(No) Postmodernism in the Age of World Literature

Theo D'haen
Leuven University

Douwe Fokkema was active in many domains as a literary scholar and theoretician. Intensely engaged with matters of theory, particularly of comparative literature and literary history, he wrote extensively on twentieth-century literature, particularly on Modernism and postmodernism. In fact, together with Ihab Hassan and Hans Bertens, he was among the earliest literary scholars to attempt a definition of postmodernism, and to situate it in the flow of literary history. In what follows, I try to do something similar, but while Douwe Fokkema welcomed in postmodernism the advent of a new literary current and a new way of seeing the world, I am interested in what I see as the closure of postmodernism, particularly so as a continuingly viable mode of apprehending the world. In a sense, then, I see Douwe Fokkema's passing as symbolical also for the passing of the era of postmodernism.

The past tense in the title of Harry Levin's 1960 essay "What Was Modernism?" clearly expressed its author's feeling that Modernism at the time of his writing was a thing of the past. His article also intimated that the passing of Modernism was much to be regretted. Instead, Levin suggested in the introduction to the reprint of his essay in his 1966 collection *Refractions*, more contemporary works of literature fed into "that anti-intellectual undercurrent which, as it comes to the surface, [he] would prefer to call post-modern" (Levin 271). From what we now know, post-modernism or postmodernism (the difference in spelling is not without importance, as I will have occasion to return to) indeed became the label for what was arguably the dominant literary and artistic current of at least part of the second half of the twentieth century, at least in certain parts of the world (I will return to this issue too). Yet, fifty years on from Levin's essay, and well in the "age of world literature," it would seem as if postmodernism too is past.

Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée
CRCL SEPTEMBER 2012 SEPTEMBRE RCLC
0319–051x/12/39.3/317

I

When I suggest that postmodernism is past I do not mean to say that there are no contemporary authors using the techniques commonly thought to have also been used by the authors considered postmodernist in the heyday of that movement or current. In fact, elsewhere in this issue of *CRCL/RCLC* Hans Bertens will be arguing precisely that there is such a continuity in the use of techniques, even though perhaps, and I would even claim undoubtedly, less so in "world view" or "Weltanschauung," to refer to the title of one of Bertens's early articles on the subject. What I mean is that postmodernism has largely disappeared from the critical and educational radar of contemporary literary studies, and has come to assume a historically, geographically, socially and perhaps even gender restricted dimension that leaves it a much diminished thing from the universal ambitions once ascribed to it. Let me back up this statement with a few examples.

If one looks at www.amazon.com, or scans databases such as ProjectMUSE and JSTOR, one notices that there is relatively little new material appearing on literary postmodernism these days. There is quite a bit on "the postmodern," or postmodernism, or sometimes "postmodernity," and the social sciences, or religion, for instance, but there is little, and certainly little new, on the literary side. The most relevant recent reference I found is to a forthcoming (at the time of writing this essay) reedition of Stuart Sim's 2005 *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, a book that in fact mostly dates from 1998 when it was first published in the United Kingdom as the *Icon Critical Dictionary of Postmodern Thought*, reissued in the United States in 1999 as *The Routledge Critical Dictionary of Postmodern Thought*, reissued again in 2001 as *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, and reissued again in a second edition under the same name in 2005. A comparison of the tables of contents of both volumes shows that although there has been some change in the form of articles omitted and added, and in the names of contributors, in essence both volumes cover pretty much the same material in a series of "postmodernism and …" articles relating the phenomenon in question to philosophy, critical and cultural theory, politics, feminism, lifestyles, science and technology, architecture, art, cinema, television, literature, music, popular culture, and modernity and the tradition of dissent, followed by an extensive section on names and terms, in the first edition, while in the second edition critical and cultural theory has been dropped, religion and the postcolonial world have been added, and literature has been renamed fiction. The 2011 third edition advertises "revised essays on philosophy, politics, literature, and more, the first section now contains brand new essays on critical theory, business, gender and the performing arts," and "the concepts section, too, has been enhanced with new topics ranging from hypermedia to global warming" (http://www.amazon.com/dp/0415583306/ref=rdr_ext_tmb , accessed 12 September 2011). Obviously, and regardless of how substantial the revisions may be to earlier versions of essays bearing (roughly) the same title, in its various editions Sim's *Companion* is following the

shifts in emphasis the interest in postmodernism is undergoing. These shifts seem to show up particularly strongly in the addition of essays on aspects of postmodernism, such as business and global warming in the third edition, that move ever closer to what we can call "the postmodern" as a general condition and ever farther away from "postmodernism" as a denominator for developments in the arts, and particularly that art which, for all practical intents and purposes, and *pace* Charles Jencks' celebrated work on postmodern architecture, first served to delineate postmodernism: fiction.

