Commentary: “With no particular place to go”: Literary History in the Age of the Global Picture[1]

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> [C]riminal organizations, cannily mirroring the practices of their legitimate counterparts, have exploited economies of scale, developed worldwide partnerships, and cultivated new markets. As a result, bank fraud, human trafficking, protection rackets, narcotics smuggling, state-sanctioned embezzlement, assassinations, and even old-fashioned political corruption are practiced today on a scale previously unimaginable.
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> —Review of *McMafia* by Misha Glenny, *New Yorker*, June 23, 2008, 83

The papers gathered here offer a wide range of views on the topic “literary history in the global age.” They range from Karyn Ball’s disturbing discussion of the dark side of global technology to Anders Pettersson’s cool report on the current state of world literary studies. Many of the essays presume an important difference between “world” literature and “global” literature. A couple, those of Mark Poster and Amy Elias, for example, suggest that once literature enters into the global condition, it undergoes changes of substance that make it hardly recognizable as either “writing” or “book.” Other essays, by Emily Apter, Rey Chow, and Nirvana Tanoukhi, take on the issue of “translatability” from national and international to “global” literary markets and problems of “translation” from the analog media of modernity to the digitalized media of postmodernity. Elias and Ball ask whether the changes in world culture caused by globalization may not require a change in the way we view history itself. Fredric Jameson addresses this issue in his critique of globalism as an inherently antihistorical ideology and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht raises the question of whether we need or why should we want a “history of literature” after we have ceased to believe in history as a source of usable knowledge at all.

The histories of the history of literature adumbrated by Brian Stock, Anders Pettersson, Jerome McGann, and Walter Veit add up to a good account of the relation between literary criticism and history of literature

from the Renaissance to modernism. Taken together, they show why literary history or history of literature remains important for scholars of literature and, at the same time, seems to be regarded with suspicion by literary critics whose interests are primarily aesthetical and custodial of the value of this form of the high art of the West. On the view of literary history offered here, however, there is not much to discuss. Literary history has its uses; the new technologies that have made the global world possible pose a threat to literature and indeed art in general as we in the West have known it, but in itself literary history would not seem to offer anything substantial for determining where we stand with the history of literature in the global age.

The essays by David Bleich, Poster, Jameson, and Gumbrecht place the practice of both literary criticism and literary history within the context of the global and indicate the difficulties that the very notion of "literature" must face in making the transition from a merely "international" and analog to a "transnational" and digitalized economic and cultural matrix. As for the once modern (Stock, Pettersson) but now venerable (Veit and McGann) "literary history," Gumbrecht thinks that its day has passed (along with the traditional idea of "history" itself) and that it can be made to contribute to the understanding of what has happened to modern Western culture only if it undergoes a total remaking.

Poster usefully identifies the new (digitalized) means of production that determine a remaking of the modes of cultural production, and that do not so much change what we mean by "literature" but relocate it in a post-aesthetic space presupposing a different arrangement of the human sensorium. In this space of internet and satellite images that are not so much reproductions (analogues) of a more real, material nature, the epistemological valence of what used to be called "experience" is radically altered. What will pass for "knowledge" will have both a new form and a new content, or rather a mode of existence in which content is indistinguishable from form.

The philosopher Frank Ankersmit is fond of defining the art work as an artifact whose form cannot be changed without changing its content and vice versa. Elias convincingly shows that such a definition might very well be applied to every digitalized artifact, so that (as Arthur Danto has famously argued) in modernity (since Duchamp) anything can be counted as art if it is moved into a designated space of art and is designated as art. The difference between this idea of artistic artifact and the kind of artifact produced by digitalization is what Poster calls "a material support" (692) that allows us to believe that the reality of artifacts has disappeared. And the disappearance of the material support of the artifact destroys the kind of dialectical relationship between "matter" and whatever was meant by "spirit" that has sustained the idea of development as realization

since the time of Aristotle and served as the main metahistorical basis for the Western belief in a substance of history ever since.

A large proportion of these essays develop in the shadow of two recent works that face the problem of "world history of literature" head on: Franco Moretti's *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* and Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters*.[2] Both of these books chart changes in what might be called "the practices of literature" from a national to an international and, ultimately, global plane. Moretti's approach is quantitative, statistical, and "materialist" in kind; his model or paradigm is biological and specifically genetico-genealogical or Darwinian. Casanova's approach to the study of literary history on a world plane is more sociological and economic, using Pierre Bourdieu's theory of "cultural capital" as a way of construing the social "value" of literature and the idea of a "world market" in literary capital to organize her account of the ups and downs of literary fortunes in the modern era. Both books have been criticized for taking a perspective that deprives the literary work of qualities that can be discerned only by techniques of "close reading." Both authors have insisted in reply to these criticisms that a properly "historical" treatment of the literary thing requires taking the long view (Fernand Braudel's *la longue durée*) and reduction of the individual work, author, audience, and context to their types. Both authors claim to have utilized techniques of close reading for the derivation of the type of literary phenomenon whose history they purport to relate. But, as McGann remarked of Casanova, both authors have ended up providing not so much a "history" as rather a "theory" of literature.

