

The Crisis of Literary History and Disciplinary Renovation

The Alternative of Systemic Theories

ABSTRACT: This article reviews the principal debates and challenges to literary history after the critical revision of the discipline in the last third of the twentieth century. More specifically, the article evaluates the possibility of constructing a historiographical model founded on systemic theories, with the capacity to contribute to the renovation of the discipline of literary history. Alternative historiographical methods, based on polysystem theory, theory of literary field, and the theorization of literature as institution, are examined with the intention of showing the advantages that these approaches can bring to the study of literature, but also their failings, and the debates they have provoked that have yet to be resolved. Finally, the article proposes possible applications of these alternative approaches to literary history to the lusophone literary systems.

KEYWORDS: crisis of literary history, systemic theories, lusophone literary systems.

Constitution and Crisis of Literary History: Challenges and Possibilities for the Discipline

A synthetic study of the constitution of literary history (LH) as discipline and discourse should attend to a series of fundamental factors. The first of these has to do with the fact that LH is, essentially, a European discipline. That is to say, LH is epistemologically configured in accordance with the localized rhythms and functionalities of specific European cultural centers. The second factor has to do with the chronological development of LH in the passage from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, and therefore is linked to the decay of classical and neoclassical poetics, and the reaction against the principles of universality and rationality of the Enlightenment. Finally, it is necessary to analyze the trajectory of the discipline in terms of tensions that are manifest at different levels: between different epistemological and philosophical models, between

national and geocultural spaces and schools, between differently assumed roles and functions, and also between different disciplines and fields of knowledge.

This article attempts to create a dialectical comprehension of the processes that not only allowed for the emergence of LH as discipline and discourse but also its legitimization and institutionalization. This dialectic should include a mapping of the emergence of national identity, linked to the nation-state, at the ideological, ethical, civic, and moral levels, the assumption of some type of historicist paradigm, as well as an understanding of the emergence of LH as civil history and its progressive scientific legitimization (Cunha 2002, 25–38). The emergence of LH reinforced the abandonment of the classical and humanistic thought of the Renaissance and involved a chronotopic reorientation from the cosmopolitan to the national, and a correlative understanding of an autonomous and diverse development of various “national organisms.”

In *The Rise of English Literary History* (1941), René Wellek argued that the constitution of LH involved, on the one hand, the fusion of biography and criticism and, on the other, the importation of the narrative structures of political historiography. This capacity to assimilate not only practices from the field of knowledge but also programs initially defined in terms of philosophical and ideological intent forms part of the configuration of the two principal literary historiographical models of the first half of the nineteenth century. As opposed to the German Romantic model, which is marked with Hegelian historicism and a Herderian genetic historicism, it is important to take into account the models that are informed by Enlightenment values, connected to the processes of social reform derived from the French Revolution and representative of the political-cultural hegemony of France in the first half of the nineteenth century. These approaches are related in some ways to the philosophical innovations of Francis Bacon at the start of the seventeenth century and also to what would be known in the following century as *philosophical history*, concerned with offering a unified vision of the object of study, determining its temporal development in terms of determinate categories (origin, progress, advance, decadence), and attempting to find a causal explanation for the succession of different phases (Equipo Glifo 2003).

Typical of the protean character of the discipline was the development of the positivist LH, based on the investigation of the facts (literary, in this case), conditioned by the methodology and scientific objectives imported from the natural sciences, and—a fundamental point—linked to the Darwinian and Spenserian

conception of nature and evolution that was to become hegemonic in the second half of the nineteenth century. Equally reflective of the dialectic development of LH is the historiographic criticism of Gustave Lanson, the basic elements of which were the adaptation of an epistemology that would later be recognized as sociological, and which entailed the rejection of a mechanistic positivism that diminished the importance of observation and reflection as intellectual faculties, and likewise diminished the consideration of the civic, moral, and national functions of literature.

