J19

FORUM: New Sitings and Soundings for Transnational Poetics

Introduction

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Introduction

The study of nineteenth-century American poetry and poetics has been enjoying an efflorescence that shows no signs of contracting, as the essays in this special forum attest. Each of the invited contributors has in his or her own way drawn on and extended what the past two decades, especially, have yielded up: (1) vast numbers of long-forgotten poems in need of "recovery" and interpretation; (2) fresh readings of many major poets and poems that had been languishing in inattention; (3) voluminous and well-edited anthologies and editions,[1] along with a proliferation of sophisticated electronic databases and hypertext archives,[2] which continue to make more and more poetry readily available for reading, scholarship, and classroom use; and (4) criticism of unprecedented variety and sophistication, which has done much to reinterpret and retheorize both established and emergent canons.[3]

Among the most consequential developments has been the belated recognition of not simply the existence but also the centrality to North American literary and cultural history of poetry by women. And the comparable recovery and demarginalization of poetry by authors of color has also had far more than an additive effect on canon (re)formation. Fundamental reimaginings of American literary history have taken place across a critical terrain now comprehensively reshaped by the salutary seismic pressures of the dialectic between identity politics and the politics of the impersonal. We continue to attend as scrupulously and humbly as possible to the historical situatedness of persons and the plight of subjectivation, while also challenging the

persistent but often misleading equation of poetic language with the manifestation of a personal voice. We have repaired the hasty dismissal of the aesthetic *tout court* with enhanced sociohistorical approaches to literary form and counterhegemonic reengagements with philosophical aesthetics. And our sharpened awareness of how the constant migrations, free and forced, of elites as well as of the disprized, along with women's transnational voluntary associationism, has helped us deconstruct the often still tenacious national orientation of literary studies generally.

With such vital developments over the years has come the readiness of scholars of nineteenth-century American poetry and poetics to follow—and in many cases to help direct—the movement of critical thinking by various so-called turns: the linguistic, the historical, the ethical, the transatlantic, the transnational, the affective, the material. Long before all of this, of course, there was the turning of a plow at the end of a row that the Greeks called *trepein* and the Romans *vertere*, which gave to English the terms *trope*, for figural turns or shifts in meaning, and *verse*, for the literal turning of the end of a line. Line breaks have never been the absolute sine qua non of poetry as such, yet the line has always been fundamental to the making of poetry as a particular kind of discourse, turning to make another turn, in what may be recurrent or discordant patterns, as when a minister "lines out" a hymn, or when a blues artist "worries" the line. The *line* of nineteenth-century American poetry is manifold, in all the ways conjured by the Latin *linea*: originally, a linen thread or string essential to tasks of gathering, measuring, and ordering: used to make fishing lines and nets, to plumb depths, and to fix verticals in masonry and carpentry; also meaning the stroke or mark of a pencil; and, crucially, a line of descent, as well as a boundary, limit, or ultimate goal. (Let's agree never to give up gorging on etymologies.)

As the lines, or lineages, of American poetry have turned and turned again with the shifting movements of critical thinking, what counts as *American* poetry has been an abundant source of literary-historical discord: written elsewhere; published elsewhere; frequently imagined to have come from a place existing only retrospectively, if at all; projected onto colonies, regions, territories, and nations, and fitting awkwardly, at best, the shifting measure that came at a certain point to be called the United States. In the present context, nineteenth-century American poetry and poetics are understood chiefly in relation to the North American geographical and linguistic sweep from Canada to

the United States, Mexico, the Caribbean, and the rest of the region north of the Panama-Colombia border. Indeed, it extends even further in recent hemispheric and oceanic critical paradigms, as reflected in the forum's second essay. The concision of this special forum cannot possibly begin to encompass such an enormous range, but it amply suggests the field's impressively expanding scope.

While there are risks to methodological expansions—flattening of detail, overgeneralization, attenuation of expertise, enthrallment to inference, the drift toward universalism, the inattentiveness of "distant reading," and so on—the contributors to this forum balance with aplomb their attention to the material and stylistic specificities of their respective poetic archives and broader aggrandizements and speculative enrichments of the field.

