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# The Spatial Turn in Literary Historiography

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**Fernando Cabo Aseguinolaza,**
**"The Spatial Turn in Literary Historiography"**
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**Abstract:** In his article "The Spatial Turn in Literary Historiography," Fernando Cabo Aseguinolaza examines the spatialization of literary history in recent years. He evaluates the resurgence of interest in literary geography and argues that the geographic dimension is not the only aspect of the predominant spatiality in new literary histories. Further, Cabo Aseguinolaza postulates that although the emphasis on spatiality marks many current literary histories, all literary histories imply spatial elements of different character and scope and that these options constitute an essential part of the performative capacity of history writing. In particular, Cabo Aseguinolaza discusses categories proposed by Henri Lefebvre in his *La Production de l'espace* (1974) and illustrates Lefebvre's notions with examples from Spanish scholarship.

**Fernando CABO ASEGUINOLAZA**

## The Spatial Turn in Literary Historiography

Translated from the Galician by Manus O'Dwyer

Literary historiography has been characterized in recent years by an increased emphasis on spatiality. To speak of a spatialization of the history of literature would probably be an exaggeration; however, the growing interest in what could be termed the space of history is relevant enough to warrant special attention. This is reflected in the abundance in recent years of historiographical projects based on regional or spatial premises. In addition, many other projects, whose spatial emphasis is not as obvious, often introduce considerations that point very clearly toward an almost always problematic spatiality. In both cases, this new pertinence of space can be interpreted as a clear manifestation of the crisis in conceptions of a homogeneous and teleological historical temporality, combined with, in many cases, the problematization of traditional histories of national literatures.

The critique of outmoded temporal frameworks is reflected in many recent projects to use new spatial forms of organization as opposed to the traditional narrative sequentiality that informed literary history in its classical period. In fact, fairly frequently, the primarily geographical definition of a historiographical project goes hand in hand with the use of spatial forms for its internal structuring. This is a clear indication that a rejection of the traditional paradigm of literary history inspires very significant conceptual innovations. When speaking of the importance of spatiality in literary historiography, diverse dimensions spring to light, dimensions which are often connected, but which can also exist independently. Thus, it is useful to distinguish at least three aspects of the issue: 1) the definition of the object of historical study from a geographical perspective, or rather, a geoliterary one; 2) the internal structure of historiographical work according to guidelines to do with the organization and structuring of spatial contents; and 3) recourse to theoretical and epistemological models that imply a definition of the object in which spatiality takes precedence over temporality. This last would include categories such as, for example, literary fields or systems. And it must be added that the clash between spatial orientation and teleological temporality frequently runs parallel to the opposition between the comparative and the national models of literary history. Mario J. Valdés bases a programmatic declaration on the full, although undoubtedly deceptive, expression of this methodological dichotomy: "comparative literary history is a relatively recent development in literary studies. It can be described as a collaborative interdisciplinary study of the production and reception of literatures in specific social and cultural contexts. Instead of writing a historical narrative of one language in one geographic area, comparative literary history examines literature as a process of cultural communication within one language area or among a number of them without attempting to minimize cultural diversity ("Rethinking" 75; see also Cabo Aseguinolaza; Domínguez; Valdés, "A Historical"; relevant is also Anton Ocvírk's *Teorija primerjalne literarne zgodovine* [Theory of Comparative Literary History] [1936]).

However, once we admit the presence of spatiality to be one of the axes of contemporary historiographical discourse, we must add that positions are not always transparent and that discussion of the space of literary history is still in a preliminary phase, requiring careful reflection. Confusion and misunderstandings are frequent. What is more, this increased interest in the spatial dimension of literary historiography is in most cases accompanied by a lack of appropriate theoretical reflection and a very limited awareness of its practical and theoretical antecedents. And although this new return to the concept of space takes place in a very specific context, we must not forget the pivotal role of the geoliterary dimension in the general historical development of the comparatist project, or in the establishment of literary nationalities and their respective historiographical traditions. In truth, any history involves a spatial aspect, profoundly entwined with the epistemological and ideological hypotheses on which it is based. But it would be an error to suppose that the space of history is solely an aprioristic element, or based on an initial choice. The spatiality of histories, in this case literary ones, is also a product of them. It is, if you will, a consequence of the "performativity" of the historiographical exercise: a factor that although until implicit lately, has now become a determining factor in many of the most recent historiographical projects.

