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Introduction: Transatlanticism's Influence on British Literary Study

The metaphor of a 'symbiosis' between British and U.S. literature implicit in this journal's title implies that the literatures of both countries are dependent on each other in a mutually enriching relationship. The field of transatlantic literary and cultural studies has provided ample evidence that the national literary traditions of the two countries are permeable. Texts that seem recognizably American or British often become, upon further examination, a product of international cultural forms. A variety of studies have shown that literary cultures have moved both ways across the Atlantic for centuries, in a two- or many-way exchange, from east-to-west, west-to-east, north-to-south, south-to-north, and circum-Atlantic trajectories. Theorists argue that traditions and nations are invented, that national and racial identities on both sides are 'transcontinental co-constructions' (Buell), promoted seriously or facetiously by outsiders and insiders alike. So, operating from the position of high theory, there may seem little need to inquire how transatlanticism has influenced British literary study. Yet outside that sphere, many readers and scholars still rightly view the two national literary traditions as distinct, distinctive and separable.[1] For these reasons, it seems worthwhile to articulate how transatlanticism has changed how British literature is written, read, analysed, or curated.

This journal being a key exception, transatlanticism as an approach has played a more prominent role in the meta-criticism of American literature than it has in the meta-criticism of British literature. There is no book series for British literature analogous to Routledge's 'Routledge Transnational Perspectives on American Literature'. Edinburgh University Press's website subdivides literary studies into different periods of literature, and American and transatlantic scholarship share the same tab. The journal *American Literary History* has published nine polemical 'state-of-the-field' review essays on transatlanticism since 2002 (the most

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recent, by Martha Schoolman, prefers the historians' term, 'Atlanticism'), as well as a host of similar pieces on related approaches like the hemispheric, the transnational, or the concept of a world literature. There have been no similar 'state-of-the-field' essays on transatlanticism in such journals as *English Literature in Transition 1880–1910*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, *Victorian Studies*, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, *Women's Writing*, *Studies in Romanticism*, *Modernism/modernity*, or *English Literary History*.[2] The journal *Modernist Cultures* published its first special issue on transatlanticism just last year, entitled 'New Transatlanticisms' (David Barnes). That said, recent nation-specific compendiums on British print culture have taken into account North America's role in the internationalization of print culture in English (such as the essay by John Barnes, Bill Bell, Rimi B. Chatterjee, Wallace Kirsop and Michael Winship in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain. Vol. VI 1830–1914* or the essay by Bob Nicholson in *The Routledge Handbook to Nineteenth-Century British Periodicals and Newspapers*). Like other recent compendiums, such as the *Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, these volumes treat transatlantic crossings as one of many 'geographies' that connect to or qualify any discussion of 'British' literature, alongside Scotland, Wales, Ireland, the Continent, or the empire.[3]

Recognition of the transatlantic dimension of British literary culture rarely prompts existential doubt about the entire body of literature and the methods and theories with which it is studied.[4] In contrast, Americanists have seem bothered. On the related concept of the 'transnational', the American Studies Association Presidential Address has advocated for transnational approaches twice in this century, the 2004 address by Shelley Fisher Fishkin and the 2006 address by Emory Elliott, although the 2008 address by Philip J. Deloria called for more recognition of the continuities across different generations of American Studies scholarship, and the theme of the 2014 conference parodied the association's perennial calls for revision of its archives and methodologies; the theme was 'The Fun and the Fury: A New Dialectics of Pain and Pleasure for the Post-American Century'. There are various explanations for the diverging rhetoric with which the scholars of U.S. literature and the scholars of British literature have taken up transatlantic approaches. It is almost impossible to compare like to like, because the study of British literature has long been so divided into different period designations (Renaissance, eighteenth century, Romanticism, Victorianism, modernism, etc.) that no one journal or scholarly association can hope to speak for all of them at once. The prospect of providential urgency might well feel more natural for Americanists in ways that are

easy to parody but difficult to trace to a single origin. Perhaps it is the different class styles (not to be confused with class realities) of academic professionalism in the United States and the United Kingdom; a middle-class work ethic underpins the U.S. version of professionalism while a leisure-class dislike of being a swot is adopted by some British academics; perhaps it stems from covenant theological traditions that inspire self-scrutiny and a sense of higher purpose – yet, as transatlantic scholarship has shown, these intellectual traditions are shared in Scotland and elsewhere, one of the many reasons why the modifier 'British' is often less appropriate than 'English' (see Manning, *The Puritan-Provincial Vision*). Perhaps the call for new critical turns arises out of the need to justify more books and articles, an entrepreneurial urge of the neoliberal academy.[5]

