Beyond Binarisms

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Discontinuities and Displacements:
Studies in Comparative Literature

IMAGOLOGY AND RELATIONAL COMPLEXITY:
THE GROUP STEREOTYPE

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The issues raised by the concept of representation have, in the present day, achieved a huge amplitude and an unusual diversity due to the fact that they are contemplated by various domains of knowledge and from different perspectives, from Sociology to the Arts, from Philosophy to the Social Sciences.

In this context, imagology appears as a very demanded area of knowledge, since it revolves around imagetical representations and studies a multitude of representational forms. Then, the challenge that imagology faces today is the ability to respond to the diverse requests that appear in this area, and in order to do so, imagology must be able to activate a kind of knowledge that allows the establishment of connecting points and unifying ties between the different areas of research, exploring in this manner, the uniqueness of a kind of *"in between"* – a fundamentally relational space.

Numerous scholars have been calling attention to this issue, amongst them Hugo Dyserink and Joep Leerssen. The first of the two vehemently pointed out, in 1994, that imagology occupies a space of cooperation with other disciplines, thus opening up an essential path for Comparative Literature:

> ... il s'en détache une spécificité qui pourrait facilement trouver de nouvelles voies menant à une coopération avec d'autres disciplines ou à une coopération avec d'autres spécialités dans le cadre des sciences humaines – voire même à son intégration dans celles-ci [...] notamment à l'anthropologie philosophique, à la pedagogie (ou andragogie) comparée, à la politologie ... (1994: 94).

Joep Leerssen (2000: 287) has recently also stressed the "challenge" of studying the configuration of "national character" (national stereotypes) and "imagemes",[1]

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[1] Joep Leersen suggests "that imagemes (stereotypical schemata) are typically characterized by their inherent... National imagemes (stereotypical schemata) are defined by their Janus-faced ambivalence and contradictory nature" (2000).

by taking into consideration their pragmatic dimensions or, in other words, taking into account the "audience" factor and its diverse contexts which bear multiple historicity.

Due to the peculiar fact that imagology occupies a position within the fertile ground of the "in between" domain, and can therefore be approached by various disciplines (whose borders intercept and partially superimpose each other), a path can be seen emerging in order to face it: the one in which imagology begins to take advantage of the different contributions of diverse disciplines assuming the interdisciplinary countenance (and dimension) that necessarily come with them.

The recent developments in the scientific areas of physics, biology and neurology, among others, have demonstrated the necessity of taking into consideration, for example, random chance, non-linearity and auto-organization, as inevitable elements in the observation and particular study of certain phenomena or specific situations. While considering the epistemological implications of this situation, Edgar Morin (1991: 287) highlighted *three main principles of complex thought*: the hologramatic principle, the dialogical principle and the principle of recursive organization:

> . The hologramatic principle establishes that not only parts are in the whole, but the whole are in the parts.
> . The dialogic principle establishes that duality can be maintained at the core of a unit (duality in oneness). It links two terms that are complementary and antagonist at the same time.
> . The organizational recursivity principle establishes that products and effects are, at the same time, causes and producers of that which produces them (- that breaks down the cause/effect linear idea, of product/producer, of structure/superstructure - retroaction mechanisms).

Within these principles certain fundamental issues emerge, such as multidimensionality, recursivity, contradiction, and the mechanisms of retroactivity and dialogical[2] interactivity, that belong to a relational paradigm, in which literary works have a place, due to the complexity of the relations that they establish internally and the bonds they create with society. Furthermore the complexity that can be observed within the compositional web of the literary work is generated in a

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[2] According to Edgar Morin, "The word "dialogic" means that it will be impossible to arrive at any single principle or any key word whatsoever. A simple principle will always have something irreducible about it, whether chance, uncertainty, contradiction or coherence. But at the same time the dialogic medium, despite its intrinsic limitation, holds the potential for establishing an interplay between concepts which are at once complementary, competitive and contradictory, operating in what I call the tetragram. What this means is that a phenomenon cannot be reduced to any one of these concepts and that it can only be understood through the interplay of all four, a variable interplay according to the specific phenomenon contemplated. In other words, the dialogic principle involves the complementary interaction of concepts which, if taken as absolutes, would be contradictory and mutually exclusive" (apud, Bennegadi, 2000).

mimetic game that, without being a mere reflex of the ordered chaos of human relationships in society, establishes strong links with those relationships, by representing them in an elaborate and artistic way. In this manner it becomes clear that, in order to better understand the complex nature of the relationship between literature and society, it is fundamental to adopt a multidisciplinary analytical perspective that can be guided by the hand of imagology.

