

Beyond Theory:**The Necessity of a Pluralist Framework in Comparative Literature****Chinmay Pandharipande¹ and M. Jagadish Babu²****Abstract:**

There are many ways of practising comparative literary analysis; the methods differ. When one says 'method', what does the term imply? Generally, to have a method, one must first have a theory. It is this dynamic of theory and method that the paper intends to explore. It is because of the pluralist assumption of comparative literature - the plurality of languages and cultures - the paper proposes that reading or methods of a scholar cannot be guided by theories. However, reading itself implies reading from a perspective. This 'perspective' is what this paper calls a flexible framework that is democratic enough to allow the scholar to perceive the differences in texts. In the spirit of pluralism, the paper puts forth a framework of intersubjectivity, understanding, and the foregrounding of difference.

Keywords: Plurality, Intersubjectivity, Essence, Entextualisation, and Difference.

Introduction:

The so-called crisis that Comparative Literature is in, is a crisis of methodology. To use comparison as a tool for the phenomenon of reading is essentially what comparative theory tries to propose. This paper looks at one of the theories, and by extension, a method of comparative literature, featured in *A Companion To Comparative Literature*, to test its validity and to propose the idea of a conceptual framework as opposed to theory. In their introduction to *A Companion to Comparative Literature*, Ali Behdad and Dominic Thomas say that dominant theoretical paradigms like feminism, deconstruction, psychoanalysis etc. have become prevalent in the study of literary texts in the late 20th century, and new theoretical interventions like new historicism and post-colonialism have defined and highly influenced the field of comparative literature. Behdad and Thomas quote Kenneth Surin when

¹ Chinmay Pandharipande teaches literature and journalism at Mount Carmel College, Bengaluru. He also holds an M.A. in Comparative Literature from EFL University, Hyderabad.

² M. Jagadish Babu is a Postdoctoral Research Associate in the Archiving and Translation, Department of History, Goldsmiths, University of London.

he says “from a traditional kind of ‘comp lit’ [the practice of comparative literature is moving] towards a more intellectually ramified ‘comparitism’ involving a diverse range of theoretical paradigms” (Behdad et al. 4).

This paper calls into question theoretical paradigms and their potential to be turned into actual practice that assists in a comparative reading. But, what, in the first place, is a comparative reading? And why comparison? In what ways can one form relations with the text? This paper explores such questions, attempts to understand and answer them, and proposes a framework for the reading of literary texts that can unravel the ‘being that is seen through literature’. It does so by first providing a subjective reading of Michael Lucey’s theory. This paper then provides explores a subjective understanding of literature and comparative literature, and then talks about the implications of such proposition: to move from the fixity of theory to the fluidity of a conceptual framework.

Michael Lucey’s *A Literary Object’s Contextual Life and its Implications*:

Featured under ‘theoretical directions’ in Behdad and Thomas’s book, Michael Lucey opens his theoretical standpoint by asking a very important question: how does one make meaning of a work of art or literature? He draws the attention of the reader not only to the production of texts but asks them to think of their transmission, circulation and reproduction. He says that when one takes into consideration these phenomena, the meaning held by the text becomes clear. Lucey then goes on to describe various ways in which the ability of a reader to experience a text is based on the “history that brought us to it, on the institutional situation in which we find ourselves with it ...” (Behdad et al. 121). The knowledge, sensitivity, and experience of an individual, he says, are not simply personal, but outcomes of his particular interaction with the structured universe. It is this collective experience of a work of art by many such people, he says, that helps produce a public meaning, as a result of the circulation and transmission of literary objects. According to him, the initial days of the life of a literary object, after its publication, are ‘fundamentally social.’ He quotes from Pierre Bourdieu’s *Intellectual Field and Creative Project* - “Society intervenes at the very centre of the creative project and the way artists have to ‘face the social definition of their work... the success or failure it has had, the interpretation of it that has been given” (Behdad et al. 122).

