

UC Santa Barbara

Journal of Transnational American Studies

Title

Introduction to *American Literature in the World*

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1936727c>

Journal

Journal of Transnational American Studies, 8(1)

Author

Dimock, Wai Chee

Publication Date

2017

DOI

10.5070/T881036648

Copyright Information

Copyright 2017 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/>

AMERICAN
LITERATURE
IN THE
WORLD

Anne Bradstreet, William Carlos Williams, Elizabeth Bishop, William Apess, Thomas Jefferson, Margaret Fuller, Stephen Crane, Mark Twain, John Ashbery, Edith Wharton, Rita Dove, Muriel Rukeyser, Langston Hughes, Philip Levine, T. S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, Kurt Vonnegut, Jonathan Safran Foer, Art Spiegelman, Jorie Graham, William Faulkner, Norman Mailer, John Hersey, Leslie Silko, Chang-Rae Lee, Philip K. Dick, Thomas McGrath, Myung Mi Kim, Jay Cantor, W. S. Merwin, Yusef Komunyakaa, Maxine Hong Kingston, Michael Herr, Jean Didion, Junot Diaz, Philip Roth, Michael Chabon, Naomi Shihab Nye, Cabeza de Vaca, Mary Rowlandson, Louise Erdrich, Theodore Roosevelt Jr., e.cummings, Amy Tan, Ha Jin, Sharon Olds, Ursula LeGuin, Herman Melville, Jack London, Upton Sinclair, Willa Cather, Alice B. Toklas, Monique Truong, Natasha Trethewey, Oscar Hijuelos, Cristina Garcia, Jamaica Kincaid, Julia Alvarez, Edwidge Danticat, Jhumpa Lahiri, Allen Ginsberg, Gerald Vizenor, Ruth Ozeki, Gary Shteyngart, Marianne Moore, Gary Snyder, Richard Blanco, Frederick Douglass, Hawthorne Henry James, Richard Wright, Robert Hass, Robert Pinsky, Karen Tei Yamashita, Norman Rush, Agha Shahid Ali, Herman Melville, Harriet Beecher Stowe, John Steinbeck, W. E. B. DuBois, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, Maya Angelou, Ishmael Reed, Audre Lorde, Raymond Chandler, Rolando Hinojosa, Sherman Alexie, Walt Whitman, Claude McKay, Amiri Baraka, Toni Morrison, Robert Pinsky, Okunoluwa Egun, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Emily Dickinson, Zilkala Sa, Zora Neale Hurston, Gloria Anzaldúa, Scott Momaday, Denise Levertov, Gary Snyder, Jack Kerouac, Joanne Kyger, Washington Irving, Paul Bowles, Malcolm X, John Updike, Mohsin Hamid, Grateful Dead, Marianne Moore, Ezra Pound, Robert Lowell, Toni Morrison, Barbara Kingsolver, Elizabeth Alexander, Frank Norris, John Dos Passos, Dave Eggers, Jack London, Saul Bellow, Robert Frost, Carl Sandburg, Randall Jarrell, Adrienne Rich, Brian Turner, George Oppen, Denise Levertov, Isaac Asimov, Richard Powers, William Gibson, Ray Bradbury, Philip K. Dick, Octavia Butler, Anne Bradstreet, William Carlos Williams, Elizabeth Bishop, William Apess, Thomas Jefferson, Victor Sejour, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Stephen Crane, Mark Twain, John Ashbery, Edith Wharton, Rita Dove, Muriel Rukeyser, Langston Hughes, Philip Levine, T. S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, Kurt Vonnegut, Jonathan Safran Foer, Art Spiegelman, Jorie Graham, William Faulkner, Norman Mailer, John Hersey, Leslie Silko, Chang-Rae Lee, Philip K. Dick, Thomas McGrath, Myung Mi Kim, Jay Cantor, W. S. Merwin, Yusef Komunyakaa, Maxine Hong Kingston, Michael Herr, Jean Didion, Junot Diaz, Philip Roth, Michael Chabon, Naomi Shihab Nye, Cabeza de Vaca, Mary Rowlandson, Louise Erdrich, Theodore Roosevelt Jr., e.cummings, Amy Tan, Ha Jin, Sharon Olds, Ursula LeGuin, Herman Melville, Jack London, Upton Sinclair, Willa Cather, Alice B. Toklas, Monique Truong, Natasha Trethewey, Oscar Hijuelos, Cristina Garcia, Jamaica Kincaid, Julia Alvarez, Edwidge Danticat, Jhumpa Lahiri, Allen Ginsberg, Gerald Vizenor, Ruth Ozeki, Gary Shteyngart, Marianne Moore, Gary Snyder, Richard Blanco, Frederick Douglass, Hawthorne Henry James, Richard Wright, Robert Hass, Robert Pinsky, Karen Tei Yamashita, Norman Rush, Agha Shahid Ali, Herman Melville, Harriet Beecher Stowe, John Steinbeck, W. E. B. DuBois, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, Maya Angelou, Ishmael Reed, Audre Lorde, Raymond Chandler, Rolando Hinojosa

