature, for people who see trees; world literature, for people who see waves” (138). He concludes: “The point is that there is no other justification for the study of world literature (and for the existence of departments of comparative literature) but this: to be a thorn in the side, a permanent intellectual challenge to national literatures - especially the local literature” (138). Water metaphors, as we can see, are employed abundantly by Moretti. He even links the globality of literature directly to the mobility of water. In relation to the Western novel’s relationship with local narrative traditions, he implicitly refers to the sea and rivers. Yet as much as he traces the movement of waves, he overlooks tributaries to some extent, and how they act on rivers and seas. He ignores *tarāfud* (confluency), as discussed above.

Emily Apter, on the other hand, believes that the challenge lies in the need for a complete globality that values textual proximity and refuses to sacrifice distance (79), that is, a combination of close reading and distant reading. Her example of this practice is Leo Spitzer’s work at the Turkish university in the years 1933-1945 which “yielded a linguistically focused world-systems theory” (108). By this he means that philology allows the development of a close reading which has a

^{xi} Moretti, Franco. “Takhminat ‘an al-Aadab al-Alami@ (Conjectures on World Literature)’ *al-thaqafa al-alamiyya (World Culture)*, 106, May 2001 (in Arabic).

world view that is, the histories of words as histories of the world (108). “Whereas Auerbach established an ethics of textual autonomy in which texts discover the appropriate order and relationality because they are ‘allowed to live freely,’ as Damrosch says, Spitzer created a similar ethics for the language of the original, whereby originals are not surrendered to translations but instead find each other freely, attempting connection even at the risk of failure and shock,” the failure in communication and the shock of linguistic differences. In doing so, Spitzer was thus able to “[transform] philology into something recognizable today as the psychic life of transnational humanism” (109).^{xii}

Spitzer’s work, as shown by Apter, has particular appeal for the languages that have not found a foothold in the global struggle for linguistic dominance. In this sense, Apter restores confidence in close reading and in the right of languages to find “a place in the sun” as well. In this way, she grants importance to the specificity of the literary text, not in terms of its reliance on a different local narrative, as Jameson and Moretti contend, but on a more fundamental aspect, i.e., as a primarily linguistic being. By expanding the meaning - the meaning of language - to incorporate style in its structural and formal meanings, *linguistic* plurality (multilingualism) becomes *literary* plurality. This multilingualism “disturb[s] monolingual complacency,” says Apter, and plays an important role in transnational humanism. Thus, Spitzer does not call for hostility towards translation but advocates learning foreign languages, out of “a profound respect for the foreignness of a foreign language,” that is, to respect of foreignness. In so doing - and this is what Apter did not say - he transforms Auerbach’s fear of the world marching towards uniformity and standardisation into a positive work programme in which difference is restored in order to resist standardisation and the tendency for literary and linguistic hegemony that is mainly led by English and, to a lesser extent, French.

There is no denying that this perception, and its reconsideration by Apter, relates to the pedagogical and institutional side of world literature. As such, it refers to the teaching of languages where the study of world and comparative literature should require knowing foreign languages, which in turn impacts the relationship between translation studies and world literature, and highlights the role of so-called Area Studies.^{xiii} This kind of division of labour or collaboration between specialists in national literatures and comparatists, this *tarāfud* (confluency) as both collaboration and solidarity, constitutes one of the points addressed by Spivak in her book *Death of a Discipline*, but is a differently form and more in favour of non-Euro-American literatures. She advocates for a relationship between comparative literature, not with cultural studies, but with area studies. What is

^{xii} For further analysis, see ‘Local Narrative Form and Constructions of the Arabic Novel,’ *Novel* Spring/Summer (2008) 41(2-3): 244-263.

^{xiii} See *The Novelization of Islamic Literatures: the intersections of Western, Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Turkish Traditions* a special issue of *Comparative Critical Studies* 4:3 (2007).

important for her is to unsettle European dominance on the one hand and to open ways for the Other not as a subject of knowledge but as a producer of knowledge, on the other. She also calls for the substitution of the term globalization with planetarity in the framework of the struggle for justice.^{xiv}

David Damrosch, on his part, focuses his attention on literature and defines world literature as follows: “I take world literature to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original languages” (139 Wenger). This includes those texts that have existed at a specific time and in a specific place, not an ideal and exhaustive records of texts:

“World literature is a type of reading that can be experimented with **intensely** with a small number of texts just as it can be experimented with **extensively** with a large number of texts” (140). **Weninger**

notes that Damrosch’s understanding is similar to reception studies of texts in translation. What Damrosch has done was replace idealistic ambition with pragmatism, which advocates that “**the global market economy is a reality that must be accepted and included in our ways of thinking**” - as opposed to Spivak, who has called for overturning this economy, or at the very least rebelling against it, or restoring what it corrupted. In her vision, she does not deviate much from the old ambition; even though her a revolutionary edge has won over the ability to pay attention to the specificity of the literary act and the literary work.