From the geographical perspective of space it seems worthwhile to recall the positions taken by two prominent representatives of literary studies, who, at different times, reacted strongly to what they argued were restrictive and obsolete vision of literature. In both cases, the geoliterary dimension is directly involved, although not in an identical manner. In one it is involved explicitly, while in the other it is more elusive. Nonetheless, the relevance of this long-ignored issue and the important implications of its mere consideration can be felt at all times. The first position is that taken by René Etiemble, who in the 1940s reacted to the publication of various books that proposed carrying out a "literary geography": "it is dead people whom we must kill. Still-borns as well: the geography of literature" (131; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are by Cabo Aseguinolaza and O'Dwyer). The tendency to identify literary geography with literary regionalism and to interpret literature based on authors' birthplace justified Etiemble's reaction in the name of radical cosmopolitism. His was a refusal to accept a geographical determinism — especially the definition of authors by genetics — as complement to positivistic historicism, conservative in its ideological assumptions. Geography, at least in this version, has no place in the universalist perspective of Etiemble, who rejects deterministic geographical analysis of the literary phenomenon with all the armory of his immense learning. Secondly, it is also worthwhile to recall the statements made by Stephen Greenblatt regarding the development of literary historiography. Of particular importance is his debate with Linda Hutcheon. The disagreement stems from Hutcheon's guarded approval of the fairly common thesis that historiographical revisionism is a luxury that disaffected groups that have not yet managed to articulate their own "narrative of emergence" cannot permit themselves (9-14). Declaring traditional models to be obsolete would seem to be, according to this way of seeing things (characteristic of a sort of self-righteous Hegelianism), one more way to exclude all literatures that had been denied the opportunity to affirm their national (or other) identities during the period dominated by hegemonic groups or traditions. Consequently, we would have to grant them a sort of epistemological exception by virtue of a theoretical pragmatism that recognizes the performative capacity of otherwise outmoded teleological paradigms.

If we look for the most recent precedent for claims of a spatial turn — regardless of whether or not it was labeled as such — we would have to turn to the end of the 1960s. There is a general consensus that points towards "des espaces autres," a conference given by Michel Foucault in Tunis in 1967, unpublished until 1984, as the fundamental point of reference. In his article, Foucault defined his concept of "heterotopy"; however, before doing so, he began the text with a diagnosis that graphically characterizes the spatial nature of the contemporary era: "The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein. One could perhaps say that certain ideological conflicts animating present-day polemics oppose the pious descendents of time and the determined inhabitants of space" (22). This is a conception of the network society, of an experience and of an epistemology that are not modern, and that Foucault saw exemplified in the structural project of his time; although he also brought forward many of the ideas that would later be common in theoretical debates starting in the 1980s.

Two significant years were 1973 and 1974: in *The Country and the City* (1973) Raymond Williams examines the cultural opposition between the country side and the city through their representations in English literature as a manifestation of the effects of the capitalist mode of production and social organization, in *Espéces de espaces* (1974) George Perec proposes a typology of vital, diversified, and fragmented spaces as material for a reflection on identity and the void, and in *La Production de l'espace* (1974) Henri Lefebvre critiques thinking about space from a theoretical, as well as a political standpoint with regard to structuralism, linguistic centricity, and the tendency — which Foucault in a way had already identified — and imports into discourse the abstract properties of space. In Williams's, Perec's, and Levebvre's works literature plays an important role. However, in *La Production de l'espace* — where at various points the importance of representations of space in literary texts is acknowledged — readers are warned against the temptation to elaborate literary research that claims to orient itself towards "socially real spaces" (Levebvre 22). Since then, attention toward the expression or the representation of social, ideological, or cultural spaces in literature has been

increasing progressively, culminating in Franco Moretti's radical proposal (opposing Etiemble) in his *Atlas de la novela europea* (1997) where geography is what generates literature. Moretti argues that the preoccupation with space has been gaining importance in literary studies in a discontinuous but increasingly intense manner.

