The Comparative History of Literatures in the Iberian Peninsula series in the Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages book series:

In 1935 the Portuguese scholar Fidelino de Figueiredo published the book Pyrene as based in his lectures at Columbia University in 1931. In it, Figueiredo makes use of the beautiful myth of Pyrene, a lover of Hercules, who created a tomb for her by piling up rocks, thus creating the mountain range of the Pyrenees. Pyrene was conceived as an introductory reflection on the main guidelines for a comparative history of Spanish and Portuguese literature, symbolically self-enclosed in the peninsula that the Pyrenees separate from the rest of continental Europe.

Eighty years later, such a project has finally materialized in the two-volume A Comparative History of Literatures in the Iberian Peninsula, the first transnational study of literatures in the region—not only Spanish-Castilian and Portuguese. Carried out by an international team of around 100 scholars from universities across the world, this history abandons a so-called chronologically organic and omniscient narrative and aims at analyzing some key examples which are especially illustrative of the interliterary and intercultural network within and beyond the Iberian Peninsula.

In accordance with the geographical rationale of this history, its method has been figuratively thought of as geotechnical investigation, meaning that ten geoliterary samples have been obtained through the combination of three vertical and seven horizontal boreholes.


Volume 2 (2016) focuses on four further horizontal boreholes. The first one, “Images”, shows that the Iberian Peninsula is a multipolar environment in which the Spanish-Castilian hegemon is deconstructed by the Others, who, at the same time, generate Others of their own.

The second horizontal borehole is provided by genres, which show the rich circulation of literary forms within the Iberian Peninsula, as well as their successive changes through re-appropriations and re-definitions, not to mention those literary areas that remain alien to specific genres. The third horizontal borehole represents a step further in rewriting, for it focuses on several manifestations of what Lubomír Doležel termed as “transduction”, from translation proper to censorship. The fourth horizontal borehole, in turn, has a dual orientation, for it deals simultaneously with a discipline—cultural studies—and its object of research—popular culture—that traditionally lacks both a comparative method and an Iberian horizon. Volume 2 is brought to an end with the third vertical borehole, a sampling that this time is not applied to the object of study—literatures in the Iberian Peninsula—but to the narrative construction itself—this comparative history—in an exercise of self-awareness about the nature of comparative literary history as a form of discourse.

Though, of course, these ten penetrations into the literary Iberian Peninsula belong to different categories, they nonetheless make it possible to obtain complementary, but also contradictory, pictures whose reading do not exhaust the limits of each theme, but encourages the reader to develop and practice her own boreholes.

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