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### Literary Geography and Comparative Literature

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**César Domínguez,**  
**"Literary Geography and Comparative Literature"**  
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Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 13.5 (2011)**  
Special issue **New Trends in Iberian Galician Comparative Literature.**  
**Ed. María Teresa Vilariño Picos and Anxo Abuín Gonzalez**  
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol13/iss5/>>

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**Abstract:** In his article "Literary Geography and Comparative Literature" César Domínguez analyzes the relevance of political and linguistic frameworks for comparative literary historiography in the context of the European Union. Domínguez's discussion is based on the notion of geoculture whose theorization from Immanuel Wallerstein's perspective presents paradigms of interest to comparative literature. The idea of literary geography is conceived as a unit for analyzing diverse stages of the interliterary process. Thus, within the framework of the current renaissance of Goethe's concept of *Weltliteratur*, the phenomena of the literatures of (im)migration, exile, and literary diglossia represent challenges for the contextualization and writing of literary history comparatively.

**César DOMÍNGUEZ**

### **Literary Geography and Comparative Literature**

Translated from the Galician by Manus O'Dwyer

In 1966 René Wellek argued that literary historiography is the daughter of political historiography, a fact that can be seen when one surveys so-called universal literary histories, which, in spite of their supposed supranational intentions, are no more than a list of the literatures of nation states. Nevertheless, in more recent English-language scholarship there is a tendency towards the elaboration of multi- and intercultural historiographic models we find, for example, in the *Columbia History of the United States* (Elliot, Banta, Martin, Minter, Perloff, Shea), *The Multilingual Anthology of American Literature* (Shell and Sollors), or in the *The Cambridge Companion to Comparative Literature and Comparative Cultural Studies* (Tötösy de Zepetnek and Mukherjee) where emphasis is placed on language rather than the nation state and "national" literature and culture (see also Cabo Aseguinolaza).

In the present study I examine here the importance of political and linguistic boundaries for comparative literary historiography. Concepts such as the postnational in accordance with both political (the European Union) and economic (the neoliberal economic system and the behavior of multinational corporations) are relevant aspects to analyze and my study is based on the notion of geoculture and its initial theorization from an economic perspective by Immanuel Wallerstein. I postulate that Wallerstein's macro-systemic approach is relevant for comparative literature and thus I analyze the idea of literary geography as a unit which can describe diverse stages of the interliterary process (with regard to "interliterariness," see Đurišin; see also Domínguez, "Dionýz Đurišin"). My discussion is with reference to European geographies: Francophone, Anglophone, Lusophone, and Hispanophone. Further, I consider — within the framework of the current renaissance of Goethe's concept of *Weltliteratur* — phenomena such as the literatures of (im)migration, exile, literatures in contact, and literary diglossia (for recent work on *Weltliteratur* in English, see, e.g., Damrosch; D'haen; D'haen, Damrosch, Kadir; D'haen, Domínguez, Rosendahl Thomsen).

Erika Fischer-Lichte argues that poetological reflection was undergoing a reorientation in its methodological procedures in both temporal and spatial categories: such a reorientation is reflected in the deconstructive questioning of the Enlightenment conception of continuous and linear historical time in the skeptical postmodern attitude towards universalizing metanarratives constructed around a dominant and autolegitimating "us" in the indissolubility of the temporal and spatial dimensions in the Bakhtian notion of the chronotope, in the notion of intertextuality, and in the abundant spatial metaphors of narratology (profound structure as opposed to superficial, interior as opposed to exterior, linearity, intersection, distance, perspective, etc.). According to Fischer-Lichte, the substitution of a temporal aesthetic for a spatial one is not at issue here; rather, what is at stake is a redefinition of the relation between both categories in terms of the fourth dimension (*Raumzeit*) theorized by modern physics. Despite of the centrality of space, in comparative literature in particular and in literary studies in general, scholars appear to be removed from the use of the basic spatial tools used by other humanities disciplines such as history, geography, sociology, ethnography, anthropology, and linguistics. This indifference is even more glaring when one notes how some primary comparatist notions reveal an evident spatial character: *littérature européenne*, commonwealth literature, *Nationalliteratur*, etc.

