

دراسة تأثير الادب العربي على الاعمال الأدبية لشوسر: رحلة الطير العربي

عبر إسبانيا وفرنسا حتى بريطانيا إنموذجاً

The Journey of the Arabian Bird- Through Spain and France to England: A study of the Arab Literary Impact on Chaucer's Selected Literary Works

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المستخلص

حاول الكثير من الدارسين ان يتبعوا تأثير الأدب العربي في الآداب الأوروبية ولاسيما الادب الانكليزي. ومع ذلك فانه من العسير ان نتبع ذلك التأثير مالم نتبع الطرق التي اتى منها. فتأثير الادب العربي الذي ترك بصماته في الادب الانكليزي قد اتى عبر الادب الفرنسي والايطالي اللذان اتوا بدورهما من حركة الادب العربي في شبه الجزيرة الايبيرية (اسبانيا والبرتغال). وهذه الدراسة تحاول أن تجد مقتربات الأدب العربي وعناصره التي وصلت للادب الانكليزي وخاصة في رائعة جيفري جوسر الموسومة (حكايات كانتبري) وفيها استعار جوسر الكثير من اساليب وخصائص الادب العربي مثل الحب العذري وتقنية السرد في اعماله. وتركز الدراسة بصورة اساسية على تأثير الادب العربي في اعمال حوسر لاهميته في الادب الانكليزي كونه كان الاديبي السباق في نقله للغة الانكليزية من لغة محلية الى لغة عالمية وتجديده في الكثير من الاساليب اللغوية والجمالية. وتسلط الدراسة ايضا الضوء على تتبع تاريخي لظهور المراحل التي ازدهرت فيها اساليب الادب العربي في اسبانيا وانتقالها لبقية الاداب الاوربية وخاصة الادب الانكليزي.

الكلمات الافتتاحية: الحب العذري، الحكايات العربية، التأثير العربي، جوسر، حكايات كانتبري.

Abstract□

Lots of scholars try to trace the Arab literary impact on the European literatures, especially the English one. However, it won't be an easy task to trace

such an impact in the course of English literature unless you follow the ways that came through. The ways that Arab literature left its impact were through the French literature and Italian one. This study tries to approach the Arab literary elements which transmitted to English literature, in particular, Geoffrey Chaucer's masterpiece (Canterbury Tales). Chaucer had used some Arab elements like 'courtly love' and 'narrative technique' in his works. The study primarily focuses on the Arab literary impact on Chaucer's work owing to his importance in the English literature that comes from his originality and innovation in English literature where is often called the father of the English Literature. Moreover, the study sheds light on a historical tour to reveal the stages of transmitting to the Arab literary characteristics that flourished in Spain to the rest of European literatures, especially the English one.

Key words: Courtly love, Arabian tales, Arabic impact, Chaucer, Canterbury tales, From the east, light comes, Latin proverb.

1.1 Historical Approach: The Arabic Influence

In 711 A.D, a gleam of light spread in the meadows of Andalucía, south of Spain and then went beyond to the south of France, lit by foreign people in their face, hand, and tongue. These hordes, which Islam unified, entered the Iberian Peninsula carrying with them another culture which made the Gothic and their relatives Latin impressed. The new conquerors brought with them innumerable achievements in the field of science, philosophy, architecture, industry and manners of life which were not familiar to the European nations. It is quite evident that thousand Arabian words found their way to the European languages (Laulawa, 99)

It is undoubtedly known, that the language of knowledge in Europe till the Renaissance was Latin, the language of the church, and the ones who could read and write were the clergymen and nobles, who monopolized knowledge. The language of common people was vulgar or vernacular. In Spain, there were the local-romances languages such as the Castile-Leon and the Catalan, the Galician in Portugal. In the south of France was the Provençal, the old French in Paris and the Norman in Normandy, besides the Italian dialects in Italy and Germanic east of the Alps Mountains and the Old English and the Celtic in Britain. These languages had their own songs and poetry which were almost oral, not written. The Provençal area was always in contact with the Iberian Peninsula which was ruled by Muslims (ibid)

The rapid development of vernacular literature in Western Europe coincided in point of time with translation and transmission of scientific and philosophical works from the ancient Greek and later Persian, and Arab scholars through

Spain and Sicily. There was naturally, at the same time, cultural and literary as well as scientific and philosophical interchange between Islam and Christian civilizations in Western Europe. Beginning in the late eleventh century and extending through the mid-thirteenth, massive translation projects in Spain and Sicily were undertaken. A center for translation was established at Toledo which drew scholars and churchmen from all over Europe, and Toledo became known as a great international center of learning. Roger II had a similar one in Sicily. Additional centers were established in other cities of Spain and southern France. Through the translations, Europe came into contact with a wealth of learning, not all of which was of a purely scientific or philosophical nature (Lasater, 197).

