

The Problem of Particularity in Literary History

ABSTRACT: The present essay offers a series of reflections on the paradoxical relationship between particularity and synthesis in the practice of literary history. The essay begins by discussing the origin of this dynamic during the Romantic period, reviews the privileging of particularizing narrative and spatial locality in recent publications of literary history, and highlights the central role of the modern novel (with its representation of “particular life”) for our contemporary epistemological situation, before proceeding to identify the dynamic within the history and historiography of Brazilian modernism.

KEYWORDS: literary history, particularity, theory of the novel, Brazilian modernism.

Friedrich Bouterwek (1766–1828), now recognized as the first proper historian of Portuguese literature, begins his account (in the fourth volume of his monumental *Geschichte der Poesie und Beredsamkeit seit dem Ende des 13 Jahrhunderts* [History of Poetry and Rhetoric from the End of the Thirteenth Century], published in 1805) as follows: “Even a year ago, I still believed that I would not be able to form from all the materials that I had collected on the history of Portuguese poetry and prose anything more than a coherent fragment.”¹ Evidently, ideas and concepts of literary historiography have changed considerably since Bouterwek’s day, but his apologetic description of his yet unfinished work as a “coherent fragment” (*zusammenhängendes Fragment*) would almost seem to perfectly characterize what we expect and how we conceive of literary history today—namely, as a somewhat paradoxical or contradictory enterprise. Even as Bouterwek admits to the inevitable lacunae in his work, as well as the material and pragmatic difficulties—for instance, he had not yet attained a copy of Garcia de Resende’s *Cancioneiro Geral* (1516), but, he writes, had he waited for it to arrive, his multivolume work would have been delayed even more—his conceptual ideal remains a holistic image of “Portuguese literature” and its historiographic representation: “Yet in order to carry out this work even in a preliminary way, the dates that it contains were obtained by various, often labyrinthian and

fragmentary ways, and initially they had to be recorded in a strange disorder, until, with the help of chronology, whose high value for literary pragmatism I came to understand once more, something whole [ein Ganzes] could develop itself" (Bouterwek, vi). The fact that for Bouterwek the object and the practice of history reflect each other in an ideal totality is symptomatic for the incipient historicism at the beginning of the nineteenth century, in which *historia rerum gestarum* and the *res gestae* themselves, the events and their representation, newly come to coincide.² In Bouterwek's preface this idea is expressed in terms that associate the concept of national-cultural totality explicitly with the romantic-poetic culture of southern Europe—that is, in contrast to the more "prosaic" tendency of French literature and the "German universal spirit" (Bouterwek, 4): "For Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese form a closed whole [geschlossenes Ganzes], from which one may learn what romantic poetry had once been at its maximum height" (Bouterwek, viii). Portugal, like the other southern European countries, then, is distinguished by its immediate "poetical reflection of nature," as well as the absence of universal "philosophical or aesthetic abstractions" (Bouterwek, viii).

Therefore, the literary historian has to devote himself to the "study of the local" (Bouterwek, 411), that is, the irreducible particularity of national/natural poetry. Bouterwek's contrast between classical and romantic varieties of literature, and his positive evaluation of the latter, anticipates the properly romantic historiography as embodied by authors such as Sismonde de Sismondi, Ferdinand Denis, Almeida Garrett, Alexandre Herculano, and Teófilo Braga.³ As Roberto Dainotto has shown, such early, typically romantic conceptualizations of literary history, influenced by the geocultural musings of J. G. Herder and Madame de Staël, are grounded in the difference between a European North and South, and they substitute a national(ist) for an earlier cosmopolitan paradigm of the European Republic of Letters.⁴ However, somewhat in contrast to Teófilo Braga, as well as the cultural geographies sketched by Madame de Staël or August Schlegel, who opposed the modernity of the North to the imitative literatures of southern Europe,⁵ Bouterwek repeatedly voices his belief that the most representative Portuguese works of literature, the works by Luís de Camões and Sá de Miranda, are "organically" and poetically felt, despite having been heavily influenced by classical models.