In this revision of the constitution of the discipline, the pragmatic and performative functions of LH are vital points of interest in the construction of national literatures, both in the phase of their "invention" and in the social institutionalization of systems of symbolic capital and naturalized cultural habitus, an operation that was efficiently enforced through formalized education systems. These matters have been studied in the now classic works of Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger, and Anne-Marie Thiesse, works that tend not only to discredit the idea of a natural national identity but also to dissect the mechanisms through which collective adhesion to such an identity is achieved. In this regard, Cunha (129–60) queries the ways in which LH can function as a "história profunda da nação" (deep history of the nation), encouraging an understanding of LH as a discursive-rhetorical construct with a relevance to the political-ideological spheres, a path that was explored as well in the classic works of Hayden White and David Perkins.

Precisely this involvement in the pragmatic-ideological spheres has been the main basis for objections to LH's status as a scientific discipline. The revision of the positivist model, and reconfigurations of the discipline such as those of Lanson, or Wilhelm Dilthey's *Literaturwissenschaft*, or even the French comparatism of the first half of the twentieth century, reflects a desire to achieve scientific status that is a real leitmotif of LH. In this development, it is worthwhile to pay attention to the dialectic of history and criticism, moving from the simplistic understanding of literary criticism as a subjective discourse, as well as the limiting of its role to the field of autonomous action as opposed to literary and general history.

The use of teleological principles in any historiographical model marks specific limits with regard to the standards of scientific objectivity deemed necessary in the natural sciences. Taking on board the thought of Siegfried J. Schmidt on these matters, it is necessary to point out that the scientific value of LH tended to be related to the supposed objectivity of its results, with this

objectivity deemed as correlative to truth. The extreme exigencies imposed by these standards were a central factor in the delegitimization of the discipline, a process already visible in the first half of the twentieth century, reflecting the fact that for some paradigms the construction of a scientifically valid LH was an impossibility.

In this synthetic reconstruction of the development of LH, one must consider the mid-twentieth-century work of René Wellek. As José Antonio Escrig notes, Wellek defined (in a report written for the Modern Language Association in 1952) a tripartite division within literary research consisting of the complementary fields of textual criticism, literary history, and literary criticism, with a notable interdependency between the last two. Within LH itself, Wellek distinguished between two approaches: those oriented toward a broad cultural history on the one hand and those closer to art history, with a greater dependence on aesthetic theory and the consideration of the work of art as monument, on the other. In a paper presented at the congress of the International Comparative Literature Association in 1970, and which would form part of the much-cited article "The Fall of Literary History," however, Wellek identifies an "atomistic factualism," a sterile archeologism, the insufficiency of causal explanations derived from social sciences, and the submission of LH to the political history of nations as basic factors that hindered the articulation of LH as an autonomous discipline. He suggested three models for its renovation. The first would be based on the negation of historical causalism in the study of literature, and would take as its paradigm work such as that of Benedetto Croce, which understood the work of art as a unique and immediately present phenomenon. As against this antihistoricist model, Wellek identified a model that took account of historical factors, its origin in Marxist and positivist thought, which was most visible in the postulates of sociologically informed LH. The third model had to do with approaches that attempted to trace an internal evolution in literature, as exemplified in the work of the Russian formalists and Czech structuralists but also in some elements of the approaches of reception theory, sociology of literature, and Gadamerian-inspired hermeneutics.

Though LH underwent a long process of criticism in the twentieth century, it is also important to note the central role that the idea of crisis would acquire in the 1970s. Cunha (457–63) notes the persistence of LH as a university discipline, as compared to its gradual exhaustion as a *discursive formation*. But he also puts this decadence of the discipline in the context of the broader crisis of concepts

such as history (and the weakening of ideas of historical reason and concomitant myths), modernity (and the goals of progress and improvement that it would supposedly involve), as well as the concepts that LH had served (nation, national identity, and civic-moral conscience). The emergence, since the nineteenth century, of a new idea of literature, based on the aesthetic autonomy of the literary and the incompatibility of literature and history, was central to the weakening of these concepts. This is manifest in the contrast between the growing theorization of literary history and the scarcity of historiographical works that take account of this thought, perhaps a symptom of the lack of spaces within which the complementarity between literary theory and LH could be developed.