In my opinion, it would be preferable to avoid talk of cartographic indifference and to focus, rather, on an *a priori* approach: if the type of maps used in literary studies are investigated, it becomes obvious that they are almost exclusively political and that global organization is represented with regard to nation states with additional attention given to political groupings in regional alliances (the concept of *littérature européenne*, for example) and to subdivisions in their respective political-administrative unities (e.g., the distinction between literatures in English and Québécois Canada). This operation is brought to an extreme in its retrospective application to the historical stages of literatures in situations where the nation state had yet to exist. One of the most striking examples in this respect is the repertoire of European medieval languages and this unquestioned political map in literary studies is restrictive, especially in its historicist vein in which the object of analysis coincides with the

sum of the literatures of nation states. Such an assembly encourages the preservation of identity in the romantic superimposition of a language and a literature (in this respect the German expression *Sprachliteraturen* is revealing) and is usually set amongst examples of nation states presenting binary literary situations, such as Belgium, Canada, or Switzerland. Even when a discussion about the bi-literary nature of these countries is inexact (in the case of Canada, in addition to English and French, one must consider literatures in First Nations languages and the literatures of immigrants; in Belgium, in addition to French- and Flemish-language literatures one must account for German-language literature). I believe it is useful to provide certain linguistic data which should provoke critical reflection around the idea of literary geography. According to data provided by Juan Carlos Moreno Cabrera, in Papa New Guinea 809 languages are spoken; in Indonesia 672; in Mexico 241; in the United States 177; in China 102; in Ethiopia 120, and these are but a few representative examples. If one accepts the principle that all languages are capable of generating a discursive entity identifiable as literature, it is evident that the political map constitutes an unsatisfactory and inexact representation of global literary reality, while a linguistic map could provide us with a much more accurate idea, even if this might be difficult to grasp for literary studies, as José Lambert has indicated: "since most of us unconsciously regard the map of the political world as proto-typical of world maps, every linguistic map looks like the map of an alien planet. The interplay of colors marking territories and borderlines produces unexpected relations: 1) areas widely apart show the same color, indicating that the same language is spoken, 2) large areas which we normally regard as unified are a quilt of many colors, Russia, for instance, or India, even France, 3) old Europe looks a patchwork indeed, but North and South America are quite monotonous; we are less surprised by the vast blanks and the muddle of many colors which is Africa" (134-35; the passage should be read carefully, since the allusion to African and US-American monocromatism seems to indicate that his reflection is based on a political-linguistic map, i.e., a cartographic representation of its national languages).

Clearly, one cannot hope to apply linguistic maps to a literary situation, but, and in the lack of studies along these lines, one should recognize that these maps constitute a representation truer to literary facts than the "pre-Columbian map," as Lambert has called it, which reigns supreme in literary studies: "since literary scientists hardly ever recognize non-written literature (least of all oral traditions), official literary studies in fact institutionalize a pre-Columbian world view. Some of the continents are still missing, and not only for the period of time up to the Renaissance, but all the way into the twentieth century" (137). Scholars in comparative literature who have promoted the necessity for the cartographic route include Albert S. Gérard (if in a somewhat metaphorical manner), René Etiemble, and Lambert. At present, however, there have been few results of such scholarship except in partial applications of the said concepts, for example in studies by Franco Moretti or the recently published *Mappe della letteratura europea e mediterranea* (Anselmi). If linguistic maps cannot be accepted *tout court* as literary maps, they do constitute an essential tool for the comparatist as instruments from which new literary maps can be generated (see, e.g., *Encyclopaedia Universalis*). We are dealing with interdisciplinary research of great interest, especially because of the possibilities opened up for mutual discovery. One recalls, for example, how difficulties for the cartographic representation of Latin as a living language in medieval and humanist Europe are similar to those confronting the mapping of Latin literature or how solutions arbitrated by cultural geographies could be useful in comparative literature in its creation of literary maps.

In order to delineate the order of the current state of affairs and to address the above mentioned gaps in the comparative study of literary geography, I propose the following points of reflection: 1) the development of the idea of geoliterature founded in notions of geoculture and geopolitics; 2) the generation of literary maps from linguistic maps, and 3) comparatist problematics derived from cartographic thought. Insofar as the idea of geoliterature is concerned, one must scrutinize the proposition by Wallerstein addressing geoliterature as a category which integrates and is the expression of the dialectic interrelation of territory, cultural spaces, and multiculturalisms. Geoliterature springs from geopolitical foundations which attempt, in their spatial analysis of political phenomena "to respond to why human beings create places in space and how they imbue them with importance. ... When we create places, when "we live" in these places, we create identities" (Nogué Font and Ruff 17; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are by Domínguez and O'Dwyer). The web of factors that make up the geocultural units is complex and has most often been interpreted in

deterministic terms. One thinks of climate (the segmenting of Europe between a *Nord* and a *Midi* by Mme de Staël, for example) or in the literary use of the countryside as an identity marker (the mythical, regenerative and initiating character of the mountain — Montserrat, Canigó, Montseny, the Pyrenees — for the Catalan Renaissance, the heartland of Denmark, or the western frontier of the United States) and even canonization (Spanish dualism and the *Libro de buen amor* or the Spanish soul and the Generation of 98).

