

Renaissance Worldmakers: World-Desire Before Goethe

World Literature is current.¹ As *The Routledge Concise History of World Literature* tells us, though the term *Weltliteratur* predates even its most cited “first” use by Goethe, it “suddenly resurfaced” and “gained currency” at “the turn of the twenty-first century”, enjoying “spectacular success in the new millenium”.² Writing on “world literature today”, David Damrosch reflects on how “the cultural and political realignments of *the past two decades* have opened the field of world literature to a [...] vertiginous variety of authors and countries”.³ World Literature can even be figured as an updated or renewed version of Comparative Literature; John T. Hamilton’s persuasive assessment of both disciplines as “elliptical” methodologies that remain forever “shifting, self-critical and unstable”⁴, does exactly this, arguing World Literature has now “come to the fore as a redeeming, cosmopolitan conception for a discipline conceived of as fatally Eurocentric”.⁵ Though *Weltliteratur* itself did not initially extend its scope to the global, today its apparent “newness” lies in its aim to be a frame for “the act of comparison [...] that is as expansive and non-Eurocentric as possible”.⁶ This in turn means its shifting and self-critical nature, which Hamilton alludes to, is faced with having to keep up with itself as the “new paradigm for the study of literature”, or risk being replaced by another if World Literature’s coverage is deemed inadequate by tomorrow’s critical standard.⁷

It is easy to associate the development of this discipline with the development of globalization. Sumit Guha’s observation that “globalization [...] has radically ruptured the [...] homogeneity achieved by state efforts in the 19th and 20th centuries” can be applied to the

¹ World Literature will be capitalized to refer to the discipline.

² Theo D’haen, *The Routledge Concise History of World Literature*, (Routledge: London: 2012), p. 1.

³ All emphasis in italics is mine unless indicated otherwise in a footnote.

David Damrosch, *World Literature in Theory*, (World Literature in Theory, (John Wiley & Sons Ltd.: Hoboken: 2014), p. 1.

⁴ John T. Hamilton, “Ellipses of World Literature”, *Poetica*, Volume 46, No. 1/2, (Brill: Leiden: 2014), p. 5.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 4.

⁶ Hayot p. 35

⁷ *op. cit.*, D’haen, p. 1.

context of World Literature, as its scholars rupture the limitations of national literary curricula and canons in order to better represent and encapsulate our “irredeemably hybrid, modern present” in their work.⁸ However, viewing World Literature as a *new* critical trend that has surpassed its sibling discipline, and identifying it with the “modern present” is problematic on a number of fronts. World Literature is undoubtedly current, but does not have to be *modern*, or true to a *modern* reality. After all, a discipline that has ceaselessly attacked terms born out of Eurochronology, such as the notion of a singular Modernity or Enlightenment, should not depend on such lines of reasoning to establish its relevance. It is precisely World Literature’s relationship to periodization and Eurochronology that this essay will interrogate. There is indeed a “vertiginous variety of authors and countries” discussed in the field, with much needed attention being given to extra-European literatures. But, as Zhang Longxi comments, “the mere [...] conglomeration of different literatures” and languages “does not make a meaningful concept of world literature”.⁹ While it is vital that World Literature continues striving to be less Eurocentric, it is as important for it not to neglect temporally distant countries and literary cultures, which it *has* done as there is a noticeable lack of World Literature scholarship that concerns itself with the Renaissance.

This study will argue that this is the case because World Literature scholars veer away from engaging with a period that is so heavily associated with Europe and the West, which, in effect, only allows the Renaissance to remain a European literary phenomenon, and for Eurochronology to stay critically intact and unchallenged. Both terms that are used to refer to my period of interest, “Renaissance” and “Early Modern”, will be discussed at length and unpacked; in the first place in order to explain why World Literature scholars avoid using them, and secondly, to propose ways of redefining them so that they can facilitate worlded scholarship. “Renaissance” is used here as shorthand to refer broadly to world literature produced between the 14th-17th

⁸ Sumit Guha, “Introduction: Literary Cultures at the Frontiers: Literature and Identity in the Early Modern World”, *The Medieval History Journal*, 14 (2), (SAGE: London: 2011), p. 155.

⁹ Zhang Longxi, “The Changing Concept of World Literature”, in *op. cit.* Damrosch, p. 517.

centuries; these happen to be the rough dates that encapsulate the Renaissance works I will refer to. But, as will be made clear later, this study is aware of the arbitrary or problematic nature of start- and end-dates of literary periods, and therefore argues for a flexible use of terms such as “Renaissance” in order to overcome the problems posed by traditional periodicity. Informed by Eric Hayot’s work on literary worlds, I will suggest that Renaissance Studies and World Literature need each other, and that “world-desire” shared by Renaissance writers and World Literature critics can and should be paired so as to allow each discipline to expand into new and exciting territory.

In *How to Read World Literature*, Damrosch wonders at the “unparalleled variety of literary pleasures” on offer to those that study this discipline, the scope of which “reach[es] back more than four millennia and extend[s] today to almost every [...] region of the globe”.¹⁰ However, with the exception of Ancient language texts, the “unparalleled variety” of World Literature does not seem to extend much further back beyond Goethe. Scanning through bibliographies of leading World Literature publications, there is a clear absence of works dating from the 14th-17th centuries. The few exceptions to this rule tend to be extended analyses of canonical authors, analyses which do not deliver on World Literature’s ability and desire to venture beyond Western canonical traditions. For example, Sarah Lawall’s *Reading World Literature: Theory, History, Practice* affords some space to Shakespeare by including a chapter on *The Tempest* (a favourite of Postcolonial Studies), but the only other 17th century writer whose name is mentioned in passing is Milton’s. Joachim Küpper’s more recent *Approaches to World Literature*, again, dedicates an entire chapter to canonical literary giant Dante, but no mention of the Renaissance is made outside this chapter. Perhaps even more revealing than leafing through the contents of any single publication is to scan Damrosch’s *World Literature in Theory*; an exhaustive anthology of theory written over the years on World Literature from countless of its most influential scholars.

