A view from comparative history, II
A comparative history of literatures in the Iberian Peninsula?

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> Literary history used to be impossible to write; lately it has become much harder.
> (Lawrence Lipking, "A Trout in the Milk")

A new history for a new field

Several scholars have written extensively on the genealogy of national literary histories from the nineteenth century onward, in parallel with the development of the idea of "national character" and its political derivations through Europe. I will, however, stress, as Isabel Clúa Ginés does in this very volume, its close relation with the development of modern, national education systems during the nineteenth century. The Spanish case is paradigmatic in this sense: José Amador de los Ríos, the first Spaniard to write a history of Spanish literature (*Historia crítica de la literatura española*, 1861–65; A critical history of Spanish literature) was also the first professor of Spanish Literature at the Universidad Central, while Antonio Gil y Zárate, author of a best-selling *Manual de literatura* (Literature textbook, 1844) was very much involved in developing the education system which would then adopt his own textbook.

This introductory paragraph serves to reflect on the objective and targets of *A comparative history of literatures in the Iberian Peninsula*. Since there are not many university departments (and of course not any primary or secondary schools) that offer a subject on Iberian literatures — or, as the title puts it, literatures in the Iberian Peninsula — it cannot aspire to become a best-selling textbook as Gil y Zárate's; it can, however, as Amador de los Ríos's *Historia*, reclaim the honor of being the first of its kind: the first comprehensive history of Iberian literatures to be published with a comprehensive scope and a truly supranational foundation. In fact, one of the values of this history is that it validates and gives visibility to an academic field that deals specifically with literatures and cultures in the Iberian Peninsula (and I will return to the distinction between literatures and cultures later on). This field has been tentatively named Iberian studies, especially since the publication of Joan Ramon Resina's *From Hispanism to Iberian studies* (2009), and has had quite a rapid development in recent years, both in Iberia and outside of it.

Of course, *A comparative history of literatures in the Iberian Peninsula* is integrated in a wider and more ambitious project: the comparative history of literatures in European languages (CHLEL) project, coordinated by the International Comparative Literature Association, which includes works on Sub-Saharan Africa, on the Caribbean, and on Eastern and Central Europe, and also a chronological series devoted to specific periods, from Renaissance to Modernism; it cannot, therefore, be exclusively linked to the appearance of Iberian studies. On the contrary, it could be argued that both this comparative literary history series by the ICLA and the recent prominence of Iberian studies are representative of a wider tendency within comparative literature: the turn toward space as an object (or as a trait that defines objects), and more specifically the renewal of area studies, which have reappeared, very different from their Cold War origins, as an alternative to both hegemonic national narration, and to the global pull manifested, in the

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arena of literary studies, by the recent preeminence of world literature. This is, for instance, the take on area studies proposed by Christopher Bush (2014) in his article for the ACLA "State of the discipline report": "Area Studies: Bigger than the Nation, Smaller than the World" (although I would argue that area studies may be both bigger *and* smaller than the nation, or that they are, in fact, an alternative kind of discourse other than the nation).

There are, of course, other reasons why Spanish and Portuguese (and Basque, Catalan, Galician, etc.) literatures and cultures are now being studied from a new transnational perspective: the end of both *Estado Novo* and Francoism (combined with the disappearance of the overseas empire in the Portuguese case) gave way to a new period of interrelation among neighbors, and the integration of both countries into the European Union contributed to a new reflection on their own identities in relation to the continent they (peripherally) belong to, and to the world (of which, for instance, Eduardo Lourenço's works are a prototypical example). This change in the Iberian geopolitical space also opened the possibility of new dialogues and collaborations across borders, and also of new readings of the past which stressed (or at least did not hide) the common elements.

It should also be pointed out that, from an academic or scientific point of view, we appear to be witnessing a period of crisis or self-awareness in Hispanism (and, to some extent, also in Portuguese or Lusophone studies), which calls for new theoretical and methodological approaches: apart from Joan Ramon Resina's work, other publications such as *Ideologies of Hispanism* (Moraña 2005), *Spain beyond Spain* (Epps & Cifuentes 2005), *New Spain, new literatures* (Martín-Estudillo & Spadaccini 2010b), *Un hispanismo para el siglo XXI* (Cornejo Parriego 2011) or *Nuevos hispanismos. Para una crítica del lenguaje dominante* (Ortega 2012) indicate a trend of renewal of Hispanic literary studies which depart from or question long-established traditions and practices.

