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## René Wellek Prize 2025, Monograph

### Committee:

Chair: Simona Bertacco (University of Louisville): 2022-2025

Jeremy Glick (Hunter College): 2023-2026

Jing Tsu (Yale): 2024-2027

### Honorable Mention: *Emporialism: Department Store Fictions and the Politics of the Mediterranean*, Amr Kamal

When Goethe observed in the 1760s that commercial interests were beginning to influence literary production like a marketplace, he wasn't thinking of Le Bon Marché or Omar Effendi. Nor was Pascale Casanova when she analyzed world literature as supply chains of creators, consumers, readers, tastes, and standards competing for status and appeal. It was only a matter of time before someone seized on the market metaphor to give the physical marketplace a much deserved analysis.

Amr Kamal's original *Emporialism: Department Store Fictions and the Politics of the Mediterranean* does just that—and more. Taking department stores, or emporia, as novel interstitial spaces where literary, historical, and colonial desires refract and converge through exchanged goods, services, advertisements, and products, it reveals a much interconnected world where ideas and objects mirror and inspire not commerce as well as deep feelings for the world. With ingenuity but always an eye for profit, emporia become miniaturized world spaces, much like the better-known world fairs they emulate.

Kamal casts a wide lens on the Mediterranean literary world from the 1880s to the 1940s, tracing different scales of literary, commercial, linguistic, and colonial projects carried by often overlooked agents—shopkeepers, small business owners, and merchants whose worldview is more discrete and mundane than grand visions of world literature. Experiences of the distant, exotic, familiar, and mundane are condensed in window displays, catalogs, and shop fronts. Kamal brilliantly traces the entanglement of imperial and native desires, self-image and their projections, and linguistic mixing that happens with the expedience of making deals. Emporia are far from stagnant structures where deals happen; they are augmented and proliferated by the extension of human activities and desires. There is no imperial center that can claim exclusive authorship in this world picture, only highly-motivated interactions between French, British, and Ottoman merchants whose main concern isn't the rise and fall of empires but participation in the industrious culture of modernity.

The result is a breathtaking kaleidoscopic display rivaled only by the variety of merchandise on the shelves of these halls of consumption. This study, led by an innovative idea, reminds us how comparative literature can function as creative sociology, juxtaposing not only languages and texts but also trading zones of objects and ideas. It's a wonderful reminder of literary worlds sometimes not held together by texts and translators alone, but also experienced through what one consumes via image, taste, and touch.