

RETHINKING LITERARY HISTORY—  
COMPARATIVELY

Mario J. Valdés  
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## Rethinking Literary History—Comparatively

Mario J. Valdés and Linda Hutcheon  
*University of Toronto*

The proliferation of essays and books on the topic of literary history in the last few decades suggests that this may be a fitting time to explore not only the problematizing challenges that new methodological paradigms have raised, but also the new concrete possibilities opened up by precisely these challenges. The specific context of our particular exploration is a proposed set of multi-authored volumes of comparative literary history to be published in a series sponsored by the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA). Each of these new projects, in its own way, takes a very different tack on the writing of literary history than have other histories—even those in the series, for these have been organized around international movements (romanticism, symbolism, expressionism, avant-garde, postmodernism), linguistically-limited geographic regions (European languages in Sub-Saharan Africa), or cultural historical periods (renaissance, baroque, modern). For the purpose of initiating debate and eliciting response, this essay will outline both the general methodological frames of reference and the theoretical underpinnings of the new group of projects as a whole, and will then give a sense of what form these might take in practice by presenting the specific proposals for several of the volumes.

### i.

#### Defining the Terms

While on the surface seemingly benign, each of the words in our title, “Rethinking Literary History—Comparatively”, opens out onto large areas of both contention and excitement today. To “re-think” is not only to think again; it is to think anew. This does not involve revisionism or revising: it is not a question of correcting, altering, amending or improving. To rethink is to reconsider, with all the associations of care and attentiveness and serious reflection that go with the notion of consideration.

One of the things that has consistently been rethought over the centuries is the very concept of the “literary”: its boundaries have been extended from the view of literature as only imaginative writing, to include many other categories of discourse—factual as well as fictional, oral as well as written, vernacular/popular as well as canonical/“elite”.

This inclusive and non-normative notion of “literature” is not new to the late twentieth century, but it has been theorized anew, with the help of, among others, post-structuralist and feminist thinking that has crossed cultural and national language borders. A significant result of this theorizing (as the examples that follow will show) has been the articulation of new and more complex ways to think through the already acknowledged importance of both literature and literary history to more general categories of social history.

Thus, this broadening of the object of study not only increases the number of types of texts to be examined by literary historians, but also expands the historical contexts in which such texts will, of necessity, be considered. The “history” of literature is, in fact, the multiple and complex *historiēs* of its production, but also of its reception. Literary historians over the centuries have always been aware of the complexity of literary production, but the new methodological paradigms developed by various critical theories in the last few decades have made it impossible not to add to this an awareness of the equally complicated and equally significant nature of literary reception. What has come to be called the “literary institution”—the field in which literary experience occurs—is therefore as much a part of this history as is the development of genres or thematic motifs. For this reason, economic, political, and broader cultural and social perspectives on issues like race or gender must be brought to bear in the constructing of any “literary” history today in a different way than they might have in the past. Newly theorized by post-colonial and gender theorists, these perspectives help make conscious the ideological underpinnings of the experience of producing and responding to literature—and of writing literary histories.

It is because of this sort of “rethinking” that the recent critical reconsiderations (both constitutive and methodological) of “history” as a discipline were bound to have inevitable repercussions on the conceptualizing of what a “literary” “history” can and should be. These rethinkings are so extensive and so central to this entire project that they will be examined in detail in the second section of this essay.

What is at stake in the move from the more traditional *national* model of literary history to a “comparative” one can be seen best, perhaps, by analogy. In the introduction to the English translation of the first book of his monumental three-volume, *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme, 15e-18e siècle*, the French historian, Fernand Braudel described his project as comparative, as moving dialectically between past and present, between concrete observation and an awareness of the heterogeneity and complexity of life.<sup>1</sup> A “comparative” literary history would not only try to keep in the foreground this dialectic hermeneutic

movement between past and present, but would try to do something analogous to what Braudel and the Annales school accomplished in their moving of history's emphasis from the events of politics and diplomacy to, on the one hand, a study of the broader circumstances (demographic, geographical, climactic, etc.) conditioning such events and, on the other, a parallel and very detailed scrutiny of the concrete material data (quantified) of life of the past. A "comparative" literary history would move from this life as it is *lived* to how it is *told*. Just as Braudel's *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* brought together such diverse elements as the religion, history, geography, technology, agriculture, and general intellectual trends of this place at this time, so (as section iii will show) the specific comparative literary histories being proposed for this series will study literature in contexts beyond the aesthetic and formal, taking into account relevant political, anthropological, economic, geographic, historical, demographic, and sociological research in articulating the contexts of a community's literature.

