

COMPARATIVE CRITICAL THINKING IN CONTEMPORARY BRAZIL¹

Rogério Lima²

RESUMO: Um breve exame de alguns aspectos da ABRALIC e da crítica comparativa praticada no Brasil

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Crítica comparativa brasileira. ABRALIC. Literatura Comparada.

ABSTRACT: A brief examination of some important aspects of ABRALIC and comparative criticism as practiced in Brazil.

KEY WORDS: Brazilian comparative criticism. ABRALIC. Comparative literature.

1

It is with great pleasure that I am back here at UCLA and in the city of Los Angeles. It is an honor for me to be here today taking part in the Annual Congress of the American Comparative Literature Association representing ABRALIC (The Brazilian Comparative Literature Association). Initially I would like to thank the ACLA's president, Professor Emily Apter, the vice-presidents David Palumbo-Liu and Wail Hassan, the other colleagues on ACLA's board, and their associates for the invitation to participate in this panel on the theme of ABRALIC and Comparative Literature studies in Brazil.

I would also like to say that it is an honor to be on this panel with two professors who played a direct role in my education in literary studies: Professor José Luís Jobim and Professor Sandra Nitrini.

In this presentation, I will deal briefly with some aspects of how ABRALIC operates and will try to trace a quick overview of possible approaches in the field of Comparative Literature, as adopted by researchers in the area of Languages and Literatures in Brazil.

The founding principle of ABRALIC was to promote comparative studies in Brazil; and our participation in the ACLA congress is part of our plan to strengthen and integrate the presence of ABRALIC in international Comparative Literature forums, with the aim of promoting

¹ Fala do Presidente da ABRALIC no Congresso da *American Comparative Literature Association*, realizado na Universidade da Califórnia, Los Angeles.

² Universidade de Brasília (UnB), ORCID 0000-0002-9481-6611

ABRALIC's Institutional Internationalization, creating closer links to partner institutions abroad.

It is also our objective, as members of ABRALIC's executive board, to collaborate and participate in the development of comparative literary studies, seeking to interact with Comparative Literature research centers in the three Americas, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East.

We took over the leadership of ABRALIC after comparative paradigms experienced significant changes, after they had been developed as a result of these changes, and also after comparative criticism had considerably expanded. Identifying with current comparative critical thinking, we understand that the crossing of the borders between languages is still essential for comparative literature.

As ABRALIC's executive board, our research and evaluations in the area of Comparative Literature are focused on the relationship between Criticism and Creativity, via the use of the term Language in its broadest sense: the use of language by social and ethnic groups as a vector for literature, the language of themes and discourses, language as literary subject, language as the expression of key problems and of negotiated ideas in various literatures of the world, and even in its metaphorical sense, as a way of "speaking" or conveying styles and forms.

As an infinite code with a constant need to be deciphered, the international system of signs in literature permanently reproduces the Babelian myth of the confusion of languages, defining new tasks for a multilingual humankind that tirelessly seeks to reach an agreement to be able to coexist with literature and its criticism.

As researchers and teachers, we understand that our role is to be alert to the emergence of new forms of creation of literary and critical experiences.

Today in Brazil we are conscious that we must be prepared to try to understand and integrate into our research the latest contemporary textualities that are constantly being modified, especially in a country like Brazil that, at the present time, is undergoing major social, cultural and political changes. What we refer to as contemporary textualities is the phenomenon of the integration and interaction of diverse narrative processes, coming from the most varied fields of knowledge possible that embrace intellectual, artistic, political and social practices.

Diversity and, above all, the intensity and mixing of multiple contemporary artistic experiences and "literary experiences" undermine normative conceptualizations of the aesthetic and the literary, which drastically reduce the possibilities for reading, hindering the renewal of the critical and theoretical repertoire. Sailing against the normative tide, we incorporate a plurality of values and interests as an alternative to being *radicalized*.

Therefore, recognition of the existence of a multiplicity of mediums that embrace the literary and a diversity of forms of textual inscription, leads us to abandon the idea of a "text", in its most canonical sense, in order to reassert the notion of "contemporary textualities", with particular emphasis on the realm of the digital humanities. My use here of the term humanities does not only relate to the study of languages and literatures, but in the general sense of studies that take humankind as their central focus of interest and reflection (PERRONE-MOISÉS, 2002).

The idea of embracing cultural, aesthetic and political transformations from the present day into comparative studies in Brazil has been a constant practice in the congresses that ABRALIC has held over at least the last three decades. To give an example, we could cite the very establishment of ABRALIC in 1986, in the city of Porto Alegre, during the **1st Latin American Comparative Literature Seminar**, at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, in which European and Latin American comparatist scholars took part.

The first international ABRALIC congress was held in 1988, also at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, under the presidency of Professor Tânia Franco Carvalho, and took as its theme “**Intertextuality and Interdisciplinarity**”. The richness of the approaches taken and the presence of Portuguese, French, North American, German, Italian, Canadian, Belgian and Spanish comparatists established ABRALIC and Brazil as essential reference points on the comparatist map (ABRALIC, 2018).

