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HUSAM AL-KHATIB. *'Afaq al-'Adab al-Muqaran 'Arabiyyan wa 'Alamiyyan* [The Pan-Arab and International Horizons of Comparative Literature]. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr al-Mu'asir, and Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1992. 272 pp.

Editor's Note: Abdul-Nabi Isstaif, the author of this article, is Professor of Comparative Literature and Criticism and Vice Dean for Academic Affairs at the University of Damascus. He earned a Ph.D. in Comparative Criticism (Arabic-Western) at Oxford University in 1983, and except for two years at the University of Sanaa in Yemen, he has taught in Damascus ever since. Among his many publications are the two-volume book *On Modern Arabic Literary Criticism* and the textbooks *On Criticism* and *Methods of Literary Study*; he is also finishing a book called *We and Orientalism: The Option of Positive Confrontation*. He has spent the academic year 1994-95 as Fulbright Visiting Professor in Comparative Literature at New College of the University of South Florida.

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE IN THE ARAB WORLD: AN OVERVIEW

Responding to an urgent need for a comprehensive and up-to-date textbook in comparative literature for students in the Arabic department at the University of Damascus, Professor Husam al-Khatib published a two-volume book entitled *Comparative Literature* (Damascus, 1981), devoting the first one to theory and methodology and the second to applications. Since then the book has been reprinted several times and is still in use. In 1992, however, Professor al-Khatib published another book entitled *The Pan-Arab and International Horizons of Comparative Literature* for the general reader as well as for university students in the Arab world. Abandoning altogether the second volume of his previous book and using the first volume as a springboard, in his new book al-Khatib sets out to accomplish three main objectives:

- a. To present, in condensed form, an overview of the theories of comparative literature;
- b. To survey the developments of this field of inquiry, discipline, perspective, or approach—name it as you like—since its inception early in the nineteenth century;
- c. To write a short history of Arabic comparative literature, correcting certain prevailing notions and misconceptions, and setting the record straight concerning who first initiated this branch of knowledge in modern Arabic culture, in both theory and practice.

Trained in both Arabic and English literatures in Damascus, Professor al-Khatib received his Ph.D. from Cambridge University in

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1969. Upon his return to Damascus University, he taught European literature and modern Arabic literary criticism. In 1972 he introduced comparative literature into the program of the Department of Arabic for the first time. Since then and for almost a quarter of a century, he has been teaching, researching, and acting as an advocate for the subject, not only in Syria but also in the Arab world and beyond. In addition, he was an editor of the *Foreign Literature Quarterly* (issued by the Arab Writers Union in Damascus) for more than a decade. A member of the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA) since 1976 and a participant in several of its congresses, he is also a founding member of and active participant in the Arab Association of Comparative Literature; he organized and presided over the second conference hosted by Damascus University in the summer of 1986.

In short, Professor al-Khatib has been the right man for this task. Despite the limited research facilities in most Arab universities, he has laid an excellent base for future work in the theory and practice of comparative literature in the Arab world. He has succeeded in giving a fairly comprehensive overview of a field which is vitally important for understanding Arabic literature, both classical and modern, particularly since that literature has been constantly interacting with other cultural and literary traditions for more than fifteen-hundred years.

The Pan-Arab and International Horizons of Comparative Literature is divided into four sections which in turn are subdivided into twelve chapters; it also includes a very useful documentary appendix and a select bibliography of works in Arabic, English, and French. The first two sections are devoted to the theory and history of comparative literature in the world—with a few pages on what the author calls an Arab point of view in comparative literature—while the other two consider the history of the subject in the Arab world, covering both teaching and scholarship.

The first section starts with a "General Introduction: The Dilemma of Comparative Literature." Al-Khatib discusses three aspects of this dilemma, the field's search for a scholarly and epistemological system, the effort to define the specific sphere of its concerns, and finally the determination of its particular functions within the context of literary study. He also considers the dilemma of finding an acceptable term which would denote exactly what it means. Drawing heavily but also critically on René Wellek and Austin Warren's *Theory of Literature*, he identifies in the second chapter four main concepts of comparative literature: the study of oral literature, especially folk-tale themes and their migration which is most common, so we are told, among the comparatists of northern Europe; the study of relationships between two or more literatures, or the so-called French school; the study of literature in its totality, or the identification of comparative literature with "World Literature" or "General Literature"; and finally the American concept, which is presented as a promising alternative that can answer all the criticisms of the French school. Professor al-Khatib continues his

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discussion of the American school in the third chapter, which first considers Wellek's proposals to overcome the dilemmas of comparative literature, and then explains Remak's point of view outlined in his much-discussed and anthologized essay (in its revised, 1971 version), "Comparative Literature: Its Definition and Function."

