# COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

## AS A

# TRANSCULTURAL DISCIPLINE

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ANNABLUME

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AS A TRANSCULTURAL DISCIPLINE

# CONTENTS

# IMAGOLOGY AND TRANSNATIONALISM: STEREOTYPES, HETERO-IMAGOTYPES AND ALLOPHILIA IN RHYS HUGHES AND JOÃO DE MELO

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Intercultural communication and the way we perceive foreigners are crucial concerns in contemporary society. Throughout History, and in several ways, Literature has provided us with vivid representations of foreign and national characters, in their frequent cultural clashes, helping us to better understand humanity.

This paper aims at identifying the importance of Imagology inside the literary criticism domain as an adequate hermeneutical approach to better understand hetero-images and auto-images represented in literary texts. It also claims that recent research on stereotypes achieved in Social Psychology will vastly contribute to the analysis of the images and *counter-images* represented in literary works, as I have pointed out in the "Xenographies" - Wolverhampton Conference, in 2009, and in the introduction of the book *Imagotipos Literários* (2011). Philippe Beck also noted, in 2010, the vicinity of stereotypes study and the construction of self and hetero-images, and advocated the idea of conjoint and interdisciplinary research.

If the ways and the strategies of perceiving different groups (and their behaviours) are relevant skills to deal more effectively with the "other," it is also important to fully grasp the meaning of 'identity' and 'alterity' stressed by philosophers such as E. Levinas and to

acknowledge that their relationships are ruled by the complexity principles proposed by Edgar Morin.

A third aspect to take into account is the fluidity that characterizes contemporary society defined by its mobility.

When one takes stereotypes into consideration, recent studies underline how the stereotyping process is closely connected to categorization, which is a normal and common mechanism of the knowledge process. Marco Cinnirella has proposed an efficient definition of stereotypes:

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

Stereotypes are imbedded in social dynamics and according to Craig McGarty their formation is made up of "explanation" and "justification", and both functions help to construct understandings of the differences between social groups exploring the explanatory potential of categories (McGarty, 2002 a: 16, 33).

To explain stereotypes, Craig McGarty, Vicent Yserbyt and Russell Spears identified three guiding principles:

> (a)— stereotypes are aids to explanation, (b) stereotypes are energy-saving devices, and (c) stereotypes are shared group beliefs. The first of these implies that stereotypes should form so as to help the perceiver make sense of a situation, the second implies that stereotypes should form to reduce effort on the part of the perceiver, and the third implies that stereotypes should be formed in line with the accepted vies or norms of social groups that the perceiver belongs to. (McGarty, 2002 a: 2)

In order to deal with the full palette of stereotyping formation, Russell Spears goes further and argues that:

> ... it is necessary to bear in mind a series of key principles drawn from the social identity/self categorization approach. These are the *meaning* principle, the *distinctiveness* principle, the *enhancement* principle and the *reality* principle. (*apud* McGarty, Yserbyt and Spears, 2002:14)

But if the stereotyping categorization is a common and normal process, it doesn't mean it is exempt of negativism, hasted judgments or prejudice, as Milton J. Bennett alerts us:

> Stereotypes arise when we act as if all members of a culture or group share the same characteristics. Stereotypes can be attached to an assumed indicator of group membership, such as race, religion, ethnicity, age or gender, as well as national culture. If it's respectful, it is considered a POSITIVE STEREOTYPE. However, if it's disrespectful and sarcastic, it is a NEGATIVE STEREOTYPE. Stereotypes of both sorts are problematic in intercultural communication for several obvious reasons. Indeed it gives a false sense of understanding the culture of others. (Bennett, 1998: 6)

The stereotype process acquires special relevance when applied to the figure of the *foreigner* perceived in a nationalistic dimension. Here, the "mental model"[5] built in personal memories is impregnated with diachronic and synchronic cultural images depending of geographical and cultural relationships between countries.

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5. This concept is developed by Teun van Dijk, who claims that some steps have been taken in this direction within the field of cognitive psychology, with the development of the theoretical construct of the *mental model*: 'Mental models are representations in the personal memory of events or, as the term episodic memory suggests, of episodes. [...] In a theory of discourse, the notion of a model is especially attractive, since it accounts for the (personal, subjective) interpretation of the discourse by language users. Indeed, we may now simply say that to understand a discourse ultimately (and via a number of complex processes) consists in the construction of a model. [...] ... models are essentially personal and subjective. They embody personal interpretations and experiences of actions, events and discourse about such episodes, and this is true for all practices.' (Van Dijk, *Ideology*, pp. 79-80).