The ICLA series of comparative literary histories, as a whole, has sought to do something very different from what *national* literary histories have done, both in their traditional forms and in their recent, quite differently formatted ones (such as *A New History of French Literature*).<sup>2</sup> As Benedict Anderson argues in his influential study, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*,<sup>3</sup> nationhood is a matter of "imagined community". In Europe, he claims, that sense of collective identity was conceived in the nineteenth century and born largely of the printed word and the literary genre we know as the novel—though others would, no doubt, want to argue for the centrality of drama or even opera.<sup>4</sup> This general intertwining of the literary and the national, however, is not one to be abandoned in a "comparative" literary history, but to limit oneself to it would be to downplay the power of other "imagined communities" based on, say, language or geographic region rather than nation. Either of these categories might foreground the artificiality, not to say fragility, of national borders: after all, as historical entities, such borders have changed often and, indeed, change constantly.

In addition, any monolithic construction of a national literary history risks marginalizing or even excluding the literary creations of even those working within those borders, but in other languages or other cultural traditions. There are other complicating factors too that suggest the need for a more flexible and integrative concept of the scope and scale of literary history than that which might be implied when the focus is on a single language (often acting as a synecdoche of a nation): besides the

obvious fact that people can and often do participate in several language communities at once, texts, as well as ideas and images, pass from one language to another through the medium of translation. Films are released in many languages at the same time; novels are simultaneously published around the world in translation; plays are performed on several continents in different languages. As we shall suggest, a “comparative” literary history is also, perhaps, the history both made possible by and even demanded of our age of international information access and electronic technology.

Each example discussed in section iii will address these possibilities and fulfill these demands in the very specific and individual ways dictated by its particular, appropriate choice of focus and methodology. Despite this necessary particularity of engagement, there does exist, among all, a certain, general shared methodological and theoretical grounding on which to build in order to put into practice the insights that issue after issue of a journal like *New Literary History* has been theorizing for over twenty years. It is *in practice*, as well as theory, that we seek to “rethink” “literary” “history” “comparatively.”

## ii.

### Methodological Frameworks and Theoretical Assumptions

Fernand Braudel called his own historical work comparative not only because it crossed traditional disciplinary boundaries but because it involved what he called the “dialectic of past and present.”<sup>5</sup> Similarly, literary history is inevitably the history of the past as read through the present. It cannot be simply a cumulative record of all that has been written or performed or even a compilation of themes or forms. The literary past—that is, the past of both literature’s production and its reception—is unavoidably interpreted in the light of the present, and present knowledge of it will therefore be partial and provisional, but not insignificant for all that. A comparative literary history would have to acknowledge the epistemological limitations that its hermeneutic situation creates: each historian will be situated, as a real person living in a linguistic and cultural community, and it is from that specific position that he/she can engage what phenomenologists call the horizon of the past. The texts of that past were created by people in a specific language, at a specific moment, in a specific place; but the literary historian is also an historical being, “situated” with similar particularity. The community of readers of any text, as Hans-Georg Gadamer argued, is historically constituted, but is never limited to its creator’s contemporaries in the past.

This hermeneutic underpinning of a “situated” literary history is only one of the senses in which there is a “dialectic of past and present.” As the work of Hayden White and others has shown, it is in the present that the historian shapes and orders the events of the past, *making* meaning even more than *recording* it. In Anglo-American literary criticism, the rise of what has been called the New Historicism is an example of a post-New Critical (formalist) return to the historical embeddedness of literature. It also marks a specifically literary engaging of the issues that historians have been debating for some time now, provoked by the work of marxists, feminists, and theorists of race, ethnicity, and sexual choice.