Al-Khatib quotes Remak extensively and explores many details of his perspective in no less than twenty pages (35-55). In fact, this account is a revised version of an earlier three-part essay entitled "Comparative Literature between Methodological Fanaticism and Humanistic Openness" (published in *al-Marifah* in Damascus in 1979), which is still the best exposition of the American school in Arabic. In the Arab world, which was dominated up to the late 1970s by the French school, it has been instrumental in generating healthy shifts of emphasis in attitude and perspective, particularly in applied comparative studies. Thus Arab comparatists have become less restricted in their choice of topics and less concerned with establishing external evidence, usually considered to be absolutely vital in influence studies. Furthermore, they have made better use of the comparative approach in their appreciation of Arabic literary works, both classical and modern.

Professor al-Khatib continues this effort to introduce new ideas onto the Arab scene by elaborating what he calls in chapter four "Comparative Literature in an Arab Perspective," in which, as he puts it, he plants the seeds of an Arab point of view on the field (60-64). Referring to the development of comparative literary studies outside Western Europe in the second half of the twentieth century, particularly in the United States and the Third World, he rightly points out that despite all the objections to the French school, the field has flourished. Going beyond Europe has not only extended the area under consideration, but has also benefited both the literary critic and the historian. As al-Khatib argues, comparative literature has "what can qualify it to be distinguished as a branch of literary study with a clear character that comes quite close to scientific and objective approaches, that requires a comprehensive training, and that has its own special area—namely that area of exchanges and extensions beyond local boundaries, be they (on the one hand) geographical, linguistic, or national, or (on the other) formalistic connected with artistic creation and other systems of knowledge that bear on the literary phenomenon" (61).

In al-Khatib's view, one cannot overcome the traditional narrow outlook of comparative literature by abandoning the field altogether, but rather by going beyond the present area of research. In considering the Middle Ages when Europe was a net importer of literary and scientific ideas from the outside, we might focus attention on the Arab-Islamic influences in Dante's *Divine Comedy* or in Provençal poetry. Or, to take another example, the interaction of the various Islamic literatures with Arabic literature might prove especially rewarding. In thus broadening the research area covered by the field, moreover, we might expect to gain new theoretical insights. Al-Khatib is absolutely right and, as the

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present writer has suggested elsewhere, the very nature of Arabic literature points towards this extension. In fact, both classical and modern Arabic literature almost demand that their students resort to the comparative perspective, which alone can allow for the presence of "the Other" in such literature as well as for its own presence in other literatures with which it has been in a constant state of encounter from its very inception.

The second section of the book, entitled "Comparative Literature in the World: Emergence, Development, and Present Map," consists of two chapters. In the first chapter al-Khatib surveys the nineteenth-century roots of comparative literature in France, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Germany, and Italy before turning to twentieth-century developments in the United Kingdom, Germany, and the United States, touching very lightly on Eastern Europe and on Asia, especially Japan. The second chapter is devoted to "contemporary interests for comparative literature." Here al-Khatib discusses the ICLA and its eighth to thirteenth congresses (treating the eighth and the eleventh in detail) as well as a regional conference, at all of which he presented papers that were later published in various places in both English and Arabic.

In the third section of the book he devotes two chapters to the emergence of Arab comparative literature. Mapping the early works of some Arab writers and critics in the late nineteenth century in the first chapter, he discusses in detail Muhammed Rawhi al-Khalidi's pioneering and extremely interesting book, *The History of the Science of Literature of both the Franks and the Arabs and Victor Hugo* (written in Arabic). This book was first published as a series of articles in the years 1902-1903, and then as a book attributed to al-Maqdisi (a pseudonym referring to the author's native city of Jerusalem; he seemed to fear Ottoman oppression) before a third edition appeared in 1912 under his real name. According to al-Khatib, al-Khalidi was the true pioneer of comparative literature in modern Arabic culture, for he practiced the art with just the right qualifications, abilities, procedures, and fascinating results, particularly regarding the Arabic influence in European poetry and fiction during the Renaissance, channeled through Spain and Sicily. In the rest of the chapter al-Khatib follows the story of applied comparative literature in Arabic culture until the end of the 1980s.