In this context of an emerging discipline of literary history in Europe, then, Bouterwek may precisely be understood as a transitional figure, for his work on Portuguese literature forms only a part of his gigantic multinational, pan-

European project. He may be seen not merely as a precursor of romantic nationalism, but his essentially cosmopolitan, “prenationalist” approach to literary history may also be related to today’s post- and transnational sensibility.⁶ Yet it is also important to point out that Bouterwek’s Kantian cosmopolitanism, which he explicitly expressed in his “Five Cosmopolitan Letters” (1794), has itself a national index, insofar as he sees especially Germany (next to France, England, and Russia) as a country with a “European-universalist” mission, whereas Portugal, Spain, and Italy—whose “poetic” literary history was spread by his work beyond the borders of the respective countries, in a pioneering feat of scholarship—are seen as “too particular” (and Orientalist) for such a role. Bouterwek promotes a European pluralism, as well as the international exchange of ideas, where individual particularities are preserved. Yet through his Enlightenment ideal of a complementary “general Europeanism” runs a line between nations that are more poetic and nations that are more universal than others.⁷

As the quotations just cited indicate, Bouterwek’s tentative conceptual approach to literary history, marking a transitional point between Enlightenment encyclopedism and the romantic taste for the locally specific, wavers between the national and the universal, the fragmentary evidence and the ideal of totality. His European cosmopolitanism acknowledges and values national differences, yet the particularity of literary culture cohabits with the ideal of a coherent presentation of its “totality.” Although Bouterwek is keen to link the manifestations of literary culture to the political and national history of its time, the concept of literary history is seen as a privileged medium of envisioning totality, be it with respect to the idea of national character, be it as exemplifications of specific stages of a teleologically conceived development of history. As Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht has shown, this kind of literary history was made possible by and depended on the specifically modern notion of a self-reflexive and totalizing History.⁸

While our contemporary approaches to literary history follow Bouterwek in his dedication to the locally particular (and the transnational), they have renounced the idea of a totalizing, “grand” narrative and have developed different methods of particularizing the very mode of historiographical presentation. Especially recently, after a trend of revisionary, postmodern histories, a new awareness has arisen of the need for “nontotalizing” modes of synthesis. In the following section, I want first to briefly survey some recent examples for this

particularizing trend in literary historiography. Second, I will address the question of how this historiographical and epistemological question—the impossibility of conceiving grand narratives—is echoed by the history/historiography of the modern novel, as the quintessential genre of particularity. Finally, I want to ask how the interrelation of these two aspects—the particularization of literary history and literature as the expression of local particularity—may apply to the specific case of Brazilian literature.

The Particularization of Literary History

Recent reflections on the possibilities and problems of literary history have stressed the dialectical relation between totality and fragmentation, between the network and the irreducibly particular.⁹ Among the most well-known examples for the postmodern revision of literary history under the sign of the multiple and the fragmentary are the “new” literary histories published by Harvard University Press (*A New History of French Literature*, *A New History of German Literature*).¹⁰ These works written by multiple authors are distinguished by their “thick description” of individual moments and events of literary history. The anthologized essays are arranged in chronological order, yet they eschew any clear causal logic and deliberately juxtapose different genres as well as the individual approaches of the different contributors. While the individual essays are undoubtedly conceived as historical contextualizations of the specific texts and authors at hand, the relations between the different essays are programmatically devoid of a clear sequential logic. Instead, a system of indexed names and terms allows the (already reasonably informed) reader to establish multiple, nonhierarchical relations between the different essays. After its initial appearance in 1989, the *New History of French Literature* has been welcomed as a refreshing deconstruction of conventional literary history, yet it has also provoked criticism, especially David Perkins’s claim that this work would eschew history altogether: “Encyclopedic form is intellectually deficient. Its explanations of past happenings are piecemeal, may be inconsistent with each other, and are admitted to be inadequate. It precludes a vision of its subject. Because it aspires to reflect the past in its multiplicity and heterogeneity, it does not organize the past, and in this sense, it is not history.”¹¹ While in my opinion Perkins overstates his case—he glosses over the fact that encyclopedically arranged, microhistorical “thick descriptions” are certainly a different kind of history but still provide historical contextualization of individual texts—he is, of course, right in his assertion that such a work

makes no attempt to systematize and “organize” the past. Indeed, this “failure” is precisely the revisionary point.¹²

