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## *National Literatures and Interliterary Communities in Spain and Catalonia*

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# NATIONAL LITERATURES AND INTERLITERARY COMMUNITIES IN SPAIN AND CATALONIA

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Within the field of literary studies one of the most noticeable results of the democratization of Spain in the last decades of the twentieth century—and one directly related to the establishment of a system of autonomous communities with a relatively high degree of authority over cultural and educational policy—has been the growing production of histories that focus their attention on the literatures of the various *nationalities* and *regions* within the Spanish State. We now have a substantial number of works that chart the course of the literatures written in Spain's four major literary languages (Spanish, Catalan, Basque, and Galician) as well as of those "regional" literatures of Spanish expression. This production, I believe, can be explained by the need to redefine the marks of identity of a country that, after the political transition of the late 1970s, was eager to dispose of the totalitarian culture imposed during the Franco dictatorship and anxious to recreate itself almost from scratch. In regard to literary histories, two main directions can be discerned in this process of redefinition. On the one hand, and against the officialist culture of the recent past, some histories undertake a *critical reinterpretation* of the Spanish canon in order to question and correct the vision of national literature sanctioned by Francoism—that is the case, for instance, of Blanco Aguinaga, Rodríguez Puértolas, and Zavala's *Historia social de la literatura española* (1978–79), Francisco Rico's *Historia y crítica de la literatura española* (1980–92), or Víctor García de la Concha's *Historia de la literatura española* (whose first volumes were launched in 1995). On the other hand, there are works that pursue the *reconstruction or institution* of differential canons in order to rescue the cultural identity of regions and nationalities previously subjected to the myth of national unity advocated by the dictatorship—see, for instance, the various literatures represented in Díez Borque's *Historia de las literaturas hispánicas no castellanas* (1980).

In general, and as far as "regional" literatures in the Spanish language are concerned, the efforts of reinterpretation and reconstruction are not necessarily at odds: the institution of local canons is not perceived as a breaking-off with but rather as a complement to the larger project of national (Spanish) redefinition. Thus, works like Artiles and Quintana's *Historia de la literatura*

canaria (1978), Martínez García's *Historia de la literatura leonesa* (1982), or Díez de Revenga and de Paco's *Historia de la literatura murciana* (1989), do not define their object of attention as separate and independent from the national literature in Spanish, but rather take as their point of departure the vindication of a regional identity that is nonetheless compatible with the solidarity of the common language. In contrast, in the case of literatures in languages other than Spanish—which are associated for the most part to what the political discourse of the Transition identified as *historical nationalities*: the Basque Country, Catalonia, and Galicia—the reconstruction of their respective canons leads logically to a fragmentation of the concept of a “national Spanish literature” into various “national” literatures. The *Història de la literatura catalana* by Comas, Molas, and Riquer (1980–86), for instance, aims to present a comprehensive view of a literature that is as autonomous as are those in French, Spanish, Italian, or English. In any case, what all these histories have in common (and this is one of the main topics of concern in this paper) is a firm belief in the notion that of use of different languages leads necessarily to the existence of different literatures.

Nowadays, practically every autonomous community in Spain has at least one history that—either in the form of a textbook designed for the new demands of secondary education, or presented as a series of scholarly volumes geared toward the university audience—gives an account of the literary production of its native authors. In this sense, these histories do not stray from the methods and goals of the nineteenth-century model: they aim to catalogue diachronically a national (or regional) production that is understood as properly representative of the cultural originality of the people. Such an abundance of historiographic practice contrasts, however, with the relative marginal position that metacritical reflection on literary history (the questioning and redefinition of the categories of research) still has among hispanists.<sup>1</sup> In fact, that extensive supply of textbooks and manuals may even be surprising at a moment when the scholarly debate on the topic has shown a clear inclination to questioning not just the critical apparatus, but even the possibility of writing history, which seems destined to be replaced by the postmodern encyclopedia.<sup>2</sup> Given this state of affairs, I would like to advance here a few observations on the concept of national literature that underlies contemporary historiographical practice in Spain, in order to open the

<sup>1</sup> Marginal but not insignificant: see, for instance, the very important essays on the topic by Ramos-Gascón or Romero Tobar, as well as the volume *Literaturas regionales en España: historia y crítica*, edited by Enguita and Mainer.

<sup>2</sup> See Perkins, *Is Literary History Possible?*

discipline to the integration of a multicultural perspective in the study of Spanish and Catalan letters.