In the second chapter he turns to another pioneer, but this time in the sphere of comparative literary theory, namely Khalil al-Hindawi, born in Lebanon and active in Syria, who was the first person to use the term "comparative literature" in Arabic. Referring to the early translation of the French comparatist Van Tieghem's *Littérature Comparée* into Arabic by the Syrian scholar Sami al-Durubi in 1948, as well as to the later translations of both theoretical and applied works by Guyard, Wellek, Remak, Levin, Prawer, and Pichois and Rousseau, al-Khatib demonstrates through careful examination of most of the periodicals published in the Arab East in the first half of the century that al-Hindawi was fully aware of what he was doing when he introduced the term into

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Arabic language in a three-part article published in *al-Risalah* (Cairo) in 1936. The title of the article is most telling. It reads as follows—"New Light on an Aspect of Arab Literature: the Arab Engagement with Comparative Literature, or what the Franks Call 'Littérature Comparée,' in the Summary of Aristotle's *Poetics* by the Arab Philosopher Abu al-Walid Ibn Rushd (Known in the West as Averroes)." Al-Khatib discovered what he called the "first text" while he was a visiting scholar at Indiana University in 1988-89—a fact he acknowledges with a special word of appreciation to Professor Salih Jawad Altoma of Indiana University who first drew his attention to it (154).

The fourth and last section of the book, consisting of three chapters, is devoted to the writing and teaching of Arabic comparative literature from the 1930s to the 1980s. The first chapter discusses the introduction of comparative literature into Arab universities in 1946 (Dar al-'Ulum in Cairo was the first college to teach the subject, which was offered to third- and fourth-year students of its Arabic B.A. program). Al-Khatib also considers the works of Najib al-Aqqi, 'Abd al-Razzaq Hamidah, and Ibrahim Salamah. In the next chapter he turns to the period from the early 1950s to the end of the 1970s, paying special attention to the real founder of Arabic comparative literature, the late Muhammed Ghunaymi Hilal (an Egyptian) who, with his theoretical book on comparative literature—viewed as the best exposition of the French school in Arabic—as well as with his many books in applied comparative literature published over a quarter of a century, managed (singlehandedly, it seems) to give comparative literature all the respect and credentials of an academic specialty in Arab universities. His work on the Arabic influence in Persian literature, particularly his studies of love and madness, has not been superseded. In chapter three al-Khatib concludes the story of Arab comparative literature by surveying the field up to 1990. Here he refers specifically to an increase of applied studies; to the publication of special comparative issues of major journals in Syria, Egypt, and Kuwait; to the formation of Arab, Egyptian, and Moroccan societies of comparative literature; to the organization of major conferences in 'Innaba, Damascus, and Marrakesh; and finally to the return of specialists in many different languages and traditions from their training in various countries around the world.

In the documentary appendix the reader is treated to a list of 34 theoretical books on comparative literature published in the Arab world between 1948 and 1990, and to the contents of the first issue of *Cahiers Algeriens de Littérature Comparée* as well as the Chronicle of the *Société Algérienne de Littérature* founded in 1966. Al-Khatib then gives the recommendations of the preliminary meeting of Arab comparatists held in 'Innaba in Algeria in 1983, including the formation of an Arab association of comparative literature, the establishment of a center for Arabic comparative literature and an associated scholarly journal, a bibliography of publications related to Arabic comparative literature, the translation of the most important works in the field into Arabic as well as the

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translation of an appropriate selection of modern Arabic literature into French and English, the facilitation of scholarly exchanges among Arab universities as well as with other universities interested in the field, and the encouragement of Arab comparatists wishing to attend international conferences. Priority should be given to research in the following topics: the international relations of modern Arabic literature, the influence of classical Arabic literature in other literatures, and the image of the Arab in modern world literatures as well as the image of the world in modern Arabic literature. After listing the founding members of the Arab Association of Comparative Literature established in 1984, al-Khatib gives the recommendations of their first meeting, and concludes with a rare and interesting document—the translation of an article written especially for the *Egyptian Writer* by the French comparatist René Etiemble entitled “Renouveau de la littérature comparée,” published in January 1948 in Cairo.