Greater sensitivity to literature as literature marks Jameson’s return to the theme two decades after his aforementioned interventions in debates on world and comparative literature. He acknowledges that world literature is not a kind of imaginary exhibition or a museum to which new works are added from time to time. Rather, it is another name for a problematic and a conundrum: how can differences enter into relationships? How can nationalities become universal? How can we imagine global diversity without a centre?^{xv} Jameson opts for the concept of “the national situation” to analyse differences and entanglements in world literature. In this spirit, he transforms the binary relationship between a reader and a text into a four-dimensional situation: the meeting of a reader from a particular nation with a text from another nation through two national situations. Jameson speaks of a radical singularity and a tangible difference. A literary work must always be considered to revolve around itself and around the world and seeks, in the Darwinian sense, to survive in its local context while

^{xiv} Armando Gnisci addresses the issue from the two angles of *cultural practice* and *decolonization*, calling for comparative literature to be treated as a kind of confederative knowledge and teaching that allows for dialogue for the purposes of the common good. For countries on the path of decolonization, comparative practice can contribute to such an effort. As for Europeans, comparative literature could help in self-liberation from colonialism. This can be done by critiquing cross-representations and in paying attention to the Other’s perception (of us). Thus, Gnisci returns to Goethe’s dream in approaching world literature as a cultural and political practice, not as a practice monopolised by universities and academic studies alone.

^{xv} From Jameson’s 2008 lecture. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EUtVakCzvnu>.

imposing itself on the global context in a world governed by conflict and competition. World literature is a field and a site of competition and contradiction, governed by the struggle to control the institutions of translation and distribution, including universities, publishing houses, and so on.

This perception leads us to pose a fundamental question: how have writers and translators historically dealt with difference? What are the lessons that scholars and theorists of world literature can learn from that? In other words, how have creatives combined ambition for inclusiveness and transcending boundaries, on the one hand, and the tendency for uniqueness, on the other? In order to come to terms with this, it is necessary to survey specific cases. By this, I mean those situations in which the writer or the critic discovers that they are in the presence of an aesthetic or cultural practice which is radically different from his reference (points). Key examples, as I will shown, are the positions of Aristotle's interpreters and his Arab and Muslim translators regarding the notion of tragedy; al-Tahtawi's position vis-à-vis European modernity; Tawfiq al-Hakim's stance towards tragic theatre, and how *One Thousand and One Nights* has been treated in the East and the West.

The moment of experiencing radical difference is a defining moment in critical, theoretical and creative practice, which can be referred to as the border moment. It is a moment that is open to many possibilities, including, for example, rupture, connection, rejection, ignoring (tajahul), collision, and so on and so forth. It is a defining moment in the sense that it is a moment of choice and decision. (Clearly there is an important psychological aspect to a case like this at which I will not stop.) Radical difference calls for reflection and rationalization, and as such it necessarily calls for comparison. It is a comparative moment *par excellence*. And through comparison, the creative, the critic, or the translator may find themselves before a referential void, meaning the absence of a synonym or an equivalent to which they can returned to in order to accommodate and rationalise this difference. In the absence of a familiarity, how can a void be filled? With reference to the aforementioned examples, how did Averroes, al-Tahtawi and Al-Hakim fill this referential void? How did the ancient Arabs, including during the Arab *Nahda*, view the subject of relationships between literatures? What lessons can be learnt from that?

Discerning and pondering difference

I will focus on two books by al-Tahtawi, or rather, two separate moments in his career that I argue summarise the course of the Arab *Nahda* in its entirety. One of these two moments was his direct encounter with modern Europe, which can be referred to as the moment of witnessing in the sense of seeing and observing, including looking, snooping and watching) that he conveyed in *Takhlīs al-Ibrīz fī Talkhīs Bārīz* published in 1834. The second is an indirect encounter with Western literature and culture in its artistic and philosophical dimensions, including mythology. It is an encounter by means of translation whose focus was the translation of the French book *Les Aventures de Télémaque* into

Arabic under the title *Mawāqī‘ al-Aflāk fī waqāī‘ Tilīmāk*, translated between 1851 and 1855, and published in 1867-1868 in Cairo. This moment can be viewed as a moment of reflection and rationalization.

In both cases, al-Tahtawi encountered what could be called a radical difference; so, how did he react? Overall, it can be said that al-Tahtawi maintained a degree of critical distance, but still sought either to rationalize the difference or to adopt it as something inherently human and beneficial. In all cases, he did not dwell on the borders and discontinuities between his /culture and Western culture. On the contrary, he referred to the points of convergence, communication and bridges. During his travels, al-Tahtawi came across a totally different world; a world not of the kind that should be denied or fought, but a world that must be transmitted through a (written) text to the Arab reader, in a literary formulation or a local artistic style for the purposes of pleasure and validation, which mad him opting for the Arab art of travel writing. This is of vital importance as we are dealing with a case of intersection that completely contradicts the equation referred to by Moretti and Jameson. We are before a local form and a foreign content; a local artistic framework (in terms of narration, language, style and literary genre) that frames a strange, foreign content. This content is discordant with the form itself or, in other words, with the cultural container of this form.