¹⁰ David Damrosch, *How to Read World Literature*, (Wiley Blackwell: Hoboken: 2008), p. 1.

Again, we find a handful of references to Shakespeare, but all other of the very few mentions of 17th century writers amount to a few instances of canonical name-dropping; Moliere's and Tasso's names appear twice each, Calderon's and Cervantes' once each too, and so on.

Jane Newman, whose essay on Dante acts as the stand-alone voice for Renaissance Studies in *Approaches to World Literature*, has criticised World Literature for what she (borrowing Kathleen Biddick's term) calls its "supersessional" thought and practice.¹¹ Newman explains "supersessional" is used to describe how "earlier generations" of literature are forced to "fall behind", or even "drop out" of, literary study so that World Literature's "new generation of not necessarily more recent, but always previously absent literatures" (which are both "increasingly rich" but also often "increasingly disparate" in their "assortment") can be prioritised.¹² According to Newman, this "new generation" of works is prioritised because its works are deemed to "best apply in the face of the politically vexed conundrum of representation and coverage".¹³ The current study does not support Newman's view when she protests that the attention given to this "new generation" of worldly texts means that Western Classics are now by comparison "strikingly new" and "lesser taught".¹⁴ Her plea for a return to the study of Western canonical texts over ever-expanding worldly curricula is not only a defeatist approach for the World Literature scholar, but counter-intuitive for anyone seriously invested in the worlding of Renaissance literature. After all, the central issue I gleaned even from a quick scan of World Literature's critical anthologies is that mentions of Renaissance authors are by and large restricted to the Western and canonical. As a result, the overwhelming majority of world literature from the period stays neglected; the assumption that the Renaissance does not extend beyond Europe remains unchallenged; and even the most valuable of these worlded analyses of canonical authors will be subject to scoffs,

¹¹ Jane O. Newman, "Auerbach's Dante: Poetical Theology as a Point of Departure for a Philology of World Literature" in Joachim Küpper et al., eds. *Approaches to World Literature*, (De Gruyter: Berlin: 2013), p. 40.

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *ibid.*

received as yet more examples of hypocritical scholarship promising the world, yet remaining firmly grounded in the European. For canonical works to seriously participate in World Literature, their devotees will have to let go of these texts' assumed superior status and "play nice" alongside the non-canonical; if they are to remain on unequal footing, serious comparisons of the two will not be possible.

However, if we re-interpret Newman's theory of the supersessional, taking "new generation" to straight-forwardly refer to more recent literature rather than to threatening, new additions to the canon, we can use it to debunk wrongful assumptions made in World Literature that are indeed the result of a kind of supersessional thinking. For example, citing the argument in Emily Apter's book *Against World Literature* (2013), Damrosch has brought up the importance of not only tracing the international circulation of literature, but paying attention to the factors that determine its movement, as literature "rarely flows freely across borders".¹⁵ This is an issue in "modern literature" he claims, let alone "earlier periods" which require us to "think more in terms of largely separate regional systems, often little connected to one another: world literatures in the plural."¹⁶ This line of thought is surprising coming from Damrosch as it sets up a false dichotomy between modern literature and the literature of earlier periods not reflected in his own work which deftly stretches across time and space. To state the obvious, much of 14th-17th century literature *did* travel through an interconnected world, and surely, much of the literature produced today will have little effect beyond its place of origin. As Sumit Guha has argued, "historically viewed, [...] processes [of globalization] are not altogether new" but rather, "variations on themes that have always been present in [...] regions where diverse peoples met in past time".¹⁷ Newman's thoughts, re-interpreted thus, can help us respond to this fallacious dichotomy of earlier "world

¹⁵ op. cit., Damrosch, (2008), p. 2.

¹⁶ ibid.

¹⁷ op. cit., Sumit Guha, p. 155.

literatures” and “modern” world literature: examples taken from the “new” generation of texts can be as “disparate” as the old, and the old can be as interconnected and worldly as the “modern”.

Studies on Renaissance travel writing by both Christian and Muslim writers, undertaken by Nabil Matar and Daniel J. Vitkus, have aptly drawn attention to the multiplicity of ways in which these “regional systems” did not remain “separate”. Instead, they grew all the more unavoidably interconnected, by way of travel, trade, migration, diplomacy, and aggressive, combative encounters.¹⁸ “World” in the context of Renaissance Studies inevitably brings to mind what Walter Mignolo has referred to as “the darker side of the Renaissance”, Europe’s discovery of the “New World”, and the beginnings of colonial conquests and empire-building.¹⁹ But the increasing worldly interconnectedness of the Renaissance is not only a result of the West’s “discovery” of “The New World” in a time of pre-colonial, expansionist fervour. Though such imperial ambitions *were* growing and led to devastating consequences for huge expanses of the globe, they need to be conceived of comparatively, and not as a set of ambitions particular to Europe or the West. As Linda T. Darling points out, in an essay arguing for the inclusion of the Middle East in Renaissance Studies, “instead of the age of ‘European expansion’, this era should be rethought in terms of competing expansions and comparative advantages”.²⁰ Further to this, Daniel Carey and Claire Jowitt have also pointed out that:

In contrast to accounts of the New World, which frequently represented the continent and its peoples as a *tabula rasa* to be inscribed by European culture, the ‘East’ possessed cultural and political structures which were [...] complex and [...] significantly, older than those of Europe.²¹

¹⁸ See Daniel J. Vitkus, *Piracy, Slavery, and Redemption: Barbary Captivity Narratives from Early Modern England*, (Columbia University Press: New York: 2001), and Nabil Matar, *In the Lands of the Christians: Arab Travel Writing in the 17th Century*, (Routledge: New York: 2003).

