

Trans-Atlantic Stories, Transnational Perspectives, Hemispheric Mutations: American Literature beyond the Nation

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They say it came first from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved; that it was the death bane of the Tàinos, uttered just as one world perished and another began; that it was a demon drawn into Creation through the nightmare door that was cracked open in the Antilles. Fukù americanus, or more colloquially; fukù – generally a curse or a doom of some kind; specifically the Curse and the Doom of the New World. Also called the fukù of the Admiral because the Admiral was both its midwife and one of its great European victims; despite ‘discovering’ the New World the Admiral died miserable and syphilitic, hearing (dique) divine voices. In Santo Domingo, the Land He Loved Best (what Oscar, at the end, would call the Ground Zero of the New World), the Admiral’s very name has become synonymous with both kinds of fukù, little and large; to say his name aloud or even to hear it is to invite calamity on the heads of you and yours. But the fukù ain’t just ancient history, a ghost story from the past with no power to scare. In my parents’ day the fukù was real as shit, something your everyday person could believe in. Everybody knew someone who’d been eaten by a fukù just like everybody knew somebody who worked up in the Palacio. It was in the air, you could say, though, like all the most important things on the Island, not something folks really talked about. But in those elder days, fukù had it good; it even had a hypeman of sorts, a high priest, you could say: Our then dictator-for-life Rafael Leònidas Trujillo Molina.

Junot Diaz, *The Brief, Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

Beyond the Nation

In the past couple of decades, American Studies at large and American Literature in particular have been challenged by a series of critical investigations aimed at denaturalizing the category of the nation as the field’s main conceptual framework and problematizing historical, cultural, political and literary understandings of the United States based on nationalist criteria. The implicitly presupposed correspondence between the geopolitical contours of the nation, its cultural, political and economic structures, and “Americanness”

as a phenomenological experience has been contested on both historical and ideological grounds on all fronts of the human sciences. Historians, anthropologists, literary scholars, economists and sociologists have tried to develop methodologies that take into account the entanglements of regional and global phenomena and relations in the description of historical experience both across transnational geographies and power structures and over time. In spite of the interdisciplinary nature of these calls, however, the specific forms that the questioning has taken within different disciplinary domains has varied according to the different traditions of scholarship internal to each field of study. The recent proliferation of adjectives like “trans-national,” “hemispheric,” “global,” “Atlantic,” “trans-Atlantic,” “planetary,” “worldly” and “comparative” in both literary and historical studies related to the US testifies to a will not only to extend the scope of analysis to objects not directly connected to the nation, but also to bring into focus various kinds of relationships between the US and the world. Thus, these adjectives suggest various theoretical orientations, objects of study and geographies. At the same time, they all operate under the same rubric of acquiring better knowledge of cultural, historical and material phenomena related to the Americas by decentralizing the US as their primary subject of research. As will be discussed in detail below, the concept of the Atlantic “as a watery site of cross-cultural exchange and struggle”¹ gained increasing currency in historical studies throughout the 1990s in scholarship related to the history of Africa, Europe and the Americas. Meanwhile, there was a parallel though more sporadic trend to adopt Atlantic, neo-Atlantic or trans-Atlantic perspectives in literary studies related to Europe, Africa, the Americas and the Caribbean between the late 1990s and the early 21st century.² Before examining the Atlantic/trans-Atlantic discourse as a distinct field

1. Donna Gabaccia, “A Long Atlantic in a Wider World,” *Atlantic Studies*, 1, 1 (2004), 1-27, 1. Gabaccia also points out how the various genealogies of “Atlantic Studies” have located them “almost exclusively within the discipline of history” (2). Gabaccia’s punctualization underscores the explicit distinction William Boelhower makes between “Old” and “New” Atlantic scholarship, the former being “pre-eminently Anglo-American and North-Atlantic” as well as “unabashedly Eurocentric.” See Boelhower, “The Rise of the New Atlantic Studies Matrix,” *ALH*, 20, 1-2 (Spring/Summer 2008), 84. Eric Slauter notes that while the phrase “Atlantic World” was used in a handful of books and articles in the 1970s and 1980s, it was not in regular use until the late 1980s, after the publication of Nichola Canny and Anthony Padgen’s collection, *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World* (1987). Its use decidedly accelerated after 1999 when “seven books adopted the phrase, as many as had appeared during the preceding decade. From 2000 to 2006, forty-five books, fifty-two articles (excluding book reviews), and twenty-one dissertations invoked the phrase. Use of the phrase peaked in 2005 (fourteen books, eleven articles, and four dissertations) and then fell in 2006 (six books, seven articles, four dissertations).” Eric Slauter, “History, Literature, and the Atlantic World,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 65, 1 (Jan. 2008), 135-166, 137.

2. Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* is considered the foundational text of the neo-Atlanticist or trans-Atlanticist matrix in literary studies, as well as the study that “really fueled the explosion of research in transnational arenas” (Elliott, *What Does it Mean*). Together with Roach’s *Cities of the Dead* (2003), Gilroy’s influence in the larger field of literary studies has been instrumental in enabling a shift in how American literature is analyzed, from the nationalist pedagogy of the previous generation to the new perspectives opened by an Atlantic model emphasizing the circulation of ideas, texts and cultures at large. See the special issue of *William and*

of literary inquiry that has emerged in the last twenty years or so, we must therefore acknowledge that such scholarship is part of a general reorientation of American Studies as a meta-field along the double axis of international geopolitics and internal cultural conflict. This reorientation, which affects American Studies both in the US and in Europe, should in turn be understood in the context of two related macro trends, both of which were rooted in the 1960s, became pressing from the early 1980s on and have since challenged the humanities at large.³ The first is the acceleration of global processes involving the intensification of post-migratory movements, the multinational transformation of capitalism and the emergence of new forms of colonialism that have powerfully affected the demographic, ethnic, political, cultural and economic composition and stability of nation states.⁴ The second is the vast revision of methodological and institutional practices across the humanities along genealogical, postcolonial and comparative lines triggered by the epistemological pressure put on conventional disciplinary boundaries, canons and foundations of academic knowledge by a new global self-consciousness.⁵

In literary studies, the combined effect of these two trends has prompted the reorientation of some of the dominant critical matrices of the 1980s – deconstruction, multiculturalism, post-Marxism, postcolonialism and comparative cultural studies – towards a transnational perspective, “so that the histories of groups ‘within’ the U.S” could also be placed “within the context of global forces and diaspora.”⁶ In the late 1990s, the emphasis

Mary Quarterly by Eric Slauter, with Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, Allison Games, Eliga Gould, and Bryan Waterman, “The ‘Trade Gap’ in Atlantic Studies: A Forum on Literary and Historical Scholarship,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 65, 1 (January 2008) 135-186.

3. On the relation between decolonization and the emergence of “theory” in the 1960s, see Robert Young, *White Mythologies* (London, 1990), 173. For a specific discussion of theory as inherently postcolonial, see Stuart Brown, “The Eidaesthetic Itinerary: Notes on the Geopolitical Movement of the Literary Absolute,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 100, 3 (2001), 829-851, 846.

4. This point has been discussed extensively by several authors, including Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, (Minneapolis, 1996); Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, eds. *The Cultures of Globalisation* (Durham, 1988); Michael Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (London, 2004); Douglas Massey, et al. *Worlds in Motion: Understanding International Migration at the End of the Millenium*. (Oxford, 1998); Ramon Grosfoguel and Ana Margarita Cervantes-Rodriguez, eds. *The Modern/Colonial/Capitalist World-System in the Twentieth Century. Global Processes, Antisystemic Movements, and the Geopolitics of Knowledge*. (Westport, 2000), especially Ramon Grosfoguel and Ana Margarita Cervantes-Rodriguez’s “Introduction” (XI-XXX) and the following essays by Eric Mielants, “Mass Migration in the World-System: an Antisystemic Movement in the Long Run?,” 79-102, and Ana Margarita Cervantes-Rodriguez, “Transnationalism, Power, and Hegemony: Review of Alternative Perspectives and their Implications for World-Systems Analysis,” 47-78; Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd, eds. *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital* (Durham, 2007); and Ulrich Beck, *World Risk Society* (Cambridge, 1998).

5. The scholarship on this issue is vast. For an overview of the evolution of the methodological discourse on this and related topics in the past twenty years or so, the reader may refer to the following main academic journals: *American Literary History*, *American Literature*, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *Transatlantic Studies* and *PMLA*.

6. Amritji Singh and Peter Schmidt, *Postcolonial Theory and the United States. Race, Ethnicity, and Literature* (Jefferson, 2000), 15. This collection provides a useful overview of the plethora of positions that character-

on domestic ethnic and racial diversity – brought into focus by the so-called culture wars over canon revision of the 1980s and 1990s, and methodologically still associated with ethnic and area studies – adopted a decidedly postcolonial and deconstructive edge. It was then that scholars began identifying questions related to border porosity, fluidity of exchange, hybridity and diaspora as crucial to the articulation of the cultural, linguistic and literary differences that coexisted within the imaginary, symbolic and material boundaries of the nation, thus powerfully challenging rigid demarcations of what was and what was not “national literature.” The dominant model of national literature as an expression of a homogenous historical and geopolitical environment appeared profoundly inadequate to describe the “fluid, irregular, multi-directional and historically specific” processes of symbolic exchange, dissemination and transformation generated by cultural and literary contact. This awareness has since fueled an ongoing process to revise critical methodologies, research directions and pedagogical practices. As Giles Gunn put it, English departments have been forced to adjust to the realization that, “all national traditions are plural rather than singular; that the pluralization and heterogeneity, even polyvocality, of these traditions can be fully accessed and understood only through the use of critical methods from across the whole range of human sciences; and that this widening and deepening, not to say thickening, of the category of the literary has produced problems of comprehension we are still struggling to formulate.”⁷

The extent to which literary cultures forged along the borders between different nations and cultural zones, or brought into domestic contact after being carried on extended transatlantic or transpacific waves and then spread across the mainland, could be said to belong to a national literature has recently become both a disciplinary and a cultural question. The extraordinary surge in studies on the articulation and reproduction of nationhood, social membership and national identification throughout the 1990s can attest to this.⁸ Those studies tended to combine a robust analytics of nation, citizenship

ized literary, cultural and ethnic studies in the US at the turn of the 21st century. Within this framework, key publications of the 1990s should be mentioned such as the volume edited by Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease, *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham, 1993), and that edited by Donald Pease, *National Identities and Post-Americanist Narrative* (1994). See also the following monographs: Joan Dayan’s *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (1994), Joseph Roach’s *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (1996); and Sieglinde Lemke’s *Primitive Postmodernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism* (1996).

