A Companion to
The Global Renaissance
English Literature and Culture
in the Era of Expansion
Edited by Jyotsna G. Singh
A Companion to the Global Renaissance
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Notes on Contributors

John Michael Archer is Professor of English at New York University. He received his BA and MA from the University of Toronto in 1982 and 1983, and his PhD from Princeton University in 1988. He has taught courses in Early Modern English Literature and Culture, Renaissance Drama, and Literary and Cultural Theory at Columbia University, the University of British Columbia, and the University of New Hampshire, as well as at NYU. Archer’s first book, Sovereignty and Intelligence: Spying and Court Culture in the English Renaissance (Stanford University Press, 1993), discusses the portrayal of political surveillance in the works of Montaigne, Marlowe, Bacon, and other authors. Old Worlds: Egypt, Southwest Asia, India, and Russia in Early Modern English Writing (Stanford University Press, 2001) extends his interest in knowledge-gathering to the later seventeenth century, by analyzing European travel writings along with literary works by Shakespeare, Milton, and Dryden. In addition, he has co-edited an anthology of critical essays entitled Enclosure Acts (1994), on depictions of sexuality and property during the period. His most recent book is entitled Citizen Shakespeare: Freemen and Aliens in the Language of the Plays (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). It combines recent historiography with the close reading of playtexts to show how the London citizen and the immigrant city-dweller figure in the action and verbal texture of Shakespeare’s drama.

Richmond Barbour is Professor of English at Oregon State University. He is the author of Before Orientalism. London’s Theatre of the East, 1576–1626 (Cambridge University Press, 2003) and several essays published in PMLA, JEGP, Criticism, Clio, and the Huntington Library Quarterly. His current research involves early modern London’s theatrical and maritime industries, giving particular attention to the first generation of the East India Company and the emergence of corporate power. He has produced a scholarly edition of the unpublished papers of the company’s third voyage (1607–10), England’s first to reach India entitled, The Third Voyage Journals: Writing and Performance in the London East India Company, 1607–10 (Palgrave, 2009).
Crystal Bartolovich is an Associate Professor of Early Modern Literature and Culture at Syracuse University. She has published in a wide range of edited collections and in diverse venues such as Cultural Critique, Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies, Interventions, Renaissance Drama, and New Formations. She also co-edits the electronic journal Early Modern Culture. Her current research project—of which this essay is a part—concerns the history, theory, practice, and figuration of “the common(s).”

Nandini Das is lecturer in Renaissance Literature at the School of English, University of Liverpool. She studied at the Universities of Jadavpur (India) and Oxford (Rhodes Scholar) and was awarded her PhD from the University of Cambridge. She specializes in Renaissance prose fiction and early travel writing and is currently working on a project that explores the many versions of Renaissance travel, from European educational trips to exotic Eastern voyages. Other research interests include Elizabethan romance (texts and performance), women’s pseudo-autobiographies from the sixteenth to the early eighteenth century and the development of early eighteenth-century Orientalism. She has published essays both on Renaissance romance and travel, and her edition of Robert Greene’s Planetomachia (1585), a complex combination of humanist astronomical discourse and sensational Italianate tales, was published in 2007 (Ashgate) and has been nominated for the MLA Distinguished Edition prize.

Stephen Deng is an Assistant Professor of English at Michigan State University. He has edited with Barbara Sebek a book collection of essays entitled Global Traffic: Discourses and Practices of Trade in English Literature and Culture from 1550–1700 (Palgrave, 2008). His essay “‘Global Oeconomy’: Ben Jonson’s The Staple of News and the Ethics of Mercantilism” is included in the collection. He also has an essay on money and mystical kingship in Macbeth: New Critical Essays (Routledge, 2008). He is currently completing a book manuscript on the uses and representations of money and coinage in relation to early modern English state formation and is beginning a second project on cultural impacts of early modern business technologies such as accounting practices, the adoption of the concept of zero, and the development of insurance and credit.

