Transacting with Comparative English-Persian Literature in EFL Classrooms: A Reader-response Approach

Seyyedeh Fahimeh Parsaiyan

Assistant Professor of English Department, Alzahra University,
f.parsa@alzahra.ac.ir

Abstract

Despite scholarly criticisms censuring the monopoly of Eurocentric and Anglophonic literatures in English as Foreign or Second Language (EFL/ESL) teaching, cross-cultural literatures have not received due attention in such contexts, Iranian one as a case. Addressing the gap, in this practitioner-led inquiry, the researcher attempted for integrating Comparative Literature in English language teaching through deploying translated Persian works of literature apropos of thematically-resembling foreign ones. The participants of the study were twenty Iranian English Literature freshmen who were taking a reading comprehension course in a state university in Tehran. Partially framing the practice within reader-response approach to reading, the teacher-researcher concentrated on the ways by which the students transacted with the selected literary texts. The analysis of the class events and the students' reflective writings revealed that the students drew upon their sociocultural and literary backgrounds to construct meanings of the texts and to establish connections between them and their personal and social milieus. Considering the mounting concerns about the linguistic and cultural imperialism of English, practices like this may hint at the way local sources of knowledge could find a niche in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: Comparative Literature, English as Foreign Language (EFL), Persian Literature, Practitioner Inquiry, Reader-response Theory.

1. Introduction

With the growth in the number of non-native English speakers and emergence of varieties of Englishes around the world, new perspectives suggesting that language teachers should no longer be "charged with teaching a fixed set of grammar rules and lexical choices but with teaching creative ways to navigate varieties of English…according to a wide set of contextual variables" (Cahnmann-Taylor, Bleyle, Hwang, & Zhang, 2017, p. 71) are coming into bloom. One strand of such perspective is the type of literary texts which could be incorporated in Foreign and Second Language (EFL/ESL) contexts. Challenging the "canonical hierarchy of English that puts England at the top, with America next, and the rest of the Inner Circle following on down the ladder" (Chilton, 2016, p. 42), there have been excoriating criticisms rebuking that literature teaching should not be circumscribed by "monocultural", "Eurocentric", and "Anglophonic" literature (Cahnmann-Taylor, et al., 2017; Kachru, 1986; Kubota, 1998; Mohideen & Mohideen, 2009; Talib, 1992). This vision has occasionally brought non-native literatures including "migrant/diasporic literature" created by migrant writers, "colonial and post-colonial literature" produced by Asian and African writers, and translated national or homeland literature, inter alia, to second and foreign language teaching classrooms (Chilton, 2016; Erkaya, 2011; Florentino, 2014; Gray 2005; Mohideen & Mohideen, 2009; Raquitico, 2014; Safari, 2019; Zandian, 2015). Given the wealth of "indigenized", "hybridized", "glocalized" or "localized" linguistic elements (like structural features, lexis, phonology, and pragmatics) as well as inextricable ideas and worldviews embedded in them, non-native literatures have been appraised as valuable sources "for providing linguistic and cross-cultural explanations as they reveal how English can be redefined in non-Western contexts and how language and culture are interrelated" (Kachru, cited in Nault, 2006, p. 323).

With the thriving of post-colonial, multicultural and interdisciplinary studies changes have also occurred to literary studies discipline; one of which is the emergence of World Literature or Comparative Literature. In one broad consideration, comparative literature is a branch of literary criticism that moves beyond "general literature" and studies different nations' literature in terms of their points of convergence or divergence and the possible influence of one work or author on others (Domínguez, Saussy, & Villanueva, 2015; O'Sullivan, 2005; Salahi Moghaddam, 2007). Such cross-cultural studies are considered promising as they make contributions on developing foreign-language competence and profounder understanding of cultural diversities in the increasingly globalized age. Nonetheless, despite such linguistic and cultural merits, the integration and application of comparative, cross-cultural literature in language classrooms has not received deserved attention, and the theoretical studies do not go the extra mile beyond their disciplinary frame

(Rahman Miju, Chowdhury, & Das, 2014; Sapargul & Sartor, 2010). In other words, there seems to be lack of concerted efforts by literary academicians and language teachers for delving into the way comparative literature could be invested in and be taught in language classrooms. As argued by Sahragard and Rasti (2013, p. 247), there is a "widening gulf in the way academicians of both sides are involved, if any, in the give and take of their theories and practices". Similarly, Chilton (2016) laments that "because literary scholars have long neglected pedagogy…, language teachers certainly cannot look to them for help" (p.54).

As an Iranian English language teacher, with around a quarter-long experience of teaching at English language institutes and academes, the researcher has witnessed a wide incorporation of abridged, unabridged and leveled readers of British and Western literary works in EFL settings in Iran; works which have widely been endorsed for presenting "standard" or "native" varieties of English. With that monopoly and legitimacy, English translations of Persian literary works have historically stayed out of the limelight, given their assumed linguistic "imperfections" and "inauthenticity" as pedagogic texts. Although translating Persian classic and modern literature—from Persian to various languages, most notably English—has long been undertaken and expert translators have strived to share them with the rest of the world, such works have rarely found a niche in English education, either as self-contained pedagogic-texts or in conjunction and comparison with foreign literary works. That contradicts the suggestions that "the mutual study of literatures" like "West-Muslim", Occidental-Oriental literary works can "bridge the cultural divides between Muslims and Western literature" (Alkire & Alkire, 2007, p. 2), and raise awareness about sociocultural similarities and differences (Rahman Miju, Chowdhury, & Das, 2014; Sapargul & Sartor, 2010; Zandian, 2015).

Under the tutelage of such backdrop, the present small-scale study sets out to tread a new path by exploring how English reading classes could be a site for *thematic* comparative English-Persian literary works; "an approach in comparative literature but one that has not taken hold in a widespread manner" (Tötösy de Zepetnek & Vasvári, 2013, p. 8). Having drawn inspiration from the existing gap, in this practitioner inquiry, the teacher-researcher attempted to open spaces in which translated Persian works of literature (mainly mystic and epic prose and poetry) could be used apropos of foreign literary works in a Reading Comprehension class, and traced the reading events that occurred as a result of transacting with such works of literature comparatively. The inquiry, roughly framed within *reader-response* theory, was guided by the following research question:

How does a community of English-major Iranian freshmen transact with thematically-comparable English-Persian literary works?

The crux of the case is to depict the ways by which the students, in their transaction with thematically-resembling literary works, drew upon their sociocultural, religious and literary backgrounds to construct meanings of the texts and to establish connections between them and their personal and social milieus.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Literature and Language Teaching

The tale of incorporation of literary arts into foreign or second language curriculum, despite experiencing a host of ups and downs, favors and disfavors, is not a matter of novelty. Put into action, a large bulk of practices acknowledge the merits of utilizing un/abridged literary texts in language teaching (Amer, 2003; Domínguez Romero, Bobkina & Stefanova, 2019; Hullah, 2018; Lazar, 1993; Maley & Kiss, 2018; Picken, 2007; Van, 2009). As argued, besides the kind of pleasure and enjoyment often experienced in reading insightful works of literature, the linguistic components of literary texts like their rich vocabulary, syntactic structures, sophisticated and creative use of literary elements can provide fertile sites for language learning and teaching (Amer, 2003; Bobkina & Dominguez Romero, 2014; Khatib, Derakhshan, & Rezaei, 2011; Picken, 2007).