McGann's implicit distinction between a "history" and a "theory" of literature lands us in the middle of a current dispute that extends across the whole of the humanities. Here "theory" is the poison, to which "history" (understood as a narrative account of something's development over time) and "criticism" (understood as "close reading") are thought to be antidotes. And there is no denying that, among modern historians and literary scholars in general, it is the originality and even uniqueness of the individual work, author, person, event, and so forth, rather than its status as a member of a class, genus, or species, that motivates most of the inquiry of a professional kind.

But both Casanova and Moretti insist that, if we are interested in conceptualizing a "history of literature" on a world plane, we will have to give up the "modern" way of conceptualizing both "history" and "literature" itself. This does not mean that one has to give up the older notions of how to deal with an individual literary text. It is just to say that, if one wants to do history, one cannot do it on the "world" plane as one had done it previously in the age of nations and peoples organized as "nation-states." Whether this is true or not is discussed by a number

of our symposiasts—Stock, Pettersson, and Veit in particular. They conjure with the problems arising in trying to conceive of history on a transnational rather than a national or international scale and ask what is worth saving of the older, philological and hermeneutic approach to the study of literary history.

As Stock points out, the possibility of a "history of literature" arises in the West only in the Renaissance and then only within the context of a certain idea of "history" and a certain idea of "literature." Prior to that time, the concepts of literature and history were different from those of modern times—as different as early Arabic notions of "literature" and "history" were, according to Nadia al-Bagdadi, from their modern Western counterparts. By the time we have arrived at the end of industrial capitalism, (modern) imperialism, and the age of the great, transnational and transcultural, political, military, economic, and media agglomerates, most if not all of the categories and classification systems devised by modern Western scholars and intellectuals for the composition of a specifically modernist historicality have gone by the board.

Modern efforts to conceptualize a genuinely "world" history (as against an "internationalist" one) purchase "comprehension" of its object of study at the cost of the number of "levels" and kinds of phenomena they can legitimately include in a given account. Moreover, what historian can claim the expertise in the variety of fields that must be taken account of in any treatment of anything on a worldwide scale? Not even a "team" of historians can solve the problem of "coverage" without abandoning the overarching perspective of the single narrative voice in which historiography has typically dealt since its invention by Herodotus two and a half millennia ago. The genre of "a world history of . . ." typically takes on the aspect of an encyclopedia or, as in the case of Denis Hollier's new, not to say postmodernist, "history" of French literature, a dictionary.[3]

Finally, things get much worse when one tries to conceptualize "a history of" anything whatsoever that wishes to take account of the changes that have occurred in the world's cultures under the impact of technologies that are "global" in both a qualitative and a quantitative sense. In the global, "literature" can be considered to be a thing of the past that one might very well study "historically," but any "history of" it would have to tell of how it came to be at a certain time, developed, and then disappeared—its substance having been assimilated to a commodity form in which its electronic simulacra might be thought to have as much (exchange) value as its "original" material incarnation. But this would be to suppose that "history" remains the same as it had been before globalization, and this is highly dubious because, from within the global, history has no more substance than anything else.

As a number of our contributors to this symposium indicate, the study of literature's history was already declining even before the advent of that mode of organizing markets, communications systems, military programs, and commodity exchange that is called "global." Even though "global" is what the philosopher W. B. Gallie calls an "essentially contestable concept,"[4] having both pejorative and honorific connotations depending upon its user, it is difficult to doubt that "global" names a planetary system of production and exchange radically different from anything that might have been meant by the older usage of "international" or even "worldwide." Only certain kinds of commodities can circulate in the global system. It follows that the kinds of artifacts that formed the basis of the older world systems of exchange have to have undergone radical transformation in order to enter into and circulate in the global system. This is as true of "literature" as it is of "books" and "pictures."

It is often said that globalization deprives the world of those "places" created by sustained interaction between a locale and a group living in, on, or around it and substitutes "space" or abstract spatial relationships for the older, more "natural" sites of the earth and the "practiced" links between them.[5] What this means as well is that globalization deprives its inhabitants of both "history" and the experience of the kind of cultural artifact known since the late eighteenth century in the West as "literature."[6] As I understand it, "cyberspace" has no temporality—or at least no temporality of the kind that we have been used to experiencing as "history." This does not of course mean that cyberthings do not age. But ageing is not the same as "history-ing" or "becoming historically." Rightly or wrongly, as Paul Ricoeur spent a lifetime trying to prove, "history" is, among other things, *meaningful* temporality, an experience of a temporality that can endow ageing *with* meaning.

Or, at least, such was one meaning of the idea of history until the study of the past was transformed into a "scientific" discipline. This transformation was effected in part by the detachment of historiography from its traditional place in "literature" through the elimination from historiography of the poetic device of "narrativity." After the establishment of history as a science, as Jameson points out, it would be one thing to write a "history of" anything—literature included—and quite another to study anything, whether past or present "historically." In the former case, the aim or end of a study of some aspect of history was the composition of a story. In the latter case, it was to produce an account, more or less synchronic and more or less structuralist, of a thing's relationship with its context(s).