Matthew Dimmock is Senior Lecturer in English Literature and Co-Director of the Centre for Early Modern Studies at the University of Sussex. After completing his PhD at Royal Holloway, University of London, he was Visiting Scholar at the University of Leiden and the Centre for Editing Lives and Letters at Queen Mary, University of London, before arriving at Sussex in 2003. His work has focused on cultural interaction and notions of “otherness” in the early modern period, with particular emphasis upon Christian perceptions of Islam and the Ottomans. His publications include New Turkes: Dramatizing Islam and the Ottomans in Early Modern England (Ashgate, 2005) and William Percy’s Mahomet and His Heaven: A Critical Edition (Ashgate, 2006). He is co-editor (with Matthew Birchwood) of Cultural Encounters
Between East and West, 1453–1699 (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2005) and (with Andrew Hadfield) of The Religions of the Book: Christian Perceptions, 1400–1660 (Palgrave, 2008). He is currently completing a monograph considering early modern English constructions of the Prophet Muhammad, titled Fabricating Muhammad: English Imaginings, 1400–1750, and is working towards a project that will consider wider aspects of “otherness” in this period, provisionally titled The Company of Strangers: Articulating Difference in Early Modern England.

Mary C. Fuller is Associate Professor of Literature at MIT, with interests in travel writing, memory, and the history of the book. Her research focuses on the printed records of English travel, exploration, colonization, and trade in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. She has published numerous articles and chapters on accounts of English contacts with Guiana, Virginia, Newfoundland, West Africa, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire, as well as on the records of early English circumnavigations. Her publications also include two monographs – Voyages in Print: English Travel to America 1576–1624 (Cambridge University Press, 1995), and Remembering the Early Modern Voyage: English Narratives in the Age of European Expansion (Palgrave, 2008). Currently, she is at work on a study of Richard Hakluyt’s Principal Navigations (1598–1600), and looks forward to visiting Greenland (for the second time) in 2009.

Andrew Hadfield is Professor of English at the University of Sussex. He is the author of a number of works on Renaissance literature and culture, including Spenser’s Irish Experience: Wilde Fruyt and Salvage Soyl (Oxford University Press, 1997), Literature, Travel and Colonial Writing in the English Renaissance, 1540–1625 (Oxford University Press, 1998, paperback, 2007), and Shakespeare and Republicanism (Cambridge University Press, 2005, paperback, 2008), which was awarded the 2006 Sixteenth-Century Society Conference Roland H. Bainton Prize for Literature. He is also the editor of Amazons, Savages and Machiavels: An Anthology of Travel and Colonial Writing, 1550–1650 (Oxford University Press, 2001), and, with Raymond Gillespie, The Oxford History of the Irish Book, Vol. III: The Irish Book in English, 1550–1800 (Oxford University Press, 2006). He is the editor of Renaissance Studies.

Dr Chloé Houston is a Lecturer in the School of English and American Literature at the University of Reading. Her research interests concentrate on early modern literature and intellectual history, and in particular utopian literature and travel writing. She is the editor of the forthcoming collection of essays on representations of utopias and new worlds from 1500 to 1800, New Worlds Reflected: Travel and Utopia in the Early Modern Period, to be published by Ashgate in 2009. Recent publications include articles in The Seventeenth Century, Literature Compass, and Utopian Studies.

Jean E. Howard is George Delacorte Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University where she is also Chair of the English Department. Her books include Shakespeare's Art of Orchestration: Stage Technique and Audience Response (University of


**David Morrow** is an Assistant Professor of English at the College of St. Rose. His scholarship has been largely concerned with early modern social struggle, within the context of capitalism and from the perspectives of ideology and form. His essay on Thomas Deloney was published in *Textual Practice* in 2006; another on early seventeenth-century monopolistic merchants appeared in *Global Traffic* (Palgrave, 2008), edited by Barbara Sebek and Stephen Deng. Morrow works to promote small-scale food production and local (as against global) food networks. He is a member of a farming collective near Albany, New York.

**Patricia Parker** is Margery Bailey Professor in English and Comparative Literature at Stanford University, author of *Inescapable Romance* (Princeton University Press,


**Ian Smith** is an Associate Professor of English at Lafayette College and has published on early modern drama as well as postcolonial literature; his work has appeared in
Shakespeare Quarterly, Renaissance Drama, Shakespeare Studies, and Callaloo. He is currently preparing a book on early modern English blackface theater.