On the educational front, *The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Full Seventh Edition*, published in 2007, in volume E, "Literature Since 1945," includes only three authors that have been reckoned postmodernists from the beginning: Kurt Vonnegut, Donald Barthelme and Thomas Pynchon. The 2008 *Shorter Edition* only includes "Entropy" by Pynchon, which by now, and not coincidentally I think, has become the inevitable embodiment of "postmodernism." To be fair, the *Full Seventh Edition* has a section on "Postmodern Manifestos," with texts by Ronald Sukenick, William H. Gass, Hunter S. Thompson, Charles Olson, Frank O'Hara, Elizabeth Bishop, A.R. Ammons, and Audre Lorde, but most of these would hardly have been considered "real" postmodernists at the time postmodernism, as a theoretical concept, was at the height of its popularity in the 1970s and '80s. The *Shorter Seventh Edition* not only does not feature the *Full Version* section of postmodern manifestos, but in its introduction to "American Literature Since 1945" the term "postmodernism" is not even mentioned. In contrast, a label such as "Minimalists" is used, and one has the distinct impression that for instance Barthelme, included in the *Full Seventh Edition* but not in the *Shorter Seventh*, now is associated with this label rather than branded a postmodernist, a re-orientation that seems confirmed by the choice of "The Balloon" as anthologized story. Fairness likewise bids me to mention that in no edition of the Norton did there ever feature very many "real" postmodernists. Already the *Sixth Edition*, full version, contained only the same stories by Pynchon and Barthelme, and a different selection for Vonnegut. The *Eighth Edition*, announced for the end of 2011, lists the same selections once again by Vonnegut, Barthelme and Pynchon. Interesting to note is that the man who at a given moment was considered perhaps most representative of postmodernism in American fiction, John Barth, and whose "Life Story" was included in a number of earlier editions of the Norton, up to the *Fourth Edition* published in 1994, since the mid-1990s no longer has had a place in the anthology. Perhaps even more indicative, neither of Barth's influential articles on what was considered postmodernism in the early phases of its existence, "The Literature of Exhaustion" (1967) and "The Literature of Replenishment" (1977), are included in the later *Norton Postmodern Manifestos* section.

For my final example I turn to the *Longman Anthology of World Literature*, which started appearing in the mid-2000s, and which does include a story by John Barth: "Dunyazadiad" from his 1972 volume *Chimera*. However, it does not feature this story in its own right, but in a section called "perspectives," meant to illustrate some

major work, in this case "*The 1001 Nights* in the Twentieth Century." In fact, the term "postmodernism" is used only twice in the (second edition of the) *Instructor's Manual* to the *Longman Anthology of World Literature*. The first such mention comes in the context not of a discussion of the term itself, or of authors, such as Barth, usually associated with it, but in the context of a "Perspectives: Indigenous Cultures in the Twentieth Century," where it serves to raise the "thorny questions of postmodernist identity politics" (275). The second mention is in another "Perspectives" section, this time on "Literature, Technology, and Media," where the cyberspace of William Gibson's story "Burning Chrome" is called "the quintessentially postmodernist space" (299). The term "postmodern" is used in the same section, when television is labeled a postmodern medium (294). What we see here tallies with the developments we also saw taking place with *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, viz. a shift towards the broadly cultural, technological and medial aspects of postmodernism or the postmodern.

II

The use of the phrase "postmodernist identity politics" in the *Longman Anthology of World Literature* in itself points to a major shift in the perception of "postmodernism." In its early or orthodox uses, and certainly as related to literature, postmodernism had nothing to do with identity politics. On the contrary, identity politics arise only with the advent of multiculturalism, first in Canada but particularly in the United States and later beyond, and of postcolonialism first in the United Kingdom and its former colonies, and later also beyond. Multiculturalism and postcolonialism, in fact, can be considered reactions to postmodernism in its original form, albeit that the authors working in those more recent paradigms availed themselves at least partially of the literary techniques generalized by postmodernism.