7. Giles Gunn, “Introduction,” *PMLA*, 116, 1 (2001), Special Topic: *Globalizing Literary Studies*, 1-17, 4.

8. Trying to offer an exhaustive bibliography on this scholarship, whether it calls itself transnational, post-national, global or comparative, would be daunting given its exponential proliferation in the past twenty years or so. Such growth can be assessed by reading the addresses of various presidents of the American Studies Association, published in the journal *American Quarterly*, particularly those from 1999-2006 delivered by Janice Radway, Amy Kaplan, Shelley Fisher Fishkin (2004) and Emory Elliott (2006), respectively. These four are particularly relevant in their bibliographic surveys because they chart a period in which the field was reoriented that reflects the political passage from the Clinton to the Bush administrations, with all the historical events this passage entails, and the methodological transition of the field from the waning of multi-culturalism and the emergence of transnationalism as the dominant framework. See Janice Radway, “What’s

and identity formation with a dissection of imperialist and neo-imperialist projects and ideologies of exceptionalism, at the time still prominent in literary history, particularly in histories related to the literatures of the colonial period (1600 to the revolutions and independence, approximately) and the national period (from independence to the 1880s, approximately).⁹ Transnational or hemispheric approaches to the study of American literature and its relations to the western side of the Atlantic or the Western Hemisphere were not absent from literary scholarship in and about the US, but they were generally implied in the “elusive search for distinctive national identities” for which, for instance, the colonial periods “had to provide the cultural origins.”¹⁰ It was only from the late 1990s that a strong, innovative postcolonialist methodology started to be incorporated by these studies in order to “systematically [study] the effects of imperialism in the former colonies and at the heart of empire itself.”¹¹

When Shelley Fisher Fishkin, in her 2004 American Studies Association (ASA) Presidential Address, defined the transnational in American Literary Studies along spatial coordinates as “a web of contact zones [that] has increasingly superseded the nation” as “the basic unit of, and frame for, analysis,” the works she referenced were almost exclusively referred to as “transnational,” rather than “trans-Atlantic” or “Atlantic,” imaginatively

in a Name?” Presidential Address to the American Studies Association,” *American Quarterly*, 51, 1 (March 1999), 1-32; Amy Kaplan, “Violent Belongings and the Question of Empire Today: Presidential Address to the American Studies Association,” *American Quarterly*, 56, 1 (March 2004), 1; Shelley Fisher Fishkin, “Crossroads of Cultures: the Transnational Turn in American Studies, Presidential Address to the American Studies Association,” *American Quarterly*, 57, 1 (March 2005), 17-57; and Emory Elliott, “Diversity in the United States and Abroad: What Does It Mean When American Studies Is Transnational.” Presidential Address delivered at the 2006 American Studies Association Conference, *American Quarterly*, 59, 1 (2007), 1-22. For a decidedly comparatist perspective, see also the special issue of *PMLA*, edited by Giles Gunn (116, 1) on the Special Topic: *Globalizing Literary Studies* (2001) and the special issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 100, 3 (2001) edited by Imre Szeman and Susie O’Brian, *The Globalization of Fiction/The Fiction of Globalization*.

9. Works such as Amy Kaplan’s *The Work of Empire in the Making of U.S. Cultures*, José Saldívar’s *The Dialectics of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History* (Durham, 1991), David Shields’ *Oracles of Empire: Poetry, Politics, and Commerce in British America, 1690-1750* (Chicago, 1990), Djelal Kadir’s *Columbus and the Ends of the Earth: Europe’s Prophetic Rhetoric as Conquering Ideology* (Berkeley, 1992), Peter Carafiol’s *The American Ideal: Literary History as a Worldly Activity* (New York, 1991), and Laurent Berlant’s *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, 1994) are all important examples of this critical fold.

10. Ralph Bauer, “Notes on the Comparative Study of the Colonial Americas,” *Early American Literature*, 38, 2 (2003), 281-304, 283.

11. The conceptual matrices of all these studies are rooted in the 1960s, particularly in work dealing with identity formation, psychoanalysis, post-Marxism and postcolonial studies. (London, 1984) See Stuart Hall (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London, 1987); “Gramsci’s Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity.” *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 10, 2 (1980), 5-27; “Encoding / Decoding,” in Hall, S. Hobson, A. Lowe, and P. Willis (eds). *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79*. (London, 1980), 128-138. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York, 1971); Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategies: Toward a Radical Democratic Politics* (London, 1984). With respect to the US, the notion of colonialism generally refers to the colonial, pre-insurrectional period.

relating to the frontier rather than to the waves.¹² And yet, by the time Fishkin's Presidential Address was published in *American Quarterly* in 2005 the notion of the "transatlantic"¹³ had already been widely disseminated in American literary and historical studies, partly inspired by the publication of David Armitage's influential "Three Concepts of Atlantic History," (2002) which had helped stir interest in the Atlantic from a new, transnational perspective. In a 2004 review essay entitled "Transatlanticism Now" published in *American Literary History*, Laura Stevens pointed out that "few terms had spread across the academic landscape with the speed and thoroughness of transatlantic." Indeed, it was soon found in college curricula, academic publications, conferences and research projects; two dedicated journals – *Symbiosis* and the *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*¹⁴ – were formed; and research programs quickly bifurcated between a narrow perspective restricted to the English language and a wider, more worldly one with an expanded awareness of the history of modernity and its implication in colonialism, slavery and nationality.

It is within the tension-filled context evoked by Stevens that we should situate the trans-Atlantic paradigm in literary studies. This paradigm aims to account for the relational, mutable and erratic nature of literary objects and their concurrence in processes of identification and identity formation that transcend and transgress the category of the nation, particularly when those processes have occurred throughout historical, geopolitical and cultural environments brought into contact by Atlantic crossings. Not unlike transnational studies in general, "by showing that national identity can extend beyond natural geographical obstacles, by highlighting broader patterns of exchange, and by tracing the fraught ties of colony to metropole," trans-Atlantic studies suggest "that nations and nationalisms cannot really be considered in isolation."¹⁵ Once the box of the nation as the conceptual unit of literary history is cracked open, however, the narratives of the literary historian get exposed not only to issues of space and politics, but also to the problem of irreducible time frames, alternative periodizations, heterogeneous cultural clusters and

12. Shelley Fisher Fishkin, "Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies – Presidential Address to the American Studies Association," *American Quarterly*, 57, 1 (2005), 17-57. Only one "transatlantic" collection and one essay – both by European scholars – are mentioned in the published speech.

13. The term "transatlantic" without hyphenation or further specification refers to the broad, general transatlanticist discourse that has evolved as a reaction to the "Old" Atlantic studies Boelhower analyzes in his "The Rise of the New Atlantic Studies Matrix." "Trans-Atlantic" refers to a more recent declination of transatlanticism meant to emphasize the multi-perspective movement of goods, ideas, humans and other animals, and cultures *throughout* different stretches of Atlantic passages and from there across the African, American and European continents. In this respect, "trans-Atlantic" falls in line with Boelhower's use of the notion "New Atlantic." See Boelhower, "The Rise of the New Atlantic Studies Matrix," 83-101.

14. In 2004, *Atlantic Studies: Global Currents* joined the cluster of journals dedicated to transatlantic discourse. To my knowledge, *American Literary History* has hosted the methodological transformation of the field more systematically than any other journal and is hence the most updated and comprehensive archive for the discussion on trans-Atlanticism in US literature.

15. Laura Stevens, "Transatlanticism Now," *ALH*, 16, 1 (Spring, 2004), 93-102.

their relative causalities, including literary imaginaries.¹⁶ Considering that nationhood and identity are products of how people conceive of the relationship between past, present and future, time and language – i.e., the conceptual ability to move between temporal scales and among linguistic hierarchies and variety – are no less important than space.¹⁷

The trans-Atlantic or neo-Atlantic studies “matrix” – as William Boelhower calls it in an influential essay to differentiate it from the old, dominant Anglo-American brand of Atlanticism – emerged from the convergence of a constellation of factors: the waning of the Cold War political context; globalization and the pressure to move beyond knowledge models based on the form of the nation state; the emergence and dissemination of a postcolonial critical self-consciousness in academic culture studies; the epistemological questioning of historical knowledge and the history writing brought about by the discursive turn in literary and historical studies in the 1980s and 1990s; the investment of narratives of historical traumas (the African diaspora, the Middle passage, the plantation system) with a strong testimonial function, following the example of Holocaust studies; and the identification of the cartographic text as the fundamental epistemological object of modernity, which allowed the Atlantic to emerge as both a material and an imaginary figure. “Ultimately,” Boelhower argues, “it is the apparatus (the *dispositio*) of the cartographic text – representing a stratified and temporally rich skein of intersecting discursive and material trajectories across the Atlantic world – that allows us to refer to Atlantic studies research practices as a new disciplinary matrix.”¹⁸

We should keep Boelhower’s paradigmatic synthesis in mind as we consider Paul Giles’ concept of a “transatlantic imaginary” which he coined to identify “the interiorization of a literal or metaphorical Atlantic world in all its expansive dimensions,”¹⁹ and hence its incorporation into identity formation. As Giles explains, “conceptions of national identity on both sides of the Atlantic emerged through engagement with – and often deliberate exclusion of – a transatlantic imaginary.”²⁰ However, rather than simply dismissing a

16. Susan Gillman and Kirsten Silva Gruesz, “Worlding America: The Hemispheric Text-Network,” in *The Companion to American Literary Studies* (2011), 228-245, 229.

17. Notions of “Deep Time” are found in Wai Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature across Deep Time* (Princeton, 2006), and Lloyd Pratt, *Archives of American Time: Literature and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 2010). As we will see, the question of time, representation and identity formation has been discussed in Ian Baucom, “Introduction: Atlantic Genealogies,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 100, 1 (2001), 1-13; Bauer, Ralph. *The Cultural Geography of Colonial American Literatures: Empire, Travel, Modernity* (Cambridge, 2003); Fabian Johannes *Time and the Other* (New York, 1983); Andreas Huyssens, “Geographies of Modernism in a Globalizing World,” in Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (eds.), *Geographies of Modernism. Literatures, Cultures, Spaces* (Oxon, 2005); and Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “The Otherwise Modern. Caribbean Lessons from the Savage Slot,” in B.M. Knauft (ed), *Critically Modern* (Bloomington, 2002), and *Silencing the Past. Power and the Production of History* (Boston, 1995).

18. William Boelhower, “The Rise of the New Atlantic Studies Matrix,” 90.

19. Paul Giles, *Virtual Subjects: Transnational Fictions and the Transatlantic Imaginary* (Durham, 2002), 1.

20. *Ibid.*, 2.

nation-based approach to the study of English-language literature, Giles is interested in foregrounding the history of the nation state paradigm “and its function for the nation-state, to examine ways literature has been instrumental in consolidating or interrogating forms of national identity.”²¹

But how expansive are the dimensions of the Atlantic world? How dramatic are the fluctuations of the transatlantic imaginary, and how precise are the methodologies for interrogating it? Giles’ comparative approach might be appropriate for investigating how “the various crossovers between British and American literature might engender double-edge discourses liable to destabilize traditional hierarchies and power relations, thereby illuminating the epistemological boundaries of both national cultures.”²² Indeed, as his brilliant work has demonstrated, this approach provides an adequate epistemological framework for reading the emergence of American literature during the 18th century “in light of the British culture and vice-versa.”²³ Giles has successfully established a model of comparative analysis focused on the cruxes and points of convergence of these two cultures. And this methodology may work well for reading British and American literature alongside one another, especially because it does not assume the existence of two cohesive literatures to be compared but rather networks of overlapping literary influences. In fact, this was the approach taken throughout the 19th century before these literatures went their own national ways in the 20th century, as demonstrated in recent scholarship.²⁴ However, this approach is insufficient for investigating the kind of trans-linguistic transactions that surface to critical attention when the notion of the Atlantic expands beyond its British-American shores. From a trans-Atlantic, hemispheric perspective, “one cannot think the Americas together, [...] without considering the discrepant timing of modernity”²⁵ and the multiple registers of language use and their relation to power. When literary-cultural artifacts are the objects of investigation, as Susan Gillman and Kirstin Silva Gruesz put it, their material conditions also demand a model of analysis that can “multiply situate where a text ‘belongs’ in time and space by noting how it stands in relation to [the] third scale, language;” i.e., how it moves through “multiple translations, adaptations, and significant editions and republications, each instantiation punctuated along the scales

21. *Ibid.*, 5.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Paul Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections. British Culture and the Formation of American Literature, 1730 1860* (Philadelphia, 2001), 8.