¹⁹ Walter Mignolo quoted in Katharina N. Piechocki, *Cartographic Humanism: The Making of Early Modern Europe*, (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago: 2019), p. 5.

²⁰ Linda T. Darling, “The Renaissance and the Middle East”, in Guido Ruggiero ed., *A Companion to the Worlds of the Renaissance*, (Blackwell Publishing Ltd.: London: 2007), p. 64.

²¹ David Carey & Claire Jowitt, “Introduction: Early Modern Travel Writing”, *Studies in Travel Writing*, Volume 13, Issue 2, (Taylor & Francis: Oxford: 2009), p. 2.

The expanding world-scope and worldly interaction of the period was not only imposed on the world beyond Europe by Europe. To even speak of Europe as a cohesive, single agent imposing itself on the rest of the world is misguided. Katharina Piechocki has pressed for us to re-evaluate the term “Renaissance Europe”, the use of which is often “insufficient” and “misleading”:

[...] often equated with “the West”, Europe is an astonishingly unexamined continent commonly taken as a fixed and stable category, immune to time or history, a monolith within a broader understanding of “the world”. [...] Far from consolidated, the blurred, messy, and confusing contours of Europe [at the time] were being only negotiated.²²

When we rethink in the terms the critics above urge us to do, we can come to conceive of the Renaissance world as something far larger and more intricately connected than a small, consolidated Europe forcibly extending beyond its limited bounds.

Multiple Renaissance literary traditions grew increasingly interconnected through a constantly evolving exchange of literary and cultural capital. The Renaissance, in fact, acts as Susan Bassnett’s choice example in *Translation and World Literature* when she demonstrates how the role of translations in literary production is overlooked by curricula:

The traditional English literature curriculum that highlighted Chaucer as ‘the father of English poetry’ [...] then ignored The next two centuries until the arrival of Marlowe and [...] Shakespeare. Yet in that intervening period, the years of the European Renaissance, [...] there was immense translation activity, which would lay the ground for the poetry and drama of the sixteenth century.²³

The abundance of literary translations paired with the flourishing of print culture incited a period of literary travel and exchange that hardly leads one to view these “regions” as either separate or uninvolved in each other’s literary cultures. It is worth noting that the effects of this literary exchange were not delighted in solely by the literary elite doing the translating and publishing. This was not a privileged European republic of letters through which only masterpieces by

²² op.cit., Piechocki, p. 5.

²³ Susan Bassnett, *Translation and World Literature*, (Routledge: Oxford: 2019), p. 4.

Boccaccio inspired others by the Bard. Perceiving it as such would be anachronistic, led by our current notions of these literary classics' status. Let us not forget that Boccaccio's stories derive from a popular, oral tradition of tales in the vernacular, which, in their translated form, eventually reached the English groundlings of the Globe Theatre. Beyond the canonical too, a mass of forgotten texts travelled like wildfire in translation. And though they travelled among people we may think of as privileged, Western Europeans now, at the time, many of these people were oppressed, transimperial subjects, or second-class citizens in their respective regions. For example, Giulio Cesare dalla Croce's extremely popular farce concerning a street-smart fool, Bertoldo, titled *Le sottilissime astuzie di Bertoldo* (1606), was translated into vernacular Greek in 1646 before being translated into any other European language. This was during the Venetian occupation of Crete, a time when Greeks shared only language and religion, not established national borders, and did not comfortably belong to either the East or West, as they were continually invaded and fought over by both the Ottomans and the Franks. This anonymous translation enjoyed immense success and numerous reprints; it was embraced and is now seen as a prominent example of "νεοελληνική λαϊκή λογοτεχνία" within Greece, and also went on to gain traction across the Balkans.²⁴ Certainly, if the study of World Literature involves examining a work's "circulating out into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin", then the Renaissance stands out as a particularly fruitful period of study.²⁵ Even just within Europe, an incredible variety of international, social classes and demographics were benefiting from and investing in the circulation of world literature through translation.

Of course, examining the circulation of literature and the afterlives of texts abroad is only one measure of worldliness, one of many approaches to World Literature. To determine what makes Renaissance texts worldly other than their circulation, and how to study them as such,

²⁴ Sotiria Stavrakopoulou, ed. *Πανουργία υψηλόταται του Μπερτόλδου*, (Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki Press: Thessaloniki: 2018), p. 9. (Translation: "Modern Greek popular literature").

²⁵ David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton: 2003), p. 5.

requires us to clarify what we mean by “world”. Eric Hayot’s *On Literary Worlds* has tackled the elusiveness of this word head on. Addressing the *New Left History* journal’s “strange” decision to supplement the “World” of “World Literature” with the word “Global”, he comments that we may “take [this to be] a symptom of the insolidity and [...] ghostliness of the word [“world”] in its contemporary usage, where it [...] appear[s] only to announce its transformation into something other than what it means”.²⁶ Among its multiple, contested meanings, he muses, it can end up meaning “not the whole world [...] which is, if nothing else, weird”.²⁷ Here, Hayot playfully breaks away from theory’s tendency to languish in convoluted and contradictory postulations which often make it so dense and inaccessible, and uses this as impetus to propose a more straightforward approach to “world”. He clarifies his theory of “world” has little to do with Franco Morretti’s engagement in Immanuel Wallerstein’s “World-Systems”, or with the “world” of “World Literature” (which acts as a scale of comparison). Instead, he focuses on the two most common uses of the word “world” in a literary context. The first is the authorial world, “the social and historical space in which the author lived and worked”, and the second is the world set up in and by the work’s “unity of form”, the time, place and characters contained in the work.²⁸ He expands on these understood concepts of “world” by setting up the “diegetic” (the world inside the text) and the “extra-diegetic” (the world outside the text) in order to pinpoint the relationship between the two as the crux of what makes a text worldly: “Aesthetic worlds,” he argues, “are [...] always a relation to and theory of the lived world” and thus, “the history of aesthetic worldedness is [...] simultaneously, a history of the world”.²⁹

How we determine this relationship is by “measuring a work’s degree of orientatedness towards the world”.³⁰ It is how a work postures itself towards the world and its imperatives, how it

²⁶ Eric Hayot, *On Literary Worlds*, (OUP: Oxford: 2012), p. 36.