Among the congresses organized by ABRALIC since 1988, all very important in their own right, we would like to highlight four of them, and their respective themes, to give an idea of the diversity of the questions addressed in these academic forums: in 1996 the 5th congress, under the presidency of Professor Eduardo Coutinho, was held at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), and its theme was “**Canons and Contexts**”; in 2006, under the presidency of José Luís Jobim, the 10th congress was held at Rio de Janeiro State University (UERJ), and its theme was “**Senses of Places**”. In 2008 the 11th congress was held at the University of São Paulo (USP), under the presidency of Professor Sandra Nitrini, on the theme “**Textures, Interactions, Convergences**”.

It is no coincidence that I have by my side at this moment two former presidents of ABRALIC. Two leading researchers who have been historically involved in developing comparative literary studies in Brazil.

In 2017 the 15th ABRALIC International Congress took place at Rio de Janeiro State University (UERJ), under the presidency of Professor João Cezar de Castro Rocha, the theme of which was “**Literary experiences, contemporary textualities**”. This event stemmed from the idea of proposing new approaches for literary studies based on a methodology that related the concept of “literature” to the materiality of communication.

The main aim of the 15th ABRALIC Congress was to promote and give continuity to the flow of dialogues and exchanges between the different comparatist strands and currents of the interdisciplinary areas that ABRALIC encompasses.

The forum established by the 15th Congress made it possible to discuss different questions within the humanities: the identity of the diverse cultures that co-exist in the globalized world; poetic and fictional writing and criticism; literary and cultural translation studies; the critical reception of works in different contexts; regional literatures approached from a comparative perspective; historiographical research about reading practices, and the production and circulation of printed material; themes relating to the teaching and learning of literature; creativity, translation and new technologies; to name but a few.

Thirty years after the first ABRALIC congress was held, we are emphasizing the notion of the Geopolitics of Literature as an important focus for the 2018 ABRALIC International Congress, the theme of which will be “**Circulation, plots and pathways in Literature**”. We continue to focus on our aim of promoting and giving continuity to the flow of intellectual

exchanges and dialogues between the different comparatist strands and currents of the interdisciplinary areas that ABRALIC encompasses.

Our aim is to guarantee and increase the space for critical, theoretical and practical reflection relating to themes relevant to Comparative Literature produced in Brazil, the Americas, the Caribbean, Africa, Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Our aim is to discuss questions relating to Comparative Literary Studies beyond the borders of Latin American countries, thus embracing reflections on Cultural Geo-politics, the internationalization of Literatures and their different manifestations and languages throughout the experiences of globalization that are currently underway.

Within our set of aims, the 2018 ABRALIC International Congress represents the creation of a space in which to evaluate the new geo-political processes involved in the circulation of ideas and intellectual thinking in the realm of literary studies, as well as the training of new scholars involved in the process of comparatist research.

Themes like the identities, territories and memories of the diverse cultures that co-exist in the globalized world, literary diversity and unity, taking into account the plurality of cultural contexts; literature and power relations in different socio-historical contexts and situations; current aesthetic regimes; the parallels and complementarities between literature, culture, history and the media, among others, have a guaranteed space within the forum created by ABRALIC for 2018.

In this sense, it is important to remember that the themes to be discussed at the 2018 ABRALIC International Congress dialogue with other disciplines, creating an interactive, multidisciplinary and productive environment for research and dialogues in the areas of culture, the humanities and social sciences.

With the theme **“Circulation, plots and pathways”**, ABRALIC reaffirms the idea of contemporary textualities, recognizing the existence of a multiplicity of mediums and forms of textual inscription. There also exists a multiplicity of themes that, in an abbreviated list, include the circulation of ideas, migrations and migrants, problems relating to transsexual narratives, violence in general, issues of rights, memory, identity and territories.

All these questions lead us to abandon the idea of a “text”, in its most canonical sense, in order to reassert the notion of “contemporary textualities”, with particular emphasis on the sphere of global and digital humanities that are constantly changing and require our constant attention.

To finish, I would say that comparatist criticism as practiced in Brazil is markedly defined by its political, social and cultural engagement. I would also say that comparatist criticism as practiced in Brazil perhaps cannot save those who are suffering in the world, but it has without doubt been helping us to awaken our political and social consciousness to the fact that it is necessary to take urgent action to help them.

Thank you, everyone, for your attention.

REFERENCES

ABRALIC. “História”. URL: <http://abralic.org.br/institucional/historia/>. Accessed on 27/02/2018.

COUTINHO, Eduardo. “Discurso de emergência”. *Revista brasileira de literatura comparada*, n. 32, 2017.

PERRONE-MOISÉS, Leyla. “Para que servem as humanidades?”. *Folha de São Paulo*, 30 June 2002. URL: <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/fsp/mais/fs3006200205.htm>, Accessed on 27/02/2018.