Within Spain itself, the Arab culture over some seven centuries (from 711 to 1492) integrated with the Christian culture, an integration which was reflected in the vocabulary and syntax of Spanish language and in the development of Spanish poetry from Arabic models. Not only were the Arabs' dress and customs emulated by their Christian neighbors, but their alphabet was also used for Spanish language. A form of literature developed called Aljamiado, which consisted of a Romance dialect of medieval Spain written in the Arabic script, and many Mozarabic or Christian Spaniards, including some of the ecclesiastics, were more adapt at reading and writing Arabic than Latin (ibid, 198).

It is difficult, somehow, to follow the Arabic influence in the course of English literature and especially in Chaucer's literary works. However, a historical tour shows that the remarkable thing which left its impact on the European literature entirely written in these vulgar languages was the appearance of poets called (Troubadour). Those were the wandering poets composing their poetry in the Provençal language accompanied by music. The first troubadour was Guillaume the ninth, Prince of Poitier who was called William, Duke of Aquitaine. He ruled in 1087 and left eleven poems behind. These poems were considered an upheaval in the European poetry in their innovation formand content. Eleanor, Duchess of Aquitaine's grandson married Henry the second, king of England and brought with her a lot of troubadour poets to her palace who extended their influence on the English poetry till fourteenth century, Chaucer's century (Chaytor, 980).

1.2 The True Love in Arabic Poetry

The troubadour traditions were basically originated in Granada and Cordoba and especially flourished in the Arab Prince Al-Mansour bin Abi Amir's palace (961-1023) by the Arab poet Abu Al-Abbas Al-Ama. It is worth noting that the

word troubadour was probably derived from two Arabic words "tarab dowar" (Laulawa, 114)). The forms of the Arabian troubadour poetry were Mushahat and Kharjas which were similar to stanza with repeated refrain. The Arabian troubadour who developed the notion of the courtly love was inspired by the love which existed in Arabia at the pre-Islamic era which was known El-Amor de Oudre (Oudrean love) related to the Arabian tribe Oudre. They were also influenced by the notion of "el buen amor" (true love) that was dealt with by the Arab man of letter Ibn Hazim Al-Andaluci in his book *Touq Al-Hamama* (the collar of the dove) (Dronke, 328).

"The first of these secular poets of France known to us by name is William, Duke of Aquitaine (1071-1127), who already had behind him a tradition of classical and medieval love poetry in Latin and Arabic-Spanish for which there are no more than one or two parallels in the earlier Germanic languages. The troubadour poets, in their exploration of love's nature and transforming power and of the anguish of love-longing, evolve the notion of fin' amore: gracious love, noble and ennobling love-worship, for which nineteenth century scholars coined the term "courtly love" (Trapp, 13).

It is known that Chaucer was greatly inspired by the Spanish book *El Libro del Buen Amor* (the book of the good love) which was written by the Spanish author Juan Ruiz. This book is entirely based on Ibn Hazim Al-Andaluci's book *Tauq Al-Hamama*. The courtly love was not known by the European nations because they were ruled by the Church teachings. These teachings forbade the non-marital love and without being the concept of spiritual love. Arabs were people who had such an attitude of woman's sanctification and had passions which were characterized by developing mysticism and these two qualities gave the Provençal poetry a prerogative.

"Muslim women are, in consequence, lascivious, irresistibly attracted to Christian knights. The adventures of the romanticized epic in which European readers could project themselves into such a fantasy of Islamic society allowed them to indulge their prejudices. Saracen, the other name of Arab-Muslim, who were offended by the Christian, adopted the chivalric romance. Saracen maidens promised sensual fulfillment without the restraints imposed by Christian society. This was fertile ground for romance" (Barron, 87).

Chaucer mentioned that he had learned the principles of courtly love from the Arab. In the Prologue of the Good Women's Tale and many love poems, his writings were typically a translation of *Tauq Al-Hamama* book (the collar of the love). Chaucer was proud of his poetry that he had a collection of sixty books including this book, whereas he referred to a group of well-known medieval Arab authors (Laulawa, 165).

1.3 Courtly Love in Canterbury Tales

Chaucer dealt with courtly love conception in Canterbury Tales, especially in the Merchant Tale, Franklin and Squire Tales. The situation in the merchant

dark story of deceit, lust and vileness is a serious romance. One of the characters in the tale is not in love with her husband; this is in keeping with courtly love convention. Capellanus states that one cannot love one's own wife but must love the wife of some other man (Capellanus, 185).

Damien, the love-sick gentleman, had been criticized as lacking interest or sympathy, but that feeling came from the fact that Damien was so perfect an illustration of courtly love lover that he lost individuality because of the conventional nature of all his reactions. Capellanus adds in the rules of love; every lover regularly turns pale in the presence of his beloved. "when a lover suddenly catches sight of his beloved, his heart palpitates.... he whom the thought of love vexes, eats and sleeps very little... a true lover is constantly and without intermission possessed by the thought of his beloved" (ibid, 186).