A comparative history of literatures in the Iberian Peninsula is therefore timely in several different ways: within the wider project of comparative literary histories promoted by the ICLA, it responds to the general trend toward transnational literary studies; but also, within its Iberian context, it constitutes a significant milestone in the development and consolidation of the field of comparative Iberian studies and in the conscious reconsideration of both Portuguese and Hispanic studies.

Comparative, transnational, or systemic literary history

The editorial team declares, in the Introduction to the first volume, that "the objective [of this work] was […] to present a particular situation in order to reveal a fundamental factor in the understanding of the Iberian Peninsula as a complex and dynamic framework of interliterary relations" (Cabo Aseguinolaza, Abuín González & Domínguez 2010, xii). After this declaration of principles, it is impossible not to think of Franca Sinopoli when she states that the object of comparative literary history is "the network of interactions among several literatures" (1999, 1). On the other hand, in the Preface to the first volume of this history, Margaret R. Higonnet argues that "as comparatists, literary historians observe phenomena such as genres, themes, styles, narrative structures, and reception that flow across national boundaries" (2010, ix). Both definitions of the objects for comparative literary history have of course common elements, but

they point toward different approaches to transnational phenomena: the first trend, as proposed by Sinopoli, relates to the concept of an (inter)literary (poly)system, therefore considering space not as a homogeneous vacuum but as a network of interrelations and interferences; on the other hand, the second approach tends toward the search for supranational traits in literature which, at the highest level, would lead to so-called literary universals (motifs, genres, techniques, etc.).

These two conceptions of comparative literary history (as the search for transnational phenomena, or as the study of the complexities of transnational cultural systems) are present in *A comparative history of literatures in the Iberian Peninsula*. Not only that: I would suggest that these two approaches overlap with another divergence in the conceptualization of the Iberian Peninsula. I refer specifically to the tendency to treat the Iberian Peninsula as a homogeneous unity (as if every point of it was, so to speak, identically close to the center), and the tendency to treat it as a complex multilayered net in which centers and peripheries abound.

The section on literary genres in the present volume is, I think, a good example of the first approach to an Iberian literary history: in it, the Iberian Peninsula appears as a continuum, so to speak, so that examples of each of the studied genres can be picked from any Iberian literature almost indistinctively. The fact that several of the chapters in this section are entitled with just the name of the genre they study ("The Pastoral romance," "The historical novel," etc.) is a sign of this tendency, although other chapters, especially the one by José Camões on Iberian theatre, are much closer to a systemic approach. On the other hand, the sections that deal with "Multilingualism and literature," with "Images of national identity in the literatures of the Iberian Peninsula" and with "Forms of mediation" deal more explicitly with what Franca Sinopoli calls "the network of interactions among several literatures" (although "literatures" appears to be a restrictive term to describe the content of these chapters, which have a much wider historical, sociological, and cultural approach). For instance, the chapters devoted to the formation of Galician identity, or to the relation between Catalonian self-image and Castile as its counterpoint, exemplify the kind of tensions between centers and peripheries (which, in turn, also create centers and peripheries) that characterize the interferences between linguistic, literary, and cultural systems. It is also possible to find chapters that go in the opposite directions: that deal with literary phenomena that do not go beyond the linguistic, cultural, or national borders: most of the articles contained in the section on "Cities, cultural centers and enclaves" in Volume 1 are devoted, explicitly, to one spatial object, be it a city like Bilbao, a region like southern Spain or a whole literary system like Catalonia.

However, one of the biggest originalities of this publication lies specifically in its treatment of Iberian diversity, because, as Higonnet explains in the Preface, "attention has been given to 'minor' literatures and marginalized phenomena," which means not only including Basque, Galician, and Catalan literatures together with the Spanish and Portuguese ones, but also to attend to languages, communities, and authors that were until now absent from even the most comprehensive literary histories. This is especially true when it refers to the treatment of the Iberian "others," which are most usually absent from considerations about Iberian literatures or cultures, using the methodology of imagology as a complement and as a source for comparative literary history. I refer especially to the chapters devoted to the images of gypsies, Jews, Africans and Indians, and modern-day immigrants in the first section of this second volume.

