

# UC Santa Barbara

## Journal of Transnational American Studies

### Title

Special Forum edited by Begoña Simal-González and José Liste Noya

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8rz911pr>

### Journal

Journal of Transnational American Studies, 9(1)

### Author

Simal-González, Begoña

### Publication Date

2018

### DOI

10.5070/T891041523

### Copyright Information

Copyright 2018 by the author(s). This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

# Disrupting Globalization: Transnationalism and American Literature

---

BEGOÑA SIMAL-GONZÁLEZ, Universidade da Coruña

As the twentieth century came to an end, we seemed to have entered a transnational era, a new historical stage where nations were exposed as a mirage both because they were proved to be human constructs—Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities”—and because they had been profoundly transformed by the new dynamics of globalization.<sup>1</sup> Scholars in the humanities, most notably in literary studies, were becoming more aware of the pitfalls to be encountered in the nationalist paradigm that had allowed our very subjects (“German literature,” “English,” etc.) to exist.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, if the national paradigm subtending our particular discipline was eliminated, we could not but feel strangely orphaned. How could we as Americanists approach the study of US literature if we questioned its foundational premise, claiming that there is no “national entity” supporting it? Is it possible to negotiate the aporetic nature of a “transnational American literature”?<sup>3</sup>

## **The Transnational Turn**

Despite the doubts raised by such an apparent oxymoron, a “transnational turn” had been heralded in the discipline of “American literature” since the 1990s. Already in 1991, Gregory Jay had announced “The End of ‘American’ Literature,” decrying the excessive emphasis on the national myth, most conspicuous in the common institutional practice of “[o]rganizing courses on the bases of national entities,” a move that “inevitably reproduce[d] certain biases and fallacies.”<sup>4</sup> This warning reappeared in Carolyn Porter’s insightful analysis of the “remapping” of the discipline of American literature, which she saw as a direct result of the erosion of the territorial and historical boundaries that had once solidly marked off what constituted “America.”<sup>5</sup>

The questioning of the nationalist paradigm was not unique to American literature, but affected other fields of literary study, most notably “English.” In his foundational essay “Beyond Discipline? Globalization and the Future of English” (2001), Paul Jay announced that the decline—but not the demise—of the nation-state as the node around which identity was constructed was having an enormous impact on literary disciplines, like English, that had long been built around national (id)entities. On the one hand, Jay argued, it was imperative to adopt a transnational perspective in English literary studies because it could provide the proper context for the myriad of literary traditions in English, especially those emerging in “diasporic conditions,” which otherwise ran the risk of merely being “assimilated to a narrow, nationalist paradigm.”<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the new methodological approach would help to lay bare the very transnational nature of more consolidated disciplines like British or American literature. In other words, the transnational paradigm in English literary studies, while not entirely dispensing with the national paradigm, would focus on the discipline’s historical involvement with the nation-state, encouraging students to explore “the instrumental role literature has played in the complicated world of transnational political and cultural relations.”<sup>7</sup>

In her famous 2004 presidential address to ASA, Shelley Fisher Fishkin dared to pose the question that would effectively inaugurate the “transnational turn” in American Studies: “What would the field of American studies look like if the transnational rather than the national were at its center?”<sup>8</sup> Among the different research paths that this transnational approach might open or had already opened,<sup>9</sup> Fishkin mentions comparative investigations on race and class issues across geographical and nongeographical boundaries, studies of global environmental concerns that do not understand borders, research on authors that have been neglected precisely because of their multiple border-crossings, explorations of American literature written in languages other than English, examinations of “the cultural work that forms originating in the United States do in cultures outside this country, studying their reception and reconfiguration in contexts informed by a deep understanding of the countries where that cultural work is taking place,” or studies on the increasingly flexible nature of (imagined) national communities and ethnic groups.<sup>10</sup> “As the transnational becomes more central to American studies,” Fishkin predicts that we will pay attention not just to “the proverbial immigrant who leaves somewhere called ‘home’ to make a new home in the United States,” but also to “the endless process of comings and goings that create familial, cultural, linguistic, and economic ties across national borders,” we may “focus less on the United States as a static and stable territory and population whose most characteristic traits it was our job to divine, and more on the nation as a participant in a global flow of people, ideas, texts, and products—albeit a participant who often tries to impede those flows.”<sup>11</sup> This new understanding of the national imaginary as always already traversed and constituted by other-than-national forces would necessarily transform the discipline.<sup>12</sup>