The implications of this notion of the “situatedness” of the historian dovetail with those created by the new awareness of (and openness about) the interpretive and narrating act of history-writing. And these all have special resonance for the literary historian: perspective, interpretation, and narration are among the staples of the study of literature, as much as history. Just as a work like Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie’s *Carnival in Romans* (1979) challenged the convention of historical narrative as objective, neutral, impersonal and transparent, so too does fiction such as Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* or E.L. Doctorow’s *Ragtime*. The inevitable self-consciousness of literary historians, when they are faced with such “historiographic metafictional” texts,<sup>6</sup> cannot but condition their sense of what the “imaginative reconstruction”<sup>7</sup> of the past in the present might entail. History’s explanatory or narrative “emplotments”, to use Hayden White’s term, are never innocent or without consequences. To admit any of this is, in some way, to challenge the cognitive status of historical knowledge as it had come to be known in empirical and positivist terms in the last century. Ground-breaking work, such as Paul Ricoeur’s multi-volumed *Temps et récit*, with its painstaking study of the reconfiguration and refiguration of time by narrative—both historical and fictive—has provided the kind of necessary bridge between those cognitive challenges faced by the discipline of history and those that need considering when writing about the past of literature. As a human construct, literary history too is a narrativizing of literary “events”, and its “archive” is a textualized one in only a more immediately self-evident way than is the archive of all historiography.

Such analogies between the writing of history and the writing of literary history are also possible because of what intellectual historian, Dominick LaCapra has articulated in terms of “the postulates of unity, continuity, and mastery of a documentary repertoire”<sup>8</sup> which have underpinned both endeavours in the past and which thus have come under close scrutiny in the wake of post-structuralist, post-colonial, and other critiques that point to discontinuities, gaps, ruptures, or exclusions

rather than linear development, evolution, or continuity. This means that the very task of the historian has to be rethought. In White's words: "a specifically *historical* inquiry is born less of the necessity to establish *that* certain events occurred than of the desire to determine what certain events might *mean* for a given group, society, or culture's conception of its present tasks and future prospects".<sup>9</sup> With this kind of shift from validation to signification, it isn't hard to see where the push might have come for literary historians, as well, to reconceptualize historical process to include the relations between texts and the contexts of production—and reception. The kind of question asked of historiography for decades should also be (and is also being) asked of literary history writing today: "How did [a given] phenomenon enter the system entitled history and how has the system of historical writing acquired effective discursive power?"<sup>10</sup> The Foucaultian linking of power and knowledge points here, as elsewhere in contemporary theorizing, to an awareness that, while events did occur in the past, we give meaning to—that is, we name and constitute—those "events" as "historical facts" by selection and narrative positioning. And those acts are carried out by people who are as "situated" in the particularities of such things as time and place, language and gender. (So too are the people who first produced the literature being studied.) It is in this sense, perhaps, that we should read Nietzsche's admonition in *The Use and Abuse of History*: "*You can explain the past only by what is most powerful in the present*".<sup>11</sup> The present is what always gives the past whatever meaning it accrues. This is not a defeatist invalidation of the process of history-writing; it is merely a frank acknowledgement of a hermeneutic reality.

In literary history, as theorists as diverse as Robert Weimann, Ralph Cohen and Claudio Guillén have shown, the "events" of the past to be ordered and given meaning are, in this case, literary texts—as they are produced and received—and, for the historian as interpreter, these texts act as both documents of the past and experiences of the present. This is another of the senses in which these projects involve a "dialectic of past and present." In openly confronting this duality and in reflexively engaging with the fact (and consequences) of the power that accompanies the shaping and ordering process that constitutes the writing of any history, a comparative literary history such as we are proposing would foreground these methodological frameworks (hermeneutic, post-structuralist, post-colonial, feminist, and so on) and directly address its own theoretical assumptions regarding both texts and contexts (socio-cultural, economic, political, aesthetic). How this might work *in practice* may become clearer if we turn now to three of the most fully articulated of the projects. With contributors living in many countries and doing their

research under radically differing working conditions, it will also be clear why this is the kind of vast venture that can only be possible in an age of electronic communication among scholars and computer access to bibliographic sources previously unavailable to many.

iii.

