

Galician Portuguese Medieval Poetry and the Iberian Interliterary System

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**Abstract:** In his article "Galician Portuguese Medieval Poetry and the Iberian Interliterary System" Santiago Gutiérrez García explores the notion that the possibility of carrying out a comparative study of Iberian literatures is determined by its interliterary system. Gutiérrez García postulates that the said interliterary system comprises a series of peripheral literatures which seek their self-affirmation through opposition to the hegemonic center, namely Castilian literature. He uses the example of Galician Portuguese medieval poetry and illustrates the problematic nature of his approach elaborating that despite the fact that this medieval poetic tradition is shared by both Galician and Portuguese literatures, as literary subsystems they carry out diverse strategies of symbolic appropriation in which a confrontation arises between two national literatures in asymmetric relation: the hegemonic Portuguese literature and the emergent Galician literature.

## **Santiago GUTIÉRREZ GARCÍA**

Translated from the Galician by Belén Iglesias Arbor

### **Galician Portuguese Medieval Poetry and the Iberian Interliterary System**

Pilar Vázquez Cuesta writes in José María Díez Borque's *Historia de las literaturas hispánicas no castellanas* that "what most surprises the reader on first contact with Galician literature is the lack of continuity and scarcity of certain genres in contrast with the brilliance achieved by others such as the lyric" (621; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are by Gutiérrez García and Iglesias Arbor). In literary history, Iberian Galician literature is characterized by the discursive discontinuity in which periods of richness alternated with silence in three major periods: a literary height during the middle ages followed by decline and the re-emergence of Galician literature. This sequence constitute also for Martí de Riquer one of the notable aspects of Catalan literature: "the comparison between both examples [i.e., Catalan and Galician] reveals how two historiographic discourses that share the same cultural field, the Spanish, are constructed in independent ways and avoid the common circumstances which would facilitate a correct understanding of the historical evolutions of both literatures" (12).

We can see the triumph of the "national" in Iberian literary history in several cases and in the few works where attention is paid to the interliterary system we see description and analysis restricted to the juxtaposition of diverse historiographic discourses. Díez Borque's *Historia de las literaturas hispánicas no castellanas* is an example of this: a series of independent historiographic accounts are offered ignoring a fundamental common characteristic: their processes and functions within the same interliterary or polysystem (on the theoretical framework of interliterariness, see Ďurišin; on the polysystem approach, see Even-Zohar; on the Iberian polysystem, see, e.g., Casas). Difficulties arise upon applying the concept of the interliterary system Iberia for it determines the minority condition of peripheral literature not only with regard to a hegemonic center constituted by Castilian literature, but also through a series of common strategies which arise from a dialectical relation (see Cabo Aseguinolaza). Thus, *Historia de las literaturas hispánicas* does not constitute a literary history, but a juxtaposition of literary histories grouped together based on their belonging to a specific geocultural region. Marginalization also explains certain discourse strategies: ethnic minority literatures look for their reaffirmation through the involvement of antithetic aspects and according to their character as emergent identity discourses (see Casas, "Sistema interliterario," "Problemas") and this reveals the direct links between literary historiography and the mechanisms of the construction and formation of national and ethnic minority identities (see Domínguez, "Literary Emergence"). For this reason, the recovery of Iberian "peripheral" literatures has not only run parallel to the process of political decentralization ongoing in Spain from 1975, but has also been accompanied by the development of literary historiography in a process in which political and cultural intentions are mixed (see Santana).

Because of their need to reconstruct a past of which they feel they have been deprived, peripheral literatures on the Iberian Peninsula have found a tool in the narrative procedures of literary historiography not only for the construction of a national identity, but also for the capacity to organize information and construct a literary canon. This has helped establish it as one of the most effective tools in the emergence of national literatures, while its crisis runs parallel to an overcoming of the romantic and positivist model in which European states achieved cohesion (Casas, "Sistema" 71). Literary historiography has a performative function which predisposes it to be used by cultural and political institutions in the construction of national identity. In Iberian peripheral literatures the abundance of literary histories published in recent decades has been accompanied by the application of postulates found in the frameworks of the interliterary and polysystem approaches, although not sufficiently theorized (see Godzich). The latter aspect turns out to be symptomatic of intentions underlying the use of literary history, which, based on national myths, prevents the deconstruction and conceptualization of national mythology and favors their survival with the result of the interpretation of the nation in essentialist terms. Iberian literary historiography, then, will have to pay attention to the postulates of the interliterary process in order to avoid a historiography characterized by its discursive inflexibility and this at the time when its multiplicity of functions is derived from its subordination to the national macrotext (see González-Millán).