The Arab reader enters the strangeness of Paris through a familiar, and even intimate portal, which is the gateway to the Arab journey (rihla). Rihla, as we know, hinges on the transmission of the visual through the written t, which makes imagination a vital component). Through the his text, al-Tahtawi sought to familiarise the strange through the art of comparison – that is, linguistic, historical and religious comparison –. In doing so, he employed various methods, among which I will discuss cultural or civilizational comparison; Arabization and Islamization; and finally, differentiation (*mufadhala*). Speaking about the breadth of an Orientalist’s knowledge, al-Tahtawi remarks that it is “the breadth of this pontiff’s knowledge of ancient and modern languages of the people of the East and the West which makes it easy to believe what was said about Al-Farabi, the philosopher of Islam, that he mastered seventy tongues.” (Then he proceeds to a give a biography by Al-Farabi, “in acknowledgement of equalness,” he says, that is, from the perspective of comparing two equals) (92). But then again he does stop at quarrel with the Other by mentioning equality (niddiyyah) , but often adopts a more critical inclination. When reporting on the advancement of French women in science and literature, he says: “From this, it appears to you [the reader] that the proverb compiled by the masters which claims ‘A man’s beauty is his mind, and a woman’s beauty is her speech,’ is not appropriate for those countries, because there one askss about a woman’s mind, intelligence and understanding, and about her knowledge as well” (94).

Concerning translation, Tahtawi takes various positions, and yet he does not hesitate to translate and

believe in translation as a vital tributary in order for Egyptian culture - which is his main focus - to join that of Europe and France in particular. Tahtawi translates everything he sees and reads, especially that which conveys the French specificity or which is considered one of the pillars of the French people's progress. One of these cases is his translation of *The French Charter* (Al-Sharta, *La Charte*), "even though the vast majority of it does not correspond to Allah's book nor is it part of the Prophet's heritage, may God bless him and grant him peace." Behind this, as he argues, is a desire to show the original value of the concept of justice, despite its different sources, since the King of France does not have absolute power and "French politics is a binding law" (100).

In the field of literature and philosophy, Al-Tahtawi, who sees himself as a writer, translator and researcher, seeks to compare French and Arabic literatures and to situate the act of translation and its practice at the same time. "There is nothing wrong with French literary sciences," and thus they are worthy of translation. (Tahtawi provides translations of some poems while at the same time acknowledging translation's shortcomings in the field of poetry, whether French or Arabic: "When translated, the poem loses its eloquence and fails to convey the poet's high ability" (92)). As for the main problematic, it does not concern the literary form itself, but is rather located in the literary language of French and its metaphors. In his *rihal*, al-Tahtawi refers to this matter, but he explains it in more depth in his translation of *Télémaque*, as I will clarify below. Al-Tahtawi comments on French literature: "But its language and poetry are based on the *Jahili* custom of Ancient Greece and their deification of what they favour; so they say, for example: the god of beauty, the god of love, and the god of such and such. Thus their terms are incontestably irreligious (Islamically)." (94) This poses a real problem for Tahtawi - a problem similar to his description of the natural sciences, such as the rotation of the Earth and others ideas, which are inconsistent with Islam. Nevertheless, he does not present this radical difference as an obstacle or an excuse not to read or translate. He argues: "They - that is, the French - do not believe what they say, but this is a matter of representation and the like" (94).

This is with reference to poetry; as for philosophy, the matter requires stronger preparation and a more convincing justification. Al-Tahtawi admits that the French "have delusional/heretic components in the sciences of knowledge/wisdom (philosophy) that contradict all the divine books, and advance evidence for them which are difficult for anyone to refute." As a means of protecting oneself against these "delusions", "whoever wants to delve into the French language which encompasses some philosophy, must be able to master the Qur'an and the Sunnah so that he is not deceived and does not become susceptible to losing his conviction, otherwise his (religious) certainty will be lost" (80).

Al-Tahtawi found himself in the lands where “The stars of knowledge are never absent / and the night of blasphemy has no morning,” as he argued in one of his poems. He was in a really puzzling situation in which knowledge and blasphemy border one another. Nonetheless, that did not stop him from selecting, reading and admiring. His desire was to open a new tributary to increase and support the culture of Nile River.

When Tahtawi returned to Egypt, and during his Sudanese exile, he decided to translate *Télémaque*, as I mentioned earlier. The book posed a challenge to him that is not entirely new, but one that requires confrontation and justification. *Télémaque* is in itself considered an important tributary that feeds into what can be called the classical river, as it is an addition to the myth of Ulysses and a form of filling a gap in it. And, in doing so, it continues an art which al-Tahtawi perceived as a continuation of the tradition of “the *Jahili* Ancient Greece in deifying what they favour”. Understanding the book is based on knowledge of their myths and stories. How, then, should this radical difference be handled?