Theory in Practice<sup>12</sup>

a) *Comparative Literary History of Latin America*  
(editor: Djelal Kadir)

Beginning from the fact that, in historical terms, “Latin America” is a nominal, social and cultural construct, this three-volume project seeks to take into account the very process of that constructing—the framers’ plural agendas and investments—in its historical consideration of the production and reception of “Latin American” literature. The orientation of its comparative investigation of the literary archive and its contexts will be toward what the research team has called “problematics”: it will explore a group of contingent, shifting problems that have arisen across national borders, geographic regions, time periods, linguistic systems, cultural traditions. The first of these involves the fact that the Americas designated “Latin” are plural: the Andean region, Brazil, the Caribbean, Mexico and Central America, Rio de la Plata. Their diverse “discoveries” by different European imperial powers provide another site of literary historical research to be carried out, through an analysis of the texts written at the time in both European and Indoamerican languages. Besides studying the texts (written but also oral, ritual, and performative) of the indigenous cultures, this comparative project will investigate the relationship between indigenous and European cultures through the literary traces of the processes of cultural rupture and even destruction, as well as superimposition and hybridization. The various displacements and uprootings—both from Africa and within the Americas—form part of this investigation. The broader political (colonial), cultural, and social context in which “literature,” such as it is defined in this series, comes into being is obviously crucial to the understanding of the literary history of this vast area of the Americas.

Among the other concerns permitted and even provoked by a comparative approach would be the relation between nationhood and literary forms (epics, chronicles, utopian visions, hymns, encomia, philosophical discourses). Also of importance is the relationship between the production/reception of literature and literary institutions

(indigenous and European—academic, publishing, media, church, state, etc.). Among the most significant of the issues to be tackled in these volumes is the issue of the meaning given to colonial cultural forms in a variety of New World settings—and, more recently, vice-versa—through complex processes of repetition, syncretism, appropriation, recuperation. Dialogue is another of the models used to structure the vast field of investigation here: dialogue across oceans, national borders, ethnic divisions, cultural and linguistic contexts, dialogue between centers and between centers and margins. These volumes will deal not only with so-called “high-art” forms, but with popular culture, from oral literature and folklore to radio serials, telenovels and comics. The recent renewed interest in “orature” or the oral tradition in its many versions will inform these discussions.

There will clearly be no attempt at any illusory comprehensiveness: Latin American literature is too diverse and multifaceted. Nevertheless, what will inform all the discussions of these various historical problematics will be two important matters: an awareness of the once-elided role of gender in each, and a reflexive self-questioning about the very terms and methods of analysis and explanation being used.

b) *Comparative Literary History of the African Diaspora*  
(eds. Biodun Jeyifo and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.)

This project is not regionally based. It is, of necessity, complexly international, for the African diaspora involves four main world-dominant languages—English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese. The four volumes planned will investigate the relationships between the literatures of these various diasporic communities and the “original” literatures of the languages of imposition and adoption. They will also study the historic contacts and exchanges *between* the diaspora cultures (e.g. anglophone-francophone). There will therefore be a dual need for (1) literary historians with both deep knowledges of the literatures but also the broader cultural and intellectual context of specific local diasporic communities, and (2) scholars with “regional” diasporic interests (North and South America, the Caribbean, Europe) and continental African expertise. While acknowledging that no global literary history of the diaspora is possible, the editors of this project are also aware of the pedagogical and broadly political possibilities opened up by a comparative study such as this. Given such a self-situating, then, what becomes central to this project is a reflexive exploration of diasporic literature in all its political and historical contexts of enslavement, captivity, marginality, imposed definitions and identities, struggle and resistance, accommodation and integration.

The four volumes projected are: (I) a study of the pre-diasporic cultural and literary repertoire of Africa; (II) a comparative synchronic and diachronic history of the different literatures of the four diasporic regions; (III) an exploration of recurring topoi, themes and motifs across the regions; (IV) a meta-critical study of the historical, epistemological and systemic grounds that would make the construction of this comparative literary history of the diaspora even possible. As in the Latin American project, the category defined as the “literary” here includes oral as well as written literature, vernacular and creole texts, performance arts, popular culture, mass media, as well as the interrelations between written literature and the visual arts. What it also shares with the first project is its interest in the literary institution, and specifically in the exclusions and ethnocentric elisions that get reproduced through entrenched institutional practices.

c) *Comparative Literary History of Eastern and Central Europe*  
(ed. Wlad Godzich)

This project is a response to both the needs and the opportunities offered by a specific historic moment: that of the breaking-up of the bipolar system of Western and Soviet powers that used to define Eastern and Central Europe in terms of its own cultural politics and ideological agendas. This is not to say that new problems and new areas of contestation did not open up at the very moment that old ones dissolved. This single-volume project sees itself as more of a tactical intervention than a definitive explanation, more of a useful heuristic tool than a problem-solving synthesis. It aims to investigate and challenge past historiographical practices in the region, which have been organized for the most part along the lines of familiar Western European models of either nationally- or linguistically-based canons. This border-crossing and problematizing volume will start from an adaptation of the Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of “heteroglossia”<sup>13</sup> to explore what it will argue to be the defining literary complexity of Eastern and Central Europe: the multiple and varied layers of political, religious, linguistic and cultural experience that condition the production and reception of literature.