24. For a critical overview of the vicissitudes of British and American literature, from their shared status as Literature in English throughout the 19th century to their academic separation in the 20th century and their reunion in transatlantic studies, see Amanda Claybaugh, “Toward a New Transatlanticism: Dickens in the United States,” *Victorian Studies*, 48, 3 (2006), 440-460. Recent trans-Atlantic works by Paul Giles, Eve Tavor Bannet, Susan Manning, Amanda Claybaugh, Laurence Buell, Andrew Taylor, Elisa Tamarkin and others have adopted a language-bound notion of transatlanticism.

25. Gillman and Silva Gruesz, “Worlding,” 229.

of time and space” by its linguistic registers. “Translation represents both one form that this dynamic exchange between nations can take, and a figure for that process.”²⁶ As they showed through their reading of an American literary classic, Herman Melville’s *Benito Cereno*, this means pushing literary studies – including Atlantic and trans-Atlantic literary studies – beyond the transnational paradigm and towards what the authors call a “worlded analysis:”

A worlded analysis would plant the foot of the drawing-compass somewhere and sometime else than an “America” conceived of as the inevitable center and beginning. Further, it would attend to the way that texts move between multiple forms of language usage – native and foreign, dialect and register, Creole and *patois* – that are tied to forms of social capital. Thinking dialectally and translationally about the movements of texts across space, time, and language, such a worlded analysis would map out a network of crosshatched, multidirectional influences rather than drawing one-way or even two-way lines of comparison.²⁷

Translation and adaptation rather than specific genres; movement in time and space instead of historical periods; and flux rather than direct transmission: following the shift from a national to a post-national context, this series of substitutions actualizes the turn from a nationalist to a post-national, “trans-Atlantic” hermeneutics by introducing a poetics of relation as *alternative* or, at the very least, complementary to a poetics of comparison. A poetics of relation operates both metaphorically and epistemologically to mark the continuities between “transnational,” “hemispheric” and “transatlantic.”²⁸ As Kate Flint put it: “The Atlantic is a space of translation and transformation, rather than of straightforward transmission. [...] It has been the task of transatlantic studies and of its close relatives, Atlantic studies and Atlantic World studies, to replace the language of the frontier with that of the oceanic,” and to substitute its semantics for notions of nationhood “that depend on ideas of expansion and conquering, a concern with fluidity, transmission, and exchange.”²⁹ This task relies on comparative, elliptical methodologies that work to defamiliarize canonical formations in literature and identity by relating them to alternative focal points. In this respect, to read British and American literature side by side, as Paul Giles does, means to consider “a complex and interactive Anglophone culture” and consequently “to open up wider questions about the definition and status of literatures in English,”³⁰ while remaining well grounded in a contained cultural and linguistic space and thereby eschewing the risk of “promoting academic diletantism, however well-intended

26. *Ibid.*, 230. Emphasis mine.

27. *Ibid.*, 231.

28. The key text here is Edouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation*, (Paris, 1990).

29. Kate Flint, “Transatlantic Currents,” *ALH*, 21, 2 (2009), 324-334, 325.

30. Paul Giles, *Virtual Americas*, 5.

and progressive it may be.”³¹ And yet, even if it is innovative and productive within a contained definition of trans-Atlanticism as really an Anglo-American phenomenon, a comparative methodology so designed is also subject to the charge, raised especially by transnational anti- and post-colonial scholars, of being focused on pre-established objects of study rather than on relations between and among flexible entities.³²

Scholars continue to debate over how best to conceptualize a methodology that addresses both the oceanic “fluidity” of language, ideas, commodities and people, on the one hand, and the clustering, sedimentations, transformations and dispersions of their debris across transatlantic currents and hemispheric lands, on the other. They do however unanimously agree that “Trans-Atlanticism [...] is a call to reorganize our existing objects of study in new ways,”³³ as Amanda Claybaugh put it. This demands a point of view that is broad enough and flexible enough to consider the multiple levels of possible and actual connection as well as the many histories carried across Europe, Africa, the Americas and the Caribbean together with things, people and ideas. Transatlanticist scholarship in literary studies, then, tends to bifurcate into two main directions: scholars who work strictly with the English language and focus mainly on the convergences of Anglo-American transatlantic textual production, circulation and reception; and scholars who concentrate on relations established by transatlantic contacts and who emphasize the institution of western modernity and colonialism and the critique of that process. For the former, “the crossing of national boundaries is largely incidental to their arguments, whether about literary movements (Richard Gravil and Leon Chai), literary genre (George P. Landow), philosophical traditions (Susan Manning), or the interrelations of literary and social phenomena (Jonathan Arac).”³⁴ For the latter, instead, the focus is either “on the whole Anglo-American world, which includes those Caribbean islands under British control and ports in Africa and Latin America as well as Great Britain, Ireland, Canada, and the United States,” or “on the relations between two nations within that world, most commonly the United States and Great Britain.”³⁵ According to Claybaugh’s provisional scholarly map, scholars who explore the relationship between Great Britain and the United States have tended “to focus on relations that are imagined, not material,”³⁶ whereas those who investigate the larger Anglo-American world “have tended to excavate the material

31. Heinz Ickstadt, “American Studies in an Age of Globalization,” *American Quarterly*, 54, 4 (December 2002), 543-562, 554.

32. See Micol Seigel, “Beyond Compare: the Comparative Method after the Transnational Turn,” *Radical History Review*, 91 (Winter 2005), 62-90.

33. Amanda Claybaugh, “New Fields, Conventional Habits, and the Legacy of *Atlantic Double Cross*,” *ALH*, 20, 3 (June 2008), 439-448, 445.

34. Amanda Claybaugh, “Toward a New Transatlanticism,” 442.

35. *Ibid.*

36. *Ibid.*

networks that constituted it, such as the slave trade (Paul Gilroy and Joseph Roach), and black newspapers in the United States, Europe, and Africa (Brent Edwards).³⁷

What seems to emerge for the time being as a crucial difference between these alternative conceptualizations is that one considers the literary transatlantic as a consistent conceptual unit, relatively well defined in historical, linguistic, geopolitical and cultural terms that have sedimented over time, while the other considers it in more fluid, relational terms as a fragment of the global literary world. Provided that both views imply strictly site-specific interpretive strategies, the first kind of Atlanticism relies on a methodology based in “comparativist defamiliarization”³⁸ and underscores “a transatlanticism that is as attentive to the connections across national boundaries as to the differences between nations, as attentive to the concrete collaborations of individuals and groups as to the imaginings of nations as a whole.”³⁹ The second kind, on the other hand, demands a broader methodological framework, consistent with the view that a broader notion of the relations between transatlantic and worldly literary phenomena is required to give nuanced, comprehensive accounts of the complexities of the modern world system as it has emerged from the events of colonization – a world multiplied in various centers of exchange and reference that have in turn engendered new phenomena and centers of exchange and reference. This latter view tends to address literary events as joined or separate points of convergence and dispersion; unique, singular occurrences or fragments of a wider, interconnected network of phenomena whose limits have been constitutively made and remade by the actual dynamics of the material, political and imaginative economies of Atlantic crossings.

The more self-limiting version of transatlantic/neo-Atlantic studies tends to focus on British-American relations. The more expansive version identifies the wider Atlantic as a unit of analysis despite the elusiveness and lack of coherence historians attribute to the Atlantic and the geographies it has brought into contact as a “system or uniform region.”⁴⁰ In both cases, the transatlantic “envisions a relationship to an always distant yet ever proximate other,” as Colleen Glenney Boggs aptly put it. “Transatlantic defines a location that is always elsewhere: it means ‘being in America’ only when one is not in America; when one is in America, it means being in Europe or Africa. The term operates in relation to, yet independently of, any definitive locus. Only secondarily a geographic marker, it is therefore first and foremost a term that defines relationship.”⁴¹ Because

37. Ibid.

38. Paul Giles, *Atlantic Insurrections*, 12.

39. Ibid., 439.

40. Alison Games, “Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities,” *American Historical Review*, 111, 3 (June 2006), 743-57, 747; Alison Games, “Atlantic History,” 741.

41. Colleen Glenney Boggs “Transatlantic Romanticism,” in *Transatlantic Literary Studies, 1660-1830*, eds. Eve Tavor Bannet and Susan Manning (2010), 219-235, 222.

it measures its explanatory ambitions in relation to the context of the modern world, Atlantic history is, in the words of Alison Games, “a slice of world history.”⁴² Similarly, and by extension, as a critical practice that sees its “subject as an object that is also a space – the Atlantic Ocean and all that it holds, carries, and touches on in time,”⁴³ trans-Atlantic/neo-Atlantic literary studies is also ambiguously situated between world history, geography and cultural history. Yet, “the Atlantic” it conjures up does not appear as a space that could be established by geography or history alone so much as a conceptual and material site engendered by power relations, knowledge and physical constraints as world capitalism expanded across the watery mass of the Atlantic ocean before spreading into the European, American and African continents. The Atlantic, in Boelhower’s words, is “a uniquely extended heuristic space,” a “floating life” marked by... of “unity-in-multiplicity” whose intelligibility as a conceptual and material space “seems strictly linked to the materializing activities of ships and maps.” Indeed, “The ocean-going ship and the modern world map are undoubtedly the two major emblems of the genesis and taking hold of the modern world-system. So much so that they can be considered critical conduits for the flow of peoples, goods, and ideas back and forth between Europe, Africa, and the Americas particularly in the early centuries of the Atlantic world’s formation.”⁴⁴

If the intelligibility of the Atlantic world were generated in the making by Atlantic trafficking routes and in the fluctuations of science and capital powerfully captured by the figures of the ship and the map, then the historical narrative of the dual expansion of the (North) Atlantic and of capitalism can only be a product of what anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot called the juxtaposition of “a geography of imagination and a geography of management,” both distinctive yet intertwined in the global expansion of the North Atlantic,⁴⁵ since the logical order of the Renaissance imagination “went hand in hand [...] with the elaboration and implementation of procedures and institu-

42. “Atlantic history is a *slice* of world history. It is a way of looking at global *and* regional processes within a contained unit, although that region was not, of course, hermetically sealed off from the rest of the world, and thus was simultaneously involved in transformations unique to the Atlantic and those derived from global processes. The Atlantic, moreover, is a geographic space that has a limited chronology as a logical unit of historical analysis: it is not a timeless unit; nor can this space fully explain all changes within it. Nonetheless, like other maritime regions, the Atlantic can offer a useful laboratory within which to examine regional and global transformations.” *Ibid.*, 747.