In view of the importance assumed by literary historiography in the processes of consolidating peripheral systems, it is not strange that many of the studies dealing with them do not manage to move away from the thought processes that traditional literary history imposes. Approaches according to a national logic project these national schemes to historical stages previous to the emergence of the nations. Clearly, minority systems exercise an anachronistic reconstruction of the past, both as part of a mechanism of auto-affirmation, but also because in this re-appropriation an absent past is posited so as to fulfill the need to identify a moment of grandeur that compensates for the insufficiencies of the present. These reconstructions investigate the reasons leading to the posterior decadence of the literature involved and the history leading up to it. The result is a tendency to see the middle ages as a resplendent epoch, a trend one notices in Galician and Catalan literary historiography — although not in Basque literature, which developed later, in the sixteenth century — which are systematized in a teleological construction. A paradoxical situation is thereby established owing to the fact that the prejudices elaborated in the contemporary epoch are projected on the literature of the middle ages and neglecting its peculiar production conditions. The literature of this period is characterized by its intersystemic condition, organized around a common cultural substratum of Biblical, Latin, and Germanic roots. Latin was the linguistic code used by the intellectual medieval elite and yet, because of its a-national condition, the study of Latin medieval literature has remained subordinated to the study of texts which used vernacular languages. Of these, it is the former that provides a more suitable comprehension of the culture of these centuries.

Prior to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the borders among different literatures were more fluid and language was not working as mechanism of ethnic demarcation. This aspect favored the use of a language in a situation of allophony, since it was perceived as forming part of an artistic code. This happens, for example, with the French language of northern France used in the epic, in prose *romans*, or in encyclopedic works; or with Occitanian adopted in Catalonia and in the north of Italy as the language of the lyric poetry. We find Galician Portuguese in a similar situation, a language of lyric poetry in the center and to the west of the Iberian Peninsula during the thirteenth century and the first half of the fourteenth century. For the Catalan troubadours, who sang in Occitanian, the existence of a consolidated plurilingual tradition — based on the complementary relation between Latin and neo-Latin languages — was fundamental. Despite the fact that historical circumstances favor the study of the medieval literature with a comparative approach, the few researchers using this method and the limited results obtained warrant discussion about a failure of the comparative method in an area that should be one of its more profitable fields of study (see Domínguez, "Literatura"). If we center our attention on the Hispanic area, one must first bear in mind the secondary interest that comparativism has always awoken in peninsular academic circles (see Cabo Aseguinolaza). It is logical then that only some isolated attempt could be outlined, as the *Breve historia de la literatura española* indicates (Alvar, Mainer, Navarro). While the work is about diverse Spanish literatures during the middle ages, it must be understood as an attempt to overcome the identification of Spanish literature with literature written in Castilian. For this reason, besides these literary systems, the peripheral systems are kept in mind, although only for the period that Naftali Bassel describes as "medieval ethnic literature" as existing previous to the idea of nation (774). However, a similar attitude seems to be improbable from the opposite side; that is to say, from the periphery, since in this case the integration in a common Spanish system feels like assimilation on the part of the hegemonic center, i.e., Castilian literature. The Hispanic peripheries' need for reaffirmation from a literary point of view ends with the identification of an oppositional referent in Castile or even in Spain for that matter, as well as a series of compensatory integrational referents, such as Portugal for Galicia or Occitania for Catalonia. In the Basque case, the latter is replaced by its condition as an "exceptional people," who do not resemble neighboring ethnic communities. Partly, the difficulties in carrying forward a comparative study of Spanish literatures comes from this need for self-vindication imposed by the processes of hegemonies in struggle. It is also necessary to bear in mind that the consolidation of the national character of peripheral literatures is exemplified, among other manifestations, in the writing of historiographic discourse and it turns out to be an effective mechanism for placing the concept of Spanish national literature in crisis (Santana 160) and thereby reaffirming the different peripheries.