However, in an attempt to explore the diverse contributions of the different disciplines, it is important to draw near the concept of stereotype as it has been theorized in the domain of social psychology, to the recent theory on fiction proposed by Kendall Walton.

Concerning the first domain, a pioneering book has been published (in 2003) as a result of the gathering of numerous studies of Australian, Belgian and Dutch social psychologists that investigated the issues raised by the creation of stereotypes: *Stereotypes as Explanations: The Formation of Meaningful Beliefs about Social Group*. By bringing a crucial contribution to understand the relevancy of the processes behind the creation of stereotypes in the relationships amongst diverse social groups, this theoretical conceptualization opens up a communication gateway to literary hermeneutics, since it allows us to see the common points between the psychic formation of stereotypes in social terms, and the way in which the literary world produces the representation of characters and social types and how stereotypes are configured in fiction.

For those who contributed to this publication "stereotypes are impressions of groups held by people", [that is], "stereotypes are shared group *beliefs*" (McGarty *et* alii, 2002: 5). Hereas, in the referred second domain, according to Kendall Walton's recent theory on fictional representation, fiction is generated through a game of make-believe, sketching a number of beliefs that presume an interaction between actually believing and wanting to believe.

These two conceptualizations have a common viewpoint: both show the importance of the sharing of belief amongst individuals and amongst groups. This paper intends to highlight that it is worthwhile to explore this common viewpoint since it will cast new light on the two domains of knowledge.

By understanding stereotypes as "psychological constructs", social psychologists stated that:

> stereotypes are normative beliefs just like other beliefs. They are shared by members of groups not just through the coincidence of common experience or the existence of shared knowledge within the society, but because members of groups act to coordinate their behaviour [...] especially in intergroup conflict (McGarty *et alii*, 2002: 5).

In his turn, Kendall Walton's theory on fiction and artistic representation, systematised in his book *Mimesis as Make-Believe: on the Foundations of the Representational*

Arts, reveals itself to be rather persuasive[3] due to its comprehensive and ductile exegesis of the generation of beliefs and make-believe in fiction. As K. Walton demonstrates in his astonishing theorization, fiction largely surpasses the artistic field – being present in fabling, in our imagination, in the simulation, make-believe and pretence games that we so often take part in. But, as the author himself makes clear, the relation between fiction and fantasy itself is not new, (as it also was not in 1965 when Gombrich compares pictures to wooden horses) however, the dividends withdrawn from this generative similarity have been scarce, and this is why, in his opinion, it is necessary to properly explore the similarities and the dissimilarities between fiction and general imagination (Walton, 1990: 4).

The great quality leap that can be verified in waltonian theorization has been achieved by simply making this kinship the starting point for the theoretical perspective of artistic fiction, and of understanding artistic representation as pretence: a *make-believe* game. This may look like a small leap, but actually it is extremely relevant since it implies *conceptualizing* this sort of *make-believe* (this special kind of pretence game), and implies querying its ontological status and theorizing the difference (guessed long ago by Pessoa) between the pretence of *make-believe* and a lie.

According to K. Walton (1990: 21, 39) there is a kind of fiction that has no props or supports, a kind of fiction of (almost) free contours and (almost) no binding rules, the one that is implied in imagining; but there exists also another kind that is generated (mandated, prescribed) by certain props that impels fiction, in a game controlled by rules and social conventions that are more or less established, and that is the kind of fiction that is put forward by representational works of art. When it comes to fiction, K. Walton believes that the implicated attitude is one of "pretending belief" (included within the games of social pretence) – an understanding that has a much more positive sign than the theory of artistic convention crystallised in Coleridge's expression "the willing suspension of disbelief".[4] The relational, participative and retroactive (to a certain extent) attitude

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[3] The well known journal *Philosophy* states that this is a "work of great importance that ill set the agenda for discussions inaesthetics for a long time to come".