43. Tamarkin, Elisa. “Transatlantic Returns,” in *A Companion to American Literary Studies*, eds. Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine (London, 2011), 264-293, 267.

44. William Boelhower, “I’ll Teach You How to Flow: On Figuring out Atlantic Studies,” *Atlantic Studies*, 1 (2004), 28-48, 33 and 47. For a brilliant reading of the paradoxes of production, discourses of freedom and racial narratives within a mercantile Atlantic context that relies on and exploits Boelhower’s figuration of the early Atlantic, see Laura Doyle, “Reconstructing Race and Freedom in Atlantic Modernity,” *Atlantic Studies: Global Currents*, 4, 2 (2007), 195-224. Online, last accessed September 3, 2014.

45. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “The Otherwise Modern. Caribbean Lessons from the Savage Slot,” 220-237, 221.

tions of control both at home and abroad.”⁴⁶ This twofold geography, in turn, can only be described from a perspective that relativizes the (North) Atlantic as one factor in the evolution of colonial, trans-Atlantic world cultural history.

Maps and ships – organizational instruments of world capitalism – were initially “fully involved in ‘worlding’ the space [of the Atlantic]” because they functioned simultaneously as the semiotic operators of modernity and modernization in the two geographies of management and imagination. It is precisely in the fissures and points of disjuncture of these two geographies that, Trouillot reminds us, “we are likely to identify processes most relevant to the joint production of sameness and difference that characterizes the dual expansion of the North Atlantic and of world capitalism,”⁴⁷ since the latter established the modern world with the new order over/of the world. That order was established as the epistemological distinction between modernity and coloniality brought about by modernity itself. Therefore, just like the *Fukù Americanus* in Junot Diaz’s novel, that order remains influential even in today’s globalized world. Midwifed on the Antilles by the Admiral Christopher Columbus – another one of “its great European victims” – *fukù* haunts the present and has bound cultures and histories ever since, much like the experience of colonial or modern subjectivity brought about by the maps and ships that instituted and installed modernity. As Diaz’s narrator explains: “No matter what its name or provenance, it is believed that the arrival of Europeans on Hispaniola unleashed the *fukù* on the world, and we’ve been in the shit ever since. Santo Domingo might be *fukù*’s kilometer zero, its port of entry, but we are all of us its children, whether we know it or not.”⁴⁸

Transatlantic/Neo-Atlantic Studies

Just as Atlantic history has its conventional beginning in Columbus’ 1492 voyage and the trade between the European, African and American continents,⁴⁹ Atlantic literary studies also has two points of origin: Robert Weisbuch’s 1986 monograph, *Atlantic Double-Cross: American Literature and British Influence in the Age of Emerson*, and Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993). Together, these critical works not only spurred the two main paths along which Atlantic studies were developed but they also chronologically established the shift from Atlantic to Transatlantic (or neo-Atlantic) studies. The Anglo-American “special relationship” was foregrounded and contested

46. Ibid., 222.

47. Ibid., 223.

48. Junot Diaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (London, 2008), 1-2.

49. See Alison Games, “Atlantic History,” 747. See also, David Armitage, “Three Concepts of Atlantic History,” in David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (eds.), *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (New York, 2002), 1-30.

in the *old*, “white” Atlantic matrix of studies focused on European imperialism and Anglo-American traditions that followed Weisbuch’s call for “a rigorous study of Anglo-American literary relations.”⁵⁰ The “black” Atlantic genealogy of the trauma of slavery and the history of the African diaspora is unanimously acknowledged as the foundation of what Boelhower has called “the new Atlantic studies matrix,” which emphasizes the “abrupt perspectival reversals” injected into Atlanticist scholarship by postcolonial and cultural studies methodologies.⁵¹ Although we can find significant overlaps between these two lines of research throughout the long list of publications they have inspired, those with a special awareness of “the heteronomic and multilingual condition of Atlantic studies themselves” who also question “the very concept of Europe as a unified, integral entity”⁵² tend to distinguish between Black Atlantic and Anglo-American transatlantic studies.

The Anglo-Atlantic matrix gradually shifted the focus of American literary studies, especially that concerning early revolutionary literary histories, away from considering American literature as an extension of the English tradition. Instead, that literature came to be viewed more as a dynamic element in an emergent transatlantic system that was “produced in a process of mutual intrainperial cultural exchanges”⁵³ and was later identified with all writing in English that attempts to “make room in the language of the New World [and has] helped to create the stylistic circumstances in which that writing is now received.”⁵⁴ Early major works using this matrix include William C. Spengenmann’s *A New World of Words: Redefining Early American Literature* (1994); Myra Jehlen and Michael Warner’s influential anthology, *The English Literatures of America, 1500-1800* (1997), which treated pre-revolutionary Atlantic culture as a unit while also seeking to canonize marginal voices; and Paul Giles’ *Transatlantic Insurrections* (2001) detailing the intertwined relations between English and American literatures during the revolutionary years, culminating with the American Revolution. The legacy of such critical investigation can be seen in the countless scholarly attempts to compare the construction of transatlantic subjects, subjectivities, identities and reformism, and to analyze the correspondence, travelogues, poems and print cultures shared by the cultures of Britain and the early revolutionary antebellum US and published into the early 21st century.⁵⁵

50. Robert Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross: American Literature and British Influence in the Age of Emerson* (Chicago, 1986), XX.

51. William Boelhower, “The Rise of the New Atlantic Studies Matrix,” *ALH*, 20, 1-2 (2008), 83-107.

52. *Ibid.*, 85.

53. Bauer, *Comparative Studies of Colonial America*, 285.

54. *Ibid.*

55. In addition to works already mentioned in Paul Giles’ *Atlantic Republic: The American Tradition in English Literature* (Oxford, 2006), some of the most significant publications in this tradition include:

We can find the Black Atlantic matrix in most studies of transatlantic culture. Indeed, one could argue that Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* midwifed *transatlantic* American studies by ushering in its (black? mixed?) post-postcolonial configuration to replace its (white) *Atlantic* matrix. In his influential study, Gilroy invited scholars to "take the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussions of the modern world and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective."⁵⁶ In Gilroy's seminal project, "the Black Atlantic" referred to both a specific "modern political and cultural formation" and a conceptual category, thereby rupturing accounts of modernity based on "the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity."⁵⁷ It also helped articulate a "counterculture of modernity" grounded in the transactions and movements between Africa, Europe and America, conceived as flows in "watery spaces"⁵⁸ as part of a "system of cultural exchange" largely determined by "the economic and historical matrix in which plantation slavery – 'capitalism with its clothes off' – was one special moment."⁵⁹ By reintroducing to the history of western modernity the history of the Middle Passage, "the half-remembered micro-politics of the slave trade and its relationship to both industrialisation and modernisation," and its dissemination, Gilroy bound the field of Atlantic/neo-Atlantic studies to a rewriting of modernity that operates both historically and conceptually, in order to pressure us "to rethink

Amanda Claybaugh, *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World* (Ithaca, NY, 2007); Kate Flint, *The Transatlantic Indian, 1776-1930* (Princeton, 2009); Audrey Fish, *American Slaves in Victorian England* (Cambridge, 2000); Elisa Tamarkin, *Anglophilia: Deference, Devotion, and Antebellum America* (Chicago, 2008); Meredith McGill (ed.), *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting* (Philadelphia, 2003) and *The Traffic in Poems: Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Transatlantic Exchange* (New Brunswick, 2008); Eve Tavor Bannett and Susan Manning, *Transatlantic Literary Studies, 1660-1830* (Cambridge, 2012); Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor, *Trans-Atlantic Literary Studies: A Reader* (Baltimore, 2007); Lance Newmann, Joel Pace and Chris Koenig-Woodyard, *Trans-Atlantic Romanticism: an Anthology of British, American, and Canadian Literature, 1767-1867* (New York, 2006); Leonard Tennenhouse, *The Importance of Feeling English: American Literature and the British Diaspora* (Princeton, 2007); Richard Gravil, *Romantic Dialogues: Anglo-American Continuities, 1776-1862* (New York, 2000); Heather Slettedahl Macpherson, *Transatlantic Women's Literature* (Edinburgh, 2008); Leslie Butler, *Critical Americans: Victorian Intellectuals and Transatlantic Liberal Reform* (Chapel Hill, 2007); Leslie Eckel, *Atlantic Citizens: Nineteenth Century American Writers at Work in the World* (Edinburgh, 2013); and Samantha Harvey, *Transatlantic Transcendentalism: Coleridge, Emerson and Nature* (Edinburgh, 2011).

56. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, 1993), 15. Other key contributions to this burgeoning research field include Marcus Rediker *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge, 1989), and *The Many Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston, 2000); and Edward Brent Hayes, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, 2003).

57. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 19.

58. Kate Flint, "Transatlantic Currents," *ALH*, 21, 2 (2009), 324-334, 325.

59. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 15.

modernity via the history of the black Atlantic and the African diaspora into the western hemisphere.”⁶⁰

Atlantic studies understood as studies of literary, political, ideological and commercial relationships across the Atlantic, particularly between British and North American literatures, was hardly a new subject at the time *The Black Atlantic* was published. However, two trends in American literary history retained a strong Eurocentric connotation that is incompatible with the critical questioning of the western epistemology of modernity intrinsic to Gilroy’s Black Atlanticism: first, the lengthy dominance of the “American exceptionalism” theory cast as the search for the origins of an authentically American identity “however that was defined at various point in history”⁶¹ and, more recently, the re-historicization of the field from a British imperial perspective inspired by historians like Gordon Wood and Bernard Bailyn, according to whom, for instance, early American culture formed “a huge, outwardly expanding peripheral arc” connecting the colonies and the rural provinces of England to metropolitan London.⁶² Baylin’s view seems highly innovative if we think of literary studies as a discipline historically related to nationalist ideologies and projects of cultural nationalism. However, if we resituate this view in the context of the methodological shift from the mid-1980s that led historians of early American literature to “abandon the quest for a distinctly American literary tradition [and begin] to see early American literary culture as an extension of the English tradition,” we must acknowledge that, while valuable, this view left little conceptual room to account for the circular traffic of the Black Atlantic.⁶³ On the contrary, as Boelhower has pointed out, Baylin’s attempt “to delineate an Atlantic history narrative” now seems to belong “to an already completed paradigm, ending – in terms of its thinkability – with

60. *Ibid.*, 17. Scholars agree that *The Black Atlantic* is “the most influential and field-defining” of several works around which a recent, critical Atlantic discourse has developed. See Mackenthun, Hall, Boelhower and Baucom.

