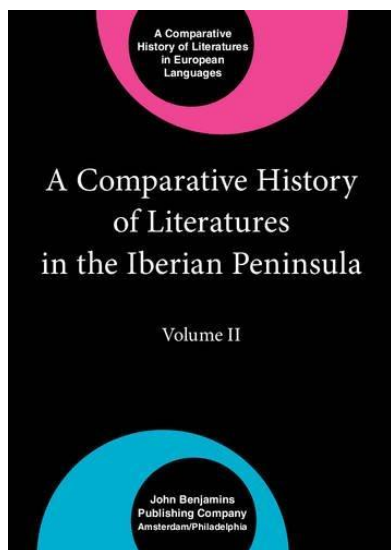


IBERIAN VOICES, SIDE B: A *COMPARATIVE HISTORY OF LITERATURES*
IN THE IBERIAN PENINSULA, VOLUME II. A REVIEW.

César DOMÍNGUEZ, Anxo ABUÍN GONZÁLEZ and Ellen SAPEGA, *A Comparative History of Literatures in the Iberian Peninsula, Volume II*. Amsterdam-Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2016, 765 pp.



One of the risks when approaching literary phenomena through a geographical frame —whether it is a national, continental or any spatial delimitation— is to oversee the cultural plurality within. A second risk is to factually diminish the relevance of ‘the difference’ (which, by definition, is ‘the minority’) by only recognizing its existence, without considering its substance and role ‘inside the whole’. Both problems had become regular threats in the newest proposals that, again, take the spatial dimension of literary phenomena as point of departure. An exemplary case is World Literature, a paradigm that since its re-emergence in the early 2000s has been dealing with such concerns, particularly due to the width alluded by the term: «Which literature? Whose world?» (Damrosch, 2003: 1). As

it is well-known, the destabilization of Comparative Studies arose the questioning of the immediate cultural identities, as opposed to the implications of stereotypes inside geopolitical frontiers. Subsequently, research fields had addressed *the local*, strongly linked to *the region*, etc. as debates which actual depth leads to reformulate viewpoints and methods of approach for Literary Historiography (Mignolo, 2000; Casas, 2004; Domínguez, 2015, among others).

Whether the incentive is to encompass the world (World Literature), to find a distinctive way of showing awareness about the relevance of ‘the other’ (like in Postcolonial and Migrant Studies), or merely to emphasize the existence of alternative ways in which literature functions and manifests (in the line of regional interests and parameters), spatial frames are a hazard for Literary Studies. Yet, selections are needed, and geographical delimitations had proven to offer a prolific set of re-interpretation since they suggest the preexistence of a linkage, dialogue or, at least, a logical reason for being an analytical conjunction.

A Comparative History of Literatures in the Iberian Peninsula, Volume II is inscribed in this kind of environment. Coordinated by César Domínguez (Universidade de Santiago de Compostela and

Sichuan University), Anxo Abuín González (Universidade de Santiago de Compostela) and Ellen Sapega (University of Wisconsin Madison), this second volume continues the intended task of situating a region as the main area to examine interliterary dynamics and relations, instead of departing from national —and traditional— discourses and structures. Moreover, while *Volume I* inaugurates the series within a diachronic and historiographical setting, *Volume II* offers an approach to what can be considered other faces of Iberian diversity that had not received the same kind of treatment by scholars, in comparison with major topics: regional stereotypes, minor sub-genres, singular forms of mediation, performative arts and the media. This book not only attends to the recognition of different (sub-)regions as countercultures of a hegemonic core (Castile, for instance); neither is focused on register regionalist inclinations of ‘locally profiled’ departments to counteract Hispanism with ‘not-Spanish but still Spaniard’ literary histories, for instance. In wide terms, this second conglomerate opens up a space for other literary manifestations that have been minimized by academic discussions, functioning as a lead-off rather than an a resolute attempt.