Geoliterature implies a more critical approach to the functioning of literary systems in its transcendence of both literary, as well as political borders. In this respect, it should be understood that political maps are inexact representations of literatures and that linguistic maps raise certain difficulties: one thinks, for example, of translation or of the multinational literary diffusion of original language editions, all of which suggests that one possibility for the elaboration of literary maps lies in the recourse to systemic theory. As Milan V. Dimić has suggested, "Polysystem Theory and its compatibility with contemporary historico-social approaches to literature opens up comparative literature ... to conceptualize the discipline less according to traditional divisions by states, regions, and languages (boundaries which are always changing and frequently illusory), and more according to verifiable macro and micro systems" (35). Of interest on this subject is also Roger Bauer's conception of cultural pluricentrism and the work of Walter D. Mignolo, which constitutes one of the clearest illustrations possible in the application of comparatist resources to the notion of geoliterature, in this instance brought to bear on the Latin American situation.

The parallel disciplinary structure of German-language *Literaturwissenschaft* and linguistics is not merely anecdotal; rather, it is an index of the necessary interchange of methodologies and content which holds beneficial possibilities for both fields. One cannot overlook the fact that literature's raw materials are natural languages and that the results obtained through an interdisciplinary comparative investigation of universals typologies should be valued in this sense. In the case of literary geography, we find ourselves in another situation where the collaboration between comparative literature and (socio)linguistics is both unavoidable and productive. This is not only because the hypothetical literary maps correspond with linguistic maps thus marking a point of departure, but also because the use of linguistic cartography allows us to pose questions pertinent to problematics in comparative literature. I propose three paradigmatic cases: 1) by building on the Uriel Weinreich's *Languages in Contact*, sociolinguistic analysis has devoted special attention to the contact between languages, a reality in today's multi- and intercultural communities, although an incontestable fact such as the following is often forgotten: "multilingual communities are the majority: there exists 4000 or 5000 languages in the world, but only 140 nation states; in some of these there are more than one hundred languages" (López Morales 142). It does not seem out of the question to state that many of these linguistic contacts are also contact points between literatures from which we could conclude that processes of interference would also take place, one literature assimilating structures belonging to another. This, precisely, is a basic notion in the polysystem theory of Itamar Even-Zohar. Undoubtedly, literatures in contact constitute an authentic challenge for this cartographic representation that I am referring to, one of the most extreme manifestations of which might be the phenomenon known as heterolingual literature, which has its sociolinguistic parallelism in the exchange of codes or linguistic alternative, to which we will return later.

If literatures in contact comprise the most integrative framework for comparativism and sociolinguistics, both of the following cases must be conceived as subcategories. Thus, in the second tier we find bilingualism and plurilingualisms and their literary counterparts (biliterariness and pluriliterariness), to which particular attention is paid by Claudio Guillén. These can be both individual, as well as social (in bilingual or plurilingual communities segments of the population read and/or write literary works several languages, see, e.g., Sturm-Trogonakis). Leonard Forster offers a historical panorama on bi- or plurilingual literary authors and George Steiner provides an exposition of literary plurilingualism. Third, it would be worthwhile to undertake a study of literary diglossia, understood as linguistic usage functionally differentiated in literary terms and tending towards a certain genological specialization. For example, Peter Z. Schubert gives several examples of this phenomenon in the context of Czech-language literature citing Viktor Fischl, who writes Czech-language poetry but English-language essays. Jean-Paul Pazziani, on the other hand, provides an analysis of literary diglossia connected to the phenomenon of translation. Systemic interferences of literatures in contact

and the cases of pluriliterariness and literary diglossia lead us to conclude with Guillén that "these various situations have many common traits: that one lives intellectually in a language other than his or her most familiar one, the porousness of a language surrounded by others, the function of alterity or 'heteroglossia' that Bakhtin so much insisted upon" (*Entre* 333).