When it comes to the global system, there is no story to tell because the global has no genealogy—it is not related to earlier modes of production in the "genetic" manner used in traditional narrativistic historiog-

raphy that relates the "after" to the "before." Beyond that, one cannot study the global system "historically" because the global dissolves the distinction between itself and any context. Within the global system, it is not as if there were some "reality" for which there was an "archive" to which one could go for "documentary" evidence as to this reality's way of becoming what it is. So it might seem that if one effect of the global is to dissolve the distinction between an event, process, or institution, on the one side, and "context," on the other, then the notion of "a history of literature" would inspire less interest than it arouses in the age of internationalism and what, after the work of Immanuel Wallerstein, we call the "world system."

Poster argues that the global is characterized by the fact that the commodity or artifact is totally deprived of its older material support. The global has no material basis. In the literary world, which is to say, the world of literature, the *litereme* floats free of its basis in both work and text in order to circulate in cyberspace where its possibilities of permutation become infinite. What can the "history of" literature—with its interest in lineage, origins, legitimacy, and purity of the original—tell us about this new world?

The global realizes, completes, fulfills, or renders possible that program of encasing the earth in a network of communication, trade, and exchange towards which the "civilized" powers of the world have been tending since the neolithic age. The global names an earth in which spatial relationships of an abstract and geometrical kind replace or overwrite those of real places and geographical locales. Nowadays no one has any particular place to go, not only because there are no places in the global village but also because there are no *particular* places. When Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak points out that, in computer land, "[n]o one lives there," she might have added that this was because in computer land, "there is no *there* there" either.[7]

Above all, as Poster makes clear in his essay, the global appertains only to that part of the world covered by the World Wide Web, satellite imaging, and digitalized information and retrieval systems. The global creates new kinds of labor, new kinds of commodities, new kinds of exchange and consumption, and new kinds of waste, noise, or dissonance in the system. Thus, a literary history on a "world" scale will be thought to offer the same kinds of problems that the conceptualization of a "world history" offers to historians used to thinking in terms of nations, regions (areas), or ecumenes such as the Roman, Byzantine, Chinese, or Mogul empires. Here the question becomes how to include the different (in this case, the semi-, hemi-, or paraliterary) in the same (that is, the literary properly so called)?

Older, nonscientific, and more humanistic conceptions of "history" will tend to take "literature" as the subject of a possible narrative and try to chart its development in time and space from some origin down to (or up to) the present. The problem here is how to contrive a story capable of containing or finding a place for the wide variety of kinds of writing qualifying for the title "literature." This is the kind of history of literature outlined by Pettersson and Stock in their contributions to this symposium. Veit, on the other hand, outlines a possible "history of the history of literature" in his essay, charting its rise and fall in order to pose the question of whether and in what manner it might be reconstituted as a worthwhile scholarly project at the present moment in world history.

The other way of naming our topic ("the history of literature in its global context") projects a different approach and a quite different problematization of the component terms. Here literature's history is limited to a consideration of its participation and circulation in that structure of communication, media, and marketing made possible by the technology of computers, digitalization, and satellite imaging, which is not only transnational but transcultural as well—and threatening therefore to the very substance of both the nation and culture as previously experienced (in the West).

Here "global" means not "world" but that unlocalizable domain of Poster's postmaterial commodity production and exchange that operates without any consideration or even consciousness of the site-specific "contents" of the older (preelectronic) kinds of cultural artifacts. In the global, for instance, the idea that the Elgin marbles have their "natural" place in Athens, and therefore have a "right" to be returned to that place, would be as inconsequential as the idea that these artifacts possess some inherent value or worth by virtue of their having originated in that place at a particular time. In the global, the only value is exchange value. In the global market, it is not unusual for a copy or even a photograph of a lost original to bring a price absolutely unrelated to its status as copy or photograph.[8]

All of which would imply that the very notion of "the history of" anything whatsoever belongs to an era in which cultural artifacts were still thought to be related to one another genealogically, in the manner of "family resemblances." Nowadays the search is underway to find a cultural equivalent of the gene (for example, Richard Dawkins's "meme") that would allow the reconstruction of families of cultural artifacts and permit hope for discovery of originary paradigms or archetypes of cultural styles, modes, and practices of the kind postulated by Darwin for organic species in *The Origin of Species*. One could then conceptualize a "history of literature" of the narrative kind that, according to Veit, went out of style just after World War II. But this search, it seems to me, is

motivated by feelings of nostalgia for an older conception of what "history" was once thought to be.

Like "literature," "history" itself has a history. History's signified (concept or idea) changes as often as a new mode of production supplants an older one. Nowadays atomic energy and electronic technology drive social and therefore historical change. Culture follows in its wake and along with culture, literature. Any future history of literature will have to conjure with the ways in which "literature" undergoes a change of "substance" as it takes on a form that will permit it to circulate in the global system.