Edward M. Test is an Assistant Professor of English at Boise State University. His current scholarship explores the material and mythic influences of New World culture on English Renaissance literature. He is author of the book chapter “The Tempest and the Newfoundland Cod Fishery,” published in the collection Global Traffic: Discourses and Practices of Trade in English Literature and Culture from 1550 to 1700 (ed. Barbara Sebek and Stephen Deng, Palgrave, 2008). In addition to academic pursuits, he is also a writer and translator of poetry. He has translated poems by the Chilean poet, Raúl Zurita, Cuban poet Orlando González Esteva, and Spanish poet Luis Alberto de Cuenca Poetry. He has published poetry in literary journals such as Parque Nandino (Mexico), Poetry London (UK), Poetry Wales (UK), Quadrant (Australia), Utne Reader (USA), and Southern Poetry Review (USA). A book of his poetry, Fata Morgana, was published in a bilingual edition with El Tucan de Virginia (Mexico, 2004).


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Figure 6.1, Chapter 6: *Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings* by Bichitr; India, Mughal period, c.1615–18; opaque watercolor, gold, and ink on paper. Reproduced by permission of Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC: Purchase, F1942.15a.

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Figure 14.1, Chapter 14: Mexican Sacrifice based on José de Acosta’s descriptions. Theodore De Bry, *Americae, Pars Dvodecima* (Frankfurt, 1624); © Huntington Library.

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Introduction: The Global Renaissance

Jyotsna G. Singh

I Globes

Queen Elizabeth claims the world in the allegorical Armada portrait on the cover of this book. Her right hand rests on a globe, her fingers “covering the Americas, indicating England’s dominion of the seas and plans for imperialist expansion of the New World.”¹ Dated c.1588, this painting commemorates the defeat of the Armada, part of an “outpouring of the eulogistic material” that marked this event, but the date of the portrait has also been anecdotally linked to the birth of the first English child in the Virginia colony.² The viewer’s gaze is particularly drawn to the terrestrial globe under her hand – seemingly innocuous in terms of its dimensions – but a familiar object of the period, represented in print and paintings, and that functioned as a “socially affective object” signaling a “transitional moment in the history of modernity” (Brotton 1999, 72). History and geography intersect in the allegorical image of the globe, marking recognizable territorial boundaries of the new world, while observing a triumphant moment in Elizabeth’s reign in which England defeats Spain, a Catholic power and its rival, with one instance of its rivalry being the colonization of the Americas. Here, it is apparent that placed in the luxurious setting of this painting, the globe would appeal to the emotions and imagination of the viewers, while signaling the development of an emergent geography in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. Showing the ways in which the terrestrial globe figured in promoting “an affective global awareness,” Brotton explains its history as follows:

By the end of the first decade of the sixteenth century, geographers and diplomats began to question the effectiveness of the flat, rectangular map for encompassing the growing dimensions of the terrestrial world. In 1512 the Nuremberg scholar Johannes Cochlaeus reflected a sense

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that classical geographical perceptions were no longer adequate in describing and representing the proliferation and expansion of newly discovered territories . . . [One] response of a range of geographers and cosmographers was to intensify their interest in projecting the earth’s surface on a sphere, rather than on a plane surface. (1999, 78)

Interestingly, however, these terrestrial globes not only figured in the development of global geography in early modern Europe, but were also ideologically deployed by rulers in drawing their claims to territorial possessions in newly discovered, distant territories, and generally invested with geographical and political power by men of authority and knowledge at the time. Not surprisingly, then, images of terrestrial globes proliferate in Renaissance cultural artifacts, as symbols and markers of a new global consciousness, evident in Holbein’s famous portrait of the Ambassadors, which depicts French claims to Brazil, in Francis Drake’s coat of arms on which a sailing ship sits atop a globe, in Queen Elizabeth’s Armada portrait mentioned earlier, and in the Ditchley portrait by Marcus Gheeraerts the younger which depicts the Queen standing on a map of England on a globe, among numerous others. A preoccupation with the image of the globe vividly evokes an awareness of an expanding world, which Europeans began to recognize through their experiences of travel, exploration, discovery, commerce, and competitive conquest and colonization of new lands.