The relations established within the framework of a non-Hispanic but Iberian area turns out to be more complex than the dialectics between a canonical center and a few secondary subordinate discourses that dispute this function. This is observable in the relation the Galician and Portuguese literatures establish. The latter serves as a referent for the former, offering itself as the counterpoint that separates Galician literature from Castilian literature: both literatures share a period of origins transferable to the linguistic plane. The recognized *etapa galegoportuguesa* (Galician Portuguese era), which runs up to the middle of the fourteenth century (although it is sometimes dated as ending in the second half of the fifteenth century in order to make it to coincide with the conventional limits of the middle ages). During this period both form a literary subsystem, the most outstanding manifestation of which is the corpus of lyric troubadour poetry.

Unlike what happened with Catalonia's relation with the Occitanian system during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries — which was reconciled by the incorporation of those troubadours born in Catalonia to the Catalan canon — a similar situation has provoked more complex attitudes in Galician Portuguese poetry, because they share the same idiomatic code. For example, the idea of a common medieval period has launched more widespread designs for the integration of the Galician language and literature within the context of *Lusofonia*. This methodological proposal — whose logic responds to the importance granted to Castilian literature as an oppositional referent — seeks to break away the Castilian referent in order to merge with a linguistic and cultural system of a planetary dimension. This allows the existence of the Galician culture in the context of a globalized world, although paradoxically at the cost of its self-affirmation. Nevertheless, it must not be overlooked that proposals such as *Lusofonia* are fostered by the unequal degrees of institutionalization of the Galician or Portuguese literatures. This is reflected in the establishment of asymmetric relationships dominated by the admiration — and occasionally the emulation — of the former with regard to the latter and, on the other hand, the disregard of the latter with respect to the former. The inequality alluded to is the result of different needs, which, especially on the part of the Galician literature, complicate the application of a comparative approach to the research of medieval poetry and cause its study to follow the requirements imposed by the narrative logic of the respective national literatures.

The discovery of Galician Portuguese medieval poetry in the middle of the nineteenth century offered the possibility of (re)constructing a glorious past from the cultural point of view of these nascent Portuguese and Galician literatures. A series of mechanisms of appropriation occurred around these literatures and they now make up the underlying material premises for a common Galician Portuguese space. The differences between a still emerging literary system and one with full institution building capacities can be seen here. Thus, Galician scholarship insisted on the Portuguese character in the poetry of the troubadours due to two factors. We know, for example, the Portuguese origin of the earliest known manuscripts, the *cancioneiros* of the *Colégio de Nobres* — nowadays known as *Cancioneiro da Ajuda (A)*; *Colocci-Brancuti* — presently at the National Library of Lisbon (*B*); and the works of the Library *Vaticana (V)*. In addition, the first studies and editions, in the context of early philological research by foreign, especially Central European and Italian scholars and critics, ignored the fledgling Galician literature and centered their attention on the Portuguese. The response of Galician scholars headed by Manuel Murguía in the early twentieth century was to try to correct the deviation that for example the references to the *Canzioneri portoghesi* of the editions of Ernesto Monaci or Enrico Molteni suggested. In spite of this, it appears that Galician scholars lagged behind with regard to their Portuguese counterparts in the race to appropriate medieval poetry. Teófilo Braga shared this perception when he declared the oblivion of Portuguese literature in Romance studies due to its being a peripheral literature in the European context. For this motive, both to the north and to the south of the river Miño, the rediscovery of medieval poetry was seen as an opportunity for both literatures to reach the dignity they were lacking as compared with the rest of Europe.