This notion of cultural “heteroglossia” will be used to explore what are called “nodes” of intersection. The suggestive illustration used to explain the comparative methodological orientation is a series of superimposed, transparent maps that would show the interrelations among centers of cultural production, trade routes, patterns of movement for “cultural mediators”, sites linked to historical turning points, linguistic demographics, and so on. The idea would be to make visible the underlying patterns of cultural transfer as well as the multiple layers

of cultural affiliation and competing cultural pulls felt by the region. But even such a complex map, however, might not do justice to the aim of giving a sense of the *dynamic* historical process of intersection and interference that this volume hopes to communicate.

Of the many possible types of “nodes” available, three will be chosen as revelatory and exemplary, but by no means exhaustive.

- *Exemplary Sites or Cultural Centers.* Cities such as Vilnius, Timisoara/Temesvar, Odessa, Constantinople/Byzantium/Istanbul would be explored at historical moments of special interest for the patterns of intersection that influence the literature of the region. As sites of confluence, they would also focus attention on the relations between urban and rural forms of cultural production. As rivals with cities like Paris, Vienna or Venice, they permit analysis of a more general cultural economy of the region.

- *Figures.* Individuals such as Petöfi Sandor, Josef Roth, Franz Kafka, or Elias Canetti act as mediators, circulators and carriers of cultural heteroglossia. They may also become icons to be claimed (or disclaimed) by more than one culture or country. The complexity of the access to a variety of languages and cultural contexts by these figures suggests the need to go beyond any simple class explanation (based on the idea of the social mobility of a cultural elite) to explain their presence as well as their continuing power as cultural icons.

- *Events.* Large-scale historical events such as the two World Wars, the siege of Vienna, or the Napoleonic Wars serve as markers of major shiftings in national boundaries, linguistic power, religious affiliation, not to mention such recently explored issues as gender relations and the literary institution. And all of these “events” have an impact on the literature of the region.

The organization of the project around these types of “nodes” means adopting a version of what Braudel called a “pointillist” method, borrowing from art history a term that he hoped would suggest the myriad details needed to represent the complexity of the past. This is to be accomplished by a careful, comparative “inventory” of a range of cultural practices in order to give a sense of the “thickness” of the “heteroglossic” cultural base of the literary history of Eastern and Central Europe.

iv.  
In Conclusion

In full awareness of the current debates in historiography, then, and necessarily drawing on the work of experts in the other adjacent fields of anthropology, sociology, geography, fine art, music, communications, economics, and political science, as well as history, the proposed series of comparative literary histories described here seeks not only to address specific instances of historical exclusions and inclusions, but to rethink the very categories of selection and ordering used in the writing of literary history. As we have described it here, comparative literary history seeks to recast literary works as historical “events” within a dynamic cultural context of reception and transmission. This undertaking will necessitate the reexamination of certain historiographic blind spots involving such matters as the institutional promotion or suppression of literature. It will also involve a questioning of the basic assumptions of historical narrative, including those of narrative time frame and narrative authority.

Our model, adapted to literary ends from Braudel’s historical one, calls for the separate and detailed elaboration of the broader social context along with the narration of literary “events”, in an attempt to redress some of the omissions of the past by confronting issues such as the social institutions which have been important in the production/reception of literature or the politics of readership in a given community. This model eschews periodization based on either empirical evidence (dates of birth and death of writers, publication dates) or interpretive/generic categories (“late romantic prose” or “neo-classical drama”), and substitutes instead alternative time frames of reception in which, for example, specific literary works can be examined as mobile attractors of larger cultural forces: *The Tempest* as a post-colonial historical text, perhaps, or *Don Quijote* as a twentieth-century mediator of Spanish literary identity (in Unamuno, Ortega y Gasset and Azorin). This will mean expanding the scope of what constitutes the “literary” as well as what a “period” might entail. As Denis Hollier put it in his Introduction to *A New History of French Literature*: “Today it is increasingly difficult to draw one solid line of demarcation between the inside and the outside of a work of art; sometimes it is even impossible to distinguish between form and background” (xxv).

