

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

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World Literature, as it enters the US market at the university classroom, is usually defined by its recognizable big names, the ones who win prizes and dominate best-seller lists. But behind these names are the unseen forces of the literary marketplace, the typically anonymous agents who make it possible for a writer from a distant country who works in a foreign language to become a success in the publishing houses of New York. These are the heroes of William Marling's *Gatekeepers*. This is not a book to turn to for new readings of the novels themselves, since that is not the aim of this study. To be sure, there are already shelves of books devoted to analyzing the novels of Marling's central authors: Gabriel García Márquez, Charles Bukowski, Paul Auster, and Haruki Murakami. What's less often done, however, and what's desperately needed in the field of literary studies is the careful work of reconstructing a text's path from the writer to readers around the globe. This is the rare gift that *Gatekeepers* offers. Marling chooses a small group of writers and engages in a meticulous accounting of the literary worlds each inhabits and the multiple actors leading to their success on the World Literature stage. This work makes use of biographical study, tracking the older writers and literary influences that touched each writer. But *Gatekeepers'* most meaningful contribution is its examination of literary agents, translators, publishing houses and reviewers—all of the literary tastemakers who allow some books to become "World Literature" and others not.

Marling's work is an important addition to the ongoing conversation about World Literature, especially Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters*, which *Gatekeepers* engages explicitly. Rather than a "republic," Marling's book sets out to "discuss World Literature as the sociology of a *field* of opportunities, on which the conversation is partly bracketed by historic events and technological opportunities" (165). This language makes clear Marling's debt to Pierre Bourdieu; throughout, he draws on Bourdieu's terminology (mostly from *The Rules of Art*) to connect the important agents and institutions that lie beneath such disparate literary landscapes as Colombia, France, the US, and Japan. This methodology works as an updated version of the "sociology of literature," an approach which Marling rightly argues is lacking in contemporary studies. His own Bourdieu-inspired framework allows *Gatekeepers* to arrive at some far-reaching conclusions beyond the particulars of these writers and their original contexts. For example, he analyzes the relationship between Carlos Fuentes and García Márquez as that of an archetypal "older writer," even though, as Marling notes, Fuentes was only one year older (21-22). Instead, what interests Marling is the function of the "older

writer” in providing access to networks of financial and cultural capital, and he quickly leaves behind the particulars of these two authors to theorize the behavioral economics of the transaction and how such apparent altruism on the part of Fuentes might help us to understand other relationships between writers. Although much of Marling’s work is based in biographical criticism, he goes on to suggest a more universal literary structure and to identify one of the many surprising forms of “gatekeeping.”

Indeed, a particular strength of the book is its study of García Marquez. Marling revisits the early years of his biography and traces how he made his way from the bohemian contexts of Colombia and Mexico to the heights of anglophone World Literature. Along the way, Marling’s methodology provides for some fascinating insights into the ways in which these famous texts found their audience. He especially attends to the oft-neglected role of the literary agent, examining the important role played by Spanish agent Carmen Balcells in advancing García Marquez’s work and promoting him not only in the hispanophone world but in foreign markets as well. Because of these efforts on behalf of García Marquez and numerous Latin American writers, Marling argues convincingly that she is the single gatekeeper who “most changed modern World Literature” (25). The chapter delves at great depth into the issue of foreign publishing rights, precisely the kind of bureaucratic subject matter which most books of literary criticism avoid but which here proves to be truly revelatory. By recounting Balcells’s creative use of legal loopholes to acquire the rights for foreign authors and the various ways that she applied these lessons to protect her own clients, Marling offers an important new way of historicizing the Latin American Boom as partly the result of a literary “contract revolution” that incentivized translation (26). Throughout, he brings the behind-the-scenes work of literary production to center stage in a way that provokes new understandings of familiar authors.

One of the book’s other important contributions is its thoughtful analysis of translation. Marling devotes space to particular translators, such as Gregory Rabassa or Carl Weissner (Bukowski’s German translator), and offers close comparative analyses to illustrate various translation strategies. What’s more, *Gatekeepers* deftly locates this conversation about translation studies within the framework of World Literature by studying the writers as global readers themselves. Noting Auster’s work as a translator of French and Murakami’s translation of US literature, Marling traces a wonderfully intricate network of cultural transmission. Indeed, by tracking Murakami’s longstanding relationship with US letters, he reveals why the Japanese author has found such a warm reception among US readers and reviewers, and why Susan Sontag might write that Murakami’s voice “seems so familiar” (cited in Marling 132).

But Marling also attends to the cultural and political changes that come from translating a novel from one language to another. For instance, he recounts how a Barcelona publisher and the government of Spain worked to promote *Cien años de soledad* throughout the Spanish-speaking world, whereupon Marling points out that the novel's "first step into the nascent genre of 'World Literature' was as a same-language, second country export" (30). This is an important exception to the dominant critical discussions of World Literature, which focus almost exclusively on anglophone reading publics. Of course, the work of García Marquez did eventually reach English-language readers, and Marling recounts the important role played by translators (such as Rabassa) along with the depoliticizing of his fiction for this audience. While it is well established that an emphasis on the "mythic" qualities of García Marquez's novels abstracts them from the contemporary political landscape of Colombia and renders them more accessible to foreign audiences, Marling's contribution is to examine how this marketing actually happens.

The status of politics in World Literature is a question always just below the surface for Marling. He offers the 1960s as a turning point in the formation of World Literature, but the authors he analyzes are remarkably disconnected from that decade's turbulence. We learn, for instance, that "Bukowski didn't care about race or war" (49) and that both Auster and Murakami found a "post-political way of moving forward" (80). Marling makes these observations matter-of-factly, but the implication is that the World Literature industry demands that politics be stripped away from potentially provocative texts (such as those of García Marquez) and that writers like Bukowski, Auster, and Murakami will be rewarded by the gatekeepers and promoted to a wider audience.

An interesting feature of *Gatekeepers* is the "coda" Marling offers at the end of each chapter. Here he pairs his four male authors with a brief discussion of how gatekeeping has functioned in the case of a complementary female writer: Rigoberta Menchú for García Marquez; Diane di Prima for Bukowski; Lydia Davis for Auster; and Banana Yoshimoto for Murakami. Each of these codas makes an interesting point on its own, but taken together they highlight a curious silence on the gender dynamics of gatekeeping. Marling attempts to clarify this point: "I might seem to be suggesting that women authors may not have reached the main stage of World Literature as often as men because of structural problems in the gatekeeping system." Indeed, this does seem the suggestion, given the book's focus on four male authors, and these issues do warrant further study. "But that's not the point at all," Marling insists. Rather, "gatekeeping itself is an opportunity structure, from which artists profit in the ways that they can" (142). This answer feels particularly unsatisfying, especially given the remarkably nuanced analysis of cultural institutions elsewhere in the book.

Aside from its analysis of any particular author, *Gatekeepers* proves an indispensable read for anyone concerned with World Literature. Moreover, for its penetrating examination of literary production and reception, Marling's work joins other important studies, like Mark McGurl's *The Program Era* and James English's *The Economy of Prestige*. It is therefore of further interest to scholars in other fields who are mindful of these cultural forces. *Gatekeepers* overturns assumptions about the current state of World Literature and is a vital addition to the field.