It is clear, in any case, that the "comparative" in the title of this work must be understood as a multilayered, comprehensive, and transnational perspective on the Iberian geocultural space,

and not in the strict sense of binary comparison between two elements (the Spanish and the Portuguese, for instance). Rather, as Helena Buescu puts it referring, in her case, to world literature, "the comparatist perspective I defend […] allows us to pass from a contrastive and binary vision […] to a more prismatic vision, in which the exclusivistic gesture makes no sense" (2013, 16). It is in that sense of a prismatic approach to Iberian identities and cultures, that we can say that this is in fact a comparative history.

The de-naturalization of space

It is almost unnecessary to insist, at this stage, on the insufficiency of national literary histories to explain the complexity of literary phenomena, especially when contemporary national divisions are artificially expanded toward the past, to periods when these divisions make no sense at all. Claudio Guillén summarized it when he stated that "as an object for literary history, national literature is, in most cases, from a historic-literary perspective, not only an insufficient institution […] but also a spurious and fraudulent one" (1989, 235). The chapter written by Fernando Cabo in the first volume of this *History* also shows to what extent so-called "national characters," as well as the literary canons and histories they supposedly inspire, are based on historical and ideological constructs. In fact, one of the explicit objectives of this work is "to question the foundations of national literatures by consciously challenging them with complex case studies" (Cabo Aseguinolaza, Abuín González & Domínguez 2010, xii), a deconstruction of national literatures that can be made for its own sake, or in the name of other supranational entities such as Iberian literature (as is the case here), European literature, or world literature, among others.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that by merely substituting these national borders by other supranational ones, all arbitrariness disappears, especially in those cases when (as happens with the Iberian Peninsula) there exists a fiction of "natural geographical borders" which can then be extrapolated to history, language, literature, culture, etc. The question is not if the Iberian Peninsula exists, as a geographical term and even as shared meta-geography; but if it exists as a cultural system with enough coherence and cohesion to constitute a scientific and academic object. The danger of deconstructing one (or more) essentialism by constructing an alternative one, and then presenting this second one as natural or self-evident, is one that must be fought when dealing with any manifestation of area studies.

The authors of *A comparative history of literatures in the Iberian Peninsula* are very aware of that danger, which is specifically tackled in César Domínguez's chapter in the first volume. The introduction already states that they are "conscious of the controversial character of the chosen geographic framework," but that "this project stems from a historical recognition of the Iberian Peninsula as a supranational whole" (Cabo Aseguinolaza, Abuín González & Domínguez 2010, xii). The question still remains whether the Iberian cultural system is transformed into the object of this comparative history because it is, indeed, a cultural (sub)system with stronger literary and cultural ties than the rest of the European (or Western, or world) literary system (not because of the existence of any metaphysical or ahistorical essentialism, but for historical, geocultural and political reasons); or if it is an arbitrarily chosen subsection of the "Republic of letters," as valid and, at the same time, as questionable, as national literatures, and which finds its own confirmation, circularly, in the existence of this history and of an academic field specifically devoted to it.

In other words: if its foundations are cultural and historical, or merely methodological. (This is a question that also applies to the other volumes of the series coordinated by the ICLA, devoted to the South-Sahara, to the Caribbean, or to Eastern and Central Europe, and which has been answered differently depending on the case).

The Introduction to the first volume offers a somewhat elliptical solution to the question, when it states that the Iberian Peninsula is "perceived as a *possible community,* not only from its interior but rather from an external and distanced position which defines it in relation to the concepts of *European* or *world Literature*" (Cabo Aseguinolaza, Abuín González & Domínguez 2010, xii; emphasis added). In a similar fashion, Arturo Casas, following both Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory and Dionýz Ďurišin's concept of interliterariness, defended in 2003 that "the Iberian geocultural space could be studied as an example of (macro)polysystem, understood […] as a group of national literatures which are historically linked and which maintain among themselves a series of hierarchic relations and fluxes of repertories or interferences" (2003b, 73–74). Domínguez, on the other hand, has argued against "the danger of transforming spaces into natural entities" (2007b, 78), precisely in the context of a revision of the application of Ďurišin's interliterary theory to the Iberian context. I, myself, tended toward the methodological definition of the object, when in 2013 I tentatively defined Iberian studies as "the consistent and deliberate consideration of the Iberian Peninsula as an interconnected, multilingual and multicultural political, identitarian and (of course) literary polisystem" (Pérez Isasi 2013, 11), thus stressing the perspective of the observer rather than the object itself.