Al-Tahtawi sets off with an affirmation of the compatibility of the Arabic language with the mission at hand and its ability to deal with a book, which he describes as follows: “not a sea can come to terms with the jewels of its words” in its original language. This is because “the sea of the Arabic language cuts off all other currents” (5). The water metaphor here is related to what I have been attempting to capture with regard to the flow, or confluence, between languages and literature, but it also reveals the preferential evaluation of Arabic by the author, making it the mouth of each stream. In order to make “the foreign material” malleable to the “local form”, al-Tahtawi thought of transferring the book into “a template/ mold that corresponds to the mood of Arabic, where I would offer it another literary formula, adding to it some occasional poetry and include proverbs and prose and rhymed parables. In other words, to weave it afresh and rewrite it in a style that makes less of its origin and more of it as a model for the originality of the original” (23). In other words, al-Tahtawi thought of transforming *Télémaque* through a translation into literature in the Arabic sense of the word *adab*, a process which was similar to that followed by his contemporaries in their tackling of world literature. There was no time for Tahtawi to rewrite *Télémaque*’s story entirely in(to) Arabic literature, so he wrote a prologue that takes the place of an introduction, but which at the same time contains an important vision of translation, or might we say, the translation of radical difference?^{xvi}

Al-Tahtawi stands baffled – in the beginning at least - in front of an extremely testing problem, which is that the hero is the product of a marriage between a human and a divine being. How can he present a hero like this to his monotheistic readers, who believe in a God with no progeny or partners?

^{xvi} Is it the translation of the untranslatable as discussed by Apter?

However, he soon finds in the tradition an Islamic explanation for such a practice. He has firm evidence for this going back to the Qur'an, which is supported by Al-Jahiz and others (24). Al-Tahtawi argues: "For female jinn strike human males with love in search for coupling/ sex; and the same goes for male jinn with regard to human females. The Quran says: 'Whom [i.e. chaste maidens] never touched a human nor Jinn' before . Therefore if Jinns do not have sex with humans and such a [desire] was not in their composition, Allah would not have preached such words." Al-Tahtawi reviews Al-Damiri's views in his book *Life of Animals*, as reported by Al-Jahiz. He concludes that it is by no means strange "if we substitute Jinn with what the Greeks had long called superhumans or gods. We might then understand why "Hercules for the Greeks is born to a human and a non-human and the same for the Arabs as well. The only thing is is that the Greeks believe in the godly nature of the angels and the superhumans so they would call a superhuman a god or a deity, or a reason, and call the one borne to a superhuman and a human a demi-god ..." (25). In what can be seen as comparative mythology, al-Tahtawi traces a resemblance between Muslims and the Greeks through which meaning is approximated (taqrib) and translation is justified. He also adds an explanation for the prevalence of idolatry with the aim of stressing proximity and comparison.

This is from the anthropological point of view, if we like. As for the literary and poetic aspect, al-Tahtawi has another theory that falls within the remit of what can be called comparative poetics, or comparative literature more generally. Al-Tahtawi believes that Greek literature, just like Arabic literature, is inclined towards "myths and falsehoods whose purpose is to understand what literature stands on" (27). In other words, they are introductions and formulas whose purpose is to transcend words in order to arrive at the meaning. "The virtuous reader should not intervene by re-presenting or tampering with them in a way that risks dimming their light" (26-27). In the case of Arabic, he notes the reliance of Islamic poetry on the "doctrines of the Jahiliyyah" as articulated in this verse: "If upon a stone we were slain, to the [two] blood[s], in their separate paths, truth belongs." The *literariness* of literature permits what is impermissible except for literature, and it is exactly this permissibility that literatures share. Thus, there is no reason to alter its authenticity under the pretext of respect for public taste or the sanctity of the reference. In other words, Greek literariness has its Arabic equivalent, and the two are equal in the boundless sea of poetics.^{xvii} On the surface, he would justify what appears to be different and shocking and seeks to make it familiar. For the core of mythology, however, there is a reason to accept it and be guided by it since it includes (its own) symbols and signs (27) as when the Greeks, for instance, say Saturn eats his children, Arabs, may say "time consumes its people."

^{xvii} Note Al-Tahtawi's use of the word *ādāb* (also *adabiyyāt*) in the sense of literariness or as regards the technical elements and the form of literature, arguing that "what is in *Télémaque* of *literariness* is in effect based on the Greek literariness" (27).

From the foregoing reading, we trace a process of justification through a comparison that searches not only for the different and the untranslatable, but also for the common. It also draws a line between content and form supposing that the literariness of literature is the same in terms of the literary and the poetic, even if it differs in its reliance on what is cultural and local. Indeed, al-Tahtawi's admiration for Fénelon's creations leads him to place him among the most prestigious of Arab creations, thereby classifying them according to purely Arab references. "It is known that it [*Télémaque*] is among the creations which take the form of Hariri's *Maqamas* but in the shape of essays" says Tahtawi. In this sense, *Télémaque* is a serious and refined creation: "How can it be measured against *One Thousand and One Nights* and *One Thousand Days and One Day*, and how can it be compared to the stories of *Dhī Yazan* and *Antara* whose subject is limited and incomplete?" (29). *Télémaque*, in Al-al-Tahtawi's words, is world literature ("These discourses were widely famous with kings and across numerous nations and have been translated into all languages ..."). This is its position, even if its content is different: then how should it not be translated into Arabic and added to its sea?