In the forum's first essay, Raúl Coronado draws our attention to the early-nineteenth-century crisis in the transatlantic Hispanic Enlightenment through his analysis of the Spanish American poet José María Heredia's ode "En una tempesta: Al huracán" (1825) and its problematically adaptive English translation by William Cullen Bryant. Coronado reminds us of the hurricane's longstanding importance as "a vivid political-aesthetic trope for Caribbean writers." And he demonstrates in his critique of Bryant's distinctly Anglo-Protestant excisions, remodulations of tone, and distortions of address that the latter's translation practice is itself a kind of material disaster as well as a metaphysical recasting of Heredia's far less complacent, Hispano-Catholic take on modern sovereignty and secularist nationalism.

In the second essay, Hester Blum and Jason Rudy, specialists in American and British literature, respectively, explore a different sort of liquefaction, so to speak, of sedimented national models of literary history. Through their co-constructed archive of Anglophone shipboard poetry, Blum and Rudy argue that studying the coterie production and circulation of largely occasional, often anonymous, poetry on long-voyaging ships opens up new ways of reading beyond landed norms—that is, not only beyond the bounds of national imaginaries but also in salutary excess of conventional ontological groundings, of persons and texts alike, in the fixed, or seemingly fixed, places and spaces of the terrestrial world. In the process, they help model the very fruitful and—as the linguistic as well as geographical scope of nineteenth-century American poetry studies continues to expand—increasingly essential collaborations among specialists in different national, regional, and linguistic traditions. The continued enrichment of the field will depend

more and more on our willingness and ability to engage in such collaborations, which will invite both disciplinary reconfiguration and enhanced institutional support.

Catherine Robson, author of the third essay, is, like Jason Rudy, one of an increasing number of Victorianists whose scholarship explores and deconstructs the Anglo-American binary. Her work focuses on the place of the short poem in pedagogical practice—especially recitation—in British and American schoolrooms. Among the surprising historical and interpretive openings her research produces are broadly consequential insights regarding (1) the nature and degree of the state's influence on poetry's national and transnational dissemination and (2) the ongoing literary-critical importance from the early nineteenth century to our present critical moment of shifting dynamisms between memorization and close reading.

Musical protocols for close reading are the subject of the forum's penultimate essay, by Tsitsi Jaji, who turns her training as a concert pianist to account in her performance-based analysis of the Afro-British composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's musical setting of Paul Laurence Dunbar's 1896 poem "A Corn Song." Jaji argues not only that Coleridge-Taylor's setting represents an understudied form of Black Atlantic literary commentary but also that it demonstrates how art-song settings move self-consciously with and against the grains of elite musical registers. The need for work like Jaji's is vast, as the study of the relation between nineteenth-century American poetry and music remains woefully underexplored. And it is the rare critic who can supply, as Jaji does here via an embedded link to an MP3 file, her own recorded musical performance—not simply to supplement her reading but as an integral part of her literary-interpretive act.

The forum's final essay, by Christopher Nealon, urges us not to read modernist poetry as a radical break with its nineteenth-century precursors, arguing instead for better recognition of the "wobblings" of form and theme across temporal and geographical divides commonly perceived as sharper or more definitive than they actually have been in poetic practice. Nealon aims to redirect the attention of scholars of both the nineteenth century and the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to poetry's vital role in illuminating what he calls "the ongoing present tense of social reproduction." Not just literatures but literacies are at issue here, particularly as the reading and writing of poetry have enabled scenes of antiauthoritarian learning that link texts and traditions of social struggle. Nealon argues that, instead of pitting past against

present, as many critical narratives of the modernist "break" with formalism tend to do, we should develop a new thematics of the "matter" of poetry to help better account for the interconnected histories of the subjects of its tutelage.

Both individually and as a group, these essays are a necessarily brief and limited set of provocations to further local, regional, transnational, and—crucially—translinguistic explorations. As reflected not only here but on the broader critical landscape as well, the Anglo-American binary continues in many ways to dominate the field. Nineteenth-century Caribbean poetries in English, French, and Spanish have yet to receive more than the most preliminary study.[4] And the rich linguistic variety of the nineteenth-century United States itself continues largely to exceed the reach of those trained in our historically and, sadly, increasingly monolingualist doctoral programs.[5] Nineteenth-century Native American poetry, both in its abundant English translations and adaptations and in its much rarer documentations in native languages, continues to go virtually ignored.[6] We also await further advances in book-history and material-text scholarship on nineteenth-century American poetry,[7] as well as in relation to the "new lyric studies" and "historical poetics."[8] Phenomenological and cognitive approaches, too, are just beginning to emerge.[9] We hope this forum will inspire readers to pursue these lines of critical thinking and to develop others not yet envisioned here