In fact, and because of their use of these very literary techniques, what we see is that in the 1980s and into the 1990s there was a tendency to subsume such authors under the postmodernism label, as happened for instance in *Postmodern American Fiction, A Norton Anthology*, published in 1997, which featured, next to the usual suspects—Walter Abish, John Barth, Donald Barthelme, Richard Brautigan, William Burroughs, Robert Coover, Don DeLillo, William Gass, Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut, and (from a younger generation) Paul Auster and William Gibson, and (even younger) William T. Vollmann and David Foster Wallace—a number of authors not usually, or at least not initially, linked to postmodernism but more frequently discussed in the contexts of feminism (Joanna Russ, Grace Paley), multiculturalism (Ntozake Shange, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Leslie Marmon Silko, Gerald Vizenor, Maxine Hong Kingston), or both (Toni Morrison, Gloria Anzaldúa). At its simplest, such an amalgam of apparently disparate authors under the rubric of postmodernism could be seen as employing the term in a purely temporal sense: whatever

is "post"-modern. Beyond this, though, and especially in its unhyphenated guise, the term also implies a certain worldview. This is certainly what I had in mind when around the same time as the publication of *Postmodern American Fiction, A Norton Anthology*, I myself indulged in similar conflations when I proposed that magical realism Latin-American style, both in its original context and as exported around the world, but particularly as used by postcolonial (Salman Rushdie, Ben Okri) and feminist (Angela Carter) authors, be recognized as the cutting edge of postmodernism (D'haen 1995). I sought backing for this opinion from Brian McHale and Linda Hutcheon, whose *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987) and *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), respectively, I saw as proof that "in international critical parlance a consensus is emerging in which a hierarchical relation is established between postmodernism and magic realism, whereby the latter comes to denote a particular strain of the contemporary movement covered by the former" (D'haen 1995: 194). And I repeated the exercise for postcolonial literature more generally when I argued for seeing this literature as "counter-postmodern," using literary techniques by then customarily associated with postmodernism to express a worldview oppositional to that equally customarily ascribed to, using Shu-mei Shih's (2004) term, Western-centric "orthodox" postmodernism, yet thereby effectively also asserting the temporal primacy of postmodernism (D'haen 1994).

In fact, in retrospect all of these statements can be seen as illustrations of Aijaz Ahmad's assertion when, in 1992, still using the earlier term "third-world literature," he proposed that: "there now appears to be, in the work of the metropolitan critical avant-garde, an increasing tie between postmodernism and the counter-canon of 'Third World Literature'" (Ahmad 1992: 125). Already in 1990 the Indian critic Kumkum Sangari had criticized postmodernism's Eurocentric "tendency to universalize its epistemological preoccupations," which she saw as "the complex product of a historical conjuncture" and "as both symptom and critique of the contemporary economic and social formation of the West," but which she also saw as being "carried everywhere as cultural paraphernalia and epistemological apparatus, as a way of seeing; and the postmodern problematic becomes *the* frame through which the cultural products of the rest of the world are seen." Such "postmodern skepticism," she argued, "does not take into account…the fact that the postmodern preoccupation with the crisis of meaning is not everyone's crisis (even in the West)" (Sangari 1990: 242-43). Similar sentiments were voiced by Adam and Tiffin (1991: vii), two of the more prominent postcolonial theorists at the time, when they noted that

> ...there is a good deal of formal and tropological overlap between "primary" texts variously categorised as "post-modern" or "post-colonial"...But if there is overlap between the two discourses in terms of "primary" texts...there is considerably less in the "secondary" category. It is thus in the selection and reading of such "primary" texts, and in the contexts of discussion in which they are placed, that significant divergences between post-colonialism and post-modernism are most often isolated.