Of course, even if we choose the first answer to this question, i.e., if we believe that there are in fact historical and cultural reasons that justify adopting the Iberian geocultural space as an object of study, this does not mean that we must completely sever it from other cultural systems: it is not impossible to think of a literary work, or a wider set of literary phenomena, as having multiple refractions, to paraphrase David Damrosch (2003), from the local to the global, with many other intermediate steps (regional, Iberian, European, Atlantic, Lusophone, etc.). On the other hand, even if there have been, obviously, periods in history in which literary and cultural relations among the different entities that compose the Iberian geocultural system were less intense (for instance, between Portugal and Spain during Francoism and Salazarism), this does not invalidate the existence of a common interliterary system: as Juan Miguel Ribera Llopis has shown in his works, a negative kind of relationship (for example, the tensions between Catalan and Castilian literary elites by the end of the nineteenth century) is still a kind of literary or cultural relation, susceptible of being studied, explained, and integrated into a wider framework; interliterary systems, in this sense, should not be considered as static entities solely identifiable in moments of extreme interconnection, but as a complex flow of interferences which vary throughout the centuries, shaping and reshaping themselves, and which also interrelate with other cultural systems in various and complex ways.

The editorial team and contributors of this history are very conscious of the inextricable web of interrelations that link the literatures in the Iberian Peninsula with other cultural systems: the introduction itself claims that one of the objects of the book (always with the aim of challenging national literatures) are "*a-national* literatures, such as those written in Hebrew or Arabic, or those that point towards an extra-Peninsular dimension: Hispano-American or African Lusophone literatures" (Cabo Aseguinolaza, Abuín González & Domínguez 2010, xii). There are even some chapters — and this is by no means accidental or arbitrary — that study

literary phenomena produced outside the Iberian Peninsula, thus apparently contradicting the title of the volumes. To what extent can we say, for instance, that the literature written in Iparralde (the French Basque Country), as analyzed by Ur Apalategui in a fascinating and much needed essay, is part of the "literatures of the Iberian Peninsula," if it is written in southern France, and looks towards Paris for most of its historical development? But at the same time, is it possible to exclude it, considering its formidable links with the literature from the Spanish Basque Country, not only because they share a common language, but because they are intertwined throughout history? The same could be said, of course, about the chapter dealing with the Canary Islands, which may be part of the Spanish state, but which are not "in the Iberian Peninsula." The case of Gibraltar, pointed out by Domínguez in his chapter in Volume 1 (since Gibraltar is in Iberia, but it is never considered Iberian) offers a perfect example of the opposite contradiction, when mere geographic existence does not seem to be enough to grant cultural inclusion.

I do not point out these cases, or other extremely interesting chapters like the one written by Inocência Mata on "The construction of the literary city," in order to criticize the contributors or the editorial team for not strictly sticking with the object designed by the title; on the contrary, these kind of supposed contradictions are linked to the very core of the questioning of a naturalization of the idea of space as a foundation for the definition of academic or scientific objects. It is not as if a term like "Iberian Peninsula" was so self-evident that it annihilated all the problems and contradictions created by national literatures; on the contrary: the setting of new boundaries to the study object will always raise questions about its validity, about the limits it sets, the connections it severs or hides, and about what it leaves out by declaring what belongs inside of it.

A history without story

In 1967, Hans Robert Jauss opined that "in our time literary history has increasingly fallen into disrepute, and not at all without reason" (1970, 7); in 1973, René Wellek wrote a much-quoted text, which opened with Jauss's words, entitled "The fall of literary history" (Wellek 1982). "Literary history is in a state of ferment and crisis, not for the first time," wrote David Perkins in his introduction to *Theoretical issues in literary history* in 1991 (6). It appears as if literary history (just as much as literary theory or comparative literature) is a field in a perpetual state of crisis, always on the edge and never yet falling down the cliff. The fact is that literary histories (or at least, works with that title, like this one) continue to be written and published, and they continue to be one of the essential (if not *the* essential) tools for literary teachers and students at every level of education. In the words of Lawrence Lipking, "the impossibility of writing [literary histories] does not stop scholars from trying and often succeeding. Despite the uncertainty of its terms and its grounds, the writing of literary history remains a fascinating and deeply satisfying practice" (1995, 12). Yet, it is undeniable that literary histories are in crisis, if we understand *crisis* in the sense of transformation, and not decay. All aspects of literary history are put into question: its object (the idea of "literature" it embodies, of which I will speak in the next section), its traditional national limits (as explained in the previous section), and of course its methodology, in which what Paul Ricoeur calls "the eclipse of narrative" (1984, 95–120), which applies to historical studies in general, has had a great impact.