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ *ibid.*, p.45.

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ *ibid.*

reflects the world it was created in, consciously or unconsciously, that we must examine in order to engage with its worldliness. Through a number of examples, ranging from a comparative look at Balzac's and Raymond Chandler's works to the Star Wars franchise, Hayot makes it clear the distinction he is making here is not between realism and non-realism. Realism builds worlds as artificially constructed and unrealistic as the stylised or the surreal do, and even fantasy or dystopian narratives hinge on a relationship between our world and their worlds in order to be conceived and understood. Using the word "world" as opposed to realism, or any other alternative, is highlighted by Hayot as important due to it allowing us to carry out comparative work across nation, language, genre and time in ways that other concepts do not. It enables us to view the work as a "dialectically [...] organized whole" and "to appreciate its worldly totality, [...] to recognize the relationship between literature and the cosmological imagination".³¹ The idea of being a product of, part of, and a reflection of the world that Hayot emphasises, as well as the insistence on the use of "world" is overtly present in Renaissance theatre, acting almost as a cliched idea today. From Calderon's *El Gran Teatro Del Mundo*, to the naming of the *Globe* theatre and Shakespeare's "All the world's a stage...", the act of worldmaking through literature in the Renaissance is both conscious and deliberate.

Through this world theory we can come to measure worldliness not as an impossible global scale, but as an approach invested in examining a text's "orientatedness" towards the world; the ways in which a text represents and relates to the world it knows, and what we as critics can learn about the world by engaging in this textual worldliness. While my discussion of translation acted as a first port of call in establishing the period's worldliness, reflecting on Hayot's world theory I will proceed with an analysis of the ways in which this worldliness can be established through representations of difference and in what remains untranslated. After all, the study of "world" does not rely on eradicating difference and establishing a singular totality or

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 52.

cohesion; some of the best examples of worldly, polyglottic Renaissance literature, rely precisely on the juxtaposition of differences. Anne Coldiron's *Printers Without Borders* provides a fascinating analysis of macaronic verse, "the fugitive oddball lurking at the far edge of a spectrum of early modern plurilingual practices", which remains, as she points out, "little discussed today".³² She brands her selection of poems (by John Bale and William Caxton among others), chosen for their "stubbornly visible foreign practices", as "anti-translation"; poetry that relies on difference and aural variety to achieve its desired effects. Despite the multilingual character of these works, they were in fact translated for English audiences, at least in part, and Coldiron looks into which words would be translated in England and why. This research seems particularly relevant to Emily Apter's theory of the "*Untranslatable*". In Apter's view, one of the main critiques that can be wielded against World Literature is its reliance on translation, which has left "the right to the *Untranslatable* [...] blindsided"³³, and enables those who do not engage with concepts that resist translation to arrive at "flaccid globalisms" which eradicate all difference for the sake of unity and continuity.³⁴ "

The representation of linguistic difference, which interests Apter so much, reflects the will of authors to represent the diverse amalgam of identities and voices sounding and migrating throughout the Renaissance world. Drama in particular provides valuable insights into how minority identities sounded, and how they were perceived by the majority. Take for example the representation of Dutch religious refugees in Elizabethan London in the works of John Marston, Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker. In some cases, it is literature alone that provides us with a way into hearing these past worlds. Marc Lauxtermann's analysis of the use of early Modern Greek in orally performed, Venetian poetry and comedies explains that Greek was present in 16th century Italy in three forms: Greek loan-words making their way into *Venexian* (the Venetian

³² A.E.B. Coldiron, *Printers without Borders: Translation and Textuality in the Renaissance*, (CUP: Cambridge: 2015), p. 255.

³³ Emily Apter, *Against World Literature*, (Verso: London: 2013), p. 8.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 7.

dialect), Greek's contribution to *Gergo* (an informal, vagabond language spoken by those living on the margins of society not wishing to be understood the mighty and powerful), and *Greghesco* (an invented, burlesque language, used to parody what Greek immigrants sounded like when speaking Italian).³⁵ Even though by the end of the 15th century there were over 4,000 Greeks living in Venice, the majority were impoverished immigrants, who, for all intents and purposes, would be silenced by time if it was not for the worldly texts that preserved their voices; as Lauxtermann points out, the only samples of *gergo* we have available are, in fact, in literature.³⁶ As for *Greghesco*, this made-up, nonsense language was used by dramatists Andrea Calmo, Gigio Artemio Giancarli, the poet Antonio da Molino (who even went by the Greek pen-name Manoli Blessi), and famous, jester-like street performers, or *buffone*, Zuan Polo Liompardi and Domenico Taiacalze, who would reportedly speak in many tongues so as to amuse and attract audience members from every pocket of Venetian society.³⁷ The existence *Greghesco* itself indicates the need for writers and entertainers to represent, however parodically, the polyphonous, aural tapestry of Venetian society, and speaks to the comic effectiveness of “a Babelian confusion of voices and tongues, a carnivalesque topsy-turvy”.³⁸

The above discussion of *Greghesco* does not only indicate that nonsensical babble is burlesque and amusing, however. The effects of the representation of difference are two-fold: Lauxtermann argues that the laughter produced by the parodying of non-standard languages, acted as a unifying, inclusive force, as the audience shared in that laughter, while all the while drawing attention to the frictions between Greeks and Italians.³⁹ In either case, the employment of *Greghesco* signals these texts are not just Italian, or pertaining solely to Greeks and Italians.

