

Gatekeepers: The Emergence of World Literature and the 1960s. William Marling. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. ISBN: 9780190274146. 232 pp.

Yao Mengze (Beijing Normal University)

Over the past nearly twenty years, scholars such as Pascale Casanova, David Damrosch, Franco Moretti and John Pizer have devoted their scholarly attention to the discussion of world literature with conceptual, theoretical, historical, practical and pedagogical approaches, and consequently, made world literature a major topic of debate for literary scholarship. Such an academic phenomenon may cause people to ask themselves why world literature was never this popular before, after all, Goethe had already coined the term *Weltliteratur* back in 1827. In other words, what elements contributed to its reemergence? William Marling's new book, *Gatekeepers: The Emergence of World Literature and the 1960s*, is one key contributor in shedding some light on this very same issue.

As a former award-winning journalist and an active scholar in American letters who has had much experience in conducting research abroad in Spain, Austria, France and Japan, William Marling points out that world literature is not only a literary invention, but rather the result of a collaborative effort. Basing his analysis on Pierre Bourdieu's literary-sociological notion of *field*, Randall Collins' notion of *interaction rituals*, and David Damrosch's notion of *world literature*, Marling utilizes the term "gatekeepers," by which he means "agents," including "scouts and literary entrepreneurs"(2) who "have acquired the cultural resources to be aware of the literary artifact's possibilities beyond its home field."(5) Furthermore, Marling argues that the appearance of this figure contrastingly differs from "the older, romantic notion of authorship, of isolating genius," pointing out that "success in World Literature is about gatekeeping." (1)

In the book's introduction and conclusion, and in its main four chapters, Marling analyzes the cases of several such gatekeepers in relation to the work of four writers: Gabriel García Márquez, Charles Bukowski, Paul Auster, and Haruki Murakami. In Chapter One, "Gabriel García Márquez: Gatekeepers and *Prise de Position*," Marling draws from Bourdieu's reading of Flaubert's *A Sentimental Education* as well as the concept of *Prise de Position* in order to examine Márquez's success in the field of world literature. Marling argues that as a Columbian journalist and film reviewer constantly wrestling with an autocratic government, Márquez developed a literary style that highlighted both local color and political connotations. However, through various gatekeepers, such as "the first reader," "the salon," "the

leader writer or patron,” “the agent,” “the hegemony government,” “the translator” and “the reviewers,” Márquez’s work was de-politicized in the shape of a modern biblical history of “the family of man,” before going on to be regarded as a grand-master of the literary genre which came to be known as “Magical Realism.”

In Chapter Two, “Charles Bukowski and the Entrepreneurs of World Literature,” Marling shows how the German-born American author Charles Bukowski’s writing about the lower classes, women, sex, alcohol, and the drudgery of everyday life dovetailed with the needs of the left-leaning political landscape of the 1960s. Bukowski’s work was published by John Charles Bryan, who ran an ad newspaper and let Bukowski “[propose] a weekly column to be called ‘Notes of a Dirty Old Man’”(49) which made his name “[reach] a large public”(49-50) and allowed him to be noticed by the adult literature publisher Essex House. After that, Bukowski was “discovered” (10) by patron and literary entrepreneur John Martin, a book collector who encountered Bukowski’s works in a magazine and sought more poems from him. Furthermore, another literary entrepreneur, as well as translator, Carl Weissner, who was running an avant-garde magazine in Germany between 1965-1969, noticed Bukowski in 1968, and eventually translated twenty-eight of Bukowski’s works. This brought his name to attention abroad, first in Germany and then in France, where Bukowski gave a reading tour later and sparked a literary fever around him. In this chapter, Marling also discusses the role played by Bukowski’s page on Wikipedia in both its German and France versions, since “there is no doubt that Wikipedia is a gatekeeper in the electronic age.” (67)

In contrast to the first two authors, the next two belong to a younger generation and they received a better formal education during the 1960s. In Chapter Three, “Paul Auster: ‘Bootstrapping’ and Foreign ‘Exile,’” Marling describes how as a graduate student in Comparative Literature, Auster established his first reputation as “a gifted, sensitive, learned translator of contemporary French literature, especially poetry” (99-100) in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when French literature and theory received prominent critical attention in America. His literary writing “would go on to make small waves” but not yet at the level of “the phenomenon he would [later] become.” (100) That did not happen until the French publisher Actes Sud, ran by the couple Hubert Nyssen and Christine Le Bœuf, translated him. Nyssen was raised within the counterculture of the 1960s, and was eager to introduce modern foreign literature to France. Meanwhile, Le Bœuf was a translator who felt an instant connection with Auster’s works. Their translation and publishing of his work opened the gates for Auster’s reputation to grow in France during the late 1980s, and at last led to what Marling terms “Refracted Reputation,” (100) as a celebrity, a price win-

ner, and a modern world literature author from America.