A range of factors that were important in the debates of the 1960s and '70s, and that were developed in the following years, should take into account the following positions:

- The removal of the opposition between objective and subjective forms in literary studies, as reflected in the recognition of the interpretative and necessarily partial discursivity of LH.
- An idea of literature that does not depend on essentialized categories and is open to relational and functional thought.
- The assimilation of the “linguistic turn” in the social and human sciences (with the rhetorical and pragmatic implications that this turn implies) and its influence in the critique of the hegemonic models of historiography in works such as those by Hayden White.
- The definition as a theoretical object of study, under non-normative parameters, of the social functions of both LH and literature itself.
- The broadening of the field of study and the consequent decentralization of literature, which is now seen as part of a wider field of cultural systems. This broader approach has had different expressions in cultural studies, New Historicism, and polysystem theory.
- The assumption of the general principles of poststructuralism, with the significant presence of Michel Foucault: the questioning of the figure of the author and an increasing disinterest in the reconstruction of the biographical context of creation; the linking of discursive practices (among these LH), *episteme*, and power; the recognition of new subjectivities, legitimacies, and discursivities that are important in the development of counterhistories.

- The emergence of paradigms that, like the sociological model of Robert Escarpit or those derived from the French *Annales* school of history, reject historiography as a narrative of events. The *Annales* school, specifically, gave special attention to the methodological debates between general and cultural history and focused on broad historical processes and structures of *longue durée*. They also encouraged interdisciplinarity and explicative rather than interpretative discursivity.
- On an institutional level, the public interrogation of the epistemological basis of LH and its pertinence and viability. René Wellek's presentation of 1970, which could be said to symbolically begin the process of disciplinary self-questioning, was accompanied by another important event, the founding, in the same year, of the journal *New Literary History*, whose second issue questioned the continuing relevance of LH. Another important event in this history was the publication of David Perkins's *Is Literary History Possible?* (1992) and the discussion prompted by the journal *Neohelicon* in 1993.¹
- The emergence of decolonizing paradigms, such as that promoted by Walter Dignolo, which highlighted LH's status as a European discipline, and the challenge posed to it by the field of postcolonial and subaltern studies.

In this context, the challenges that contemporary LH must face can be organized in three large areas, defined by their heuristic, methodological-discursive, and institutional bases. By heuristic I mean that which concerns the selection of principles that should orient historiographical work before its elaboration, and this involves the systematization of an object of study for LH. This, in accord with the cultural turn already mentioned, the spatial turn in the social sciences, or the systemic turn that this article assimilates, could include literature (implicitly this means national literature), culture, system or field, or even literary zone. It is also absolutely necessary to clarify the links between historiographical discourses and specific identity constructs. Finally, it would be necessary to adopt thought-out approaches toward the representation of time, which is traditionally central to the discipline, and toward the representation of space.

Methodology and discursivity are the problems most frequently related to the disciplinary definition of LH. Pertinent here are the debates on the periodization and organization of the materials of historical-literary discourse and the

search for discursive and periodological models not bound to totalizing or teleological schemes. Also important is the reconsideration of synchronic as well as diachronic levels of historiography, the attempt to connect narrative formulas and hermeneutic paradigms, and the reevaluation of notions of authorship and authority. This group would likewise include a reflection on the importance of methodological and procedural innovation, with a focus on the necessity, or not (in terms of scientific value/objectivity), of the use of empirical methods.

On the institutional level, it would be important to reflect upon the ways in which LH attempts to retain its prestige through a renewed positioning within the disciplinary and academic field. The proposals of the last four decades, of course, have also been part of a redefinition of the functional and performative attributes developed by LH on ethical, ideological, social, and political levels. Relevant in this regard is the reflection on the possibility of including historiographical work in long-term plans for public intervention, on the relationship between performativity and literary emergence, or, finally, on the need for a constant, dynamic, and nonconditioned validation of the discipline.