Notes

1. The first three major new anthologies were Cheryl Walker, ed., *American Women Poets of the Nineteenth Century: An Anthology* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992); Joan R. Sherman, ed., *African-American Poetry of the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); and John Hollander, ed., *American Poetry: The Nineteenth Century*, 2 vols. (New York: Library of America, 1993). Among the many essential anthologies that followed were Paula Bernat Bennett, ed., *Nineteenth-Century American Women Poets: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998); Marcus Wood, ed., *The Poetry of Slavery: An Anglo-American Anthology, 1764–1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Robert Dale Parker, ed., *Changing Is Not Vanishing: A Collection of American Indian Poetry to 1930* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

2. Important publicly accessible electronic archives currently include African American Women Writers of the 19th Century at Digital Schomburg (http://digital.nypl.org/schomburg/writers_aa19/toc.html); American Verse Project (http://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/amverse/); Dickinson Electronic Archives (http://www.emilydickinson.org); the Vault at Pfaff's (http://digital.lib.lehigh.edu/pfaffs); and the Walt Whitman Archive (http://www.whitmanarchive.org).

3. The essential books and essay collections include Mary Louise Kete, *Sentimental Collaborations: Mourning and Middle-Class Identity in Nineteenth-Century America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Kirsten Silva Gruesz, *Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); Paula Bernat Bennett, *Poets in the Public Sphere: The Emancipatory Project of American Women's Poetry, 1800–1900* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); John D. Kerkering, *The Poetics of National and Racial Identity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Mary Loeffelholz, *From School to Salon: Reading*

Nineteenth-Century American Women's Poetry (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Eliza Richards, *Gender and the Poetics of Reception in Poe's Circle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Angela Sorby, *Schoolroom Poets: Childhood, Performance, and the Place of American Poetry, 1865–1917* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2005); Max Cavitch, *American Elegy: The Poetry of Mourning from the Puritans to Whitman* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Meredith L. McGill, ed., *The Traffic in Poems: Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Transatlantic Exchange* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008); Augusta Rohrbach, ed., "Special Issue: Poetry," *ESQ* 54 (2008); Kerry Larson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Christopher N. Phillips, *Epic in American Culture: Settlement to Reconstruction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

4. Two important exceptions are Deborah Jenson's chapter on lyric, libertinage, and "courtesan rap" in her book *Beyond the Slave Narrative: Politics, Sex, and Manuscripts in the Haitian Revolution* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 277–302; and Lloyd Pratt, "The Lyric Public of *Les Cenelles*," in *Early African American Print Culture*, ed. Lara Langer Cohen and Jordan Stein (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 253–73.

5. A decade on, we still await work comparable to Silva Gruesz's groundbreaking *Ambassadors of Culture* (2002).

6. The most notable exception is the critical and anthologizing work of Robert Dale Parker.

7. See Meredith McGill's innovative work on "format," in "Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and the Circuits of Abolitionist Poetry," in Langer and Stein, *Early African American Print Culture*, 53–74.

8. On new lyric studies, see Virginia Jackson, "Who Reads Poetry?" *PMLA* 123.1 (2008): 181–87. On historical poetics, see Yopie Prins, "Historical Poetics, Dysprosody, and the Science of English Verse," *PMLA* 123.1 (2008): 229–34.

9. See Max Cavitch, "Slavery and Its Metrics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Poetry*, ed. Kerry Larson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 94–112.

The Poetics of Disenchantment: José María Heredia and the Tempests of Modernity

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The recent comparative literary study of the Americas has produced innovative literary histories that have forced us to rethink the relationship between literature and nation-formation. The brief though significant period of trans-American literary camaraderie in the early decades of the nineteenth century aimed at producing an inspiring aesthetics for the Americas. Poets, both Spanish and Anglo-American, read and translated one another's work.[1] This was a moment of great possibility, matched as well by the flourishing of scientific explorations of the Americas where Spanish and Anglo-Americans, who now simply referred to themselves all as "Americans," shared with one another their knowledge of their vast territories. But by the 1830s