

## A brief theoretical overview of imagological literary studies

PhD student Nataliia Potapenko  
Universitatea „Dunărea de Jos” din Galați

**Abstract:** *One of the leading research strategies for studying the images of countries is imagology. In a broad sense, this concept can be interpreted as knowledge about the image of another country and people. The main sources of this field are culture, literature, language and folklore. Imagology has acquired an interdisciplinary character, thus being of great importance in literary studies. Literary imagology studies the issue of the literary depiction of other peoples, it investigates how images enter the consciousness of society in various types of discourse, in particular in fiction, and then are transformed into stereotypical images and form the nation's perception of itself and other peoples. In modern conditions, the study of the peculiarities of perception of the country image in literature is of great interest. So, it can be inferred that imagology is one of the new methods of studying literature. Not only the country depicted is under research, but also the context of the image, the position of the authors.*

**Keywords:** image, culture, representation, stereotype, literary discourse

The study and analysis of the image of another country are at the intersection of several research areas and sciences, in particular, such as history, linguistics, philology, cognitive science, political science, cultural studies, anthropology, etc. Interdisciplinarity, which has been gaining increasing recognition in recent years, is fully inherent in this problem. In addition, one can note the increasing attention to the comparative historical comparison of the images of peoples and countries in the authors of various national literatures, which is becoming especially relevant in the era of expanding interethnic cultural contacts. In Western literary studies, a whole separate direction has developed that examines the problem of ideas and sources of the formation of images of countries and peoples in the literatures of other countries. It is called “imagology”. The term “imagology” comes from the Latin word *imago* – image and the ancient Greek *λόγος* – word [Beller 2007:122]. Thus, imagology in a broad sense is knowledge about the image. But it should be taken into account that this knowledge is about the image of another, “alien” people, country, that is, the basic component of imagology is the dichotomy “own – alien”, which permeates the entire culture and which is one of the main concepts of any collective, mass, popular, national worldview. [Dyserinck 2007:126].

A significant contribution to the development of the theoretical foundations of imagology was made by the founder of the Aachen School of Comparative Studies H. Dyserinck [Dyserinck 2003], and his follower, the Dutch scientist J. Leerssen. He emphasizes the significance of the historical context in the study of national representation; in addition, he attaches great importance to the pragmatic-functional approach, which takes into account the target audience of the work and its impact on the reader. The scientist emphasized the need to track the dynamics of the relationship between the image of “others”, which is called the hetero-image in imagology, and the image of “self”, which is called the auto-image [Dyserinck 2007:128].

The famous comparative scholar Hugo Dyserinck writes about imagology as follows: “Comparative imagology strives first and foremost to explore and understand certain forms of manifestation of images [of countries or peoples], as well as the moment of their origin and their existence. In addition, it wants to contribute to illuminating the role that such literary

images play in the encounter of individual cultures with each other” [Dyserinck 2007:131]. To a significant extent, the questions and subjects of attention of imagology intersect and touch upon cultural and linguistic cognitive science.

Mutual assessment of peoples in fiction (as well as non-fiction) literature has long been one of the objects of study in comparative literary studies. Thus, already Louis-Paul Betz in his work “Critical Observations on the Essence, Task and Significance of Comparative Literature History” (insisted on the analysis of changing mutual ideas of peoples and nations as one of the main tasks of comparative literary science. In this case, the researcher partially relied on the opinion of Goethe, who spoke about the connections between peoples that contribute to the self-knowledge of each national literature [Beller 2007:123].

J.-M. Carré studied the formation and evolution of the image of Germany in French literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the preface to the book, he emphasized that he was not going to study the influence of German literature on French literature, and that he saw his goal as “recalling the optical errors that were made by French writers” in their ideas about Germany. [Dyserinck 2007:223].

Polish researcher M. Świdarska associates the emergence of imagology primarily with the names of the comparative scholar J.-M. Moore, a French specialist and author of the work “Literary Imagology: An Essay on Its Contribution from the Point of View of History and Criticism,” and the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, author of the works “Time and Narrative,” “Memory, History, Forgetting”. The researcher writes that “according to J.-M. Moore, social fantasy contributes to the creation of culturally mediated images of the “foreign” in literature, which have an ideological or utopian character. In the text, these images play either an integrating role (as an ideology), or (as a utopia) a subversive role, destroying a given group, nation, or culture” [Schwidarska 2001:115].

A kind of manifesto of imagology was undoubtedly Guillard’s “Comparative Literary Studies”, where he called for the study of myths-images, and not the influence of one literature on another: “Let us no longer trace and study the illusory influences of one literature on another. Let us rather try to understand how great myths about other peoples and nations are formed and exist in the individual or collective consciousness ... – this is the key to the renewal of comparative studies, a new direction for its research” [Dyserinck 2007:251]. The problem of the reception of the “other” thus comes to the fore.

Imagology sets the question of how images of the “other”, created in fiction, the media, journalism, art, that is, in various types of discourse, enter the public consciousness, turn into stereotypical images and form the nation’s perception of itself and other peoples. A literary work is considered by imagologists not as an independent aesthetic phenomenon, but as a source of “images”, stereotypical, stable, simplified images that are transmitted to the public consciousness from various types of discourse and largely determine the attitude of one people to another. Images of “strangers” created in works of fiction “make it possible to distinguish the so-called “artistic imagology”, which is developing in literary comparative studies. Unlike historical imagology, which relies on material with a high degree of reliability, artistic imagology is characterized by a different type of reliability: literature, with all its convention, is able to fully recreate the atmosphere of human relationships, mentality, character, speech features, stereotypes of existential consciousness that have formed in a certain national or social environment. Imagology, of course, requires an interdisciplinary approach, that is, the use of materials from history, cultural studies, ethnopsychology, information about the national character, way of life, behaviour, customs,

religion, etc. [Zocco 2017].