Systemic Epistemology and Historiographical Models

In the context of not just LH but the contemporary renovation of the study of literature as a whole, the bases upon which we can speak of *systemic theories*, or a *systemic epistemology*, are related to a group of theoretic paradigms that comprehend cultural systems, to a greater or lesser degree, as entities ruled by relational and functional principles of a communicative nature and tending to create autopoietic and autoreferential realities (Tötösy de Zepetnek 1992). This group of theoretical paradigms would include, in accordance with the loose criteria defined by the Hungarian-Canadian researcher, the polysystem theory of Itamar Even-Zohar and researchers at Tel Aviv University, the empirical science of literature, founded by Siegfried J. Schmidt and developed by the NIKOL group, the various theories propagated by literary scholars, such as those devised by Jacques Dubois and Peter Uwe Hohendahl, and the various sociologically based paradigms that use the notions of *system* and *field*, with special importance given to the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his disciples.

In all of these systemic theories, there is a desire to move past the schemes of analysis that had already shown signs of exhaustion by the mid-1970s, and whose lineage could be traced to elements of Romanticism and positivism on

the one hand, and the structuralist tradition on the other. Systemic theories aspire, to varying degrees within any given approach, to levels of scientific value and objectivity in their analyses and deny the criteria of taste, canonical status, or a priori interest in the definition of their object of study.

None of the systemic paradigms here mentioned corresponded to an explicit interest in the disciplinary reconfiguration of LH, and it is difficult to reconstitute from the theoretical-methodological corpus traits that would allow us to speak of a systemic historical-literary epistemology. However, despite the unstable relationship that these theoretical approaches have with LH, it is possible to undertake a critical review of systemic theories and methodologies and explore the ways in which their innovations are relevant to LH as a discipline.

Thus, in order to create a historiographical model based on *polysystem theory*, it is necessary to attend to the way in which it comprises literary and cultural systems that are interlinked and internally complex, and thereby dynamic and contingent. As opposed to the centrality of notions such as *change* and *diachrony* as the bases of historical research, dynamic functionalism values stability and synchrony as historiographical categories.² The first of these terms is understood in relation to the analysis of the struggles between centers and peripheries, and to the functions assumed by canonized models. Synchrony becomes the basis for a new perspective: *dynamic polychrony*, the comparison of synchronic sections of given systems. Polysystem theory, then, opts to consider literary systems in terms of their links with adjacent systems or structures, whether these are cultural, political, or economic.

Of interest here is the work of Even-Zohar and the members of the Unit of Cultural Research at Tel Aviv University, who focus on the Hebrew-Israeli cultural system, which comprises a series of elements (territorial dispersion, an indefinite community) that problematize conventional LH. This means that the group works with an alternative concept of history, oriented toward the analysis of change in a diachronic perspective but renouncing the chronological schemes traditionally accepted in LH. The incorporation of a synchronic dimension should be understood in terms of a questioning of the links between LH and long-term historical periods on the one hand, and LH and a totalized referent (e.g., literary system, national literature) on the other.

This refusal of the existence of a unique model of historiographical application, or a conception of a (complete) LH of a determined system (linked to a national referent), allows us to advance in the formation of methodology for a

polysystemic LH. In the first place, the idea of system obliges us to overcome the study of a determinate textual tradition situated "in context"; it also allows us to decenter canonized works as privileged objects of study. The vital point here is the incorporation of systemic categories that have been elided in historical research, such as production, consumption, institutions, market, and repertoire, and also the inclusion of intersystemic relations and transfers, with obvious repercussions in terms of the ideas of tradition, continuity, and territoriality, which constitute the foundations of the historiographical model that has been hegemonic since the nineteenth century. This would mean the possibility of an LH that attends to more than literary or philological factors, extends beyond the national, and is more attentive to the planned, constructed, and institutional nature of cultural systems, elements that are especially visible in emerging systems (such as the Angolan, Mozambican, or Galician, in the lusophone world) but never absent in the stronger, more stable systems (such as the Portuguese or Brazilian).