Divided in four sections and an inclusive epilogue dedicated to evaluating the project in its entirety, *A Comparative History of Literatures in the Iberian Peninsula, Volume II* encompasses «images, forms and genres, [mediation, as preferred by the editors], and lastly, the interrelation between popular and mass culture and the literary repertoire» (*Volume I*, 2010: xiii). In this occasion, the attention falls into unusual topics on the historiographic schedule of Comparative Studies, such as subregional identities and marginalized circulation practices, as well as samples of postmodern artistic interpretations linked with literary expression. Sections I and II emphasize two essential models, the nation (in the sense of historiographical and cultural imagery) and the genre, both named by Maria Fernanda de Abreu as «the other roots» (2016: 128). Section III alludes to mechanisms whose intervention on extraliterary events had permeated on the reception of literary production. Section IV, finally, constitutes a step forward on the overall spectrum, as involves different fragments of recent developments, allowing to end up the general channels of the volume and of the whole collection.

In sum, the gathered articles project the density of each intended zone, leading to reevaluate the ways in which Iberian literatures have been thought and organized by the Iberian academies. This is not to suggest that the spirit behind the second conglomerate is merely to vindicate unheard voices in the Literary field; nor to expand the subjects already discussed in the earlier publication. Although it does so, partially: a particular emphasis relies on the amplification of the action field —meaning the critical panorama. As considered in *Volume I*, *Volume II* deals with «complementary aspects» (2010: XIII) of literary history and sociocultural interpretation of the Iberian Peninsula inside and outside the geographical frontiers. Nonetheless, the resulted articles show a collective surpassing of the projected course.

Intuitively, the substantial links between these sections respond to a spatial partition made from a European front. However, a further reading will reveal fundamental concepts of the volume as a grand proposal. First, the notion of ‘borehole’ as an argumentative technique to tackle a —recently reconsidered— spatial formula, the Iberian Peninsula, from its less-explored manifestations. In

comparison, this guideline appears distinctively essential to Section II, introduced by Abreu as a space dedicated to minor models of literary history, almost treated as collateral consequences of widespread enterprises, like nationalization and censorship. By immersing in the development of singular cases such as subgenres and processes of marginalization, the articles in Section II come to exemplify the aimed methodology of ‘digging’ into traditional structures of literary orchestration. With such guidance, for instance, Abreu points out the ubiquity of what she calls the «giants» of the literary repertoire, which can hardly be considered as the main reason for omitting other literary voices, but that continues to be a widespread practice in the literary field. Briefly, with the calling of including minor literary forms, Section II illustrates modes of reading than can lead, subsequently, to the expansion of the Iberian repertoire.

An advantage, then, of searching and/or identifying ‘boreholes’ in Literary History, is to go from smaller scales to a regional frame. Also, is interesting to observe how such formula functions —and it does— with common resources for literary circulation; particularly, for interpret the ways of translation, a current trend in the field. Josep Pujol’s article in Section III, for instance, alludes to the impact of translators’s criteria in the construction of a literary image that can become part of a geocultural anthem. Furthermore, Pujol demonstrates that even with the selection of a specific and distant event such as Catalan writers of the 15th century communicating and writing in Castilian, it is possible to appreciate the fluxes of interlinguistical existence —also a main trend in academic debates. David Wacks would take the subject from a diasporic arena (the Sephardic Spanish-Hebrew case), which implies another —spatial and cultural— set of complications, evidently not exclusive of the Iberian paradigm. Yet the addition of translation by Cees Esteve and María José Vega allows to explore an international way of mediation, again, from inside a smaller scale.

