

Book Reviews

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Editorial note: Book reviews are edited for typographical errors, and otherwise are printed as received.

Reviews

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO TRANSNATIONAL AMERICAN LITERATURE. Edited by Yogita Goyal. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2017.

Who can say how long the term “transnational” will be employed in American literary studies. Likewise, there is little agreement on precisely when such a term is historically most applicable and exactly which authors and texts embody or encompass the transnational. That is to say, for now, there is good reason to enlist a range of experts within multiple subfields of American literature to examine, critique, challenge, support, and expand the term. Whether the transnational turn becomes an extended pivot to something else or whether it is flexible and plastic enough to embody a range of somewhat contradictory and equally elastic terms become part of the difficulty (and impossibility) in genre or terminology prophecy.

The Cambridge Companion to Transnational American Literature consists of an introduction by the book’s editor, Yogita Goyal, and fifteen essays divided into four main parts: the “Shape of the Field,” “Literary Histories,” “Critical Geographies,” and “Literature and Geopolitics.” The term “transnational” is the most alive and ripest when:

1. it becomes evaluated within conceptions of pluralist, imperialist, and multicultural histories and realities within the United States (in particular);
2. the inevitable annoyance and questioning of why that one (undeniably powerful) country overshadows the literary output and importance of other American countries (North and South) within the most expansive geographical conception of American Studies;
3. when so-called localized texts are included in the transnational turn (ably examined by Jessica Berman’s essay looking at Claude McKay and Faulkner); and
4. the contested, overlapping, imbued, enmeshed, and internally fracturing literary sites, replete with multivocal, hybrid, and

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porous texts, authors, characters, settings, and themes, can all be subsumed under the transnational concept.

Shelley Fisher Fishkin, for example, examines how classic US fiction (Twain and Melville) get translated abroad and how such translations dissect, appropriate, or critique US imperialism or a call for greater freedom in the localized context (see especially her important inclusion of Iraqi Poet Saadi Yousef's use of Whitman). Fishkin also analyzes the impact travelling has on US writers like James Baldwin and why the "US" label is not permeable enough.

Other fascinating and helpful essays include (the always creatively stalwart) Viet Thang Nguyen, here examining Pacific Rim and Asian Literature; María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo's "Hemispheric Literature"; Destiny O. Birdsong and Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwankwo's "Black Atlantic and Diaspora Literature", and John Alba Cutler's "Borders and Borderland Literature." As gleaned from the titles, these are clear representatives of such expansive, multifaceted sights, and the authors and texts examined in these chapters further en flesh the term "transnational." Outside Timothy Marr's keen analysis of Muslim identity amidst American identity through novels like *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, I was less engrossed in the final version of the other essays, but were glad important topics like "American Indian Transnationalisms", or "Transnational Feminism" were also included.

Thus, where chapters eschewed a plethora of extended jargon and trendy (or more often, overused) critical terms and closely examined interesting texts and themes pertinent to an umbrella term like "transnational", an engaging and illuminating chapter generally resulted. I thus highlighted ones I found successful. When the evaluation of concrete texts was outweighed by internal reflection and grappling with terminology, this particular reviewer was less engrossed. Note: while one of my diplomas reads an M.A. in British and American Literature (Georgetown), we were studying then (1999–2001) what some are calling Transnational American Literature now. Naming and classifying an academic term, like a specific diagnosis, can be valuable, but whether it changes anything is the more important question. This reviewer would need more explicit political and moral investigations that somehow do not silence the poor, generally white voices that feel left behind (emblematic in recent popular non-fiction works like *Hillbilly Elegy*, *White Rage*, and *White Trash*) yet name, blame and (inevitably), confront the structures, laws, wars, and (even literary) terms which deny the value, dignity, and equality of all people (emblematic in movements like Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, the Dreamers, and other social justice initiatives). Here, in particular, the "transnational" not only has immense moral potential, but can help steer and refocus what it means to be "American" or what makes something "American" with its celebration of diverse voices, open borders, and what I would call, a movement towards, across or through—(*trans*)—solidarity, hinting or even courageously prophesizing what lies beyond, to a time when peoples, cultures, and nations truly embrace the transnational in thought, word, and deed.