Apart from the above discussed conceptions, but showing the spatial orientation in literary studies, Daniel-Henri Pageaux explored the relationship between literature and space from a comparative perspective. On the one hand, he posits the possibility of a geocriticism, whose function would be to form the base for a truly literary geography. The specific object of this first level would be related to research on cultural spaces and their association with the study of (in the language of Pierre Bourdieu) literary fields, adapted to classical comparatist geography with its vocabulary of borders, zones of exchange, and literary regions. On the other hand, and with more skepticism, Pageaux ponders the plausibility of a geopoetics whose sphere would coincide with the confluence of an element of external reality whether this be landscape, space, place, territory, etc., and literary form. Thus is raised the possibility of a literary geography with special connection with a concrete spatial field (maritime, rural, etc.). Pageaux suggests the possibility of a third sphere, the sphere of the geosymbolic; or, to be more exact, the geographic imaginary and he underlines, among other things, the role of the other arts such as painting and photography when structuring an imaginary of this type, but also — and this is a key point — the role of certain disciplinary and intellectual traditions which through their vocabulary contribute to the spread of spatial imaginaries which penetrate a given culture.

Coming back to the space of literary historiography, it is not difficult to imagine the possibility of transposing these approaches based in literature *per se* to historiographical texts, which also include a strong spatial component in their approach to the representation and conceptualization of the literary phenomenon. This does not only apply to recent histories which call attention to space, but also to more traditional ones which do not consider it necessary to explicitly acknowledge this essential element of any discursive strategy. Thus we can speak of a geocriticism of literary history, since any historical study presupposes and sustains a literary field, and, based on the object they define, ratify certain cultural spaces and the hierarchy that regulates regional, national, or continental (even world) entities, assigning centers and peripheries. In this way we also start to see the possibility of analyzing the geopoetic, and above all, the geosymbolic dimensions of the histories of literature: the geographical imaginary turns out to be a factor in the development of literary histories, since it was a decisive element in their characterization and the works of Mme de Staël, Léonard de Sismondi, or Friedrich Schlegel are indicative of this. Pageaux indicates the importance of these factors in the quest to overcome history in its traditional sense. It cannot be coincidental, after what we have seen, that his principal reference is the very same work by Foucault (Pageaux 83). Fernand Braudel — who as in the late 1940s had proposed the possibility of a geohistory – would also have been a good example, since, at the end of Pageaux's essay, Braudel is cited as the inspiration for a possible literary history focused on the *longue durée*, and, therefore, on geography. This would be a literary history, as Pageaux points out, situated in a different terrain from that of the more typically postmodern conceptions of interconnectivity and spatial fragmentation despite the fact that in both cases, spatiality occupies a privileged position in the historiographical project. Between the spatial turn of certain sectors of postcolonial theory or of certain aspects of globalization and a historiographical model inspired by Braudel's concept of geography as the *longue durée*, there are gaps difficult to bridge and that define opposing models when it comes to understanding the relationship between history and space.

The complexity of the debate on space demands the recognition that not all conceptions that draw on it are comparable; on the contrary, they can entail incompatible ideologies and epistemological models. Thus there exists a new zone of theoretical and methodological discussion rather than a unique approach, built on the ruins of literary history as it took shape in the nineteenth century. It is also essential to note that this spatial debate not only deals with historiographical models with innovative approaches, but also necessarily takes us back into the past, forcing us to stop and consider forms of spatiality inherent to previous literary histories. Directing our attention toward space almost always suggests a tactical declaration of opposition to other historiographies, not only alternative ones in the present, but also those already formulated. Observers of the development of literary history can appreciate that the precursors to these and other spatial models are born as a