Despite considering literature as a potential source for language development, its teaching has been an issue of contention. While stylisticians celebrate text-centered approaches by putting the main focus on linguistic, discoursal, and structural features of the literary texts, somehow detached from the lives of the authors or readers and the historical, societal and political era in which they were written and read (Carey-Webb, 2001; Connell, 2000; Whiteley & Canning, 2017), reader-based critics cherish readers' involvements, responses, and stances with regard to literary works. The latter orientation is mainly configured through Louise Rosenblatt's well-cited Transactional Reader-Response Theory (1983), in which distinctions are made between efferent (information-oriented) and aesthetic (reader-oriented, responsive) readings. Proponents of reader-response theory argue that too often in literature classrooms, driven by standardized-examination and information-driven curricula, literature reading is reduced to imparting cumulative themes and legitimate or authoritative interpretations and reader-oriented practices, like various transactions between readers and literary pieces, are stifled (Beach, 1993; Carlisle, 2000; Connell, 2000; Cushing, 2018; Karolides, 2000; Mitchell, 1993; Rogers, 1997). Putting up an effective defense, Hirvela (1996) argues that reader-response "acknowledges the fact that learners bring many forces into play when they read a text, and that, as a result, the interpretations or reactions they describe are a reflection of themselves as well as the text" (p. 130).

Considered as a promising movement in literature teaching pedagogy, the possible pedagogical implications as well as applications of reader-response theory in EFL literature classes have been investigated. Park's (2012) report on urban adolescent girls' participation in book club meetings and reading and responding to literature critically; Cushing's (2018) study on deployment of reader-response theory in teaching grammar and poetry; Flint's (2018) focus on children's responsive play to literature, Hodges, McTigue, Wright, Franks, & Matthew's (2018) investigation on the effect of character perspective taking (attending to the feelings of characters, their acts, and conflicts while reading) on children's comprehension of authentic literature are a few examples of the reported studies; however, more empirical work is still needed. Although reader response theory has been critiqued for "romanticizing" "the effect of literature and the individual uniqueness of student response" (Carey-Webb, 2001, p.7), various advantages of its application have been acknowledged, including improving learners' comprehension of texts, literary interpretation ability and critical thinking; aiding them to establish connection with texts and practice ownership of reading; and encouraging them to consider multiple even conflicting responses and perspectives, particularly in communal reading, to mention some (Carey-Webb, 2001; Carlisle, 2000; Cushing, 2018; Flint, 2018; Karolides, 2000; Leung, 2002; Louie, 2005; Mitchell, 1993; Park, 2012; Woodruff & Griffin, 2017).

2.2. Comparative Literatures

With the thriving of post-colonial and multicultural studies spaces have also been created for the flourishing of World Literature or Comparative Literature; a domain which exposes readers to one of the "broadest possible picture of human response to perennial issues" (Scollon & Scollon, 2002, p.1) via bringing into conversation the vast diversity of literatures around the globe. In a broad conceptualization, comparative literature, whether considered a discipline or a literary method, moves "beyond a single literature" by considering "what different literatures have in common, as well as the peculiarities and individual features of the various literatures which come to light only when they are seen in relation to others" (O'Sullivan, 2005, p. 4). To facilitate such "interliterary" relations, *translation*, despite its limitations, is pivotal to comparative literature (Basnett, 1993). In other words, although doubts and uncertainties have long been raised "about the feasibility of translating literature…innumerable pieces of literature…have been rendered from one language into another, enriching and influencing the recipient community's literary, artistic and cultural spheres" (Tee, 2012, p.2). In view of that, the commonality between comparative literature and translation studies has made their relationship a complicated one (Bassnett, 1993 & 2006; Kumar Das, 2008; Large, 2015); though there is more

dereliction for viewing them as two "divergent" disciplines and subsuming both under the overarching field of "intercultural study" (Large, 2015).

Nonetheless, what comparative literature actually entails, its nature and scope, theoretical background, and methodologies have been a matter of contention (Anushiravani, 2010; Bassnett, 1993 & 2006; Brown, 2013; Lefevere, 1995; Tötösy de Zepetnek, 2003) and its intermittent deaths and rebirths have impeded it from finding a firm establishment in the academe (Behdad & Thomas, 2011; Brown, 2013; Tötösy de Zepetnek, 2003; Virk, 2003). Tötösy de Zepetnek (2003) argues that "surprisingly" an all-inclusive history of the discipline "is yet to be written" as the history "is available only in fragments" (p.3). To circumvent the problem, he suggests that any descriptions of the history of the discipline had better be based on a "regional approach" and within national borders.

Regionally speaking, "comparative literature is a young discipline in Iran" (Anushiravani, 2010, p. 2); nevertheless, there are growing number of studies on the issue plus several scholarly journals in the Iranian academe. The published articles focus largely on theoretical issues and are concerned with analyzing literary relations among different works of literature, their points of convergence or divergence as well topics like the influence of Islamic literature on Persian literature or the influence of Persian literature on European and non-European literatures (Khodayar & Emami, 2010; Khoshbakht, Ahmadian, & Hekmat, 2013).

Despite the promises like providing learners with profounder understanding of linguistic, sociocultural and ideological diversities in the increasingly globalized age, reading literatures comparatively or cross-culturally has received scant attention in language teaching contexts, and the small number of published pedagogic works chiefly end up providing teachers with tips for dealing with cross-cultural literatures in classrooms (Rahman Miju, Chowdhury, & Das, 2014; Sapargul & Sartor, 2010).

Such a paucity of research kindled the researcher's interest to start an inquiry for deploying translated Persian works of literature (both prose and poetry) apropos of foreign literary works in an English literacy class through adopting a reader-response approach.

3. Method

The present study is methodologically informed by Practitioner Inquiry (PI), a research approach in which teachers, positioned as researchers, consider the contexts of their own professional practice as a site of inquiry and reflect thoughtfully on the formation and transformation of their contextualized practices and professional knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Kemmis, 2012). As an Iranian EFL in late-thirty, the researcher

had the experience of teaching English at Iranian language institutes and academes for around fifteen years. For the last few years, her modest acquaintance with critical pedagogies and reflective teachings and her desire for cutting back on conventional institutional practices have occasionally inspired her to season classroom experiences with sprinkles of creative teaching. This time, her enthusiasm for literature and her prior experience of using translated national literature in English classes drove her to venture into the realm of comparative literature. She started with the broad questions of how she could deploy Persian works of literature vis-à-vis foreign literary works in an English reading class, what pedagogical strategies she could plan, and what reading events could be experienced by the students. Besides selecting the texts, she took time figuring out how the students could get involved actively in the reading events. Wishing to steer away from conventional practices in which attention is largely centered on extracting and retaining right answers (Karolides, 2000), she attempted to frame the work within *reader-response approach* to language teaching.