With its well known complex modes, Literature often explores the different *nuances* of the "foreigner" images and counter-images, frequently opposing imagined figurations of self-national characters to foreigner national characters.

The novel *Madrid Sea (O Mar de Madrid)*, by the Portuguese writer João de Melo provides an example of these confrontations when the author depicts the complexity of the relationship between nationalist auto-images and hetero-images as they are perceived by the narrator. This novel portrays the prejudiced representations that several writers (Spanish, Latin American and Portuguese) have about their foreign colleagues when they meet at a conference in Madrid. The narrator expresses his astonishment regarding the writers' disdain of the (supposed) affinities that should arise between them. Instead they criticize one another differentiating poets from novelists, critics and essayists. From his own perspective, the narrator unveils the xenophobic vision of a celebrated Portuguese writer *vis-à-vis* Spain and Spaniards, which exemplifies the biased hetero-imagotypes frequently emerging when vicinity is at stake:

> And what did he think of Spain?
>
> Well, that it was what is called a latent country, made up of other latent countries. And that it existed between the limit of integrity and the limit of disintegration. First of all, the poet thought that Spain was big and powerful in excess. It wasn't handy for a Portuguese like him, and with his temper, to deal with Spain every day as neighbour. The countries, the bigger they are the more insolent they look at the eyes of the smaller ones. (…) Secondly, it was a country of fervid people, gifted with extreme nerves, and which character (...) filled Spain with an insufferable genius (...).
>
> And there they were, Spaniards, disdaining everything and everyone and treating us as we were simpletons, poor devils, Fado singing people, people of small voices that exhale sighs and fatality in the interior of darkened houses[6]. (Melo, 2006:189).

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6. Portuguese text: "E que pensava ele de Espanha? Ora, que era o que se chama um país latente, feito de outros países latentes. E que existia entre o limite da integridade e o limite da desintegração. Em primeiro lugar, achava o poeta que Espanha era grande e ponderosa

Clearly the geographical and historical questions traditionally opposing Spain and Portugal are caricatured here, but this and others discourses show that national issues are still important, as Peter Flynn, Joep Leerssen and Luc van Doorslaer (2016: 1) argue in their recently published book:

> National ideologies and cultural borders are still with us, and indeed play a far more prominent role in contemporary "identity politics", exclusionism and xenophobia than avant-garde theorists and artist seem to realize. In addition, they are part of a heritage, which is still an informing and self-replicating presence in our present-day cultural ambience. A sense of nationality and ethnicity, with its attendant stereotyping, still inform our daily lives (…). (Flynn, Leerssen & van Doorslaer, 2016:1)

Nevertheless, not only are many writers aware of the resilient force of nationality, but they also acutely represent the multiplicity of the *nuances* that it can embrace, namely the possibility of self-criticism that Literature can endorse.

Rhys Hughes, for example, in his weird and fantastic fictions, conveys self-critical visions of his fellow countrymen. In *The Mermaid of Curitiba* (A Sereia de Curitiba), the narrator, transformed in a traveller, imaginatively runs away from everyday life to foreign lands giving an ironical account of his own environment and constantly undermining a conceited[7] auto-imagotype of the Swansea bohemians group with whom the

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em excesso. Não dava jeito nenhum a um português da sua tempera lidar com ela dia a dia e em posição de vizinhança. Os países, quanto maiores forem, mais insolentes parecem aos olhos dos pequenos. (…) Em segundo lugar, era um país de gente férvida, dotada de nervos extremos, cujo carácter (…) a enchia de um mau génio intolerável (…). [E] lá estavam eles, espanhóis, a desdenhar de tudo e todos e a tartar-nos como se fôramos uns trouxas, uns pobres diabos, gente canora do fado, povo de vozes baixinhas que exalavam suspiros e fatalidade no interior de casas escuras. (Melo, 2006: 189).

