

Study Materials on Comparative Literature - 2

**II MA English Literature
(2017 Regulations)**

**Topic:
Claudio Guillen's "First Definitions"**

Prepared by
Dr. Anvar Sadhath
Associate Professor

Postgraduate & Research Department of English
The New College (Autonomous)
Chennai – 600 014.

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“First Definitions” by Claudio Guillen

How does Claudio Guillen define Comparative literature?

In his “First Definitions”, the opening chapter from his book, *The Challenge of Comparative Literature*, Claudio Guillen attempts to offer a definition of comparative literature. He begins his discussions by saying that ‘comparative literature’ is not a new label in literary studies and it is usually understood as a systematic study of “supranational assemblages”. By using the phrase, ‘supranational assemblages’, he suggests that Comparative Literature deals with literary works that have transcended their national boundaries.

However, Guillen does not consider Comparative Literature as engaging in an examination of literature from an international point of view, because the identity of comparative literature does not solely depend on its observers. Rather, Guillen thinks that the primary presumption of Comparative Literature is to understand the fact that the concept of literature cannot be regarded as national in nature. Guillen uses the term supranational rather than international to emphasize that the main point of departure in Comparative Literature is not found in the national literature, nor in the interrelationships between them, but in the worldwide scope of literary works. He cites the example of the worldwide use of certain multi secular genres like comedy, methods like rhyme and movements like Romanticism, to bring home this point.

Although it is difficult to clearly define Comparative Literature, it can be clearly stated that Comparative Literature as a discipline continues to reflect on the basic dimensions of literary history. Claudio Guillen proposes to approach Comparative Literature initially as an affinity, desire and activity that examines literature beyond cultural nationalism and national boundaries. He associates the concept of Comparative Literature to the concept of world literature introduced by Goethe. That is, Guillen considered Comparative literature as dealing with literature from across the world, and he does not want literature to be confined by narrow narcissistic as well as nationalist tendencies. Thus he draws the attention of the scholars of literature to turn to Comparative as the need of the changing times. Following Adrian Marino, he believes that Comparativism cannot be stressed enough.

Points to Remember:

1. 'Comparative literature' is not a new label. It is usually understood as a systematic study of "supranational assemblages".
2. By using the phrase, 'supranational assemblages', he suggests that Comparative Literature deals with literary works that have transcended their national boundaries.
3. Comparative Literature does not engage in an examination of literature from an international point of view, because the identity of comparative literature does not solely depend on its observers.
4. According to Guillen the concept of literature cannot be regarded as national in nature.
5. Guillen uses the term supranational rather than international to emphasize that the main point of departure in Comparative Literature is not found in the national literature, nor in the interrelationships between them, but in the worldwide scope of literary works.
6. Comparative Literature as a discipline continues to reflect on the basic dimensions of literary history.
7. Claudio Guillen proposes to approach Comparative Literature initially as an affinity, desire and activity that examines literature beyond cultural nationalism and national boundaries.
8. He associates the concept of Comparative Literature to the concept of world literature introduced by Goethe.