He then talks about how the meaning of literary texts is made differently when one is given a particular direction to reading before their reading happens. He uses Colette's short story as an example to substantiate his argument. He draws on an example from the French secondary school curriculum from 1920-1930 that featured Colette's *The Last Fire* and *Sleepless Nights*, which were dedicated to her female lover, Mathilde de Morny. However, unlike the original short stories, the stories included in the curriculum rendered different meanings because of the 'strong form of editing' they underwent to intentionally depict heterosexuality in the place of homosexuality for convenient inclusion into the school curriculum. This, Lucey says, happens through 'entextualisation' – a "process of lifting text out of context, placing it in another context and adding metapragmatic qualifications to it, thus specifying the conditions for how texts should be understood, what they mean and stand for, and so on" (Behdad et al. 125).

Honore de Balzac's *The Girl with the Golden Eyes* is another French work from the 19th century that, Lucey says, is interested in the history of same-sex sexualities and their literary representation. This text illustrates the sociological and epistemological curiosity of Balzac with respect to the same-sex relationships he witnessed around him. Lucey says that "the text or the contexts on their own, reveals to us now something about the history of sexuality, about the use of this literary text within the history of sexuality, and also about the ongoing production of meaning through repeated contextualization" (Behdad et al. 129). As some cultures do not allow certain reading practices of Colette's work, the English resisted the circulation of Balzac's work in England because of the "differing French and English conceptualization of and valuation of what is 'real' and 'realistic' in literary representation ... [and] differing aesthetic tendencies ... [based on] aesthetic, sociological, and epistemological dimensions" (Behdad et al. 134).

Theoretical and Literary Analysis of Lucey's Standpoint:

Lucey puts forth his theory of entextualisation and explores same-sex relationships in the two texts by suspending them in different contexts. Lucey's theory is illuminatory on the history of a text, its context, and its location. The word location, as scholars believe, is important to

the practice of Comparative Literature as it plays a vital role in the ever-present cycle of expression or utterance and the understanding and interpretation of that utterance.

This paper foregrounds a particular way of *relating* to a literary work. For the practice of Comparative Literature, that is, to compare, one must take into consideration more than one text. Comparison, this way, presupposes a practice that always looks at something that is 'more than one'. It presupposes an 'other'. The comparatist must make sense of the two or more literary texts in front of them, understand them and then provide their relation to the texts. For this, one must first start by understanding what a text is. According to Roland Barthes' *From Work to Text*, a text is a "methodological field" that is experienced in language and does not end on a certain page like a book. The text lives inside discourse, weaves through other texts and is plural in nature. What one can understand by this statement is that the state of being of a text is undeniably plural - that it is always in dialogue or in relation with another text, yet a Text, as opposed to a work, cannot be systematised and engulfed inside a theory.

The comparatist perspective in this way, that is of presupposing an 'other', upholds plurality in its assumption. To establish one's relation to texts, one must engage themselves in the reading of them. To study this reading then becomes one of the objects of study for comparatists.

Reading, for a comparatist, is a singular event. This means that it happens anew every time. Through the event of reading, Literature is born. Syed A. Sayeed explains this phenomenon lucidly when he says: "Literature is a complex event, which begins with the aim of the author to create a text that would compel a particular perspective and terminates in the success of the reader in appropriating that text in a certain mode. To use a somewhat old-fashioned terminology, a text has only literary potentiality, which must be activated by the reader for literature to happen" (Sayeed 28). The key word here is 'activated' because it is the reader's act of reading and understanding that brings literature into existence. As Barthes would say, the author is dead the moment the text is produced. What then makes a text 'literature' is the act of reading and an active engagement of the reader who brings meaning to the text, which otherwise would be a piece of paper with symbols written on it. As each reader comes to the text with their own understanding of his surroundings and experiences, every act of reading is unique in its own time and space and each unique act thus produces

different meanings. Barthes writes, “but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author” (148). The meaning being made from the text is made ‘by’ the ‘destination,’ the reader’ and not the ‘origin,’ the author, Barthes points out. This way, the meaning of a book is plural as it is made and remade endlessly by different readers rather than being assigned to the notion of an all-powerful author.