In the work of the Belgian researcher José Lambert, we can find other elements of interest for the application of polysystem theory to LH. Lambert ("In Quest of Literary World Maps") proposes a merging of systemic and "alternational" principles with a spatialized analytic gaze. Lambert conceives, then, LH as the study of literary practices and processes within a given geocultural space; a particular example could be presented as *The Literary History of [a given place]*. Lambert structures a historiographical model based on the dynamic, nonunivocal relationship among linguistic, literary, and political maps that attempts, ultimately, to attend to the heterogeneity and dynamism of social systems (e.g., linguistic and cultural competition, the definition of boundaries, relations of exportation and importation, deterritorializations, intercultural hierarchies) as opposed to the homogenizing approaches often associated with centers of power (Lambert 1999, "Aproximaciones sistémicas y la literatura").

Siegfried J. Schmidt defines the basic problems for a definition of LH from a constructivist and empirical viewpoint: (a) the necessity of establishing concrete definitions for the concepts of literature, history, literary history, study of literature, theory, method, and so on; (b) the consideration of the data of LH as able to be interpreted and evaluated; (c) the linking of data for the construction of coherent units (periods, epochs, genres), but with the understanding of history as a retrospective construction; (d) a reflection on the nature of historical representation that should account for certain preliminary considerations—every LH

is partial; narrative conventions provoke an order that depends on the activity of the author; the opposition to the conventional narrative model allows for accusations of arbitrariness and relativism; (e) the placing of the scientific value of LH in its aspects that make our experience accessible and understandable, on the one hand, and in terms of plausibility, acceptability, and social intersubjectivity, on the other; (f) the articulation of LH as a complex history of the relations among systems of social life; (g) the critical assimilation of the intellectual tradition that puts into question the concepts of text, subject, and sense; (h) the consideration of LH as a social and political institution and as a legitimizing science; (i) the reconsideration of the role of interpretation in LHs.

A central question for the concretization of a historiographical model in accordance with the postulates of the empirical science of literature is the difficult harmonization of constructivism and empiricism in the area of LH. In the words of Schmidt (266), “the constructive ‘nature’ of our cognition excludes the possibility of an empirical literature—it is not possible to demonstrate the descriptivity of our historiographical affirmations,” a circumstance that causes the author to propose, synthetically, the elaboration of an “empirical mentality,” with the construction of intersubjective bases, coherent in their argumentation and with sufficient factual guarantees. It would also be necessary to consider different levels of empiricity, especially those that could be applied to literary texts as material resources; this last approach would be inevitable in the moments when these are the only elements within a given period but would only be valid at those moments when the (“current”) reading of literary texts corresponds intersubjectively with the reading of nonliterary texts from the same period.

Demonstrating that the most direct link between the systems theory of Niklas Luhmann and literary studies passes precisely through Schmidt’s empirical science, Manuel Maldonado Alemán also reflects upon systems theory’s importance for LH. For Maldonado Alemán, the study of LH is based, first of all, on intra-, extra- (relationships between a system and its environment), and inter- (relationships between systems) systemic relations. At the same time, Maldonado Alemán identifies as the principal challenges for the establishment of a historiographical model the problems of integrating the evolutionary character of LH with the understanding of system not as process but as state, best approached with the concepts of autopoiesis, autoreference, and autonomy. He also recognizes the difficulties of understanding extra- and intersystemic relations and their functioning as indicators of systemic limits.

The proposed solution is provided by the notion of *structural coupling*, "which emphasizes the influence of the environment on the system, and is complementary to the notion of autopoiesis and indicates the relationships of dependence, adaptation, and compatibility that are established between a systemic unit and its environment" (Maldonado Alemán 31), and moves the focus of study to the continuous process of coupling that is dynamic and evolutionary. Overall, Maldonado Alemán's approach seeks to understand LH as a complex process of evolution, with stages of variation, selection, and stabilization, and with a double focus of observation that also involves the functioning of the literary system as an environment for other social systems.