As the terrestrial globes symbolized growing territorial power, they were also reminders that European nations – despite their bitter religious and political schisms and rivalries – shared a proximity of history and geography, even as they were often rivals in the commerce and conquest. But did they realize that some powerful, non-European, Islamic rulers, for instance, also claimed the globe in their own terms – in which Europeans were often inconsequential and insignificant? Not only in Europe and England, as in Elizabeth’s portraits, was the terrestrial globe deployed as a symbol of power, but it also functioned as a “socially affective object” in non-European, Islamic imperial representations of the global imaginary, as in Mughal court paintings. A remarkable example is an allegorical portrait (figure O.1) of the Mughal emperor, Jahangir, embracing the Persian, Safavid monarch, Shah Abbas, both standing on a globe, which seems geographically accurate, and “based on European allegories and probably on English models introduced at court by [the English Ambassador], Sir Thomas Roe” (Okada, 55).

This painting also employs “the traditional imperial iconography such as the lion and the lamb lying side by side . . . [and although] it shows the Great Mughal giving his Persian rival a protective embrace, Shah Abbas is depicted in a docile submissive pose, with his feet on the lamb, whereas Jahangir’s feet are on the lion” (Okada, 55). This imperial embrace within the allegorical “dream” was far from historical reality and, instead, reflected Jahangir’s anxieties about actual Persian incursions into the western border of the Mughal territory (Okada, 54–5). Yet, nonetheless, with the two rulers standing on a swathe of territory stretching (it seems) from the edge of Europe over the land mass of India, this painting evokes a range of associations about the
close relationships and rivalries in the Islamic world, which included the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals, while implicitly excluding Europe.

I invoke the portraits of the two early modern rulers, Elizabeth and Jahangir, not quite contemporaries, here facing each other, symbolically, if not literally, in order to show how their claims of world domination (though with a differing sense of the frontier) were ideologically inscribed via the globes represented in these paintings. Like Elizabeth I claiming the globe after the defeat of Spain in the Armada portrait, or towering over the globe with her feet firmly planted on the map of England in the subsequent Ditchley portrait, this image of Jahangir by his court painter Abu’l Hasan represents the power politics of his region, authorizing a view in which the Safavid ruler is shrunk in the Mughal’s dominant embrace, although they both seem to be claiming the same global territory. And the name Jahangir itself, which literally means “World-Seizer” – a name chosen by the emperor on his accession to the Mughal throne – signals a self-aggrandizement that was befitting the large Mughal empire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, though their “notions of a frontier of expansion largely seem to have been southwards and eastwards” to the “ancestral
homelands” of their ancestor Timur [Tamburlaine], and Europe held little interest for them (Subrahmanyam 2006, 72). Jahangir was not alone in projecting an image of himself as a “ ‘World-Seizer’ and successive Mughal emperors in India used similar titles . . . Shahjahan (World-Emperor) and Alamgir (World Seizer)” (Subrahmanyam 2005, 29).

Similar to Renaissance representations, and evidently influenced by Western iconography and art forms, Mughal paintings frequently deployed the image of the globe or an orb denoting the world or “Jahan,” which the particular ruler grasped, or held under his feet. The socially affective power of the image of the globe in the two cultures suggests, perhaps in an uncanny way, that they were a part of a gradually emerging “global cultural economy.”4 Here the implied presence of European artistic conventions behind the representation of Jahangir and the looming presence of England’s tussle with Spain over the Americas in Elizabeth’s image both implicitly gesture at this widening of the horizons. And it is also noteworthy to recall, for instance, that in the period between the Armada portrait of Elizabeth (1588) and the allegorical image of “Jahangir’s Dream” (1618), England expanded its influence and trade in East India, as evidenced, among other sources, in letters exchanged between the Mughal rulers and Elizabeth and James, before and after the formation of the East India Company in 1600. Elizabeth’s formal letter to the Mughal ruler, Akbar (Jehangir’s father), in 1583, describes how her English subjects have “great affection to visit the most distant places of the world” and calls the king to allow “mutual and friendly traffic of marchandise on both sides” (Hakluyt, V: 450). And the reply received by her successor King James I from the Emperor Jahangir (1618) to his “letter of friendship” assures access to English trade: “I doe command that to all the English merchants in all my Dominions there be given freedome and residence” (Foster, 559). These exchanges offer one instance of the mid-seventeenth-century globalizing trends, whereby the European imagination was undoubtedly being stimulated by increasing trade and cross-cultural interactions across the globe. Richard Hakluyt’s Principal Navigations (1589, 1599–1600, I–XII), for example, offers ample testimony of England’s increasing engagement with different parts of the globe: the Americas, Africa, East Asia, and even the North seas. Yet, in the literary history, the world picture of the Renaissance often seems to be firmly ensconced within the boundaries of European aesthetic traditions drawn from antiquity. What are the parameters of this dominant literary history of the European Renaissance in English studies? And what is its continuing validity?