Peter Admirand
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W. E. B. DU BOIS: An American Intellectual and Activist. By Shawn Leigh Alexander. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015.

It is unlikely that David Levering Lewis' monumental two-volume biography of American black sociologist, author and activist W. E. B. Du Bois (*W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1865-1919* [1993]; *W. E. B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and*

the American Century, 1919-1963 [2000]) will ever be superseded. However, Shawn Alexander (African/African-American Studies, University of Kansas) has produced a marvelous concise version of Du Bois' life, one that will provide an excellent refresher course for those already familiar with the subject, as well as a fine short introduction to Du Bois for those who need one.

Alexander has scoured Du Bois' multiple and multifarious writings over his 70-year career, read all of the existing literature on Du Bois and has written a well-organized, clearly-written and short yet thorough overview of his subject, accompanied by a thorough 12-page bibliographical essay. Hopefully Alexander's work, along with Lewis' massive (1400+ page) study will help to rescue Du Bois from his Cold War status as the American equivalence of an "un-person," which he was consigned to for his repeated criticisms of American foreign policy and especially for advocating "peace" at a time when the enthusiastic embrace by the Soviet Union of a "peace campaign" led the U.S. government to view such advocacy as "un-American." Thus, Du Bois was prosecuted and had his passport revoked on the highly-strained claim that his Peace Information Center was an agent of the Soviet Union and that he had failed to register as a foreign agent, but the government's case was so weak that it was dismissed by the judge at trial.

Embittered by this experience and the un-ending discrimination faced by American blacks, Du Bois eventually joined the American Communist Party (ACP) and left the United States for Ghana, where he died in 1963 and was honored with a state funeral, attended by representatives of every embassy and consulate in the Ghanaian capital of Accra, with the exception of the U.S. When the ACP organized the W. E. B. DuBois Club as its youth group in the mid-60s, "liberal" Johnson administration Attorney General Nicholas invoked the cold war Internal Security Act of 1950 to attempt to force the group to register with the government as a "subversive" organization and former Vice President Richard Nixon alleged that the communists had sought to confuse American youth into joining by misleading them into thinking the group was a "boys club."

As for the bulk of his book, Alexander traces Du Bois' career from his early work as a Harvard researcher and his Ph.D. studies at Fisk University, then his emergence as a leading young sociologist and expert on American blacks, especially marked by his landmark books, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and *Black Reconstruction* (1935), which pioneered an interpretation of reconstruction which American historians largely embraced only 50 years later. Along the way, DuBois was a founder of the NAACP and editor of its influential newspaper, *The Crisis*, for 25 years (1910-35), a post which, along with his numerous other writings and hundreds of lectures, made him the leading American black spokesman following the death of Booker T. Washington in 1915.

This is a fine study, which deserves a broad audience and would be an excellent choice for college textbook adoption.

Robert Goldstein
University of Kansas

BLACK ON BOTH SIDES: A Racial History of Trans Identity. By C. Riley Snorton. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 2017.

On Transgender Day of Remembrance in 2017, C. Riley Snorton wrote an essay asking, "What [do] we mean when we 'say their names?'" In *Black on Both Sides*, he offers ways to think through an answer to this question, as the text is a "looking for" and a "looking after" the "theories and politics that emerge at the limits of current operations for making biopolitical and necropolitical sense of black and trans death." (xiv) Through

a deft analysis of a vast and heterogeneous archive, Snorton interrupts dominant narratives of transness, blackness, and the co-constitutive genealogy of these categories by offering up grammar for black and trans life both historically and temporally. His deep and nuanced argument requires readers to examine how “category of transness is a racial narrative . . . [how] blackness finds its articulation within transness,” as well as how both of these categories are “inextricably linked yet irreconcilable and irreducible projects.” (8) While his engagement with disability studies is perfunctory, overall he demonstrates his ability to move deftly among scholarship from a range of disciplines in a way that asks the reader to rethink blackness, transness, and temporality.