For a more recent revision of literary history, let me mention an interesting example from Italy, a country with a particularly strong tradition of academic historicism (Francesco de Sanctis, Benedetto Croce, Antonio Gramsci) and a venerable tradition of writing literary histories. The three-volume work *Atlante della letteratura italiana* (Atlas of Italian Literature), published by Einaudi, is one of the most ambitious and sophisticated examples of national literary history in recent times. It is symptomatic for a new tendency that, while following in the microhistorical path of the “New Histories,” is also highly aware of the necessity and the challenges of what Michel de Certeau has called the “historiographical operation.”¹³ This Atlas tries to counter the idea of a totalizing, Hegelian historicism by combining historical chronology and context with the particularizing category of space or geography, in order to conceive of a different form of temporality. As the editors write in their introduction, this temporality “is capable to pass from the phenomena of long duration in the Italian literary civilization to the small events, only apparently marginal, which through fulminous ignitions, perhaps by way of a sudden encounter or confrontation, end up determining a shift destined to weigh on the subsequent history” (*Atlante* 2010, xvi).¹⁴ Such an approach appears indeed to be suitable for a national tradition that has been unusually polycentric within the European context. Yet, as the quotation indicates, the focus on spatial marginality also entails a microhistorical dimension, whereby apparently contingent “small events” are seen as replacing a “too much ordered gallery of masters and masterworks” (*Atlante*, xviii), so that they may illuminate literary history also by way of the dead ends, roads not taken, losers of evolutionary processes, as well as coincidences, synchronies, and missed encounters. Moreover, given the editors’ desire to displace the centrality of single classical texts, the authors of the Atlas were also asked to consider aspects of production, reception, performance, or the relations to other media. Nevertheless, all contributions are grounded in a specific “*hic et nunc*, a spatio-temporal point as concrete as possible” (*Atlante*, xx), a point that mediates contingency with historical decisiveness. Yet eschewing the contemporary “fetishism of the fragment,” the editors postulate that a literary history that anthologizes discrete events must also confront the question of interrelations: “In any case, these moments are of interest especially in their relation to so many other moments of the same genre: because of their interconnectedness, more than for their

(splendid) isolation" (*Atlante*, xx). Concretely, this means that a series of essays are grouped together under a more general, synthetic account, which presents a larger historical curve or structural background of the cultural "system." In this sense, the *Atlas* may be said to follow in the steps of Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire* and the "New Histories," yet it complements the idea of the essayistic narration of "loaded" anecdotes with a more systematic presentation of the spatial and temporal frames (called *reti*, or nets), specifically with regard to the contextualization of the modes of authorship—an approach that is in some respects reminiscent of Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theory of the literary field. Moreover, the combination of deliberately marginal literary manifestations with the "hard facts" of cartographic and infographic elements is clearly indebted to Franco Moretti's polemical intervention in favor of statistical research and the (now routinely criticized) practice of "distant reading," as well as the application to literary history of other epistemological models from the social and natural sciences.¹⁵ In contrast to the acknowledged model of Moretti's *Atlas of the European Novel*, which combined the distribution of literary models in space with the representation of space within realist novels, the *Atlas of Italian Literature* is generally not concerned with this latter aspect.

It is also remarkable that this approach, centered on the locally situated social networks of literary production, is ultimately said not to dismantle the canon but to "better appreciate—and better comprehend—the canonical authors of Italian literature" (*Atlante*, xxiii). Evidently, this work's emphasis on geography and topography is related to what has been called the "spatial turn" in the human sciences, and in this sense it also exemplifies the recent tendency to foreground the question of space within the field of literary history. In contrast to the "New Histories," then, this work places literary objects and events in contexts that are more rigorously defined both spatially and temporally. Einaudi, which published both the original Italian version of Moretti's *Atlas* and the *Atlas of Italian Literature*, is also responsible for the multivolume work on the novel edited by Moretti, now (partly) translated into other languages.¹⁶ Although this work is not explicitly framed as a history of the novel, the wide panorama provided—including essays on individual national traditions, subgenres, themes, material aspects, "key works," and so forth—ultimately amounts to an encyclopedic vision of the novel from its earliest beginnings to the present day, with an unprecedented international range. By way of its encyclopedic, anthologizing

approach, this work shares in the contemporary preference for spatial, horizontal, serial, self-consciously fragmentary mapping of a given terrain of knowledge, rather than for the sequential and synthetic mode of proper historiography, although some of the individual essays, in contrast to the “New Histories,” use synthetic (and even statistical) methods of presentation.

As we have seen with regard to the *Atlas of Italian Literature*, such a revisionary kind of literary history maintains the general framework of the national while at the same time weakening this category in favor of more local frameworks (regions, cities, provinces). Paradoxically, the “spatial turn” may thus be seen as a reterritorialization of literary studies after the demise of the national as the central organizing category.¹⁷ The decentering of the national by the local and subnational is also embodied by another collaborative enterprise of recent times, namely the three-volume *Literary Cultures of Latin America*. This work is, of course, not the first attempt to understand the literatures of Latin America as a common field “beyond the nation-state” (Valdés, xix).¹⁸ Yet this project is remarkable for its attempt to conceive multilayered constellations that negotiate the subnational with the supranational. As the editor puts it in the introduction: “The reader of literary history ought to be given the larger network of cultural relationships that are at play in the particular detail, but how can we describe multiple perspectives and yet maintain a sense of historical narrative discourse?” (Valdés, xix).