Many literary scholars view transatlantic approaches as a correction of problems that have plagued the study of U.S. literature, but not necessarily the study of British literature. Most scholars probably share the belief that the United Kingdom is the less insular, more outward looking culture, a belief that leaves instances of U.K. insularity, ethnocentrism, or anti-intellectualism unchallenged. Many scholars justify transatlantic approaches with reference to American exceptionalism, the belief that American society developed in different conditions from those of Europe, and thus must govern itself by different principles. Yet analogous terms that describe the faith in the longevity, independence, and internal coherence of British culture, like Anglo-Saxonism or Anglophilia for instance, are discussed less by transatlanticists.[6] Likewise, there is no clear analogue for 'Americanist'. Eve Tavor Bannet nicely uses the generally applicable term 'nationalist master-narrative' (1).

One scholar has long called for transatlantic scholarship that changes the parameters of British literature, Paul Giles. In *Transatlantic Insurrections: British Culture and the Formation of American Literature, 1730–1860*, Giles proposes that 'the prospect of America produces various forms of disturbance within English texts' (11). Rather than viewing the United States as a belated inheritor of cultural forms, he proposes that we view British and U.S. literature as developing in 'parallel' (2) or 'as heretical alternatives to each other' (2). Because of the history of the United States being a settler culture, both colonised and coloniser, which won independence through a decisive break, both countries' cultures and literatures exist less in a divided and antagonistic relationship than in 'reciprocal attractions and repulsions' (1). The disturbing prospect of a family break up lies behind Jane Austen's seemingly insular representations of British family life, for example (*Transatlantic Insurrections*, 117–41). Giles's

Atlantic Republic: The American Tradition in English Literature offers tightly constructed readings of how the United States operated literally and metaphorically for English writers as a 'locus of dissent' (2) with different meanings at different time periods for writers as diverse as Mary Shelley, Lord Byron, Charles Dickens, Arthur Hugh Clough, D. H. Lawrence, Angela Carter, and Salman Rushdie. Individual chapters exemplify just how textured, particular, and various these English responses to the United States are; but Giles's opening rhetoric—

> the emphasis here is upon neither consolidating nor ignoring nationalism as a principle in the formation of cultures, but upon ways in which the definitions of such cultures becomes [*sic*] twisted and grotesquely perverted through various forms of entanglement with opposing centres of gravity' (9)

—could easily raise hackles among people who do not wish their ideas about literature to be 'twisted' or 'grotesquely perverted' or involuntarily pushed by too many 'centres of gravity'. Such people are not only those who voted to leave the E.U. or to build physical or symbolic walls. The rhetoric here and in much transatlantic scholarship of the same era treats transatlanticism as, for Britain, a sign of diminished sovereignty or health.

The essays collected in this special issue do not contest the validity of the category of British literature, nor do they see Britain or its literature as woefully dependent or unhealthy. They treat the transatlantic movement of people, trade, and texts as one transnational impulse among many. These essays conceptualise the Atlantic through an arguably narrow frame of U.S. and British (and mainly English) crossings, but that tight focus enables them, somewhat paradoxically, to challenge the belief that transatlanticism matters more to the United States than it does to the United Kingdom. A broadening of the definition of literature underpins all of the essays collected here, which are less about the central institutions of British literature than about the many outlets and occasions for British writing.