Beginning with fungibility and fugitivity, he elucidates how both gender and sex are racial arrangements. Snorton brings “black” and “trans” into conversation by examining how both have been “constituted as fungible, thingified, and interchangeable.” (6) He demonstrates how genealogies of blackness and transness are parallel and interrelated formulations in which “captive and divided flesh function[] as malleable matter for mediating and remaking sex and gender as matters of human categorization and personal definition.” (11, 20) In this remaking, Snorton challenges notions of immutable gender so often rooted in white epistemologies, arguing that it is crucial to consider how “chattel persons gave rise to an understanding of gender as mutable and as an amendable form of being.” (57) Within this framework, the ungendering of blackness is a site in which gender became subject to rearrangement, thus providing opportunities for fugitivity through performances of transness. Enslaved people utilized this ungendering as a “critical modality of political and cultural maneuvering” evidenced by “the frequency with which narrative of fugitivity included cross-gendered modes of escape.” (56, 58) This refiguration and fugitive potential of gender provides a grammar for thinking through the racial history of trans identity in a U.S. context and how these genealogies inform our present moment.

Snorton’s explication of black gender as “anagrammatical” within the frame of Black modernity challenges the reductive ways in which binary sex and gender are read back in time through the filter of whiteness, and in ways that dismiss black experiences of fungibility. He calls attention to how the “color line was produced and policed by black women’s reproductive capacity,” arguing that this reality “necessitates an encounter with the figure of the black maternal as a character and as the ground of nonbeing that engenders black manhood.” (108)

Unlike most scholarship engaging trans history, Snorton moves quickly through and beyond Christine Jorgensen’s story, focusing instead on media constructions of black transwomen that illustrated “the impossibility of a ‘black Jorgensen,’” exposing how “anti-blackness [was] a critical paradigm for making sense of Jorgensen’s figuration.” (157) Snorton skillfully identifies the ways in which transwomen of color articulate their genders in ways that subvert linear logic, as achievable outside of medical and legal intervention. Ava Betty Brown’s narrative, for example, “points to how knowledge systems unrecognized by colonial authority . . . suggest a different, and perhaps decolonial, understanding of the body she inhabited.” (162) In this way, Snorton centers “other ways to be trans, in which gender becomes a terrain to make space for living.” (175)

Snorton concludes by broadening our capacity to imagine and “construct more livable black and trans worlds.” (14) Ultimately, he argues that this is what we must do when we “say their names.” As such, he attends to Phillip DeVine’s death and its framing in the Brandon Teena archive. Snorton names the absence of DeVine in articulations of Brandon’s story as a “symptomatic disavowal of blackness and anti-blackness.” (182) DeVine’s death as a black man is directly connected to the “interstitialities of black and trans life and black and trans death,” where “antitrans violence is also and always already

an articulation of antiblackness.” (184-5) We are called to remember and say the names of black, trans, and black trans individuals in a way that demands a radical dismantling of the conditions that produce the death of these individuals. Ultimately, Snorton’s book is a glimpse into what a future might look like where black trans lives will have mattered. (196)

Liam Oliver Lair
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OMAR NELSON BRADLEY: America’s GI General, 1893–1981. By Steven L. Ossad. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2017.

The purpose of this book is to bring new light to the life of Five Star General Omar Bradley and to revise the traditional narrative of his life. Ossad observed that: “Omar Bradley has for too long been relegated to the shadows cast by his larger than life contemporaries or has been explained away as an example of a nice guy who made it to the top through hard work. That perception is not only wrong, it does a disservice to Bradley and those who can still learn from his example (16).” Ossad believes the story of Bradley’s life has been dwarfed by that of Eisenhower and Patton. He seeks to provide a more complex, a more nuanced portrait of the man who commanded the largest operational command ever assembled by the United States, the 12th Army Group, and led in the biggest campaign ever fought by the U.S. Army, the Battle of the Bulge. This book is, in part, a study of command.