reaction to the crisis, whether owing to discreditation or exhaustion, of historiographical forms based on canonical criteria, lineal temporality articulated in aesthetic movements and epochs, a conception of literary spaces derived almost without alteration from a nineteenth-century tradition based on the national model. The adoption of a more critical perspective towards traditional literary geography, as well as the use of spatial forms in the internal structuring of new histories prevails — although neither unanimously nor homogeneously — as a reaction to a situation of historiographical impasse. We should recall that the title of David Perkins's *Is Literary History Possible?* served as the gateway to the negative response the question elicited. Although it should also be noted that at that time Perkins had not yet sensed the scope of the spatial turn and its epistemological consequences as a determining factor for the future development of literary history. But spatiality is already an incontrovertible dimension for the definition of new historiographical projects, as well as for the critical revision of already existing ones. Its analysis can be approached in many ways, as space can also be understood in many ways. However, this should not obscure the urgent need to formulate the issue with a consistent criterion that permits us to discern the multiple implications of the so-called spatial turn and its antecedents. On this subject, it would not be fruitless to return once again to one of the works that remains of the utmost interest for the critical and theoretical study of the histories of literature, Lefebvre's *La Production de l'espace*. Lefebvre juggles three ideas in an attempt to highlight the multiple crossovers characteristic of attention toward social spaces (42; on Lefebvre and space see, e.g., Lungu; Smethurst; Soja; Vitiello).

Lefevbre's first formulation is spatial practice. This has to do with the production and reproduction of spaces typical of each social formation, which assure the cohesion of these spaces from the point of view of the competence and action of social subjects. Spatial practice abounds in the field of perception. In other words, it is spatial practice that produces social spaces to the extent that it postulates and at the same time presupposes them. Lefebvre speaks of a dialectic relationship in this sense, but it could also be called dynamic. Second, we have the representations of space which imply a knowledgeable or reasoned understanding of spaces. They include a discursive elaboration and also organization and planning of the spatial sphere. Lefebvre identifies them as the dominant spatial models in a given society, usually understood as the manifestation of a concrete code that semiotizes space with a fundamental productive dimension, as far as these representations are part of a highly practical or programmed project. And third, there are the spaces of representation, suggestive of more complex symbolisms. In the words of Lefebvre, it is the lived or suffered space that imagination attempts to appropriate and modify. It appears mainly in symbolic works. Lefebvre argues against the dissociation of these three aspects; on the contrary, they must be approached from the angle of their permanent interrelation, even the confusion that can occur between the dimensions that they appear to define. But what is of interest here is the relevance that these considerations can have for a spatial reflection on literary historiography, which, while dealing with apparently dissimilar elements, can articulate them in a consistent manner. Thus would be opened up a new possibility for critical analysis of the disciplinary tradition, and for the clarification of many disagreements on the epistemological identity of future literary histories.

To speak of spatial practice would, for example, point towards the spheres from which a given historical work originates and toward which it is directed, including not only the disciplinary or academic space, but also, to return to what we have previously mentioned, comparatist, national, or other approaches. To give a clear example, the differentiation between local, regional, national, interliterary, and universal literary histories implies, not just a field of variable dimensions, but the presupposition and the affirmation — or the negation — of geoliterary entities in the dialectical or dynamic way Lefebvre signals. The very elaboration of such a history would imply an exercise of spatial production and reproduction worthy of our attention. On the other hand, representations of space are of capital importance for the understanding of the underlying models in many historiographical exercises. It is here where presuppositions about the tensions between centre and periphery, cultural globalization, and the articulation of edges and borders in the marking out of cultural and literary spaces, begin to make sense. And lastly, we must also approach the analysis of the spaces of representation from a sphere halfway between the sphere of the symbolic and the sphere of Pageaux's geopoetics, which could include the use of certain spatial forms and strategies of representation: in this case the move from the selection of narrative to more fragmentary techniques.