Clearly, al-Khatib's book has explored for the first time in Arabic certain new horizons for the Arab reader. First, he introduces the American school to his readers through its main exponents, Wellek and Remak, leaving the exciting developments of the last quarter century for another scholar. Second, he explores the international horizon of the field through his detailed account of the ICLA and its recent congresses, leaving again to others the Far Eastern horizons of the field, in India, China and Japan. Third, he explores the new, yet still vague and hazy, horizons of the field in the Arab world, shedding much needed light on key early figures in both theory and practice.

Yet one cannot help but wish his survey of the field in Arabic was more comprehensive, for important figures—including some of international stature—with excellent training and with promising, widely known and highly acclaimed books and articles in Arabic and other languages have been left out, such as the late Muhammad 'Abdul-Hai from the Sudan, the author of *Greek Myth in Contemporary Arabic Poetry* (Cairo, 1977, in Arabic) and the excellent and authoritative *Tradition and English and American Influence in Arabic Romantic Poetry* (London, 1982). Also missing are M. M. Badawi from Egypt, now teaching at Oxford, who wrote *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry* (Cambridge UK, 1975) and *Modern Arabic Literature and the West* (London, 1985); Muhsin Jassim 'Ali from Iraq, author of *Scheherazade in England: A Study of Nineteenth-Century English Criticism of the Arabian Nights* (Washington, DC, 1981); and Muhammad Shaheen from Jordan, with his many articles in both Arabic and English on Arabic-Islamic influences on Pound and E. M. Forster, as well as on Eliot's influences on modern Arab poets such as Salah 'Abd al-Sabur. Other omissions include Rasha' al-Sabah from Kuwait, 'Abd al-Wahid Lu'lu'ah from Iraq, 'Adnan Wazzan from Saudi Arabia, Mahmud Tarashunah from Tunisia, Yusuf Bakkar from Jordan, 'Aminah Rashid from Egypt, Jamal Shihayyid' from Syria, 'Ahmad 'Utman from Egypt, Khalil al-Shaykh from Jordan, 'Abduh Abbud from Syria, and many others.

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One can, of course, easily blame the wretched state of research facilities in the Arab world for this, but these figures are among the best examples of scholars whom the new generation of Arab comparatists might follow and later go beyond. It is very important when mapping the history of a recent tradition not to overlook the most serious and probably most difficult work for the sake of the most popular. Comparative studies in the Arab world, owing to the nature of Arabic literature with its interaction with most world literatures from early times to the present, is a very promising branch of literary research. However difficult, demanding, and time consuming they might be, particularly in institutions that are striving to meet the very basics of academic life, these studies deserve as much encouragement as they can get, especially from a noted scholar in the field such as al-Khatib. Nonetheless, al-Khatib's book will remain an extremely important contribution to the history of comparative literature in the Arab world, where the privilege of free thinking and writing is not always taken for granted.

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MATEI CALINESCU. *Rereading*. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1993. xv + 327 pp.

This book treats an important subject—important to readers at all events—and treats it in different frames and terms, drawing on other theorists such as Borges and Bakhtin but also on works by sociologists, psychologists, and philosophers. The greater part of the book seems to rely somewhat heavily on the interests and theories of Michel Picard in *La lecture comme jeu*. The presence of Picard is, if not truly a secret, in part an enigma for the reader (to use terms that occupy one part of the book). Picard's name and a description of his theories do not arrive until page 172, by which time we have had almost too much of the "ludic." Calinescu also adopts Kendal Walton's philosophic theory that the play of make-believe experienced and sought after in reading fiction attracts us because we are offered "the opportunity to experience a wide range of emotions that are make-believedly true" (189). To quote Calinescu,

Walton's theory provides an elegant explanation for how certain literary or artistic works are able to survive multiple readings, viewings, or hearings. To use one of his examples, a rereader of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* may be as concerned about Tom and Becky being lost in the cave as someone who reads Twain's novel for the first time. The rereader of course knows the outcome but, being engaged once again in the same game of make-believe, may pretend for the sake of playing it effectively and satisfyingly that he or she does not know more about