61. Bauer, Ralph. “Notes on the Comparative Studies of the Colonial Americas,” *Early American Literature*, 38, 3 (2008), 281-304, 284. I am extending here Bauer’s reconstruction of the roles played by ideologies of exceptionalism and British imperialism in American literary history beyond the province of Early American Literature, which is Bauer’s focus. The revisionist impetus of American Literary History in the mid-1980s and early 1990s, which resulted in the publication of the two major histories of American literature – the eight-volume *Cambridge History of American Literature* edited by Sacvan Bercovitch and the *Columbia History of American Literature* edited by Emory Elliott – testify to the shift in orientation from the old exceptionalism of origins to the new exceptionalism of multiculturalism and diversity. See also Stevens, Claybaugh and Eltys.

62. For a historical account of a colonial, imperial Atlantic pursued vigorously by historians of the British Atlantic and historians of colonial British America working within national paradigms characterized by exceptionalism, see Alison Games, “Atlantic History,” 744. Games also dates the most recent emergence of an Atlantic orientation in historical studies to the 1970s.

63. Literary historians such as Michael Warner, Myra Jehlen and William Dowling told the story of early (or Revolutionary) American literature as that of an “English Diaspora,” a Protestant “print culture” or a transatlantic variant of an essentially English “Country ideology,” Bauer, “Notes,” 285.

its own pre-eminently Anglo-American and North Atlantic explorations.”⁶⁴ The limits of this paradigm can be foreseen in its “often parochial and at times unabashedly Eurocentric genealogy [...] and, even more tellingly, [Baylin’s] unwillingness to consider the ways in which Atlantic history is being significantly enriched by cultural studies and decolonizing methodologies.”⁶⁵ By challenging national histories and charting the evolutions and convolutions of modernity across national borders, postcolonial methodologies demonstrated that the “European world system” emerged alongside the colonization of Africa and the Americas, thus instituting an epistemology that bounded modernity and colonization as the effects of the same historical and conceptual event, while also producing a counter-historiography aligned with the counter-cultural, anti-Eurocentric project of the Black Atlantic and thence with the new Atlantic or trans-Atlantic studies matrix. Furthermore, as Charles Piot pointed out, *The Black Atlantic* also helped to establish the sort of cultural mixing – *creolité/métissage*/hybridity – characteristic of black Atlantic cultures as generally paradigmatic of cultural process.⁶⁶

As an explicit anti-Eurocentric critique of modernity, the mode of inquiry launched by *The Black Atlantic* demands new epistemologies of modernity, new ways of posing the relationship between the Atlantic and the modern that “question, rather than take for granted the very concept of ‘Europe’ as a unified, integral entity.” This can be done by interrogating the archive of slavery and the network of meanings and relations it produced alongside the emergence of a European world system, thus forcing a reconsideration of modernity, the Enlightenment and their attendant categories: “the idea of universality, the fixity of meaning, the coherence of the subject, and, of course, the foundational ethnocentrism in which these have all tended to be anchored [...] through the lenses of colonialism or scientific racism.”⁶⁷ Furthermore, as Ian Baucom suggests, by asking a genealogical question about the emergence and convergence of modernity, race and identity, Gilroy’s study really raises the question as to whether the modern concept of the subject and the conception of identity we inherit are not “in some fragmentary,

64. William, Boelhower, “The Rise of the New Atlantic Studies Matrix,” 83-107, 84.

65. Ibid.

66. Charles Piot. “Atlantic Aporias: Africa and Gilroy’s Black Atlantic,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 100, 1 (2001), 155-169. It is worth pointing out that Piot’s essay explicitly criticizes Gilroy and Stuart Hall’s work on the African diaspora and on identity and diaspora for focusing almost exclusively on Britain, the US and the Caribbean, thus leaving Africa out of the picture. Piot also tries to re-Atlanticize the African continent by addressing the diasporic, multicultural, multilinguistic and socially diverse environment generated by the displacement of people throughout the continent caused by colonization and the Atlantic slave trade. As he puts it, “This omission not only silences a major entity in the black Atlantic world but also leaves unchallenged the notion that Africa is somehow different – that it remains a site of origin and purity, uncontaminated by those histories of the modern that have lent black Atlantic cultures their distinctive character – and thus risking reinscribing a conception of culture that Gilroy, Hall, and many of the new diaspora scholars otherwise spent much of their work critiquing.” (Piot, “Atlantic Aporias,” 155-156).

67. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 54.

fissured, heterogeneous sense,” traceable to that “centuries-long ‘Atlantic now’” that we have inherited.⁶⁸ In this regard, the Black Atlantic, *post*-postcolonial matrix of trans-Atlantic studies described by Boelhower, Baucum, Jonathan Elmer – as we will see below – and others installs within literary studies a critique of modernity that dovetails with the hemispheric critique of modernity developed by Peruvian sociologist-anthropologist Anibal Quijano, Argentine-Mexican political scientist Enrique Dussel and Argentinian semiologist and anthropologist Walter Mignolo, who explore the relationship between globalization, capitalism, modernity and colonialism from the vantage point of “coloniality as a place of enunciation from where the invention of modernity can be disclosed and its ‘natural’ underpinning revealed.”⁶⁹ Their aim is to actualize the project to decolonize knowledge/power and to separate from modern rationality and its epistemology in order to foreground “other epistemologies, other principles of knowledge and understanding and, consequently, other economies, other politics, other ethics.”⁷⁰ Baucum also emphasizes the logic of unsettlement undergirding these anti-Eurocentric, *post*-postcolonial, genealogical – i.e. decolonial and trans-Atlantic – critiques of modernity in his description of Atlantic discourse as a critique of modernity:

Whatever else it has been, Atlantic discourse has articulated itself over this period as an origin-and foundation-worrying mode of critique, as an examination of those “subtle, singular, and subindividual marks” that collectively compose a complex transmarine “network” of cultural, historical, literary, and ethnographic exchanges, as a form of critique that – whether its object of study is the modern nation-state, the literary canon, religious, commemorative, or expressive practices, the constitution of corporate identities, or the formative logics of modernity itself – repeatedly “disturbs what was previously thought immobile,” “fragments what was thought unified,” and “shows the heterogeneity of what was thought consistent with itself.” [...] If Atlantic discourse is thus, in Foucault’s sense, a recognizably genealogical mode of discursive inquiry, then [...] such disturbances, fragmentations, and fissurings name more than a critical grammar of unsettlement, [...]. They also name an unsettled and unsettling way of inhabiting and experiencing the modern.⁷¹

Trans-Atlantic discourse so conceived works to reveal the hidden faces of modernity and to dislodge its prescriptive universals by suggesting the discontinuities “inherent” in

68. Ian Baucum, “Introduction: Atlantic Genealogies,” (2001), 1-13, 5.

69. Walter D. Mignolo, “The Enduring Enchantment (or, The Epistemic Privilege of Modernity and Where to Go from Here),” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101, 4 (Fall 2002), 927-954, 934.

70. For a good synthesis of the decolonization project in the context of transnational American studies, and for an overview of the many theoretical positions within that field, see Guenter Lenz, “Toward a Politics of American Transcultural Studies – Discourses of Diaspora and Cosmopolitanism,” *Journal of Transnational American Studies*, 4, 2 (2012), 1-33.

71. Ian Baucum, “Introduction: Atlantic Genealogies,” 3.

Atlantic history and the ideologies that underwrite “a Western system of racial hierarchy.” In this sense, Elisa Tamarkin points out, “Atlantic Studies derives from black Atlantic studies in particular its characteristic modality: a provocation away from ideologies of modernity and progress that are put at sea.”⁷² Those “real disjunctions that characterized the Atlantic’s historical and geographical components”⁷³ therefore become the conceptual levers of a critical, truly circum-Atlantic⁷⁴ methodology that is “fundamentally ocean based” (Boelhower)⁷⁵ or “transmarine” (Baucom) because the Atlantic world is “a field of strategic possibilities in which the Oceanic order holds all together in a common but highly fluid space.”⁷⁶

According to Boelhower, we can call the Atlantic and its mutants a “field of emergence and transformation,” a fluid, relational, excessive and perhaps inexhaustible conceptual domain that is necessarily “more than itself,” both historically and spatially, as it is meant to evoke the material and symbolic reservoir of information lost at sea, carried by the crosscurrents of the ocean through the centuries, and retrievable only by adopting a specific set of research strategies. Together with the genealogical method, these are: “foregrounding of scale, the archaeological turn, the writing of history as testimony, radical archival maneuvering, focus on case studies, and semiophoric analysis.”⁷⁷ As is clear from this quote, not only are traditional categories of humanistic scholarship (national canons, historical periods, literary genres, monolingualism) challenged by the improvisational, context specific, multi-scalar methodology heralded by Boelhower, but the set of strategies demanded by the heterogeneity of Atlantic genealogies and their dissemination may also require expertise not readily available in literary scholarship. The important point here is that an Atlantic domain so conceived defies any comprehensive literary methodology. We are thus warned that any attempt to bring together a “whole” Atlantic world may be, as Tamarkin has observed, only “an anachronism of it – one that reflects an impulse to imagine histories beyond the presence of the nation, that an earlier [...] moment has passed down to us.”⁷⁸

72. Elisa Tamarkin, “Transatlantic Returns” in Caroline F. Leander, Robert S. Levine, eds., *A Companion to American Literary Studies* (London, 2011), 270.

73. Alison Games, “Atlantic History,” 741.

74. The term “circum-Atlantic” is one of three descriptors identified by David Armitage in his overview of Atlantic History. Armitage derived it from literary scholar Joseph Roach, who first used it in his influential monograph, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York, 1996). Roach’s study was greatly inspired by Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic*, but expanded the definition of the Black Atlantic to encompass the African-diasporic, Native American and Caribbean dimension of Euro-Colonial Atlanticism.

75. Boelhower, “The Rise of the New Atlantic Studies Matrix,” 89.

76. *Ibid.*, 93.

77. *Ibid.*, 94. Inspired by Krzysztof Pomian, Boelhower defines a semiophore as “a highly condensed site, object, or event that brings the typically contingent history of the Atlantic world into focus in a fleeting but exemplary fashion.” *Ibid.*, 97.

78. Tamarkin, “Transatlantic Returns,” 267.

Shifting the methodological weight from place to relation via a spatialization of time inspired by Braudel's historiography – “The armature of Atlantic studies, we might conclude, is nothing less than the changing historical relation between land and sea understood as two different symbolic and geopolitical orders”⁷⁹ – allows new Atlantic studies to avoid the pitfall of returning to an anachronistic “totality” of the sea. However, what remains elusive is the object of studies proper to this “matrix” as well its research methodology and the archive it configures, since all ultimately depend, in Boelhower's words, on an equally elusive, problematic, “Extended phenomenological awareness [...] of the shifting historical relation between [land and sea].” Constitutive of the field, thus, are not even the *relations*, but the *awareness* of those relations. In fact, as Boelhower emphasizes, it is precisely the “awareness of this shifting relation” that “has generated the Atlantic world's first language and arguably its first archives.”⁸⁰ However, while a heightened awareness of shifting historical relations between elusive entities may open up fresh perspectives from which to analyze disciplinary subjects, it does not in itself provide sufficient grounds to either define a field or delimit an archive, and as a research project it will likely fail to satisfy either the epistemologist or the historian.