I do not have the space — or the strength — to tackle here in depth the theoretical and methodological consequences of this "eclipse of narrative," but I would like to distinguish three possible ways to understand the questioning of the relation between time and history: as a crisis of the narrative model (or models, as studied and defined by Hayden White in works such as *Metahistory* or *The content of the form*) applied to historical studies; as a questioning of the historical study of literary objects — as opposed to their consideration as textual monuments without context, or with no inherent connection to their context; and as a devaluation of time and chronology as the decisive factor in the configuration of (literary) histories, giving way to an at least partially spatial approach (as Cabo Aseguinolaza [2004, 21] points out).

The configuration of *A comparative history of literatures in the Iberian Peninsula* would be impossible to understand without this crisis of the narrative form in history, which, in this case, also denies chronology a central role. In the words of the editors: "The point of departure was an explicit renunciation of those chronologically organic and narratively omniscient histories which attempt to cover all fields and periods" (Cabo Aseguinolaza, Abuín González & Domínguez 2010, ix); and later on: "the objective [of this work] was not so much to trace an exhaustive itinerary through the different literatures, from their origins up to the present" (xii). And in fact, the sections into which the history is divided ("Discourses on Iberian literary history," "The Iberian Peninsula as a literary space," "Multilingualism and literature," "Dimensions of orality" and "Temporal frames and literary (inter-)systems," in the first volume; "Images," "Genres and repertoires," "Forms of intermediation" and "Cultural studies and literary repertoires," in the second one) seem to function as thematic clusters and, I would suggest, could be redistributed in a different order without any loss for the work as a whole — except for the first section, which serves as a theoretical and methodological threshold.

I would like to point out, however, that even though in this introduction "narrative" and "chronology" appear to be linked together, it is not impossible to have the second one without the first one: it is not impossible to imagine a non-narrative history which does include a chronological configuration of some sort. In fact, Part 1 of Volume 1 of Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer's *History of the literary cultures of East-Central Europe* organizes itself around chronological "nodes of political time," thus offering a model of non-narrative history in which chronology is not completely absent, while at the same time stressing the historical (contextual or political) implications of literary history. It could also be argued that the collective, and therefore fragmentary, nature of this history explains the absence of an "omniscient entity" to guide the reading of the past; however, recent literary histories like the *History of Spanish literature* coordinated by José Carlos Mainer for Crítica or Patricio Urquizu's *History of Basque literature* are collective, while maintaining not only a chronological disposition, but also, to some extent, a strong narrative component.

Of course, this does not mean that chronology, and even narration, are completely absent from *A comparative history of literatures in the Iberian Peninsula*: they are traceable in specific chapters and sections, such as Santiago Díaz Lage's or Antón Figueroa and Elias J. Torres Feijó's. In the first volume, the section on "Temporal frames and literary (inter)-systems" is the one in which the historical approach to literary phenomena is more evident, and also the one in which it is easier to identify a chronological configuration, from medieval times (in Fernando Gómez Redondo's chapter) to contemporary Iberia (in Randolph D. Pope's). Considered individually, this section could be described as a fragmentary and non-narrative, but still chronological, history of the Iberian cultural system in relation to its geopolitical context.

This conscious decision on the part of the editors to organize the volumes around theoretical or methodological clusters is coherent with their objective of subverting the traditional models of literary history; it is a pioneer effort — to my knowledge, at least — in the field of Iberian literatures, and it stands out in the Spanish and Portuguese academic fields, in comparison to recent efforts of collaborative literary histories which have maintained a more classical approach in relation to the disposition of their objects (and also with the selection of their object, but that is another matter, which I will discuss in the following section). My only concern is, again, a terminological one: why do we keep using "history" to name a work without any chronological or narrative configuration? What is it that distinguishes this project from other collective, monographic volumes devoted to Iberian literatures published recently? Is it the existence of a common effort of reconsideration of the Iberian cultural system from past to present that guides all the sections and chapters, or the common reflection and self-awareness of all of the authors and section coordinators on the theoretical and methodological bases of the project? That which we call a history, would it be recognizable as such if we gave it any other name?