This endeavour to make meaning is then also affected and dependent on the *language-use* of the author and this must be acknowledged when one is writing about the event of literature. David E. Linge, in the introduction to Gadamer’s *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, writes: “Our possession of language, or better, our possession by language, is the ontological condition for our understanding of the texts that address us” (Gadamar xxix). What is ontological here is the being of ‘our understanding’ and reading, but this ontology is existentially embodied by readers. This essentialises the role of the reader: that the reader is an embodied consciousness placed in a particular time and space who is engaged in the textual practice of reading.

It is through this understanding of literature that one can associate literature with being as something existential, as one enters a particular situation through literature, that is, through language and makes meaning out of it. What one encounters inside literature is the *other* or *difference*. Comparative Literature foregrounds the fact that it can never truly know the difference that it encounters in a text. Hence, a comparatist can only provide their relation to the text. The ethical impulse underlying this practice seeks to understand the difference, rather than erase it or misappropriate it for personal gain. In his *Notes on Comparative Literature*, Sayeed writes: “... It [Comparative Literature] denies itself the luxury of a deferring silence as an option. It confronts the external plurality of literatures while embracing the interior singularity of literature without compromise and out of this fecund negotiation comes all that is valuable in the endeavour of comparative literature” (Sayeed 32). What is presented in the preceding two statements is what lies at the core of comparative literature - the practice of it cannot be silent to the fact that, while comparing, the two literary elements are not taken in isolation. They exist in relation to the literary others in their respective systems while retaining the autonomy of expression. What this means is that the single texts - interior singularities - cannot be representative of the languages or literary

systems - external pluralities - they are placed in; they are part of a system, but not representative of the system itself. Comparative literature, according to Sayeed, is the practice of comprehending these systems without compromising the independence of the particulars - literature - that are inside the systems.

The assumption of Comparative Literature that difference exists does not seek to intentionally draw strict boundaries, but rather, it propels itself to consider more than a singularity. The establishment that the subject is always in relation to difference begs the question: what is this relation to difference? The relation that the comparatist takes up is one of understanding, and not of knowing. This is the ethical impetus of comparative thought - that the 'other' can never be an object that one *knows*; the other is always a subject, like an 'I', so that an 'I' can *relate* to them. Therefore, one's reading of the other will always be subjective, and never objective, as one's utterances are always human, and therefore conditioned by experience and influence. They are located inside what Raymond Williams calls the 'structures of feeling' (132).

However, one must avoid the danger of saying that one's expression or utterance is representative of one's structure of feeling or context. This is because every expression is a response to a situation and it exists in its singularity not to show us the situation but to meaning itself. At the same time, one cannot be outside of history in some isolated location and grasp the meaning of the text. One cannot, as Hans Robert Jauss says, 'feign objectivity' (29). Ipshita Chanda, in her introduction to *Historiography*, writes:

"Perhaps the most tantalising answer to this dilemma has been offered by Marx, who pointed out that man makes history, but not in the conditions of his own making. It is this dialectic (between agency and structure, or between the individual and the collective, or self and system, or any corresponding dyad according to the theoretical proclivities of the reader) that forms the dynamic of history as a process..." (Chanda viii).

So, therefore, while man does write and does make history, what the event of writing points towards is not *only* history, or *only contexts*. Events are always open to interpretation when one realises that the interpreters are thinking subjects. The challenge then, is to have a framework that guides one's interpretation but does not fix it. It is here that intersubjectivity can become the field of comparative literature as comparatists navigate the waters of various

literatures. While some scholars agree that contexts are important and that they can be found inside texts, this paper differs from Lucey in the following ways. Lucey fails to provide his understanding of what a literary object is when he writes:

It can become part of our critical practice to learn to watch ourselves doing those things, to find ways to objectify our own relations with literary objects, to objectify the set of practices that make up our “approach” to literature, to study the history (in which we ourselves are caught up) of the use, circulation, transmission of this or that literary or cultural artefact (Behdad et al. 121).

Comparatists compare, and for one to compare texts one has to understand a text, rather than use it. The understanding can then be articulated as a *relation* to the text. If one were to approach a text with a predetermined ‘usage’ of it in their mind, one would end up objectifying the difference one encounters in the text rather than understanding it, simply because one would be ‘looking for a use’ of the difference. As discussed above, one cannot objectify their relations with literary texts. It is always a relation of *someone* with someone or something else. A comparative reading, however, can question and study one’s subjective relations with a text as the study or reading of a subject, and not of an object.