The first will question the formal, epistemological limits of “an extended phenomenological awareness” to constitute a research matrix, precisely since this notion brings us back to the problem of subjectivity as central to the conceptual vocabulary of the new Atlantic paradigm. Whose awareness does this research perspective rely on? That of the literary historian? What if no literary historian is aware? Does the matrix then disappear? (“Awareness of the shifting relation between them has generated...”) The second will raise the question of what precisely establishes the authority of such a self-instituted, elusive archive, and what explanatory power it holds over *what* objects, materials and un-archivable ghosts the Atlantic is supposed to hold (“the Atlantic world's first language and arguably its first archives”).

In his extension of the Black Atlantic order to the entire aqueous globe, Boelhower identifies the space of the Caribbean archipelago – “the Atlantic world in microcosm”⁸¹ – as an exemplary environment for the anti-Eurocentric, new-Atlantic methodology he is laboring to describe, and he singles out two texts that epitomize Atlantic ur-textuality and new-Atlantic methodology, respectively. The first is Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African Written by Himself* (1789) – a classic of the Black Atlantic tradition to which we will return in the final part of this essay. Boelhower defines it as a “quintessentially field text” whose erratic and paradoxical unity is the result of “a set of conditions, moves, utterances, and transformations, which need to be interpreted in terms of the very processes of their emergence and

79. Boelhower, “The Rise of the New Atlantic Studies Matrix,” 92.

80. *Ibid.*

81. *Ibid.*, 93.

formation, all of which take place in a spatial field.”⁸² The second is Edouard Glissant’s *Poétique de la Relation* (1990), whose methodological value springs from its dominant mode of inquiry and its logical construction, both of which emphasize the process of circulation of cultural traces and implies an understanding of history less inclined to chart progress and change than to trace the slow emergence of events and the transformations and hybridization of relations over the *longue durée*.⁸³

Perfectly in keeping with the expanded, post Black Atlantic idea of neo-Atlantic studies described by Boelhower, both examples herald an ambiguity, a conceptual paradox that only surfaces once it departs from its Black Atlantic matrix to expand into a more comprehensive paradigm for literary criticism. Unmoored from the traumatic archive of slavery, the heuristic and epistemological values of trans-Atlanticism become intellectually seductive but historically and conceptually questionable, because they are left bereft of a principle in relation to which an oceanic logic may be adjudicated as preferable to a territorial one, on both empirical and conceptual grounds. Unhinged from the history of the Black Atlantic as “a structure and a system,” as Gilroy framed it, even an expanded neo-Atlanticism so invested in the deconstruction of western modernity and its symbolic expressions loses its epistemological anchorage. We are thus left to wonder, along with Jed Esty: “Does a liquid or oceanic spatial array bear an inherently radical relation to the authority of the Archive? [and...] Is it possible for land-based interdisciplines such as the new hemispheric studies [...] to challenge the authority of state archives in parallel ways?”⁸⁴

Literary scholars and historians have adopted an Atlantic perspective with the purpose of “seeking larger patterns derived from the new interactions of people around, within, and across the Atlantic.”⁸⁵ Yet, the Atlantic does not always function as a necessary or preferable concept with which to explore so many types of literary exchange. In other words, unless it functions as a *device* – i.e. an epistemological machine that can produce and lead to otherwise inaccessible knowledge – the notion of the sea remains metaphorical and, as such, is unlike any other trope literary scholars have mobilized to organize their knowledge. To paraphrase Gaines’ words in reference to history, if circulation around and across the ocean is not a fundamental part of literary historical analysis and does not in itself provide explanatory power of the system under discussion, “then we would do well to define these projects by some other name.”⁸⁶ If the liquid, fluid, transnational order of the water does not secure an epistemological advantage over other domains of erratic transnationalism or globalism, such as those constitutively inhabited by literature, whose

82. *Ibid.*, 93.

83. Edouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation* (1990).

84. Jed Esty, “Oceanic, Traumatic, Post-Paradigmatic: A Response to William Boelhower,” *ALH*, 20, 1-2 (2008), 102-107, 104.

85. Gaines, “Atlantic History,” 749.

86. *Ibid.*, 746.

object is always literature in relation to other literature – across cultures, continents, waterways and what Wai Chee Dimock calls “deep time” – then literary trans-Atlanticism must perhaps content itself with claiming *to itself* an aesthetic advantage over other perspectives, rather than an epistemological one. An aesthetic advantage also carries with it the ability to affect our understanding of how the dynamics of water and land, ideas and objects, past and present, slavery and freedom, modernity and coloniality have incessantly shaped and re-shaped each other. If the trans-Atlantic defines a project to map out literary influences across time and space, it does not necessarily need to project an impossible, imagined origin back onto the figments and traces of “a world that remains apart from the modernity it helps to make.”⁸⁷ With this question in mind, we can begin to see, as Tamarkin wrote, that

the project of transatlanticism is almost impossible to conceptualize, in literary terms at least, without a sense that its character as an intellectual practice is essentially genealogical: alternative lineages are claimed for figures rarely pictured in relation; multiple inheritances for texts are accumulated but left unresolved as if to confirm that genealogy ‘opposes itself to the search for origins’ in favor of ‘the details and accidents that accompany every beginning’ (Foucault, 77, 80).⁸⁸

Varieties of Trans-Atlantic Experience

In literary history, the explanatory power of a concept depends on its ability to organize and give logical, rhetorical, ideological, aesthetic and chronological consistency to otherwise heterogeneous material, thus providing the measuring stick that “spans the distance from literary history as narrative to literary history as reference archive.”⁸⁹ To date, there is no comprehensive literary history of the Atlantic. However, one could speculate on what such a project would be like, methodologically speaking. Bracketing, for purely speculative purposes, all linguistic, temporal and cultural problems, we can say that, ideally, a literary history of the Atlantic would be a narrative history organized around the suprapersonal, collective concept of the Atlantic. This would in turn hold together and explain the vast archive of drawn and submerged traces of “trans-,” “circum-,” and “cis-” Atlantic space and the historical and literary modernities that evolved alongside it. Like 19th-century narrative literary histories, this history would also present a plot (the history of the Atlantic as a literary archive and as a conceptual fold). Unlike its positivistic predecessors, however, it would not be directed by a teleology (of the nation, freedom,

87. Tamarkin, 277.

88. *Ibid.*

89. Jonathan Arac, “What Good Can Literary History Do?,” *ALH* (2008), 1-11, 1.

emancipation, conquest or any other). On the contrary, and like most postmodernist literary histories, by taking an Atlanticist perspective to select, organize, generalize and explain diverse cultural and historical elements, material and discursive phenomena, and real or imagined events that have occurred over time in relation to a geopolitical space, such a history would likely try to counterbalance the impulse to encyclopedically include the boundlessness of the Atlantic with the impulse to organize it narratively.⁹⁰ From this vantage point, a literary history of the Atlantic would not be methodologically different from now-familiar literary histories that aim to retrieve “the context in the text,” as Hayden White put it long ago, and to provide historical reconstructions of the complex network of relations instantiated by textual objects by resituating these relations in specific material zones of production, representation, appropriation and use.⁹¹ As we may now infer from the discussion presented thus far, such a history would also be genealogically oriented so as to “cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning,” and to “seek the subtle, singular, and sub-individual marks that might possibly intersect in them to form a network that is difficult to unravel,”⁹² thus connecting asymmetrically, *in disparity*, modernity and the Atlantic as “a space of dwelling ‘in’ and a way of reflecting ‘on’ the modern [beginning of things].”⁹³ And yet, what seems most challenging about a prospective Atlantic literary history is precisely the problem of framing the Atlantic as “a modern archive,”⁹⁴ as Jonathan Elmer put it in his Foucaultian review of Black Atlantic methodologies.⁹⁵ Indeed, Foucault argued that the archive is “the general system of the formation and transformation of statements,” that which “between tradition and oblivion reveals the rules of a practice that enable statements both to survive and to undergo regular modification,”⁹⁶ a practice that articulates language and objects, making *statements* emerge as regularities from dispersion and thus subtracting language and objects from “the indiscriminate generativity of language” and making them available for further re-description by keeping them “between tradition and oblivion.”⁹⁷ If we no longer assume that the archive can be equated with tradition – as all Atlanticist scholarship makes abundantly clear – then, Elmer claims, we need to be more self-reflectively aware of the “continuities between [...] historical discursive practices and our own archiving

90. David Perkins, *Is Literary History Possible?* (Baltimore and London, 2002). For a detailed discussion on these topics, see also my *Effetti Teorici: critica culturale e nuova storiografia letteraria americana* (Torino, 2002).

91. Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse. Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore and London, 1979).

92. Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice. Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*, Donald F. Bouchard, ed., (Ithaca, 1977), 139-164, 142.

93. Ian Baucom, “Atlantic Genealogies,” 4.

94. Jonathan Elmer, “The Black Atlantic Archive,” *ALH*, 17, 1 (2005), 160-170, 168.

95. *Ibid.*

96. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (1972), 130. Quoted in Elmer, “The Black Atlantic Archive,” *ibid.*

97. *Ibid.*

practices.” This is particularly true when the latter cluster around that “recognizable genealogical mode of discursive inquiry that is ‘Atlantic discourse,’”⁹⁸ and which we may also call the archival apparatus holding together the narrative and referential dimensions of literary history by negotiating between the vastness of the oceanic environment and the statements about what that environment is and how it relates to other discursive practices, texts and phenomena. Otherwise, we would once more evade either the epistemological or the ideological question implied in suggesting or establishing a relationship between the two. This seems to be what Elmer suggests with his example about our current archival practice of *naming* with regards to Olaudah Equiano’s *The Interesting Narrative* – a key recurrent text in Black Atlantic scholarship also mentioned by Boelhower, as we have seen. The three names used by the author for his autobiography – “Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African” – are bracketed in contemporary editions of the text, and the first, African name is used despite the fact that, as Vincent Carretta scrupulously points out in his preface to the Penguin Edition, the author signed himself as “Gustavus Vassa” in all but two documents.⁹⁹ As Elmer insists, Carretta’s efforts are insufficient to challenge Penguin’s design needs, and this is exactly where discursive, that is, archival (epistemological? ideological?) constraints are at work and demand reflection: “Vassa was regularly Vassa in his own time, he is regularly Equiano now. The ‘statement’ of *The Interesting Narrative* has undergone a transformation. Why? The kinds of puzzles about identity, experience, and history so powerfully revealed in research on the black Atlantic infest our own archiving practice.”¹⁰⁰ What else, Elmer goes on to ask, does ‘the Atlantic’, in the various manifestations of Atlantic studies, stand for if not an unstable articulation of identity, experience and history?