A second concept (and perhaps less notorious) is a general veil of subjugation towards more pervasive forms of reading. This matter culminates, particularly, in the introductory article for the fourth section, where Anxo Abuín González highlights the resistance of Spanish Academy to Iberian and Spanish Cultural Studies outsets. Although the main focus of the article is directed to the media, Abuín also distinguishes the reactions of regional contexts such as Portuguese cases and Galician literary studies, showing the extension of a collective interest to reformulate epistemological as well as disciplinary structures and models. Ultimately, due to the traced bibliographical road(s), is possible to notice —as Abuín’s title suggests— a perpetual (re)birth of Spanish but also local enquiries, in order to become part of a recognized disciplinary (even departmental) sector. Which, in a way, calls up the attention as an inconstant event when thinking, for example, on the depth and width of the nationalist stereotypes presented under the coordination of Dorothy Odaty-Wellington. The «hyper-awareness of the existence of [Iberian] borders» (Odaty-Wellington, 2016: 6) that defines the entire volume (and not only Section I) denotes the prevalence of the antagonism between *a center* and non-center entities. Furthermore, it demonstrates an increasing development around such relationship, coming to justify, collectively, the necessity of continuing with the search of a different formulas to approach literary phenomena.

The reader of *A Comparative History of Literatures in the Iberian Peninsula, Volume II* is not going to find abundant crossovers between literary sub-regions, nor the mere acknowledgement of geographical segregation and of examples of cultural (and political) repression; nor even a monographic synthetization of current interests for Iberian historians. Indeed, there is a treatment of the processes of marginalization exercised over non-traditional models, forms of circulation, as well as disciplinary perspectives (Santiago Fernández Mosquera, Irene Bertuzzi, Maria do Céu Fraga, Isabel Almeida, David Wacks, Cristina Gómez Castro, Santiago Díaz Lage, Virginia Guarinos, Ana Merino, for mention a few). Nonetheless, the highlight of the proposal relies on the research over the unusualness; or else, on the acknowledgement of the side B of literary evolution.

A distinctive trait of *Volume II* is the infrequency as common quality across the presented samples, whether the area of analysis is a subgenre, a type of movement, a performative arena, or a literary region. Along with this sense of uniqueness, the scholars involved with the entire project (from forty to one hundred according to *Volume I*) have engaged the diversity of the land with an innovative outset yet to be explored by renewed standpoints. This sort of compromise, as contemplated by the literary historians of the epilogue (Frederik Verbeke, Joan Ramon Resina, Gabriel Rei-Doval, Paulo de Medeiros, Germán Gullón, Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, Maria Alzira Seixo and Santiago Pérez Isasi), demands an understanding of the imagological content as a historical and geographical construct; and, therefore, it is expected that this book works as a landmark for forthcoming reflections.

Such ambition starts to justify the plurality of geographical dimensions embraced by the directors of the project. Madrid and America; Basque Country, Galicia, Catalonia; Gypsy culture and Jews; immigrants in Spain; Portugal. In addition, by stablishing a network of (inter)literary realities, this second and final volume supposes a beginning for the reformulation of canonical literary systems from inside the conventional borders of Comparative Studies. In this sense, *Volume II* turns the spatial referent into a prismatic paradigm, allowing readers to stablish contact with different scales and, above all, with the analytical and thematic possibilities beyond frequent discussions.

In sum, *Volume II* should not be considered, only, as a complementary handbook, but also as an inclusive proposal that invites to critique the way Literary Studies had been dealing with the complexity of literature. What is more, in the initiative to discern new paths for literary analysis, both volumes had gone beyond the preliminary concerns: *A Comparative History of Literatures in the Iberian Peninsula* is an outcome of a fervid call to (re)connect with the totality within the region, with the (actual) country —not nation— and, modestly, with «a» European peninsula. Ultimately, subsequent readings might endorse or, more likely, question implications, advantages and lacks of the included viewpoints —which would be and should be a practice oriented to enrich the debates of the (arising) Iberian paradigm. Yet, a more innovative and fruitful purpose would be to destine any further discussions beyond the rejection to ambition the diversification of literary departments. Rather, the task is to respond the call of current concerns by expanding the imaginary map of the literary spectrum and try to be at the height of the cultural phenomena on which Literary Studies depends on. For such purpose, *Volume II* is, indeed, an advantageous starting point.

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Mitzi Eunice MARTÍNEZ GUERRERO
Universidade de Lisboa
mitzi.e.m.guerrero@gmail.com