The Novel and Particularity

In general, the examples just discussed all share an approach that favors an idea of literary history as nonhierarchical, nonconsequential interconnectedness. This tendency is evidently a reflection of our own epistemological present—the “taste for the particular” as the leading stimulus for the human sciences—just as Bouterwek’s idea of *das Ganze* was reflective of the historiographic ideas of his time. Let me state it again: Bouterwek’s concept of totality was the objective correlative of the particularity of national literature. Even as today we no longer accept unproblematically the national telos of literary expression, we cannot but see literature as an embodiment of particularity. Nowhere is this clearer than in the literary genre that, for better or worse, is universally favored today, namely the novel. How and why is the novel the genre of particularity; to what extent may the history of the novel be understood as the emergence and transforma-

tion of the particular? While in the study of the novel these questions are not entirely new, they have never been laid out as forcefully as in Guido Mazzoni's remarkable recent book *Teoria del romanzo* (Theory of the Novel; 2011).¹⁹

In his historical morphology Mazzoni presents the course of the Western novel precisely as the emergence of particularity—and I would like to argue that this book has much to teach us not only about the novel but also about how literary historians may approach literature as the medium of particularity. In fact, in an afterword he reflects on the question of how such a historically informed theory of the novel has to confront the particular and not subsume it too readily into generalizing abstractions. This explains why the book is as much a theory as a history of the novel (and why its title points toward an implicit critical revision of Georg Lukács's "high theory" of the novel). This is to say that Mazzoni establishes a certain parallel between his own methodological approach—sensitive to historical particularities and differences—and his theory of the novel as a narrative about the emergence of particularity.²⁰ In this regard Mazzoni invokes Peter Szondi's critique of Hegel's misrecognition of particularity: "Because particularity is the *proprium* of our epoch, the figuration of a single entity, in all the restrictedness of its world, may become a representative gesture" (Mazzoni, 377). According to Mazzoni, the anthropological function of reading novels consists in our experience of what it might have been like to live in a particular time and place, and thus to assume a particular point of view (Mazzoni, 373). The fact that we moderns attribute a singular significance to the "ontological region of particularity" (Mazzoni, 376) explains not only our relation to the modern novel (Mazzoni, 381) but also what we might call the particularization of the epistemological landscape and modes of intellectual operation: ". . . historicism and localism introduce, into the very heart of philosophical theories, an ontology of a narrative sort, the same that resides since time immemorial in any kind of story" (Mazzoni, 380). The practice of storytelling is thus equated with the gesture of historicization, which is in turn coterminous with a "relativistic skepticism" distrusting of time-transcending concepts:

Few disciplines rest on a foundation so thoroughly nihilistic as philology. The image of the world informing its *a priori* sees reality as an agglomeration of particular events and minimal genealogies: the influence of someone on somebody else, of a singular event on another singular event, of a circumscribed milieu on an individual. . . . Philology knows no other metaphysics

but one, obtuse and minimal, which is inscribed in the method of mechanical causality. Every form of regularity that assembles particular objects into greater connections comes out of it destroyed. In this sense, philology is an extreme example for how the logic of narrative has penetrated the realm of concepts. (Mazzoni, 381)

On the one hand, then, Mazzoni shows how the history of the European novel moves toward and is coterminous with the “discovery of the milieu” (Mazzoni, 268), with the consequence—most visible in Balzac—that the individual appears more or less connected to (if not determined by) the particularities of the local and the historical (Mazzoni, 270). At a later point, during the time of classical modernism, novelistic, interiorized subjectivity affirms itself by its relative independence, yet even here emerges a characteristic conflict between the universal and the particular (Mazzoni, 395–97). Mazzoni provides an extraordinarily detailed account of how what he calls the “book of particular life” gradually comes to emancipate itself from other literary genres, such as epic and tragedy, and previous conceptions of the novel. The development of the modern novel is associated with a series of discursive transformations that are, in turn, responsible for the demotion of universal concepts in Western metaphysics and for the origin of the perspectivism and particularism of the human sciences (Mazzoni, 165): “The birth of the novel as the genre of private life and the first stages of the development of the European human sciences are contemporary phenomena” (Mazzoni, 166). In the last chapter of his study, then, Mazzoni moves toward the present epistemological situation, where he diagnoses the contemporary skepticism toward essentialist portrayals of cultural phenomena and historical epochs: “Today, whoever wants to reflect on linguistic games and historical periods has to abandon certain gestures that are too immediately synthetic, and has to penetrate into the analytical territory of philology. . . . The synthetic power of certain judgments is directly related to the scarcity of details, to the certainty with which many facts are being ignored” (Mazzoni, 385).