Damien says:

"And ful joye and blisse is very man
Al but a squyer, highte damyan,
Which carf biforn the knight ful many a day.
He was so ravysshed on his lady May
That for the verray peyne he was ny wood
Almoost he swelte and swowned ther he stood,
So soore hath Venus hurt hym with hire brond.
This sake Damyan in Venus fyr" (ibid).

In courtly love, complaints and lays were manner of communication between lovers; therefore Chaucer employs one of his characters as an allegorical representation of love, and he displays debates in which he reveals comparison between the worldly love and divine one (Wagenknecht, 243).

"But prively a penner gan he borwe,
and in letter wroot he al his soewe,
in manere of a compleynt or a lay,
unto his faire, fresshe lady Mary" (ibid).

In courtly love convention, the life of the lover is in danger, secrecy is essential, and the pity and generosity of the beloved are prime virtues. Damien pleaded to Mary.

1.4 The Influence of Arabian Tales

The Canterbury Tales, the greatest work of Chaucer, is a collection of stories that begins with a journey of pilgrims. A number of pilgrims meet at the Tabard Inn in Southwark, near Canterbury, where the poet himself is also staying at the time; and, as he, too, is going on the same pilgrimage, he is easily persuaded to join the party. One of the favourite places of pilgrimage in that age was the shrine of the murdered St. Thomas a Becket at Canterbury. When the pilgrims are about to start their journey, the jolly host of the Tabrad Inn, Harry Baily, gives them hearty welcome and a good supper. Then he made this

proposal: the one who tells the best tale shall be given a supper in their return. The suggestion is warmly welcomed, and the *Canterbury Tales* is the result. (Lowe, 57-68-69) All this is explained in the Prologue. According to a program, each of the pilgrims was to have told four stories. The tales are not original in theme. Chaucer takes his raw material from many different sources such as Arab, French and Italian literature. But whatever he borrows, he makes entirely his own, and he remains one of the most delightful story-tellers in verse. (Tila, 4)

Undoubtedly, the themes of *Canterbury Tales* were mainly taken from Boccaccio's *Decameron* (100 tales) which itself was largely influenced by the Arabian tales *The Thousand Night and a Night*. "In these tales, nature of events interrupts the storyteller (Shahrazad), the narrator of *The Thousand Nights and a Night*. Although the day breaks in at more or less regular intervals, it almost always takes us by surprise as we are engrossed in the tale that the narrator spins. As readers, our experience portrayed in the text, yet the complexity of the narrative seduces as just it does Shahrayar". Shahrazad, considered here the main storyteller, makes Shahrayar ignore the real world and abandons his plan to kill her and instead he lives in the world of virtual and hovers in the imaginary life (Mahdi, 27).

"In the oriented collection entitled *The Thousand Nights and a Night*, the stories are told in order to postpone the execution of a condemned person. In the first case, this is done by the device of interrupting each story at crucial point, with a promise to conclude it if the execution is put off for a day" (Wagenknecht, 3).

The various frame tales whose main purpose to entertain, contain different narrators, listeners besides themes, hence they have different contexts. In fact, there is one narrator (Shahrazad), in *The Thousand Nights and a Night*, the girl who tries to soften the heart of the cruel king (Shahreyar) by telling entertaining tales. Moreover, we have seven or nine narrators in the *Book of Sindibad* and *The Seven Sages of Rome* in which a malignant queen and a prince employ the technique of various narrations to make the king declare the innocence to the prince in the trial (Mahdi, 27)

Boccaccio depicts seven women and three male companions whose role is to tell stories in an attempt to make the time pass quickly when they run from the contagious disease. Eventually, Chaucer employs more than 20 narrators, one of them Chaucer himself to alternate telling the tales "on their pilgrimage to Canterbury" (ibid).

"The idea of the poet in Chaucer's time is the maker; he is the creator of a cosmos; and Chaucer is the creator of the whole world of his creatures. He was open to the rest of cultures; no wonder that his imagination hovered to remote angles and inspired by Arabian romance and wrote it in the Squire's tale. Through the mouth of the Squire the wild, almost Arabian romance of

Cambuscan and he told it in sustained melodious verse, seldom so continuously prolonged in literature" (Chesterton, 21).

As a matter of fact, Chaucer was influenced by Boccaccio's *Decameron* (one hundred tales) that inspired *The Thousand Nights and a Night*, in addition to Dante's *Divine Comedy* which was basically influenced by the Arab man of letter Abu Al-Alaa Al-Ma'ari's book *Risalat Al-Ghufran (The Message of Forgiveness)*. In this book, Al-Ma'ari imagined that his friend Ibn Al-Qarih visited hell and heaven. In hell, Ibn Al-Qarih met many clergymen who were driven by Satan and received sorts of tortures. (Al-Ma'ari, 84-85). But he used to read Italian literature through French versions. The most remarkable influence on Chaucer's works came from France.