Next, I discuss some of the aspects signaled in Lefebvre's conceptual triad with examples of a few specific cases which one way or another involve the Iberian Peninsula, the spatial framework for a possible literary history that is always latent in these reflections. The first reference goes back to the demand for literary geography, to which Etiemble was opposed. Exploring it allows us to grasp the pertinence of the notion of representation of space in the development of a literary stance towards history conceived as a privileged approach to literature. In 1931 José Osório de Oliveira published a volume entitled *Geografia literária* with essays in which he dealt with issues current to the debates about comparativism: colonial literature, the situation of exile, and travel literature. An employee of the Ministry of Colonies during the Salazar regime, he was himself the author of travel books, as well as works on Portuguese and Brazilian literature and on the image of Spain in Portuguese literature. However, the tone and ideological attitude of his writings bears no comparison to those who would later dominate work on these questions. Osório de Oliveira is an author whose metropolitan, colonial, and undoubtedly reactionary political stance is shot through with a reactive nationalism seeking a place for Portugal among countries taken as points of reference: England and especially France. But this same position, modernist in the broadest sense, drove him to an iconoclastic position towards the contemporary situation he deplored. Hegemonic representations of space played a crucial role in this regard and it is for this reason he paid attention to issues which often pass unnoticed or are treated indirectly; among other reasons because they are not clearly associated with what for example Itamar Even-Zohar understands as cultural planning, the motive which underlies Osório de Oliveira's writings. It is precisely in this context that the close attention paid to the spatial dimension of literature becomes relevant.

Because of this it is important that we recognize to what extent the proposal of a literary geography is seen as a reply or an alternative to literary history and that we link both rubrics to precise models or paradigms for approaches to literature that occur at different moments in time. In this sense, Joaquim de Carvalho's introduction to Osório de Oliveira's book is enlightening:

> Osório de Oliveira, like all young people who liked to dismiss triviality as the temptation of an idea, heard the two voices that invite the migration of the current: the voice of the preterite, saturated with history and continuity, and the voice of the future, discontinuous and doubtful, expressing itself for the evocation, for the voyage, for times to come or for unfamiliar space. His spirit captured the two so very opposing messages and allowing himself successively to be seduced by both, in the end was left with the call of the faraway and the future, or, as he admitted, "nostalgia for the unknown, and unfulfilled, but still hopeful desire." Hence it is the essays on literary geography and not history but on the integration of the course of history in which he moves clearly through the literary diversity of different areas, be they geographical or aesthetic. After a century as historicist as the nineteenth, this geographical direction presents novelty. (xii-xiii)

It is obvious that the opposition established between literary geography — conceived as an approach oriented toward the future, the imprecise, and the discontinuous and literary history, which is linked to ideas of continuity and succession — suggests a model only understandable as a rejection of the nineteenth-century tradition of national historiographies. And this is not because that tradition avoided a strict geographical model: Carvalho is — as he understands Osório de Oliveira's thought — distancing himself both from the linear and continuous time of romantic history, which consigns Portuguese literature (and Spanish literature along with it) to a temporal position of pastness and subjects it to a foreign teleological principle and from the peripheral geoliterary position that was assigned to the Iberian Peninsula. The appeal to the future and to discontinuity in this framework take on a precise meaning as the expression of a programmed intentionality through the foundation of a literature no longer fixed by the historical past but tied to a geography linked to the themes of travel and exile. The search for the rupture with and opening of a preconceived intellectual sphere leads necessarily to the prevalence of geography in which the Portuguese colonial expansion would not be an incidental player. The expression of this discontent has clear ideological connotations in the case of Osório de Oliveira, especially given the events of that particular period in Portuguese history as he discussed in his 1926 article "A verdadeira literatura portuguesa. Conferência que devia ter sido dita no Brasil" and identified the essential condition of contemporary Portuguese authors to be exile. An exile that in some cases was understood as spatial displacement, as in the cases of Camilo Pessanha or Wenceslau de Morais and that in other cases was seen as a retreat or removal from society "in one's own land" as with Teixeira de Pascoaes or Ana de Castro Osório. Always important, however,

was the basic criterion of "moral exile," derived from dissatisfaction with a contemporary state of affairs that they rejected: "above all, it is a moral exile provoked in great sensibilities by the tumultuous agitation of our country and the period in which we live. Literature could not escape the wave that crushed everything, and to those who refused to yield, or be responsible, only one course of action remained: to go into exile" (*Geografia* 2).

