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Review by: Gerald Gillespie

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BOOK REVIEWS

INTERNATIONAL POSTMODERNISM: THEORY AND LITERARY PRACTICE. Edited by Hans Bertens and Douwe Fokkema. *A Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages 11*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1997. xvi, 581 p.

This hefty, handsomely produced volume is a complex exercise in writing the literary history of something still palpably in motion. As such it certainly will not, nor does it intend to, cap the debates regarding the constituent elements and the prospective viability of what has come to be called postmodernism. But it sets the bar so high in scholarly terms and it addresses so many cultures that one senses there probably will never be a second effort to match what Professors Bertens and Fokkema accomplish here. *International Postmodernism* appears destined to have long-lasting value for its painstaking sorting out of the issues and phenomena, which are caught possibly just after the highwater mark of postmodernism as a cultural current. So as to give fuller body to the story, the editors also scrupulously strive to pay attention to resistances to postmodernism. Their objective is to provide a broad contextualized picture of literary reception, not a literary history ruled by an ideological agenda.

Thus, the volume's organization does not reflect a settled understanding of a literary period, even though such a period may indeed be in the process of precipitating out before our very eyes. The first section, "Introductory Essays," is quite variegated and merits some scrutiny for the implications of such a range of general statements. Section two, "Postmodernism in the Other Arts," makes the case that a pervasive shift in cultural paradigms has been occurring on a wide front. Section three, which is twice as long, then takes up in considerable detail "Renovations and Innovations in Postmodernist Writing" and a variety of "Other Strategies and Devices in Postmodernist Writing." Finally, occupying about forty percent of the volume, section four, "The Reception and Processing of Postmodernism," is a medley of twenty-five chapters or reports that impressively roams over Canada (Robert Kroetsch), Spanish-speaking Latin America (Julio Ortega), Brazil (Eduardo F. Coutinho), the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland (Richard Todd), France (Geert Lernout), the German- and Dutch-speaking countries (Frans Ruiters), Scandinavia (Morten Kyndrup), Finland (Anna Makkonen), Italy (Monica Jansen), Spain (Enric Bou and Andrés Soria Olmedo), Portugal (Maria-Alzira Seixo), Slovakia (Tibor Zilka), the Czech territories (Milan Suchomel), Poland (Halina Janaszek-Ivanicková), Hungary (Mihály Szegedy-Maszák), Romania (Marcel Cornis-Pope), the territories of the former Yugoslavia (Edward Mozejko), post-Soviet Latvia (Inguna Bekere), Russia (Sergey Kuznetsov), moves to literatures of Africa written in European languages (Chantal Zabus on English, Eric Sellin on French, Alberto Carvalho on Portuguese expression, André Brink on Afrikaans and English in South Africa), and finally considers postmodernist inroads in India (Indra Nath Choudhuri), China (Wang Ning), and Japan (Kodama Sanehide and Inoue Ken) that cross linguistic and cultural barriers. This is a remarkable grand tour, and the cultural directions that it identifies are truly heterogeneous. There are indeed clusters of similarity—for example, the clear function of postmodernism as a political instrument of resistance in Eastern Europe—but, as several scholars caution, it is by no means certain whether postmodernism will continue to expand its role or even be a dominant force in the future simply because it was suited to certain needs in the recent past. Caveats and scepticisms about a lasting global role for postmodernism are scattered through these various accounts, despite the universal recognition of the power of the contemporary media and their globe-encircling invasiveness.

The densely written, factually solid, and open-eyed "Introductory Note[s]" with which Bertens and Fokkema preface sections two, three, and four are indispensable. Especially interesting is their careful analysis, in the introduction to section four,

of the importance of American ideas and works, and of American predilections for specific European thinkers and texts, as the energizing or emanational core of postmodernism. This analysis also examines a reciprocal, widespread American influence on European views of modernism and postmodernism and on European (re-)self-redefinition (especially in France, Germany, and Italy) in recent decades. While Bertens and Fokkema acknowledge that literary intersystemic traffic always flows in more than one direction, they sketch a convincing argument that postmodernism is a cultural movement that, at least in its early years, gathered its chief momentum in the New World and lent significant new impulses to the Old World. American writing is so heavily represented across most of section three that a separate chapter on the United States is not needed.

The "Introductory Essays" of section one fall into three broad categories. The first provides historical and formal overviews, thorough scholarly framings of the influential critical and philosophical positions of the postmodernist pioneers. Complementing these historical outlines (Bertens's "The Debate on Postmodernism," Wolfgang Iser's and Mike Sandbothe's "Postmodernity as a Philosophical Concept"), Fokkema discerns prominent themes, strategies, devices, and conventions that impart a distinct character to postmodern texts in his chapter "The Semiotics of Literary Postmodernism." Although permeated by a rhetoric of commitment to postmodernism, James McCorkles's "The Inscription of Postmodernism in Poetry" is a useful adjunct to Fokkema's formalist insights. The second category of "Introductory Essay" consists of historical-critical assessments of postmodernism's philosophical claims (Noël Carroll's finally skeptical evaluation of "The Concept of Postmodernism from a Philosophical Point of View"), and of its impact on the social sciences (Bertens's "The Sociology of Postmodernity"). The third category consists of essays by critics who feel personally involved in the drama of postmodernism as a massive happening on the world scene and want to express an historical or ethical position necessitated by this involvement. In "Rethinking the Postmodernity of the Discourse of Postmodernism," William Spanos—clearly a key participant through his founding of *boundary 2*, the American flagship journal of postmodernism, in 1970—warns against the pitfalls of the Jamesonian and New Historicist views and makes a passionate plea to refocus on the trauma of the Vietnam era as the deep marker for a profound decentering of the dominant Western ontotheological-logocentric tradition. In "The Politics of Postmodernism after the Wall," Susan Suleiman emphasizes the difficulty of decision making under the postmodern condition and meditates on the value of irony as a positive instrument in a time of outrageous horrors such as ethnic cleansing.