One way of addressing Elmer’s question beyond the Black Atlantic framework is to present the issue of the Atlantic as always doubly bound to modernity. This way, it can be read in relation to a colonial past and a neocolonial present and the many genealogies of Atlantic practices encompassed in both: “history, institution, form, or mode of subjectivity that exists ‘within’ a circumambient modernity.”¹⁰¹ By foregoing all ambition to operate within a single disciplinary or institutional framework and by attending to the interdependence of the three concepts structuring our Atlantic discourse – identity, ideology and epistemology – we could perhaps better understand the links that make literary practices and literary histories modern *and* Atlantic. In practice, this would mean doing what scholars have recently been doing

98. Ian Baucom, “Atlantic Genealogies,” 3.

99. Jonathan Elmer, “The Black Atlantic Archive,” 169.

100. Ibid.

101. Ian Baucom, “Atlantic Genealogies,” 5.

on a large scale: linking literary texts from old empires, such as Edmund Spenser's *The Fairie Queen*, with, in Baucom's words:

the transatlantic slave trade, the slave trade to the modern forms of mobile identity, mobile identity to cosmopolitan traveling theory, traveling theory to the invention and, counterintuitively, the purification of diasporic religious, cultural, and commemorative practices, such purity discourses to the contemporary resurgence of a range of cultural nationalisms all around the Atlantic Rim, and the discourses of postcolonial nationalism to the Atlantic denationalization or diasporization of Caribbean, South African, West African, and British politics and cultural forms.

Such a scholarly endeavor would be aimed at disassembling not only the nation state but also other central forms of modernity such as "the sovereign individual, a range of 'high' and 'low' literary modes, etc.;" in other words, doing the preliminary work to enable literary scholars to reroute and expand canonical readings and works of literature in order to critically reassemble

something like a provisional, Atlantic countercanon that runs from Edmund Spenser to Victor Headley and replaces the analysis "of the exclusive generic characteristics" of an individual national literature with the examination of "the subtle, singular and subindividual" intersections of Renaissance epic, Caribbean romance, and yardie fiction within a network that is [...] difficult to unravel.¹⁰²

Baucom seems to consider the permanence of the slave trade as the foundational element of the ongoing Atlantic discourse he has in mind, as though – in line with Gilroy's project – that event/archive could not be separated from modernity. The extension of the Black Atlantic paradigm to the neo-Atlantic project foregrounded by Baucom's words expands "the temporal, canonic, geographic and linguistic" boundaries of the old paradigm to encompass the globalized, diasporic, polylinguistic and polycultural neoliberal present. It engages Anglophone, Francophone, Lusophone and Hispanophone Atlantic cultures and hemispheres, and covers literary genres and periods like "Renaissance epic, high modernist drama, postcolonial bildungsroman, 'minor' literature [...] and [...] postcolonial pulp fiction."¹⁰³ Ultimately, a critical Atlanticist discourse so practiced takes the shape of an ongoing series of investigations around events and moments in which "an array of African, Caribbean, North American, South American, or Western European cultural, narrative, literary, historical and ideological practices converge"¹⁰⁴ and then linger, recede, resurface or oscillate as coexisting modern phenomena bound to different temporalities and hence unevenly distributed over time. Here, the Black Atlantic is truly a synecdoche for the Atlantic, which is a synecdoche for "modernity."

102. *Ibid.*, 6.

103. *Ibid.*

104. *Ibid.*

How valuable has this critical discourse been to literary scholarship? To answer this question, we must begin by considering both the number of publications it has generated in the past twenty years and the quality of knowledge it has inspired. When it comes to quantity, there is no question that Atlantic studies has been extraordinarily generative. Suffice it to consider Eric Slauter's 2008 "Historiographical Note," which lists over 120 publications – partial literary histories, multivolume literary histories, anthologies and monographic studies – each dealing with some aspect of the literary Atlantic.¹⁰⁵ This number has even since expanded because the field continues to grow. As for quality, the methodological revision sparked by the Atlantic/neo-Atlantic paradigm helped both retrieve archival material and organize that material in fresh ways in at least three main areas of American literary studies, namely, early modern/colonial literary studies, 19th-century and African diasporic studies, and modernist studies. Each of these areas has developed a field-specific version of transatlanticism consistent with its own historical relationship to the narratives of the nation and/or of exceptionalism. As Eric Bauer explains, for instance, the study of colonial/early modern American culture sprouted from the "puritan origins" model, which valued early American literary and cultural productions based on what they had contributed to the national literary culture of the US in the 19th and 20th century. In the 1990s early Americanists challenged this proto-nationalist interpretive model, which was both anachronistic and philologically wrong given the widely diverse cultural production of the Americas, and "included not only geographical and cultural areas outside Puritan New England (such as Catholic Maryland) but also geographical areas not now part of the US (such as the Caribbean or Canada)."¹⁰⁶ However, by placing their object of study within the transatlantic frame of British imperialism, these scholars ended up redefining it in equally problematic Anglocentric terms like "literature of British America," which was ideologically focused on the mutations of British Renaissance cultures across the ocean. The introduction of a broader circum-Atlantic perspective critically focused on the study of literary cultures in relation to imperialism and colonialism depended upon a steady recuperation of a hemispheric, comparative approach to the study of Anglo and Ibero American cultures that had always been vital among literary historians and historians.¹⁰⁷ Although this perspective does partially overlap with a transatlantic approach, the latter tends to emphasize linguistic

105. Eric Slauter, "History, Literature, and the Atlantic World," *Willam and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 55, 1 (2008), 135-166.

106. Ralph Bauer, "Early American Literature and American Literary History at the 'Hemispheric Turn,'" *ALH*, 22, 2 (2010), 250-265, 250.

107. Ralph Bauer demonstrates how this alternative, circum-Atlantic and hemispheric interpretation of early American cultures was already in place during the first three decades of the 19th century, during the peak of the Monroe Doctrine's success and the ideological process of nation building, thus establishing a continuity in literary scholarship that stretches from *The North American Review* (1832), to Stanley William's *The Spanish Background of American Literature* (1968), to José Saldivar's *The Dialectics of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History* (Durham, 1991).

affinities, ethnic ancestry and literary-cultural continuities that move back and forth between single cultures across the Old World/New World divide. The former approach, on the other hand, has traditionally “emphasized the relations among and similarities between the literatures and cultures of the New World, focusing on what distinguishes the cultures and literatures of the New World at large”¹⁰⁸ from those of the Old World. Thus, the comparative hemispheric study of American cultures qualifies as a genuinely circum-Atlantic perspective, which in its current configuration has been inspired by the publication of works like Joseph Roach’s black circum-Atlantic study, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (1996).¹⁰⁹

Significant examples of hemispheric scholarship on the colonial period include: Eric Bauer, *The Cultural Geography of Colonial American Literatures: Empire, Travel, Modernity* (2003); Caroline Levander and Robert Levine, eds., *Hemispheric American Studies* (2008); Eric Bauer and Jose’ Antonio Mazzotti, eds., *Creole Subjects in the Colonial Americas: Empires, Texts, Identities* (2009); Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World: Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (2001) and *Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550-1700* (2006); Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *The Americas: A Hemispheric History* (2003); and Tamara Harvey, *Figuring Modesty in Feminist Discourse Across the Americas, 1633-1700* (2008).

Some of the most relevant examples of a hemispheric approach to the study of American literature beyond the colonial period include: Anthony Pinn, Caroline Levander and Michael Emerson, *Teaching and Studying the Americas. Cultural Influences from Colonialism to the Present* (2010); Eric Wertheimer, *Imagined Empires: Incas, Aztecs, and the New World of American Literature, 1771-1870* (1999); Kirsten Gruesz, *Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing* (2002); and Anna Brickhouse, *Transamerican Literary Relations and the Nineteenth-Century Public Sphere* (2004). Important works on 20th-century hemispheric literary history include José David Saldívar, *The Dialectics of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History* (1991); Hortense Spillers, *Comparative American Identities* (1991); and Jeffrey Belnap and Raúl Fernández, eds., *José Martí’s “Our America” from National to Hemispheric Cultural Studies* (1991).¹¹⁰

From a transatlantic perspective, studies of American literary cultures in and around the national period (1776 to 1880s) tend to split into Anglo-American or Black Atlantic studies. As we saw in the first two sections of this essay, the first group addresses the

108. Ralph Bauer, “Early American Literature,” 251.

109. See Elica J. Gould, “Atlantic History and the Literary Turn,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 55, 1 (2008), 175-180. See also John Gillis, *Islands of the Mind: How the Human Imagination Created the Atlantic World* (New York, 2004); and Jack P. Greene, “Beyond Power: Paradigm Subversion and Reformulation and the Re-Creation of the Early Modern Atlantic World,” in Greene, *Interpreting Early America: Historiographical Essays* (Charlottesville and London, 1996), 17-42.

110. For a full, updated bibliography on hemispheric American studies, see the website of “The Hemispheric South/s Research Initiative” at UC Santa Barbara, <http://hemsouths.english.ucsb.edu>.

commerce and reciprocal influences of ideas, material cultures, genres, styles, expressions, books, political movements and social ideals mainly between Britain and the US (with some extensions to Canada and Ireland), and restricts its critical investigations to the English language. The second, following the legacy of Peter Linenbaugh, Marcus Rediker and Paul Gilroy, expands the Black Atlantic perspective to encompass cultures of North and South America, Africa (especially West Africa) and the European empires, and spans a boundless array of languages and cultures, at least in theory.

In general, works of criticism aligned with the Anglo-American brand of transatlanticism tend to revise nationalist literary histories, be they British or American, and to engage with the process of identity formation and the emergence of an American literary and cultural scene in relation to a continuous process of exchange and influence with its British counterpart. Issues like the American reinvention of literary genres, the history of American publishing, the genealogy of reformism and the production of new subjectivities from an intricate nexus of connections and correspondences between writers on both sides of the Atlantic make up the focus of this branch of scholarship. In addition to the aforementioned monographs by Paul Giles, the many important publications in this group include Leonard Tennenhouse, *The Importance of Feeling English: American Literature and the British Diaspora 1750-1850* (2007); Leslie Butler, *Critical Americans: Victorian Intellectuals and Transatlantic Liberal Reform* (2007); Amanda Claybaugh, *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World* (2007); Meredith McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853* (2002); Heather Macpherson, *Transatlantic Women's Literature* (2008); and Samantha Harvey, *Transatlantic Transcendentalism: Coleridge, Emerson and Nature* (2011). Among the most influential examples of collaborative collections that showcase research on a variety of subjects within Anglo-American transatlanticism, we should mention Janet Bear and Bridget Bennet, eds., *Special Relationships: Anglo-American Affinities and Antagonism 1854-1936* (2002); Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor, *Transatlantic Literary Studies: A Reader* (2007); and Eve Tavor Bannett and Susan Manning, *Transatlantic Literary Studies, 1660-1830* (2012).

The slave trade and the African diaspora provide the main point of convergence between Anglo-American transatlanticism and Black Atlanticism via a vast scholarship focused on reassessing anti-slavery movements and abolitionist rhetoric in England and America (typical of Anglo-American transatlanticism), as well as efforts to inscribe in literary studies the traumatic history of the African diaspora and the modernities that emerged alongside it across Africa, Europe, and the Americas as typical of Black Atlanticism. Important examples of cross-fertilization between different areas of the transatlantic literary 19th century include Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Women's Rights and Transatlantic Antislavery in the Era of Emancipation*, (2007); David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (2000); Timothy McCarthy, *Prophets of Protest: Reconsidering the History of*

American Abolitionism (2006); Denise Kohn, Sarah Meer and Emily Todd, *Transatlantic Stowe: Harriet Beecher Stowe and European Culture* (2006); and Laura Doyle, *Freedom's Empire: Race and the Age of the Novel in Literary Modernity, 1640-1949* (2008). By shifting the focus from the literary to the cultural practices that accompanied the slave trade and focusing on their disseminations into the 20th century, the following publications all reconstruct alternative, fully racialized versions of Atlantic modernity and its formations of capital, nation and language: Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (1996); Brent Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (2003); and Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance, Capital Slavery and the Philosophy of History* (2005).