3.1. Context

The context of the study was a state-run single-sex university in Tehran, Iran. The events leading to the generation of the present research project took place in a Reading Comprehension course; a four-credit compulsory course which was held twice a week on Saturdays and Mondays 10-12 AM for thirty sessions (ninety minutes each) from October 2017 to February 2018. The course is conventionally aimed at assisting English-major students with reading comprehension skills and vocabulary development, with some emphasis on developing reading strategies. Generally speaking, reading comprehension textbooks containing graded passages and comprehension activities are taught for such courses and the whole syllable often hovers around them. Occasionally, short stories and simplified or abridged novels are also used as extensive reading materials.

3.2. Participants

The participants were 20 first-year university students of English Literature, all young females in their late teens and early twenties. The majority of them had taken English courses at private institutes for two to six years and had various experiences of reading literary works; mainly abridged and simplified novels. Given that, they enjoyed a fairly good command of English (roughly at intermediate and upper-intermediate levels of English language proficiency), and as expressed by them, were keen on English and Persian literature, literary writing, poetry, translation, music, film, and the arts, and some had the experience of teaching English at private language institutions. The artistic flair and literary enthusiasm on the part of the students and their proficiency in English language assured the teacher-researcher that they deserved a more aesthetic and intellectually-nurturing

learning climate than an ordinary textbook-bound one; events which would better equip them with literal and critical competencies. It was where the idea of comparative literature took shape in her mind and was put into action.

3.3. Materials and Instruments

As acknowledged by literary practitioners, selection of literary texts for ESL/EFL classrooms is a fairly thorny prerequisite for the success of literature-based curricula. Considering "general literature", criteria like availability of the texts, their linguistic and conceptual complexity, degree of explorability, and target students' cultural, social, and political backgrounds, linguistic proficiency, and literary background have been mentioned (Gray, 2005; Lazar, 1993). However, when it comes to comparative literature, the criteria for selecting texts to be compared seem to be less explicit as various differences and affinities among different literatures could be considered, including the direct or indirect influence of one author on another, the themes, literary style, structure, mood, genre or aesthetic elements of the works, the social, political and literary movements affecting them and the philosophic vision of their authors, to mention some.

In case of the present inquiry, the researcher's prior experience of using translated national literature in EFL classes inspired her to check what well-famed Persian classic works of literature had been compared with foreign ones. Although there were numerous options, she eventually selected Bach's *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* and Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* to be presented and critiqued in light of Attar's *Conference of the Birds,* Behrangi's *The Little Black Fish*, and Ferdowsi's *Kaveh, The Blacksmith*, respectively. What aided her in the process were the existing comparative studies focusing on the mental, cultural and artistic commonalities of the selected pairs of literary works (Koupa, Hejazi, & Ghazanfari Moghaddam, 2010; Mohammadi Badr & Ghazanfari Moghaddam, 2012; Valipour & Hemmati, 2017). For example, Koupa, Hejazi, and Ghazanfari Moghaddam (2010) in their comparison of Attar's *Conference of the Birds* with Bach's *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* argue that common "spiritual" and "metaphysical" symbols like "journey", "death", and "bird" and themes like "unceasing effort for reaching an elevated goal" or "the presence of guides" make the two stories comparable; though they are different in their Islamic-Mystic and Christian-Western traditions. Mohammadi Badr and Ghazanfari Moghaddam (2012) make similar observations in their comparison of the two stories. In another comparative study, Valipour and Hemmati (2017) compared Behrangi's *The Little Black Fish* and Bach's *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*. They list several points of comparison in the content of the stories including similar settings (sea in both stories); childish imageries; the heroes' journey; their desires for pushing out the limitations, discovering the truth, and reaching perfections despite being reprimanded by their societies' for

transgressing the redlines; the presence of comparable antagonists and protagonists; the simple language of both texts and their fable genre; and the triad organization of both stories.

In addition to the thematic comparability of the texts, cultural, social, and political backgrounds of the target audience were also taken into consideration in choosing the selected works. The spiritual theme of *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* and *Conference of the Birds* accorded the Islamic, religious or didactic education and lifestyle the participants of the study, like other typical Iranians, had been brought up with or naturally encountered in their individual and social life. The socio-political auras of the other two stories, Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Kaveh, The Blacksmith*, were also conceivable by the students as a result of living in a society which has experienced various socio-political upheavals in its past and contemporary history like revolution, eight years of imposed war, politico-economic sanctions, constant struggles for independence, and the like.

3.3.1. Instrument 1: Observational Fieldnotes

Like other classroom-based inquiries, the researcher, positioned as participant-observer, kept observational fieldnotes which contained not only descriptions of classroom events, participants' reactions and interactions but also the researcher's preliminary interpretations of the unfolding events.

3.3.2. Instrument 2: Participants' Reflective Journals

Besides reading the assigned materials and taking part in class activities, every three weeks all the students emailed reflection papers of various lengths (one to five pages) recapitulating what they had picked up during their readings and class discussions; particularly the meanings that did not simply reside in the texts. Such reflective writings formed the main source of data in this inquiry.

3.4. Procedures

Being a staff member of the academia where the study took place, the teacher-researcher took the liberty of conducting the inquiry with one of her classes. Although, the participants were selected conveniently, they met the criteria desired by the researcher including having a fairly good command of English and being interested in reading literary works. In order to use the students' oral and written documents as research data, they were requested to grant the teacher-researcher the permission by signing a research participant informed consent form. The students were assured that their participation was all voluntary and their choosing to participate or not would not have any bearing on any university-related evaluations and reports. Furthermore, they were informed that in the final report, pseudonyms, instead of their real names would be used to protect their identities.

The inquiry started with reading the fable novella of *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* by Richard Bach (1970). It tells the story of a seagull named Jonathan who finds the mundane life of the average gulls meaningless and aspires to fly higher and faster than any seagull has ever flown despite being banished by the society. This was followed by self-studying the book *The Little Black Fish* by an Iranian author, Behrangi (1967), translated to English by Emam (2008). This political allegory narrates the journey of a small black fish that desires to leave its local pool to discover the ocean while his fellow fish are too startled to do anything different from their routine life. He learns more about the world by swimming over the pool, into the stream and river, despite eventually losing his life. Reading selected parts of *Conference of the Birds*, a mystical poem by the Iranian poet, Farid Al-Din Attar (1145 –1221 AD), translated into English poetry by Alexandrian (2003), was the next activity. The allegory narrates the tale of thirty birds that endeavor to find a king, called Simorgh. While reading the allegory, the students kept writing reflective notes on the philosophical meanings behind the story, the symbolic role of the characters, the parts (words, phrases, sentences, scenes or events) that enthralled them or were meaningful to them, the analogies they could draw between the three stories and the ways they could relate them to their own lives.