Lucey uses Collete and Balzac’s stories to comment on the sexual politics of their time. The problem with using what is inside works of fiction to support what is non-fiction is that this inquiry then becomes sociological/anthropological and fails to be a literary enquiry. To make a literary enquiry would be to show how a work of literature produces the literary effect. Using literature to show how society functions would have to come under a different discipline. Dr Syed Sayeed explains this split between fact and fiction in his paper, *Freedom of Expression, Literature, Fact and Fiction*: “Fiction is an expression of what is imagined, which means that it does not represent the real. *We perceive what is real and imagine what is not real* [and vice versa] ... Therefore, fiction is the *other* of fact and they stand in a relationship of mutual exclusiveness” (7). Further, he says, fact and fiction are only related to each other by their “*mutual non-relation*” (10). Thus, one of the very important points to understand is that when fact enters a frame of fiction - a book, a movie, a play - it loses its hold on its truth-value, as fiction fundamentally is what is imagined or created. So, it is important to remember that literature is a fictive institution.

However, the *ensorship* of the letter “e” in Colette’s *Nuits Blanches* which Lucey uses to put forth his theory is very much real. The decision to censor same-sex love in the publication shows the nature of that particular publication house and points to the existence of, among other things, a dominant structure of feeling that was heteronormative in nature which erased the differences in sexuality.

Lucey then introduces the concept of ‘entextualisation’. He asks the reader to consider the possibility of an aspect of a text becoming salient only later. He says that ‘re-entextualization’ allows this. But, one does not need to ‘re-contextualise’ a text to understand it. Rather, one needs to study how it was received. In his theory, Lucey talks about circulation and transmission but never about the reception of the text by the reader. The reader must not be treated passively but as a formative of history itself. One must aim to make their enquiries with an understanding that presupposes a dialogical relationship to the text. Different readings from different times make up the eventfulness of literary history - in this way, the text is like an undulating landscape: always opening and closing, revealing and concealing at the same time new experiences that new readers pull into the present by reading something that was written in a different time. Jauss explicates this understanding in his theory of reception and proposes a ‘horizon of expectation’ as a tool to understand reception. When he writes about reading in the context of experience, he says that reading an unknown text will have references or inferences from something that is known and this knowledge builds a reader's expectation towards a middle and an end of the text. Each text, in this way, evokes earlier ‘horizons’ in the genre, time and place. “... Through the negation of the familiar experiences or through raising newly articulated experiences to the level of consciousness,” the horizons of expectations then get altered or pushed or even just met because of the event of reading, and these effects, in turn, can produce poetic effects on the reader (Jauss 25).

What can be inferred from this is that the horizons of the dominant structures of feeling in which Collete and Balzac wrote, were hostile towards the expressions of same-sex relationships. Jauss’s theory also explains the rise in studying lesbian and gay writing that Lucey writes about: “With the rise of lesbian and gay literary studies in the late 1970s, the importance of the original context of *The Tendrils of the Vine* began to be reasserted” (Behdad et al. 125). This shows that the horizons of the readers of the 1970s were stretched

further to expect or to accommodate the same expressions of same-sex relationships that were erased or frowned upon at the time of their production.

In his *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, Hans George Gadamer presents the thoughts of Aristotle: “Man is of logos who has the capacity of thought unlike animals” (59). The word ‘logos’ mean ‘reason,’ ‘concept,’ and ‘law’, and the concept of ‘language’ and its use underlies all these references. He says that language “has the ability to ‘communicate’ everything that he [a human] means, there exists a common meaning ... in the form of social life ... [and] all of this is possible because he possesses language” (Gadamer 60). The different attributions of meaning are possible because “human language takes place in signs that are not rigid ... not only in the sense that there are different languages but also in the sense that within the same language, the same expression can designate different things. It is precisely this possibility of attributing different meanings to the text that has the potential to break the horizon of expectations and affect the outcome of the event of literature.