The concept of national literature remains largely untouched by critical scrutiny, even though this romantic legacy is still a central component of the institutional landscape that frames our scholarly research and academic programs, and both supports and conditions the production and consumption of literature in each country. Literary historians have traditionally devoted most of their attention to temporal matters (the problem of periodization, for instance), but the category of space that delimits their field of study has been kept safely away from the center of reflection.<sup>3</sup> Most literary histories show little concern for the borders and extension of national literatures, which are assumed as obviously identical to those of their respective political — or, in some cases, linguistic — units. I am concerned here with space not as an object of representation (in the sense that works of a national literature may portray the country's physical and human geography), but rather as a condition of possibility to establish a degree of affiliation or kinship that would allow us to decide whether an author or a text belong to — or can be located within — a certain literature. Traditionally, the way in which literary objects find their place in a literary canon has depended on the delimitations grounded on the national or linguistic geographies of independent literatures.

Closely associated with the national concept of culture is the belief in an essential relation between language and literature. Thus, Spanish literature would not simply be that written by Spanish citizens, but that which is written in the Spanish language. It is this criterion that guides the geography charted by the histories of Spanish literature mentioned above, as they exclude from their field of study the production in other languages of Spain. Similarly, in the case of Catalan literature, it seems normal that Spanish-language writers such as Jaime Gil de Biedma, Esther Tusquets, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, or Rosa Regàs should not appear in catalogues of Catalan literary production, even though nobody would question their status as citizens of Catalonia. The value accorded to the *national* (or native) language as privileged medium of creative expression is one of the more solid principles of literary criticism, which in this regard continues to pay tribute to the foundational legacy of philological tradition. According to Claudio Guillén, "it is the mother tongue that

3 In the last decades there has been, however, more interest in the subject from a variety of approaches: Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the literary field, Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory, Siegfried Schmidt's Empirical Science of Literature, or Franco Moretti's analyses on literary geography, among others. See also Lambert, "In Quest of Literary World Maps."



offers us the most intense access —the most secure and the most intimate— to aesthetic emotion" (7). Significantly, however, this view is generally presented in connection to poetry, and it is precisely the literary critics' traditional preference for this genre that has served to idolize the relations between languages and literatures. The linguistic demarcation of national literature (that is, the idea that only works written in the national language can legitimately belong to the literature of that nation) is dependent on the romantic concepts of genius and originality: to be properly national, the work has to be unique and original, and therefore essentially untranslatable (Lefevre 144-45). But again, the substance that cannot be translated is usually identified by reference to the harmony and evocation of poetry — narrative plots, which seem to undergo more easily the translation to other linguistic codes, occupy a marginal position in this context— and leads to the mythicizing of origins that serves to discriminate between texts produced in different languages.

I do not intend to deny here the value of that which is autochthonous, the intimate association between language and culture, the legitimacy of the study of literary languages, or the utility of analyzing the work of an author in the context of others who write in the same tongue. There is nothing wrong with the classification of literatures according to language; but neither I do see anything particularly advantageous to it in contrast to other potential ways of approaching the historian's task. What should certainly be questioned is the privilege given to the linguistic criterion when we need to map our field of study, a privilege that still conditions to a great extent the research and findings of even those who aim to approach literary texts from a standpoint other than the purely philological.<sup>4</sup> This may seem paradoxical at a time when such a philological study —the analysis of linguistic structures particular to a language— is no longer, for better or worse, a central concern of literary study.<sup>5</sup> Either under the label of narratology, poststructuralism, gender or cultural studies, most of our

<sup>4</sup> Thus, for instance, in their *Historia social de la literatura española*, Blanco Aguinaga, Rodríguez Puértolas, and Zavala propose to study literature as a system in dialogue with the larger Spanish social milieu, but have no reservations —because of linguistic differences— about excluding from that system the culture expressed in languages other than Castilian. Even Darío Villanueva, who has repeatedly argued for the need to apply a systemic approach to Spanish literature, draws the boundaries of this system according to linguistic borders (perhaps in his eagerness to promote the study of interliterary relationships between Spain and Spanish America), so only the production in one of the four official Spanish languages is subject to consideration.

<sup>5</sup> I do not mean to say, of course, that language is not a significant element of literature. But the fact is that most programs of study nowadays give greater attention to the study of problems that transcend linguistic diversity (issues of poetics or gender, for instance) that they do to the peculiarities of each individual language.

current interests differ significantly from those of traditional stylistics or philology. But eventually the emphasis on that which is native and original, the fixation of an *origin* that serves as foundation for the determination of the identity of a literary work, is still the basic guide for the construction of the majority of historiographical projects. Since literature is exclusively understood as a matter of creation, our efforts focus on establishing the genetics of texts (who writes them? what is their original language?), because it would only be according to that origin that they achieve full realization and meaning. Despite all the attention given in the last decades to the study of reception, the truth is that most literary histories show little concern for the idea of literature as a function of the readers' experience.