The next practice was reading an abridged version of the novel *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens (1859) and watching a movie adapted from it. Depicting French revolution as set in Paris and London, *A Tale of Two Cities* narrates the tale of a French family unfairly accused of disloyalty. This was followed by reading Ferdowsi's *Kaveh, The Blacksmith* (from his *Epic of Kings*, translated and adapted by Sadri, 2013) which narrates the story of a ruthless ruler, Zahak, who upon paying allegiance to the Evil starts murdering the youth of his land; until one day a blacksmith, named Kaveh, rebels against him and overthrows his tyranny with the aid of another freedom seeker. Subsequent to reading the epic, we conversed about the story's similarities and differences with Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* as well as the relevance of these classic stories to our modern time; an activity that was called "weaving readings".

Besides comparing the selected stories, there were other class activities which could not be directly categorized under reading comparative literatures, but had features of comparative reading like thematically comparing Shelly's *Frankenstein* novel with a paragraph-length poem of *Snake Catcher* by the Persian mystic writer Rumi as both displayed how human mundane ambitions may bring about destruction. These were accompanied by other fairly conventional activities like searching about the authors' biographies, looking for criticisms, and negotiating the themes underlying each story. When available, adapted movies and oral narrations

were included to feel the descriptions of moods, actions, and settings more deeply.

While not believing that "anything goes" should be welcomed (Mitchell,1993), the teacher-researcher was determined to respect the students' ideas and intellectual standing, encourage them to vend their hunches, buttress their reasoning and garner persuasive evidence for their observations. Accordingly, she constantly reminded the students that there could be a variety of reactions and interpretations; however different from theirs there were. As suggested by Varvel (2000), "reader response can potentially transform teaching in two primary ways: It changes the way a teacher structures and uses his or her knowledge, and it transforms the relationship between the teacher and students." (p.163)

3.5. Data Analysis

The teacher-researcher's familiarity with reader-response theory, which roughly formed the conceptual framework of the study, guided her analysis and informed what she identified as noteworthy data. It was through this lens that researcher began reading and rereading the students' documents, assigning codes and designations to various parts of the reflective notes submitted by the students, highlighting the parts that stroke her as significant, and writing her memos, reflections, and tentative themes in the margin of the hard copies.

Having worked through the entire document in this manner, she went back over her marginal notes and comments (codes) and tried to group those comments and notes that seemed to go together. These categorizations, representing how the act of reading may go beyond conventional text-based and efferent practices, enabled her to reduce tens of pages of data to "something more comprehensible and meaningful" (Smagorinsky, 2008, p.397). In reporting the findings, she used *in-vivo coding* to name the categories as "what I see in all these stories", "this makes sense to me", and "the stories are recurring in our life".

Due to the significance of bringing valid and trustable account of events and credible interpretations, attempts were made to rule out possible sources of validity threats, to the extent possible. The researcher's fairly prolonged presence and encounter with the participants (for nearly thirty 90-minute sessions) aided her to approach them, learn about and learn from them, and gradually come to a general recognition of them. In reporting the findings, she intentionally displayed adequate extracts of the participants' original data and their standpoints so that those reading the work can transparently see how and in what ways she as the researcher arrived at the themes. However, as the small-scale study took place in a particular setting,

with specific research community and unique participants, no generalizable data with replicable results are intended. Still, the endeavor could be considered as a transferable or applicable case within a broader context (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

Analyzing the data regarding the students' transaction with the thematically-comparable English-Persian literary works let the researcher see three interwoven reading practices; each of which will be explicated below.

4.1.1. "What I see in all these stories…"

As planned by the teacher-researcher, on several occasions throughout the semester, the students discussed how the paired literary works, their themes, concepts, or characterizations held together, and how they could be re-seen in light of emerging insights. In articulating what they could see in the stories, the students used their sociocultural, religious and literary backgrounds to offer *various* readings of the stories or story scenes *with different levels of depth and sophistication*. For example, in drawing comparisons and contrasts between Attar's *Conference of Birds*, Bach's *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, and Behrangi's *The Little Black Fish*, multitude of themes were suggested by the students as running through the stories. These included surface-level readings offering summative, clichéd, or visible themes like "not giving up" and showing "tenacity" and "determination" in "reaching aims", being "brave" and "not feeling afraid of change and novelty". These responses were coded by the researcher as "seeing the overt meanings". Contrary to them, there were instances of more sophisticated and analytic comparisons which were coded as "unveiling covert meanings". For instance, drawing upon the concept of "death and birth", Shirin, one of the students, commented that "somehow in all of the three stories, they experienced rebirth, though differently". She added "in the death process you abandon your materialistic desires and shake off yourself from your past immoral goals, habits and faults and start moving in the right path; the death of mundane desires and the rebirth of super-physical ones". Looking differently, Nazanin viewed how the three stories' leading characters "had to battle with two different sorts of obstacles; first, the obstacles inside them and their own limitations in their thoughts such as despair and hesitation, and second, the obstacles outside them like humiliation and opposition". To that Mobina added that "they all carried the weight of not being accepted by the society/community of their own time which is a pretty big burden on one's shoulders, although in the *Conference of the Birds* the author does not talk about any special manmade rules".

Similarly considering Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* and Ferdowsi's *Kaveh, the Blacksmith*, "feeling fed up with injustice and cruelty", "rising against oppression of tyrannies", "fighting for freedom", and "short life of cruelty", and moral lessons like "we must always try to be free and don't accept injustice and cruelty" were coded as *seeing overt themes*, contrasted with more *thoughtful, analytic interpretations*. For instance, in a fairly analytic comparative reading, Nazanin, wrote that "Cannon and weapons are not much of importance for this revolt; they can take over the aristocrats by empty hands; what is really needed is a heart full of revenge, and also a leader who guides their emotions". She added that "in both stories we have guides, aristocrats (French and English kings and Zohak) and the afflicted people from the lowest level of the society…. With these three elements, the story takes its shape". In another witty comparison of the events in the two stories, Bahar stated, "the first idea of revulsion in a *Tale of Two Cities* is created by a father who his son is killed. Similarly, in the story of *Black Smith* the first opposing against the oppressor is done by a father who has lost his son…this is how the revenge grows". Likewise, acting thoughtfully, Azadeh referred to a "contrast" in the two stories which prompted her to comment that "while the oppressed characters like Madame Defarge had become a 'human evil' because of the environment, because of the difficulties that they had tolerated", we are not "certain about" the presence of "irrational human evils or unruly mobs killing the people at the time of revolution without proper assessment of their crimes in Ferdowsi's *the Blacksmith*". Besides these sociocultural readings, Shirin a teenage student famous for her mystical views, shared "another point" she had discovered in the two stories:

…we are not born with human evilness but if we neglect the goodness within ourselves … then we will become a human evil. A baby's soul is all saint… but as he grows up in a society in which the poor are underestimated as some animals and exploited, then if the person does not restrain the ugly monsters of revenge and cruelty from cultivating within himself/herself, then he/she will also become a monster like Zohak, Defarge and the Evremonde.