To be sure, as Jameson pointed out some time ago, "writing literary history . . . of the narrative kind" is one thing, while "doing criticism historically" is quite another.[9] In his own contribution to this collection of essays on "literary history in the global age," Jameson himself identifies globalization (a kind of late capitalism) with postmodernism (the cultural equivalent of late modernism) and suggests that postmodernism is irredeemably "presentist" and therefore inherently antihistorical in its basic orientation. Not only do postmodernists not believe in "history" (there being for them no past and no future, but only a present) they have given up also on the kind of "literature" that can be said to have had a "history."[10]

Jameson's own formulation of the condition of literature and its history is an example of "doing criticism historically." It places the tasks of writing literary history and doing criticism historically within the current "global" context (by which he means that of Americanization and Disneyfication) and generates thereby the possibility of the search for the solution to the question of how "literature" came to this condition as a result of, or in response to, changes in its social and economic milieu over the course of time. Thus, Jameson can write: "In globalization, there are no cultures, but only the nostalgic images of national cultures: in postmodernity we cannot appeal back to the fetish of national culture and cultural authenticity. Our object of study is rather Disneyfication, the production of simulacra of national cultures; and tourism, the industry that organizes the consumption of those simulacra and those spectacles or images" (379).

This does not mean that there are no "cultures" still around or that the older, nation- and language-based "literature" is not being produced. It is just that this "literature" is being written only in the backwaters of the "developing" or "Second World" societies, where the kinds of social and political conflicts that served as the ultimate referent of the great tradition of literary realism in nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Europe are still going on. Presumably "history"—real history—is still going on there, too, so that, on this account, "a history of literature"

would still be possible and, moreover, socially relevant there. There is, however, no "history of" in the global or, if there seems to be, it is only a simulacrum of that older history that has already come to an end in the West.

Nor does it mean that criticism cannot be done "historically" in the globalized version of our modernity. But if to historicize means to contextualize, how could we study historically an art in which the very distinction between an object and its context—like the distinction between doing art and doing criticism—has collapsed? To think historically means to be able to distinguish between a thing and its context, an event and a structure, a message and its medium.

Gumbrecht has written "history of literature" and practiced criticism "historically," and he has also written an unorthodox, even antihistorical history, *In 1926: Living on the Edge of Time*. In an appendix entitled "After Learning from History," he argues that unlike earlier epochs and periods of Western history, we no longer can learn anything of *practical* value from the study of "history." This does not mean, of course, that we cannot learn something from the study of old things, even old literature. But "history" has ceased to be a *place* (the past) inhabited by exemplars of good and evil, of models and antimodels, of events to learn from and of situations to repeat or avoid, and become instead a *force* that sweeps everything before it, creating situations so novel that prior events and situations provide no useful models of how to act in the new ones or any wisdom with which to grasp their significance.[11]

However, while willing to jettison "history" as a source of usable wisdom, Gumbrecht thinks that art in general and literature in particular have the power to "mak[e] the past present. . . . as the impression of a material and sensual environment" (530). Thus, for him, "the historicity of literature" consists in its power to inspire a "sensual feeling of being part of and inscribed into the material world that surrounds us" (530). Instead of histories of national literatures devoted to the task of fulfilling "through an extended narrative, the image and the concept of a nation," what Gumbrecht envisions is "a new type of literary history that is fragmented into hundreds of short 'entries'" that "brings back to life and presence what we call 'literary events'" in order "to conjure up worlds of the past" (530). I presume that this alludes to the current widespread revival of interest in an older, premodern conception of "materiality" and his own doctrine (equally premodern, not to say parareligious) of "presence"—just at the moment when art is by way of losing its "material support" to digitalization and its sense of material existence to virtualism.

But a lot of this has to do with the difficulty of grasping the deeper implications of our transition from an era of nationalism (and interna-

tionalism) to an era of the global. While literature's premodern "past" seems to have assumed the outlines of a fairly comprehensible story, its future in globality seems uncertain. What used to be thought as "literature" now has a different look, so different that it is quite uncertain whether it is continuous with or divergent from that older thing. It has changed in both content and, more importantly, in form.

It is this change of the form of "literature" in the global age that engages the attention of Elias. Whereas most of our symposiasts continue to speak of literary works and texts, authors and writers, books and volumes, genres and modes of literary writing, Elias addresses the topic of the kinds of "texting" that are not only replacing the older kinds of writing but are, in many respects, assimilating them to new medial formats. Marshall McLuhan used to insist that every new medium takes some older medium as its "content"—like those Hollywood movies of the 1930s that had vaudeville, theater, radio, the telephone, newspapers, and novels as their subjects. Thus do the media "genealogize" and at once affirm their continuity with their predecessors and definitively break with them. Elias seems to suggest that modern digitalized media and the World Wide Web are doing the same to "literature." That is to say, "literature" becomes a stage on the way between the age of "writing" and the age of "texting."

She points out that not only does the Web make possible new (extralibrarial) ways to study "literature," but it makes it possible to change the ways in which literature is produced, exchanged, and consumed (or recycled). She stresses the extraprofessional (I do not want to call it "amateur") nature of participants in the kind of knowledge production that the Web has made possible. Online publishing, online "para-scholarly" journals, projects that are collective, dialogical, and "folksonomic" make for a different kind of "scholarship"—of which "historiography" and even "historiography of literature" can be considered to be parts. But in the global, the terms "historiography" and "historiography of literature" take on a new, strange, and potentially sinister meaning.