Over the last decade the popularity of and confidence in the new transnational paradigm has not stopped growing. In fact, scholars like Laura Doyle in “Toward a Philosophy of Transnationalism” have gone so far as to dispense with the concept of nation altogether, proposing alternative terms like “internations” or “transnations.” Like earlier proponents of the transnational turn in literary and cultural studies, such as Jay or Fishkin, Doyle offers an optimistic appraisal of the transnational turn. The transnational approach, she claims, is less restrictive than previous national(ist) models, which were exclusively concerned with the ways in which nations shaped, or constructed, identities; transnationalism, instead, encourages critics “to piece together the myriad and multisided histories *within* which nations themselves have taken shape and in turn exerted their force.”<sup>13</sup> More recently, Caroline Levander has advocated an understanding of American literary studies that is both “place-based” and transnational. For Levander, we should no longer approach American literature as “a celebration or reenactment of US empire- and nation-making”; instead, we should recognize its “founding dependence on others, the interdependencies that continue to shape the field, and the vanishing points, vulnerabilities, and internal fault lines that refute once and for all the notion of a stable and distinctive American literary tradition.”<sup>14</sup>

In 2017, Yogita Goyal edited the immensely valuable *Cambridge Companion to Transnational American Literature*. In its opening piece, the critic takes up the debate around the transnational turn in literary and cultural studies, including the doubts about the very rubric “transnational” and the uses it can be put to.<sup>15</sup> If deployed wisely, Goyal argues, transnationalism can disrupt “nationalist myths of cultural purity,” emphasize the past and present interdependence and interconnectivity of places and peoples all over the world, and provide invaluable analytical tools for a thorough study of old and new modes of imperialism.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the transnational approach can become an effective method when trying to scrutinize what is often known as (contemporary) globalization: “the increasing awareness and cross-cultural dialogue of the Information Age, where the diffusion of cultural forms through immigration and the spread of capital and commodities is ubiquitous and dazzling in both speed and reach.”<sup>17</sup> There is no denying that the transnational method constitutes an excellent tool to explore the “shrinking of the world” brought about by people’s increased mobility, the advent of the ICTs, global trade and other economic and cultural aspects of contemporary globalization. However, Goyal also joins those critics that caution against purely “triumphalist” accounts of transnationalism, premature<sup>18</sup> or naïve,<sup>19</sup> in that they obscure the negative underside of globalization.

Among the unresolved or unanswered questions that Goyal poses in her introduction is the need to draw precise boundaries between similar concepts: “How does one distinguish transnationalism,” asks Goyal, “from past and present discourses of internationalism, cosmopolitanism, and globalization?”<sup>20</sup> In what follows I will try and elucidate the complex relationship between globalization and the transnational turn in literary and cultural studies.

## Globalization and Transnationalism

Chronology matters. The fact that the transnational turn in American Studies was proclaimed at the turn of the twenty-first century, soon after the advent of contemporary globalization, certainly invites cause-and-effect readings. And yet, transnationalism, understood as the emerging methodology in literary and cultural studies, has also been perceived as going beyond contemporary globalization in conceptual and chronological terms. One way in which we can bypass the debate around the co-emergence of globalization and the transnational turn is by extending the chronological scope of the former. This is what Paul Jay does in “Beyond Discipline?”, where he argues that, for the purposes of cultural and literary analysis, it seems more fruitful to consider the phenomenon of globalization as having a long history than as having come on the scene just a few decades ago: the former position “offers wider opportunities for those of us in literary studies interested in the intersection of globalization and literary and cultural production”; the global frame, viewed in this less restricted way, “provides an important way to rethink our approach to the study of literature across a range of historical periods.”<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, several literary historians and critics implicitly disengage the arrival of transnationalism in academic and critical circles from the changes brought about by economic, political and cultural globalization; paradoxically enough, they do so by invoking social and institutional changes at the national, US level as the immediate cause for the transnational shift in American cultural and literary studies. In his influential “‘Paradigm Dramas’ in American Studies” (1979), Gene Wise had already remarked that the last of those paradigmatic changes occurring in the 1960s had been a direct consequence of the political and social activism filling the streets and the minds of America, starting with the Civil Rights Movement and followed by feminist and antiwar activism, among other movements. Such social upheavals eventually reached academia and fundamentally altered disciplines like American Studies. “By the middle of the 1960s,” Wise explains, the paradigm known as the “intellectual history synthesis,” which had been prevalent in the field for decades, was falling apart; American universities “were threatened by forces which charged them with being bastions of reaction, not a haven for free, inquiring minds,” while American Studies was increasingly perceived “not as a vanguard movement on the frontiers of scholarship ... but as an overly timid and elitist white Protestant male enterprise which tended to reinforce the dominant culture rather than critically analyzing it.”<sup>22</sup> In time, many of those intellectuals who saw themselves as teacher-activists would enter the academia and push forward a new paradigm shift.