In Chapter Four, “Haruki Murakami: The Prizes, Process, and Production of World Literature,” Marling goes on to examine how world literature is entangled with the act of translation, prizes and literary production. Just like Auster, Murakami also attended university in the 1960s and is familiar with contemporary Western culture. He earned his early recognition through not only translating but also through befriending contemporary American authors, such as Raymond Carver and John Irving. Along with this type of cultural capital, Murakami included in his writings abundant references to, and quotations from, American literature and Western culture. Blessed with great timing, such writing coincided with the Japanese financial boom of the 1970s and 1980s, when not only companies invested their excess financial capital into the literary prize system, which also played a major role in the process of Murakami’s ascension to fame in Japan. It also coincided with “the Japanese government’s policy of the 1980s known as *kokusaika* internationalization” which provided his novels with a great environment in which to enter into global circulation, because in Marling’s understanding, Murakami’s body of work actually “‘Japanizes’ American culture” and “even resells this Asianized version of Western popular culture to China and Korea, where his novels are successful.” (124)

At the end of each chapter, Marling adds a “Coda,” in which he discusses a case that is somewhat similar to that of the author discussed in each chapter. For Márquez, he gives the counter example of Rigoberta Menchú, a Latin American author discussed in Damrosch’s work. For Bukowski, there is Diane di Prima, who published works on the theme of sex in the 1960s. For Auster, the case is that of Lydia Davis, the first wife of Auster, and the person who “shared the same experiences, met the same people, and worked together at translating and in small presses” (112) with him. Lastly, for Murakami, the counter example is Banana Yoshimoto, who is well-known in Japan and whose works have been translated into several languages. In these Codas, Marling tries to analyze why they have not been more successful in the realm of world literature, and in doing so underscores the important function of the gatekeeping process in the creation of world literature canons.

This book shares some similarities with Pascale Casanova’s work. However, in contrast to hers, Marling’s study gives us a more contemporary and material view of the making of world literature, and a clear depiction of how the institutionalization of scholarship and the monopolization of publishing has impacted world literature during the last half century. While Casanova gives us an aesthetic and political analysis of the Paris-oriented world literature, Marling points out in the “Conclusion” that “World Literature from the 1960s onward begins to align itself with” (11) those

gatekeepers, and in its last stages, makes itself Anglophone. Moreover, Marling has astute insights into analyzing how gatekeeping that is external to the texts is, nonetheless, actively participating in the process of literary invention, as his four cases illustrate. We should notice that this type of analysis had been announced by Casanova in her studies regarding “the World Republic of Letters,” but I doubt she has yet fulfilled it.

There are perhaps two main interrelated flaws in this book. The first one is the problem of the name and nature of the subject matter. The title of this book hints at the critical importance of the 1960s in relation to world literature. However, the four cases studied show that the emergence of world literature encompasses a “gatekeeping process from 1960-2010.” (9) That is to say, it is not an event rooted exclusively in that decade. This is shown clearly in the chapters dedicated to Auster and Murakami, where the element of the 1960s exists only in the authors’ college experiences. The second flaw, I suppose, is that the argument of this book falls short due to a lack of analysis of the conditions of world literature before the 1960s. After all, we should notice that there was already an economic and marketing dimension in Goethe’s and even Marx’s understandings of *Weltliteratur*. This omission indicates that Marling’s 1960s were perhaps only an updated case of the dynamics in Goethe’s or Marx’s era. Furthermore, if we would like to talk about the “emergence” of world literature, the translations of world literature in Asian countries such as China and Japan that started in the late 19th century or even earlier should not be overlooked. As such, Marling offers the reader a thorough explanation of an America-centric vision of the 1960s as a gate to world literature, instead of dedicating some of his attention toward early 19th century Western Europe or late 19th and early 20th century East Asia and their relation to the formation of contemporary world literature.

Author Profile:

Yao Mengze is a PhD candidate of the School of Chinese Language and Literature, Beijing Normal University. He majors in Comparative Literature and World Literature. His research interests include world literature studies, as well as modern Chinese intellectual and academic history under comparative frameworks.