[4] Kendall Walton's proposal surpasses the negative sense implied in the attitude of a "willing suspending of disbelief" that, according to Coleridge, characterizes the relation between the public and a theatrical representation or any other. Coleridge's sentence, frequently used to explain the attitude towards a fictional world, presupposes, "a suspension of the act of comparison" concerning reality, leading into a kind of "negative belief". (Coleridge, 1971: 426). Considering this traditional form of perceiving the attitude towards fiction is mischievous and considering it an inappropriate expression, K. Walton, since 1983, proposes to substitute it by a more positive idea of "pretending to believe" in a game of "make-believe" that accounts for our involvement and "psychological interaction" with fiction.

required in make-believe games radically differs from the unidirectional intentionality[5] merely attributed to the receiver as it is presupposed in Coleridge's formula.[6]

In effect, for Kendall Walton, the intentionality of artistic fiction implicates a relational game between the producer of the fiction and the receiver. Hence the concept of prescription plays a fundamental role in his theory:

> Imaginings are constrained also; some are proper, appropriate in certain contexts, and others are not. Herein lies the key to the notion of fictional truth. Briefly, a fictional truth consists in there being a prescription or mandate in some context to imagine something. Fictional propositions are propositions that are *to be* imagined – whether or not they are in fact imagined. [...] Anyone who refuses to imagine what was agreed on refuses to "play the game" or plays it improperly. He breaks a rule. (Walton, 1990: 39).

In the specific case of literary fiction a whole series of conventions are presupposed which, once activated, promotes this ontological imaginative belief. By involving an enormous complexity of aspects, the creation of stereotypes also depends on social conventions and deals with psychologisms that have configurative mechanisms and characterization processes. This is the reason why Joep Leersen stresses that, concerning the "creation and dissemination of national stereotypes", literary studies are of paramount importance.

> Since [...] national characterization usually involves the idea of the motivation of behaviour, descriptions of national peculiarities will often gravitate to the register of narrativity – exempla, myths, parables, and jokes, as well as novels and dramas. [...] To put it bluntly: national stereotyping is easier in a context that requires the reader's willing suspension of disbelief. In many cases, therefore, national stereotyping is not merely a matter of affixing certain psychological traits to a given nation or ethnic group but also the attribution of certain actorial roles to a certain nationality within a narrative configuration (Leerssen, 2000: 281, 282).

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[5] Thus, Walton's position comes closer to Husserl's intentionality theory and Beardsley's idea of co-intentionality, and corroborates Rainer Warning's (1979) conceptualization of fiction as a fundamentally contractual relationship (apud, Villanueva, 1991: 176-7).

[6] In reality, it is mainly the receiver's intentionality that seems to be emphasized in Coleridge formula. Some interpretations of the "deautomation" mechanism considered in phenomenological theories are similar. Indeed, "if, to Husserl, things are not their mirror image – because he eliminates the mental image going between the conscientiousness and the world (the world is in conscientiousness), the intentionality is what directs the stream of conscientiousness on what belongs to that conscientiousness" (Bordini, 1990: 35). However, it must be recalled that the understanding of intentionality, even in Husserl, is not unique, because his theories show some evolution and differences, as Dominique Souches-Dagues highlights (1972: 290).

This line of reasoning explored by Joep Leerssen presupposes a proximity between stereotyped cultural configurations and literary configurations, but becomes somewhat incoherent when he links the "involvement of the concept of behavioural motivation", verified in the creation of stereotypes, with "the willing suspension of disbelief", attributed to the fictional game by Coleridge.

This contradiction can be overcome if we consider the fictional game as both a mutually intentional and a proactive one, as in Kendall Walton's proposal (very briefly described above). In fact, both perspectives (Joep Leerssen and Kendall Walton's approaches) imply a more or less conscious intentionality, a relational movement and a development within the imaginary of the human being.

Closely related to this idea is the understanding of the process of stereotyping as an unstable, or "mobile" phenomenon, not a static one, perceiving the idea that stereotypes may present themselves with multiple variables, appearing as "variations of a theme", according to Marco Cinnirella[7] (1997:46). With support on studies and inquiries, this investigator (following the research line of Henri Taifel) stresses the fact that, in what concerns the functionality of intergroupal relationships, stereotypes *adapt*, and *mould* themselves so to say, according to the different social situations:[8]

> If the social stereotypes endorsed by an individual are associated with the social group to which he or she owes allegiance, then it is likely that social stereotypes *beliefs* will fluctuate in salience parallel with their associated social identities. An associated assumption states that individuals might endorse quite disparate social stereotypes of the same group, in different situations, and when different social identities are salient (Cinnirella, 1997: 48).