In the development of a model for LH based on the theory of literary field (Bourdieu), an important methodological question arises involving the tension between the synchronic and diachronic planes. The comparison between literary history and the history of a given field should be understood as a history of struggles with different types of capital at stake and for which the reconstruction of an internal logic (or *habitus*), which regulates behaviors and positions within the field, should be undertaken. On the other hand, Bourdieu defines a field as a "synchronization of discordant times" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 66–70; Bourdieu 1992, 238–40), alluding to the necessity of recognizing in this concrete state of the field the preceding historical development and, in his words, the dynamic of "permanent change" that guarantees the field's continuity and that, for the agents and groups involved in the struggle for capital and institutional control, constitutes the main index of its pertinence to the same.

The French sociologist proposed a *genetic analysis* of the constitution of, and tensions within, a given field as well as the study of the relationship between the field studied and other fields, especially the field of power (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 67). Both the conceptualization of the literary field and its applications to literary historiography have been frequently criticized because of their subjection to a particular period of French literature. This has led to the recognition of a type of conceptual *a priori* in the thought of Bourdieu: the history of an artistic field is the history of the struggle for the achievement and conservation of its autonomy.

However, it is important to recognize two distinct uses of the theory of field in its application to historiographical programs. The first, linked to authors such as Anna Boschetti, Gisèle Sapiro, and Fabrice Thumerel in the French context, and Patricia Cabrera in the Mexican, is the analysis of consolidated literary

fields, with recognized autonomy and localized origins and, because of this, suitable for the development of genetic analysis. The second use is the application of Bourdieu's theories to those literary fields with less autonomy, or whose existence has been put in question (such as the Galician, or those of African countries with Portuguese as an official language), and it is obvious that processes of constitution, autonomization, and legitimization of the literary field (with regard to other cultural fields, other literary fields within the same social space, and the broader field of power) should be of special interest for historiographical work, normally undertaken in relation to the processes of identity formation, which is nearly always conceived in national terms.

One application of the theory of cultural fields to the study of literature is that based on the prosopographic method, the most dynamic branch of which is a political history of the elites. Prosopography, in a wider sense, is the interpretation of internal relations among collective subjects, including political, economic, and social powers (Carasa Soto 1994, 41–51). This is the elaboration of collective biographies through the compilation and cross-referencing of a series of data that would delimit the positions and trajectories of the agents selected, with the ultimate aim of identifying the field's historic structure. This perspective allowed researchers, such as Gisèle Sapiro and Rémy Ponton in the French context, to study writers in concrete moments and showed the special productivity of the theory of literary field as a literary theory of authors.

Despite the epistemological difference between the Bourdian approach and those approaches that consider literature as an institution, many practitioners of the latter chose to establish analogies between the two models, based on their interest in the study of the material and symbolical conditions of literary activity and, also, in the sociological grounding of their proposals. The most well-known cases are those of Jacques Dubois, Cees van Rees, Alain Viala, and Peter Bürger. Bürger, however, and unlike the others mentioned, proposed an institutional LH, based on a critique of the traditional narrative model and giving a decisive importance to the processes of the avant-garde, with these seen as moments of crisis in which institutional mechanisms are questioned and identified with greater clarity and therefore open to a more precise study.

Of more importance for the creation of an LH is the methodological approach suggested by Peter Uwe Hohendahl in his theory of the literary institution. The German author thus identifies four indispensable areas of study for the development of a literary history: (1) the conditions of emergence for the

practices of reading and writing; (2) the systems of norms and conventions that dominate the institution; (3) the relations between the literary institution and other cultural and political institutions; and (4) the processes of change within literary institutions (Hohendahl 1989, 34). This is a program that, although absolutely aware of the importance of the national in historiographical construction, assimilates the notion of public space and demonstrates an explicit interest in the performative function of LH, literary theory, and criticism in conforming their objects of study.

