

**PHILIP LEONARD: *Orbital Poetics. Literature, Theory, World***

London – New York – Oxford – New Delhi – Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2019. viii + 204 pp.  
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Space exploration, driven by the rapid advancement in technology in the past century, is generally regarded as one of the greatest achievements of mankind. Significantly, space technology has also brought the images of the Earth from space and thus strongly changed the way we look at our planet. In his new monograph, Philip Leonard, professor of literature and theory at Nottingham Trent University, explores conceptions of the world from the orbital perspective. He focuses on the relationship between orbit and writing. Literature, both imaginative and philosophical, not only discusses space travel and the circumnavigation of the Earth, but, what is Leonard's primary concern, it also offers a space which makes them possible. It creates the orbital perspective of the world even before the modern technology in the form of satellite images.

As we well know, the human conception of the world has undergone a tremendous change in the course of millennia. Leonard starts his exploration with the speculations of ancient Greek philosophers and claims that satellite photography confirmed their vision of the shape of the Earth. However, more importantly, it is the philosophical significance of these satellite images that concerns him. For Heidegger, he says, they provide “visual evidence of a humanity that is no longer thinking about what it is but is instead captivated by the impression that it has conquered space” (18). He disputes Heidegger's claim that satellites function exclusively as tools of remote tyrannical governance and tries to offer an alternative conceptualization of the world observed from space. He argues that the images from space and related imaginary imply something different, i.e. that “the world cannot

be contained as an entity that occupies in its own space” (24).

Leonard sees a significant moment in the transformation of the conceptualizations of the world in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Echoing Erich Auerbach, he asserts that in this work, “the world comes into view for the first time” (47); as seen from above, as if through God's eyes. Leonard is able to find a link between Dante's narrative poem and Thomas Bergin's poem “For a Space Prober”, the first piece of poetry launched into orbit in 1961. In it, Bergin, himself a translator of *The Divine Comedy* into English, reproduces Dante's idea of humanity rising above its earthly home. Poetry launched into orbit represents for Leonard world literature because it literally, i.e. as an artifact, leaves the geographical and cultural space of its origin.

In the seven chapters of the book, Leonard discusses various topics related to the orbital perspective of the world: electronic literature and its association with satellites, calculable order and the current debates on the system of world literature (Moretti), orbit as a place of disaster, etc. It is a challenging reading because he pursues the discussion in dialogue with many important thinkers of the 20th century such as Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy and Peter Sloterdijk, just to mention a few. This is also the reason why it is difficult to adequately summarize and evaluate the rich array of ideas and material he examines.

Leonard refers to Edward Said's questioning the universality of Western European humanism and historicism (43), but he does not subject his own vision of the world to it. His is a world of Western European intellectualism. The way he construes history and humanity is Eurocentric, and non-Eu-

ropean conceptualizations of the world and their contribution to mankind do not figure in it. The stream of knowledge flows from the ancient Greeks to modern Western Europe. This issue is particularly significant because the blurb of the book opens with the following set of questions: “What do we do when we talk of ‘world literature’? What does a global, even a planetary view reveal to us about literature, culture and being?” In my opinion, if we do not move intellectually beyond the confines of the perimeter of Western culture, we have still not stood up to the challenge of the orbital perspective of the world. We are just likely to reproduce the vision of our territorial space and our hegemonic ambitions in the orbital gaze. Leonard himself notes that the terrestrial perspective is incomplete and contaminated, and almost apologetically adds that “it must be carried into orbit if the world is to be seen at all” (157). I believe that in the post-Saidian world the impossibility of achieving completeness should not prevent

us from taking up the intellectual responsibility of widening our scope and looking beyond Europe when we talk about the world. As a matter of fact, Leonard does mention some non-Western writers. He discusses the works of Haruki Murakami, who managed to succeed on the global English book market, and Vandana Singh, who writes in English. However, their works are arguably examples of writing which throws the cloak of Western sensibilities over their native cultures.

Despite my above-mentioned reservation, I think that Leonard’s *Orbital poetics* is a fascinating book. It definitely does what a good academic book should do: it opens new horizons and provokes thinking. His erudite and philosophical exposition of the interplay between literature and orbit is an ingenious contribution to the debate on literature from the “global” perspective.

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**ANDREA RIZZI – BIRGIT LANG – ANTHONY PYM: What is Translation History?  
A Trust-Based Approach**

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The reviewed publication was written in collaboration between a historian of the Italian Renaissance (Andrea Rizzi), a cultural historian specializing in Germany and Austria (Birgit Lang), and a translation scholar/historian (Anthony Pym). Since the authors take pains to communicate their respective disciplinary positionality and consider this factor important in their program for an interdisciplinary translation history, it is of note to mention it. The book was published as the first and programmatic publication of the new Palgrave Macmillan series called Translation History, launched in 2019, whose aims are in line with the approach discussed in the book itself: “This new series is the first to take a global and interdisciplinary view of translation and translators across time, place,

and cultures. [...] Translation History aims to become an essential forum for scholars, graduate students, and general readers who are interested in or work on the history and practice of translation and its cultural agents (translators, interpreters, publishers, editors, artists, cultural institutions, governments).” (See more at <https://www.palgrave.com/gp/series/15957>)

The book synthesizes newer interdisciplinary approaches to translation history research which since the 1990s have displayed a tendency toward using sociological concepts and methodologies (most notably in Pym’s 1998 *Method in Translation History*) and since the early 2000s shown ever greater conceptual and methodological affinities to historiography (as seen in the 2006