The same point is made by Stephen Slemon (1991: 4) when he remarks that Hutcheon's

(1988) analysis of intertextual parody as a constitutive principle of postmodernism resembles the post-colonial practice of "rewriting the canonical `master texts' of Europe," but with the difference that "whereas a post-modernist criticism would want to argue that literary practices such as these expose the constructedness of *all* textuality,...an *interested* post-colonial critical practice would want to allow for the positive production of oppositional truth-claims in these texts" (1991: 5). Finally, Hutcheon herself concurs when she says, in the essay "Circling the Downspout of Empire" in the same volume that contains Slemon's "Modernism's Last Post" from which the previous quotation comes, that "the post-colonial, like the feminist, is a dismantling but also constructive political enterprise insofar as it implies a theory of agency and social change that the post-modern deconstructive impulse lacks...while both 'post-'s *use* irony, the post-colonial cannot *stop* at irony" (1991b: 183).

In the 1990s, then, postmodernism and postcolonialism seemed locked in a struggle over the definition of those authors whom Linda Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* as well as in *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction* (1991: 7) called "the ex-centrics." Hutcheon herself seemed inclined to recuperate them for postmodernism, at least if we are to judge from another article she wrote in 1991, "Discourse, Power, Ideology: Humanism and Postmodernism" (1991a):

> The interrogations of the "different" form their own discourse, one that attempts to avoid the unconscious traps of humanist thought, while still working within its power-field. Like feminists, postcolonial theorists and artists are initiating their own discourse, with its own set of questions and strategies (see Bhabha 1983: 198). Black and gay critics now have quite a long discursive history. And all of these marginalized ex-centrics have contributed to the definition of the postmodern heterogeneous "different" and to its inherently ideological nature. The new ideology of postmodernism may be that everything is ideological. But this does not lead to an intellectual or practical impasse. What it does is underline the need for self-awareness, on the one hand, and on the other, for an acknowledgement of that relationship—suppressed by humanism—of the aesthetic and the political. (1991a: 122)

In large measure Hutcheon here was reacting to what by then had become the dominant view of postmodernism formulated by Fredric Jameson.

Hans Bertens (1991), contextualizing the debate on postmodernism around 1990, distinguished an "avant-garde," a "poststructuralist" and an "aesthetic" postmodernism, and linked these various postmodernisms both to different historical stages in the use of the term, roughly speaking the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, and to different stances, inspired by opposing socio-political convictions, toward contemporary literature and culture in general. These stances, moreover, are perceptually defined. In other words, they depend upon how one *reads* a particular work rather than upon any "objective" quality of the work itself. An avant-garde reading, which Bertens primarily associated with Ihab Hassan (1982 [1971], 1975, 1980, and 1987) and Douwe Fokkema (1984 and 1986), foregrounds the work's technical features, distinguishing

it from works in a previous mode, and specifically from modernism. It sees postmodernism as an artistic current, characterized in its literary manifestations, and particularly in fiction, by a common set of techniques, conventions and themes. A poststructuralist reading, associated by Bertens with Brian McHale (1987 and 1992) and Linda Hutcheon (1984, 1985, 1988, and 1989), focuses on the de-centering of the (bourgeois) subject, the deferment of meaning, and the problematical status of the text. What Bertens calls an "aesthetic" reading fits the period approach—"postmodern"—of not only Jameson (1984 and 1991) but likewise and ironically enough also the latter's neo-conservative humanist counterparts, and stresses the artificiality, the emptiness, the lack of depth, the purely formal interests of the postmodern work. This reading sees postmodern works as directly translating late capitalism's commodifying influence into an "aesthetic" experience, reduplicating as it were the very personality (or non-personality) make-up multinational late capitalism needs: functional man, broken up in disparate units, without any essence to him, man as malleable putty, what Gerhard Hoffmann (1982) has called "situational" man. In this sense, too, aesthetic postmodernism (both in its neo-Marxist and its [neo]-conservative reading) sees postmodern works, functionally speaking, as the continuation of earlier forms of mass culture. Particularly in its neo-marxist version, this reading blames postmodernism for having sold out to the culture-industry of late capitalist consumer society, thus also taking up Theodor Adorno's, and the Frankfurt School's, more general point with regard to mass culture after WWII (Adorno 1991a [1944] and 1991b [1967]).