In line with the above and according to Al-Tahtawi, we might infer that world literature is structured in layers/classes, not including what is now commonly called popular literature, even if it transcends its national borders. (This is an opinion that will be rebutted later as we examine *One Thousand and One Nights* in some detail.) *Télémaque* and Hariri's *Maqamas* are now part of the "museum" of world literature, and therefore it is necessary to transfer the former to the latter's language, as an example of the Arabs' pursuit of a globability for which they are worthy.^{xviii} Through this sober and sensitive vision, al-Tahtawi established a specific position on the relationship of Arabic literature with other literatures, which will have an important resonance and long-term impact whose features will become apparent in the dynamism of translation during the *Nahda* period.

On **drinking** from the classical river

In reality, al-Tahtawi was not the first Arab-Muslim writer to encounter the Greeks' world and its manifestations in literature, and stand before it to reflect at first and then attempt to invent methods

^{xviii} It is worth mentioning that the *maqama* is one of the most important local forms in the Arabic case, which played an important role in resisting the incoming (and imported) literary forms but also engaging them. For Al-Tahtawi, for example, the *maqama* represents a rival equivalent to the epics and he talks about the French "*maqama*" in their "literariness". As for the writer in the modern era, the *maqama* represented an attraction, challenge and legitimacy. At a time when the foundations of the identity were shaken, resorting to *maqama* was key in understanding, as well as rationalising, the challenges ahead and in finding a form capable of sustaining resistance. (It is also a form of symbolic resistance, just like the veil which was defended by the secularists during the time of the French occupation in Tunisia, for example, in opposition to the occupier's culture, despite some of them rejecting the veil). In this sense, I view the *maqama* as a mode of thinking about the Arabic novel and short story. It is also an active element in the transformation of the modern Arabic narrative. For further details, see Omri's 'Local Narrative Form and Constructions of the Arabic Novel,' *Novel*, Spring/Summer (2008) 41(2-3): 244-263.

with a creative comparative dimension. A careful examination of the Arabic commentaries and translations of Aristotle's *Poetics* would reveal that Muslim philosophers were keenly aware of the points of intersection and difference between Arab and Greek fields of literature and thought. In turn, they resorted to fields beyond poetry to explain and demonstrate some aspects of tragedy when Arabic poetry alone failed to do so. Indeed, Al-Farabi (d. 950), Avicenna (980-1037), and Averroes (1126-1198) wrote commentaries on and summaries of *Poetics*. Avicenna, for example, made the lengthiest of such summaries, while Averroes made the most consistent of attempts towards a comparative poetic approach. All three of them agreed that what struck them the most was the universality of the book, meaning that they were able to focus their explanations on the elements that they considered common to all nations. "The purpose of this is to summarize what is in Aristotle's book of universal laws common to all nations, or the vast majority, since much of it stipulates laws specific to their [the Greeks'] poetry and their ways in composing it, which are partly found in the words of the Arabs or in other languages," says Averroes. Avicenna, on the other hand, notes a radical difference between the two cultures: "Greek poetry was intended, most of all, to imitate actions and conditions only. As for animals, they not working to imitate them in the first place, as is the case for the Arabs. As Arabs (used to) say: poetry has two sides: First, for the self to be touched by a specific matter, like action and reaction, and the second to elicit wonder only" (34).

Although he acknowledges the obvious differences, Averroes sees, in turn, intersections with and likenesses to the Islamic culture. Thus he uses the word 'praise' to bring the meaning closer to the Arab reader, recognizing at the same time that the likeness is not entirely convincing, turning to the Qur'an in search of a better equivalence: "Reader, you should know that the likes of these four types of praise of the voluntary, virtuous action are not found in the poetry of the Arabs but, abundantly, in the Noble Qur'an" (232).

In the Qur'an, Averroes also finds examples of the four types of tragedy.^{xix} He states: "Since Arabic poetry is devoid of praising virtuous deeds and denigrating deficiencies, the holy book blamed them and excluded those whose poetry was inclined towards this type" (229). For example, he considers the story of Abraham's sacrifice of his son part of (a discourse that elicits sorrow and fear), which is his translation of what Aristotle calls "Catharsis" (Avicenna translates the same word as mercy and piety). Linking tragedy to the Qur'an reveals, perhaps, an awareness of the religious dimension of tragedy in Greek culture and the desire to translate this literary genre into a language or discourse similar in terms of status and symbolic weight, namely, to the Qur'anic discourse. Likewise, Averroes's observation should help enhance understanding of, or at least situate, the Qur'an's

^{xix} Complex tragedies, tragedies of pathos, tragedies of character or ethical tragedies and simple tragedies, which depend on the scene and exposure.

disregard for poetry and poets. Averroes implies that the Qur'an ignored *Arabic* poetry, not poetry *per se*, meaning that the prohibition is culturally specific and can be understood in the context of a cultural struggle to prove the supremacy of the Qur'an in an environment marked by the dominance of poetry. (This preferential categorization of cultural forms resonates with Al-Tahtawi equating *Télémaque* with Hariri's *Maqamas* exclusively.)

