

The Sonnet in Omer Abu Resha's Poem *Leda*: A Case Study

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Abstract

This study examines the convergence of Arabic and Western literary traditions through an analysis of Omer Abu Resha's poem "Leda." Despite its extensive and distinguished history, Arabic poetry has rarely employed sonnets or other Western literary forms. This article examines the integration of European literary forms, especially the sonnet, into contemporary Arabic poetry, a topic that has received insufficient scholarly attention. This research aims to address the deficiency in literary criticism by studying Abu Resha's Leda. This work contributes to comparative literature by emphasising the function of poetry forms as bridges among diverse civilizations. This underscores how Arab poets such as Abu Resha were affected by Western styles while retaining their cultural identity, so contributing to the global literary discourse without being overwhelmed.

The idea posits that Leda by Abu Resha exemplifies literary synthesis by amalgamating aspects of Arabic poetry with the European sonnet, resulting in a hybrid form that integrates emotional growth, thematic coherence, and structural organization.

The research indicates that Abu Resha adeptly maintains the cultural essence of the sonnet form while integrating it into Arabic poetry. His paintings resonate with the symbolic and thematic preoccupations of Shakespearean sonnets, particularly the quest for eternal love and beauty in defiance of the passage of time. This comparative research suggests that poetry may function as an active vehicle for cross-cultural communication, therefore augmenting the global nature of literature.

Keywords: Comparative Literature, Arabic Sonnet, Cultural Hybridity, Omer Abu Resha

السونية في قصيدة "ليدا" لعمر أبو ريشة: دراسة حالة

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المستخلص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في التقارب بين التقاليد الأدبية العربية والغربية من خلال تحليل قصيدة "ليدا" لعمر أبو ريشة. على الرغم من تاريخها العريق والتميز، نادراً ما استخدم الشعر العربي السوناتات أو غيرها من الأشكال الأدبية الغربية. تبحث هذه المقالة في تكامل الأشكال الأدبية الأوروبية، وخاصة السوناتة، في الشعر العربي المعاصر، وهو موضوع لم يحظَ باهتمام كافٍ من الباحثين. يهدف هذا البحث إلى معالجة النقص في النقد الأدبي من خلال دراسة قصيدة "ليدا" لأبو ريشة. يُسهم هذا العمل في الأدب المقارن من خلال التأكيد على دور الأشكال الشعرية كجسور بين الحضارات المتنوعة. وهذا يُبرز كيف تأثر الشعراء العرب، مثل أبو ريشة، بالأساليب الغربية مع الحفاظ على هويتهم الثقافية، مساهمين بذلك في الخطاب الأدبي العالمي دون أن يُطغى عليهم. تفترض الفكرة أن قصيدة "ليدا" لأبو ريشة تُجسد التوليف الأدبي من خلال دمج جوانب من الشعر العربي مع السونية الأوروبية، مما يُنتج شكلاً هجيناً يجمع بين النمو العاطفي والترابط الموضوعي والتنظيم الهيكلي. ويشير البحث إلى أن أبو ريشة يُحافظ ببراعة على الجوهر الثقافي لشكل السونية مع دمجها في الشعر العربي. وتتردد صدَى لوحاته مع الانشغالات الرمزية والموضوعية لسونيات شكسبير، وخاصةً البحث عن الحب الأبدى والجمال في تحدٍ لمرور الزمن. ويشير هذا البحث المقارن إلى أن الشعر قد يكون بمثابة أداة فعالة للتواصل بين الثقافات، مما يُعزز الطابع العالمي للأدب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأدب المقارن، السوناتة العربية، التهجين الثقافي، عمر أبو ريشة

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1. Introduction

Comparative literature is not a new literary phenomenon that appears suddenly in modern age. Comparative literature has its roots deep in the antiquity. The oldest phenomena of the influence of one literature on another appears in the impact that the Greek literature created in the Roman literature, in time when Greek were defeated by the Romans in 146 BC. The Greek writers and Philosophers had a strong influence on the Roman writers to the extent that the Latin literature appeared without any significant originality that enabled it to stand alone as an independent literature. This impact had created the core of the 'Mimesis' theory in Europe when the Latin writers imitated the Greeks in order to revive the Latin literature. The results of the mimesis experience were fruitful as the Roman poet and critic Horace (85-8 BC) confessed, Horace urged his native writers to follow the Greeks' experiences and try to keep their originality as well. Later on, the Roman critic Quintilian (35-96 AD) had paid a great attention to the theory of mimesis and established some general rules and disciplines to govern this theory (Abu-Risha 1,2024).