7.  According to Corine Albrecht, "the foreign is not an objective quality of whatever is distant, strange (…) but relative vis-à-vis the observer subjectivity experience or knowledge. (…) The projection of other nations (…) likewise highlights the interdependence of (national) images of the foreign and those of one's own self." (Albrecht, 2007: 327).

narrator identifies[8] himself and whom he presents as differentiated individuals, quoting their own name and talking about their skills:

> The Swansea bohemians like to complain that they have no cultural scene, and they make these complaints as they play music, write books, paint or sculpt, discuss philosophy...
> What they really mean is that they are not really enjoying themselves as they feel they should, though (...) [t]hey want to remain what they are, nothing else.
> In the house of Huw Rees, drummer and wine specialist, they get together to rehearse music and little ironies, sometimes even to wear hats. ... One wet night, Stuart Ross...leaned his bass against the wall and sat down on the sofa. ... He had been a member of a jazz funk band, but had left the band under a cloud of bad mood. In Wales everybody leaves everything under the clouds, there is no big choice (...). (Hughes, 2007: 30).

Presenting the members of his group as differentiated individuals and talking about their personalities and skills, the narrator shows that he knows them so well he could not apply the named "outgroup homogeneity effect". Scott Plous explains this effect as follows:

> In the language of social psychology, an "ingroup" is a group to which someone belongs, and an "outgroup" is a group to which the person does not belong (hence, one person's ingroup may be another person's outgroup, and vice versa). Research on the outgroup homogeneity effect has found that when it comes to attitudes, values, personality traits, and other characteristics, people tend to see outgroup members as more alike than ingroup members. (Plous, 2002: 10)

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8. The strategy to conceal Huw Rees from being the author is so obvious that it is nothing but a feigned goal.

Assuming their curiosity toward the "other", both writers Rhys Hughes and João de Melo, through their narrators and their characters, reveal their admiration and allophilia when it comes to concerning foreigners: the narrator of *Madrid Sea* falls in love with a Catalan writer and the traveller of *The Mermaid of Curitiba* wants to go after his Brazilian loved mermaid even deep into the ocean. Although written in English, this last work, was "especially created for publication in Portuguese[9]" as a tribute to the openness and the acceptance Rhys Hughes experiences with Brazilian and Portuguese people.

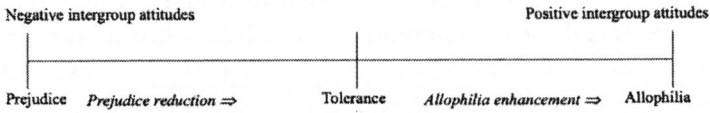In this sense, both works illustrate and concur with the shift claimed by Todd Pittinsky:

> It is becoming increasingly clear that the key to promoting positive intergroup relations is to shift the focus away from whether members of one group *dislike* members of another group and, instead, to place the focus squarely on how much the members of one group *like* the members of another group. We believe that the Allophilia Scale[10] is an important tool that can serve as a backbone to this paradigm shift. (Pittinsky et alii, 2011: 55).

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9. The author allows for the possibility of the publication of separate texts, provided that this would not constitute a whole that would prevent him from "preserving the integrity" of the project. Of course a reader that is familiar with *A New Universal History of Infamy* and other works by this author will realize that the frontiers between truth and falsehood, pretense and fiction are very porous; hence, such claims should be taken lightly, coming from a writer that feels so free to contradict himself. One example of this breaking of boundaries in the game of metalepsis (frequently used by the author) can be found in the following excerpt of short story entitled "Que Pena!" ("What a Shame!"): "[Don Cosquilla]'s dreams were the normal dreams of fictional characters, lies within lies, which gives rise to the useless speculation that a falsity under another falsity *may* cancel all the untruth out, like two negative numbers multiplied together, but probably wont. And in this particular case it didn't. Perhaps he dreamed he was being tickled by an octopus or *may* be his dreams didn't concern himself at all and were devoted solely to a young girl who wished to travel to the evening star. I don't know or care, and neither should you" (Hughes, 2008).

10. This author claims that "The Allophilia Scale is a valid and reliable tool for measuring the multidimensional construct of positive attitudes toward outgroups." (Pittinsky et alii, 2011: 56).