It is known that Averroes was subjected to severe criticism by the West at first, and by Arabs at a later stage, accusing him of inadequately reading or misreading Aristotle, prompting Terry Eagleton in recent times, despite his belief in the necessity to put things in their historical context, to refer to Averroes's misconstruing of tragedy as praise "as a certain tragicomic failure of communication between antiquity and its aftermath" (12). Borges, in turn, tried to recall a defining moment in the history of accumulation and cultural communication through an acknowledgment of what I refer to here as the creativity of misreading, in his magical story "La Busca de Averroes" (Averroes's Search), which he published in 1947. In the story, the Andalusian philosopher is sitting, looking at his garden, contemplating what might have been his "Greek forefathers" purpose and how to transfer his art to a Muslim Arab reader. The strangeness of the concept and the art associated with it baffles him and yet it does not deter or discourage him from the desire to understand and make others understand, and to translate. In fact, Averroes does not deny the concept of tragedy but instead approximates – and compares – it to the poetry produced by Arabs and to what there is in the Qur'an by way of equivalents.

In reality, Averroes's main interests did not lie in Greek culture *per se*. He was an interpreter and commentator writing with the Arab reader in mind and within the framework of the laws and codes of the arts of Arab explanation (*sharh*) and interpretation (*tafsir*). In this framework, the examples and evidence must be drawn from the recipient's culture, in a work which is both pedagogical and literarily. Averroes had concurrent intellectual and practical interests: knowing the ways in which others think and their forms of expression, on the one hand, and employing what seemed most appropriate or beneficial to his Islamic culture, on the other. His role was to bridge a chasm between Aristotle and an Arab reader who was not familiar with the Greek dramatic art. In other words, Averroes took it upon himself to convey a kind of absence, and theatre was that absence. He, just like his readers, did not know what exactly theatre was. Averroes, along with other Arab commentators on and translators of *Poetics* managed to transfer theatre to poetry and narration with the aim of bringing meaning (*closer*). They read Aristotle - and did not misread him - within the framework of their cultural authority. Thus, as history shows, they favoured connection to separation and severance despite the strangeness and confusion in the face of radical difference. They favoured listening to exclusion. By listening, literatures and cultures flow into each other (*tatarafud*).

This was the experience of ancient Arabs with Aristotle's *Poetics*. In the modern era, however, tragedy had an added importance that should be addressed for two reasons, the first of which is the position of this art in the "museum" of literary arts from a comparative and global point of view. The second reason concerns the national and global dimension in literature. Tragedy, as much as it condenses the commonality of human significance, remains a subject of difference, considering its specific cultural history, by which I mean that of ancient Greece and modern Europe. As such, it is a "pampered" literary genre in comparative criticism and the history of literature in the Western canon.

In this sense, Eagleton says critically: "If tragic art really does bear witness to the highest of human values, as so many of its advocates insist, then this carries one generally overlooked implication: that societies in which such art is either marginal or unknown are incapable of rising to what is more sublime" (72). We are therefore before a literary genre that has evolved into a cultural container and a scale by which nations' cultures are measured, not only in their development, but also with regards to their creative capacity. It is an evaluation through which the linking of modern Europe with what is Greek was established in a processes of connection and disconnection whose analysis is beyond the remit of this study. This link between Greek arts and European modernity led to a kind of temptation tinged with a sense of historical injustice. In Arab theater, Tawfiq al-Hakim may represent the most profound and influential case in the context of the relationship between Greek, French and Arab literatures, which is also an indication of the historical destiny of what al-Tahtawi has established in this regard.^{xx}

Describing his project, Al-Hakim says: "They (meaning the Europeans who composed tragedies in the modern era), by virtue of their Latin and Greek cultures, do not find this work (i.e. Oedipus) alien to them or to their literature, which is itself based on Greek and Latin literature. While today I am trying to establish this new art, in line with its Greek rules, in our Arabic literature, it is the work that should have been made available for us centuries ago" (*King Oedipus* 185). Al-Hakim refers here to what he considers a historical error, embodied in Muslims' (like Averroes and others) neglect of Greek literature and their failure to translate it into Arabic, or to subsequently create a theatrical art similar to the Greeks'. In his introduction to the play, *King Oedipus*, he seeks to develop a comprehensive perception and explanation of this rupture between the two literatures. He argues that, on the one hand, the Arabs were not in need of the poetry of others, and since Greek poetry is contingent on performance, and, on the other, given their Bedouin and nomadic living, the Arabs were not exposed to the art of theatre. Al-Hakim, however, does not refer to what Al-Tahtawi argument about the

^{xx} There are, of course, many ramifications and representations of the counter between Arabic and Greek literatures, including the cases of Al-Mas'adi, Taha Hussein, and others, in addition to theatrical production.

Arabs' paganism and the Muslims' belief in jinns in his attempt to bring meaning closer and prepare the reader to accept difference and foreignness. Rather, he argues that the deep bond between the Greeks and Muslims, which spans in particular the religious dimension, is stronger than the formers' connection to Europe,. Tragedy, in his opinion, was built on a religious spirit, and thus it is in agreement with the Islamic community, even if the concept of fate differs between the two cultures.