Such responses may indicate that the students in their attempt to draw analogies between the literary works tried to spot comparable events and characters, juxtaposed them, and resorted to their own literal, sociocultural and religious backgrounds to offer various, even unique, interpretations of them. However, as the excerpts suggest, the depth of reading varied based on the depth and breadth of meanings constructed by the students.

4.1.2. *"This makes sense to me"*

Espousing on reader-based orientation towards teaching literature, the teacher-researcher constantly encouraged the students to reflect on their personal engagements with the texts; express how they felt the striking

moments in the stories evoked specific impressions, emotions, reactions, or thoughts on them; and how they could personally make sense of them. However, analyzing such verbalized "dialogues" between the students and the texts made her encounter different types of responding. A good body of personal reactions was limited to knee-jerk reactions and simple exclamations of agreement or disagreements, like or dislike, and the "moral points" and "life lessons" the stories had "taught" them. Such statements were categorized as "preliminary responses". For example, referring to the sentence "The trick…was for Jonathan to stop seeing himself as trapped inside a limited body… .The trick was to know that his true nature lived, as perfect as an unwritten number, everywhere at once across space and time" in *Jonathan Livingstone Seagull*, Sara had simply commented that "it taught me that there is no limitation for people to discover the facts and to progress". Mahdis while quoting one of the characters in the *Conference of the Birds* that averred "No love is without pain and true lovers do not think about themselves but are ready to sacrifice their lives", had self-prescribed that "It means to me that if you want to achieve something you should endure lots of difficulties and failures and should not say, God, why is it happening to me?...and have this in your mind that no pain no gain. Zohreh had explained how the sentence "Heaven is not a place, and it's not a time. Heaven is being perfect" in *Jonathan Livingstone Seagull* had "broken the meaning" she had "set for the heaven" in her mind. She added that "now I think heaven is just a feeling that comes when…God and you are satisfied with yourself". Similarly, the sentence "break the chains of your thoughts and you break the chains of your body too" in *Jonathan Livingstone Seagull* "made sense to" her as it reminded her "of the ability of our thoughts and limitations that we have in our minds".

However, there were also instances of profounder intellectual and emotional engagement and *personalization* by the students through making links to personal experiences or bringing concrete examples from their own lives. For instance, in a more elaborated response, Arezoo, one of the students who based on her loose head covering and trendy outfit is commonly considered as unobservant of the religious edicts in the Iranian society, had written how the stories, their underlying themes, and class discussions had made her re-vision her mission in life.

From less than three months ago that we have started our class, I understood that life is not only sleeping or eating. I need to go for knowledge, go beyond the limitations and prove that I can have big goal too. God has big goal by creating us. I should look at deep layer of everything. When I look at deep layer of creation I see that a person will never be able to create human like God. If you do something only with science, of course it won't be

complete as the Snake Catcher, or Frankenstein did. If not, I should pay high costs for it.

Such responses in which the students examined the ideas against the self by seeing how they are striking them intellectually and emotionally may resonate with Rosenblatt's notion of "live circuit" which could be set up between readers and texts; as "the reader infuses intellectual and emotional meanings into the pattern of verbal symbols, and those symbols channel his thoughts and feelings" (Rosenblatt, 1983, p. 25). However, as the instances indicate such self-engagements varied from simple reactions to expressing "change in perceptions" (Beach, 1993).

4.1.3. "The stories are recurring in our life…"

Besides encouraging the students to share their personally-arrived themes and interpretations, the teacher-researcher regularly invited the class to ponder on how the literary works are symbolically or thematically representative of our real, larger socio-historical and cultural contexts. As suggested by Leung (2002), the "study of literature becomes more meaningful if the real problems and life situations experienced by students outside of school" are brought to the class (p.31). Though on some occasions the students viewed the practice "too challenging" and "not easily imaginable" by keeping quiet or stating comments like "I cannot see any connections", at other times, chiefly with the aid of hints provided by the teacher, they tried to move beyond the literary texts, contextualize them, or examine the ways by which the running themes, events, and characters alluded to other events in their socio-cultural and historical context of living. For instance, while analyzing Bach's *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* and Attar's *Conference of Birds,* some students suggested that they could draw analogies between these stories with the Reverend Imam Hussein; one of the Shia Muslim Imams and the grandson of the Islamic Messenger who refused to pledge allegiance to the unjust ruler of the time and was thus martyred and beheaded in the battle of Karbala along with most of his family and companions. Commenting on the metered verse, "neither heads remain here, nor body or hue" in *Conference of Birds*, Sara had noted: "It reminds me how Imam Hussein gave everything he had for what he believed in but in return he saved something priceless, his faith". Similarly, Nazanin had written:

There's a unique sentence in them all. Imam Hussein said: "To die with honor is better than living with abjection." It is similar to "To die in perish is better than dying in dirt and filth" in Conference of Birds; "Someday I should be forced to face death- as I shall- it doesn't matter. What does only matter is the influence that my life or death will have on the lives of others" in The Little Black Fish; and "We can lift ourselves out of ignorance" in Jonathan Livingstone Seagull.

In another occasion, analyzing *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Kaveh, The Blacksmith* was coincided with news broadcasting Muslims' genocide in Myanmar and ferocity against them on the Iranian media. Talking around the tragic event, some of the students placed it in relation to their literary readings commenting that "history repeats itself" and "the stories and their characters are recurring in our life". Below are two written excerpts:

What is the benefit of reading these stories? We read Zahak story and came to this conclusion that he was a cruel king?! He killed many young people to feed his snakes?! If we clear our eyes and see better we can understand that history is recurring. What is the fault of people who live in Myanmar?? Just because they are Muslims??

I could see an advantage in the story of Zahak and A Tale of Two Cities, and it was the people who started their fight against tyrannies, but what about the people of the world today? Do other countries (powerful ones) support humanity? The countries that remain silent and prefer not to even express their objection to this genocide… .

In yet another occasion, as we were discussing Victor Frankenstein's adventurer into unknown scientific lands and his wildest dreams of bestowing eternity to mankind, the students were asked to search about Cryonics—the practice of preserving human bodies— especially those died from an incurable disease—in extremely cold temperatures with the hope of reviving them sometime in the future when a cure has been discovered. Drawing upon Islamic religious beliefs, the students objected the idea on certain grounds. Shirin stated that "there are things which are in God's hands not ours so we just make the situation worse by interfering". Similarly, Negar observed that "it's dangerous to tamper with nature; it's unwise to start something that we can't be sure about its result and it takes away people's control over their lives". Drawing analogies between Cryonics and Frankenstein's desire for immortality, Shirin commented:

Those people who have doubts on the resurrection and life after death are always looking for a way to survive from death. They seek eternal life in this world because they don't know the reality of human's eternal life after death… . Science is a tool, depending on our usage, it can be destructive or helpful, and it can kill people or survive them. Instead of thinking about defeating death we should concentrate on the quality of our life.