Later critics and literary historians have insisted on the relevance of this pivotal moment for the disciplines of American Studies and American Literature.<sup>23</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s the progressive social activism in the streets triggered significant changes at both theoretical and institutional levels: grassroots activism for women’s rights intersected with the arrival of (second-wave) feminist theory and the development of

Women's Studies programs; Civil Rights movement with Critical Race Theory and the creation of Departments of Ethnic Studies; anticolonialist movements (the anti-Vietnam protests can be interpreted as such) with postcolonial theory and Postcolonial Studies; and so on and so forth. Porter, writing in 1994, ventured that the remapping of US literature had been carried out "first by African-Americanist and feminist critics and then by the flourishing scholarship on Asian-American, Native American, and Chicano literatures," all of which had started "to undermine the fundamental terms by which American literary history must be comprehended and taught. Both the historical and geographical frames once dictated by the national, and nationalist, narrative of the US [were] collapsing."<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, in her 2004 address, Fishkin maintained that it was the American social activism of the 1960s that opened up the field of American Studies "as scholars recovered the voices of women and minorities and replaced earlier exceptionalist visions of unsullied innocence with a clear-eyed look at the lust for empire that America shared with other Western powers."<sup>25</sup> However, in her opinion, at the turn of the century the national paradigm still remained untouched, as the US continued to be perceived by most scholars as an unambiguously defined "geographical and political space."<sup>26</sup> In this respect, her reflections on the transnational turn in American Studies did not constitute so much a description of what had already happened as an invitation to join a still incipient tendency in both research and teaching. This situation changed in just a few years. While in 2005, when she published her presidential address, Fishkin was still using the conditional (asking what would happen "if" the transnational approach superseded the nationalist model still prevalent in American Studies), by 2010, when Paul Jay published his *Global Matters*, he maintained that "the transnational turn" had already "began in earnest," at least in literary studies.<sup>27</sup>

Although these crucial developments in US history continue to be present in most accounts of the transnational turn, more recent criticism tends to devote more time and attention to the phenomenon of contemporary globalization. In addition, as we might expect, globalization figures more prominently in the work of those transnational critics and literary historians who expand the range of influences that brought about the "transnational turn" in literary studies in order to encompass movements and schools of thought, most notably postcolonial theory, that arose and developed outside the "national" US frontiers, as well as current global dynamics. This is the case of Paul Jay's work, which acknowledges the importance of recent processes of globalization in the rise of transnationalism.<sup>28</sup> Both in his 2001 essay and in his later *Global Matters*, Jay painstakingly builds a genealogy of the "transnational turn" in cultural and literary studies by braiding the national social and intellectual "effervescence" discussed above with the worldwide changes known as globalization and the concomitant rise of a discipline studying this phenomenon.<sup>29</sup> According to him, "the transnational turn in literary studies" rose out of the confluence of precisely these two strands: "the study of minority, multicultural, and postcolonial literatures," on the one hand, and "work done under the auspices of the emerging study of globalization,"

on the other.<sup>30</sup> While Jay critiques the univocal linkage of the transnational turn to contemporary globalization, he does not deny the latter's role in highlighting what, in his view, is a much longer phenomenon, dating back to the European colonial ventures starting in the sixteenth century.<sup>31</sup> And yet, it is worth noting that all the literary texts that Jay chooses in order to illustrate his transnational mode of analysis in *Global Matters* are *contemporary* narratives dealing with *contemporary* globalization. This is actually a fact that the critic highlights in the introduction to the book, when he explains that he has chosen these particular narratives because they “chronicle the experiences of people around the world whose lives are being shaped by the accelerating forces of globalization.”<sup>32</sup> Jay does not seem totally aware that this choice of corpus undermines the very theoretical underpinnings of his critical position: if transnational interpretative strategies can be applied to a large literary archive, including old and contemporary texts, why then this emphasis on—indeed, exclusive attention to—recent fiction dealing mostly with the different facets of contemporary globalization?<sup>33</sup>

We are left with the central question posed by transnationalism understood as a reading practice: how can critics incorporate older texts to the potential archive of transnational analysis? How can we de-anchor transnationalism from its frequent identification with current globalizing trends? While the first impulse in a transnational(ist) critic may be to scrutinize recent narratives in search of the specific concerns and motifs often associated with contemporary globalization (the ICT revolution, neoliberal capitalism, global climate change, etc.), this is by no means the only alternative. Should we focus less on thematic specifics and more on larger underlying paradigms like transnationalism—the impetus to go beyond the nation-state—, we could retroactively read older narratives from the new, transnational perspective. The fact that these “retroactive” reading practices are common in other critical schools such as ecocriticism, postcolonial, gender or queer studies, should encourage us to incorporate them into transnational literary studies as well. After all, it may be our fixation with the aforementioned specifics of contemporary globalization that prevents us from imagining a more flexible use of transnational reading practices; it may well be our own mimetic preconceptions when approaching literary texts that forestall the possibility of locating and reading transnationalism *avant la lettre*.