Lucey then looks at Balzac’s *The Girl With the Golden Eyes* as a manifestation based on real life. This work of literature is read, perceived, and discussed in the background of the structure of feeling and horizon of expectations of that society which assigns a value to it. The value attached to a text is an outcome of the literary tastes of society, its culture, and its symbolic systems (Behdad et al. 128). On such a basis, Lucey wishes to look at the history of sexuality in the text which is impossible, as matters of factuality cannot be found in a work of fiction. In the next paragraph, he says:

“When you suspend a text in a particular context, you reveal how it points to that context, how it indexes it. ... indexing [towards] a context is not just part of what *texts* do, it is also part of our own daily practice of existing, of rendering our lives intelligible to ourselves and others. Making ourselves intelligible in different ways in different contexts ... is one of the most basic forms of social competence one possesses ... *The Girl with the Golden Eyes* is ... about the social intelligibility of certain sexual practices and cultures in particular.” (Behdad et al. 128)

Contexts or structures of feeling do play a part in understanding texts. But to read a text only to understand the context or the structure of feeling at that time and place is to rob the text of its singularity, of the unique utterance of language-use by the author. If a text is read with a predetermined notion of understanding the context of its time and space, then it is

not a literary reading. It could be a reading motivated by a socio-economic or political query wherein one ‘knows’ what political affairs went on when, what economic factors were present in influencing the text and so on. Since literature, or reading, is a singular event and because of one’s relation to the text, one understands that the encountered ‘other’ is not an object that serves the purpose of “pointing outwards towards” a context, but it is the subject of their own story. It is this act of relating to the text in such a way that reading does not fall into the trap of representation but embraces the recognition of articulation of a voice inside hierarchical structures that then becomes the ethical standpoint for a comparatist.

Lucey’s reading of *The Girl With The Golden Eyes* is based on how the culture of a society is formed with respect to the previous knowledge system of sexuality, how it has been understood, the evolving nature of sexuality, and how these ideas are perceived, discussed, and standardised as conventions. However, as discussed previously, such an understanding is not the purpose of a literary text since it is fiction and an imaginative imitation of beings of society. Furthermore, if one uses set contexts and conceptual boxes to understand a text, it will not be understanding, but merely *fitting* the text according to the context; a structure. One must aim to fit their concepts and theories to the text rather than the opposite. Amiya Dev calls this ‘Comparative Literature from Below.’ He says, “... every time we do have fresh data – it is simply a matter of recognising them.” (93). According to Dev, one must not look for structures that resemble other structures in new data.

Studying and questioning one’s reading makes the event of literature and experience of it richer. Comparative Literature may seem like a way of stating the simple, *ethical* and commonsensical that one cannot speak for the other. It specifically does because one lives in a world where there is an equality of difference. Dominant groups generally tend to speak for the non-dominant and objectify the other. In the light of comparative practice, this paper foregrounds difference in a way that acknowledges and celebrates the other in the spirit of pluralism.

Application of Lucey’s Theory to Literary Texts and its Implications:

For this exercise, the authors read Anna Bhau Sathe’s *Gold From The Grave*, translated from Marathi into English by Vernon Gonsalves. If one were to read this text in the light of Lucey’s theory where the social distribution of ideologies and historical knowledge systems concerning their evolution forms the authentic reading of the text, then that would differ from

the original reading of the same text. While the authors understand the plight of the quarry worker and the inequality between the rich and poor *in* the text, that was not all that the paper took from the text. In fact, it wasn't the central concern of this reading. For example, one of the things that was learnt was that jackals existed in the story. A lot of attention was also paid to the language of the translator. The mention of Kurla, an area in the city of Mumbai, made us want to look it up and look at its images. This reading of the text didn't point "indexically" to a social or an economic situation. It struck wonder about what would happen if one attempted a translation of the text and if one would use the same words.

Another text taken into consideration for this paper is C.S. Lakshmi's, aka Ambai, *The Kitchen In The Corner Of The House*. This story was written in the light of the Self-Respect Movement in Tamil Nadu led by women to address several important issues like the Hindi imposition, caste conflicts, liquor prohibition, practices of oppression of women, and religious hatred prevalent during and after independence in India (Lakshmi 1997). C. S. Lakshmi penned several short stories in Tamil especially addressing the issues of women before marriage, in marital life, and widowhood, and this is one of them. At the University of Chicago, J. Bernard Bate and A. K. Ramanujan with a couple of other members of their class decided to translate this story as a part of their class project and published it in 1990 (Ambai, 1992).