Imagology is also of great importance in literary studies. Fiction plays a major mediating role, firstly, in creating a certain image of the people of the country that created this literature, and secondly, it becomes a kind of channel of communication, introducing its own people to other peoples and cultures. In the understanding of imagologists, a nation is not an identity, but an identification, that is, identification with national myths, intellectual concepts that are at the origins of the feeling of belonging to a certain nation and influence the socio-cultural practice of the people. Imagology studies the mental models that are the basis of national identity and their objectification in literature [Dyserinck 2007:272].

A. Nunning believes that the study of culture is associated with the restoration of the “mental program” of society, which is represented in a concise form in literary texts. Accordingly, literature must be studied from the point of view of the materialization of the cultural system in it, the embodiment of forms of social mentality and cultural memory [Nunning 2005:38]. From the point of view of this approach, literary texts are forms of self-knowledge of culture. Moreover, in the world of “interdiscourse” developed in Western literary studies, literary texts, due to their interdiscursive structure, contribute to the rapprochement of all discourses of culture and the establishment of a single discursive space of cultural eras [Dyserinck 2007:272]. It is important to remember that the image of another state is the property not only of fiction, but also, first of all, of mass consciousness, which finds its realization in the work of individual authors, therefore, in addition to fiction, one should take into account scientific texts, journalism, political speeches and declarations, etc.

One of the most important categories that imagology operates with is the image. In fact, imagology, in accordance with its name, studies images; this word is encountered most often in imagological research, and it is with this that we should begin.

An image is an extremely broad concept, receiving various interpretations depending on the philosophical, sociological, psychological, philological or aesthetic subject matter, therefore the most brief definition of an image is a subjective depiction of a picture of the world. The most important category for imagology is mental images. Another culture, going through the process of comprehension, perception, becomes a mental product, which, in accordance with the social, psychological and other factors of the perceiving subject, is transformed into a receptive, accepted and assimilated mental image. Thus, an image can denote either a certain part (cliché, stereotype), or the whole (image of a people, country, world).

Stereotype is another central concept of imagology. It is introduced in connection with the problem of aberration, or distortion of the vision of a foreign-language culture. This problem is also called the “problem of stereotypes” [Zocco 2017]. Incorrect, one-sided opinions about other countries and peoples, based on insufficient or incomplete information, or even simply on prejudices, acquire the stability of stereotypes. These stereotypes live in the consciousness of people; they influence the depiction of other countries, other cultures in literary works. Such, for example, are stable ideas about the rationality or, conversely, the frivolity of the French, the coldness of the English, the carelessness of the Italians or the passion of the Spaniards, etc. – such ideas, as a rule, are not confirmed in real communication, but are firmly entrenched, including in literature.

The main thing is that, when studying the image of one country in the perception of another country, it is necessary to distinguish between the foreign-language culture itself (and here the linguistic aspect of the problem is most clearly manifested) as an objective reality and culture as a system of foreign-cultural and autocultural stereotypes and its interpretations.

The idea of a stereotype as a kind of myth or system of mythologemes that has developed in the idea of a country, as a collective (and, in general, unconscious) image of this country, having a multi-level complex structure and stage-by-stage development, turns out to be naturally applicable in this case [Leerssen 2016].

It is necessary to emphasize that in the process of analysing a particular stereotype, i.e. a stable, established generalized idea of the “foreign”, the perceiving subject himself is revealed and characterized – the features of national consciousness and the national value system are reflected.

Finally, when studying a particular image in a literary work, one must rely not only on the influence of the constructive features of the genre of the work being studied, but also on the temporal historical and cultural context of the source, which, as a rule, has a strong influence on the formation of the image [Leerssen 2016].

Neighboring concepts are the pairs “Self” – “Alien”, “Other”, “Different”, which are most often written with a capital letter and denote evaluative ideas, a product of reception of the external world. Imagologists in their studies have in mind the image of a foreigner, that is, they talk about the “Other” – the external, which must be borne in mind when studying this area [Beller 2007:130].

Some other terms that need to be highlighted are: “perception”, “reception” and “influence”. The concept of perception is similar to and often confused with the concept of reception, that is, perception and transformation. With regard to the mechanisms of imagology, it can be said that perception is the first stage, and reception is the second. Some French researchers who work in the field of studying images distinguishes between the concepts of “reception” and “influence”, arguing that in the field of imagology the first concept has supplanted the second, since reception is more associated with the process of collective perception, while influence is individual and, accordingly, correlates less with the spirit of imagology, which, by the way, is a relevant direction in modern comparative studies, systematically studying the ideas of one people about another [Beller 2007:130].

Imagology continues to develop and gain more and more space from various disciplines, including philology, cultural studies, history, folklore, etc., proving its interdisciplinary nature and demonstrating the extraordinary depth and diversity of the subject of study. In conclusion, the study of imagology in literary studies is an important field of study that clarifies the construction, dissemination, and reception of national identity in literature. By examining literary works from different cultures and historical periods, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of how images and national stereotypes are created, challenged, and transformed in literature.

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