The six articles in this **Special Forum** constitute a good example of flexible transnationalism at work: while Mandala White's exploration of culinary tourism illustrates the multiple ways in which the transnational approach can be employed to explore the more obvious issues raised by contemporary globalization, essays like Lori Merish's study of transindigeneity prove that the transnational critical method can also be applied retroactively, to texts set in periods predating contemporary globalization. The variety of uses to which transnationalism can be put is also evident in the way some authors focus on the obvious political issues raised by contemporary globalization, while others favor aesthetic issues, and most highlight the interconnection between the formal and ideological aspects of the transnational

approach. Transnational diversity is also present in the range of contributors to this Special Forum. Heeding the advice given by Fishkin in her 2004 presidential address,<sup>34</sup> the scholars taking part in this Forum come from a variety of backgrounds: Some are based in the US while others are not, and most of them are literally transnational. This diversity is also encountered in the writers whose work is examined in the six articles comprising this Special Forum. American authors like Junot Díaz, Ernest Hogan, Ruth Ozeki or Diana Abu-Jaber have generally been perceived as “ethnic” writers. However, the very meaning of multiethnic America has changed. It may be true that, as Goyal notes, the fields of “ethnic studies and black Studies ... were transnational from their very inception”;<sup>35</sup> and yet, the erosion of the traditional, unidirectional model of emigration, transformed by the increasing mobility of individuals that has brought about new identities, has led to a revision of the American ethnic paradigm from a transnational perspective.<sup>36</sup> This new, revised paradigm transpires in the articles dealing with US writers heretofore labeled as “ethnic,” whose work is now resituated in a transnational or global frame.

One recent novel by an “ethnic” American writer that has received critical attention as an exemplar of the transnational and the global paradigms is Ruth Ozeki’s *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013).<sup>37</sup> Both the author and her alter ego in the novel, Ruth, can be identified as that elusive figure so dear to transnational critics: those “marginalized precisely because they crossed so many borders that they are hard to categorize.”<sup>38</sup> However, it is the translational work that the character and the novel carry out that makes Ozeki’s novel particularly amenable to a transnational approach. This is Claire Gullander-Drolet’s central premise in “**Translational Form in Ruth Ozeki’s *A Tale for the Time Being*.**” Contemporary globalization, in bringing together people and information from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, seems to have intensified the need for all sorts of translation: cultural, historical and “interlingual.” The privileged position of translational work, Gullander-Drolet argues, is conspicuous in Ozeki’s narrative, where translation plays a pivotal role, particularly “in shaping the ways in which that otherness is negotiated across geographical and temporal meridians.” After framing her transnational analysis in the context of current debates in Asian/American studies, Gullander-Drolet ultimately puts forward a “new model of empathic reading,” derived from the logics of “not knowing” foregrounded in the novel.

Janet Zong York’s contribution to the Special Forum illustrates how deeply imbricated are the aesthetics and the politics of globalization. In “**Anthologizing “Little Calibans”: Surplus in Junot Díaz’s *Linked Stories*,**” York focuses on the formal and political consequences of lifting such texts from the original short story cycles in which they were originally published (*Drown* and *This is How You Lose Her*) and redeploying them in anthologies. While the drive to anthologize Díaz’s stories should be framed within the larger context of a national and international demand that owes much to cultural and economic forces of globalization, York also points out to the hermeneutic implications of anthologization per se. For her, the “surplus of feeling and



knowledge” that emerges from the very structure of linked short story collections is lost in the process of anthology curation. The transnational approach emerges precisely from this dialogue between the text situated in its original short story collection and that same text framed in a more sizable anthology that necessarily brings the story to its own ideological orbit and agenda, be it ethnic distinctiveness or universal representativeness. It may very well be that through the dialectics between fragment and whole that inheres in both short story cycles and anthologies we can get a glimpse of the larger local–global dialectics of contemporary globalization. And yet, York is careful not to draw simplistic parallelisms; instead, her project is heavily invested in showing “how narrative fragments of displacement and diaspora constitute an irreducible surplus.” Collected/anthologized stories, because of their mobile and slippery nature, can help us negotiate the fraught trajectories of people and culture in a globalized world.

