

Comparative Study of Alfred Tennyson and Ahmed Shawqi

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Abstract

This study explored and discussed the poetry of Alfred Lord Tennyson, considered to be the greatest English poet and the third greatest English writer, and Ahmed Shawqi, the greatest poet in modern Arabic literature. This study discussed the poets' biographies to provide a historical background before turning to their literary works. By looking at their works, we discover similarities and differences between the poets. The poets' early lives were significantly similar. On the one hand, Tennyson was close to the Royal English Family. Whereas, Shawqi grew up in Egyptian Royal Palace with kings and queens, for whom he wrote elegies. A significant difference between them is that Shawqi was an only child, while Tennyson was the fourth son of nine children. Concerning their literary work, both were prominent writers who mastered the craft of creation and created poetry unique in terms of length and quality. We discovered that the poets composed elegies for kings and their beloved people. Shawqi wrote an elegy for his father, while Tennyson did not.

Keywords

Poet, Poem, Similar, Difference-Poetry

1. Introduction

This study explores and compares the poetry of the famous English poet Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) and the genius Arabic poet Ahmed Shawqi (1870-1932) concerning language, subjects, themes, and imagery, among others. Additionally, this study highlights the poets' biographies and works. The researchers examine the poets' commonalities and differences, considering that they lived during the same era. The study is under the umbrella of comparative literature, a vast field of comparative study on fiction, drama, and poetry, among others.

Poetry reflects an overflow of feelings; it was transmitted from generation to generation through storytelling until the invention of printers and when it began to be written on paper.

Al-Hemeedawi (2022) defined comparative literature as follows:

Comparative Literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country, and the study of the relationships between literature on one hand and other areas of knowledge and belief, such as the arts, philosophy, history, the social sciences, the sciences, religion, etc., on the other. In brief, it is the comparison of one literature with another or others, and comparing literature with other spheres of human expression.

Steven Totosy de Zepetnek (1998) defined comparative literature as follows:

First, Comparative Literature means the knowledge of more than one national language and literature, and/or it means the knowledge and application of other disciplines in and for the study of literature and second, comparative Literature has an ideology of inclusion of the Other, say, marginal literature (1998: p. 1).

From the above definitions, comparative literature is a broad term that includes national literature, culture, and history; it has content and form and can be applied to various aspects of culture and literature. This comparison may take place within one language or between two languages. Moreover, this study compares poetry in Arabic and English.

2. Alfred Tennyson

Biography

This section includes a short biography of Alfred Tennyson, and Ahmed Shawqi, and aims to provide insight into the poets' lives.

“Alfred Tennyson was born August 6th, 1809, at Somersby, Lincolnshire, fourth of twelve children of George and Elizabeth (Fytche) Tennyson. The poet's grandfather had violated tradition by making his younger son, Charles, his heir and arranging for the poet's father to enter the ministry. The contrast of his own family's relatively straitened circumstances to the great wealth of his aunt Elizabeth Russell and Uncle Charles Tennyson (who lived in castles!) made Tennyson feel particularly impoverished and led him to worry about money all his life. He also had a lifelong fear of mental illness, for several men in his family had a mild form of epilepsy, which was then thought a shameful disease. His father and brother Arthur made their cases worse by excessive drinking. His brother Edward had to be confined in a mental institution after 1833, and he himself spent a few weeks under doctors' care in 1843.” (**Robson, 2023**)

Tennyson lived with his family, surrounded by his brothers and sisters, which influenced his work. Moreover, his grandfather did not follow the traditions and customs of society. When his grandfather died, his wealth was given to Tenny-

son's uncle instead of his father. Thus, his life was uncomfortable; he was dominated by poverty and the fear of illness. Tennyson was invited to join an undergraduate club of poets who gathered and discussed poetic and philosophical issues. In this club, he met his close friend Arthur Hallam. Hallam accompanied Tennyson to visit his family. Hallam fell in love with Tennyson's sister Emily, and got engaged.