Kathryn Gray's essay, '"Literary Performances": Edward Kimber, the Novel and Natural Histories in the Eighteenth Century' conducts a close reading of travel essays collected in *Itinerant Observations* (dating various) and the novel, *The History of the Life and Adventures of Mr. Anderson* (1754) by the forgotten English writer Edward Kimber, who toured the colonies of New York, Maryland, Virginia, Georgia and Florida in the 1740s. These books have been made newly available in affordable scholarly editions because of the broadening of definitions of the literary. A small body of work has located Kimber's significance in his sometimes radical

exploration of slavery, Indian-white relations, and rebellion in *Mr Anderson*. In contrast, Gray links Kimber to questions of natural history. The focus on periodical publication and travel writing as well as fiction enables her to demonstrate the interplay between narrative literary forms and natural history. Other scholars have shown how natural history and empirical science fed the growth of the emerging novel form, but Gray argues for seeing a two-way influence between literature and science.

Sofia Prado Huggins's essay, 'Slavery, Sex, and Social Networks: The Reception of Harriet Jacobs's *The Deeper Wrong: or, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* in the British Periodical Press' similarly pays attention to an expanded definition of literature and to the transatlantic print culture that made its physical circulation possible. The popular reading matter that Gray discusses helped lay the groundwork for a politically conscious transatlantic abolitionist movement. Huggins shows how a series of ties between British and American abolitionists helped Jacobs publish her slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) under a new title, *The Deeper Wrong; or, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1862), renamed in honour of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's anti-slavery poem, 'The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point' (1848). Although the transatlantic dimensions of Jacobs's writing and activism have been explored by Jean Fagan Yellin, Huggins's focus on networks and the business of reviewing is new. Huggins' readings of specific reviews demonstrate that journals reluctant to cut economic ties between British industry and slave-grown cotton also decried the unclean and immoral sexual content of Jacobs's narrative, whereas other journals praised Jacobs's evocation of facts usually kept veiled. The subtle differences in reviews illustrate that actors motivated by ethics and business shared the same space on the pages of periodicals. The inclusion of an essay about a U.S.-born writer in a special issue devoted to British literature might disappoint those who rightly criticise the dominance of African Americans in the story of the black Atlantic, but Huggins's attention to the networks that turned Jacobs's experience into literature for British readers shows the entanglement between white British and black U.S. literature, not to mention the boundary between white and black women's writing.

Amber Shaw's essay, 'The "Dire Clash of Civil War" in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*' shows how the American Civil War serves as a backdrop to Eliot's 1876 novel. The novel's dense allusions to world events include many to the American Civil War, and these amplify the novel's themes of nation-building, transnational connections, and personal identity. Although one might think first of the Zionist aspirations of Mordecai and Daniel, Eliot often turns to her female characters to demonstrate

the connection between seemingly insignificant lives and global movements. There are parallels between scenes in which the Meyrick sisters sit and sew and similar scenes in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868–69). Whether one thinks of these parallels as uncanny or everyday depends on one's beliefs about the British canon. Historians have long debated the place of the American Civil War in British economic and political history, but fewer literary critics have discussed its influence on the British novel, particularly novels by women. Despite the ongoing work on the reciprocal influence of British and American women writers,[7] many readers will be surprised to see Eliot drawing on Alcott and the American Civil War.

The U.S.-born Ezra Pound is one of the literary figures most responsible for fixing the geographical stereotypes of the United States as a standardized, commodified space and England as the beleaguered old country. It is expatriate writers like Pound that early twentieth century critics could invoke to question the viability of an 'American' literature (Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections*, 5; Abravanel, *Americanizing Britain*, 12–13, 110–27). Alex Runchman's essay, '"Only Social Credit Could Have Produced This Poet": Satire, Parody, and the Periodical Publication of Ezra Pound's "Alfred Venison's Poems"' complicates the cultural identity of both Pound and modernism further. The Alfred Venison poems, first published in A. R. Orage's *New English Weekly* in 1934, rail against bankers, usury, and the complicity between the press, politicians, and business tycoons more openly than do Pound's better known poems, and they voice these awkward sentiments by parodying Tennyson and Kipling in Cockney dialect. The poems illustrate how distinctively American discourses, like satirical and topical newspaper verses, came to 'infiltrate' British cultural forms in the 1930s. Like Gray and Huggins, Runchman expands our sense of what counts as literature to include the business of periodical and book publishing and the evolution of an author's voice between ephemeral and lasting genres.

