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Part I

Introduction

DAVID T. GIES

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The Funes effect: making literary history

DAVID T. GIES

One fears that Pierre Menard might have had it right when he proclaimed, “There is no intellectual exercise which is not ultimately useless.”[1] Certainly, the thorny problem of writing literary history might fit into Menard’s category and he might have despaired at, if not the ultimate uselessness of the task, at least its seeming impossibility. Moreover, if Menard despaired, then his colleague (and presumed soulmate) Funes, whose implacable memory prohibited him from making connections (indeed, from thinking), merely went crazy in his attempt to sort out his own reality and reduce it to comprehensible units. As the narrator of his story reveals, “I suspect, nevertheless, that he was not very capable of thought. To think is to forget a difference, to generalize, to abstract. In the overly replete world of Funes there were nothing but details, almost contiguous details.”[2] If Menard was not up to the challenge of reliving every crucial moment in the life of the author of *Don Quijote* in order to replicate not only the end product, but the experiences which informed that text, and Funes could forget nothing, and hence, not think, what, then, is to become of the modern literary historian, who faces similar challenges? How is the historian of literature to “think” when crushed by an avalanche of details (dates, categories, names, works, “-isms,” movements, languages, boundaries, nationalities)? To write literary history – to rewrite literary history – must we relive literary history? Is this what Mario Valdés has in mind when he states, “every writing of literary history is inadequate to the task of reenactment, but nevertheless is a necessity for the cultural identity of the society that produces the writing”?[3] “Inadequate . . . necessity” – do the terms cancel each other out? Like Funes, are we doomed if we do, doomed if we don’t?

Literary history is indeed an accumulation of contiguous details and an act of forgetting. Homi Bhabha articulated this latter belief in *The*

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[1] Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones*. Ed. and trans. Anthony Kerrigan (New York: Grove Press, 1962), p. 53.

[2] Borges, *Ficciones*, p. 115.

[3] Mario J. Valdés, “Rethinking the History of Literary History.” In *Rethinking Literary History*. Ed. Linda Hutcheon and Mario J. Valdés (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 80.

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Location of Culture (but with no reference to Funes, of course).[4] The issue is, naturally, how many details are to be included, which details they might be, how they might be structured, and, in the end, how much forgetting is acceptable. How does one decide what to "forget"? Does one "forget" for ideological reasons? For aesthetic reasons? For reasons of structure or space or power or mere convenience? If the accumulated memory of individuals, groups, or nations informs the act of making literary history, then, whose memory is it? Is it a national memory, a repository of canonical "greatest hits?" Is it a gendered memory? A racial memory? Or is it a web of opinion – "opinion with dates," as Valdés calls literary history,[5] a personalized selection based on – what? – taste, availability, popularity, influence, aesthetic impact, ideological content, thematic concerns, or chance encounters? Louise Bernikow puts this succinctly: "What is commonly called literary history is actually a record of choices. Which writers have survived their times and which have not depends on who noticed them and chose to record their notice."[6]

If literary history consists of choices, then who chooses? And can choice produce any semblance of objectivity? Furthermore, is objectivity possible? Is objectivity even desirable? As David Perkins, one of the most articulate defenders of the enterprise called literary history, notes, "The only complete literary history would be the past itself, but this would not be a history, because it would not be interpretive and explanatory."[7] This is what Funes finally realized, and, as we know, his inability to forget was the road to madness.

Literary History is, or can include, a series of dates, names, works, titles, concepts, genres, movements, regions, schools, influences, traditions, languages, and ethnic groups. *Is Literary History Possible?*, the title of Perkins' provocative book, captures the dilemma of the writer of literary history in the modern world, less naive than his/her forebears, who were more confident of the necessity and possibility of the categorization, evaluation, and selection of literature than we are today.

As early as 1790 in Spain, Cándido María Trigueros seemed to have had a sense of what the writing of literary history might encompass. Yet what provided the bedrock for his interpretation of literary history is precisely what provokes anxiety among modern literary historians. In his *Discurso sobre el estudio metódico de la Historia literaria* ("Discourse on the Methodical Study of Literary History") he wrote:

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[4] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

[5] Valdés, "Literary History," p. 74.

[6] Louise Bernikow, *The World Split Open: Four Centuries of Women Poets in England and America, 1552–1950* (New York: Vintage, 1974), p. 3.

[7] David Perkins, *Is Literary History Possible?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 13.

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> El mérito de los libros de cada materia respectiva, y de las ediciones de cada libro, cuyo conocimiento guía como por la mano a discernir y escoger los mejores en todas, excusando metódicamente la pérdida de tiempo y de caudal; es a lo que se dirige el estudio de la Historia Literaria; agregándose a esto el examen de los progresos del ententimiento humano, que para ser verdaderamente útil debe descubrirnos no solamente las mutaciones, adelantamientos, y atrasos de todas las Naciones en los respectivos ramos de la literatura y en el por mayor de los estudios y de las artes; pero es necesario también que averigüe las causas, o civiles, o morales o físicas, que produxeron aquellos efectos: en una palabra, para que sea loable la Historia Literaria que se estudie, debe ser *filosófica*, *completa*, *breve*, *imparcial* y *verdadera*.
>
> (The value of books in each respective subject, and of editions of each book, the knowledge of which guides us toward understanding and selecting the best among them, thereby helping us to avoid wasting our time or resources: this is what Literary History tries to do. To this is added the examination of the progress of human understanding, which in order to be truly useful should reveal to us not only the changes, advances, and slips of all nations in the respective areas of literature and in the great majority of sciences and arts, but it is also necessary to discern the causes, whether civic or moral or physical, that produced those effects. In a word, for Literary History to be worthy of study, it must be *philosophical*, *complete*, *short*, *impartial*, and *true*.)[8]

Most of Triguero's basic assumptions are questioned today (we understand that literary history is not, nor can it be, "complete," "impartial," or even "true," and his idea of national "progress" has likewise been dismantled since the 1970s by thoughtful historians and cultural critics), but still we recognize the inherent validity of selection, aesthetic choice, and contextualization in the creation of literary history: "There must be similarities between works to justify grouping them together (in genres, periods, traditions, movements, discursive practices, and so on), for without classification and generalization, the field cannot be grasped mentally. A great many, perfectly heterogeneous objects cannot be understood."[9] Yet classification in itself has become a contested area as scholars redefine the borders between "periods" such as Medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, Modern, Contemporary, etc. We now work with more supple concepts such as Early Modern Spain, the Long Eighteenth Century, Post-Franco Literature, and even attempt to eschew or redefine "old" categories such as Generations (the Generation of 1898 is a perfect example). Mario Valdés invites us to consider such period groupings as "ideational cultural systems" rather than narrow temporal categories,[10] and we would do well to heed this advice.

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[8] Cándido María Trigueros, *Discurso sobre el estudio metódico de la Historia literaria* (Madrid: Benito Cano, 1790), pp. 27–28.

[9] Perkins, *Literary History*, p. 126.

[10] Valdés, "Literary History," p. 69.

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It may be that we have lost our innocence, and our confidence, as literary historians. Literary histories written by individuals have largely been supplanted by collective efforts. For Valdés, "The choices we make as historians are not individual – they are collective or one's own understanding of the collective sense of axial moments."[11] Or, to use Marshall Brown's terms, literary history today is more "assembled" than "written."[12] The hubris of individual protagonism has given way to the comfort of collectivity. If once upon a time we could welcome a single-authored literary history (we think of the early efforts of George Ticknor, Hippolyte Taine, Carl Van Doren, or James Fitzmaurice-Kelly), the modern world demands more reticence, and thus we get the admirable and useful *Literary History of Spain*, edited by R. O. Jones; Víctor García de la Concha's as yet unfinished *Historia de la literatura española*; or Roberto González Echevarría, Enrique Pupo-Walker, and David Haberly's *Cambridge History of Latin American Literature*, all collectively authored and in multiple volumes. I write "the modern world," since it goes without saying that Postmodern critics reject the single-authored volume out of hand, seeing in it (correctly) yet another attempt to create an untenable Master Narrative. "Useful" is a key concept here, however, for as David Perkins believes, "the function of literary history is to produce useful fictions about the past."[13]

The forces of history and historical change do not develop as a linear story or as a coherent narrative. They are *made* narrative *ex post facto*; the story is created through a process of research, selection, sequencing, and the imposition of order on often contradictory and disparate elements. Hans Kellner warns, "[W]e cannot forget that our ways of making sense of history must emphasize the *making*."[14] This is literary history, too, although the tension between the "literary" and the "history" have led to accusations of failure on both sides.[15] Linda Hutcheon reveals that literary history is "a storytelling project,"[16] while Marshall Brown insists, "We want some history in our literary history."[17] We seem to be compelled to make sense of ourselves, of our history, of our literary history, and so,

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[11] Valdés, "Literary History," p. 70.

[12] Marshall Brown, ed., *The Uses of Literary History* (Durham: Duke University Press), p. 100.

[13] Perkins, *Literary History*, p. 182.

[14] Hans Kellner, "Language and Historical Representation." In *The Postmodern History Reader*. Ed. Keith Jenkins (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 128.

[15] Lawrence Lipking, "A Trout in the Milk." *Modern Language Quarterly* 54.1 (1993), p. 7.

[16] Linda Hutcheon, "Preface. Theorizing Literary History in Dialogue." In *Rethinking Literary History*. Ed. Linda Hutcheon and Mario J. Valdés (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. xi.

[17] M. Brown, *Uses of Literary History*, p. 118.

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like Don Quijote, armed with a smattering of knowledge and a handful of texts, we venture into uncharted territory.

Well, not entirely uncharted. As Perkins reminds us, literary history, from its antiquarian roots in the eighteenth century, has become a staple of the profession of literature and has been written, contested, rejected, criticized, and rewritten for more than 200 years. If the eighteenth century witnessed its invention, it was the nineteenth century which expanded the range of literary history and connected it to the nationalistic enterprises which the twentieth century has come to reject with such force. We are well past asking literary history to find or define the "soul" of a nation. This "Volkgeist" was a construction of the German Romantics (of Johann Gottfried von Herder, in particular), brought to Spain by the Romantic theorists Johann Nikolas Böhl von Faber and Agustín Durán in the first years of the nineteenth century, but it lost its ability to structure literary history and fell into disuse. Indeed, by the second half of the twentieth century, critics not only rejected such reductionist history, but were actually proclaiming the demise, fall, or obliteration of Literary History. As René Wellek wrote in a famous paper, "something has happened to literary historiography which can be described as decline and even as fall. Particularly in the interval between the two world wars widespread dissatisfaction with literary history was voiced in almost every country."[18] The journal *New Literary History* even dedicated a special issue to the question, "Is Literary History Obsolete?" in 1970.

In the present volume, Wadda Ríos-Font traces the origins of literary history in Spain and addresses the ideological biases that inevitably inform the enterprise. We know the impossibility of completeness, of objectivity, of coverage, of inclusiveness, and yet we struggle on, convinced that even an inadequate and reductive overview of a nation's literary achievements can provide at least some guidance through the past and some keys to interpreting the present. All decisions made by the literary historian are necessarily arbitrary, although they are made within the boundaries of a series of accepted codes and assumptions, codes secreted over the years like stalagmites on the floor of a dark and unknowable cave.

What do we do when we attempt to write Literary History? Perkins problematizes the issue well:

> The question is whether the discipline can be intellectually respectable. Hundreds of books and articles testify every year that literary history can be written. [The aim of literary history is] to recall the literature of the past, including much that is now seldom read; to organize the past by selecting which authors and texts are to be discussed and by arranging them into interconnected

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[18] René Wellek, "The Fall of Literary History." In *The Attack on Literature and Other Essays* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), p. 65.

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groups and narrative sequences; to interpret literary works and account for their character and development by relating them to their historical contexts; to describe the styles and *Weltanschauungen* of texts, authors, ages, and so on; to express the contents of works and quote passages from them, since many readers will have no other experience of these works; to bring, through selection, interpretation, and evaluation, the literary past to bear on the present, with consequences for both the literature and the society of the future.[19]

The writing of literary history is further complicated by any attempt at a national project. The very word "nation" provokes another series of questions. What constitutes a "nation"? Whose nation? If we have learned anything from Benedict Anderson's book, *Imagined Communities*, it is that nations are constructs, formed for disparate and complex reasons. If the idea of "nation" is a contested one, then the idea of "national literature" becomes even more so. Does something called "national literature" exist? When does a nation come into being? How would a "nation" produce a "literature"? Such questions cannot be answered by literary history, but they cannot be avoided either, since they inform the decisions, categories, and choices one must necessarily make while attempting to write a narrative of literary history. Vicente García de la Huertas' interest in creating his *Theatro Hespañol* ("Spanish Theatre," 1785) was in part (in large part) motivated by nationalistic concerns. Indignant, as were many others, at Nicholas Masson de Morviller's famously offensive article in the *Encyclopédie méthodique* ("Methodical Encyclopedia," 1782) – in which the Frenchman wondered what Spain had ever contributed to civilization in two, four, or even ten centuries of existence – García de la Huerta presented a series of texts and authors which in his view demonstrated the superiority of – at least – Spanish theatre. Ideological bias and nationalistic rhetoric informed the very roots of literary history in Spain. John Dagenais addresses this thorny issue nicely in the present volume (he writes, "The idea of 'national' literary canons and literary traditions in a national language which founds collective volumes like the present one belongs to a rapidly changing, if not already outmoded idea of the ways in which peoples, languages, and literatures exist"). "Spanish literature" has been confused and conflated with "literature in Spanish," but they are not the same thing. Still, lurking beneath the narratives in all of the chapters in this volume is the inevitable issue of "Spain," "Spanish," and "Spanishness." Linda Hutcheon points out correctly that the literary past has been recounted most frequently through the categories of nation and language: "In our twentyfirst-century globalized, multinational, and diasporic world, how can we explain the continuing appeal, not only, of the single-nation/single-ethnicity focus of literary histories, but also, of

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[19] Perkins, *Literary History*, pp. 12–13.

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its familiar teleological model, deployed even by those writing the new literary histories based on race, gender, sexual choice, or any number of other identitarian categories?"[20] Perhaps we cannot explain it. Yet, can it be otherwise?

What determines what is "Spanish" about "Spanish" literature? Is it the place of birth of the author? Is it his/her native language, the language in which he/she writes, or the language in which he/she is known? Is language the main determinant for nationality? If nation and language are not organizing categories for Literary History (and many today reject such categories as reductive and/or imperialistic), what groupings can be made which avoid the reality or appearance of teleology? Certainly, any literary history organized by gender, race, theme, ideology, or even (perhaps) temporal sequences, runs the risk of falling into similar traps. If traps they are. As Brad Epps asks in his chapter on the contemporary novel, do we consider Spanish literature that which is written in Spain, in Spanish, by native-born Spaniards, or is it something else? If it is not "something else," what does one do with literature written in the Iberian Peninsula, in the country today called "Spain," but written in languages such as Basque, Catalán, or Gallego? Can there be, as Maria Rosa Menocal and Charlotte Stern ask, a "Spanish" literature before there was a concept of a country called "Spain"? Theorists today rightly question the need for, or validity of, national models of literary history.

If what we commonly believe to be a nation emerges from a shared heritage of "linguistic, cultural, political, and social values to which we must assent,"[21] then Spain is a nation, an entity which holds on to a generally shared heritage. It is, however, a hotly contested heritage, as we know from those in (particularly) the País Vasco or Catalonia who do not fully share that heritage. They elbow in and assert their own "national" identity politics, often with results that are informative, useful, and enriching. Yet where does the border begin to form between a shared national heritage and a localized, individualized heritage? How much of the latter rewrites the former? To what degree can these contested areas co-exist? Are hegemony and, concurrently, cultural imperialism the inevitable end products of a shared heritage? There is clearly no percentage, no mathematical formula which can be accessed to resolve this tension. Quotas are hardly the answer (75% Castilian? 15% Catalán? 5% Basque? 3% Gallego? 2% Other?); such renderings are obviously absurd and unhelpful.

Perhaps an even more important question would be: why are we so afraid of nationalism today? Clearly, evidence abounds in its rawest form

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[20] Hutcheon, "Rethinking the National Model." In Hutcheon and Valdés (eds.), *Rethinking Literary History*, p. 3.

[21] Hutcheon, "Rethinking," p. 9.

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that aggressive nationalism leads to exclusion, oppression, pain, and war. It can also lead to bad literary history, as exemplified in *La literatura española en el siglo XIX* ("Spanish Literature in the Nineteenth Century," 1881–1894), the aggressively nationalistic three-volume work of Father Francisco Blanco García, whose ideology frequently blurred his critical faculties. Yet is all nationalism evil? Is all nationalism hegemonic, jingoistic, chauvinistic, and bloody? Might nationalism be considered one of Perkins' "useful fictions," something which binds together disparate elements, like eggs, flour, and spices in a recipe, in order to create a palatable, even tasty, result? Are we able to think of cultural nationalism in its best sense – as an organizational category, one which allows disparate elements to coexist in a totality, one element informing the other, one drawing strength and ideas and inspiration from the other? Cervantes drew from multiple sources, literature written in Catalán, French, and Italian, and allowed his knight to absorb the noblest impulses from the literatures of the past before sending him out to save the world. It was a foolish endeavor, of course, and one doomed to failure, but don Quijote's failure has provided inspiration and laughter to millions of readers whose paths he has subsequently crossed.

This also provokes, in turn, the much broader question that Sartre first posed in 1948: what is literature? How is the category "literature" assigned? In the case of the present volume, what constitutes the corpus of texts that will be studied under the rubric "Spanish," categorized, ordered, sequenced, and placed into a narrative? Does one include "great" literature only? What constitutes "great," and, again, who decides? Trigueros? García de la Huerta? García de la Concha? Does one include literature reflective of what is normally called high culture, or low culture, or both? The eighteenth-century idea that literature was a multiplicity of texts written in many disciplines gave way in the Romantic nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to a more reductive idea of literature as something personal, more "aesthetic," and more refined. Today's multidisciplinarity, interest in cultural studies, and attention to popular literature has brought with it a broader definition of "literature" and "text" which now includes film, comics, romance novels, rap songs, and oral work of many sorts. Where does one draw the line? Is a city park a "text"? Is a T-shirt a "text"? Is a piece of pottery a "text"? The case could be made in the affirmative for each example – certainly so, if Foucault's belief, laid out in *The Archeology of Knowledge*, that all texts are equal has any validity – but when we further press the question to "is it a 'literary text'?", the category becomes inescapably more contained. Jerome McGann, looking toward Matthew Arnold, asks whether there is "something to be called 'the best that has been known and thought'? . . . Antitraditionalists have counterargued that the received Canon is also an airless structure of 'great

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works' organized to maintain the good order of inherited prejudice."[22] One would hope that today we see the Canon as something more subtle, something that falls somewhere between insubstantial yeastiness and choking airlessness.

So, what are we to do? Do we write only those histories that are comparative across national and linguistic boundaries, or diachronic through time and theme? Do all literary histories become multidisciplinary and "global"? Do we accept Stephen Greenblatt's view that literary history is intellectually and ideologically bankrupt, and just give up on it? Do we accept Pierre Menard's conclusion that such activity is, anyway, useless? Perkins knows that literary history is impossible to write, yet equally impossible not to read.[23] This is the dilemma, of course, and to act one way or the other is to take an ideological stance, or, perhaps in a meeker and more cowardly manner, to act merely motivated by commercial reasons. That is, literary historians might not want to write such histories (they might not be capable of doing so, even collectively), but since the histories want to be read – someone wants to read them – publishers create opportunities to revisit the enterprise and produce an object that will, indeed, be read (and, they hope, bought). Do publishers and the producers of cultural objects direct our intellectual output? How much does or should utilitarianism guide the project of writing literary history? Are we to believe José María Pozuelo Yvancos and Rosa María Aradra Sánchez when they claim, "La historia de la literatura resulta, pues, de gran utilidad porque selecciona de forma crítica a los buenos autores y les ahorra a los futuros lectores tiempo, dinero y trabajo, al informarles previamente sobre su mérito" ("The history of literature turns out to be very useful because it selects, using critical methods, the good authors and it saves future readers time, money, and effort by informing those readers of their merits")?[24] Sounds right, but sounds awfully like Trigueros too.

Linda Hutcheon equates national literary history with sectarian violence, and consequently advocates "the need to rethink the dominance of the national model of literary history, a model that has always been premised on ethnic and often linguistic singularity, not to say purity."[25] The readers of this *Cambridge History of Spanish Literature*, however, will find no attempt to discover a primordial purity anywhere in the literatures of the Iberian Peninsula. "Limpieza de sangre" (clean bloodlines), a concept that worried early modern theologians and politicians,

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[22] Jerome McGann, "Canonade. The Academic War Over the Literary Canon." *New Literary History* 25.3 (1994), pp. 488–489.

[23] Perkins, *Literary History*, p. 17.

[24] José María Pozuelo Yvancos and Rosa María Aradra Sánchez, *Teoría del canon y literatura española* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2000), p. 155.

[25] Hutcheon, "Rethinking," p. 3.