“Transnational questions and approaches,” as Fishkin noted in her 2004 address, “can complicate Native American issues in American studies in fascinating ways.”<sup>39</sup> Lori Merish’s **“Mapping the Transnational in Contemporary Native American Fiction: Silko and Welch”** is a good example of Fishkin’s intuition. Seen from outside, far away from the usual national frame(work), the very concept of indigenusness can be “reconstellated,” as Merish proves in her analysis of Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Gardens of the Dunes* (2000) and James Welch’s *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* (2001). These two novels, she argues, “engage the transnational in three ways: affirming ‘America’ as transnational cultural space from its inception by staging ways Native cultures’ ‘disidentif[y] with the nation’; affirming the transnational complexity of Native cultures; and registering Pan-Indian and indigenous transnationalisms vitally alive in the present.” Interestingly, as anticipated, both Silko and Welch set their novels at a time that preceded the intensified forms of globalization we are now familiar with. And yet, transnationalism is central to the development of their main characters, whose travels help reshape their own Native Americanness. In Silko’s *Gardens of the Dunes*, the protagonist forges transindigenous solidarities that contribute to the crystallization of an ecofeminist awareness. Welch’s Bildungsroman, on the other hand, highlights the “transnational dimensions of tribal cultures” back in America.

American culture is not immune to the “discontents” created by the hegemonic neoliberal—and profoundly unequal—type of globalization that we are currently witnessing.<sup>40</sup> The last three articles in this Special Forum address the particular discontents and the general sense of malaise that contemporary globalization has triggered. And yet, it is worth reminding that, even though globalization is most commonly perceived as a process through which the US is “coca-colonizing” the rest of the world, there are increasing signs that the influence is not univocal but mutual. This more or less asymmetrical reciprocity, which some theorists call transculturality, is both cause and consequence of cultural and literary production. A transnational reading practice that can be productive will consist in elucidating whether American literary texts foster, reflect or problematize such transculturality, still haunted by the

spectre of (old discourses of) authenticity and Orientalism. “As the transnational becomes increasingly central to American studies,” Fishkin ventures to predict, “we will value contemporary scholarship that probes the vectors of tourism and the commodification of culture and heritage from multiple vantage points,” by examining, for example, “the consumption of culture-specific cuisines in global contexts.”<sup>41</sup> Some of the the pitfalls and possibilities of the aforementioned transculturality, such as the “commodification of culture”—including particular cuisines—in a globalized world, are explored in Mandala White’s **“Exotic Arabs and American Anxiety: Representations of Culinary Tourism in Diana Abu-Jaber’s *Crescent*.”** Abu-Jaber’s Orientalist depiction of Arabic culture, according to White, is clearly related to “a post-9/11 American culture eclipsed by anxieties about terrorism.” After examining “culinary tourism,” the ways in which food works as a figurative trope and a material vehicle to access exotic authenticity in a world of increasing transcultural exchanges, White contends that the novel explores the double function of exoticism: “the fear of a vaguely defined Arabic or Islamic culture, on the one hand, and the potential for its strangeness to be seen as fascinating on the other.” Ultimately, White considers Abu-Jaber’s novel to be formally complicit with the very discourse—exoticism—that it purportedly intends to critique.

The last two essays in this forum engage speculative fiction as the privileged site from which to explore current globalizing dynamics. In **“Postethnicity and Antiglobalization in Chicana/o Science Fiction: Ernest Hogan’s *Smoking Mirror Blues*, and Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita’s *Lunar Braceros* 2125–2148,”** Elsa del Campo Ramírez touches upon one of the most common critiques of contemporary globalization: the fact that the future still seems to be “predominantly white, masculine, and globally built on indigenous exploitation.” Del Campo argues that the utopian scenarios depicted in the two novels are postracial in alarming ways, ultimately “spiraling into the erosion of the American ethnic paradigm through the configuration of nonspecific and inconsistent ethnic categories.” In her analysis, she insists on the commonalities shared by the politics of global corporate capitalism and the racial (bio)politics fleshed out in these Chican@futurist narratives. Science fiction is also the focus of José Liste-Noya’s contribution, **“Being True to the trans-: Samuel R. Delany’s *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand* and the Transglobal Imagination.”** His essay begins with the recognition that science fiction, classic as well as contemporary, has always possessed a global, postnationalist imaginary, shying away from if also secretly conditioned by contemporary nationalist and imperialist scenarios. In recent critical work on SF, critics such as Fredric Jameson have persuasively argued that contemporary SF is a privileged literary mode of “cognitive mapping” of the inherently unrepresentable, technologically conditioned global economy. Delany’s 1984 novel dramatizes such an insight via a literally “transglobal” extrapolation of our current transnational dynamics. In the process, Liste-Noya suggests, the transglobal fictional world of Delany’s novel counters totalizing notions of the global and of the literal globe that is a planetary world by exposing the “plural singularity” of any and all worlds.

Drawn from the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, the phrase points to the novel's and the essay's exploration of the juxtaposition between the notion of world and the global in order to pinpoint the paradoxical tendencies of globalization, its simultaneous opening up of the singular differences of world(s) and its homogenizing curtailment of such diversity within the enclosure of globality. Delany's tale of desire, sexual and political, becomes a demonstration of science fiction's straining at the boundaries of the global by tracing the postnational utopian impulse inherent in the very idea of the transnational.