³⁵ Marc D. Lauxtermann, “Linguistic Encounters: The Presence of Spoken Greek in Sixteenth-Century Venice” in Marina S. Brownlee, Dimitri H. Gondicas, eds. *Renaissance Encounters: Greek East and Latin West*, (Brill: Leiden: 2012), p. 190.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 192.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 196.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 202.

³⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 205-206.

They are worldly texts, reflecting the world situation that led those waves of immigrants to Venice, representing the changes Venetian society was faced with following this. Another related, largely unexplored and promising avenue of study, which Diana Berruezo-Sánchez has drawn attention to, is the representation of the Black African presence in Spain in the 16th and 17th centuries. As Berruezo-Sánchez explains, the Renaissance saw one of the “largest forced migrations in early modern history: the slave trade”. Its victims were othered and aurally parodied by the drama of the period through its use of the so-called ‘*habla de negros*’.⁴⁰ Interestingly, examples of minority literature are slowly being discovered, as Berruezo-Sánchez brings up an example of a recently uncovered poem written in Spanish by a freed slave, the title of which translates to: “The Black Man Who Didn’t Want to Have a White Soul”.⁴¹ Further study into polyglottic texts, representations of movement, slaves and migrants, not to mention comparative study between these works and minority literatures of the Renaissance, will not only reveal how worldly the Renaissance was, but will also allow us to understand boundaries, difference and margins as represented and experienced by Renaissance subjects.

Furthermore, what I wish to add to Hayot’s world theory is the idea of “world-desire”. The worldliness of a Renaissance text can not only be ascertained by the conscious or unconscious ways in which it represents and turns itself towards the world, but, as many critics working on the period have picked up on, by its desire to deliberately pursue the subject of “world”. Ayesha Ramachandran’s *The Worldmakers* asserts: “It would be no exaggeration to identify the central intellectual task of the late Renaissance [...] as the thought of the world itself”.⁴² Recognizing how “we are yet to grapple with the lure of the term ‘world’ [...] in terms that go beyond discourses of power and oppression”, her book acts as a leading voice in discussing the Renaissance

⁴⁰ “Reversing Invisibility: Enslaved Black Africans in Early Modern Spain” in *The Oxford Polyglot*, 2018-2019, Vol. 13, Issue 2, (Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages, University of Oxford: Oxford: 2019), URL: <https://www.mod-langs.ox.ac.uk/oxford-polyglot/2018-19/2>

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² Ayesha Ramachandran, *The Worldmakers*, (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago: 2015), p.

conception of “world” beyond histories of globalization.⁴³ The thrust of her work expands on the Renaissance’s attention to the “insurmountable gap between our fragmentary apprehension of the phenomenal world and our *desire* for complete knowledge of it”.⁴⁴ This almost Heideggerian understanding of being-in-the-world is one that understands that the self is not “subordinate” to the world; the self constitutes part of the world and at the same time creates the world it perceives itself as part of.⁴⁵ Some of the examples provided by Ramachandran encapsulating this sentiment include Montaigne’s metaphors in his *Essais* which corporealize the world and geographically map the self, and the *Fool’s Cap Map of the World*, which draws attention to our desire to affiliate with a global totality while at the same time being limited to “the particularity” and singularity of our bodies; “the cosmopolitan World-Fool suggests that knowledge of the self is knowledge of the world and vice-versa”.⁴⁶

The world-desire identified by Ramachandran is the trigger which moves the Renaissance subject to re-imagine both definitions of self and the world through their relationship to one another. This position is further supported by Mary Blaine Campbell, whose *Wonder & Science* is an investigation of the ways in which world-desire captured the imagination of Renaissance literary and scientific authors alike. Covering texts from Aphra Behn’s travel writing to the corpus of Giordano Bruno and Bernard de Fontenelle’s best-selling and widely-translated *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds* (1686), she identifies “longing for another world” as the key “element of desire” that acted as “a pressure on the construction of the Edenic narrative of America”, and argues that:

“The pressure of that same desire produced many kinds of other worlds, less usable, less phenomenal, and although they were stained with the original sin of the conquests, they represented the efforts of

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 224.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 223.

imagination to yearn past the bounds of the known”⁴⁷

To “world” one’s thought as these authors do, is a conscious act, and is something we, as World Literature scholars, do also. As Djelal Kadir has explained, “Comparative Literature is neither a subject nor an object, nor is it a problem”, it is a “practice” defined by the agency and work of its practitioners rather than a specified corpus.⁴⁸ Worlding literature, which Kadir defines as “giv[ing] it a particular historical density”, is something even scholars working in singular, national literatures in Renaissance or Early Modern scholarship are embracing; Wiley’s ‘Companion to’ series published *A Companion to the Worlds of the Renaissance*, a publication priding itself on looking at “at the Renaissance from a world, as opposed to just European, perspective” in 2007, and Jyotsna G. Singh’s publication in the same series, *A Companion to the Global Renaissance*, while focusing on the English Renaissance, places it in its wider worldly context.⁴⁹ Like Singh, scholars working on *TIDE*, an ongoing European Research Council-funded project, also wish to situate English Renaissance literature in the world, aiming to uncover “how mobility in the great age of travel and discovery shaped English perceptions of human identity based on cultural identification and difference”.⁵⁰ Some of this worlding has even begun to be implemented at an institutional level: Brown University opened its interdisciplinary Center for the Study of the Early Modern World just last September; and Yale University’s Renaissance Studies PhD programme is offered as part of a combined degree alongside Comparative Literature.

With Renaissance Studies scholars recognizing the importance of worlding their period, it seems bizarre that World Literature has shown so little interest in worlding the Renaissance. Bizarre though it is, the reasons for this boil down to entangled questions of Eurochronology and

⁴⁷ Mary Baine Campbell, *Wonder and Science: Imagining Worlds in Early Modern Europe*, (Cornell University Press: Ithaca: 1999), p. 1.