Literature, however, is not simply a phenomenon of creation, but also a system of communication—and thus the literary space should be understood also in terms of processes of reception and appropriation effected by other participants in the literary community (readers, critics, publishers, translators...). To put it in rather simple terms, a literature is defined not only by what its citizens *write*, but also by what they *read*. If we accept as valid the possibility and legitimacy of studying literature not only as a listing of texts and writers, but also as a relational set of social activities (the production, circulation and consumption of objects deemed as literary), it is evident that literary citizenship is not a matter of *essences*, but rather of *processes*: a work is not necessarily born with a fixed nationality, but it may acquire one or several by means of the naturalization implemented by various forms of appropriation. This makes possible that a single work may belong to several literary communities which are simultaneous synchronically and/or diachronically. Comparative literature, as a discipline, has had little problem accepting these acts of appropriation: as István Sötér has argued for the case of Hungarian literature, "Baudelaire or Dostoevsky can be regarded as twentieth-century writers, because it is then that they were appropriated" (452). The study of national literatures, however, committed as it is to projects of national construction, is not so willing to grant such residence permits freely.

It is starting to be common for hispanists of the Peninsularist variety to recognize that when they speak about the literature of Spain they are mostly talking about that which is written in Spanish or Castilian. There is an increasing consciousness that the so-called peripheral languages are also legitimately—or, if you prefer, at least constitutionally—Spanish.<sup>6</sup> Thus, recent works like the *Cronología de*

<sup>6</sup> This constitutional detail seems to have been missed in the restrictive view that the Instituto Cervantes wishes to promote around the world, as its programs deal almost exclusively with the culture and literature of Spain in the Spanish language. According

la literatura española (1991-98), coordinated by Darío Villanueva, or the *Historia de la literatura española* (published in French in 1993, in Spanish in 1994-95) directed by Jean Canavaggio, openly acknowledge and justify their restriction to literature in the Spanish language (in the case of the *Cronología*, as in other similar texts, linguistic and political criteria are mixed, so it includes the work of Spanish American authors before the independence of the colonies). Little is gained, however, if this awareness serves only to clarify our terminology but allow us to continue approaching our objects of study (each of the literatures defined by language) as independent entities. If the academic education of hispanists who could not read what colleagues in their field publish in French or English is correctly regarded as limited and impoverished, we should also deplore the lack of a reasonable competence in Catalan, Galician, or Basque among specialists of Peninsular culture. This sort of multicultural awareness could help understand better various developments of literary history. It is commonly accepted, for instance, that the appearance in Spain of an autochthonous form of *novela negra* should be dated around 1974, with Vázquez Montalbán's *Tatuaje*; however—as Joan Ramon Resina has reminded us—Manuel de Pedrolo had already begun publishing criminal novels in Catalan in the fifties, and we should also take into consideration the case of Joxeba Andoni Loidi Bizkarrondo's *Amabost egun Urgain'en* (1955), a Basque detective novel that was translated into Catalan in 1961 and proudly presented by the publisher as “possibly ... the first complete rendering of a Basque literary book in another language.”<sup>7</sup> My point, of course, is not to take anything from the significance of the Carvalho series for the Spanish detective novel, or to engage in a somewhat misguided debate about when the “first” sample of the genre appears in the country, but to show how a restrictive, language-based, view of Spanish literature can distort our historical perspective. To a large extent, current scholarship seems to regard as unproblematic the restriction of the object of study to Spanish-language cultural production. Even in the few instances in which a work in another language finds its way into the field of vision (with the award of the National Literary Prize, for example) it is generally only when the text is translated into Spanish that it attains admission into the “national” canon.<sup>8</sup>

to the information provided by the Instituto Cervantes (“Cursos en otras lenguas de España”), of its thirty-five centers only four offer classes in Catalan, Galician, or Basque.

<sup>7</sup> See preface to *Quinze dies a Urgain*, trans. Josep Aguirre (Barcelona: Albertí Editor, 1961).

<sup>8</sup> This appears to be the case of the analysis of the Spanish literary system advanced by Darío Villanueva in “Los marcos de la literatura española,” where “vernacular” literatures are mentioned according to their contingent translation into Spanish (15).