Since 1984, date of publication of Jameson's article "Postmodernism; or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," and especially as of 1991, date of appearance of the book with the same title, Jameson's reading has largely monopolized discussions of postmodernism, at least in the United States. Tracing a genealogy stretching back from Jameson to Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*, for which Jameson, not coincidentally also in 1984, wrote a foreword to the English translation, to the early work on postmodernism of Ihab Hassan, upon which Lyotard at least partially based himself (Bertens 1995: 17), we can see that Jameson's utterly negative yet sweeping interpretation of "postmodernism" is ultimately predicated upon those "experimental" American novelists of the 1950s to '70s, namely John Barth, Donald Barthelme, Richard Brautigan, Robert Coover, Don DeLillo, E.L. Doctorow, Raymond Federman, William Gaddis, William Gass, John Hawkes, Thomas McGuane, Thomas Pynchon, Richard Sukenick, and Kurt Vonnegut, who formed the "original" and "real" postmodernists.

For Jameson postmodern literature served as a symptom of the disease affecting our era: it is representative of contemporary society to the degree that it represented the gap that obtains between reality and representation. In addition, he saw postmodern literature as accessory to the creation and perpetuation of this society: as the former did not succeed in re-connecting the reader to any underlying "reality," this literature merely further ensnared him in the Baudrillardian (1993) simulacral

universe of late capitalism. The way postcolonialism and multiculturalism acknowledge the relationship between the aesthetic and the political is to insist precisely on the "reality of representation." They do so by unveiling how colonial literature, Eurocentric or "Western-centric" works of literature *mis*-represented US minorities and Europe's "Others." In return, postcolonial or multicultural works of literature seek to re-present those hitherto marginalized because of their race or gender on more equal terms. But they also seek to redress their marginalization in terms of representation in the sense of number and kind of texts selected, anthologized, critically discussed, etc. in the study of literature. In other words, representation here also translates as representativeness. In the process "postmodernism" is shorn of its universal ambitions and restricted to expressing the identity of one particular historically, geographically, socially, ethnically and gendered category: that of post WWII white American middle-class man.

III

At around the same time that efforts were being made to recuperate the multicultural and the postcolonial for postmodernism other critics were trying to re-interpret both postmodernism and postcolonialism within a (re-)emerging discourse on world literature. Homi Bhabha, for instance, in his introduction to *The Location of Culture* (1994), suggests that world literature might be based not on the recognition of what is common in all literatures, as has often been the interpretation put upon Goethe's *Weltliteratur*, but rather rooted in "historical trauma" (Bhabha 1994: 12). As Bhabha puts it, "the study of world literature might be the study of the way in which cultures recognize themselves through their projections of 'otherness'" (Bhabha 1994: 12). Hence, he proposes, "where, once, the transmission of national traditions was the major theme of world literature, perhaps we can now suggest that transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees—these border and frontier conditions—may be the terrains of world literature" (Bhabha 1994: 12).

Fredric Jameson too, as Vilashini Cooppan (2004) reminds us, had started off his 1986 essay "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" with "in these last years of the century, the old question of a properly world literature reasserts itself," before going on to say that "today the reinvention of cultural studies in the United States demands the reinvention, in a new situation, of what Goethe long ago theorized as 'world literature'," and to then assert that "any conception of world literature necessarily demands some specific engagement with the question of third-world literature" (Jameson 2000: 318). Concretely, Cooppan asserts, "even as nationalism, 'that old thing,' is more or less sublimated in America into the placeless form of global postmodernism, 'a certain nationalism is fundamental in the third world'," (Cooppan 2004: 17). For Bhabha, on the contrary, "the currency of critical comparativism, or aesthetic judgment, is no longer the sovereignty of the national

culture," conceived as Benedict Anderson's "imagined community" (Bhabha 1994: 6). Rather, Bhabha envisages new "modes of cultural identification and political affect that form around issues of sexuality, race, feminism, the lifeworld of refugees or migrants, or the deathly social destiny of AIDS" (Bhabha 1994: 6). In this new "geopolitical space," Bhabha argues, "the Western metropolis must confront its postcolonial history, told by its influx of postwar migrants and refugees, as an indigenous or native narrative *internal to its national identity*" (Bhabha 1994: 6).