Last, I refer to certain specific cases of multi- and interculturalism which constitute far-reaching challenges for the course of these hypothetical literary maps, and therefore for comparatist historiographic thought, with the understanding that this study does not seek to elaborate on homogenous teleological narrations, but rather attempts to question and formulate, using rhizomatic and nodal models, literary realities incomprehensible to national historiography. One of these cases is the literature of (im)migration marked in its early stages by an autobiographic tendency to narrate the journey to the destination country and the identity problems that follow, but leads to a more complex later phase dedicated in general to the confrontation and questioning of imaginary constructions and the mythologizing and demythologizing of the home and destination countries (see, e.g., Tötösy de Zepetnek and Wang; Tötösy de Zepetnek, Wang, Sun). This identity (re)construction resembles the movement of the Second and Third World towards the First World, ideological constructs of profound geocultural implications: "in the early modern world, languages were attached to territories, and nations were characterized by the 'natural' links between them. ... After World War II, languages and territories were redefined when area studies emerged as a consequence of the hierarchical division into First, Second, and Third Worlds" (Mignolo 221; see also Domínguez, "Literary Emergence"). Problematics in comparative literature associated with the literature of (im)migration involve both its transmission in the source language, as well as its target language in which the reader is faced with hybrid works combining linguistic, as well as literary contacts (survival of the poetics of the source-literature fused with elements of the literary system of destination). Jean-Marc Moura offers the following taxonomy of the formulas of poetic hybridization: 1) passage from one autochthonous literary form to a Western one (from epic poetry to story, from the oral story to the written, from autochthonous to western meter); 2) appropriation of a Western genre; and 3) incorporation of the work into a Western tradition (136-37). H. Gilbert and J. Tomkins offer an interesting study on the fusion of Western and non-Western dramatic forms (on this and the related problematics of [im]migrant literatures see Bonn; Bortoloni; Chaulet-Achour; Gnisci; King, Connel, White; Leoni; Perrot). Obviously, the literatures of (im)migration are encompassed by a much larger phenomenon, namely the category of emerging literatures, within which other related categories, such as the literature of exile and literature in translation also participate (see, e.g., Bartoloni; Bevan; Goldman; Guillén, *El sol*; Hellerstein; McClennen; Tötösy de Zepetnek).

Next, I present three specific phenomena derived from languages and literatures in contact which, while able to coexist with the aforementioned literature of (im)migration, exile, and literature in translation, also appear in diverse spheres. I take into account what has been termed heterolinguistic literature and that has its sociolinguistic parallel in the exchange of codes or linguistic alternatives defined as the combined use of linguistic structures. At first it might seem that the notion of heterolinguism is opposed to that of monolingualism. It is important to note, however, that monolingualism is a myth (see, e.g., Lambert; Sturm-Trigonakis) in the sense that linguistic use, even at the heart of the same language, cannot be uniform owing to the fact that it is composed by different strata and registers. Rainer Grutman defines heterolinguism as "the presence within a text of foreign languages, under whichever form this might be, as well as the varieties (social, regional, or chronological) of the principal language" (37). Building from a study of literary bilingualism as an index of intersystemic contacts, Grutman analyzes Canadian Québécois literature in the nineteenth century and argues that it is characterized by the conflict between standard and spoken French in Québec and its contamination by British and US-American *koiné*. Moura, on the other hand, gives examples pertaining to the Francophone area, such as Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo or Amadou Hampâté Bâ. Further, it is worth considering a variant of heterolinguistic literature, namely interlinguistic literature defined as employing a not entirely competently acquired language which retains traces of the mother language or (a) previously acquired foreign language(s) (see, e.g., Zabuz). In this sense, we are dealing with "interlingual" language composed both of correct forms and rules, pertaining to the system of the meta-language in question, as well as incorrect forms and rules unconnected to this same meta-language. One thinks of the *Palm-Wine Drunkard* by Nigerian novelist José Luandino

Vieira, whose works use interlingua resulting from the fusion of Portuguese, English, French, and Kimbundu. Another example is that of Creole languages: as opposed to the literary construction of interlanguages (even if some interlanguages are authentic Creole), Creole languages are the result of the process through which a Pidgin language — created with the goal of communicating with another group — evolves in its linguistic structures and becomes the mother language of a community (e.g., French Creole theater in Haiti, Sango in Africa, or South African literature in Afrikaans).

In conclusion, it is evident that the problems and challenges faced by a comparative literature sensitive to the notion of literary geography are multiple and complex. In general terms, these problems are associated with the diminishing relevance of the nation state (i.e., with regard to language and culture but not in the political sphere) as the only referent in the literary development of a homological space amid clear and stable frontiers, immersed in an apparently contradictory double process, with globalization (which fragments and dissolves sovereignty amid various agents) on one hand, and localization (emergence of subnational spaces such as global cities and new areas) on the other. However, emphasis on multi- and interculturalism as a project based on respect for cultural diversity and the affirmation of the right to difference and the reorganization of public structures so as to recognize these rights should not occlude the fact that transnationality is not an exclusively contemporary phenomenon. Comparative studies of the literary process must pay attention to those periods previous to the appearance of nation states (especially the medieval period), the understanding of which can allow us to better comprehend the contemporary world.

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