Despite the differences in the examples I have surveyed, we notice the insistence on the genuine particularity of literature and, as a consequence for literary historiography, the implicit or explicit critique of gestures that smack of “immediate synthesis.” Yet we have also seen that synthesizing gestures and “historiographical operations” are nevertheless unavoidable and necessary. For instance, one need only look at the chapter headings of Mazzoni’s study (“The Novel and

the Literature of the Ancient Regime," "The Birth of the Modern Novel," "The Nineteenth-Century Paradigm," "The Transition to Modernism") in order to see that his historical morphology is indeed heavily dependent on synthesizing operations. Or, as David Perkins has put it: "We must perceive a past age as relatively unified if we are to write literary history; we must perceive it as highly diverse if what we write is to represent it plausibly" (Perkins 1992, 27).

Particularity and Synthesis in Brazilian Literature

The question, then, is how to write literary history by avoiding the sin of "immediate synthesis," to write a particular history of particularity. It goes without saying that even more caution would be required if one were to deal with very recent, or contemporary, literature. In a recent essay on the problem of how to categorize the contemporary novelistic production in Brazil and Latin America, Pedro Dolabela Chagas argues that these contemporary novels eschew the traditional paradigm and hermeneutics of nation formation (as present in studies by Roberto González Echevarría and Flora Süssekind) and therefore also require a different historiographical approach. Or, rather, a "historiography" appears impossible in this case, for the novels appear as yet only isolated phenomena in formation. Therefore, "the first step has to be precisely the following: to confront the singularity [of the work], to appreciate it without submitting it to generalization, to let it speak before enlisting it into a lineage, into tendencies. . . . This would mean to privilege criticism over historiography, thus reinvigorating the analysis of the particular, in the light of the difficulty to recognize the synchronic historical picture."²¹ Moreover, in his survey of contemporary novelistic production (e.g., of Bernardo Carvalho, Roberto Bolaño), the author also recognizes a lessening of, say, the importance of "Brazilian" national identity for the signification of the novel. The author concludes that, in the present time of "universalizing" globalization, literature takes on the task of representing "individual experience," the "singular individual," and the "circumstantially local" (Chagas, 57). In other words, Chagas sees the contemporary Brazilian/Latin American novel distinguished by what, according to Mazzoni, the modern novel has always been about. In this sense, it might be true that the contemporary novel represents a certain change with regard to a former dominance of the "panoramic" novel of *brasilidade*. Yet Chagas appears to forget, first, that his enlisting of contemporary works under this rubric ("the novel of individual experience, of a mitigated frame of nationality") amounts indeed to nothing but a

sort of “generalization” and, second, that the idea of individuality is not exactly something new in the history of the novel. The change he is addressing here might also be described as a move from the novel’s task of “manufacturing difference” (P. Casanova) on the level of foundational, individual nationality to one of individuality on a sub- or supranational level.²² In any event, the deployment of such an argument also points to the difference between the history of the European and the Brazilian/Latin American novel.

And indeed, in the past, both Brazilian literature and its historiography have often been heavily determined by narratives about the formation of Brazilian nationhood. It is all the more remarkable that Antonio Candido, in his classic *Formação da literatura brasileira*, already sees this “nationalist” aspect of literature in the context of a dialectical relationship between romantic and neoclassical tendencies, insofar as his book sets out “to study the formation of Brazilian literature as the synthesis of universalist and particularist tendencies.”²³ This is to say that Candido sees his own project as distinct from romantic historiography, where *brasilidade* was necessarily seen as a “differential trace and criterion of value” (Candido 1981, 28).