For Jameson postmodernism is a mode expressive of America's inner reality, which he sees as "epistemologically crippling, and reduc[ing] its subjects to the illusions of a host of fragmented subjectivities, to the poverty of the individual experience of isolated monads, to dying individual bodies without collective pasts or futures bereft of any possibility of grasping the social totality" (Jameson 2000: 336). In third-world culture, on the contrary, he maintains, "the telling of the individual story and the individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the experience of the collectivity itself" (Jameson 2000: 336). For Bhabha, the popular use of the "post" in "postmodernity, postcoloniality, postfeminism" only makes sense "if [the latter] transform the present into an expanded and ex-centric site of experience and empowerment" (Bhabha 1994: 4). Concretely, he proposes, "if the interest in postmodernism is limited to a celebration of the fragmentation of the 'grand narratives' of postenlightenment rationalism then, for all its intellectual excitement, it remains a profoundly parochial exercise" (Bhabha 1994: 4). "The wider significance of the postmodern condition," he continues, "lies in the awareness that the epistemological 'limits' of those ethnocentric ideas are also the enunciative boundaries of a range of other dissonant, even dissident histories and voices—women, the colonized, minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities…for the demography of the new internationalism is the history of postcolonial migration, the narratives of cultural and political diaspora, the major social displacements of peasant and aboriginal communities, the poetics of exile, the grim prose of political and economic refugees" (Bhabha 1994: 4-5).

Postmodernism and postcolonialism thus meet in Bhabha's new "geopolitical space, as a local or transnational reality" (Bhabha 1994: 6). As the "Other" to Euro-American modernity, then, postcolonialism feeds "difference" back into the center. In fact, it is in this return that postmodernism recognizes itself as not just Bhabha's "celebration of the fragmentation of the 'grand narratives' of postenlightenment rationalism" (Bhabha 1994: 4) but as an articulation of the particular condition of the West (or, in the first instance, the United States) *in relation* to the rest of "the world." As Bhabha puts it in "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern," "we see how modernity and postmodernity are themselves constituted from the marginal perspective of cultural difference…they encounter themselves contingently at the point at which the internal difference of their own society is reiterated in terms of the difference of the other, the alterity of the postcolonial site" (Bhabha 1994: 196).

A world literature under the aegis of postmodernism and/or postcolonialism,

however, at least in some interpretations, projects a world that remains relentlessly "western," whether in extending the postmodernism of the West, and perhaps even of only one nation of the West, viz. the United States, to comprise all of the world, as happens for instance in Bertens and Fokkema's *International Postmodernism* (1997), or in countering such postmodernism with a postcolonialism that for its definition is finally dependent upon what it subverts. In fact, postcolonialism might well be regarded as another instance of what Rey Chow has called a "post-Europe and…" construction, where whatever "new" theory or approach that defines itself through difference from European or American theory remains fatally beholden to the primacy of the latter (Chow 2004).

Around the turn of the millennium, however, another world literature appears, or rather re-appears, as a major player in literary studies, particularly so again in the United States. Of course, we have all long been familiar with Goethe's famous pronouncement on *Weltliteratur* in Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe*, but beyond the rather narrow circle of Comparative Literature scholars, the concept of "world literature" had never really gained much currency. The subject for a long time remained a minority concern at best, historically restricted to a small elite of European academics, or mostly European-born literary scholars exiled or self-exiled in the Americas, and primarily the US and Canada. Moreover, regardless of its "global" claim, world literature in its customary guise largely limited itself to the comparative study of some major, and sometimes some minor, European literatures. When the latter changed with the advent of multiculturalism and postcolonialism, a change reflected, for instance, in the volume entitled *Reading World Literature: Theory, History, Practice*, edited by Sarah Lawall in 1994, the changes advocated were in essence quantitative in nature: wider representation, more authors, more works, from more literatures. More recently, the work of Pascale Casanova (1999, 2004) and Franco Moretti (2003, 2004, 2005, 2009) seems to have paved the way for a paradigmatic shift in thinking about world literature, privileging a systems approach to world literature over one based on quantitative representation. Yet, as of the appearance of his *What is World Literature?* in 2003, it is the work of David Damrosch that has set the agenda for world literature studies. *What is World Literature?* not only quickly established itself as the most frequently cited (next to Goethe's) work on world literature, but the principles and the approach it propagated also became embodied in the *Longman Anthology of World Literature*, which from its first appearance in 2004, and under the general editorship of Damrosch, swiftly edged out its competitors. These principles were further spread by Damrosch's student manual *How to Read World Literature* (2009) and the collective volume he edited, also in 2009, *Teaching World Literature*. That the latter appeared under the aegis of the Modern Language Association of America is, I think, indicative of the turn that the study of world literature is taking, particularly in the United States. Instead of advocating a systemic or a quantitative approach to world literature, Damrosch prefers what he calls an "elliptical" "*mode of reading, a detached engagement with a world beyond our own*" (Damrosch 2003: 297). Bringing into play

the work's original historical, geographical and cultural context as well as that of its present-day reception, we "observe ourselves seeing the work's abstraction from its origins," and at the same time "we gain a new vantage point on our own moment" (Damrosch 2003: 300). Damrosch's approach resonates with a number of concerns that are particularly topical for present-day American society and academe.