Al-Hakim talks in detail about the necessity for "reconciliation", "agreement" and "consensus" as well as ending "antipathy", "estrangement" and "animosity" in the context of a relationship that "should have been" predicated on communication. The determinant for such an obligation or desire is that Al-Hakim regarded performance as the loftiest of all artistic forms (drawing on Victor Hugo's views). While the determinant in a direct contact with the Greeks is the religious aspect that has been absent(ed) from modern tragedies, such as the works of André Gide, as al-Hakim argues.

Al-Hakim takes us back to a new kind of relationship among literatures in line with Moretti's and Jameson's formula, which is something that was neither within Tahtawi's horizon nor the horizons of the ancient Muslim philosophers prior to him. Hence, what concerns Al-Hakim is the question of the "template"/mold or form as an element of interaction with foreign literatures, and a necessity in order to develop Arabic literature while preserving its local content. He does so through a formula that simulates modern European literature's handling of the Greek tragedy on the one hand, and reconnects what was severed between the Arabs and Greeks, on the other, but this time without any Western mediation except in terms of following their example. In this sense, Al-Hakim Islamizes the content of tragedy without Arabizing its form. The reason for this, according to him, is that "the development in terms of the subject had taken place ... but the development in terms of form has been prevented by the same circumstances that led to the emergence of the Arab state" (28). The solution is that "There must be a missing link, to which we should return in order to tighten the relationship between literature and performative art. This link can only be Greek literature" (30). In a notable water metaphor, al-Hakim adds: "The goal is to scoop it up from the source, drinking it (isaghah), digesting it and representing it, so that we can bring it out to the people once again, painted with the colour of our thinking, imprinted with the character of our beliefs" (31). In keeping with these beliefs, and due to them, it is necessary to abandon Greek mythology in its entirety.

We have to wonder what was behind such a heroic, and at the same time impossible – i.e, tragic – attempt prompting Al-Hakim to fill what he considered a historical void, or a cultural error, epitomised by the Arabs' neglect of Greek theatre? Al-Hakim tried to bridge both literatures and cultures, but within his religious condition. But did Al-Hakim overlook the historical condition? Or did he misread history? Or had he been suffering - just like his tragic heroes - under the burden of the national imperative, appearing to him as an inevitable destiny, so as to seek inspiration from Sisyphus,

making his heroes “die while trying” (just like Mahmoud Al-Masaadi’s heroes)? In any case, what al-Hakim cannot be faulted for is his work ethos and his systematic methodology. Al-Hakim thought, planned, and accomplished. This, in itself, is a historical event that made al-Hakim a tributary which enriched Arabic and world literatures, becoming an integral part of the history of the literary movement and its flow.

Against the current or the liquid text

Of course, it is possible to change direction – and rivers often change their directions. In this spirit, I will now turn - albeit hastily – to an “Arab” work (in inverted commas) to come to terms with a movement that has become almost exemplary in world literatures. This work is *One Thousand and One Nights*, a text that I consider “liquid” in terms of its birthplace, its structure, and its ends, as its sources are still unclear, and yet its influence on literature and the arts has continued uninterrupted.^{xxi} This is in terms of the development and formation of the influence over many centuries and across different cultures. As for its (i.e. the influence’s) lineage, it is like myths and tales - orphan and of multiple sources at the same time, with one identity, albeit an intertwined one, and that is the language. This identity is, in turn, hybrid and heterogenous. Such a perception should not count against the work as much as it sheds light on its transformation, more than any other Arab work, into global human heritage. Thus *One Thousand and One Nights* is a work that is free of any national burdens, carving out a way for everyone who finds himself or herself capable or daring, whatever his language, art or age, to converse with it without any sense of shame, without the need to claim ownership, appropriate, or raid other people’s heritage.^{xxii} *One Thousand and One Nights* has turned into communal property, just as it was in its beginning and during its early lives. One of the reasons behind this is the orality of this work and its reliance on the openness of (oral) narratives to addition and accumulation. In this regard, it is closer to a river, meandering, branching out into tributaries at times and opening up to others, which add to its capacity and power, at other times.

Let us dwell briefly on one of the moments of connection of *One Thousand and One Nights* with comparative literature, summarised by Mahmoud Tarshouna in his book *Introduction to Comparative Literature and its Applicability to One Thousand and One Nights* in which he argues, based on extensive research, that the book is “Eastern in some of its components, Arab in its final conception, language and style, humanist in its values, dimensions, and aesthetic enjoyment” (83). Tarshouna provides an introduction to comparative literature which shows that the movement of literature is by

^{xxi} In this sense, it is “like water flowing” - as Al-Masaadi once described one of his characters when unable to grasp or characterise them. Al-Masaadi is this sort of writer, in so far as many tributaries had flown into him and my in-depth and comparative study of his writings constituted, I would argue, the first precursor to the present thought experiment.