What, Elias asks, are the implications of all this for literature and a new global literary history? And her answer is that: "The question is really whether interactive Web technologies facilitate a new kind of literary history based more on folksonomies than taxonomies—a literary history that operates in collabulary domains that disrupt institutional hierarchies and disciplinary blindspots, encouraging creativity through formal experimentation, offering opportunities for constant updating and revision, and extending authorship to experts without consideration of national borders or limitation to national histories" (717–18).

She goes on to characterize what a "nonhierarchically ordered database, the different filiations of literature across historical, national, and

linguistic borders" would look like, suggesting a (Deleuzian) "rhizomatic" rather than the conventional "linear" plotlines of conventional literary historiography. More specifically, she says: "The challenge of a literary history in database or wiki format would be to negotiate contiguity (or diachronic progression) and connection (or synchronic simultaneity)—the presentation of coherent discussion threads lengthy enough to construct a developmental historical narrative of one sort or another *along with* the dialogic linking of such narratives to other narratives or elements in other threads" (719; Elias's emphasis).

I have to say that my own experience in the use of the Web over the last fifteen of twenty years convinces me of the plausibility of Elias's line of thinking. Already in the field of archeology, the use of computer imaging techniques and new conceptions of the "site" and the "museum" have revolutionized the way the archeological past is "brought back to life." In freeing the historical "document" from the twin tyrannies of its material support, on the one side, and its status as a unique item "fixed" in an archival cubbyhole, on the other, similar possibilities open up for the conceptualization of the past and history.[12]

But Elias raises a question we cannot ignore, namely, is there a *form* of historiography adequate to the task of illuminating—in a non- or at least transideological way—the relation of literature to its historical context in the global age? She imagines a number of different approaches to the historical study of literature in the global age, including one "concerning the origins and development of literary history itself and addressing how definitions of history have changed and will change in a global field" (706). She rejects them all, however, because each keeps attention focused on the "*subjects* of literary history (national versus global versus local, gendered, raced, language-origin based, and so forth)" and ignores the problem of "the *form* of literary history, the way that literary history is actually written or transmitted" (706–7; Elias's emphasis). In other words, insofar as literary history remains "the work of experts with deep and sometimes unacknowledged allegiances to academic hierarchies, print culture, filled intellectual spaces, continuities, and diachronic evolution" (707), it will tend to underappreciate what modernist and postmodernist texting practices can teach us about different styles or modes of *historical* presentation.

More specifically, any version of the old premodernist literary history will remain insensitive to "the importance of poetics as the subject of literary history as well as the foundation of literacy history, history's emanciatory mode. And it [will run] right by the question of whether the form of historical narrative itself matters if we are going to discuss a global literary history" (707).

I am interested in this idea because I believe that, in fields of study in which there is no agreed-on metalanguage for the initial description of the phenomena under study, the "form" of the presentation is more important for its explanatory effect than its "contents" (whether understood as information or data, on the one side, or "analysis" and argument, on the other). What Elias is pointing us to is the "poetics" of discourses adequate to the presentation of global phenomena. And it seems to me that here Elias gives us insight into what Casanova was getting at when she drew a distinction between a "*historical* history of literature," on the one side, and a "*literary* history of literature," on the other.

Casanova's treatment of world literature in the modern age begins with the recognition of a fundamental conflict between literature and history. Literature presumes to speak from and to a relationship with history that, according to Veit, troubled the great René Wellek and a host of colleagues concerned to establish world literature as a legitimate field of literary studies. Wellek and his contemporaries saw that literature was in many respects antithetical to history—at least, to "scientific history" with its interest in "atomistic factualism" and antiquarianism, "uncritical scientism which pretends to establish causal relationships and provide causal explanations by listing parallels between works of literature," and, most importantly, for its "lack of focus," the surrendering of "its central concern to general history" (as quoted by Veit, 418). Casanova, identifying history with politics, on the one hand, and with temporality, on the other, grounds her history of literature in an idea of "literary temporality" and the way in which modern literature, originally identified with politics and nationalism, managed, "through a gradual accumulation of autonomy, to escape the ordinary laws of history." This allows her to define literature "without contradiction," she says, "both as an object that is irreducible to history and as a historical object, albeit one that enjoys a strictly *literary historicity*."[13]

Casanova bases the distinction between a "*literary* history of literature" and a "*historical* history of literature" on a difference of their respective "contents." In her view, a "literary history of literature" will focus on what happened to "literature" as it escapes "the ordinary laws of history," jettisons its "national" baggage, and enters an international literary market as "cultural commodity," the value of which is established by something like the laws of "cultural capitalism." This is useful because it allows her to posit something like a worldwide literary stock exchange in which the trajectories of winners and losers can be tracked with a pseudomathematical precision. This is in accord with both bourgeois and Marxist notions of "history" where the aim is to account for why the winners won and the losers lost. And it provides a criterion for deciding which works are to be considered high points of literature's development over "literary time"

and international space. It is difficult to see, however, how this "*literary* history of literature" differs from a "*historical* history" thereof.