Aside from the references to the then contemporary situation, Osório de Oliveira links these considerations on the condition of exile with reflections which deal directly with the geocultural position of Portugal in the framework of the Peninsula and of Europe highlighting the importance of the maritime imaginary, which, to some extent, presents Portuguese literature as exiled from Europe and even from the Iberian Peninsula. Thus, taking as a starting point one of Ramón Gómez de la Serna's observations on the affinity between Portuguese authors and Paul Gauguin's departure for the far Pacific, Osório de Oliveira comments that "almost all those Portuguese are like Gauguin: backs turned to Europe and with the sea ahead, they do not just go to Spain, do not even descend the West coast of Africa, but pass the islands, round the Cape, go up the coast of Mozambique and India, to Macau or to Timor, to the end of the world, they go to make a life for themselves or slake their thirst for the exotic" (*Geografia* 5-6). Literary geography entails a stance with regard to a model of representation of geoliterary space, whose starting point implies the rejection of literary history, indirectly associated with another geoliterary model and with the definition of a position for Portuguese literature totally different from the one championed by Osório de Oliveira. At least in this respect we can see the distance between the representation of space and the mere practice of space, no matter how decisive this turns out for the production / reproduction of social and cultural spaces.

Denis Hollier's edited volume *New History of French Literature* can be defined as spatial practice. The work was one of the most controversial historiographical projects of recent years from an international point of view, particularly as regards the form chosen for its internal organization. The work consists of about 200 essays written by a wide range of authors. Each essay has a date for its heading — the dates are a way of ordering the chapters — and the mention in a subtitle of a given event (historical or literary) which would provide a chronological starting point for the essay in question. It is futile to look for criteria to link the chapters except for a brief recommendation to see other sections of the book as a complement to the portion just read. Given all this, it is not surprising to find that in an introductory note, Hollier expresses his distance not only from narrative literary histories, but also toward the use of an alphabetically organized dictionary format. Both those models were dismissed as "traditional modes of encyclopedic presentation" (xix). The organizing principle used in the volume, therefore, was intended to disrupt the effect of historic and epistemological continuity normally associated with traditional histories, via, among other techniques, randomizing the subjects treated in each chapter (a genre, a work, an image, an institution, a historic juncture, etc.) and taking care to avoid turning the author into the pivot point of the work, or, similarly, refusing to obey common periodological schemas. However, the concept of French literature, like the concept of the spatial framework that it supposes, cannot be more traditional in appearance. In fact, hardly any consideration is paid to the explicit questioning of these concepts. Many of those who have critiqued the work have pointed out this crucial question: Hollier's insistence on innovation is based on the presupposition that the readers — "the general reader" to whom the book is directed — already possess a general and consistent idea of French literature. We would have to reflect, then, on the possible tension between an innovative space of representation and a more conservative approach to spatial practice, which obviously reproduces in large part the cultural spaces of the French national literary tradition. This *décalage*, nonetheless, can be interpreted as a clear indication of an active, even deep awareness of the sort of representation of space supported by such a project.

The opening and closing chapters, both written by Hollier, attempt a reflection on the nature of national limits from a literary point of view. The general thesis would be that despite the humanist and cosmopolitan appreciation of its capacity to transcend its original circumstances, when it comes to its production and consumption, literature remains bound by the non-universality of language and by the experience of borders (xxi). This particularization of the literary experience is accepted generally along with the recognition of its romantic antecedents and its ability to model what is understood as modernity (in contrast to the classical pattern), but with the introduction of some relevant corrections. The most important correction refers to the awareness of the multiplication of borders of all kinds,

which, in the end, would show how inadequate the national framework is for containing and homogenizing the new differences and borders that are now being recognized. Hence the multiple perspectives applied to the work, as well as the notion of literary space that it stems from: "For us, the space of literature is mapped according to more complex and more delicate strategies, which, though not denying the inescapable partisanships that go with the politics of language, are no longer contained by national politics. Its focus has shifted from the assertion of borders through literature and the presentation of a literature within borders, to a questioning that results in the proliferations of those borders. Such a questioning, occurring both within and outside literature, both constitutes and undoes literature" (xxv). Nonetheless, the outline of French literature is not seriously put into question. A large part of the strategy of this introduction is really an attempt to reconcile a novel epistemological approach with a spatial practice that in spite of everything remains fundamentally conservative. Because, after all, a representation of space that appears innovative can support a practice that clings more closely to traditional elements than may appear at first glance.