This expansion of scope, however, does not do away with, but rather only intensifies, the need to acknowledge that the act of narrativizing—of writing a literary history of any kind—imposes a sense of order and, inevitably, closure upon the literary “events” under scrutiny. The

question of narrative authority is one that both the meta-theoretical volume and the individual histories will all address, for this authority is linked not only to the multiple truth-claims that historical narratives propose but to the historians' causal explanations themselves. The exercise of narrative authority is more blatant, perhaps, in such nineteenth-century histories as the first volumes of Michelet's *Histoire de la Révolution Française*, but it is a constant in historical writing, for this process involves selecting and sorting evidence, organizing it into a narrative sequence, and thus interpreting it and giving it meaning. Literary histories are no different: they too give form and coherence to data. The task set by a *comparative* literary history is all the more complex because such a project must deal with multiple social and demographic factors, sometimes of long duration. That more than one such historical narrative should—and inevitably will—be offered in each collaborative volume is a sign of the interpretive complexity of both the data and the narrativization process itself.

Literature does not exist in isolation from the culture in which it is “experienced”—that is, the culture in which it is both produced and received. While acknowledging the undeniable specificity of language or nation, we feel it may now be time to consider as well other more comparative configurations for the historical knowledge of literature.<sup>14</sup>

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Civilisation and Capitalism 15-18 Century* [sic], volume I, *The Structures of Everyday Life: The Limits of the Possible*, trans. Sian Reynolds (London: Collins, 1981), 25.

<sup>2</sup> Ed. Denis Hollier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> (London: Verso, 1983)

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Herbert Lindenberger, *Opera: The Extravagant Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 257.

<sup>5</sup> *The Structures of Everyday Life*, 25.

<sup>6</sup> See Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988).

<sup>7</sup> Louis Gottschalk, *Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method*, 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1969), 48.

<sup>8</sup> *History and Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 32.

<sup>9</sup> “Historical Pluralism,” *Critical Inquiry* 12.3 (1986), 487.

<sup>10</sup> Sande Cohen, “Structuralism and the Writing of Intellectual History,” *History and Theory* 17.2 (1978): 206.

<sup>11</sup> Trans. Adrian Collins (Indianapolis and New York: Liberal Arts Press and Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), 40, his italics.

<sup>12</sup> We have drawn extensively here, for the articulations that follow, both from statements by the editors (noted by name) of each project and from the reports drafted in July 1993 at a working conference held at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Study and Conference Centre. The 22 participants from 19 institutions in 10 countries were: A. James Arnold, Ziva Ben-Porat, Lisa Block de Behar, Roman de la Campa, Daniel F. Chamberlain, Beatriz Garza Cuarón, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Albert S. Gerard, Gerald Gillespie, Wlad Godzich, Norman Harris, Margaret Higonnet, Biodun Jeyifo, Djelal Kadir, Nicolas Kanellos, Mary Louise Pratt, Silvano Santiago, Mihai Spariosu, Maria Elena de Valdés, Mario J. Valdés, Tomas Ybarra-Frausto, Iris Zavala. We would like to extend our thanks to all the participants for their collective as well as individual assistance, and for their thoughtful and provocative draft reports.

<sup>13</sup> Heteroglossia (*reznorechie*) is a term used to refer to the many different discursive layers within any national language that work to determine meaning in any specific text: these layers provide the contexts, both individual and trans-individual. See Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 259-422.

<sup>14</sup> Our thanks to both Hayden White, University of California, Santa Cruz, and Brian Corman, University of Toronto, for their vigorous critical reading of this paper in various of its stages.

## ACLS Occasional Papers

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21. *A Life of Learning* (1993 Charles Homer Haskins Lecture) by Annemarie Schimmel
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25. *A Life of Learning* (1994 Charles Homer Haskins Lecture) by Robert K. Merton
26. *Changes in the Context for Creating Knowledge* by George Keller, Dennis O'Brien, and Susanne Hoerber Rudolph
27. *Rethinking Literary History—Comparatively* by Mario J. Valdés and Linda Hutcheon