My confusion results from Casanova's ambiguity in her use of the word "literary." I agree with Elias's suggestion that a "literary" history of literature (or of anything else, for that matter) would not only focus on whatever passes for "literature" in any given time and place in history but would also draw its descriptive, classificatory, and analytical categories from *poetics* and *topics*, rather than from *logics* alone. A poetic historiography of literature would be characterized by the problematization not only of its subject matter (literature) but also of its own modes and means of presenting that subject matter. Such a historiography would not necessarily take the form of a lyrical poem—an ode or a sonnet, say—but it would not rule out the lyrical as a mode of its composition and presentation. Here both the thought about the object of study and the emotional register appropriate for its valuation would be presented in such a way as to account for the confluence in modernist and postmodernist thought of the historical with the novelistic and vice versa.[14]

Wai Chee Dimock, otherwise sympathetic to the enterprise of making literary studies more cognitively responsible if not more scientific, likes the macroscale proposed by Moretti but cautions against the abandonment of the microphenomena of literary writing that might function as an element of a literary "genetic code." The old technique of "comparison," long cultivated in the field of comparative literature during the age of internationalism, can still serve us well in the global age—she thinks—if we attend to the lessons taught by Braudel's successors at *Annales*, the so-called "microhistorians."

For Dimock, it is all a matter of the *level* at which the investigation is carried out. Thus, a microhistory of literature would license us to connect up the most diverse and separated of texts (such as the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* and Whitman's *Song of Myself*) if we proceed at the level of the most minute grammatical phenomena, such as the pronoun or—why not?—the preposition. As a historical exercise, Dimock's approach resembles that used by Carlo Ginzburg, microhistory's founder and theoretician. In *The Cheese and the Worms*, Ginzburg claims that his close reading of a couple of pages of inquisitorial interrogations of a poor Friulian miller allows him to discern the existence of a whole worldview that had never been glimpsed before.[15] With comparative close reading at the microlevel, Dimock suggests, we can conceive a whole new kind of "history."

In her other work, Dimock has argued for the replacement of the conventional linear, cyclical, and sinusoidal models of historicality with the concepts of "deep time" and a "fractal" geometrical model.[16] I am very sympathetic to this suggestion, if for no other reason than that it

permits us to junk the narrativistic myth of smooth transitions in history, the ambiguity of the concept of periods, the notions of "influence," causation, and development—not to mention the hated "teleology"—at least in cultural history, and permits the possibility of new and original readings of texts of all kinds by a refined version of what McGann calls, following Marianne Moore, the technique of "inspection." But most "practicing historians," as they are called, will not take kindly to Dimock's suggestions for a new literary history—not only because most will not be interested in "literature's history," but also because most of them are suspicious of "literature" as too "fictional."

In her elegant essay on "The Scale of World Literature," Nirvana Tanoukhi focuses on some of the problems raised by Moretti's recommendation for what he calls "distant reading." Moretti's idea of literary history is "postmodernist" inasmuch as he counsels abandonment of any kind of essentialist distinction between "literature" and nonliterature and treats as literature anything that enters the literature market. Tanoukhi points out that reading at the distance required for a world-scale map or picture of literature in modernity may create problems of classification or taxonomy that make misperception or distortion inevitable. Thus, she notes that in attempts to analyze "*the* African novel," the norm for "novel" is presumed to be the modern Western European version, a presumption that can render the historian or ethnographer of African literature blind to the way African writers have used both metropolitan and local forms and contents to create something new: in the way a Nigerian sculptor had bricolated a manifestly "African" figure ("Man with a Bicycle") out of elements both Western and Nigerian in origin. Is the figure European or African, modern or "folk," global or local, assimilative or resistant?

Tanoukhi suggests that it will not do to classify figures such as this, whether sculptures or texts, as failed, imperfect, or simply ambiguous on the presupposition that the creator was trying to produce an equivalent of a modern European prototype. Like Dimock, she will go back to the rough ground and try to track the emergence of hybrids, genre variations, and new species as they emerge in local conditions and, working from the bottom up, as it were, build up a picture of world literature as more of a salad than a soup. Rather in the manner of Frances Ferguson, who departs from Bertrand Russell's distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description, Tanoukhi wants to build a "history" of world literature from the ground up but using the methods of the local surveyor rather than the satellite eye.

But will hers be a history or will it be a kind of pastiche of "close readings" focused on genres and united by a certain thematics of hybridity and species pseudopurity? Whatever else "history" may or may not be, it not

only changes, it develops. In a number of places in her essay, Tanoukhi speaks of "false teleologies," insisting that the various kinds of writing that spring up over the planet are not all striving to become versions of some "chosen" one of them. They are not even necessarily striving to become "literature." But if they are not so striving, then they cannot be said to belong to the same history—which would be heresy to what Emily Apter calls "the philological heritage of humanistic transference, displacement, and exile" (584).

As for Apter's take on the situation, she begins with basics: literature is a verbal phenomenon, a special kind of language use, and has language as both its manifest form (of "expression") and its deep ("substance" of its) content. She then places the problem of world or global literature within the larger frame of what she calls the "Realpolitik of language conflict" (584)—of which what might be called "the literature wars" would be one manifestation.