### **Coda**

Trying to apprehend the current global(izing) dynamics is like aiming at a moving target or pinpointing a quantum particle: One can never be sure whether, as we speak, the world/globe has turned again and we now have to confront a phase/face whose existence we had not imagined. This realization becomes all the more poignant in these times of geopolitical uncertainty, when the obvious movement towards greater worldwide interconnectivity seems to run up against unforeseen obstacles, most notably the nationalist backlash and the new economic protectionism. How does the apparently "unstoppable" globalizing trend become reconciled with the pendulum reaction of local/national jingoism and, in the case of America, exceptionalism? How does one negotiate the ostensibly inexorable phenomenon of globalization with the equally conspicuous emergence of its "old" and "new" discontents, to use Stiglitz's fortunate phrase? If—and, as we have seen, this is a big "if"—one draws a cause-and-effect arrow between globalization and the transnational turn in American Studies, does it mean that the present deglobal(izing) dynamics will erode and ultimately undermine what prominent scholars have heralded as the most important paradigm shift in the discipline since the 1970s?<sup>42</sup> While future paradigmatic changes and "dramas," to use Wise's preferred term, are still a matter of speculation, what is undeniable is that, in the last few decades, cultural and literary critics have had to grapple with an approach, transnationalism, that has fundamentally altered the nationalist assumptions prevalent in the field for more than a century. This Special Forum joins the ongoing conversation in Transnational American Studies by addressing the complexities that inhere in the interface between transnationalism, globalization and literature, at the same time that it tries to offer different critical tools for (re)orientation. The globe may keep turning as we speak, but human imagination is versatile enough to devise new critical compasses that prevent us from going adrift in this (trans)global space, unless we choose to do so.

### **Notes**

The edition of this Special Forum is the result of the joint effort of the two co-editors, José Liste and Begoña Simal, and of the research assistants Lucas Martingano and Sara Villamarín, whose help, especially during the last, copyediting stage, has been crucial.

This edition was also made possible by the Spanish Research Agency (Agencia Estatal de Investigación), Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities, which funded our research project “Literature and Globalization: A Transnational Approach to American Literature” (ref. FFI2015-66767-P, AEI/FEDER, UE).

<sup>1</sup> In trying to define globalization, the *what* is intimately bound up with the *when*, and, as we shall see in the following pages, this has vast consequences for the way we understand the impact of globalization on literary and cultural studies. Although historians concur that the 1990s saw the intensification of globalizing processes, they differ in their attempts to periodize globalization as a whole (Paul Jay, “Beyond Discipline? Globalization and the Future of English,” *PMLA* 116, no. 1 (2001): 32–47; Paul Jay, *Global Matters*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010); Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction*. 2nd edition, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). One graceful way to avoid the impasse of debates about historical periodization is to use the phrase “contemporary globalization,” which, while not denying the roots of the phenomenon in earlier times, effectively foregrounds the intensification of globalizing trends in recent decades.

<sup>2</sup> In the particular case of American literature, we cannot forget that, as Gregory Jay puts it, “[t]he anxiety to invent an American nation and the anxiety to invent American literature were historically coincident” (“The End of ‘American’ Literature: Toward a Multicultural Practice,” *College English* 53 (1991): 267). “Since the rise of the modern university in the West is directly linked to the development and needs of the nation-state,” Paul Jay reminds us, “the globalizing of literary studies portends a remarkable reversal, one that is bound to have a deep effect on the discipline we call English” (“Beyond Discipline?” 32).

<sup>3</sup> This paradox was already noted by Carolyn Porter in “What We Know That We Don’t Know,” where she contended that “a field defined by reference to the very nation whose nationalist discourse is to be relativized is automatically self-deconstructing” (“What We Know That We Don’t Know: Remapping American Literary Studies,” *American Literary History* 6, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 501). Similarly, in her 2017 book, Yogita Goyal also mentions the apparently contradictory nature of the phrase. Yogita Goyal, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Transnational American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017): 6.

<sup>4</sup> In the particular case of American literature, Gregory Jay urges teachers to pay attention to the “acts of writing committed within and during the colonization, establishment, and ongoing production of the US as a physical, socio-political, and multicultural event, including those writings that resist and critique its identification with nationalism” (“End,” 268).

<sup>5</sup> Porter, “Remapping,” 468.

<sup>6</sup> P. Jay, “Beyond Discipline?” 44.

<sup>7</sup> P. Jay, “Beyond Discipline?” 42.

<sup>8</sup> Shelley Fisher Fishkin, “Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies: Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004,” *American Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2005): 21.

