



## RECEPTION STUDIES IN COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

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### ABSTRACT

Comparative Literature is an interdisciplinary field which implicates the evaluation of text across cultures and reviews the patterns of connection of literatures across time and space. Anyone who has interest in this field and has spent some time to know more about comparative literature can see the inter-connections between the various literary works. Thus while reading Chaucer, we come across Boccaccio, when we read Shakespeare, we can trace the influence of many French, Italian, Spanish and Latin works. When we read Roman Literature, we come into contact with Greek literature, Persian with Arabic, Japanese with Chinese and Indian with the literatures of Europe. Whenever two literatures come into contact, it entails for wider perspective involving more than one language and one literary tradition. These interconnections resulted in certain critical changes and necessitated the widening of critical perspectives. At the same time, this helped to understand the diversities of literature and also to discover the deeper affinities between them. This trend gave importance to the reception studies in comparative literature. Thus, reception studies in comparative literature is an interdisciplinary field which encompasses a variety of disciplines, each with its own canons and practices.

Key Words: Reception studies, Comparative literature, Canon

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Comparative literature is a term which is not easy to define as it involves more than one literature at the same time. It is a literary field which studies literature and other cultural expressions across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Comparative literature has a wide horizon which encircles the literature of the entire world. Rene Etiemble, one of the pioneers of Comparative literature stressed that Comparative literature is a form of humanism. According to Margaret Chatterjee, 'Comparative literature can widen our horizons both nationally and internationally.' The inter-relationship of literature and society and the prominent concept that literature is a reflection of

life provide strong bed rocks for the development of comparative literature. also helped to reinforce the idea of comparative literature. Rene Wellek and Austin Warren explain the concept of comparative literature in three different senses. Firstly, as the study of the interconnections of world literatures. Secondly, as the study of interconnections between two or more literatures. The third sense identifies comparative literature and world literatures. (*Comparative Literature: A Case of Shaw and Bharatendu*). As Nirmala Jain points out, "the growth of comparative studies all over the world is a twentieth century phenomenon". She also adds that comparative studies can widen our horizons and

provide us with tools with which we can delve into both nation-wide and world-wide heritage. Thus the discipline of comparative literature is the study of literature in at least two ways. It is concerned with the knowledge of more than one national language and literature. It means that knowledge and application of other disciplines in the study of literature. Comparative literature has the content and form which facilitate cross-cultural and interdisciplinary study of literature and it has a history that substantiated its content and form (*Comparative Literature: Theory, Method, Application*).

Comparative Literature as a branch of study aims to cultivate cross-cultural reading. Readers can travel outside the boundaries of one national language. Those who have genuine interest in Comparative Literature trace the transformations and travels of literary genres and texts across time and space. They explore the connections of literature with history, philosophy, politics, and literary theory. And they study the intersections of literature with other cultural forms such as film, drama, the visual arts, music, and new media. In our increasingly globalized age, reception studies are also an important part of the comparative approach to literature. (<http://www.bu.edu/wll/home/why-study-comparative-literature/>)

in Comparative literature. Reception theory is a revolutionary approach in which the role of the reader gains importance.

In his book, *Reception Theory* (1984), Robert C. Holub characterizes Reception Theory as “a general shift in concern from the author and the work to the text and the reader.” Reception Theory reflects a paradigm shift in the history of literature, and it is considered “a reaction to social, intellectual, and literary developments in West Germany during the late 1960s.” According to Holub, Reception Theory was a revolutionary approach to contemporary literary criticism. This new paradigm of literary criticism pays attention to the function of the reader in a process of literary experience. Hans Robert Jauss, one of the main contributors to Reception Theory, published an essay, “The Change in the Paradigm of Literary Scholarship” in 1969. In this essay, Jauss points out the rise of the new

paradigm and emphasizes the importance of interpretation by the reader, replacing the obsolete literary scholarship methodology which involved the studies of accumulated facts. (<http://www.yumikinoshita.com/receptiontheory.pdf>)

Jauss’s theory views literature “from the perspective of the reader or consumer” and treats literature “as a dialectical process of production and reception.” In his article “Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory” (1969), Jauss states:

...the relationship of work to work must now be brought into this interaction between work and mankind, and the historical coherence of works among themselves must be seen in the interrelations of production and reception. Put another way: literature and art only obtain a history that has the character of a process when the succession of works is mediated not only through the producing subject but also through the consuming subject—through the interaction of author and public. (<http://www.yumikinoshita.com/receptiontheory.pdf>)

The field of reception studies in Comparative literature ranges over a vast stretch of time and materials from classical antiquity to the present day. It extends from literature to art, music, film or any form of art. It is thus an interdisciplinary field consisting of a variety of disciplines, each with its own canons, practices and shared working assumptions. Here the emphasis is on the reading of texts as a part of historical continuum. Reception studies offer an immense variety of perspectives to analyze a work of art based on its own working principles.

Reception studies in comparative literature gathered much momentum during mid 1960s. In its primary stage this field flourished by analyzing the reception of German Romanticism in France. In 1967, the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA) launched a series of volumes on comparative history of literatures in European languages under the supervision of an international coordinating committee consisting of sixteen schools. This became a foundation stone for reception studies in Comparative literature.

Reception studies enable us to measure the effects of a writer's literary destiny which is a combination of various factors. On one hand, there are some national factors like national politics, cultural exchanges, changing trends etc, which influence the writer. On the other hand, the changing critical attitudes also affect the writer to a great extent. For example, a book like Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* got high reputation partly due to its high critical acclaim and partly as a result of its literary criticism. However by comparing the success of the novel and its high critical reception in two countries, France and Russia, over a period of twenty years from its publication, shows how it was received in these two countries. Such a comparison of famous literary works helps in bringing out what Jauss calls its "potentiality of meaning". Thus the comparison between two or more nation's receptions can help to understand and enrich the greatness of a work of art and to appreciate its reception by different cultural canons.

Reception studies in Comparative literature is thus a massive approach and discipline of study of literature. It helps to create meaningful interaction between cultures and convey to us the changing intellectual and cultural canons of art and literature. It examines the cultural context and setting in which the work appears. Thus the emerging new theories and methodological frameworks will help in deeper and broader understanding of reception studies in Comparative literature.

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