As already mentioned, section two of *International Postmodernism* deals with "intermedic" questions and the general proposition that postmodernism readily crosses borders of all kinds. Charles Jencks' cogent chapter on "Post-modern Architecture and Time Fusion" sketches phases of reaction to the assault on history in the modernist treatment of the city and a countervailing reintrusion of an "evolutionary" awareness of historically shaped symbolic codes in postmodernism. Johannes Birringer deals with postmodern theatrical performance as a critical refusal of closure and as a "vertiginous" demystifying, destabilizing intersection where we witness how conventions are used to manipulate our identities, how the ghostly qualities of fantasized identity and body appear, and how ideologies are openly organized around fetishistic obsessions. In "Postmodernism and Film," James Peterson stresses the coexistence of multiple modes of cinema and the failure of high modernism, in the face of a populist reaction, to dominate the immediate post-World War II scene the way the International Style did in architecture. Especially noteworthy phenomena are the deconstruction of representation in the "pseudo-documentary" and the fragmentation of voices in the more centralized modernist mass media. Sally Banes sees fluctuations and hybridization of

modernist approaches in "Postmodern Dance," while Hermann Danhauser observes that ever fewer critics believe that postmodern music is merely a negation of modernism, given the work of predecessor and bridging figures (Mahler, Yves, Zimmermann, et al.). In "Postmodernism and the Visual Arts," Mark A. Cheetam likewise points out that numerous scholars see no postmodern evolutionary ascendance over modernism and/or find many modernisms operative in postmodernism, even though postmodern art often reacts against the autonomous creative artist central to the modernist ethos, foregrounding "a call for the fragmented self to act politically through critique."

These general themes run throughout many of the commentaries on narrative genres, strategies and devices examined in this volume for their prominence in the bigger postmodern picture: "The Western" (Theo D'haen), "The Detective" (Bertens), "Historical Fiction: Utopia in History" (Elisabeth Wesseling), "The *Heimat* Novel" (Andrea Kunne), "Autobiography" (Alfred Hornung), "Science Fiction" (Brian McHale), "Rewriting" (Matei Calinescu), "Intertextuality" (Ulrich Broich), "Self-Referentiality" (Cornis-Pope), "The Refutation of Truth Claims" (Elrud Ibsch), "Nonteleological Narration" (Szegedy-Maszák), and "Postmodernisms: From Fantastic to Magic Realist" (D'haen). Among the pertinent issues treated are: the epistemological and ontological drive of much postmodern fiction, operating through deconstruction, in the face of indeterminacy and unintelligibility as the postmodern condition; efforts to enlarge collective historical memory through utopian projections, to criticize aspects of social and political life through parodic quotation of genres, to employ autobiography as literary therapy, metafiction, narrative restoration, and an expression of multicultural existence; the symbiosis between Science Fiction and postmodernism as part of the collapse of the distinction between high and low culture; postmodernism's palimpsestial obsessions and practices; "pla(y)gerism" (Broich) as a kind of ludic emancipation enabled by fragmentation, syncretism, and infinite regress; the possibility that disruptive metafiction typical of postmodernism is also, in its best authors, the building of systemic narration that can have lasting impact; the refutation of entrenched elements of the cultural repertory through a confrontation of texts; the pervasive circularity, open-endedness, and aleatory arrangement of postmodern texts both as a natural historical evolution in literature and an expression of the reevaluation of human personality; and the ways that magical realism, rooted in earlier twentieth-century experimentation in Latin America, provides a channel for historical revision and oppositional expression, extensively blending with postcolonial thought and influencing literature worldwide.

International Postmodernism proves the value, indeed the imperative, of international teamwork in Comparative Literature. The appended bibliography of secondary sources, subject index, and name index are vital aids in navigating the postmodern ocean that Bertens and Fokkema chart for us. As literary historians, they do not pretend to resolve such questions as the internal contradictions in writings that are claimed as "hard core" postmodernism—for example, an anti-referential strain, as against a passionately engaged strain that amasses referentiality; the pronouncements of entrance into apocalyptic drifting difference, as against the desire for history; the debate whether postmodernism is extensively an epigonal hypertrophy of modernism(s), as against a permanent transformation in literature constitutive of a new beginning era, etc. Their admirable achievement consists in gathering the team and thereby the record, in its most comprehensive breadth to date.

GERALD GILLESPIE