This shift is represented as follows:

Figure 1. *Prejudice, Tolerance, and Allophilia*

Negative intergroup attitudes                                    Positive intergroup attitudes

Prejudice    *Prejudice reduction* ⇒         Tolerance      *Allophilia enhancement* ⇒    Allophilia

Rhys Hughes declares his attraction to Brazilians and Portuguese, and shows that he has internalized certain aspects of the "foreign" culture — such as his knowledge of songs, instruments (corroborated, for example, by his reference to the *cavaquinho*, a string instrument used in Portuguese folk music) and historical events and places (Hughes, 2006: 94). In several short stories, the author also demonstrates his admiration for the Spanish landscape, and its colourful towns and praises cultural habits even if in a fantastic timbre or humorous register. He clearly shows a high degree of *admiration* and *socialization* with foreign people — two of the five components ascribed to allophilia by Todd L. Pittinsky:

## The Five Components of Allophilia

Trust    Socializing    Admiration    Kinship    Ability
◀ 01     ◀ 02           ◀ 03          ◀ 04       ◀ 05

05                01
20%      20%
04    22%    20%      02
18%
03
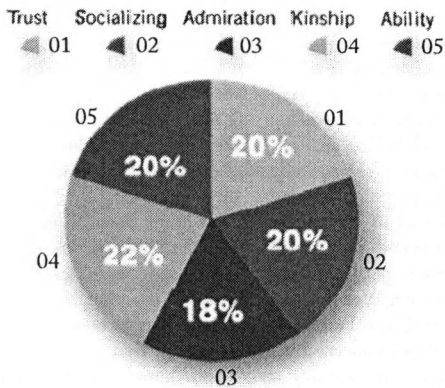
Following a tripartite model of attitudes[11] that distinguish affective, behavioral and cognitive evaluations, Todd L Pittinsky names Affection, Comfort, Kinship, and Enthusiasm as to affective evaluations, and Engagement consisting of behavioural evaluations (putting aside cognitive evaluations for the time being[12]).

But what Rhys Hughes and João de Melo fictions (as many others pieces of fictions) suggest is that the prejudiced and the allophilic relationships are mingled and intertwined presupposing what Edgar Morin (1991: 291) calls the principles of complexity — the hologrammatic[13], the dialogic and the recursive principles:

> The hologramatic principle establishes that not only parts are in the whole, but the whole is in the parts.
>
> The dialogic principle establishes that duality can be maintained at the core of a unit. 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.

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11. Model proposed earlier by D. Katz & Stotland, in 1959, and Rosenberg et al., in 1960 (*apud* Pittinsky, 2005).

12. As Pittinsky says cognitive evaluations were excluded from the scale early in the process.

13. Edgar Morin explains the hologrammatic principle as follows: "... in human beings as in other living creatures, the whole is present within the parts; every cell of a multicellular organism contains the totality of its genetic patrimony, and society inasmuch as a whole is present within every individual in his language, knowledge, obligations, and standards. Just as each singular point of a hologram contains the totality of information of that which it represents, each singular cell, singular individual contains the whole of which he is part and which is at the same time part of him." (Morin, 1999: 14).

Considering E. Morin principles of complexity, I proposed a table (Figure 2) that correlates different types pf relationships with various degrees of emotion :

| Type of relationship / Emotionality | Relationship of contiguity | Relationship of ownership or subsumption |
|---|---|---|
| High degree of conflict | Hate, disdain, phobia | Eugenie, xenophobia racism, exile, ostracism |
| Medium degree of conflict | Contempt, fear, apprehensiveness, awkwardness | Separation, separation, rejection of immigrants/emigrants |
| Zero degree of conflict / confraternization | Indifference, coalescence | Coalescence |
| Medium degree of confraternization | Allophilia, courtesy, friendship, cohabitation | Hybridism, contamination, acceptance of immigrants/emigrants |
| High degree of confraternization | Falling in love, mirage, maniac/obsessive fascination, enlargement | Mixture, cross-breading, identification |

But, in order to emphasize the recursive and multidirectional of these connections, I also proposed a diagram (Figure 3) that could, somehow, depict feedbacks, answers in loop and non-linear connections (Simões, 2011: 46):

The fictional works of both authors considered here represent this complexity in their own ways, proving to be melting pots of several representations of the 'other' seen in his radical alterity, as thought by E. Levinas:

> The metaphysical other is other with an alterity that is not formal, is not the simple reverse of identity, and is not formed out of resistance to the same, but is prior to every initiative, to all imperialism of the same. It is other with an alterity constitutive of the very content of the other. Other with an alterity that does not limit the same, for in limiting the same the other would not be rigorously other (...). Alterity is possible only starting from *me*. (Levinas, 1969: 39, 40)[14]