In the Medieval Ages which lasted from 1395 to 1453, the European literatures had been united under the umbrella of Christianity, beside some other elements such as chivalry. This unity gave the European literature a kind of universality. Of course, at that time, no comparative studies had happened but if it happened, it would be based on those common influential elements that united the European literature at that time.

Later on, in the Renaissance Age, the European literature turned back to the classical Greek and Latin literature. The Renaissance men tried to obtain the original classical texts, then printed, translated and commented on. The imitation of

Greek and Roman literature was a great intellectual revolution that roused against the Christian spirit of medieval literature (Helal 23-25,2003).

The term "comparative Literature" is not easily to be defined. In spite of 200 years have passed on such kinds of studies, comparative literature has faced many problems due to its interdisciplinary nature and the tendency of these studies towards the expansion and renewal. This kind of studies is related to more than one branch of knowledge such as literary criticism, literary history and sociology. Susan Bassnet defines comparative literature as "the study of texts across cultures, that it is interdisciplinary and that it is concerned with patterns of connection in literatures across both time and space" (Bassnet 1,1993). Traditionally, comparative literature is "the examination and analysis of the relationships and similarities of the literatures of different peoples and nations"(Cuddon 145,2012).

The great transitions that appeared in European nations during the late 18th and early 19th centuries were as a result of the strong relation between the political events and cultural development that happened in these nations. Peoples who struggled to have their independence, aimed to find and discover their cultural roots and identities as well. This imposed the necessity for finding new culture that help them to achieve their goals of the independence (Bassnet 20,1993).

Comparative literature is an independent discipline that has crystallized in the in the second half of 19th century. The scholars of this kind of study from different countries with their various opinions have given birth to some schools of the comparative literature such as; French, American, Russian and other schools (Jaradat 2,2015)

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Research Problem

Despite the profundity of the Arabic poetic tradition and its extensive historical foundations, contemporary Arabic poetry has faced difficulties in assimilating Western poetic structures, such as the sonnet. Although academics have examined the impact of Western literature on Arabic literature broadly, there exists a deficiency in the analysis of particular instances when Arab poets have integrated European forms into an Arabic poetic framework. This study examines the degree to which Omer Abu Resha employs and modifies the sonnet form in his poem *Leda*, and how this illustrates a cultural and literary exchange between the East and the West.

2.2. Significance of the Study

Through an original instance in contemporary Arabic poetry, this study emphasises the cultural and literary value of comparative literature. It helps us to better grasp how Arab writers such as Omer Abu Resha mingled with European literary styles without sacrificing the core of their own cultures. The study also underlines how poetry form helps to convey universal human sensations such love, desire, and the artistic search for immortality. Furthermore, the book offers insightful analysis of how poetic forms serve as means of cultural interaction and creative inspiration rather than only technical tools.

2.3. Hypothesis

The poem "*Leda*" by Omer Abu Resha adheres to the visual and rhythmic conventions of Arabic poetry, yet this study posits that it incorporates essential features of the European sonnet—particularly in thematic coherence, line quantity, and emotional development — thereby

exemplifying a hybrid poetic form that connects Arabic and Western literary traditions.

3. The impact of sonnet upon Arabic poetry

Omer Abu Resha (1910-1990) is a prominent modern Syrian poet and dramatist who brought up in a well-educated family whom almost all its members admire poetry. His father supported, encouraged him and sent him in 1930 to England to continue his education in chemical studies. He is distinguished for his unique poetic works that exerts his poetic gift. like any writer, the poet is the product of time and age who may devote and dedicate his literary text to serve a "Nobel cause" like the reflection of his native land's culture throughout his poetry, yet any writer might be influenced whether consciously or unconsciously by other cultures and literary products all over the world. One of the most influential poetic forms that may arouse the curiosity of any poet and trigger his talent to write is the sonnet (Omar Abu Risha Biography, online,2024)

In Arabic literature Al-Mouashah and Zajal came into being in the 5th&6th century as a new way of innovative way in writing poetry. In European literature the sonnet crystalized years later after Al-Mouashah and Zajal however therefore, it is believed that the sonnet might be derived from the two Arabian forms. In spite of the Arabic literature depth and richness, some poets endeavored to write their poetry in the sonnet form with slight changes from the original version. One of those writers is Abu Resha's *Leeda*, a sonnet that is based mainly on the Greek mythology (Al-Sabeel 1-12,2012).