It is also well known that Brazilian modernism echoes Romanticism in its nationalist aspirations and its efforts to conjoin the particular and the universal. In this context the concern with Brazilian nationhood is perhaps most visible in the writings of Mário de Andrade, who is above all concerned with the integration of regional particularities into a national whole, which as such forms the national-as-particular. The complexity of Mário’s nationalism is well captured by Tania Franco Carvalhal: “Mário de Andrade understood what had been an intuition for José de Alencar: A national entity would not exist in its totality without the insertion of all its parts into the whole. It is for this reason that Mário de Andrade searches for a break with geography (*desgeografização*); he wanted to neutralize the emphasis placed on local particularities in order to be able to discover an underlying unity of identity, extending beyond regional differences.”²⁴ In his search for such a strategy of making Brazilian literature at once more particular and more universal, Mario was inspired by the affinities he saw with the similarly “peripheral” and romantic culture of Germany, where music and the popular were seen as distinctive traits. As he proposes in his essay *Teutos mas músicos* (1939), his personal conversion from the “classical” French to the “romantic” German paradigm could mark the way to a properly Brazilian culture: “The fact was that I felt excessively frenchified (*anfrancesado*) in my spirit. . . . I

realized that in order to become really Brazilian in my sensibility and in my work, I first had to detoxicate myself from the exaggerated Frenchness of my being."²⁵ Characteristically, in talking about himself, Mário also talks about Brazil, in this case the formation of Brazilian literature as an emancipation from a universalist model. Similar to Eça de Queirós's renunciation of his French past in 1889,²⁶ for Mário an imported universalism calls up the specter of imitation.

The case of Brazilian modernism, as should have become clear, has a somewhat complex relation to the terms *particular* and *universal*. Therefore, a history of this movement faces unique challenges to integrate this tension—arguably, distinctive of literature tout court—into its own mode of narrative presentation. A very interesting and persuasive attempt has been made in a recent book by Ivan Marques, *Cenas de um modernismo de província* (Scenes of a Provincial Modernism; 2011). This is a self-reflexive attempt to write the literary history of a distinctive inflection of Brazilian modernism, as embodied by a specific group, or generation, of writers from Minas Gerais.²⁷ Let me conclude this essay, then, by pointing out the ways in which Marques addresses questions of particularity/difference, as well as achieves synthesis/unity.

1. *Local Difference*. The category of peripheral or "provincial" modernism addresses the question of cultural geography—that is, how the "peripheral modernism" of Brazil, despite its unifying and universalizing traits, must in fact be seen as heterogeneous, as a unity made up of different parts. The modernist writers from Minas (the book contains long, detailed chapters on Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Emílio Moura, João Alphonsus, and Cyro dos Anjos) provide thus a kind of alternative modernism to the more "central" and "cosmopolitan" version associated with São Paulo (Oswald de Andrade, Mário de Andrade). The importance of space, the rootedness in a local context ("particular expressions in every historical reality," 9), is associated with the particular cultural situation of the provincial capital of Belo Horizonte.²⁸ The introductory chapter is dedicated to the local particularities of this regional modernism, and here Marques criticizes previous studies of a strictly sociohistorical bent for having neglected to "investigate the reasons for this singularity" (Marques, 23).
2. *Time/Distinctive Commonalities*. The subtitle of the book ("Drummond and Other Boys from Belo Horizonte") links the idea of the locally distinctive

to the time-bound phenomenon of a literary group, or generation of writers—which is, of course, a traditional concept of literary history. Since the French Revolution, the concept of the generation has served to designate a specific “age cohort” defined by its difference from the values of the past and shaped by common experiences.²⁹ In other words, the term *generation* gathers historical significance through its designation of an irreducible, chronologically situated span of experience, while it also is constitutionally synthetic in its reduction of many individuals under a single, general rubric (think, say, of the Portuguese generation of 1870). The modernist generation of Minas Gerais, according to Marques, was united by a strong sense of “literary sociability,” by the participation in a common journal (*A Revista*) and other editorial projects, by similar social backgrounds, a dislocation within modernity, and trajectories leading from the “private” to the “public” domain (birth in the interior, in traditional families; the sense of social decline; work as public functionaries in the city, as well as a close connection to journalism; later, an affinity with the educational projects of Getúlio Vargas). Common experiences and activities also led to a shared intellectual and literary style or rhetoric, such as the characteristic blending of tradition and modernity, as reflected in the specific urban history of Belo Horizonte (Marques, 20). These commonalities also were linked to a deepened concern with local roots and psychological interiority, “a greater preference for particular beings than for the national myth” (Marques, 22)—yet also, paradoxically, a French-influenced “spirit of classicism” and “universalism” (Marques, 35), which was precisely what Mário de Andrade criticized in them (Marques, 38). All of these traces are designated by Marques as being “particular” to the “character of Minas Gerais” in general (Marques, 35). Yet about the group of writers Marques has chosen to study, he also writes: “However, in our search for an identity that we already know to exist among them, we should not exaggerate to the point of neglecting the configuration of the parts. It is in variety that unity is found, as wrote Mário de Andrade, while he observed that in the group of Belo Horizonte, behind the appearance of the most ‘harmonious intellectual movement’ there was a sum of solipsistic snails [*caramujos ensimesmados*], with everyone preserving his own traits” (Marques, 45–46). Marques moves from Mario’s comment