The perspectives outlined by Baucom, Roach, Edwards and other scholars only strengthen the hypothesis whereby the Black Atlantic *is one of modernity's foundational archives*, particularly if we recall that “the African diaspora provides the greatest number of voyages, migrations and trades around the Atlantic (the British, for example, carried three Africans to the Americas for every European through the early nineteenth century).”¹¹¹ Starting from the awareness that the African diaspora also “points to the atrocities that leave gaps in the archive,”¹¹² Atlantic studies tries to respond to such absences “through the immensity of its efforts to chart them, seeing the proliferation of materials and perspectives as a challenge to binary categories of centers and peripheries [...] and other paradigms of knowledge that fail to capture the complexities of the diasporic experience. The closer we look the more we find exceptions to official archives that subsume slaves within slave societies.”¹¹³ Furthermore, taking inspiration from Toni Morrison’s foundational 1992 essay about the absence of Africans and African Americans in canonical American literature,¹¹⁴ pioneering work by literary scholars such as Gesa Mackentum’s *Fictions of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (2003) address the absence in literary historiography of the transatlantic slave trade as both historical subject and critical practice, and connect this absence with the vicissitudes of the discourse on American national identity. From a transatlantic perspective, the autobiography of Olaudah Equiano, the post-revolutionary novels of Royall Tyler and Charles Brockden Brown, and the Pacific fictions of Melville

111. Tamarkin, “Transatlantic Returns,” 269.

112. *Ibid.*

113. *Ibid.*

114. “For some time now I have been thinking about the validity or vulnerability of a certain set of assumptions conventionally accepted among literary historians and critics and circulated as ‘knowledge.’ This knowledge holds that traditional, canonical American literature is free of, uninformed, and unshaped by the four-hundred-year-old presence of, first Africans and then African-Americans in the United States. It assumes that this presence – which shaped the body politics, the Constitution, and the entire history of the culture – has had no significant place or consequence in the origin and development of that culture’s literature.” Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark. Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 4-5.

became evidence for Mackentun's claim that "the absence of the Black Atlantic is in part the result of the absence of the Atlantic as such from a discourse that still seeks to accommodate the ideological demands for national myth-making."¹¹⁵

Taking the same research approach, Mackentun's critical revision of some classical American narratives from a Black Atlanticist perspective has been radically extended by Yogita Goyal's *Romance, Diaspora, and Black Atlantic Literature* (2013), which discusses literary representations of Africa as "constitutive" of black modernity. According to Goyal, African-American, African and black British diasporic writers fabricated a discourse of Africa that challenged existing models of nation and diaspora and shaped

a black Atlantic canon [that includes] not only texts that highlight transnational mobility across various locations of the Atlantic triangle, but also those that take up the conceptual core of the idea of diaspora: the loss of home, the meaning of memory, and the struggle to find a usable past [... and involve] a meditation on the legacy of slavery and colonialism, as well as a consideration of the relationship of blacks to the modern West and its traditions of thought.¹¹⁶

From Gilroy's to Goyal's Black Atlantic, the canon of diaspora and Atlantic studies has significantly expanded to include everything from

the late-nineteenth-century African-American magazine fiction of Pauline Hopkins to the late-twentieth century black British novels of Caryl Phillips, W. E. B. Du Bois, Joseph Casely Hayford, Edward Blyden, Marcus Garvey, Chinua Achebe, Richard Wright, Frantz Fanon, and Ama Ata Aidoo.¹¹⁷

"Read together," Goyal writes, "the writings of these intellectuals comprise what I call a black Atlantic canon." Alongside the long path navigated by these two revisionist interventions into the circum-Atlantic canon are a plethora of interdisciplinary studies that take Gilroy's Black Atlantic as their epistemological and historical point of departure, as well as the publication of archival material from the historical Black Atlantic. Of the former, some of the most important works include: Darlene Clark Hine and Jacqueline McLeod, *Crossing Boundaries: Comparative History of Black People in Diaspora* (1999); Jonathan Elmer, *On Lingering and Being Last: Race and Sovereignty in the New World* (2008); Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (2008); Alan Rice, *Radical Narratives of the Black Atlantic* (2003); Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440-1870* (1997); Vincent Carretta and Philip Gould, *Genius in Bondage: Literature*

115. Gesa Mackentun, *Fictions of the Black Atlantic in American Foundational Literature* (London and New York, 2004).

116. Yogita Goyal, *Romance, Diaspora, and Black Atlantic Literature* (Cambridge, 2013).

117. *Ibid.*, 8.

of the Early Black Atlantic (2003); Elisa Tamarkin, *Anglophilia: Deference, Devotion, and Antebellum America* (2008); Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780-1865*. (2000); and Philip Gould, *Barbaric Traffick: Commerce and Anti-slavery in the Eighteenth Century Atlantic World* (2003). The latter includes Vincent Carretta, *Unchained Voices: an Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the 18th Century* (1996); William L. Andrews and Henry Louis Gates Jr., *Pioneers of the Black Atlantic: Five Slave Narratives from the Enlightenment, 1772-1815* (1998); and Joanna Brooks and John Saillant, "Face Zion Forward": *First Writers of the Black Atlantic, 1785-1798* (2002).

The third area of literary studies currently undergoing Atlantic recontextualization is "Transatlantic Modernism," which has long been considered the foundational axis of international, cosmopolitan modernism historically connecting Europe and the US through a nexus of exchanges and collaborations between artists, institutions and cultures. As a sort of naturalized trope for international modernism, "Transatlantic Modernism" has, paradoxically, only become particularized recently as an effect of the transnational turn in modernist studies. By broadening the perimeter of modernism to include Caribbean, African, South American and Latin American routes, "Transatlantic Modernism" has widened its geopolitical imagination to actually become circum-Atlantic modernism. At the same time, it has also foregrounded a rethinking of modernity from an anti-Eurocentric, postcolonial, global perspective. This approach has brought new transatlantic formations and relational networks to the surface and demands sophisticated comparative models of analysis to address both their alternative temporalities and their racial and colonial configurations.¹¹⁸ For instance, and to insist on the Black Atlantic legacy of this new circum-Atlantic modernism and its broader transnational past, Laura Doyle's work on Nella Larsen collected in Doyle and Winkiel's *Geomodernisms* (2005) reinstalls Larsen's early-20th-century narratives in a long "Atlantic story" that links the Harlem modernist scene to earlier political writing from New England, Britain, Africa and the Caribbean. Doyle's Atlantic modernity traces the relationship between literature by Larsen, Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys and Claude McKay, among others, and the emergence, appropriations and transformations of notions of liberty back to its 1640s polysemic and ideological roots. Similarly, in her study of Nancy Cunard's *Negro*, Laura Winkiel aims to recontextualize the aesthetics and politics of the white avant-garde in relation to African and African-diasporic modernity in order to explore the possibility of alternative modernisms. Winkiel's revision of the standard Euro-Anglo-American-centric modernism is based on

118. See Andreas Huyssen, "Geographies of Modernism in a Globalizing World," in Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (eds.), *Geographies of Modernism: Literatures, Cultures, Spaces* (London and New York, 2005). See also the special issue of *Modernism/Modernity*, 13, 3 (September 2006) entitled *Modernism and Transnationalisms*. For a synthetic overview of the current configuration of Modernist Studies, see Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz, "The New Modernist Studies," *PMLA*, 123, 3 (2008), 737-48.

the reconstruction of the relationships between race, nation and modernity in avant-garde manifestoes. Like Doyle's work, it is also greatly inspired by Brent Edwards' monograph, *Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*, one of the first to present the Harlem Renaissance as a transnational movement.¹¹⁹

Similarly inspired by Brent Edwards' important monograph is a recent cluster of studies that have moved away from interpreting the African American intellectual diaspora to Paris in the central decades of the 20th century as a de-localized, limited chapter in the history of 20th-century African American literature in order to view it as a segment of a wider transatlantic circulation of people, ideas and texts from the Americas, Africa and the Caribbean to Paris.¹²⁰ Important contributions in this area of trans-Atlantic modernism range from the studies of individual authors, intellectuals and public figures to comprehensive accounts of the Black Atlantic scene in Paris, including: Petrine Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s* (2000); William Shack, *Harlem in Montmartre: a Paris Jazz Stories Between the Great Wars* (2001); Jeremy Braddock and Jonathan Eburne, eds., *Paris, Capital of the Black Atlantic: Literature, Modernity, and Diaspora* (2013); Tyler Stoval, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (2012); and Katherine McKittrick, *Sylvia Winter: On Being Human as Praxis* (2015).

Some of the most important studies on circum-Atlantic modernism include: Rebecca Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism beyond the Nation* (2006); Howard Booth and Nigel Rigby, *Modernism and Empire* (2000); Sieglinde Lemke, *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism* (2000); Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, *Alternative Modernities* (2001); Patricia Chu, *Race, Nationalism, and the State in British and American Modernism*. (2006); Edward Culter, *Recovering the New: Transatlantic Roots of Modernism* (2003); and Paul Stasi, *Modernism, Imperialism, and the Historical Sense* (2012).

The current configuration of the neo-Atlanticist paradigm in literary studies has greatly expanded our understanding of the interconnections between the cultural, material and conceptual roots of the modern circum-Atlantic world and their dissemination into so many routes across the watery and terrestrial global surface. The genealogical methodologies developed by scholars in the various sub-fields concerned with Atlantic phenomena have helped to retrieve and pursue Atlantic cultural, material and ideological formations in the long "modernity at large" that we still inhabit. They have also generally succeeded in establishing some conceptual parameters that not only give coherence to an otherwise too

119. Laura Winkiel, *Modernism, Race, and Manifestos* (Cambridge, 2008).

120. Michel Fabre, *From Harlem to Paris: Black American Writers in France, 1840-1980* (Urbana, 1993) is a foundational text in the critical history of the study of the African American diaspora to France and exemplifies (by contrast) how the research orientation of this field has shifted from international to trans-national, and from African American to Black Atlantic.

ample and amorphous range of abstract and material experiences dispersed and re-clustered across a wide spatial and long temporal axis, but also allow us to compare such experiences. In particular, by epistemologically addressing the connection between modernity, slavery and coloniality, scholars working within the Atlanticist paradigm have exposed the plurality of modernities and their “uneven flows of translation, transmission and appropriation,”¹²¹ thus keeping on the critical studies agenda the awareness that current globalization is “both continuous with and yet distinct from”¹²² the earlier modernity that produced the circum-Atlantic imagination our literary practices set out to retrieve and investigate.

121. Andreas Huyssens, “Geographies of Modernism,” 17.

122. *Ibid.*