<sup>9</sup> Fishkin, “Crossroads,” 23–32.

<sup>10</sup> Fishkin, “Crossroads,” 33, 24.

<sup>11</sup> Fishkin, “Crossroads,” 24.

<sup>12</sup> With the advent of the transnational paradigm research in American Studies has irreversibly changed. “Rather than construing the territorial nation-state as the instrument for evaluating and representing America’s global inter-relationships,” Donald Pease reminds us, the new “transnational model called for the reconceptualization of social movements as models for transnational understandings of cultural and political processes as passing back and forth between disparate cultural systems” (“Re-thinking ‘American Studies’ after US Exceptionalism,” *American Literary History* 21, no. 1 (2009): 20). Similarly, Paul Jay urges us to approach literary texts and other artistic production “not simply as aesthetic objects but also as cultural objects caught up in complex systems of transnational and intercultural exchange, appropriation, and transformation” (“Beyond Discipline?” 44).

<sup>13</sup> Laura Doyle, “Toward a Philosophy of Transnationalism,” *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 1, no. 1 (2009): 1–29, <http://repositories.cdlib.org/acgcc/jtas/vol1/iss1/art7>.

<sup>14</sup> Caroline F. Levander, *Where is American Literature?* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013): 188.

<sup>15</sup> Goyal wonders whether the term is merely employed as “a euphemism for minority, ethnic, or multicultural US literature” or whether it “replac[es] the category of Third World literature” (*Transnational*, 1).

<sup>16</sup> Goyal, *Transnational*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Goyal, *Transnational*, 6. Not every literary critic has welcomed the transnational turn. Some have qualms about the excessive optimism sported by the aforementioned scholars (Porter, “Remapping”; Bryce Traister, “The Object of Study; or, Are We Being Transnational Yet?” *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 2, no. 1 (2010): 1–28). Bryce Traister warns us that those critics advocating for a transnational turn in American Studies can end up merely “recycling” and perpetuating the discourse of “American exceptionalism.”

<sup>18</sup> Goyal, *Transnational*, 7.

<sup>19</sup> Porter, “Remapping,” 512. In her 1994 essay, she already warned us against a naïve, acritical embracing of transnationalism understood as unequal globalization, for “there is nothing inherently socially progressive about transnationalist models, whether they be global or merely hemispheric” (“Remapping,” 512).

<sup>20</sup> Goyal, *Transnational*, 6. Exploring the international and cosmopolitan idioms is beyond the scope of this essay, which just focuses on the interplay between the global and transnational paradigms.

<sup>21</sup> P. Jay, “Beyond Discipline?” 36.

<sup>22</sup> Gene Wise, "'Paradigm Dramas' in American Studies: A Cultural and Institutional History of the Movement," *American Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (1979): 311–12.

<sup>23</sup> Porter, "Remapping," 468; Fishkin, "Crossroads," 20; P. Jay, *Global*, 2–3; Goyal, *Transnational*, 6.

<sup>24</sup> Porter, "Remapping," 468.

<sup>25</sup> Fishkin, "Crossroads," 20.

<sup>26</sup> Fishkin, "Crossroads," 20. In her presidential address, Fishkin does not link the transnational turn to contemporary globalization, as Jay does, but she also subscribes to a view that is more encompassing, historically speaking. In fact, some of the examples of recent and future scholarship she provides explore phenomena taking place before the British settlement in North America.

<sup>27</sup> P. Jay, *Global*, 2. In 2017 Goyal went even further and proclaimed that, by now, "transnational frames ... have become normative rather than insurgent in American literary studies" (*Transnational*, 5).

<sup>28</sup> P. Jay, "Beyond Discipline?" 45; *Global*, 40–52. It is worth remarking the paradoxical fact that this article, one of the publications that inaugurated the transnational turn in cultural and literary studies, invoked in its title a concept, globalization, that it later problematized not so much by denying its relevance as by redefining it in temporal terms. Instead of circumscribing the phenomenon of globalization to the last four decades, Jay opts for a more flexible understanding of globalization ("Beyond Discipline?" 33).

<sup>29</sup> P. Jay, "Beyond Discipline?" 33, 34; *Global*, 2, 12.

<sup>30</sup> P. Jay, *Global*, 2.

<sup>31</sup> P. Jay, *Global*, 2–3.

<sup>32</sup> P. Jay, *Global*, 12.

<sup>33</sup> See, in comparison, the range of historical periods and authors covered in Goyal's 2017 book, which is less limited, including studies of literature from nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as Johannes Voelz's chapter on nineteenth-century American texts, Jessica Berman's transnational study of modernist literature, or Shelley Fisher Fishkin's discussion of "traveling texts" like those of Walt Whitman or Younghill Kang ("Unsettling American Literature, Rethinking Nation and Empire," in *The Cambridge Companion to Transnational American Literature*, ed. Yogita Goyal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 20–21).