In the diverse strategies that scholars of the Galician and Portuguese literatures have used for their respective appropriations of medieval poetry, the difficulties faced by the former stand out. It has often resigned itself to articulating answers from the Portuguese point of view or has simply been unable to find alternative mechanisms. We find certain attempts in the development of historical studies destined to demonstrate the Galician condition of the lyric school by means of the study of administrative documents containing biographical information about the troubadours (see, e.g., López,

"Andrés Martínez" 227). The reason for this type of research resides in the hesitation to establish the Galician language as a criterion of canonization, a phenomenon extending to the end of the nineteenth century. The results of these biographical investigations culminated in the composition of indexes of Galician troubadours as exemplified in Andrés Martínez Salazar's *Jograes galegos. Documentos inéditos* (1896), José Villa-Amil Castro's *Outros jograes galegos* (1896), or Murguía's *Los trovadores gallegos* (1905). The shortage of documentation on many authors of Galician Portuguese poetry has occasionally ended in disputes over the place of birth of certain troubadours. The importance that these type of studies grant to the present-day political borders between Portugal and Galicia exemplify the attitudes of symbolic confrontation between the two literary systems. A further consequence of these biographical studies is that they overlook the common Galician Portuguese perspective. A good example is José Joaquín Nunes's 1927 article, "A proposito da naturalidade dos trovadores galego-portugueses." Nunes defends Pero de Veer and Johan Garcia de Guilhade's Portuguese background as opposed to the opinion of Galician scholars such as Manuel Amor Meilán or Antonio López Ferreiro, who do not hesitate to emphasize that the poets of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were using the same language (165).

However, the general range of possibilities for appropriation observed on the Portuguese side comes directly from the links between literature as a manifestation of a *Volksgeist* (i.e., "national spirit") and the possession of a nation provided with political structures. This beginning of romantic origins joins the destiny of a literature to the corresponding process of national construction. Troubadour poetry, then, would be a manifestation of the Portuguese spirit, since its origins are linked to Portugal as a kingdom and to the establishment of a cultural center in Afonso Henriques's court in Guimarães. On the other hand, the integration of Galicia into the monarchy of Leon relegated Galician literature to a regional condition, whose possibility of expression was to be limited to folklore. The survival of this sort of nineteenth-century nationalistic scheme in literary studies is accentuated in a case such as the Galician one, which historically has lacked possibilities for affirmation. For this reason, Galician cultural agents have adopted the theories that Braga used over a hundred year ago. Thus, they have explained the minoritization of Galician literature as a process parallel to that of the impossibility of developing itself as nation and, taking Portugal as a model, that it constitutes an independent state apart from Castile (see, e.g., Pena 350). But this option, which explains medieval literature under the prejudices of teleologic schemes, not only transforms the history of Galician literature into an account of lost opportunities, but, with regards to troubadour poetry, limits the mechanisms of re-appropriation because it accepts Portuguese theoretical and methodological principles.

The consequences of the subordination of literature to the discourse of national construction for the Galician literary system includes the undermining of many of the resources for claiming medieval poetry. Whereas Portuguese literature is based on the successive reigns of the sovereign of Portugal, Galician literature must resort to those of the monarchies of Leon and Castile. The weakness of the Galician option is obvious if we think that the assimilation of its vernacular poetry on the part of the central Castilian system (its oppositional referent) and is thereby favored. The need to distinguish this antagonistic system determined the scant attention Galician criticism gives to the *Cantigas de Santa María*. These *cantigas* are attributed to the cultural environment of the court of Alfonso X in Toledo, as the epigonal lyric production belonging to what was known as the *escola de decadencia* or, in a symptomatic way, the *escola galegocastelá*. The opposite option, i.e., the construction of a chronology in which the Castilian and Leonese kings are enumerated as if they were monarchs of the kingdom of Galicia is less desirable because of its evident nationalistic interpretation and political implications (see Rodríguez Sanchez). In addition to the political institutions, the ethnic substrata it offers towards an idea of a Lusitanian or Galician *Volksgeist* remains in too ambiguous a field for one of two conflicting systems to appropriate it only for itself. The *cantiga de amigo* is the poetic genre where this question is most clearly observable. In these poems scholars and critics observed the confluence of courtly elements with northwest peninsular folklore derived from feminine love songs. But besides such general considerations, it is not possible to know more about the matter and for this reason both systems claim an ethnic substratum for themselves. In Portuguese literature, from Braga's works, Don Denis's figure stood out as the author with the most widespread production of *cantigas de amigo*,

which he updated at the end of the thirteenth century and who adapted the archaic *estilo galliziano* to Portugal. The similarity of the *cantigas de amigo*, the popular poetry of Gil Vicente and the folklore of the regions of the north (Minho, Tras-os-Montes) reaffirms the Portuguese character of the aforesaid genre and that would later spread throughout Galicia and Asturias (see De Vasconcelos; Ferreira). In any case, from Galicia, we see the update of the folkloric origins of these compositions in the *neotrobadorismo* of the second third of the twentieth century, particularly in the cultivation of the genre of the *cantiga de amigo*, precisely because of its supposed vernacular and popular character, explained by the employment of distic strophes with refrain and *leixaprén* (the repetition of the second verse in a pair of strophes in the first verse in the next pair), for example (see López, *O neotrobadorismo*).