about the problem of group formation as unity-in-variety to his own methodological declaration that he wants to “always preserve the particularity of every work” against the background of a shared social and historical condition (Marques, 46).

3. *Particularity in Literature.* Marques writes that “the union of the particular with the universal (another ‘characteristic’ of the epoch in question) in fact defines the very nature of lyric and art” (Marques, 35). This is to say that Marques, just like Mazzoni, sees literature as the realm of the particular, although it is here not restricted to the genre of the novel. The Minas modernists are paradigmatic for a universalism rooted in a decidedly local experience (Marques, 252–53). This means, for example, that the adoption of a radically subjectivist viewpoint in a novel such as Cyro dos Anjos’s *O amanuense Belmiro* (The Amanuensis Belmiro, 1937) can transcend the represented solipsism by appearing as representative for an entire generation (namely, the generation studied by Marques). Furthermore, Marques observes that the author “Cyro dos Anjos shares obviously in the small world of his alter ego, yet he also elevates himself above him” (Marques, 249), so that the pseudoautobiographical account comes to represent “the bovarysme of the alienated Brazilian intellectual” (Marques, 239), or what the novel itself, on the occasion of the Carnival celebrations, calls Belmiro’s “impossibility to fuse with the masses.” In contrast to the objectifying and socially engaged novel of the 1930s, *O amanuense Belmiro* continues the Symbolist concern with an “antisocial” withdrawal to an interior self, yet it is precisely this stance through which dos Anjos achieves a portrait of his generation. The resistance to the social is itself socially determined, and even the most “interiorized” novel maintains links with its particular milieu (see Mazzoni), which in turn, we might add, shares features with other spaces of peripheral modernity and the metonymic figure of the alienated employee.³⁰

My point here is obviously not that Marques has reinvented literary history. Rather, his study can simply serve as a self-reflexive example from which we can extrapolate what, in my view, essentially remain the principal challenges for literary history: (1) to demarcate a series of literary objects in circumscribed parameters of time and space; (2) to achieve a certain narrative coherence and “flow” that is not exhaustive but rather a “coherent fragment,” in Bouterwek’s

term, which is concentrated on individual episodes, constellations, or “scenes”; and (3) to wrest a certain general significance from the particular case or case study at hand, and hence also to reflect on the myriad ways in which literature itself produces the universal appeal of particularity.

NOTES

1. Friedrich Bouterwek, *Geschichte der Poesie und Beredsamkeit seit dem Ende des dreizehnten Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: J. W. Röwer, 1805), 4: ii. All translations are my own. Bouterwek’s foundational role, even with regard to Brazilian literature, is briefly acknowledged in Tania Franco Carvalhal, “The Foundations of Brazilian Literary Culture,” in *Literary Cultures of Latin America: A Comparative History*, eds. Mario J. Valdés and Djelal Kadir (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1: 126–132 (128). On Bouterwek in the context of early Portuguese literary history, see Carlos Manuel Ferreira da Cunha, *A construção da história literária na literatura portuguesa do século XIX* (Polierdo: University of Minho: 2002), 124, 263–66.

2. Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989), 262.

3. See Carlos M. F. da Cunha, “A história literária e a ‘invenção da tradição,’” *Limite* 2 (2008), 97–114 (105).

4. Roberto M. Dainotto, *Europe (in Theory)* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007). Dainotto quotes the Italian historian Federico Chabod’s comment on the emergence of European nationalism as a reaction against French universalism: “The particular against the general, the individual against the universal. Exactly because the fear is that universality will suffocate individuality, and that the general will suffocate the particular, for this very reason, the promoters of national individuality hold a strong polemical attitude against [Francocentric] Europeanism” (Chabod, *Storia dell’idea d’Europa* [1961], as quoted in Dainotto, 134).

