
Editorial

Comparative literature in Iran: with/without parentheses?

How did comparative literature emerge in Iran? What is the mission of comparative literature in Iran? Where do we stand in the realm of comparative literature in today's world? Has comparative literature research in Iran been based on clear and systematic research theory and methods? What have been our literary and cultural achievements in the past two decades when comparative literature has quantitatively grown in Iran? Do we have a roadmap? Do we have an institution or a center as a scientific authority that will show us the right path whenever we go the wrong way, or are we floundering in the heart of darkness? Has comparative literature played a role in the growth and prosperity, promoting the globalization of the rich treasure of Persian literature, and in introducing and recognizing oneself and others? Do we really need comparative literature in Iran or not?

Now it's time to seriously examine the origin and status of comparative literature in Iran. And give an answer to these questions, not emotional and politicized, not tasteful and dogmatic, but scientific, logical, elitist, comprehensive and strategic. The scientific life of comparative literature in Iran depends on clarifying the problematic nature of this literary and cultural phenomenon.

On the other hand, theories are not permanent and stable and are often rejected or changed over time. Comparative literature, from its birth until now, has gone through various crises, and as a result, various developments. According to David Damrosch, "Long focused primarily on the literature of a few major European powers, comparative studies have increasingly been giving substantial attention to writers in smaller countries and using less widely diffused languages." (Damrosch 2023: 459).

When we are talking about Similarities Theory, the misunderstood theory that prevails in Iran, usually we are talking about a research to the extent of enumerating the similarities and adding some superficial differences.

Jean Bessier, professor of comparative literature at Sorbonne Nouvelle University, says,

Les théories littéraires n'offrent pas de définition unitaire de la littérature. Cela a mené à la conclusion qu'une telle définition est inutile. Ce défaut de définition unitaire est ici reconsidéré selon ce qui fonde ces théories : les ontologies de la littérature qu'elles développent, qu'elles impliquent et qui constituent autant de définitions unitaires de la littérature. (2023:447).

We are facing a crisis in the problematization of comparative literature. Using random brackets such as Persian Arabic or Persian-French has made comparative literature arbitrarily limited. Despite the multitude of definitions, comparatists agree on one point. Comparative literature is interlingual, intercultural and interdisciplinary.

The essence of comparative literature lies in this prefix "Inter" which means interaction with another; this can either be another author from a different culture or other sciences and arts. The root of comparative literature is based on persistence and tolerance, and interaction with others. Do not delimit it by adding parentheses.

Thus, genuine comparative literature does not have parentheses. Bracketing is one of our improper inventions. Comparative literature is inclusive in nature and cannot be artificially reduced to only two languages or two nationalities. We learn from each other without parentheses. It is no exaggeration that adding any parenthesis is in clear contradiction with the interactive and intercultural nature of comparative literature.

Conclusion

I have a modest proposal. I believe that currently one reputable and research-oriented university in Iran has the ability to launch this field as a consortium at the postgraduate level. In the virtual Roundtable "Critical Review of Comparative Literature in Today's Iran" organized by the comparative literature working group of the Iranian Association for the Promotion of Persian Language and Literature on Tuesday March 1st, 2024 with the participation of Alireza Anoushirvani, Abolfazl Harri, Seyyed Mehdi Zarqani, Hadi Nazari-Mohamad, Ebrahim Mohammadi and Ali Akbar Mohammadi, the following suggestions were made.

1. The main mission of comparative literature in Iran is to strengthen and globalize the Persian language and literature, the main pillar of Iran's national and cultural identity, at the international level.
2. Due to the fact that the hardware and software facilities for setting up a comparative literature course are not available in all universities, for the time being, a university with the supervision and support of the Ministry of Higher Education should be in charge of setting up this discipline.
3. With the cooperation of experts from several universities, who have experience

in teaching comparative literature courses, the consortium of comparative literature consisting of departments of Persian and foreign literatures, humanities and arts can start comparative literature on a trial basis at the master's level.

4. The educational and research program of the discipline should be compiled with the cooperation of comparative literature experts.

5. The possibility of starting comparative literature at Ph.D. level as a consortium after the end of the first master's degree should be considered.

6. Students of this field should be selected under the supervision of the Comparative Literature Consortium from among the eligible candidates through a written exam and an interview.

7. The educational program and current standards of the comparative literature trend in the universities implementing this trend should be revised and at the same time holding educational and research workshops and knowledge enhancement of comparative literature and postdoctoral programs.

In this short article, I did not intend to enter into a discussion and controversy of the various theories of comparative literature. I hope that with the efforts of the experts, the foundations of real dialogue will be laid and this will be the beginning of the work and have a sequel.

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