The writer João de Melo had already illustrated the encounter or the confrontation with the 'other' in his novel *Happy People in Tears* where he depicts the Portuguese diaspora from the Azores Islands to America in times of poverty, censorship and obscurantism due to the dictatorial regime of Salazar. But, in *Madrid Sea* the author goes even further writing about the traditional hatred between Portugal and Spain side by side with the love between a Portuguese poet, Francisco, and Dolors, a Catalan novelist[15]. In this novel love and allophilia operate as a metaphorical counterpart of xenophobia and hate. The protagonist is well aware of his roots and responds patriotically when a Spanish teacher starts a xenophobic discourse about Portugal; on the other side, he can not take the outdated

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14. The alterity, the radical heterogeneity of the other, is possible only if the other is other with respect to a term whose essence is to remain at the point of departure, to serve as *entry* into the relation, to be the same not relatively but absolutely. *A term can remain absolutely at the point of departure of relationship only as I.* (Levinas, 1969: 36).
Pluralism implies a radical alterity of the other, whom I do not simply *conceive* by relation to myself, but *confront* out of my egoism. The alterity of the Other is in him and is not relative to me; it *reveals* itself. But I have access to it proceeding from myself and not through a comparison of myself with the other. I have access to the alterity of the Other from the society I maintain with him, and not by quitting this relation in order to reflect on its terms. (Levinas, 1969: 121).
15. The encounter takes place during the international Iberian meeting of writers in Madrid refered above.

rejection of a Portuguese poet endorsing prejudiced stereotypes about Spaniards.

Rootedness is, in fact, an indispensable element to understanding mobility, as Stephen Greenblatt claims when he chooses rootedness as the fifth point of his "Mobility studies manifesto". Actually, not only does he say that "mobility studies should analyse the sensation of rootedness" (Greenblatt, 2010: 252) but he also explains how the connection between mobility and rootedness is but an apparent paradox, because they implicate each other.

Another innovative contribution of his "manifesto" is the alertness to hidden movements of people, like tourism, study abroad, etc., which are not usually taken as seriously as migrant or exile movements.

This is precisely the case of several contemporary writers and of both writers at hand here: João de Melo was, for more than ten years, cultural advisor in the Portuguese Embassy in Madrid and Rhys Hughes, more than a tourist, was a sojourner[16] in Brazil, Portugal and Spain. Another exemple of this sujet can be seen in the text "Sky Badger!", written in 2007, where Rhys Hughes talks about his sojourn in the Yator Valle[17] (near Granada), called "El valle de sensaciónes", narrating some experienced episodes there: for example, the day when he went "harvesting capers with an old resident, Ricardo, who d[id]n't speak a word of English", or the moment when he "was asked what [he] missed most about Wales, if anything" and he gave the wrong answer[18] by not saying he missed his English friends.

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16. This distinction was proposed by Michael Byram as follow: "Where the tourist remains essentially unchanged, the sojourner has the opportunity to learn and be educated, acquiring the capacity to critique and improve their own and others' conditions". Although for Michael Byram the sojourner seems to be equivalent to a migrant, we think that the word could be applied to the traveller that stays in contact with local people for shorter or longer periods.

17. A communal village analogous to Yegen village.

18. Rhys Hughes (2007) amusingly explains why it was a wrong answer: "I gave the wrong answer -- 'Bombay Mix' -- when in fact I should have said 'My friends and/or the sea.' I *am* missing those things, and Hannah whom I grew very close to while living in Waunarlwydd. Dare I say I'm even missing the rain? No, I dare not."

The author himself portrays the complexity of the liaisons between rootedness, identity and urbane features through an ironical short story entitled "The Furious Walnuts". Here, the protagonist faces real problems because "[h]is Scottishness was growing worse by the minute" causing him to be fired. Playfully, the narrator tells Walter astonishment when he sees people disposing of their identities and observes that when "shells of identity [were] falling off and rattling on the pavement (…) a horde of imps" were taking them. Trying to solve his Scottishness in the growing "Rampant Internationalism" environment, Walter decided to undergo a surgery that was not successful as the surgeon wishes to admit: "Your head seems to have remained Scottish while the rest of you has altered. You have become a walking analogue of the British Isles. Your body is England, your arms are Wales and your legs reach all the way down to Cornwall" (Hughes, 1995: 127-128).

Allegorically, this satirical version of the *golem* myth is an example of the imaginative ways Literature dramatizes the complexity of identities. Even upside down or in other subversive modes, fiction offers us artistic possible worlds where we are able to read the complexity of relationships in humankind — so long as we pay attention!

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