

Literary constellations

A Digital Humanities approach
to the study of literary salons in Mexico during the 19th century

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In this paper I will propose a way of understanding literary history and the establishment of a written culture in Mexico through Geo-spatial and network visualization of literary associations. Following Bourdieu's *rules of art* I will consider salons as “key elements in the social genesis of the literary field” (Bourdieu, 1996, p.XIX). However, rather than considering them as simple mediums for assuring “stage patronage” (Bourdieu, 1996, p.49), I will return to Matthew Arnold's idea that these associations served as *literary tribunals* (Arnold, 1914, p.39) i.e. **schools of style**, and in the Mexican-case, schools of specific aesthetic thoughts that would later reign on national literature expressions.

Ultimately, exploring these schools of style through data compiled in the bibliographic works about them (Perales Ojeda, 1957; Sánchez, 1951) means adding a new point of view to the *literary historiography* which, traditionally, tends to categorize its actors either merely temporarily or aesthetically. Belem Clark de Lara already showed her concern on these divisions and opted to talk about *constellations* rather than *generations* to stress the idea that literary groups are not necessarily formed by *contemporary* authors (in the same way constellations may have stars of different ages), and that their unity is drawn by an *imaginary line* (Clark de Lara, 2005, p.16).

By identifying these associations' location, duration, and participants I have created a relational database from which I derived some graphic representations that I hope will provide new ways of exploring the coordinates of these networks. The temporal and geographical distribution of these groups will be displayed using DARIAH's Geobrowser (Figure 1) while the lines connecting its participants' network, will be sketched with the visualization and network analysis statistic possibilities integrated in Gephi (Figure 2 and 3). Finally, I will approach these methods critically by addressing two questions: is the visual display of these groups and their participants' relevant for our understanding of them? And if so, how do digital methods help us portray a new way of comprehending them?



Figure 1: 208 Literary associations time-mapped with DARIAH's Geobrowser

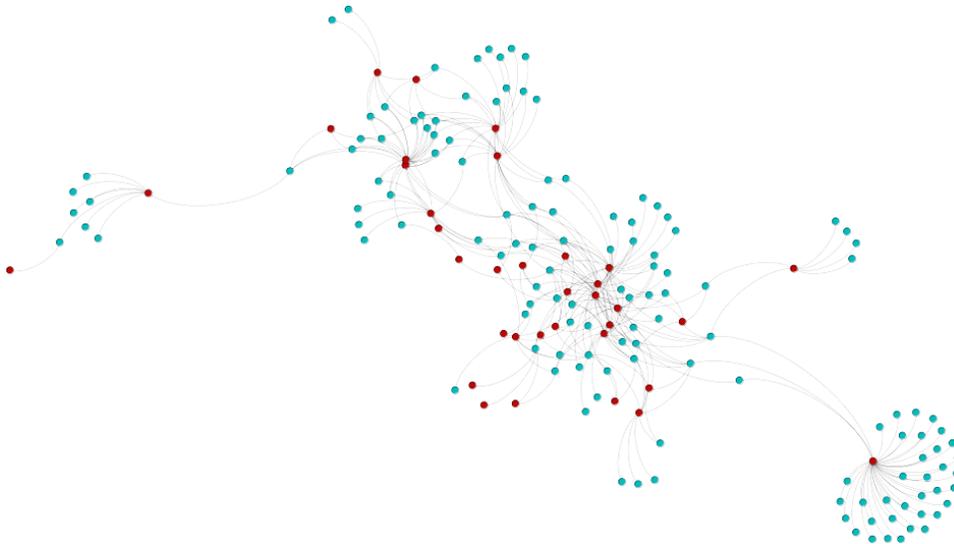


Figure 2: 36 unique Mexico-City-based associations (red), and 138 different members (blue) plotted with the Yifan Hu Proportional layout algorithm

References

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