4.2. Discussion

While Comparative Literature is witnessing an upward trend on theoretical and methodological grounds in Iran, its integration and applications in language teaching appears to be a palpable void. Addressing this gap, the researcher set out to deploy translated Persian literary works

apropos of foreign ones in an English literacy classroom, and traced the reading events that took place as a result of co-incorporating such thematically comparable works of literature. Framing the inquiry within reader-response theory, she encouraged the student-participants to write reflective comments and interpretations, make links to personal experiences and concrete examples from their own lives, find contemporary relevance for them, interweave their readings by making comparisons and contrasts between the themes, characterization, and settings of the selected literary works and examine "the differences out of similarities and the similarities out of the differences of various literatures" (Cao, cited in Presada, 2016, p. 204).

What could be defended spiritedly is that such classroom events succeeded in moving literary reading beyond conventional and fairly mechanical exercises aimed at vocabulary, syntax, and literal-level comprehension as well as the ones which reduce literature reading to fixed, legitimate thematic interpretations. In other words, the freshmen practiced acting like "critics" by voicing their own opinions. This could be seen with regard to the "weaving" events in which the students were encouraged to make comparisons and connections across literatures. Through going beyond single literary works and juxtaposing them, the students were involved in a challenging "intellectual activity" which demanded them to interweave the fragments and look at the pattern as a whole. The ample instances of rich perspectives and deep insights offered by the students could be considered as merits of integrating comparative approach to literature. As also discovered by Safari (2019), there is a move "from a neutral, silent, and immobile state towards a nomadic, self-shaping, and self-defining existence" (p. 306). The responses displayed that the students' ideology as Muslim-Iranian ones, their educational backgrounds or upbringings wrapped with didactic teachings (as depicted through their frequent mentioning of spiritual or moral themes), and their sociocultural identity shaped by living in a society which has experienced socio-political upheavals in its past and contemporary history like war, fight for independence, and ongoing resistance against the oppressions, as well as the mass media which are constantly highlighting these issues, all affected the way they read the selected texts inter-textually and the worlds they brought to their readings. As put by Beach (1997, p. 70), "students are socialized or positioned to adopt stances associated with their membership or status in certain communities". However, that probably does not mean that we should close our eyes to the instances of surface-level, summative, clichéd themes commonly offered by the students. Such *varying* depths of reading ranging from seeing the visible themes to unveiling invisible meanings could be related to the students' range of "experiential knowledge, their funds of knowledge and their intertextual knowledge – as sociocultural resources" (Flint, 2018, p. 12), their interpretation ability, as well as the meaningfulness of the reading materials for them; which affected

and led how they voiced their opinions. With this regard, the findings of the study partially resonate with those of Cushing (2018), Flint (2018), Leung (2002), and Park (2012) in which the importance of readers' sociocultural, familial backgrounds as well as lived realities has been underscored.

Considering the second reading event, forging personal connections with readings, while there were fascinating instances of personalization in the dialogues and actions of the literary texts by the students, though fairly few, there were plenty instances of "preliminary responses" (Karolides, 2000) like sheer exclamations of agreement and disagreement, like or dislike or mentioning the positive values, moral issues, and "it-taught-me" life lessons which they had picked up from reading such works, like "perseverance", "determination", "enduring the difficulties", "faith" in themselves and God. In one comparison, Karolides (2000) compares such "preliminary feelings" to "only unlocking a door, perhaps opening it slightly" (p.135). The reasons for such "slight unlocking" (Karolides, 2000) might be sought in transmission-based educational system the Iranian students are socialized to which puts emphasis on receiving, memorizing, and repeating information instead of self-reflection and self-expression, on the one hand, and the conventional didactic approaches to reading literary texts which chiefly treat literary texts as authoritative sources containing wise messages and life lessons, on the other hand. Similarly, Cushing (2018) argues against literature teaching practices in which "meaningful explorations of literature are often replaced with activities focused on assessment objectives, timed exam question drills and teacher-led explanations" which hence "leave little room for student-centred interpretations and appear to deny the opportunity for authentic, idiosyncratic and immersive readings." (p.8) Although more triangulated, fine-grained analysis is demanded, it seems that the novelty of the practice—entering into a dialogue with literary texts by bringing concrete examples from lived experiences and "even being asked to think so much about their own minds during the reading process" (Cushing, 2018, p.17)—intimidated the students into going beyond *preliminary* responses or minor personalization.

In addition, the students could contextualize the literary texts by pondering over how the running themes allude to other events in their socio-cultural, historical context of living. Although provided with occasional hints, the students made interesting connections between Attar's and Bach's stories and a religious event commemorated annually in their community and placed Muslims' genocide in Myanmar in relation to Dickens's novel. These comparative practices of "linking the old thoughts and ideologies to the current social and cultural issues" (Boroomand, et al., 2014, p. 354) provided grounds for lengthening the reading shot to encompass the relations between literature and other spheres of lives. In another interpretation, such beyond-

the-text readings might reflect Freire's (2000) oft-cited concept of literacy as "reading the word and the world".

5. Conclusion and Implications

The present inquiry aimed at integrating Comparative Literature in English language teaching through deploying translated Persian works of literature in relation to thematically-resembling foreign ones. The findings reveal that the practice of reading homeland translated literature vis-à-vis foreign literary works, unpacking and discussing their hidden meanings, and making defendable interpretations, provided spaces for this community of Iranian language learners to see how themes, motifs, symbols or myths rooted in their homeland literature (like spiritual journey for self-recognition or fight for freedom) have been circulated and endorsed by different literary authors across cultures, time periods, and geographical locations, on the one hand, and how they could be re-seen in light of events occurring in their sociocultural context of living, on the other hand. Hence, it could be advised that inclusion of Persian Literature vis-à-vis foreign ones, in case planned appropriately, can strengthen Iranian national and cultural values and heritage; lessen the repercussions of linguistic and cultural imperialism, self-alienation, marginalization and culture and identity loss, and aid learners "to see themselves both from the inside and from the outside" (Kramsch, 2013, p. 62); to use Bakhtin's (1981) "transgredience" and Kramsch's "third place" metaphors. As Kramsch (2013) suggests, "part of what it means to learn someone else's language is to perceive the world through the metaphors, the idioms and the grammatical patterns used by the Other, filtered through a subjectivity and a historicity developed in one's mother tongue" (p. 62).