4. Analysis

It is worth noting that the European sonnet is a very complicated kind of poems in the sense that it

consists of 14 lines divided into two parts octaves, the first eight lines, and the sestet, the last six lines and a volta, the turn of the poem. The octave carries the main idea and the sestet suggests the conclusion of the poem. Hence this kind of poetry requires a condensation of ideas, words, images, and all other literary devices that reflects the talent of the poet and his mastery over this strict kind of poems. The pioneers of the sonnets are Petrarch, Milton, and Shakespeare even the divisions of the sonnet was named after their names i.e.

Petrarchan, Miltonic, and Shakespearean. In his *Leda* 1946, Abu Reshah presented a sonnet of an Arabic version that follows the Arabic structure not the European one in terms of structure for example in Arabic the poem is divided into two columns vertically divided and arranged namely (Sader&Agaz), whereas in the European sonnet the lines are arranged horizontally and divided into two parts (octave & sestet) (The Arabic Prose Poem 240).

"أناها الإله" زوس "بصورة طائر"

وتناسي وحشة العمر الجديب	مرّ غيغفنيك بالحلم وغيببي
تشتهي الموت على وهج اللهب	واهصري ما شئت من أجنحة
أن ترخمرك فيك أسحبب	كبرياء الفتنة البكر أربب
أذن الواشي ولا عين الرقيب	فاحملي الشوق فما تدري به
قر في نهديك منخمروطيب	واسفحير عشة تنضج ما
مصرع النشوة بالطرف الكئيب	يا ابنة الأحلام لا تستقبلي
بندي الفجر وأنسام المغيب	يكتفي الزنبق فيصحرائه

The rhyme of the poem is totally different than that in the European sonnet as indicated at the end of each line with (ب) letter since the Arabic poems generally speaking are characterized by their unique rhyming as known قصيده نونية – واويه-ميميه the same letter is repeated neatly and harmoniously at the end of each line. In the European sonnet letters are not necessarily matching frequently all the time i.e. iambic pentameter and sometimes ABAB / CDCD / EFEF / GG.

Any reader may not find out easily that *Leeda* falls into the part of the sonnets because apparently it is

structured according to the Arabic style. Only when counting the number of lines, one may depict the resemblances of the poem to the European sonnet. To add universality to the sonnet, Omer based his poem on Leeda's mythology which is major jest is love. He is addressing his beloved to remember him and to renew their decayed relationship. In the last two lines the soul is yearning to meet her eternally and revive their love instead of wasting it. This sonnet might be compared to some extent with Shakespeare's *A Summer's Day* (Shakespeare's Sonnets in Arabic):

"Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:

Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
 And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
 And every fair from fair sometime declines,
 By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimm'd;
 But thy eternal summer shall not fade
 Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
 Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
 When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st;
 So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
 So long lives this, and this gives life to thee”

In Shakespeare poem This sonnet consists of 14 lines iambic pentameter. The poet uses natural imagery describing a lady comparing her to buds and flowers. Abu Reshah's also uses the image of daffodils that might be destroyed and corrupted by the barren and sterile environment. Both poets at the end of the poems especially the last two lines are looking for eternity, a love to be remembered and live ever after despite all devastating circumstances. Both poets use hyperbolic words to describe their deep emotions. Also, they invested Weather, the Seasons, stars, flowers and trees interrelatedly to pursue their love. Most importantly is that both of them are concerned about time that may ruin everything beautiful.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, literature is signified by its universality and interwoven relation that echo all human's sensation, passion, and innermost feelings. The reciprocal connection is shown from time to time when one kind of literature influences the other and reflected clearly in the literary works. Sometimes poets and writers are accused of imitating others blindly, yet skillful poets may avoid such pitfalls and produce a genuine and meaningful product characterized by its beauty similarly to Omer Abu Reshah and others who

may come up with a new genre of Arabic literature. Still, comparative literature serves as the umbrella that unifies all different kinds of literary works, put them together juxtaposed to be studied and analyzed harmoniously.

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