AMERICAN LITERATURE IN THE WORLD

AN ANTHOLOGY FROM
ANNE BRADSTREET
TO OCTAVIA BUTLER

WAI CHEE DIMOCK,
WITH JORDAN BROWER, EDGAR GARCIA,
KYLE HUTZLER, AND NICHOLAS RINEHART, EDITORS

COLUMBIA
UNIVERSITY
PRESS
NEW YORK

Chop, William Apess,
Margaret Fuller, Stephen
Crèvecoeur, Muriel Rukeyser,
Stein, Kurt Vonnegut,
Samuel Beckett, Norman
Lippitt, K. Dick, Thomas
Komunyakaa, Maxine
Philip Roth, Michael
Olson, Louise Erdrich,
Sharon Olds, Ursula
Willa Cather, Alice B.
Lous, Cristina Garcia,
Jhumpa Lahiri, Allen
Marianne Moore, Gary
Henry James, Richard
Norman Rush, Afghan
John Steinbeck, W. E. B.
Tahira, Ishmael Reed, Audre
Alexie, Walt Whitman,
Lorraine Hansberry, Olaudah Equiano,
Ralph Waldo Emerson,
Diana Anzaldúa, Scott
June Kyger, Washington
Tahira, Grateful Dead,
Barbara Kingsolver,
Eggers, Jack London,
Adrienne Rich, Brian
Richard Powers, William
Anne Bradstreet, William
Jefferson, Victor Sejour,
Mark Twain, John
Langston Hughes, Philip
Han Safran Foer, Ar
r, John Hersey, Leslie
Myung Mi Kim, Jay
Langston, Michael Herr,
Imani Shihab Nye, Cabeza
velt Jr., e.e.cummings,
Melville, Jack London,
ng, Natasha Trethewey,
ia Alvarez, Edwidge
r, Ruth Ozeki, Gary
r, Frederick Douglass,
bert Pinsky, Karen Tee
ville, Harriet Beecher
James Baldwin, Maya
r, Rolando Hinojosa



Columbia University Press
Publishers Since 1893
New York Chichester, West Sussex
cup.columbia.edu
Copyright © 2017 Columbia University Press
All rights reserved

Published with assistance from the Frederick W. Hilles Publication
Fund of Yale University

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Dimock, Wai Chee, 1953– editor.

Title: American literature in the world: a tradition rediscovered / [edited
by] Wai Chee Dimock.

Description: New York : Columbia University Press, 2016. | Includes
bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016014671 | ISBN 9780231157360 (cloth : acid-free paper) |
ISBN 9780231157377 (pbk. : acid-free paper)

Subjects: LCSH: American literature. | Geography and literature. | Literature
and globalization. | American literature—Foreign influences.

Classification: LCC PS507 .A59 2016 | DDC 810.8—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016014671>



Columbia University Press books are printed on permanent
and durable acid-free paper.

Printed in the United States of America

c 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

p 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Cover image: © Frank Stella/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Photo © Christie's Images/Bridgeman Images.

Cover and book design: Lisa Hamm

INTRODUCTION

A Twenty-First-Century Platform

This anthology is an attempt to broaden the scope of American literature, opening it to a more complex sense of geography and to a variety of genres and media. It is impossible to read the work of Junot Díaz and Edwidge Danticat, Robert Hass and Jorie Graham, Dave Eggers and Jhumpa Lahiri without seeing that—for all these authors—the frames of reference are not just the United States, but a larger, looser set of coordinates, populated by laboring bodies, migrating faiths, generational sagas, memories of war, and accompanied by the accents of unforgotten tongues, the tastes and smells of beloved foods and spices. Tracing these planet-wide arcs through the microhistories of individual lives, they distill broad swaths of the world into intimate settings, into the heat and furor of local conflicts, giving us both the amplitude of space and the jaggedness of embodied passions.

The twenty-first century is a good one in which to think about American literature in the world. But this anthology is by no means a showcase only of recent works. As evidenced by Anne Bradstreet, