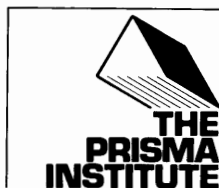


# THE CRISIS OF INSTITUTIONALIZED LITERATURE IN SPAIN

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INTRODUCTION:  
THE COURSE OF LITERATURE IN  
NINETEENTH-CENTURY SPAIN

Wlad Godzich and  
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In matters of literature, periodization is always a perilous though unavoidable undertaking. Upon the numbing diversity of literary artefacts it seeks to impose the implacable orderliness of sequential temporality, thereby reducing the overwhelming mass of literary output to an apprehensible set of constructs. As the basic instrument of literary history, periodization has functioned as the principle of a mode of subordinating and assembling that has gone far beyond the confines of scholarly speculations or even the much broader reach of textbooks, to structure general knowledge, or more precisely *doxa* (non-specific opinion), about literature in our societies, as well as to provide the articulating mechanism for the internal organization of departments of literary studies in our universities. Its very power in all of these realms has raised a series of concerns, ranging from a questioning of

the subdivisions it effects to outright rejection. The strongest of the critiques is the one that has issued from within the Russian Formalist school which argued correctly that the prevailing mode of periodization was not grounded in literature but sought to impose upon it temporal sequences derived from other considerations, principally those of political, or at best, social, history. For the Formalists, such a mode of periodization rests upon the unfounded *a priori* assumption of causal links of determination between the social sphere and literature. They argued initially for the autonomy of the diverse spheres of human activity, including literature, each possessing its distinctive history, with relations of asynchronicity between the different spheres that would not readily admit reduction to easy or even mechanistic forms of causal determination. They came to recognize, however, that such an absolute autonomy is equally untenable for it erects impermeable walls between areas of human experience that one groups intuitively and can easily demonstrate to communicate with each other in however complex ways. As a remedy they proposed an integrating mechanism to correct and supplement their earlier analytic one: yes, each sphere is primarily autonomous and governed by developmental rules that are proper and specific to it, in effect making it into a system, but all of these systems—they called them "series"—come together into a system of systems that articulates their interactions and assigns them their respective weights.

This notion is a seductive one, yet it has largely remained but a tantalizing possibility. All recent attempts to reformulate the project of literary history seem to be caught in the dilemma of either resting upon deterministic models that assign literature a secondariness (often thematized as reflection) to more primary historical phenomena, or of appealing to some form of the notion of system of systems in which the questions raised by literature's relation to its outside are putatively resolved. The reductiveness of the first option is too well known to warrant rehearsing here; it will suffice to recall Bertold Brecht's rejoinder to Lukács that literature *has* and *produces* social effects and cannot be merely reduced to one it-

self. The major flaw of the second—despite the fact that it proposes the integrative system of systems in which all questions are answered as a *horizon* to its own inquiry, and this horizon is not different from any other horizon in that it remains forever beyond reach—is that, as a theory of history it is spectacularly blind to its own historicity. After all, the autonomization of the various spheres of human activity and their concomitant problematic reintegration into a more or less cohesive whole is an integral part of the division of labor and the serialization of social life that is attendant to the establishment of modernization. It is a historical happenstance and not a transhistorical model. This does not invalidate it altogether; it simply requires that its domain of application be clearly identified. We will suggest that nineteenth-century literature constitutes such a domain. Since this essay continues the work that we have undertaken earlier as an inquiry into the history of literature, it may be useful to recall the focus of that inquiry and, more specifically, how our analysis of developments in the eighteenth century led us to formulate the view that the most significant fact was the emergence of an institutional framework for considering literature.

Our project has sought to re-examine the construct of literature in Spain with the idea of specifying its register in different moments of Spain's history (Godzich and Spadaccini, *Literature Among Discourses*). More than a literary history, we have attempted to arrive at a history of literature. For if literary history gathers its concepts of periodization from other sources, then a history of literature has in common with history in general the search for an appropriate conceptualization of temporality and the elaboration of a theory of change and transformation—what has sometimes been called the search for agency. Following this approach, literature comes to be treated as a historical entity, the same as history in general.

In the second volume of our project we advance the notion that as literature in Spain constitutes itself as institutional practice, between 1700 and 1830, certain results are worked in the production and reception of the same (Godzich and Spadaccini, *The Institutionalization of*

*Literature in Spain*). The proliferation of poetics in this same period demonstrates that these aspects had special interest for their contemporaries. It likewise proves significant that this institutional practice coincides with the emergence of the aesthetic as the key category of conceptualization and theorization of the literary artefact.

It is well known that around the end of the eighteenth century, an enlightened intellectual minority intended to carry out a project of manipulation that would operate in the spheres of production, distribution and reception of the cultural process. It was a question of a culture of the State for the State that was represented ideologically as a culture of the Nation for the Nation. That culture was conceived in terms of unity and homogeneity. Its function was no longer that of recuperating elements from other cultural practices but of insuring the constitution of a monologic culture. Thus, those practices considered harmful to the dominant group's interests remained marginal to the point of exclusion from the cultural sphere. This is precisely the period in which the distinction between *low* and *high* culture begins to acquire functional roles.

In the cultural area, this process of marginalization was carried out with weapons produced and defined in terms of the following: rationality; good taste; progress and prosperity; education of the public; and promotion of the Nation's and the State's interests. In all instances, the terms of this struggle were defined and controlled by the intellectuals of the Enlightenment, so that, perhaps the most effective opposition practice was the accusation that was being articulated more and more in terms of a condemnation of *afrancesamiento* or sympathy toward French culture.

The cultural vehicles most suited for the propagation of the Enlightenment program were the theater and written literature. But that theater and that literature could no longer be the artisan's activity, as in the prior period, but, needed to become institutionalized. As such, their problematicity would orient itself toward problems of orientation management. This involves the creation of their own