And here things get really interesting. Building on the idea informing Barbara Cassin's philosophical "dictionary of untranslatables," Apter proposes construing world cultural history as a market in false goods wherein what appears as a "translated" artifact is revealed as containing "untranslatable" singularities. Not "not translated" but "untranslatable."

Everyone knows, of course, that there is no such thing as a perfect translation, but translatability has long been the mainstay of the humanistic philological approach to the comparative study of literature, the principal device for representing the relation between one period and another in literary history, and the secret to that "continuity in change" that is supposed to be the payoff of a specifically historical treatment of anything whatsoever. As I understand it from Apter's account, the instability of the translation system derives from the inclusion within the translated of some originally local term that, because it is grounded in an experience of a unique place and/or situation, *cannot* be translated into any other language. It is the untranslatable content of a national language tradition that constitutes what might be called the "substance" of a given language's "ipseity" and the "genius" of its "literarité."

Are new genres made by virtue of translation failure? Is the lack of a common ground of comparison a spur to literary evolution? Does differentiation (in the species sense) necessarily come at the expense of hybridity models of cultural difference? Is the interdependency of the narrative market—crucial to a Wallersteinian model of literary world-systems—now simply the economic symptom of literary survivalism? Is a genre's travel the measure of its aliveness, its drift the gauge of force required to break open the bounds of a closed world-system?

Karyn Ball's eccentric paper raises the question of the price that the world has had to pay for the benefits—if such there be—of globaliza-

tion. It is a well-known topos of modernist discourse that, as Walter Benjamin put it, every advance in civilization is paid for by an increase in a certain barbarism. In her paper on "Primal Revenge and Other Anthropomorphic Projections for Literary History," Ball does not deal with literary history or history of literature directly. She seeks, rather, to shift our aestheticizing eye to a consideration of the amount of animal pain needed to keep the global market in operation.

As I understand it, Ball thinks that the global system in which our "literature" circulates as one commodity among many is based on a technology that has also rendered possible the destruction of thousands of organic species daily. Ball sees awareness of this mass manufacture of animal pain and destruction manifesting in a number of cultural genres that bear striking similarities to the genres of literature: in the modernist (or postmodernist) "zoo"; museums of "natural history"; in W. G. Sebald's postmodernist pseudo-anti-memoir *Austerlitz*; in films like Hitchcock's *The Birds*; and in a certain kind of psychoanalytical discourse (specifically, that focused on the "death drive"). She sees one of "literature's" tasks as that of thematizing and endowing with symbolic value those "uncanny" aspects of human self-making that indicate that things are not always all right in "the city." Indeed, she seems to think that the city's destruction of "the wild" has emerged as the principal threat to our own "animality" and therefore to our own bodily existence. Whereas any science would treat mankind's capacity for self-destruction as a technical problem to be solved by technical means, Ball treats the coming death of animality as the kind of global topic that any literature will have to address if it is to qualify as "modern" at all. In a word, Ball is alerting us to the posthumanist theme of "the death of man." How literature and art in general have come to address this theme would, for her, be the subject of any history of literature in the global age worthy of the name.

I suppose it all has to do with whether you study history in order to understand the past or whether you study it to understand the present. If you are interested in how things came to be as they are, it is one thing; if you want to know how they were at some earlier time, it is another. The difference between these two kinds of interest has been expressed by the philosopher Michael Oakeshott as marking a difference between two kinds of past: "the practical past" and "the historical past."[17]

Historians are interested in constructing a *historical* past, which means a version of the past that is based upon the kinds of evidence and the procedures for vetting it that historians recognize as being properly "historical" in kind.[18] This quite apart from any present interest and beyond any considerations of the possible practical uses to which the knowledge of the past might be put. When we scan our memory and our memory-banks, use our powers of recall, and employ other kinds of forensic

methods to study a past in aid of the solution of a practical matter, it is to those aspects of the past that might be useful for the conceptualization or solution of a problem in the present to which we turn. This cannot be the historical past, because it is constructed in such a way as to occlude any sense of its relevance to present problems and questions. With the practical past, it is quite a different matter. Here the past interests us only in the extent to which it is or seems to be relevant to the solution of a practical matter—and here "practical" is understood in Kant's sense of "practical reason." Which is to say, reason confronted by a situation that calls for an answer to the question: what is to be done? And Oakeshott insists that we should never think that we can be helped to resolve this question by recourse to the kind of knowledge that historians produce in their study of "the past."[19]

Now it might follow that our interest in the "history of literature" has more to do with "the practical past of literature" than with "literature's historical past." And this is because the latter topic deals with what literature was or has been, what happened to it in the past, and how it came to rest in that past as a certain item in the canon (or excluded from it). While the former topic ("the practical past of literature") requires us to ask about literature's social function in our time, its capacity to enfigure the "history of the present" or "the present as history" in the way that writers like Don DeLillo, Thomas Pynchon, Philip Roth, W. G. Sebald, Thomas Bernhard, and, yes, Virginia Woolf, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, and Gertrude Stein tried to do.