II The Global Renaissance

Traditionally, the term “Renaissance” has been deployed to denote a revival of classical antiquity, and to valorize this revival in European art and culture of fifteenth-century Italy – of Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Michelangelo, for instance – as the birthplace of the “Renaissance Man” (Burckhardt, 303–52). He was labeled the precursor
of the “modern man,” a term whereby the white, European man served as a universal embodiment of superior civilization and culture, coming out of the nineteenth-century colonial world-view. Furthermore, if on the one hand humanists of the period (exemplars of the “Renaissance man”) were typically represented as practitioners of the liberal arts and the study of classical antiquity, via imitatio, the humanist project of education more broadly viewed included not only logic, rhetoric, and grammar, but also opened the way to an interest in new disciplines like geometry, algebra, and mathematics, so crucial to understanding and mastering networks of money and goods in an increasingly global economy. Interestingly, these new commercial practices within European trade were in turn shaped by Arabic economic structures, derived from earlier Arabic knowledge of algebra and mathematics. My point here is that while European humanists had a strong interest in recovering their intellectual roots in classical antiquity, academic subjects such as mathematics also intersected with commercial practices based on Arabic, non-Western technologies and modes of learning in various fields. In effect, the expanding commercial world enlarged the intellectual, cultural, and linguistic boundaries of Europe.

In this context, while the terms “Renaissance” and “global” traditionally would be considered anachronistic if yoked together, recent globally oriented scholarship of the past decade has led the way in creating a more expansive, shifting Renaissance world-picture. Thus, the “Renaissance” that emerges in this perspective – and as reflected in this collection of essays – is more multidimensional and culturally fluid than the one traditionally centered in Italy. Following this logic, the “Renaissance man” is not a singular, heroic figure embodying the spirit of a culture, but is relocated within the historical phenomenon of an expanding global world, one which includes the discovery of America to the West, growing interactions and encounters with the East ranging from the Ottoman empire on Europe’s borders to the far East, forays into North and sub-Saharan Africa, and even explorations to the North Seas.

Drawing on and developing the discourse of the “global,” this volume emphasizes the historical transition of an era of European expansion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, recognizing the paradigm shifts in the production of knowledge and belief about various aspects of human experience, such as geography, economics, history, religion, and nature, among others. While following these modes of inquiry about Europe in general, it is England that is the predominant subject of most of these essays, though inevitably in shifting relationships with other kingdoms, cultures, and peoples. Overall, this volume tells a story of England’s emerging role in the complex networks of travel and traffic in diverse regions and nations, ranging from the Americas, North Africa, East India, Russia, Iceland, Mexico, the Canaries, and Japan, and in commercial and competitive relations with European imperial powers such as Spain, Portugal, and City States like Venice, and with non-European Islamic rulers such the Ottoman Turks and the Mughals in India. In doing so, it explores both the formation of English conceptions of the “global” and the impact of global economic, cultural, religious, and political developments on English society and culture during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
What becomes evident is that cross-cultural encounters generated not only material exchanges within varying and uneven power relations, but also a rich and complex cross-pollination of art, culture, belief systems, and technologies between England and its “others,” both within and outside Europe. And English literature and culture of the period – poetry, drama, prose writings, including the vast travel archive – are clearly imbricated within the larger imaginings of the “worlds elsewhere,” which were brought home via a new cosmopolitanism. Dislodging the Spaniards in some areas in the Americas, and developing new routes to the Eastern Mediterranean and the East Indies, England emerged in the seventeenth century as a power on the rise. According to Alison Games, “Cosmopolitanism and Cosmopolitans facilitated this shift” (25). She goes on to chart this process as follows:

These cosmopolitans were most evident in the world of commerce. Tangibly centered around the circulation of goods, commerce first required the circulation of people who traveled abroad, inserted themselves in foreign communities, and brought back their treasures. Everywhere the appearance of cultural understanding was crucial to successful trade. (25)

Cosmopolitanism was clearly an offshoot of the imperatives of trade and profit, and one aspect of this outside exposure could be viewed in positive terms, namely that in their travels on commercial ventures, cosmopolitans “demonstrated their interest in and sympathy for foreign mores, worked with and for foreigners, sometimes immersed themselves in foreign worlds, and gradually dislodged themselves from unthinking attachments to a single nation” (Games, 25). English merchants in this era, for instance, who “were first of their nation to open new markets, to assess new commodities, to persuade foreign merchants that they wanted to buy English goods . . . had to rely on their social acuity to establish trade” (Games, 25). If the era of expansion produced such cosmopolitan modes of interaction with the foreigners, it was also permeated by uneven strains of xenophobia, which in some instances, were tied to relations of power and emerging colonization. Complicated discursive operations involved in negotiating these opposing drives and tendencies are apparent, for instance, in England’s ambivalent relations with Islamic powers and Muslim peoples during the period of global exploration.

Images of Muslims proliferated in a variety of literary and cultural representations of the Elizabethan and early Stuart periods: on the Renaissance stage, in travel narratives, in accounts about pirates and renegades, and in popular polemical texts on Islam and the Prophet Mohammed. The question then arises: were these images of Islam and the Muslims accurate representations of the Ottoman Turks and North African Moors, the two Islamic communities with whom the English had many contacts? Frequently, some critics argue, the English, like their European counterparts, revealed a tendency to invoke an all-encompassing non-Christian “Other.” Nabil Matar, for instance, suggests that in English plays, pageants, and other cultural forms the “Turk was cruel, tyrannical, deviant and deceiving; the ‘Moor’ was sexually overdriven and emotionally uncontrollable, vengeful, and religiously superstitious. The Muslim was
all that an Englishman and a Christian was not” (13). Yet popular religious and cultural works, he demonstrates, belie the actual encounter with the Muslims in the Levant and North Africa, where there was “interaction and familiarity, along with communication and cohabitation” (Matar, 14). Other accounts such as government documents and commercial evidence also do not reveal a similar stereotyping (Matar, 13–14). Matthew Dimmock acknowledges the usefulness of Matar’s analysis of actual historical encounters and materials, but offers another perspective, arguing that the images of Turks and Muslims in early modern English literary and cultural texts do not depict Turks so clearly falling between “polarizing stereotypes of ‘Muslim Otherness’ and English Christian” (10). Rather, they show how “English encounters with Muslims, both imagined and ‘actual’ multiplied and complicated notions of the ‘turke’ that had been contested from their very inception” (10). Travelers who had actual contacts with the Turks and Moors, such as George Sandys, Henry Blount, Thomas Roe, and Nicolas Nicolay, also “offered accounts which combined grudging admiration and awe with some measure of demonization” (Singh, 88).

Furthermore, commercial and political relations with other Muslim powers such as the Safavids of Iran and Mughals of India were also developing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but at least in terms of the English, did not involve extended personal interactions between peoples, as with the Turks and Moors; yet English travel accounts to those empires also express mixed feelings, suggesting an attraction to the promise of trade and the grandeur of these courts, but also an investment in a Christian – in this case, Protestant – ideology of demonizing religious and cultural “others.” It is on the nexus of such complexities and ambivalences that one must consider England’s (and by inference some European) relations with the non-Western Islamic world.