Conventionally, a feminist reading of this text upholds the tortured experiences of Indian women trapped in kitchens by patriarchal norms of society and depicts their exhausting daily routine of cooking which is romanticised in the name of 'feeding and taking care of the family' and how that physically and mentally damages women. In fact, this story is taught in the curriculum of undergraduate education at a university in Bangalore, India under the context of Indian feminist writings. However, *Pappaji's* interior monologue in response to Minakshi's questions about the condition of the kitchen immensely affected the findings of this paper:

"Oh, little girl, little Mysore girl who hasn't lived here all your life, what do you need mountains for? Why do you need their greenness? And what's the connection between Rajasthani cuisine, a window and a cistern, little girl? Huh, little girl, you chatterbox, who refuses to put on a veil, little dark girl who seduced my boy?" (Ambai 25)

Both Pappaji and Jiji have complaints about how Minkashi cooks, and can only cook Mysore food but not Rajasthani food. While expressing his distress about Minakshi's resistance against upholding Rajasthani cultural norms (for instance, denying to cover her head with a veil), Pappaji makes stereotypical comments on her colour by referring to her as a 'little dark girl'. The authors were taken aback by this statement and could not undo its impact on them and look at the functioning of their house under a toxic patriarchal system. They were struck by the cultural conflict encountered by an educated South-Indian daughter-in-law who is married into a North-Indian patriarchal household, and their focus was settled on looking for such conflicts in the rest of the story. To sum up, the cultural conflict in the story strongly stood out for them over the conventional feminist reading of the patriarchal and oppressive practices foregrounded in the story.

As Lucey's theory argues, the history of the literary object accumulated through production, transmission, and circulation should impact one's reading of the text and what it means to them. But, the authors of this paper knew no history of the text, its source, inspiration, author, author's works, and her contribution to South Asian Studies. Although one was expected to read this story in the context of feminist writings, the reading and understanding of this text significantly varied. It has varied because they were struck by certain elements of the text and they continued to have an impact on them.

The paper's approach and reading of this text destroys the assumptions of Lucey's theory that every text is read in the knowledge of its production, transmission, and circulation. In the context of schooling in literature and cultures, Lucey depicts schools as 'habit-forming forces' that train students to assign a value to literary and cultural artefacts and transmit some sort of "knowledge and experience to apprehend and interpret values" (Behdad et al. 122). This knowledge and experience, again, comes from the sanitised making and production of meaning of society. While a feminist reading of this text is important to sensitise society towards the experiences of women, this paper argues, from a literary and ethical standpoint, prescribing this as the *only* way to read a text kills the possibility of plural reading and relation and homogenises the experience of reading. If one were to read this text and not understand the situation of the women in the text, then their reading and articulation of the same can be called into question from the walls of their ideologies.

Conclusion:



A study of these two texts would also have to include the *interliterary* condition that is responsible for the evolution of the respective languages, Marathi and Tamil. This paper would also say that while one aims for a “Comparative Literature from Below”, it is not only that one should fit theories to texts, but one must also provide their *individual relation* to the difference, singularity, and plurality that one encounters inside the text. Ultimately, Comparative Literature is a way of looking at the difference and this ‘way’ is at the level of the individual. A scholar’s engagement with it must be an engagement of *understanding* rather than *knowing*. This can be understood well through Dr. Sayeed’s essay *A Note on Understanding* where he makes the distinction between the verb ‘knowing’ as a process and the noun ‘knowledge’, which is the product of that process. Understanding, however, is both a process and a product; it is a state.