⁴⁸ Djelal Kadir, “To World, to Globalize—Comparative Literature’s Crossroads”, *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 1, (Penn State University Press: Pennsylvania: 2004), p. 1.

⁴⁹ ‘About This Book’ section, Wiley Online Library, (2007), URL: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/book/10.1002/9780470751626>

⁵⁰ TIDE Project Homepage, “Travel, Transculturality and Identity in England, c. 1550-1700”, An ERC-funded project, URL: <http://www.tideproject.uk/>

periodicity. The literature produced between the 15th and 17th centuries is traditionally referred to under two umbrella terms: Renaissance or Early Modern literature. Both of these terms are largely associated with Europe or the West more generally; the Renaissance in particular is cited by Apter as one of many examples of “typologies...adduced from Western literary examples”.⁵¹ Though Apter has a point, to definitively accept this thinking creates the following vicious cycle; World Literature scholars do not engage with such solely European categories, and these categories then cannot become more worldly or inclusive without such engagement. To persist in this way leads to extremely exclusionary and problematic academic practice. As Darling explains, an insistence on the omission of the world outside of Europe from Renaissance Studies “functions as a way of validating European uniqueness in having a Renaissance”.⁵² Scholars working on national literatures outside of Europe will then, in response, also “resist employing what has been historically such a Eurocentric paradigm” which continues to exclude them.⁵³ So, while it is extremely useful to challenge nonsensical periodicity as Hayot does (questioning, for example, why there should be such a thing as a *Victorian* period of Spanish literature) it is not particularly useful to entirely dismiss either the “Renaissance” or the “Early Modern”.⁵⁴ This is because the categories “Early Modern” and “Renaissance” do not refer to nation-specific rulers and phenomena. They refer to ways of thought, which we can find manifested in any given place; with re-definition and re-thinking, they *can* be applied in worldly and comparative work. In fact, the pursuit of this re-definition is urgent, as these terms, though of Eurochronological origin, are used in an incoherent and inconsistent way even within scholarship focusing on Europe.

Ironically, each of these terms signal opposite temporal movements; “Renaissance” hails the rebirth of antiquity and revitalises the past, while “Early Modern” heralds in a new, modern era and looks to the future. What both clearly aim for however, is to break away from the immediate

⁵¹ op. cit., Apter, p. 57

⁵² op.cit., Darling, pp. 65-66.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 56.

⁵⁴ op. cit. Hayot, p. 155.

past, the “middle” ages. But it is not entirely clear when this break with whatever constitutes the “middle” occurred. In “The Perils of Periodization”, Marina Brownlee takes issue with the “middle” in Middle Ages simply functioning as a “liminal term [invented] to designate (reductively) what [Renaissance scholars] perceived as the lacklustre gap” between their period of interest and antiquity.⁵⁵ Even if we were to accept the existence of this gap, in practice we do not consistently identify it in every national literature; Brownlee, for example, asks why academics working on 15th century Italian literature are considered Renaissance scholars, while those working on any other 15th century European literature are not. Evidently, adopting the term “Renaissance” is not something that can be done with confidence, even within Europe. Greek literature makes an interesting case study in this respect. In the preface to his book on the “Cretan Renaissance”, David Holton dynamically begins by addressing the following: “It is sometimes claimed that the Greeks needed no ‘Renaissance’, in the western sense, because they had never lost the knowledge of the language and the literary, philosophical and historical writings of their classical forebears”.⁵⁶ The claim in question immediately begs several questions which serve well in undoing its assertion: Did Greeks have no Middle Ages? If so, were they stuck in or continuing the Classical era? Were they always Renaissance? Or did they never have one? While Holton does not address these questions, his book uses ‘Renaissance’ to refer specifically to literary production in Crete, which, thanks to the influence of Venetocracy and the Italian Renaissance, was booming. Notably, however, Crete became part of the Venetian empire in 1211 - so when exactly can we pin-point the beginning of the Cretan Renaissance and the end of the “middle” it broke with?

From here, we can conclude that if calling Crete ‘Renaissance’ and trying to pin-point the beginning and end of this period is too uncertain and convoluted, then doing so for the rest of Europe, let alone the whole world, is near impossible. Alternatively, a more productive approach

⁵⁵ Marina S. Brownlee, “The Perils of Periodization” in op. cit. Brownlee & Gondicas, p. 5.

⁵⁶ David Holton, *Literature and Society in Renaissance Crete*, (CUP: Cambridge: 1991), p. viii.

would require us to make such terms more flexible by accepting plurality, and challenging this fallacy of a single, one-size-fits-all chronology, as David Porter does in *Comparative Early Modernities 1100-1800*. Porter explains that the titular start and end-dates of this project are intended to be provocative, as indeed every word of this title is.⁵⁷ The reason his chosen time-span is so large and inclusive is in order to avoid the trappings of Eurochronological thinking. A more limited time-frame will serve to encapsulate one nation's or region's Early Modern period, but then all other nations will be seen, at best, as "facilitators" of this modernity, "structurally exterior to any historical conception of the modern".⁵⁸ Porter's response to this issue is to treat start- and end-dates as suggestive and flexible. Through doing this, we can include a number of different modernities within these dates which we can then look at comparatively, appreciating how each one manifests itself in a different context; not all Renaissances emerged out in Italy, and not all Early Modern periods were followed by Enlightenments. Porter feels that our idea of globalization has caused us to see the world as a funnel - narrow and limited in the past, growing outwards, diversifying and expanding over time. However, "a multiplicity of pasts are embedded in our current condition" meaning this figurative funnell needs to be widened in the opposite direction too.⁵⁹ The past needs to be re-imagined creatively in order to allow us to "assert the commensurability of historical contexts", thus "not claim[ing] that they are the same", but proving that "there is no gaping chasm of radical alterity" between the histories of the West and the rest of the world which prevents these pasts from being compared productively.⁶⁰