To begin with, I think the turn toward world literature from the vantage of a didactical reading that at the same time brings the foreign nearer and makes the familiar (somewhat) strange tallies with the awareness, acute since the dramatic events of September 2001, and particularly so in American scholarly humanities circles, that the US, in the guise of its upcoming generations of citizens, has to be lifted from its customary mood of exceptionalism and brought into closer cultural contact with the rest of the world. In a sense, this is a return to the original Goethean concept of world literature as a highway toward greater understanding among nations and peoples. Second, the method Damrosch advocated essentially chimes with that of close reading, familiar to and ever prized in American literary studies. However, both the pedagogical aspect, as embodied in the world literature anthology for which Damrosch serves as general editor, and the close reading method assume a selection of the materials to be included, read, studied. This is where Damrosch parts ways with Casanova, but particularly Moretti. For Moretti all literature can, and needs, be studied not by close but precisely by what he famously called "distant" reading, meaning reading at second hand, as mediated by specialists, and then interpreted as part of general forces at work in the "world system" of literature. This is where identity politics comes into play once again, also with respect to postmodernism.

A world literature approach along the Damroschian lines sketched and practised particularly in the United States assiduously tries to avoid any Eurocentric or "Western-centric" hegemonic view. When trying for a fairly representative selection from the world's literatures, then, movements or currents such as postmodernism, that in its latest reductive re-conception can only lay claim to "local," or at best "regional," validity, and at worst only stands for a restrictively and historically gendered minority, do not merit much space or attention, as instanced by its virtual absence from the *Longman Anthology of World Literature*, as I detailed in my introductory paragraphs to the present article. Moreover, this latest re-conception of postmodernism valorizes, or perhaps better de-valorizes it as the negative, or in any case historically repressive, counterpart of all that is considered literarily worthwhile at this moment in history. Ironically, and suffering from a reverse case of "presentism" to that under which Levin labored when he launched his definition of the phenomenon, postmodernism in this latest view of it is minoritized into ephemerality to the point of practically disappearing from literary history. In the age of world literature postmodernism, rightly or wrongly, has become Pynchonesquely "entropied."

Works Cited

Adam, Ian, and Helen Tiffin, eds. *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism*. London: Harvester/Wheatsheaf, 1991.

Adorno, Theodor. "The Schema of Mass Culture." *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. London: Routledge, 1991. 61-97. (originally "Das Schema der Massenkultur," in Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialektik der Aufklärung* [*Dialectic of Enlightenment*]). n. pub., 1944.

___. 1991b. "Culture Industry Reconsidered." *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. London: Routledge, 98-106. Originally trans. by Anson G. Rabinbach in *New German Critique* 6 [Fall 1975]: 12-19, from Theodor W. Adorno, *Ohne Leitbild*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967.

Ahmad, Aijaz. *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. London: Verso, 1992.

Baudrillard, Jean. "The Precession of Simulacra." *A Postmodern Reader*. Ed. Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon. Albany: State U of New York P, 1993 (1983). 342-75.

Baym, Nina, et al. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature. Full Seventh Edition*. Boston: Norton, 2007.

___. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature. Shorter Seventh Edition*. Boston: Norton, 2008.

Bertens, Hans. "The Postmodern Weltanschauung and its Relation with Modernism: An Introductory Survey." *Approaching Postmodernism*. Ed. Douwe Fokkema and Hans Bertens. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1986. 9-51.

___. "Postmodern Cultures." *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction*. Ed. Edmund J. Smyth. London: Batsford. 1991. 123-37.

___. *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

Bertens, Hans and Douwe Fokkema. *International Postmodernism: Theory and Literary Practice. A Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1997.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.