Literary Works

When Tennyson was a small boy, his father introduced him to great poets, such as John Keats, Lord Byron, John Milton, Walter Scott, and Alexander Pope. Tennyson composed numerous poems over three volumes. Although these poets influenced Tennyson, he had his style and metric rhyme that distinguished him. He wrote lyrics, elegies, and narrative poems. Further, Tennyson beautifully revealed his thoughts in his literary work using Elizabethan verse.

He applied different styles in his literary work, sometimes using a straightforward and simple style and others a complicated, thoughtful, and sensual style typified by figurative language, such as simile, metaphor and imagery. His poetry was well-known globally, and his dominant themes are bravery, love and nature. This research will discuss some of Shawqi's poems while conducting a comparative analysis of the poems. Full list of Tennyson poems can be found in <https://www.ranker.com/list/list-of-poems-by-alfred-tennyson-1st-baron-tennyson/reference>.

List of Tennyson poems compared with Shawqi poems

In Memoriam

Cantos

Queen Mary I

Harold XI

Becket

Village of Tragedy

3. Ahmed Shawqi

Biography

Shawqi was born in Cairo in 1868, descended from blended families such as Turkish, Kurdish, Circassian.

Ahmed's grandfather was originally Turkish, worked as a tax collector in Egypt and was one of the members of the royal tiles. His grandmother took care of him during the regime of Ismail Pasha. Ahmed said:

"I heard my father say, 'may God have mercy' on him. We are Turkish and Arab. My father came to this land as a young man carrying a letter from Ahmed Pasha to Mohammed Ali Pasha. My grandfather was fluent in Turkish and Arabic, so the governor appointed him as an officer in the government. Later on, Saeed Basha appointed him as a head of the Egyptian Taxes" Shawqi (1998: p. 1).

Ahmed was an only child and was loved and cared for by his parents. His

grandmother made him developed an intimate relationship with the palace. His parents enrolled him in Elementary school to receive his primary education, after which he joined the preparatory school. At university, he studied law. Furthermore, when he was only sixteen years, the university opened a translation department after two years of his attendance. He joined it and received a certificate in translation.

When he was twenty years old, Khedive Tawfiq sent him to France in Montpellier to study law and French literature at his expense. These years played a vital role in forming his personality. He moved to many European countries, studying the French language and its culture. Then, he returned, spent a year in Paris, and received his degree in law (Zlalat, 1999).

In Paris, he studied French literature extensively and met famous French poets. They influenced him significantly because he was in contact with them frequently. In addition to French literature, he was very competent in the Turkish language, which he acquired from his family members. Moreover, Shawqi was exiled to Spain because he attached the British colonization.

“He was swept away by longing for his homeland. During his exile, the 1919 revolution erupted in Egypt, and his longing for his homeland intensified, and obsessed his heart and soul. Exile was the greatest ordeal that Shawqi went through in his life. In exile, he did not find relief except when resorting to his poetry, to which he revealed the pains of his heart. He also visited the memorials of the Muslims and their reign and civilization in Seville, Cordoba, and Granada. This resulted in Shawqi composing his lengthy poem ‘Arab Countries and the Greats of Islam’. Shawqi’s poems are considered masterpieces for their sincerity of emotion and beauty of description. Perhaps the most famous of these is *The Seeniya*; rhyming with the letter S, entitled ‘The Journey to Andalusia’, and his other longing poem, ‘The Nouniya; rhyming with the letter N’, in which he opposed the famous medieval Arab Andalusian poet, Ibn Zaidoun” (Al-Rifai, 2021: Abstract).

He became immersed in Spanish culture. These various cultures enabled him to become a very successful poet. He mastered rhyme scheme and meter, and his style uniquely changed from conventional to dramatic, imitating William Shakespeare. When he returned from France to his home country, he was promoted and took the name “the Prince of Poets (amīr al-shu‘arā’); he was the most famous poet in the entire country (Shawqi, 1868).