From literary to cultural history

In the words of Anxo Abuín González, in his introduction to the section on Iberian cultural studies, "Literary studies in the Iberian Peninsula are resistant to significant change." It is difficult not to agree with this statement, or with some of the reasons he enunciates to explain it, in particular the conservative strength of university departments, with a tendency to keep the division between "national" literatures and cultures; between literary and other artistic forms; and between so-called "high culture" and "popular culture." (In this sense, I wonder if maintaining the distinction itself, even with the purpose of questioning it, is not a sign of its power, and if this cultural approach to literary history should not permeate all other sections of this history, instead of being confined to this specific one.) It would be unfair, of course, to ignore the efforts of specific scholars or groups that have developed groundbreaking work in the field of cultural studies, which has done a great deal to overcome this barrier in the past decades, and which has come more from the fields of literary theory or comparative literature rather than from Hispanic or Portuguese Literature departments. In his introduction, Anxo Abuín González mentions, among others, the groups SELITEN@T from the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, or Hermeneia from the Universitat de Barcelona; this compensates, at least partially, for the fact that there is no chapter devoted to digital literature in this section, which I find a little surprising. I would also like to mention the work carried out by the Centro de Estudos Comparatistas from the Universidade de Lisboa, founded and directed by Helena Buescu from 1998 to 2013, and by Manuela Ribeiro Sanches since 2013, which has worked intensely and extensively to break down academic and scientific barriers, with groups and projects devoted to transnational literary studies, interdisciplinary approaches to literature, intermedia studies, and post-colonial studies, among many others.

The section dealing with popular culture is, in fact, one of the innovative elements of this history, following, at least partially, the considerations of Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek when he advocates for comparative cultural studies (2003, 235–67). Even so, the literary or, better said, textual approach to culture is still evident in this section, with some chapters specifically devoted

to narrative genres (for instance, those written by David Viñas Piquer or Germán Sierra), and others in which literature is one member of a pair with other media or arts (e.g., music and literature in the case of Joan-Elies Adell's and literature and script in Virginia Guarinos's chapters). This predominance of text and literature as the primary source for research or comparison can be explained by the origin of these volumes (they are, of course, the endeavor of an association of comparative literature), which in turn conditions the choice of experts to be included in it; or by the trends of cultural studies which have, indeed, appeared in Iberian cultural studies, which still derive from a tradition of text-driven scholars. In any case, I wonder if this selection of topics — independent of the high quality of the contributions, which is beyond doubt — represents to its highest extent the potentialities of cultural studies when applied to the Iberian geocultural space.

Even if they appear in different volumes, I feel that a link should be established between this section and the one on oral literature from the first volume. As Paloma Díaz-Mas states in her introduction: "Literature which is transmitted orally has traditionally not been included within the literary canon. […] Even today there are specialists in literary studies who believe that the denomination of *oral literature* is an oxymoron" (2010, 475). In this sense, the inclusion of a section on "Dimensions of orality" in a history of literatures in the Iberian Peninsula may be a form of comparative cultural history, or at least a questioning of the traditional limits of what we call "literature."

Of course, Iberian literary history has always reserved a special place for oral literature, or better said, *traditional literature* in which, again, according to Díaz-Mas's definition "receivers memorize the text in order to transmit it, and this process repeats itself over time establishing a chain of broadcasters-receivers which may go back centuries" (2010, 478). The *romances* or medieval epic/lyric ballads have been, since the birth of modern literary history itself, one of the key elements of the Iberian canon, more so after the monumental work of Ramón Menéndez Pidal and his school. This, however, excludes other forms of orality which do not share with the *romances* their traditional aspect, as well as their written fixation at some point of the process.

This treatment of orality in the European and Iberian traditions is in sharp contrast with the case of Basque literature, which is paradoxically absent from this section on orality. In the (short) tradition of Basque literary history, oral literature (both traditional literature and oral improvisation) occupy a very significant space. Koldo Mitxelena's *Historia de la literatura vasca* (History of Basque literature; published in 1960, it was the first history of its kind to be published) opens with a short chapter in which the richness of Basque oral literature is favorably compared with that of other neighboring literatures; this became a standard procedure for almost all Basque literary histories, and in the following decades the relevance of oral literature would increase even further: for instance, the *History of Basque literature* coordinated by Patricio Urquizu (2000) includes an initial 100-page chapter on oral literature, to which we should add the pages devoted to *bertsolarismo* (improvised oral poetry) in the chapters on nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature. This predominance of oral productions within Basque literature may of course be explained as a compensatory mechanism, destined to provide a long-dating tradition in a geocultural space where there are very few written productions to go back to (although the scarcity of Basque literature has also been somewhat exaggerated).