The past needs to be, not only revisited, but re-imagined. It makes little sense to leave the past(s) in the past, both because, as Porter points out, these pasts laid the foundations of and can help us come to terms with present realities, but also because they ultimately continue to be

⁵⁷ David Porter, ed. *Comparative Early Modernities 1100-1800*, (Palgrave Macmillan: New York: 2012), p. 5.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

relevant to and have an effect on the present. Bruno Latour's conception of "polytemporal" time is useful here; time need not be a single line racing forward, the future can instead be a series of looping lines, forming circles that extend outwards in every direction revisiting and colliding with the past, creating cycles, patterns and repetitions.⁶¹ Such a re-definition of the past transforms static literary periods into ideas that travel, morph, and reinvent themselves across time and space. Gang Zhou, Brenda Deen Schildgen, and Sander L. Gilman's study, *Other Renaissances*, perceives the Renaissance exactly thus. In their book, "Renaissance [is] not an ontological autonomous subject that existed in the remote past but an accumulation of [...] readings that is both transnational and transcultural".⁶² It is identified as a "Protean", "mobile critical and politico-cultural term" which reinvents itself across a number of world contexts; Mexican, Harlem, Chicago, Maori, Timurid, Buyid, Irish, Bengali, Tamil, Chinese, Ottoman, and Hebrew to name but a few.⁶³ Ultimately, even World Literature itself can be viewed as a kind of Renaissance if we take this definition into account: a "critique [of] the present, hark[ing] back to a lost past, [...] shap[ing] the present toward an ideal future".⁶⁴

Neither Porter, Zhou, Schildgen, Gilman, nor Ramachandran claim their studies are exhaustive, delivering for every voice and nation the impossible scale of World Literature often demands of its practitioners; they all issue a call for scholars more knowledgeable in other literatures of the world to come forward and contribute to worlded Renaissance scholarship. But their work is truly paradigmatic and demonstrative of how World Literature can gain from incorporating the temporally distant world and our multiple pasts in its study. World Literature and Comparative Literature both pride themselves on "identifying the shortcomings of other disciplines", "supplying what is excluded" when an apparent ellipsis is problematic. But this study

⁶¹ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter, (Harvard University Press: Cambridge: 1993), p. 75.

⁶² Gang Zhou, Brenda Deen Schildgen, and Sander L. Gilman, *'Other' Renaissances: A New Approach to World Literature*, (Palgrave Macmillan: New York: 2006), p. 9.

⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶⁴ *op.cit.*, Zhou, et. al., p. 4.

has detailed ways in which identifying a problem can contribute to reconsolidating it as opposed to challenging it. Challenging it requires the action of worlding and world-desire, a desire which both predates, and will continue long after Goethe. Though Kadir refers to “worlding desire”, somewhat dismissively, as a “fetish”, this study, conversely, lends its support to this fetish, one that both the aforementioned writers and scholars indulge in fully, and in doing so, challenge our assumptions about the world’s literature and history and the terms through which we interpret both. It is crucial that World Literature continues to challenge past periods such as the Renaissance, not by filling in the gaps of established scholarship, but by challenging the entire limited critical framework and practice which reduce the “Renaissance” and other periods to terms incompatible with World Literature’s ideology. If we envision literary periods and terms as houses, the works inside them as furniture, as Hayot does in the following analogy, the point then becomes not to add new furniture to the house or to rearrange its existing furniture, but

“to rearrange the house around the furniture, to produce the shock of estrangement and novelty within the framework of an internal habitation whose familiarity sustains its relevance and power.”⁶⁵

Thus, in this case, the only way to rearrange the house we call Renaissance rather than the works it is furnished with, is to world the house.

⁶⁵ op.cit., Hayot, p. 9.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- Allan**, Michael, *In the Shadow of World Literature: Sites of Reading in Colonial Egypt*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton: 2016).
- Andrews**, Walter G., **Kalpakli**, Mehmet, eds. *The Age of Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early-Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society*, (Duke University Press: Durham: 2005).
- Apter**, Emily, *Against World Literature*, (Verso: London: 2013).
- Apter**, Emily, **Bertacco**, Simona, "An Interview with Emily Apter", *The New Centennial Review*, Volume 16, Number 1, (Michigan State University Press: East Lansing: 2016), pp. 9-27.
- Apter**, Emily, "Global Translatio: The "Invention" of Comparative Literature, Istanbul, 1933", *Critical Inquiry*, Volume 29, No. 2 (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago: 2003), pp. 253-281.
- Apter**, Emily, "Philosophizing World Literature", *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 16:2, (Taylor & Francis: Oxford: 2012), pp. 171-186.
- Apter**, Emily, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton: 2006).
- Arac**, Jonathan, "Anglo-Globalism?", *New Left Review*, 16, July-August, (2002), pp. 37-45.
- Baine Campbell**, Mary, *Wonder and Science: Imagining Worlds in Early Modern Europe*, (Cornell University Press: Ithaca: 2004).
- Bassnett**, Susan, *Translation and World Literature*, (Routledge: Oxford: 2019).
- Bellos**, David, "Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability by Emily Apter" (Review), *Common Knowledge*, Volume 21, Issue 1, (Duke University Press: Durham: 2015), pp. 110-111.
- Berry**, Jerry, "Europeanization of the World or Globalization of Europe?", Peter Iver Kaufman, ed. *From the Renaissance to the Modern World: A Tribute to John M. Headley*, (MDPI: Basel: 2013), pp. 104-116.
- Brownlee**, Marina S., **Gondicas**, Dimitri H., *Renaissance Encounters: Greek East and Latin West*, (Brill: Leiden: 2012).
- Burke**, Peter, *Cultural Hybridity*, (Polity Press: Cambridge: 2009).
- Burke**, Peter, **Hsia**, R. Po-Chia, eds., *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe*, (CUP: Cambridge: 2007).
- Campbell**, Mary Baine, *Wonder and Science: Imagining Worlds in Early Modern Europe*, (Cornell University Press: Ithaca: 1999).
- Carey**, David, **Jowitt**, Clare, "Introduction: early modern travel writing: varieties, transitions, horizons", *Studies in Travel Writing*, Volume 13, Issue 2, (Taylor & Francis: Oxford: 2009), pp. 95-98.