Steven Ossad is a military historian and biographer. He coauthored, *Major General Maurice Rose: World War II’s Greatest Forgotten Commander*. He has also published articles in military history journals.

Ossad’s book divides Bradley’s life into three parts. Part I, “Becoming a Commander,” chapter 1 through 5, covers Bradley’s early life, life at West Point, assignments as an officer, learning the trade of soldier in the U.S. Army, Corps Command in North Africa, and the invasion of and campaign in Sicily. Part II, “The Liberation,” chapters 6 through 10, covers the Normandy invasion, the breakout at St. Lo, the advance across France, the Battle of the Bulge, and the final victory in Europe. Part III, “Shaper of the Post War World,” chapters 11 and 12, cover the post-war period, head of the Veterans Administration, the emergence of Cold War, service as the first Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Korean War, and retirement. Part I is the most original part of the book. In it Ossad developed a character analysis, which portrays Bradley as a man incapable of admitting his mistakes, incapable of admitting he was wrong. While identifying character flaws, Ossad’s overall appraisal of Bradley is positive. He believes the General has been overlooked and under-appreciated for his many contributions and accomplishments. Part II, the war in Europe follows traditional assessments. Operation Cobra has been viewed as Bradley’s most brilliant act of generalship, and the Battle of Bulge, where U.S. forces were surprised by the size and ferocity of the German counterattack, has not been considered Bradley’s finest hour.

Part III is the most problematic. There are errors in the book. For example, on page 368, Ossad wrote: “The new act [National Security Act of 1947] replaced the short lived National Military Establishment with new institutions, the most important being the Department of Defense.” This is not accurate. The 1947 act created the National Military Establishment, and the 1949 amendment created the Department of Defense. (See: *The Department of Defense: Documents on Establishment and Organization, 1944–1978*, edited, Alice C. Cole, et al, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Historical Office, 1978, p. 63, 84). On page 382, Ossad wrote: “Secretary of Defense George Marshall agreed

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not only that his old advisory had opposed administration policies but that his failure to clear his 24 March 1951 statement with the President and the intended violation of the December order were grounds for dismissal.” In a “Memorandum for the Record,” dated 25 April 1951, prepared by General Bradley, it states: “Secretary Acheson and Mr. Harri-man thought he [General MacArthur] should be relieved at once. General Marshall and I recommended against such action.” Both Marshall and Bradley ultimately supported the relief, but both had to be convinced. There are also problems of interpretation. On the desegregation of the Army, Ossad wrote: “By the end of 1953, when he left office, only 5 percent of African American soldiers were serving in segregated units. That, and what followed, is one of Omar Bradley’s greatest legacies to the US military, which turned out to be one of the most vital and successful engines of social change in our history.” Bradley deserves little credit for the integration of the Army. Desegregation of the Army did not take place until 1951 in the midst of the Korean War at General Ridgway’s request. Had Truman’s 1948 Executive Order Number 9981 been implemented in good faith, the process would *not* have taken place in the midst of a war, and the Korean War, not the Vietnam War, would have been the first war the United States entered with an integrated Army. The fact is that South Koreans, foreigners, were integrated into the Eighth U.S. Army in Korea before African Americans. (See Matthew B. Ridgway, *The Korean War*. New York: A Da Capo Paperback, 1967, p. 192, 193.) And, there are other problems.

Subjects such as the relief of General Douglas MacArthur, the National Security Act of 1947, and the integration of the Armed Forces cannot be adequately covered in 2.5 pages, the space Ossad allocates. These issues are distorted and mistakes were made. Because of these errors and misinterpretations I could not recommend this book to my students.

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