Several essays in this volume offer us insights into the intricacies of these relations, as they emerged in actual interactions, in trade, diplomacy, piracy, conversions, as well as in literary and cultural representations of stereotypes of Muslims and Islam in drama and poetry. If one trajectory of England’s global expansion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries led to the Eastern, Islamic empires which at this time were beyond the reach of England’s colonial ambitions, the story was different in the Americas, where powerful men like Sir Walter Raleigh – quite a cosmopolitan figure of his time – were proponents of settlement and colonization in Guiana and Virginia, and in sub-Saharan Africa, where Sir John Hawkins represented England in belatedly attempting to muscle in on Spanish and Portuguese slaving activities. The first English slaving voyages were led by Hawkins in 1562, 1564, and 1567–8, for which he had royal endorsement, taking him to the Guinea coast and the Spanish West Indies, the location for the sale of slaves. And accounts of these voyages were printed in both editions of Hakluyt’s Principal Navigations, framed by the compiler in terms of nationalistic pride and competition with Spain and Portugal in the slave trade. Overtly, cosmopolitanism – resulting from trade and contacts with foreign mores and exotic products – produced cultural diversity, but its dark side lay in the emerging sub-Saharan African slave trade and the seeds of empire being sown in the Americas.
Given these varied geopolitical arrangements, and returning to my earlier point about the opposing tendencies of cosmopolitanism and xenophobia in early modern English attitudes toward foreigners both home and abroad, we have to consider a wide range of possible responses to alterity within England’s globalizing drives. And a dazzling array of these understandings and productions of difference—cultural, religious, sexual, social, and political—is the subject of many English literary and cultural offerings. Thus, in reconsidering the “Renaissance” both as a literary movement, which captured “the spirit of the age,” and as a historical period, it is important to recognize that its range was temporal—going back to antiquity—as well as spatial and geographical, stretching across the globe.

III Mapping the Global

The title of this anthology, *The Global Renaissance*, not only calls for a reconsideration of the scope and meaning of the term, “Renaissance” as I have discussed. It also encourages us to “think globally” at the intersections of *contemporary* global capitalism and its cultural networks and the *early modern* flow and exchange of commodities, persons, ideas, technologies, and aesthetic objects in relation to England’s role within European colonial expansion. Such an epistemology helps us to confront globalization today, which many consider the central crisis of our times. Immanuel Wallerstein historicizes the “discourse of globalization” in similar terms when he states: “we are told by virtually everyone that we are now living, and for the first time, in an era of globalization . . . [but] the processes that are usually meant when we speak of globalization are not in fact new at all. They have existed for some 500 years” (249). Wallerstein’s historical formulation of a global system is a useful way of understanding the systemic nature of globalization through different periods. And many of the themes and issues within the essays in this collection resonate with contemporary relevance: flows of capital and labor power; rampant consumerism and material culture; race and gender struggles within the new global cultural economy; East–West economic power struggles and relations with Islam, among several others. While it is important to observe anticipations and echoes between the two different historical moments, and especially in terms of the emergence of capitalism and its links with colonialism, as Wallerstein suggests, it is also necessary, following Foucault’s reading of history, to avoid a “totalization of past and present” (Poster, 76). As a result, by disrupting any sense of a seamless continuity between the global drives in the different periods we can retrospectively question the inevitability of supposedly inexorable forces of globalization, which are sometimes evoked in terms of a stereotypical “march of history” (my emphasis).11

The broad range of essays in this volume offers us a rich, pluralistic perspective on the early modern global world. One way of understanding the ways in which early modern discourses and practices of globalization may conform to or diverge from contemporary global trends and events is via a broad power/knowledge axis: approach-
ing any economic or cultural process as a multiplicity in order to explore each discourse and/or practice separately, unpacking its layers, decoding its meanings, and understanding its development both in its own terms and in relation to larger, cumulative effects of change. This collection of 21 essays engages with the “global” precisely thus: as a multiplicity, encompassing the intersections of global and domestic discourses and practices, in some instances, evoking our contemporary global crises, reminding us that the processes of exploration, travel, trade, cross-cultural and religious interactions, and labor exploitation, among others, have continuing relevance today. And finally, and perhaps crucially, we learn that globalization is not simply an economic or political movement, but equally, as the essays reveal, a product of the ideological work done by literature, art and visual culture, travel writing, and other cultural forms.

The chapters of The Global Renaissance are organized into four sections: Mapping the Global; “Contact Zones”; Networks of Exchange: Traveling Objects; and The Globe Staged. These titles do not imply rigid divisions, but rather denote some broad categorizations within which all the essays share common themes and concerns. The essays in this first section all engage with globalization and the global in terms of larger historical and conceptual paradigms.