Literary Works

His mountain of varied and intensive knowledge made Ahmed Shawqi a prolific artist. He played a vital role in his nation, believing in its development and unity. He directed the young people to exert efforts and work hard to shape the nation’s future. His poetry was genius in experience; he composed it with deep imagination and a sharp mind, paying great attention to the truth. Shawqi’s poetry explained the status of Islam and Arabs to other nations.

Characteristics of Shawqi’s Literary Works

The poetry produced by Shawqi was typified by the careful selection of words—in addition to meter and rhyme scheme—as if it was classical Arabic poetry.

Epics, descriptions, narrative, historical poetry and dramatic poetry. He elevated the Arabic language and encouraged the youth to take pride in it, perhaps he was the only poet at the time to compose famous dramatic and narrative poetry.

He renewed classical poetic meanings to suit the tastes of the modern period. He criticized Arabic phonemes which no poet at his time could do. Hence, he was unique among his peers. He discovered new subjects for Arabic poetry, including extended historical poems. His poetry was distinctive in terms of styles and meanings (Ibid).

List of Works

The poet collected all his literary works in one book called *Diwan Al-shwqiat* in four volumes. Brief descriptions of the contents of each are as follows.

His poems praised the Khedives Abas and Tawfeg, and he also highlights on political, historical and social poetry.

Descriptive poetry, spinning poetry, and various poems includes all of his elegies except for those on the deaths of Abdellatif Alsofy and Ahmed Zaglul.

Varied poems and books such as *The Arab Countries* and *Greater of Islam*. He has a poem in which he imitates Lsan Addin Ibn Khateib and talks about Islamic history from the beginning to Aldowla Alfatmia.

Dramatic poetry

Shawqi was the first poet who composed dramatic poetry in Arabic. He wrote six dramatic poems, three of which about patriotism, such as *The Death of Kiliopatra*, *Ali bikk Alkabir* and *Gumbeaz*.

The rest of his dramatic poems are about love such as *Majnoun Layla* was written by Qais bin Al-Malouh, one of the great poets who lived in the first century during the Umayyad regime He excelled all constrains, until he became an example for lovers, and despite this love, Laila's family rejected him as a suitor , so he lost his mind and singing poetry and wandering between countries, until he died of desperation ,so what sort of relationship did he have in life when she became lonely, and what reassurance he had in himself when it became his bother And what love does he search in this life after the love of Layla! This poetic play by the Prince of Poets, Ahmed Shawqi, dealt with this dramatic tragedy in a distinctive and wonderful way. And *Aentra. Ast Huda* Ahmed Shawqi also wrote a play entitled *Amirat Al-andlus* (The princess of Spain).

Comparative Analysis

This section compares Tennyson's and Shawqi's poetry by focusing on the subjects, figurative language, imagery, style, and types of poetry.

Both were prominent poets and were unique in everything; both wrote lyrical and praise poetry, grew up among royalty, and wrote patriotism poetry. However, Shawqi wrote an elegy on his father, but Tennyson did not.

Aspects of Agreements

Queen Victoria was an ardent admirer of Tennyson's works; she wrote in her diary that she used to read his work, "In Memoriam A.H.H.", after Prince Albert's death.

Tennyson started writing poetry as a boy and enjoyed esteemed success. The death of his father in 1831 and Hallam's death in 1833 left him devastated, but even those heavy losses could not impede his writing abilities. In 1842, another volume of his poetry brought him financial and commercial success. Later, his masterpiece, *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, published in 1850, won him acclaim.

Elegy

We are going to compare between Tennyson's in the Memoriam and Ahmed Shawqi's upon Hafez Ibrahim, so as to explain how these two Elegies concentrating on the theme of friendship, although there are many differences between the Elegies in terms of style, imagery and Language.

Tennyson wrote an extended elegy in 131 *Cantos* on the death of his classmate and close friend Hallam, who died when he was young. The most painful lines are in Canto 4 when the speaker says that his tears are used to fill a container and turn into ice.