Jean-Paul Sartre more or less famously said that every "history of" anything whatsoever is always also a "history for" (some particular group, audience, or constituency).[20] This idea was picked up and expanded by Michel de Certeau, who stressed three things about modern (as against antique), professional (rather than amateur) history writing: one, that it is always produced in a specific place, locale, or site; two, that it takes place within a specific institutional framework; and three, that it is written for other professionals and the members of real or imagined elites.[21] It has been estimated that about 80 percent of modern historiography is written about the historian's own culture, society, or nation. It is written in the historian's own language, and it is aimed at an audience that reads in that language. It is for reasons such as these that the field of historical knowledge itself *has* a history that is no more consistently "progressive" than any other kind of human knowledge production. Moreover, it is increasingly unclear what might be the proper object of a specifically historiological inquiry.

The object of inquiry cannot be simply "the past" because too much of the past cannot be studied by the kinds of evidence and the methods that modern professional historiology favors. Nor can it be "the human

past" since vast tracts of the human past are unknown to historiology and its methods. In point of fact, modern professional historiology has boxed itself into the study of a very small range of human phenomena by the kinds of methods and the kinds of evidence amenable to treatment by those methods that constitute the bases of its orthodoxy. It is a well-known fact and a matter of no serious debate that "history" was constituted as a "science" more by what it denied among its practices prior to its scientization. For our purposes, the denial with the greatest consequences was that which severed "historical writing" from that "literature" of which it had once been a branch and subfield. Henceforth, historians would seek to suppress any evidence of anything of merely "literary" significance from their writing and eschew the techniques of "fictionalization" in the construal of their objects of study and their presentation of them in their writings.

What happened, of course, is that "history" went one way in pursuit of "historical reality" and "literature" went quite another. And while it is true that both history and the modern, realist novel developed in the nineteenth century in tandem with the nation, nationalism, and the myth of national "presence," it was literature that, long before history did so, broke with that myth and attained to a vision of a culture that would be more human for being less nationalistic and even a politics that would be more human for being less "humanistic."

It is for reasons such as these that we might look to "literature" and its postliterary, global avatars for insights into the nature of the "historicality" of our own time. But we must first purge "history" of its antiliterary biases even while we are purging "literature" of residues of an older "historicality" against which it turned in its effort to cease being "fiction" while still remaining "writing."

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NOTES

1 With thanks to Chuck Berry for the title. For "global picture," see Karyn Ball, "Paranoia in the Age of the World Picture: The Global 'Limits of Enlightenment,'" *Cultural Critique* 61 (2005): 115–47.

2 Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (New York: Verso, 2005); Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2004).

3 Denis Hollier, ed., *A New History of French Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1989).

4 W.B. Gallie, *Philosophy and Historical Understanding* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964).

5 See Michel de Certeau, introduction to *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1988).

6 On the relationship between "history" (understood as memory) and "place" (understood as "site" in the sense of German "die Staette") and the memory industry in France, see Perry Anderson, "Union Sucrée," *London Review of Books*, September 23, 2004.
7 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2003). See also Haun Saussy, ed., *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2006).
8 Vivian Sobchack, "Chasing the Maltese Falcon: On the Fabrications of a Film Prop," *Journal of Visual Culture* 6, no. 2 (2007): 219–46. Sobchack tells the story of how the plaster cast copies of the plaster cast "Maltese Falcon" standing in for an imaginary bejeweled bird statuette in the film by that name gradually acquired a collectors' value greater than the cost of the film itself.
9 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1991), 331.
10 This thought is in line with Jameson's earlier remarks on postmodernist nostalgia. Once upon a time, he has said, we had a nostalgia for certain periods, events, situations, and things of the past; now we have a nostalgia for nostalgia itself. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 19. So, too, now, under the economic conditions of the global and the cultural conditions of postmodernism, we have more of a nostalgia for both history and literature than any belief in their possibility. Instead of producing literature, the postmodernist writer is nostalgic for it and is therefore content with its idea. And so too for history. Instead of the real thing, we settle for its idea. But first one must make clear what is meant by "global," for, like its synonyms (earth, world, planetary, international), "global" is a term fraught with ideological overtones.
11 See Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, "After Learning from History," in *In 1926: Living at the Edge of Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1997), 411–36.
12 Wolfgang Ernst, "Modular Reading (Writing the Monument): The Case of *Lapis Satriacus*," *Rethinking History* 3, no. 1 (1999): 53–74.
13 Casanova, *World Republic of Letters*, 350.
14 Amy Elias, *Sublime Desire: History and Post-1960s Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2001).
15 Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976).
16 Wai Chee Dimock, "Genre as World System: Epic and Novel on Four Continents," *Narrative* 14, no. 1 (2006): 85–101.
17 Michael Oakeshott, *On History and Other Essays* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983).
18 I prefer "historiological" here, but Anglophone historians do not like such "jargon."
19 Oakeshott, *On History*, ch. 1; Luke O'Sullivan, *Oakeshott on History* (Charlottesville, VA: Imprint Academic, 2003), 221.
20 See Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966), 257–58.
21 Michel de Certeau, *Writing of History*, 41–49.