“But ultimately, truth is a matter of just facts. It is a question of whether or not something is so. Our relation to the world, in fact, the orientation of our consciousness to the world is not exhausted by facts. We may know some facts. But we must understand what they mean. This is not always a matter of logical implication. It is to do with organising the facts into a structure and seeing what they mean. This is understanding.” (Sayeed 8)

Sayeed says that *entities are known*, whereas *relations are understood*. This is crucial to the practice of Comparative Literature because comparatists, as subjects, look at other subjects. This ‘way of looking’ can only be relational simply because subjects can only *understand* themselves in relation to the world, that is in relation to the difference in it. So, the ethics of engaging with difference have to be of understanding. From *A Note on Understanding*, one learns that language is not isolated from understanding. In fact, to use language is to show understanding. “...language embodies understanding,” writes Syed (9). In this way, language is ontologically understood because it is fundamentally and existentially tied to a being; language and man are inseparable. It is on these aforementioned frameworks this paper understands the practice of comparative reading. It is at once a way of understanding ourselves and also the world. It is to understand the *being* seen through literature.

Micheal Lucey’s theory contributes greatly to the field of Comparative Literature. What he says about ‘context’ is of particular relevance to this discipline. For the comparison of two or more texts, one must ground each of the texts in their relevant literary systems and

time and place (chronotope). This endeavour is a task of rigour, research, knowledge, and reading.

If one looks at the etymology of the word context, one learns that it is a combination of two Latin words: 'con', meaning together, and 'texere', which refers to the action of weaving. One must weave together the 'surroundings' of a text and understand the discourse around it in order to actually compare it with another. The other text too must be understood this way. Such a study is undeniably needed for Comparative Literature. However, one of the pitfalls of comparative literary studies is that, in search for comparison and meaning, it essentialises the 'other' that it is attempting a dialogue with. This is why Dr. Sayeed says that comparative literature lives through the "tension between essentialism and anti-essentialism (32)" in *Notes On Comparative Literature*. To be open, to be welcoming, to truly listen to an 'other' is the assumption one has to undertake when one engages in such a study. Only then can the study be pluralist. There have been, and there are enough examples of the erasure of differences. Therefore, on the quest of comparative studies, it would prove to be futile if one ends up contributing to such an erasure. Lucey's theory unfortunately 'places' the context on the text rather than discovering the text in its own context. It also forgets that, as mentioned earlier, contexts change from individual to individual.

It is only ethical, then, to embrace a conceptual framework that allows a scholar to expand or contract itself for the scholar to perceive the 'other'. The other does not exist for a predetermined context - the other just is, emphatically so.

Works Cited:

- Ambai. Bate, J. Bernad. Ramanujan, K. A. "A Kitchen in the Corner of the House." *Journal of South Asian Literature*, Michigan State University, 1992, Vol. 27, pp. 21-42
- Barthes, Roland. "From Work to Text." 1977. *Image-Music-Text*. Fontana Press. pp. 155-164
- Barthes, Roland., 1968. "The Death of the Author." *Image-Music-Text*. Fontana Press. pp. 142-148
- Dev, Amiya. "Comparative Literature from Below." *Jadavpur Journal of Comparative Literature*. Vol 29. 1990-91. Pp. 91-96.
- Gadamer, George Hans. "Man and Language." *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, Translated and Edited by David E. Linge, University of California Press, London, 1976, pp. 59-68.
- Jauss, Robert Hans. "Toward an Aesthetic of Reception." *Theory and History of Literature*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1982, Vol. 02, pp. 3-45.
- Lakshmi, S. C. "Bodies Called Women: Some Thoughts on Gender, Ethnicity and Nation." *Economics and Political Weekly*, November 1997, Vol. 32, pp. 2953-2962
- Lucey, Michael. "A Literary Object's Contextual Life." *Companion to Comparative Literature*, Wiley-Blackwell, Edited by Ali Behdad and Dominic Thomas, 2011.
- Sayeed, Syed. "A Note on Understanding". *Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol 23, No 2. 2016. 120-136.
- Sayeed, A. Syed. "Being Seen Through Literature". *Academia*, https://www.academia.edu/42750299/Being_Seen_Through_Literature, Web. 16 March 2021.
- Sayeed, Syed. "Freedom of Expression, Literature, Fact and Fiction." *Language, Literature and Interdisciplinary Studies*. Vol 1, Issue 1. <http://ellids.com/research/volumesissues/archive-1-1/1-1-sayeed/>
- Sayeed, Syed. "Response". *Issues in Comparative Literature*, Vol 1, Centre of Advanced Study in Comparative Literature. Jadavpur University 2012.