"Of the great Italians besides Petrarch, Chaucer was most indebted to Boccaccio and to Dante who probably influenced by an Arab book, but it is now becoming clear that much, though not all, of the influence on him that was formerly thought to be directly from the Italian, came via the French" (Hussey, 90)

Although the French influence can be found in these tales through the fabliau, the Arabic influence strongly exists. In the Summoner's prologue, the friar visited hell in dream and his guide was an angel that led him to Satan; there he found about 20,000 friars with Satan. Some of the lines are derived from Dante's description of Lucifer in the circle of hell. (Maclaine, 82-83)

The Arabic influence can also be found in Chaucer's works. In the General Prologue of *Canterbury Tales*, he writes with some satire of his Physician and mentions many Arabic names. Medicine in Chaucer's time was primitive, if it is compared with Arabic medicine and all European physicians at the time tried to use the Arabic methods in medicine.

"we knew he the olde Esculapius,

And Deyscorides, and eek Rufus, Olde Ypocras, Haly, and Galyen, Serapion, Razis, and Avycen, Averrois, Damascien, and Constantyn, Bernard, and Gatesden, and Gilbertyn." (Trapp, 248).

Haly, Serapio, Razis, Avicenna, Averrios, Damascien and Constantinus Africanus were all Muslim Physicians whose works had entered Europe through translations into Latin (ibid).

The influence of the Arabic traditions can be detected in *Canterbury Tales*. In the Physician's Tale, the Arabic traditions profoundly shed their shadows on the atmosphere of the tale. The tale is merely a family drama, telling how a father kills his daughter to preserve her virginity from demands of an unjust judge. Parental feeling often interested Chaucer. The story concerns the platonic dilemma of choosing between two horrible things (ibid, 249). The theme of the tale appeals to traditional societies which believed that personal virtue and integrity were values that should be preserved even if the price was to kill oneself. The Arab tribes, especially in pre-Islamic era, almost used to kill their

daughters for fear of falling at the hands of their enemies. It has already been a tradition in Arab societies that the most horrifying act was when an unmarried girl loses her virginity. Her parents would rather die than be so shamefully scandalized.

There is no doubt that *Chanson de Roland*, the Song of Roland, was widely read in England and left its magic in the popular imagination. The same impact which threw its shadows was the true epic of the *Geste du Roi*, of Charlemagne and his douzepers, the twelve peers of France. This epic fortified the notion of the defense of Christendom against the forces of paganism as they believed at that time (Bowden, 99-100)

"The adventures of Roalnd in the land of Saracens and his challenge to the Arab kinght Otuel were rich sources of the romances that shed their milieus on Chaucer's imagination and left their fingerprints on Chaucer's works. "Chaucer's earliest poems bring into English a French literary tradition. Medieval French literature had reached its peak long before Chaucer's lifetime: in epic, in the *Chanson de Roland* (eleventh century), and in chivalric romance". (Brewer,200)

In *The Reeve's Tale*, the relationship between Alan and the miller's daughter is rapidly tied and there is somehow rapidly sprung affection. Also, there is comic pathos in the farewell between Alan and the daughter as well as ironic contrast of romantic sentiment and bawdy situation. Chaucer found this device in French fabliau which was based on Arab one, but heightened it artistically. Farewell speeches are burlesque of continental Aube of Alba which means dawn song, conventional farewell of chivalric lovers at dawn after they spend secretly the night together, hence are intended as pure comedy and no pathos. (ibid, 51)

It can be noticed that the French fabliau and Italian worked as a medium to transfer Arabic tales to English literature.

Conclusion

Chaucer is undisputedly regarded as the father of English poetry and is one of the great pillars in English literature. At his hand, English became a universal language prior to that it was a local one. This research is somehow far from the opinions of most western scholars who imply that the Provençal poetry is just a Latin production. It traces the roots, which are not deliberately dealt by the European researchers except a few who confirm that Arabian poetry left deeply its impact on Chaucer's works. The themes of Courtly love and chivalry traditions are merely an Arabic production. The notion of true love that makes the human being suffer from severe passion which is non-existent in the Western communities governed by the Church at that time, but it does exist in Arab literature. Story-telling as a technique first emerged from Arabic narrative as it was found in *The Arabian Nights* and *Al-Maqamaat*. Such a technique

became a model by which Chaucer and post-Chaucerian writers were inspired. Shakespeare is one of those writers who used this technique in his plays. As a result, the French influence was a natural medium to transfer the Arabic heritage, enriched it with a touch of local modification, to English environment. Chaucer, in his turn, utilized this marvelous hybrid to introduce an immortal literature.

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