On the other hand, the appropriation by means of artefacts — i.e., song books — belongs likewise to the Portuguese system. The symbolic appropriation that takes place thanks to the possession of the song books is derived from a monumentalist conception of the past which bestows upon the aforesaid objects the category of relics (see Gonzalez-Millán, "A constitución"). But it also reflects the existence of an institution capable of moving the symbolic dimension of literature to a more immediate plane. In other words, an institution that could support the confection of the codex in the middle ages — and this supposes implicitly the labor of poetic patronage and compilation — claims its property in the contemporary world. A revision of the textual testimonies of troubadour poetry reveals that none of them associates medieval Galicia to the center of literary production and that almost all of them have some type of relation with Portugal. Thus it is believed that the origin of the *Cancioneiro da Vaticana* and the *Cancioneiro da Biblioteca Nacional* in Lisbon is the *Livro das cantigas* compiled by Don Pedro, Count of Barcelos, and son of the King Don Denis. The latter codex, together with the *Cancioneiro da Ajuda*, remains in Portugal. As for other minor testimonies, the *Pergamiño Sharrer* contains Don Denis's poems and remains in the *Arquivo da Torre do Tombo* in Lisbon, whereas Galician literary centers have no knowledge with regard to the *Pergamiño Vindel*, except that it contains poems by a supposed Galician bard, Martin Codax.

The zeal to discover Galician Portuguese literature by means of the possession of the codices must not be underestimated, as the importance the Portuguese government granted to the acquisition of the codex *B.* demonstrates. Jean-Marie d'Heur writes about the negotiations with the inheritors of Monaci, who sold it, he observes with irony, "for a price of gold" ("à prix d'or") (36). On the occasion of its arrival to Portugal a reception was organized, which included a speech by José Leite de Vasconcelos. In his speech, the Portuguese scholar consummated the appropriation of the document by changing its name to *Cancioneiro de Colocci-Brancuti* (De Vasconcelos 252). Portuguese literature's greater capacity to revitalize itself as compared to Galician literature is also reflected in the adoption of the graphical procedure used for the critical edition of the poetic corpus. The imposition of the Portuguese theses are symbolized, among other graphical options, in the use of the digraphs *nh* and *lh* to represent palatal nasal phonemes and lateral palatal, as opposed to the Galician graphic solutions *ñ* and *ll*. The triumph of this system of representation — which the Portuguese chancery adopted as an Occitanian influence in the middle of the thirteenth century — has its origin in the publishing practices of the twentieth century from the edition of Michaëlis de Vasconcelos's *Cancioneiro da Ajuda*. However, de Vasconcelos declared that in her edition she preferred to represent *ll / nn* as *nh / lh* because the former are etymological while *lh / nh* are more representative of linguistic elements (1 xxvii). The second part of the declaration is fundamental to understand why de Vasconcelos ignores a system of graphical representation "*ll/nn*" that not only was not anti-etymological, but is present in the most ancient textual testimonies of Galician Portuguese poetry such as the *Cancioneiro da Ajuda* or the *Pergamiño Vindel*, and was therefore not only contemporary to the troubadour experience, but also reflects the linguistic stage previous to the graphical reform promoted by Afonso III of Portugal.