<sup>34</sup> Fishkin, "Crossroads," 36, 42.

<sup>35</sup> Goyal, *Transnational*, 11.

<sup>36</sup> Begoña Simal, "'Moving Selves': Immigration and Transnationalism in Gish Jen and Chitra Divakaruni," in *Transnational, National and Personal Voices: Asian American and Asian Diasporic Women Writers*, ed. Elisabetta Marino and Begoña Simal (Berlin/Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004),

165–67. The case of Native American writers, like Leslie Marmon Silko or James Welch, is qualitatively different, since their singularity can be threatened by too exclusive a focus on literal transnationalism. And yet, as Merish's article contends, transnational alliances and webs can prove highly instrumental in (re)constructing one's (trans)indigenous identity.

<sup>37</sup> For recent transnational analyses of Ozeki's novel, see Parikh and Simal. Crystal Parikh "Transnational Feminism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Transnational American Literature*, ed. Yogita Goyal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 221–36; Begoña Simal, *Ecocriticism and Asian American Literature: Gold Mountains, Weedflowers and Murky Globes* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming).

<sup>38</sup> Fishkin, "Crossroads," 30.

<sup>39</sup> Fishkin, "Crossroads," 29.

<sup>40</sup> See Joseph Stiglitz's latest edition of *Globalization and its Discontents* (Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents Revisited: Anti-Globalization in the Era of Trump* (London: Penguin, 2017). The social and political results of those "new discontents," like the victory of the Brexit in the UK or the new "Trump era" in the US, can no longer be ignored, as Nina Morgan, Sabine Kim and Greg Robinson remind us in the last issues of JTAS. While American narratives like *Empire Falls* or *The Battle in Seattle* already anticipated or echoed the main issues raised by anti- and alterglobalist discourses, recent films like *Margin Call* or *The Big Short* have chosen to critique contemporary economic globalization by focusing on the global financial crisis.

<sup>41</sup> Fishkin, "Crossroads," 34.

<sup>42</sup> "Since the rise of critical theory in the 1970s," as Paul Jay famously claimed, "nothing has reshaped literary and cultural studies more than its embrace of transnationalism" (*Global*, 1).

### **Selected Bibliography**

Doyle, Laura. "Toward a Philosophy of Transnationalism." *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 1, no. 1 (2009).

Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. "Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies: Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004." *American Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2005): 17–57.

———. "Unsettling American Literature, Rethinking Nation and Empire." In *The Cambridge Companion to Transnational American Literature*, edited by Yogita Goyal, 19–36. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Goyal, Yogita, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Transnational American Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Jay, Gregory. "The End of 'American' Literature: Toward a Multicultural Practice." *College English* 53 (1991): 264–81.

- Jay, Paul. "Beyond Discipline? Globalization and the Future of English." *PMLA* 116, no. 1 (2001): 32–47.
- . *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010.
- Kim, Sabine, and Robinson, Greg. "Introduction: Transnational American Studies in the 'Age of Trump.'" *Journal of Transnational American Studies*, 8 no. 1 (2017): 1–14.
- Levander, Caroline F. *Where is American Literature?* Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.
- Morgan, Nina. "A Community of Thought: Connecting with Transnational American Studies." *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 2, no. 1 (2016): 1–8.
- Parikh, Crystal. "Transnational Feminism." In *The Cambridge Companion to Transnational American Literature*, edited by Yogita Goyal, 221–36. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Pease, Donald. "Re-thinking 'American Studies' after US Exceptionalism." *American Literary History* 21, no. 1 (2009): 19–27.
- Porter, Carolyn. "What We Know That We Don't Know: Remapping American Literary Studies." *American Literary History* 6, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 467–526.
- Scholte, Jan Aart. *Globalization: A Critical Introduction*. 2nd edition. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Simal, Begoña. "'Moving Selves': Immigration and Transnationalism in Gish Jen and Chitra Divakaruni." In *Transnational, National and Personal Voices: Asian American and Asian Diasporic Women Writers*, edited by Elisabetta Marino and Begoña Simal, 151–73. Berlin/Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004.
- . *Ecocriticism and Asian American Literature: Gold Mountains, Weedflowers and Murky Globes*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming.
- Stiglitz, Joseph. *Globalization and Its Discontents Revisited: Anti-Globalization in the Era of Trump*. London: Penguin, 2017.
- Traister, Bryce. "The Object of Study; or, Are We Being Transnational Yet?" *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 2, no. 1 (2010): 1–28.
- Wise, Gene. "'Paradigm Dramas' in American Studies: A Cultural and Institutional History of the Movement." *American Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (1979): 293–337.