Both the inclusion of a section on cultural studies, and of a whole section on forms of orality in the Iberian context (even with the exclusion of the Basque oral tradition, as I mentioned), are forms of questioning the established Iberian canon, not as much in relation to its content but with

its boundaries and external limits. Firstly, the concept of "literature" is challenged by the inclusion of oral and popular literature, which are traditionally excluded in favor of written high culture ("traditional culture" being the only so-called "popular" genre to be considered worthy of the canon, after a process of fixation and monumentalization, so to speak); secondly, the prevalence of literature as a privileged cultural object is confronted with productions in other media such as radio, graphic novels, or cinema (and potentially with digital media too). Of course, this history cannot exhaustively explore all those fields, but it poses questions that Spanish and Portuguese studies seem to be reluctant to answer.

Open doors to future paths

In the previous pages I have tried to review and analyze some of the key elements in the configuration of *A comparative history of literatures in the Iberian Peninsula*, pointing out its most original aspects and also posing some questions which, in my opinion, remain unanswered, maybe because, paraphrasing Luis Cernuda, they are questions whose answers do not exist. In these final paragraphs, I would like to end by stressing the paths that this history opens up, in relation to the field of comparative literary history, and more specifically in relation to Iberian studies.

1. One of the first and most obviously innovative aspects of this history is that it challenges the established national boundaries in the study of literature, promoting a transnational, comparative perspective that does not exclude the existence of national literary systems, but stresses their connection with other geocultural spaces, and, more importantly, it denies any attempt at homogenization, be it linguistic, cultural, or political. The deconstruction of national identities as basis for the construction of literary histories, without substituting any other supranational essentialism, opens the opportunity to look at the complexity of literary objects without aprioristically rejecting any of them for not conforming to the national language and national character. At the same time, this multilingual, transnational, interliterary approach to literature recovers linguistic and literary productions and phenomena which have traditionally been excluded from literary histories.

2. This history also questions the strong tradition of literary (i.e. textual) studies in Spanish and Portuguese academia, which denies the possibility of considering it in relation with other cultural and artistic productions in a systemic, comparative, and transmedia approach, in which literature does not necessarily have a privileged location. The influence of cultural studies, still limited in the Iberian context, manifests itself in this history in the erasure of the frontier between high and popular culture, including oral literature, thus incorporating into the object of literary studies a great number of products that offer significant and relevant information about the functioning of the cultural system.

3. These two volumes also constitute a pioneering attempt, in the context of Iberian literatures and cultures, of exploring non-traditional methodologies regarding the practice of literary history. The "eclipse of narrative" is in this case complete, and extends itself to the abandonment of chronology as a structuring principle of the work, although it does appear as a topic of reflection and as an axis that organizes specific chapters and sections. This places this work in the trend

of spatialization of literary history, although space, as we have seen, does not stand in any case as a self-evident, unproblematic criterion. This, of course, poses questions about the specificity of literary history as a scientific field, as a practice, and as a methodology, although it does not invalidate its obvious potential as a privileged tool for educational purposes.

4. The denial of narration as the basis for historical discourse does not imply an ahistorical (i.e., decontextualized or merely aesthetic) approach to literary objects. In fact, this history places the Iberian (inter)literary (poly)system as its main object of study (although this is not equally clear in all sections and chapters of the two volumes), therefore requiring us to consider it in relation with historical, political, and cultural context, and to take into account its relation with other cultural systems, such as the European, the Atlantic, the Lusophone, or the world literary systems.

5. Finally, from the point of view of its scientific and academic location, this history locates itself as a milestone in the formation and consolidation of Iberian studies, which are nothing more (and nothing less) than a manifestation of the current recovery of area studies, combined with specific political, historical, and academic conditions, both internal and external to the Iberian Peninsula. Just two years ago, in my attempt to establish a "state of the art and future perspectives" of the field of Iberian studies, I ended by establishing three requirements for future Iberian studies: "theoretical reflections on their specificity, their methodologies, and the specific set(s) of phenomena with which they work; networks of communication that allow scholars working in this area to communicate with each other; and some level of institutional recognition" (Pérez Isasi 2013, 24). *A comparative history of literatures in the Iberian Peninsula* fulfills all three requirements, thus constituting itself as a foundational stepping stone in its field.