Definitely, more vigorous pedagogical attempts still need to be taken for subjugated nonnative, homeland literatures to transcend national borders, gain momentum, and find their niche within the flourishing global arena of World Literature and Comparative Literature. To that end, materials developers, literary academicians, and language teachers are modestly recommended to embark on interdisciplinary studies, explore what these might add to their repertoires for teaching and learning, avoid sheer dependence on native literary works as the most easily available and accessible instructional materials, see their homeland literature as an asset that should be credited and exploited for greater knowledge, and shoulder the burden of translating their literature decently into various languages.

In the bargain, instead of considering native British and American literature as a locus for comparison, the realm of Comparative Literature could be well expanded by casting the geographical net wider and bringing together homeland literature and non-European, Non-Western literatures, namely Asian, African, and Middle Eastern ones as well *multimodal*

literatures in comparative studies. By casting it in a comparative light, "English teachers can also help students recognize that English is not a unitary, solely Anglo- American discourse" (Chilton, 2016, p. 40); though it could be a tall order.

References

Alexandrian, M. (2003). *The conference of the birds: Selected parts*. Tehran: Khojasteh Press.

Alkire, S., & Alkire, A. (2007). Teaching literature in the muslim world: A bicultural approach. *Teaching English as a Second of Foreign Language*, *10*(4), 1-13.

Amer, A. (2003). Teaching EFL/ESL literature. *The Reading Matrix, 3*(2), 63-73.

Anushiravani, A. (2010). The challenges of comparative literature in Iran. *Comparative Literature, 1*(2), 1-4.

Azizi, F. (2014). *Exploring and recreating Persian narrative texts as resources for EFL classes* (Unpublished master's thesis). Alzahra University, Tehran: Iran.

Bach, R. (1970). *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*. Retrieved from http://csermelyblog.tehetsegpont.hu/sites/default/files/angol%20sir%C3%A1ly.pdf.

Bakhtin, M. M., & Holquist, M. (1981). The dialogic imagination: Four essays. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Bassnett, S. (1993). *Comparative literature: A critical introduction*. Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Bassnett, S. (2006). Reflections on comparative literature in the twenty-first century. *Comparative Critical Studies 3*(1-2), 3–11.

Bassnett, S., & Lefevere, A. (Eds.). (1990). *Translation, history and culture*. London: Pinter.

Beach, R. (1993). *A teacher's introduction to reader-response theories*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Behdad, A., & Thomas, D. (2011). Introduction. In A. Behdad, & D. Thomas (Ed.), *A companion to comparative literature* (pp.1-12). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Behrangi, S. (1967). *The little black fish.* Retrieved from *http://www.kanoonintl.com/wpcontent/ uploads/Little-Black-Fish.pdf.*

Bobkina, J., & Dominguez Romero, E. (2014). The use of literature and literary texts in the EFL classroom; between consensus and controversy. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, *3*(2), 248–260.

Boroomand, F., Ramezani, F., & Pooryazdanpanah Kermani, A. (2014). Incorporation of Persian literature into ELT in Iran: A necessity which has been ignored. *Iranian EFL Journal*, *10*(5), 344-358.

Brown, C. (2013). What is 'comparative' literature? *Comparative Critical Studies, 10*(1), 67–88.

Cahnmann-Taylor, M., Bleyle, S., Hwang, Y., & Zhang, K. (2017). Teaching poetry in TESOL teacher education: Heightened attention to language as well as to cultural and political critique through poetry writing. *TESOL Journal, 8*(1), 70–101.

Carey-Webb, A. (2001). *Literature and lives: A response-based, cultural studies approach to teaching English*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Carlisle, A. (2000). Reading logs: An application of reader response theory in ELT. *ELT Journal, 54*(1), 12-19.

Chilton, M. (2016). *English studies beyond the 'center': Teaching literature and the future of global English*. New York: Routledge.

Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. (1999). The teacher research movement: A decade later. *Educational Researcher, 28*(7), 15–25.

Connell, J. M. (2000). Aesthetic experiences in the school curriculum: Assessing the value of Rosenblatt's transactional theory. *Journal of Aesthetic Education, 34* (1), 27-35.

Cushing, I. (2018). 'Suddenly, I am part of the poem': texts as worlds, reader-response and grammar in teaching poetry. *English in Education*, *52*(1), 7-19.

Dickens, Ch. (2000). *A tale of two cities* (simplified edition). Oxford Bookworms Library: Oxford University Press.

Domínguez Romero, E., Bobkina, J., & Stefanova, S. (2019). *Teaching literature and language through multimodal texts*. U.S: IGI Global book series.

Domínguez, C., Saussy, H., Villanueva, D. (2015). *Introducing comparative literature: New trends and applications*. London, New York: Routledge.

Erkaya, O. R. (2011). Advantages of using translated stories from students' native language to teach EFL. *The Journal of Language Teaching and Learning, 1*(2)*,* 57-66.

Flint, T. K. (2018). Responsive play: Creating transformative classroom spaces through play as a reader response. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, *20*(2), 385-410

Florentino, L. O. (2014). Integrating local literature in teaching English to first graders under k- 12 curriculum. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *4*(7), 1344-1351.

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Gálik, M. (2000). Interliterariness as a concept in comparative literature. *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, *2*(4), 1-7.

Gray, R. (2005). Using translated first language literature in the second language classroom. *The Internet TESL Journal*, *XI* (12). Retrieved from http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Gray- TranslatedL1Literatue.html.

Hirvela, A. (1996). Reader-response theory and ELT. *ELT Journal*, *50*(2), 127-134.

Hodges, T., McTigue, E., Wright, K.L., Franks, A.D., & Matthews, Sh. D. (2018). Transacting with characters: Teaching children perspective taking with authentic literature. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, *32*(3), 343–362.

Hullah, P. (2018). Living in the materials world: Why literature has a place here? In D. Bao (Ed.), *Creativity and innovations in ELT materials development: Looking beyond the current design* (pp.122-138). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Kachru, B. B. (1986). Non-native literatures in English as a resource for language teaching. In C. Brumfit, & R. Carter (Eds.), *Literature and language teaching* (pp.140-149). New York: Oxford University Press.

Karolides, N. J. (2000). *Reader response in secondary and college classrooms* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Kemmis, S. (2009). Understanding professional practice: A synoptic framework. In B. Green (Ed.), *Understanding and researching professional practice*. Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense Publishers.

Kemmis, S. (2012). Researching educational praxis: Spectator and participant perspectives. *British Educational Research Journal*, *38*(6), 885–905.

Khajavi, Y., & Abbasian, R. (2011). English language in Iran: Why practice is more common than practice? *Canadian Social Science*, *7*, 89-94.

Khatib, M., Derakhshan, A., & Rezaei, S. (2011). Why and why not literature: A task-based approach to teaching literature. *International Journal of English Linguistics, 1,* 213-218.

Khodayar, E., & Emami, S. (2010). The last arrow: Comparative studies of fables of Arash and Philoctetes, *Comparative Researches of Language and Literature*, *3*, 61-86.

Khoshbakht, M., Ahmadian, M., & Hekmat, Sh. (2013). A comparative study of Chaucer's the Canterbury tales & Attar's the conference of the birds. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, *2*(1), 90-97.