Xoán González-Millán moved away from some of these orientations in his definition of a historiographical model that would suit marginal literatures or, in general, literatures in societies where the institutionalization of discursive production is controlled from an exogenous political space. His program could be applied to peripheral or minority literatures (such as Galician literature) in the European context, as to literatures in a colonial setting or in the process of emergence (the African literatures in Portuguese), and was based on four areas of basic interest: the material and institutional conditions of the production and reception of literary discourse; the reception of literary texts, with all the particularities associated with marginalized experience; the identification of systems of codification on linguistic, aesthetic, and ideological levels; the dynamics of intertextuality (González-Millán 1992, 451-52).

A comparative analysis of the approaches related to a systemic epistemology and their (not very numerous) historiographical applications shows the range of functions that each of these could fulfill. It is clear that the theory of literary field has more potential for the study of literary agents and producers; the theories of literary institution have greater applicability in the study of material conditions and infrastructures and the conditions of readership, diffusion, and market. Polysystem theory, on the other hand, was used with greater frequency for the study of texts and their literary and sociocultural function, making use of the suggestive notion of *repertoire*.

From another perspective, the incorporation of notions such as *autonomy* and *legitimization* in the methodological frameworks with a sociological basis (such as the theory of literary field or the literary institution) allowed for a greater linking of systemic-empiric theories and the pragmatic and teleological processes of national construction. This circumstance explains the success of studies of literary institution or field in peripheral or emerging cultural systems such as the Galician.³ On the other hand, and from a pragmatic-performative perspec-

tive, the polysystem theory was the preferred basis for those approaches that, far from a national pragmatics, were interested in describing and analyzing the interferences and the conflicts derived from the dynamic relationships between systems.

In the same way, some relationship should be formed between epistemological renovation in the academic sphere and the greater or lesser centrality of literary or cultural areas. In this sense, the perspectives and methodologies of systemic theories seem able to take on the challenges posed by peripheral or emergent literary systems to literary theory and history, especially in terms of the processes of institutionalization and social legitimization inherent in the emergence of these new literary systems; the representative case in the lusophone world would be the literatures in Portuguese language of Africa (Salinas Portugal 1999). If the definition of new objects and horizons for research necessarily demands the articulation of renewed conceptual tools, the principal obstacles for their effective application should be located in the use of pragmatic strategies based on the repetition of hegemonic models, which have as their aim the international recognition of a literary system. This piece argues, in turn, that the (symbolic) struggle between center and periphery in a “cultural intersystem” (Torres Feijó 2000) can also take place in the literary (Mata 2004, 231) and in the academic sphere, and that the constitution of a renewed epistemology for LH (like that here situated within the systemic theories) can only occur from positions and spaces removed from the romantic epistemological model of the nation, a model still hegemonic in the cultural and academic centers of the lusophone world.

NOTES

1. The inquiry promoted by *Neohelicon* contained the following questions: (1) Is the methodology of literary history, elaborated in the nineteenth century, still valid? (2) Can the work of literary history be absolutely restricted? Is it possible that the questions it addresses can be resolved by linguistics, cultural anthropology and sociology, or even philosophy? Does literary history have a justification and space for its existence? Does literary history have any status outside the academy? Does it create public interest? Does the role and justification of literature diminish because of mass culture and its media? (3) What place does comparatism, in the broad sense of the word, have in comparative literary history and world history? (*Neohelicon* XX, 2: 9–10).

2. Even-Zohar (*Polysystem Studies*) defines dynamic functionalism in terms of the con-

nections established among Russian formalism, Czech structuralism, the semiotics of culture of the Tartu school, and polysystem theory. The basic shared principles of these approaches are the understanding of literature as a dynamic phenomenon, the recognition of conflict as the motor for change in the interior of the system, and the integration of literary systems in wider polysystems as an important element in the way they function.

3. Here one could cite the recent work of Antón Figueroa, *Ideoloxía e autonomía no campo literario galego* (Ames: Laiovento, 2010), or Roberto López-Iglésias Samartim, "O processo de construçom do sistema literário galego entre o franquismo e a transiçom (1974-1978): Margens, relaçons, estrutura e estratégias de planificaçom cultural," doctoral thesis, University of Santiago de Compostela, 2010.

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