Casanova, Pascale. *La République mondiale des lettres*. Paris: Seuil, 1999.

___. *The World Republic of Letters*. Trans. M. DeBevoise. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2004.

Chow, Rey. "The Old/New Question of Comparison in Literary Studies: A Post-European Perspective." *ELH* 71.2 (Summer 2004): 289-311.

Cooppan, Vilashini. "Ghosts in The Disciplinary Machine: The Uncanny Life of World Literature." *Comparative Literature Studies* 41.1 (2004): 10-36.

Damrosch, David. *What Is World Literature?* Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2003.

Damrosch, David, et al. *The Longman Anthology of World Literature*. New York: Longman, 2004.

___. *The Instructor's Manual to the Longman Anthology of World Literature*. Second Edition. New York: Longman, 2009.

Damrosch, David. *How to Read World Literature*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

___, ed. *Teaching World Literature*. New York: MLA, 2009.

D'haen, Theo. "Countering Postmodernism." *REAL (Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature)* 10. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1994. 49-64.

___. "Magic Realism and Postmodernism: Decentering Privileged Centers." *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1995. 191-208.

Fokkema, Douwe. *Literary History, Modernism, and Postmodernism*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1984.

___. "The Semantic and Syntactic Organization of Postmodernist Texts." *Approaching Postmodernism*. Ed. Douwe Fokkema and Hans Bertens. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1986. 81-98.

Geyh, Paula, et al. *Postmodern American Fiction, A Norton Anthology*. Boston: Norton, 1997.

Hassan, Ihab. *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, 1982 (1971).

___. *Paracriticisms: Seven Speculations of the Times*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1975.

___. *The Right Promethean Fire: Imagination, Science, and Cultural Change*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1980.

___. *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture*. Ohio State UP, 1987.

Hoffmann, Gerhard. "The Fantastic in Fiction: Its 'Reality' Status, its Historical Development and its Transformation in Postmodern Narrative." *REAL (Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature)* 1 (1982): 267-364.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*. New York and London: Methuen, 1985.

___. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York and London: Routledge, 1988.

___. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. London and New York: Routledge, 1989.

___. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York and London: Routledge, 1988.

___. "'Circling the Downspout of Empire'." *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism*. Ed. Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin. London: Harvester/Wheatsheaf, 1991. 167-89.

___. "Discourse, Power, Ideology: Humanism and Postmodernism." *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction*. Ed. Edmund J. Smyth. London: Batsford, 1991. 105-22.

Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." *New Left Review* 146 (July-August 1984): 59-92; also in Jameson 1991, 1-54.

___. 1991. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham, NC: Duke UP.

___. *The Jameson Reader*. Eds. Michael Hardt and Kathi Weeks. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.

Lawall, Sarah, ed. *Reading World Literature: Theory, History, Practice*. Austin, TX: Texas U P, 1994.

Levin, Harry. "What Was Modernism." *Refractions: Essays in Comparative Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, 1966 (1960). 271-95.

Lyotard, Jean-François. *La condition postmoderne*. Paris: Minuit, 1979.

McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction*. New York and London: Methuen, 1987.

___. *Constructing Postmodernism*. New York and London: Routledge, 1992.

Moretti, Franco. "More Conjectures." *New Left Review* 20 (March-April 2003): 73-81.

___. "Conjectures on World Literature." *Debating World Literature*. Ed. Christopher Prendergast. London: Verso, 2004. 148-162; originally in *New Left Review* 1 (January-February 2000): 54-68.

___. *Graphs, Maps, Trees*. London: Verso, 2005.

___. "Evolution, World-System, "Weltliteratur." *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature*. Ed. David Damrosch, Natalie Melas, Mbongiseni Butheluzi. Princeton, NJ: Princeton U P, 2009. 399-408. Originally in *Studying Transcultural Literary History*. Ed. Gunilla Lindberg-Wada. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006. 113-121.

Sangari, Kumkum. "The Politics of the Possible." *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse*. Eds. Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990. 216-45.

Shu-Mei Shih. "Global Literature and Technologies of Recognition." *PMLA* 1 (2004): 16-30.

Sim, Stuart. *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*. London: Routledge, 2005.

Slemon, Stephen. "Modernism's Last Post." *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism*. Eds. Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin, London:

Harvester/Wheatsheaf, 1991. 1-11.