This, however, is not a feature exclusive of criticism in Spanish. It is in my opinion equally surprising that a recent collection of Catalan historical novels published by Proa does not include any of the Spanish-language novels by Eduardo Mendoza, perhaps the contemporary writer who has contributed the most not only to the popularity of the genre but also to the image of Catalonia (or, if you prefer, Barcelona) itself as object of narrative attention. This absence is remarkable given that the collection is presented with the explicit intention of giving the reader a chance to rediscover through literature the history of Catalonia—and not, as could be the case, the history of the Catalan literary language:

La finalitat d'aquesta col·lecció que ara us presentem, doncs, neix d'aquesta realitat de fons, la del literat que inventa, la de l'autor que es documenta històricament. Finalitat doble: gaudir de la ficció, és a dir, del plaer de la literatura, i, alhora, aprendre història, la història d'alguns moments particularment interessants de Catalunya... El lector que es capbussi en aquestes obres no coneixerà evidentment tota la història dels Països Catalans, però, sens dubte, haurà llegit les millors novel·les sobre la nostra Història. (Trepal 9, 15)

[The aim of the collection being presented here arises from this reality: that of the writer who invents, the author who does historical research. Its aim is twofold: to enjoy fiction and the pleasure of literature, and, at the same time, learn the history of particularly significant moments in Catalonia... The reader who immerses himself in these works obviously will not learn the complete history of the Catalan Countries, but will undoubtedly read the best novels about our History.]

Alex Broch's essay on the development of the historical novel in Catalonia, which serves as epilogue to the *Guia de lectura* that accompanies the collection, makes no mention of *La verdad sobre el caso Savolta* or *La ciudad de los prodigios* as it explains the interest for the genre during postfrancoism—even though it does mention the success in Spain of Marguerite Yourcenar's *Memorias de Adriano* or Umberto Eco's *El nombre de la rosa* (144). One last but equally significant illustration: a journal like *Catalan Review* limits its submissions to essays in Catalan or English. This restricted vision of Catalan literature has been questioned by Oriol Izquierdo, who regrets that the necessary linguistic and cultural normalization of the 1980s has resulted in a critical practice that privileges that which is considered properly national:

Una aplicació extrema d'aquest privilegiar o exclusivitzar allò nacional, extrema però no gens estranya, ha portat el conjunt de la crítica catalana, fetes les excepcions de rigor, a ser incapaç d'integrar en un mateix discurs en concret la literatura catalana i la literatura d'expressió castellana (inclosa la de referents culturals catalans), que és sistemàticament ignorada... Potser caldria fer una



lectura de la llengua dels escriptors catalans, i de la relació entre català i castellà, i fins i tot de l'obra dels escriptors castellans de Barcelona des dels conceptes de desterritorialització i reterritorialització (Deleuze-Guattari). I probablement tindriem sorpreses ben suggerents. (Izquierdo 109)

[An extreme—but not infrequent—application of this desire to privilege or give exclusive attention to that which is national has made Catalan criticism, with some exceptions, incapable of integrating in the same discourse literature in Catalan and literature in the Spanish language (including that with Catalan cultural referents), which is systematically ignored... Perhaps we should to study the language of Catalan writers, the relation between Catalan and Castilian, and even the work of Spanish-speaking writers in Barcelona from the notions of de-territorialization and re-territorialization (Deleuze-Guattari). That would probably lead to very revealing discoveries.]

Enric Sòria has recently reminded us of Rubió i Balaguer's distinction between *literature in Catalan* and *literature in Catalonia*: "Ambdós criteris poden ser pertinents i productius, però enfoquen objectes distints. El primer analitza la literatura com a art lingüístic autònom i el segon l'entén com a producte cultural d'una societat complexa" [Both criteria could be relevant and productive, but they focus on different objects: the first analyzes literature as an autonomous linguistic art, while for the second it is the cultural product of a complex society] (380). As Sòria notes, both criteria—the linguistic and the territorial—can be used to obtain equally significant (and also equally reductive) results, but few historians seem to be interested in exploring the possibilities of the second one. In fact, the editors of the volume in which Sòria's essay appears explicitly identify as Catalan literature "l'escrita i difosa en aquesta llengua" [that which is written and disseminated in this language] (Bordons and Subirana xi).