Daniel Vitkus’s opening essay, entitled “The New Globalism: Trans-cultural Commerce, Global Systems Theory, and Spenser’s Mammon” (chapter 1), examines the usefulness of applying “global systems theory” to early modern English literature and culture in the context of two critical trends shaping studies of the period: a “micro-material historicism,” drawn from de Certeau and Foucault, in terms of “an archeology of local knowledge that traces the private life of objects and everyday lives of people in the past.” And a “new globalism” that focuses on England’s role in the era of expansion and on how its “culture changed through interaction with other peoples in both the New and Old Worlds.” Material historicism, according to Vitkus, has produced some interesting studies in print history, archival investigations into the early modern “book,” and a history of reading. But, cautioning against a nostalgia – and fetishization – of the printed book, he promotes recent globalist approaches that weave into their scholarship, capitalism’s rise to global dominance and its role in shaping cultural production, including the production of literary texts in early modern England. Global systems theories proposed by Wallerstein and others, Vitkus suggests, enable scholars to connect the most domestic-seeming texts to broader transcultural and global elements.

One such canonical work, Spenser’s The Faerie Queene – perhaps among the more nationalistic English texts – is also a work that “is restlessly global,” Vitkus argues. Beginning with the proem to the second book of The Faerie Queene, with its allusions to Peru, the Amazon, Virginia, and to “unknowne lands,” which suggests linkages with global networks, the essay focuses on the poem’s treatment of Mammon, “both a devil and a false god, and as a personification of wealth and worldly goods.” While Guyon’s trial in the cave of Mammon (Book II, Canto seven), namely his resistance to the temptation of gold, is often described in theological terms, this essay places
that narrative within a global context, namely that Mammon’s attempts to seduce Guyon associate gold not only with the Spanish colonies, but rather with a global phenomenon that includes both Spain and England in its worldwide sweep. Thus, ultimately, Spenser’s epic, with all its hearkening back to the Crusades and Middle Ages, is also an important site for unresolved tensions between “a residual code of honor that rejects money as corruptive and a desire to obtain wealth and power . . . under an emergent capitalist economy.”

Crystal Bartolovich’s essay, “‘Travailing’ Theory: Global Flows of Labor and the Enclosure of the Subject” (chapter 2), maps the emergence of capitalism by following “both local and global flows of labor-power – and resistance to its privatization,” while arguing that both were “implicated in the formation of early modern subjects at the dawn of capitalist accumulation.” Exploring both the labor and laborer in a trajectory that moves from the domestic enclosure acts which led to a growing landless population, often labeled “vagrant,” in England to narratives of travel and colonization, such as The Journal of Richard Norwood (1590–1675), the colonial surveyor of Bermuda, Bartolovich demonstrates how the common labor in domestic and foreign locations did not result in the creation of a global community: but rather “[it led] to securing its opposite: the estrangement and atomization of laborers.”

Richard Norwood is known today mainly as the first cartographer of Bermuda. The famous shipwreck of 1609, recounted in William Strachey’s narrative (a part of the Bermuda sources of Shakespeare’s The Tempest) produced conditions of social egalitarianism without any claims of private property, so that the “common people” did not want to leave Bermuda for Virginia. When their demands were quashed and a year later Bermuda was officially colonized, Norwood (also a Puritan) became the surveyor of this Edenic island, imposing private property relations on it for potential investors. Showing the formation of his growing individualist self-consciousness, Bartolovich makes a clear connection between capitalism and individualism as she shows us how “Norwood’s Bermuda writings entirely suppress the early Edenic moment of the shipwrecked community,” which implies that “the compensation for giving up Eden was individualism, improvement, and order.” To sum up, as a Puritan as well as a surveyor, Norwood marks a site in which religious self-consciousness and technological “improvement” worked together to produce the “individual” that is now often, paradoxically, taken for granted as the fundamental unit of “modern” society.

John Michael Archer engages with globalism via an analysis of map-making, representation, and Islam in the Renaissance world-picture as contexts for Marlowe’s Tamburlaine plays in his essay, “Islam and Tamburlaine’s World-picture” (chapter 3). Approaching Marlowe’s play as an epic on a global scale, this essay examines Marlowe’s “world-picture” – as Heidegger defines it: “not a picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped as a picture.” Archer begins with a consideration of how contemporary map-making projects influence the play’s epic sweep of geographical locations; and, second, he questions the extent to which Islam was represented within “the human geography of the world pictured on the early modern stage.” Muslim strictures on the image and the Qu’ran’s cosmography figure in the play,