Then, it is not surprising that the "nuances" introduced by this scholar may translate the possibility of configurative fluctuation in the creation of stereotypes as we can see in the following definition:

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[7] C. Stott e J. Drury stress: "stereotyping is a dynamic process through which social groups make sense of and pursue their identity-related goals within intergroup contexts (Haslam, Turner, Oakes, Reynolds, & Doosje, 2002; Oakes et al., 1999; Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). In this sense stereotypes are understood to be both (a) a representation (or construction) of the ingroup and its surrounding social relations and (b) an aspect of the social psychology that actually produces those very same social relationships. Therefore stereotyping is one aspect of a dynamic inter-related process involving subjectivity, group processes and intergroup relations" (Haslam et al., 2002; Turner & Oakes, 1986).

[8] Such is the case of the example, presented by Marco Cinnirella, based on the observation of college students who do not show sexist or racist stereotyping in some situations, but let them emerge in a specific kind of sports context frequently connotated as a sexist and racist one: rugby (Cf. Cinnirella, 1997: 48).

> A stereotype may essentially be thought of as a set of beliefs about the members of social category or social group. In particular, stereotypes are *belief systems which associate attitudes, behaviours and personality characteristics with members of a social category* (Cinnirella, 1997: 37).

A similar approach can be seen in a different research area – discursive pragmatism. For example, Teun Van Dijk highlights the manner in which group representations give shape to ideologies:

> Processes of social identification ultimately take place on the shared social representations we call ideologies. The social inspiration for a theory of ideological structure therefore must be sought in the basic properties of (social) groupness, of which the following ones have particular relevance: 1. Membership devices (gender, ethnicity, appearance, origin, etc.): Who *are* we? 2. Actions: What do we *do*? 3. Aims: *Why* do we do this? 4. Norms and Values: What is good or bad? 5. Position: What is our position in society, and how we relate to other groups? 6. Resources: What is ours? What do we want to have/ keep at all costs? (Van Dijk, 2001: 14).

According to these perspectives, stereotypes must be perceived under the complex web of group relations from which they emerge, as well as from the ties (often oppositions) that these establish with other groups – even more carefully those stereotypes that are related to national self-characterization and the characterization of foreign countries, or, in general, stereotypes of the "other" seen as foreigner – whether it is considered a *phobia,* as a *mania* or as a *filia* (Machado; Pageaux, 2001: 61).

Therefore it is fundamental to consider stereotypes in view of complexity theories. This is where the role of literature can become crucial since her stereotyped configurations are highly complex. In fact, literature often deals with type characters and characters that represent social groups and their figurativeness, necessarily inserted in a plot; it emerges inside a web of connections between characters and the compositional complexity of the work. Furthermore, the literary work itself is subjugated to a complex game of conventional intra and extra barrier relationships.

What is extraordinary is the capacity that writers often reveal as they subtly and rapidly apprehend the main features of contemporary knowledge and the recent aspects that circulate in the world of ideas: they are able to give shape, artistically, to their particular perception in relation to the changes in the ways of thinking, capturing the right moments of change, creating fictions that illustrate these ideas and subtle alterations. Ian McEwan accomplishes this in his novel *Saturday* by configuring as his main character a neurosurgeon dealing closely with the brain and the way it processes images and transmits impressions by neurological stimuli. He is aware of what is known and what is not known about how these impressions interconnect, and how they transform themselves into rationalization exercises that we commonly call conscience.