In order to advance the study of Spanish and Catalan literatures from a territorial perspective, that is, as the literature of Spanish or Catalan citizens (whether we take into consideration the territory of the Spanish State or that of Catalonia), more research needs to be done on the phenomena of interliterary relations within the Peninsula. There have already been important contributions to the study of the relations between cultures in Catalan and Spanish: the volume on *Las relaciones de las culturas castellana y catalana* (which contains the proceedings of a meeting held in Sitges in 1981) o the *Lliçons de literatura comparada catalana i castellana* (by Beser and others, the result of a course at the Col·legi de Llicenciats en Lletres i Ciències de Catalunya in 1982) are sufficient proof of the interest for a Peninsular comparatism. But I would contend that the task at hand is not simply a question of doing comparative literature, at least if this is understood in the sense of charting influences, or documenting the reception of certain works and the personal relations between individual writers.

This kind of practice, although of enormous interest, is often grounded on the conviction that comparatism is something alien to the study of the "national." But the strict dichotomy between the national and the comparatist is based on a fiction: the myth that independent national literatures exist free from imports and foreign loans.<sup>9</sup>

National literatures do not exist — what we have are *nationalized literatures*. Literary histories do not describe the production of a particular nation or region, but rather *construct* that literature on the basis of an interested selection of materials, a selection which is made according to critical categories custom-designed for an imagined community. The invention of a national literature is therefore not simply an academic enterprise, but also and essentially a political act that defines the rules of membership into a (literary) community. In the case of Spanish and Catalan literatures, our approach should take into consideration that both are, in themselves, the result of multicultural or bilingual communities. The inquiry into interliterary relations has opened for Hispanism the field of what is now called "transatlantic studies" as it explores the connections between Iberian and Latin American literatures (this is, for instance, a major component in Darío Villanueva's recent calls for a systemic approach to Spanish letters). What remains largely free from examination is the understanding that a systemic approach should also force us to consider the interaction between different literary languages within the Iberian Peninsula (and its archipelagoes). Literary life in these communities does not feed exclusively on a monolingual literature, but their cultural life is grounded on the interweaving of a multilingual existence.

Without denying the legitimacy of other possible constructions of a national literature, I believe there are obvious advantages to conceiving Spanish and Catalan literatures as multilingual systems. In the case of Catalan studies, which is the main concern of this issue, the integration of the Catalan production in the Spanish-language would underline the importance of particular cultural contents that would otherwise remain hidden from view: the contribution of Spanish speakers to the cultural identity of Catalonia (and, by the same token, that of Catalan speakers to Spanish culture), the topic and poetics of immigration, etc. To abandon these matters in the hands of those concerned with literature in the Spanish language seems to me not only mistaken but even dangerous at a moment when cultural

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9 Mario J. Valdés and Linda Hutcheon have warned against the risks of "any monolithic construction of a national literary history" and argued for a new comparative model that takes into consideration the fact that "people [and texts] can and often do participate in several language communities at once" (3-4).

identity has acquired an even more fundamental dimension in everyday politics. The critical inquiry into the construction of cultural identity among Spanish speakers in Catalonia should be left exclusively in the hands of institutions of cultural production and communication whose decision-making centers lie elsewhere.

In the case of Peninsular studies, the multilingual character of Spanish literature should prove a fertile ground where to test hypotheses whose utility transcends our own academic specialization and would make our object of study relevant to scholars in other literatures of a similar multicultural configuration. As I indicated before, it is not simply a question of applying to Spain the traditional design of comparative literature but rather of forging an epistemology (in a direction also indicated here by Elisa Martí-López) that would allow us to understand Iberian cultural processes in their singularity. To apply to the Peninsular case categories and methods of research developed in other historical and social configurations (the French national state and its literature has had enormous influence in this context) can lead to misreadings, and I also believe there remains little to be discovered in that direction. At a time of increasing globalization, when one of the challenges of cultural criticism is to account for the existence of complex identities, both hispanists and catalanists are —because of the very nature of their objects of study— in a privileged position to make a relevant contribution. In contrast to the national essentialism of some forms of catalanism, but also against a Spanish nationalist discourse that disguises itself as a form of universal cosmopolitanism, the possibility offers to fulfill the promise of what Josep Miquel Sobrer has termed “critical nationalism.”

Many questions remain open in this direction: What are the conditions that determine the membership in a literary community? Which factors decide the citizenship of a writer or the pertinence of a literary object? If two texts in different languages are written by individuals who belong to the same society, if they reflect on the construction of common literary imaginary, and coexist within the same community of readers, can they be said to belong to different literatures? As Pierre Vilar put it almost twenty years ago: “*Cultura de catalans?*, *cultura en català?*, *cultura a Catalunya?* És molt còmode d’annexar. És injust de restringir. No sempre és còmode d’associar” [Culture of Catalans? Culture in Catalan? Culture in Catalonia? It’s easy to appropriate. It’s unfair to restrict. It’s not always comfortable to associate] (43).

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