Koupa, F., Hejazi, B., & Ghazanfari Moghaddam, S. (2010). From Attar's "Conference of the Birds" to Richard Bach's "Jonathan Livingston Seagull". *Literary Studies*, *43*(3), 49-70.

Kramsch, C. (2013). Culture in foreign language teaching. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, *1*(1), 57-78.

Kubota, R. (1998). Ideologies of English in Japan. *World Englishes. 17*(3), 295–306.

Kumar Das, B. (2008). Comparative literature and translation studies: A correlation. In Das. B. K. (Ed.), *A handbook of translation studies* (pp. 124–134). New Delhi: Atlantic.

Large, D. (2015). Translation studies versus comparative literature? *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, *8*(3), 347–354.

Lazar, J. (1993). *Literature and language teaching: A guide for teachers and trainers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lefevere, A. (1995). Introduction: Comparative literature and translation. *Comparative Literature*, *47*(1), 1–10.

Leung, C. (2002). Bicultural perspectives and reader response: Four American readers respond to Jean Fritz's *Homesick. Canadian Modern Language Review, 60*(1), 27–54.

Louie, B. (2005). Development of empathetic responses with multicultural literature. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 48*(7), 566–578.

Maley, A., & Kiss, T. (2018). *Creativity and English language teaching: From inspiration to implementation*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

McWilliam, E. (2004). W(h)ither practitioner research? *Australian Educational Researcher, 31*(2), 113–126.

Merriam, Sh., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mitchell, D. (1993). Reader response theory: Some practical applications for the high school literature classroom. *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*, *9*(1), 41–53.

Mohammadi Badr, N., & Ghazanfari Moghaddam, S. (2012). Simorq of Attar and the Seagull of Bach: Common symbols in Manteq Ol-Teyr and Jonathan Livingston Seagull. *Mytho-Mystic Literature Quarterly Journal*, *8*(27), 181-211.

Mohideen, H., & Mohideen, S. (2009). Translated Malay short stories as a resource for teaching language skills. *The English Teacher, XXXVIII,* 58–73.

Nault, D. (2006). Going global: Rethinking culture teaching in ELT contexts. *Language, culture and curriculum*, *19*(3), 314-328.

O'Sullivan, E. (2005). *Comparative children's literature*. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge.

Park, J. Y. (2012). Re-imaging reader-response in middle and secondary schools: Early adolescent girls' critical and communal reader responses to the young adult novel *Speak*. *Children's Literature in Education, 43*(3), 191–212.

Picken, J. D. (2007). *Literature, metaphor, and the foreign language learner*. Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Presada, D. (2016). Comparative literature classes in higher education. A case study. *Journal Plus Education*, *XVI*, 199-209.

Raquitico, K. L. (2014). Inclusion of non-native English literatures in English textbooks toward critical and multicultural literacy. *Asian EFL Journal, Professional Teaching Articles,79*, 4-23.

Rahman Miju, M., Chowdhury, Sh. B., & Das, U. (2014). How cross-cultural comparative literature method involves successful use of grammar translation techniques: With special reference to Bangladesh, *Education*, *4*(6), 142-147.

Rosenblatt, L. (1983). *Literature as exploration*. New York: Modern Language Association.

Sadri, A. (2013). *The epic of the Persian kings.* New York: The Quantuck Lane Press.

Safari, P. (2019). Returning to our SELF, cultivating transformative learning: Rumi's stories in English classes, *Multidisciplinary Journal of Educational Research*, *3*(9), 293-318.

Sahragard, R., & Rasti, A. (2013). Application of reader response theory in Iranian tertiary-level reading classes: A 'practical demonstration' study. *International Journal of Language Learning and Applied Linguistics World*, *4*(3), 247-255.

Salahi Moghaddam, S. (2007). *Comparative analysis between Jalal-e-din Mohammad Moulavi and William Blake*. Tehran: Susan Publishing.

Sapargul D., & Sartor, V. (2010). Trans-cultural comparative literature method: Using grammar translation techniques effectively. *English Teaching Forum, 48*(3), 27-28.

Scollon, R., Scollon, S. (2002). How to teach thematic comparative literature. A curriculum note for secondary teachers. Retrieved from

http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/curriculum/AxeHandleAcademy/axe/compl it.pdf.

Smagorinsky, P. (2008). The method section as conceptual epicenter in constructing social science research reports. *Written Communication*, *25*(3), 389-411.

Talib, I. (1992). Why not teach non-native English literature? *ELT journal*, *46*(1), 51-55.

Tee, C. G. (2012). Towards a new and more constructive partnership: The changing role of translation in comparative literature, *Fu Jen Studies: Literature & Linguistics*, 45, 1-21.

Tötösy de Zepetnek, S. (2003). From comparative literature today toward comparative cultural studies. In S. Tötösy de Zepetnek (Ed.), *Comparative literature and comparative cultural studies* (pp. 235-67).West Lafayette: Purdue UP.

Tötösy de Zepetnek, S., & Vasvári, L. O. (2013). The contextual study of literature and culture, globalization, and digital humanities. In S. Tötösy de Zepetnek, & T. Mukherjee (Ed.), *Companion to comparative literature, world literatures, and comparative cultural studies* (pp. 3-35). India Pvt. Ltd: Cambridge University Press.

Valipour, A., & Hemati, R. (2017). Searching for ideal perfection: A comparative study of Samad Behrangi's The Little Black Fish and Richard Bach῾s Jonathan Livingston Seagull. *Journal of Children's Literature Studies*, *8*(2), 161-178.

Van, T. T. M. (2009). The relevance of literary analysis to teaching literature in the EFL classroom. *English Teaching Forum*, *3*, 2-9.

Varvel, L. (2000). Reader response to drama: Prospecting for human understandings and connections. In N. J. Karolides (Ed.), *Reader response in secondary and college classrooms* (pp. 159-178). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Virk, T. (2003). Comparative literature versus comparative cultural studies. *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, *5*(4), 1-14.

Whinfield, E. H. (1979). *Masnavi III, the spiritual couplets of Maulana Jalalu-d'in Muhamad Rumi.* London: Octagon.

Whiteley, S., & Canning, P. (2017). Reader response research in stylistics. *Language and Literature*, *26*(2), 71-87.

Woodruff, A. H., & Griffin, R. (2017). Reader response in secondary settings: Increasing comprehension through meaningful interactions with literary texts. *Texas Journal of Literacy Education, 5*(2), 108-116.

Zandian, S. (2015). Migrant literature and teaching English as an international language in Iran. In C. Kennedy (Ed.), *English language teaching in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Innovations, trends and challenges* (pp.113- 120). London: British Council.

Bibliographic information of this paper for citing:

Parsaiyan, S., F. (2020). Transacting with comparative English-Persian literature in EFL classrooms: A reader-response approach. *Journal of Modern Research in English Language Studies*, *7*(4), 133-158.