Shawqi also wrote an elegy on the death of his close friend and poet Hafez Ibrahim, in which he spoke of tears as a dressing for the town: "How much tears do deserve for Hafez and how do you mourn and cry for him".

Both poets suffered deeply from the loss of their friends, and their descriptions of their sorrow are similar. Tennyson wrote an elegy on the death of Prince Albert entitled *Idylls of the King*, wherein he was motivated primarily by the kindness of the prince. Shawqi wrote an elegy on the death of Khedive Ismail who took much pity on Shawqi and sent him to study abroad. Both poets wrote elegies on princes to acknowledge their kindness, but Shawqi wrote far more elegies overall.

Dramatic poetry

Tennyson wrote dramatic poetry, including *Queen Mary*—a play about Queen Mary I of England—*Harold*, about Harold XI of England, *Becket*, and the *Village of Tragedy*.

Shawqi's dramatic poems include *The Death of Kiliopatra*, *Ali bikk Alkabir*, and *Gumbeaz*. A comparative analysis shows that Tennyson wrote six dramatic poems, while Shawqi wrote five.

Lyrics

Most of the poems written by Tennyson were lyrical. He wrote more than fifty-six lyrical poems, published in a collection in 1930.

While Shawqi wrote more than forty-seven lyrical poems, Tennyson wrote more lyrical poems than Shawqi.

Sonnets

Tennyson wrote several sonnets. His most famous five sonnets are *If I were loved, as I desired to be*, *Poets and their Biographies*, *Bounaparte*, *Love and Death* and *A question by Shelly*. Whereas, Shawqi did not write sonnets.

Flattering

Shawqi was very distinct in flattering poetry; he composed poetry on Ismail Basha, Tawfig Basha, Hussain Basha and Fouad Basha. He wrote flattering poetry on pharaohs from the distant past. He also wrote poetry on the kings of the Ottoman Empire. The most important flattering poetry is his writing about our Lord Mohammed Pray and Peace is upon him. His flattering poetries include *The Princess*, *Praise to our Indian Brothers*, *Dedication to the Queen*, *Edwin Morris* and others.

The subjects

Love is the most common subject between both poets. Shawqi wrote more than seven poems on love, while Tennyson wrote more than fifty love poems. The overall poems written by Tennyson are not counted whereas Ahmed Shawqi wrote 1350 lines of verse.

Figurative language

Shawqi used many personifications in his poem, evident in "Death has a heavy hand if it hits." Tennyson also used personifications in his poem *In Memoriam A.H.H.*: "The sad mechanic exercise."

4. Conclusion

This study aimed to discover similarities and differences between the works of Ahmed Shawqi and Alfred Tennyson. Both are unique writers and very distinguished among contemporaries. Ahmed Shawqi was appointed as the "Prince of Poets" due to the quality and quantity of literary work he composed, According to my own opinion, Alfred Tennyson is the third writer in the history of English Literature.

Both poets suffered the loss of a beloved one, so their elegies reflect the deep wounds of this loss. Shawqi wrote more elegies than Tennyson.

Both of them lived among royalty, naturally contributing to their works of flattering poetry. Tennyson was very loveable to Prince Albert, and the prince had an abiding interest in Tennyson's poetry. Thus, Tennyson wrote a dedication called *Idylls of the King* in memory of Prince Albert.

Shawqi also lived among royalty (The Palace of khedies Ismail). His grandparents brought him to the king in early childhood, so he grew up under king's guards and wrote many flattering poems about them. Ahmed Shawqi was distinctive in composing poetry praising our lovely prophet Mohammed Pray and Peace be upon him.

Both of them produced several epic poetries. In addition, the poets produced several lyrical works, later sung by singers in their home countries, to entertain their nations. Both of them produced excellent dramatic poetry. They were both geniuses of style and metaphorical language, in addition to having deep imaginations.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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