The English poet Lee Harwood is central to the British Poetry Revival of the 1960s, whose poetics were sustained by influences and active connections with art and literature outside Britain. In fact, previous critics have labelled the British Poetry Revival as 'a reverse British invasion', and Lee Harwood's second poetry collection, *The Man with Blue Eyes* (1966), has been read as love poetry for the U.S. poet John Ashbery. Thus, transatlantic crossings are one geographical component of the collection. Rogers, however, questions how adequately transatlanticism can describe Harwood's poetics. Harwood's poetry captures the impossibility of the lyric within modernism, which embeds spatial up-

heaval with rapid shifts and juxtapositions. By interrogating the relation between self, place, and poetry, Harwood engages with a more fundamental geographical instability that, after Pierre Joris, we might see as nomadic.

These essays draw upon the critical debates of their periods and genres, whether travel writing, abolitionist texts, the novel, or modernist poetry. The authors consider what the transatlantic has meant for British literature in these different genres and contexts. Most authors choose to focus on transatlantic influences that make British literature more diverse, with a broader array of authors, publishing outlets, and political perspectives than are traditionally allowed for, but, as recent political events remind us, transatlantic crossings can be conservative as well as liberatory. Whether British literature is enriched, perverted, infiltrated or bypassed has not been resolved, but the different foci of different periods have been brought together in what we hope is a fruitful dialogue.

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Notes

I wish to thank Erin Atchison for her assistance and guidance in writing this introduction and editing the special issue.

1. Other scholars reviewing the last twenty years of transatlanticism have agreed on this point. Joseph Rezek has argued that the approach of transatlanticism 'is vulnerable to a vague and purely negative justification (even among its practitioners) as merely another antinational framework for literary study', a justification that cannot be sustained because in transatlantic analyses 'the nation remains a crucial historical and heuristic category' (792). Laura Doyle argues against seeing 'transnationalism' as smaller, later, or more liberatory than nationalism: 'in Atlantic modernity at least, transnationalism and nationalism have since the seventeenth century arisen together and unfolded dialectically' (532).
2. Some of these journals publish on similar approaches using different terminology. The journal *Women's Writing* has run a special issue on women readers across Europe (Astbury, Brown, and Dow), and it has also published analyses of American and British women's transatlantic travel and friendship networks. The journal *Modernism/modernity* has published several transatlantic articles, including Genevieve Abravanel's 'English by Example: F. R. Leavis and the Americanization of Modern England' (revised in her 2012 book, where she has more to say about Ezra Pound) and Laura Doyle.
3. *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, edited by Brooker and Thacker, places its special cluster of essays on 'Cross-Currents: America and Europe' in the volume on North America, not the volumes on Europe or Britain and Ireland.
4. Meredith McGill makes a similar point, notably on the pages of the *Journal of American Studies*:

> While transatlantic approaches are often imagined as a necessary antidote to American exceptionalism, they appear to be an optional extra for students

> of British literature, little more than an expanded field in which to track the dissemination of British culture. If, as [Susan] Manning argues, the schism that creates American literature as British literature's uncanny double is constitutive, internal to the British tradition, then British literary history ought to be more unsettled than it appears to be, both in Manning's account and elsewhere. (164)

5. Often voiced in *Times Higher Education Supplement* pieces on the state of academic research, this final case is made well by Tom Wright, 'Contribution to Roundtable on Hester Blum, ed. *Turns of Event: Nineteenth-Century American Literary Studies in Motion*'.
6. Paul Giles's *Transatlantic Insurrections*, for instance, cites scholarship on the political implications of the emergence of English literature and American literature as academic disciplines, but examples from the American 1910s, 1920s, and 1940s are discussed in the text, whereas British examples are relegated to the footnotes. See pages 5–8.
7. See Ford; Smith; Bode, 'Belonging, Longing, and the Exile State' and 'Among the Prophets'; Spengler; Silvey; Bernstein. In *The Poetics of Character*, Susan Manning argues for theorizing transatlantic literary influence as a series of correspondences, patterns, or resemblances; these scholars operate mostly from an older empirical model of influence because they are combatting the beliefs of earlier critics that the U.S. women are belated. This belief may be strongest within U.S. Anglophilia rather than British literary institutions per se. Note again that this work has been published under the umbrella of American literature, in these cases as in others, largely due to institutional and marketing considerations rather than conceptual ones.

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