Cohen, Walter, *A History of European Literature: The West and the World from Antiquity to the Present*, (OUP: Oxford: 2017).

Coldiron, A.E.B., *Printers without Borders: Translation and Textuality in the Renaissance*, (CUP: Cambridge: 2015).

Damrosch, David, "Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability by Emily Apter" (Review), *Comparative Literature Studies*, Volume 51, No. 3 (Penn State University Press: Pennsylvania: 2014), pp. 504-508.

Damrosch, David, *How to Read World Literature*, (Wiley Blackwell: Hoboken: 2008).

Damrosch, David, ed., *World Literature in Theory*, (John Wiley & Sons Ltd.: Hoboken: 2014).

Damrosch, David, *What is World Literature?*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton: 2003).

Deen Schildgen, Brenda, **Gang**, Zhou, **Gilman**, Sander L., eds. *Other Renaissances: A New Approach to World Literature*, (Palgrave Macmillan: London: 2006).

D'haen, Theo, ed. *The Routledge Concise History of World Literature*, (Routledge: New York: 2012).

Goodman, Nelson, *Ways of Worldmaking*, (Hackett Publishing Company: Indianapolis: 1978).

Guha, Sumit, "Introduction: Literary Cultures at the Frontiers: Literature and Identity in the Early Modern World", *The Medieval History Journal*, 14 (2), (SAGE: London: 2011), pp. 151-157.

Hamilton, John T., "Ellipses of World Literature", *Poetica*, Volume 46, No. 1/2, (Brill: Leiden: 2014) pp. 1-16.

Hayot, Eric, *On Literary Worlds*, (OUP: Oxford: 2012).

Holton, David, ed. *Literature and Society in Renaissance Crete*, (CUP: Cambridge: 1991).

Küpper, Joachim, **Hijiyou-Kirschner**, Irmela, **Keppeler-Tasaki**, Stefan, eds., *Approaches to World Literature*, (De Gruyter: Berlin: 2013).

Kadir, Djelal, "To World, to Globalize—Comparative Literature's Crossroads", *Comparative Literature Studies: "Globalization and World Literature"*, Volume 41, No. 1, (Penn State University Press: Pennsylvania: 2004), pp. 1-9.

Larsen, Svend Erik, "Walter Cohen, *A History of European Literature: The West and the World from Antiquity to the Present*, A European Roundtrip to World Literature" (Review), *Comparative Critical Studies*, Volume 16, Issue 1, (MHRA on behalf of the British Comparative Literature Association: London: 2019).

Latour, Bruno, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter, (Harvard University Press: Cambridge: 1993).

Lawall, Sarah, ed. *Reading World Literature: Theory, History, Practice*, (University of Texas Press: Austin: 1994).

Mani, B. Venkat, *Recoding World Literature: Libraries, Print Culture, and Germany's Pact with Books*, (Fordham University Press: New York: 2016).

Morretti, "Conjectures on World Literature", *NLR*, 1, January-February, (2000), pp. 54-68.

- Morretti**, Franco, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History*, (Verso Books: London: 2005).
- Morretti**, Franco, "More Conjectures", *NLR*, 20, March-April, (2003), pp. 73-81.
- Nünning**, Vera N, **Nünning**, Ansgar, **Neumann**, Birgit, eds., **Horn**, Mirjam, *Cultural Ways of Worldmaking: Media and Narratives*, (De Gruyter: Berlin: 2011).
- Piechocki**, Katharina N., *Cartographic Humanism: The Making of Early Modern Europe*, (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago: 2019).
- Podruchny**, Carolyn, **Warkentin**, Germaine, eds. *Decentering the Renaissance: Canada and Europe in Multidisciplinary Perspective 1500-1700*, (University of Toronto Press: Toronto: 2001).
- Porter**, David, *Comparative Early Modernities: 1100-1800*, (Palgrave Macmillan: New York: 2012).
- Ramachandran**, Ayesha, *The Worldmakers*, (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago: 2015).
- Ruggiero**, Guido, ed. *A Companion to the Worlds of the Renaissance*, Second Edition, (Blackwell Publishing Ltd.: Oxford: 2007).
- Schmidt**, Benjamin, *Inventing Exoticism: Geography, Globalism, and Europe's Early Modern World*, (University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia: 2019).
- Shields**, Kathleen, "Challenges and Possibilities for World Literature, Global Literature, and Translation", *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, Vol. 15, Issue 7, (Purdue University Press: West Lafayette: 2013).
- Singh**, Jyotsna G., *A Companion to the Global Renaissance: English Literature and Culture in the Era of Expansion*, (John Wiley & Sons: Hoboken: 2009).
- Stavropoulou**, Sotiria, ed. *Πανουργίαι υψηλόταται του Μπερτόλδου*, Παλαιότερα Κείμενα της Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας 11, (Ινστιτούτο Νεοελληνικών Σπουδών, Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki Press: 2018).
- Tanoukhi**, Nirvana, "The Scale of World Literature", *New Literary History: "Literary History in the Global Age"*, Volume 39, No. 3, (The Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore: 2008), pp. 599-617.
- Wallerstein**, Immanuel, *World-Systems Analysis : An Introduction*, (Duke University Press: Durham: 2004).
- Ziolkowski**, Jan M., "Incomparable: The Destiny of Comparative Literature, Globalization or Not", *The Global South: "Globalization and the Future of Comparative Literature"* , Vol. 1, No. 2, (Indiana University Press: Bloomington: 2007), pp. 16-44.