5. See Cunha, “A história literária,” 106, and *A construção do discurso da história literária*, 222–25.

6. The twelve volumes of Bouterwek’s “universal” literary history, dedicated to Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, English, and German literature, appeared between 1801 and 1820. For an excellent discussion of Bouterwek in the context of early nineteenth-century cosmopolitanism, see Andrea Albrecht, *Kosmopolitismus: Weltbürgerdiskurse in Literatur, Philosophie und Publizistik um 1800* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 170–78, 300. Albrecht points out that Bouterwek’s cosmopolitan approach to literary history becomes somewhat more nationalist after the German Wars of Liberation of 1813.

7. This paragraph is adapted from Albrecht’s account. See *Kosmopolitismus*, 302–6.

8. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, “Literaturgeschichte—Fragment einer geschwundenen

Identität?," in *Fragment und Totalität*, eds. Lucien Dällenbach and Christiaan L. Hart Nibbrig (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984), 30–45 (33).

9. Gumbrecht, "Literaturgeschichte"; Miltos Pechlivanos, "Literaturgeschichte(n)," in *Einführung in die Literaturwissenschaft*, ed. Miltos Pechlivanos et al. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1995), 170–81.

10. Denis Hollier, ed., *A New History of French Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); David E. Wellbery, ed., *A New History of German Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004). See my review in *Poetica* 37, 3–4 (2005), 495–99.

11. David Perkins, *Is Literary History Possible?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 60.

12. For a reflection on the aporia of revisionism in literary history, see Miguel Tamen, "Ghosts Revisited: An Essay on Literary History," in Miguel Tamen and Helena C. Buescu, eds., *A Revisionary History of Portuguese Literature* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), xi–xxi (esp. xiv–xv).

13. Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 48.

14. Sergio Luzzatto and Gabriele Pedullà, "Introduzione," *Atlante della letteratura italiana*, vol. I (Turin: Einaudi, 2010). The third and final volume was completed in late 2012.

15. See Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (London: Verso, 2007), and *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800–1900* (London: Verso, 1998).

16. Franco Moretti, *Il romanzo*, vols. I–V (Turin: Einaudi, 2001–2003).

17. For an overview of the spatial turn and the decentering of the nation, see Carlos Manuel Ferreira da Cunha, *A(s) geografia(s) da literatura: Do nacional ao global* (Ponte Guimarães: Opera Omnia, 2011), 45: "Não deixa de ser significativo que as principais tendências do comparatismo actual sublinhem a necessidade de desterritorializar a literatura (nacional), para a sua reterritorialização."

18. Mario J. Valdés, "Introduction: Parameters of Literary History," in *Literary Cultures of Latin America*, vol. 1, xvii–xxv.

19. Guido Mazzoni, *Teoria del romanzo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011). Since Mazzoni's study has not yet been translated, I allow myself to quote rather generously from it.

20. Such a correspondence is not uncommon in the historiography of the novel: "Numerous nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary histories assign to the novel just the storylines that novels typically assign to their own protagonists." Deirdre Shauna Lynch, "History of the Novel," in *The Encyclopedia of the Novel*, ed. P. M. Logan (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 1: 386–98 (387).

21. Pedro Dolabela Chagas, "Após a nacionalidade: História do romance e produção romanesca no Brasil e na América Latina," *Estudos de literatura brasileira contemporânea* 38 (2011), 41–59.

22. Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 220.
23. Antonio Candido, *Formação da literatura brasileira* (Belo Horizonte: Martins Editora, 1981), 1: 23. On the dialectic of the local and the universal in Brazilian literature, see also Candido, "Literatura e cultura de 1900 a 1945," in his *Literatura e sociedade* (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1976).
24. Carvalho, "The Foundations of Brazilian Literary Culture," 131.
25. Mário de Andrade, *Musica, Doce Musica* (São Paulo: Martins Editora, 1939), 315.
26. Eça de Queirós, "O Francesismo," in *Obras* (Porto: Lello & Irmão, 1947), 2: 813–14.
27. Ivan Marques, *Cenas de um modernismo de provincial: Drummond e outros rapazes de Belo Horizonte* (São Paulo: Editora 34, 2011).
28. See also Maria Zilda Ferreira Cury, "Ouro Preto, Belo Horizonte, Brasília: The Utopia of Modernity," in *Literary Cultures of Latin America*, vol. 2, 597–614.
29. See also Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft*, 313.
30. For a transnational comparison of the novel in this sense, see my essay "Unfähigkeit: Die Figur des Angestellten als schwacher Held im Roman der Moderne" (Italo Svevo and Cyro dos Anjos), in *Arcadia* 47 (2012), booklet 2: 401–20.

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