Such methodological principles have determined philological works since then up to the point that the majority of the troubadours' editions support the graphical uses nearest to the ones used in Portuguese (Lorenzo 77). This explains the dearth of editions published in Galicia (see, e.g., Monteagudo xii). This reaction of the Galician scholars and critics, nevertheless, in resisting the tradition of ecdotic Italian studies and choosing among the options offered by the hegemonic system, has aided the consolidation of the Portuguese graphic conventions. The Galician answer to the

mechanisms of symbolic appropriation used in Portuguese has garnered the implicit recognition of the expression *lírica galegoportuguesa* as applied to troubadour poetry. Such support does not prevent scholars and critics in both systems from using the adjectives *galega* or *portuguesa*, according to their interests, for nowadays a partial perspective, according to a national logic, continues to be claimed (see, e.g., Méndez Ferrín). On the other hand, the construction of the Galician literary system has increased. For example, the celebration of the *Día das Letras Galegas*, restored by the Real Academia Galega in 1963, pertains to this push and it responds to the need to construct a canon of Galician literature. Further, among the writers celebrated by Real Academia Galega we find Alfonso X in 1980 and in 1998 three *jongleurs* (troubadours) related to the Bay of Vigo: Martín Codax, Meedinho, and Johan de Cangas. The motives of such choices are clear in the aims of Real Academia Galega whose ideological intentions go beyond simply celebrating these individual writers (see Alonso Montero).

The most effective mechanism for the Galician appropriation of medieval poetry has been the promotion of Santiago de Compostela as a center of poetry and thus hopes to be for Galicia what Guimarães and Lisbon were for Portugal. For this reason, Galician scholars and critics exalt both the role of the Jacobean pilgrimage and of the Cathedral as cultural catalysts and symbols, but also the importance of the city and, in a wider sense, of Galicia with regard to the political events of Leon's kingdom during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The result is the identification with the period of greatness in which political and cultural developments went hand in hand. This period of greatness is so closely identified with the capital, that in Galician historiography such a period is named *Era Compostelana* (see, e.g., Villares 98). The efforts to claim a role for Santiago de Compostela in Galician Portuguese poetry are, however, problematic, owing mainly to the meager documentation which would be proof that the city was a center of poetry. Although the indications point to the ties that one of the patrons of the first troubadour generations — the lineage of Traba — maintained with the city, some experts, especially Portuguese ones, have reduced the importance of Santiago de Compostela in this aspect. Manuel Rodrigues Lapa, for example, refuted the role of Santiago de Compostela as a center of troubadour devotion and proposed two Portuguese sanctuaries instead, Nossa Senhora da Oliveira and São Torcato. Others such as Antonio Resende De Oliveira, have proposed that the lineage of Sousa from northern Portugal were patrons to the first troubadours.

The difficulties of Galician literature in the appropriation of medieval poetry can be explained by its struggles to be constituted in an institutionalized literary system. In this context, the perpetuation of discursive attitudes that accentuate the national character of any literary manifestation become more understandable insofar as it is felt that such absences prevent its reaffirmation as a national literature and thus Galician literary historiography manifests typical elements of literary nationalism (see, e.g., Gonzalez-Millán "Do nacionalismo"). Further, among several scholars of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Galician Portuguese poetry, in 1841 Antonio Neira de Mosquera published an article in *El ídola de Galicia* entitled, "Apuntes para una historia de la literatura gallega" in which he denounced such oblivion. In similar fashion, in 1876 Teodosio Vesteiro Torres donated a copy of the edition of the *Cancioneiro da Vaticana* that Monaci had published in 1873 at the University of Santiago de Compostela. The book included a dedication in which Vesteiro Torres confessed his desire to contribute to the Galician literary *Rexurdimento* (renaissance) by bringing the work of the troubadours to the fore (see López, "De lírica" 284-85).

In conclusion, my discussion reveals that the critical contributions of an emergent literature such as Galician serves, first of all, to construct a history of Galician literature. The need of recuperating past importance and imbue the present with relevance — understandable in the dialectic established between a hegemonic center and its emergent periphery — makes it difficult to overcome the national and thus essentialist approach. In consequence, although one hundred and fifty years of critical production have supported this approach, Galician literary historiography has not succeeded in overcoming the national approach. Further, in the said national approach troubadour poetry served — starting in the twentieth century — to consolidate the birth of the emergent Galician literature (see Guillén, *Múltiples moradas* 332).

Note: The above article is a revised version of Santiago Gutiérrez García. "La lírica galegoportuguesa en los procesos de hegemonización y canonización de la literatura gallega," *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 37.1 (2007): 245-65. Copyright release to the author.



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