But it is obvious that there is something more at work here: an aspect anticipated in the introduction and continued in the conclusion, implicating the geocultural position of French literature. The representation of spaces finally makes its appearance as part of a possible explanation for the conflict of models in the *New History of French Literature*. In the introduction, called "On Writing Literary History," Hollier highlights the resistance of a large portion of French institutional discourse on literature to accept the process of literary nationalization associated with romanticism and its historiographical models. There is a simple reason for this: the pretension of universality tied to Enlightenment classicism was compromised by national linguistic relativism in the same way that French hegemony was compromised by German, English and even, retrospectively, Spanish literatures. In other words, the spread of the romantic concept of national literature favored a significant modification of the foundations on which the preeminence of French literature in the Republic of Letters was built, and, as a consequence, forced a reconsideration of its function and position in republican terms. The current situation seems to be aiming toward a new form of universality in which the position of French literature would again be questioned, especially as regards exclusion. On one hand, Hollier highlights the weakening of the international presence of French, as well as on the clear perception of certain authors in this respect and he points to the paradox by which some of those who are most sensitive to this situation are also those who undermined the "exchange rate" of the language by the use and abuse of the semiprivate languages of some forms of structuralism and post-structuralism. Whether or not this is true, Hollier also signals the paradoxical fascination some of these authors have for US-American authors to the point of recreating in their own fiction and the disconnect between writing and reading that comes from the awareness of a language in decline, especially if at one point it was considered universal.

Surely, then, this is Greenblatt's globalism and the conflict between the geocultural map he drew and other possible ones that derive from different ways of perceiving the permanent recomposition of literary and cultural positions. In spite of itself, the *New History* illustrates the tension between spaces of representation that are closely linked to a global model — and, thus, to a representation of space — a tension at odds no longer with the maintenance of French literature as a separate and specific object of historicization, but now with the task of completing a literary history, a task which, regardless of everything, is still conceived in a traditional way. It is also at odds with radical linguistic adhesion, which, whether we like it or not, impedes immersion in a global sphere which, at least according to Greenblatt, is shaped by the paradigm of the English language. These are unresolved conflicts, which also explain how in the last chapter ("How Can One Be French?") the work is finally presented as "a critical anthology … conceived in the United States" (1061) and not as a history: in fact, this last term is definitively absent. The end result is nothing other than an ambiguous and thus suggestive spatial practice. Ultimately, this serves to shine a spotlight on the paradoxes which continue to plague this field. There is the case of Dionýz Durišin and the notion of "interliterariness" — commented on in other chapters of the same book — which proposes a model of representation of space which is attractive at first glance inasmuch as it seems to distance itself from the reductivist tendencies of more consolidated comparative literature, but which, when one reads further into it, betrays a strict teleology that moves from so-called ethnic and pre-national literatures toward world literature, making the concept of national literature into the determining axis of the literary space that it proposes. The

tendency to appropriate Durišin's vocabulary shows the urgent need to develop adequate analytical tools for the exploration of the spatial dimension of literary history and its implicit assumptions. In other words, we must be wary of the mirage of novelty that seems linked to the mere mention of space. If asked whether spatialization can be seen as an outlet, or even as a characteristic of comparative literary historiography, we would have to answer yes, but we would also have to specify how and in what circumstances. Any historiographical exercise must inevitably make space one of its axes of reflection — especially if one wishes to return to comparatism — but, after invoking space, we must necessarily go into more detail about the whats and wherefores of the proposed space. This is ideal ground for the theoretical approach.

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