Captivating is the way how the author systematically portrays the main character weighing his different perceptions, his reactions to received stimuli, revealing thus the most intimate and personal aspects of his life, and also his family life in its social dimension. Beyond this auto-analysis the neurosurgeon also constantly analyses other people's reactions – relatives, patients, colleagues and strangers – with whom he interacts. Within this continuous discernment – that mimics physical and psychic experiences of one day in the life of this neurosurgeon – different ways of thinking about the *other* and diverse prejudices and ideologies seem to proliferate. Just before the invasion of Iraq and under constant fear of an Islamic extremists attack in London, several episodes of the novel represent different attitudes in relation to the war in Iraq and the British participation in such a process. Because he gives medical care to an Iraqi teacher who endured torture under Saddam's regime, and because this character describes him the numerous atrocities and aberrations of the dictatorship, Henry Perowne sees the pacifist's demonstration, that is taking place that Saturday in London, from a different point of view than his daughter who participates in it. It is within this confrontation that a provocative sentence appears: "All over Europe, all over the world, people are gathering to express their preference for peace and for torture" (McEwan, 2004: 153). However, this confrontation of ideas emerges unfurled in its complexity: the different postures are not only generational, but also of a professional, social and national nature; the beliefs, fears, rejections, and attitudes are the result of specific experiences of different individuals, in their different social, professional or national groups. One of Harry's colleagues, an anaesthetist, is form the USA American, and therefore his agreement to with the invasion is an understandable viewpoint in a nationalist light. But it is not from a nationalistic stereotyped logical viewpoint that the Iraqi professor is favourable to the invasion. In other words, stereotypical viewpoints do exist, but they may be shaded, modified or even inverted in their logic by diverse circumstances that result from randomness and from chaos which, jointly with order, rule life. Little nothings or differences of grouping may change or twist attitudes; postures depend on knowledge and since it isn't possible to process or acquire all the knowledge, uncertainties and doubts constantly assail the main character. This is even more relevant since, as a professional neurologist, he inevitably contemplates the whole complexity of perception processing, the process of becoming conscious of something, of the modelling of thought, and the control of action. While deliberating upon patient cases that reveal various problems – functional, traumatic, degenerative or other (agnosia is a paradigmatic example) –, the neurosurgeon leads the reader through the whole complexity of the processing of information, an thus brings him near to the idea of urgent revision of the crystallized idea of consciousness in a Cartesian style. The author echoes here Daniel Denett's idea of challenging the "cartesian theatre of consciousness" (cf. Lewin, 2001: 155), or António Damásio considerations when he mentions a case of agnosia (2000: 195).

With an intensely contemporary flavour, Ian McEwan's book unveils hesitations (175), uncertainties (221), and ambivalences on the positioning of the "*self*" in his interaction with others.

Many novels mould this interactive game which is woven from images that groups create of one another, blending, sometimes, into national autostereotypes and heterostereotypes of the "other", as representative of another culture.

This can be illustrated by the dense and corrosive autostereotype of Portugal sketched by Mário de Carvalho in his novel *Fantasia para dois Coronéis e uma Piscina* (*Fantasy for Two Colonels and a Pull*). Through ridicule, caricature and satire, the *imagemes* configured in this novel give shape to a negative stereotype of Portuguese society, revealing certain recurrent group behaviours, turned up acute by a low and debased standard of attitudes: the simian performances of the football fans, the ignorance of the organizers of regional festivities, or the "babbling disease" that affects the whole country.

Equally revealing of the complexity and the unstableness of group stereotypes, are the well known short narratives created by Luis Fernando Veríssimo that demonstrate stereotypical situations of Brazilian society and at the same time, in an amusing manner, deconstruct its logic and its foundations. Such is the case, in one of those narratives, of the two old friends, who quarrelled over large ideological differences in their youth – one being a communist, the other a strict catholic – and now laugh about their young sectarianism and hug each other in an agreeable mutual understanding as followers of Krisnamon, the propagandist of "Verdade Única" (Universal Truth). This story is ironically called "O Reencontro" (The Reunion) and is one among the multiple representations created by its author in *Comédias da Vida Privada (Private Life Comedies)*.

These paradigmatic examples may lead to the conclusion that literary imagology, through the correlation of different domains, presents itself as an area of knowledge that adds potential to new readings in literary studies, for although not ignoring the sociological domain, it does not let itself be diluted into it, acquiring its own area of knowledge. Thus, imagology can "contribute towards the discussion that revolves around auto and hetero images" (Sousa, 2004: 350), as well as group images and national or cultural images, which must be deconstructed in order for us to lead better with them in our lives.

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Discontinuities and Displacements:
Studies in Comparative Literature

The present volume contains a selection of texts on the roots and routes of Comparativism, the critical discourses and the role of the intellectual and on translation studies, all relevant themes in Comparative Literature today. The first essays deal with issues such as the origins and transformations of Comparative Literature, Imagology, the role of the intellectual, problems of critical judgment and of Literary Historiography, Folklore and Narratives of European Exploration. The following texts consist of more specific studies of authors, genres and literary movements, and the last are turned towards the question of translation. Here, a wide spectrum of studies is offered which include a variety of themes: translation of erotic or Human Rights texts, self-translation, relations between travel literature and literary translation, translation of specific authors and the debate about the concept of translation in the works of authors who are at the same time creative writers and translators.