^{xxii} To understand such uniqueness, we take the example of Shakespeare or tragedy, as shown earlier, as they are all linked to their cultural or linguistic conditions or to their creators.

no means unidirectional, and that in the journey of *One Thousand and One Nights* lies more than one lesson, starting with its tributaries, leading to its propagation towards the West, and finally, to observe a kind of return of the text by underlining the impact of the book on modern Arabic literature.^{xxiii} As for the second benefit, it is to open up *One Thousand and One Nights* to new horizons, facilitating the use of comparative literature. In this regard, Tarshouna practises a counter-reading of the literary movement in what, in postcolonial theory, can be referred to as “the empire writes back to the centre.” Concluding his discussion, Tarshouna resorts to a water metaphor which is at the heart of our discussion. He says, “*One Thousand and One Nights* came into view through this approach (i.e., comparative literature); an inexhaustible stream, a sweet and often-passed through water spring” (147).

Conclusion

The present essay does not propose, in the opinions discussed throughout, a theory, a law, or an integrated approach as such. Rather, it presents a thought experiment whose key conclusions can be summarised in the following points.

Comparative and world literature have often been associated with vocabulary that denotes water; its derivatives and various states. This appears frequently in the words of theorists of comparative and world literature, even when the course of speech is competition, conflict and difference. While a careful statistical study on this specific point is lacking, I have referred to this issue wherever it occurs in an experimental way. I have also indicated that what is meant by conflict is not the literariness of literature, but rather its institutions, such as publishing houses and others. However, we must not forget that “*to influence*” (and “*be influenced*”), following the Latin etymology of the word *influence*, is derived from the movement of water, and yet it also conveys a state of inequality and hegemony that has marked the history of comparative practice. Historically, the 19th century was marked by a revolution in Biology, which led to a new vision of history that encompassed the literary field, in particular, world literature. In this regard, national literature is classified as a subspecies, and comparative literature becomes the study of cross-fertilization and contact between those subspecies and their development and transformation. Influence means that there is a tangible effect of literature (A) in literature (B) that may be influencing its inception or its transformations. The dangers and pitfalls of such an approach cannot be ignored, perhaps the most important of which is the conflation of influence and intertextuality, as the first does not necessarily lead to the second, while intertextuality does not necessarily indicate an influence. Whatever its ramifications, the issue of influence (and being influenced) is not so much aesthetic as it is psychological. This is on the one

^{xxiii} This work, as Tarshouna stresses, has two benefits: firstly, it “introduced a vital art of modern literary criticism since we are in desperate need of its methodology in order to know our Arabic literature’s status amongst other literatures” (147).

hand. On the other, however, adopting the scale of influence as a determinant of the value of the literary text and regarding a work's impact outside the boundaries of national literature as a criterion by which the universality of literature is measured, engenders a classification that is far from the origins of the concept of world literature as articulated by Goethe and others. It turns world literature into either a hierarchical list of influential texts or a "museum of bad taste" to quote a prominent French comparatist. Perhaps the most important contribution in studying influence remains in unravelling the specifics of a text or a writer, or what remains of their art after uncovering the influences which may have affected them.

The movement of literary forms, from the point of view of world literature, has often been viewed as the movement of the centre towards the periphery. This has led to a focus on the function of what can be called the central forms in the literatures of the peripheries. Within this framework, emphasis is put on tracing the processes of influence and the transformations and changes which occur in the peripheries under the pressure of external global forms. In truth, another perspective is still possible and may even be more in sync with reality. Form is a cultural product of whose history, influence and function are local. Instead of asking, for example, how the novel came to carve a position for itself in Arabic literature, we should reverse the question: how have local forms dealt with the novel? In so doing, we talk about local literature and the local form as an agent and the culture that contains it as a producer of art, thought and history. Thus, it is incumbent upon us to examine how Arabic literature or the Arab writer, for example, tried to modify, control or mediate the novel. When Moretti tried to view the Western novel as a wave, he found that the centre's novel had changed through its relation to the local situation or in conflict with it. This is what made the prototypical novel one that resulted from conciliation or compromise.

Tahtawi, more than any other cases discussed here, showcases the "universality" of literature as literature, with respect to style, structure, imagination, and so on. It is a matter that, according to Tahtawi, must be respected by not subjecting it to the receiving cultural condition. It must also be accepted and taken as inspiration or support. In this, he adheres to Averroes's approach in recognising the benefits (*manfa'ah*) while paying attention more clearly to the aesthetic aspects.

When we look at literary works from a water viewpoint, metaphorically, or from the vantage point of *tarāfud*, as a conception carved of Arabic and Latin origins, we discover that the movement of literature knows no borders, barriers or obstacles. It follows the behaviour of tributaries: it expands and contracts; it straightens and bends; it changes and, at times, reverses its direction, all in search for liquidity and permeability (*tasarrub*), and from there, connection and survival. In this, it is not looking for uniformity and standardisation, but rather for difference connected to other differences, and perhaps therein lies a preliminary answer to Jameson's aforementioned question: how can differences

enter into relationships? How can nationalities become universal? How can we imagine global diversity without a centre?. One lesson for us is to be found in the folds of *One Thousand and One Nights!*

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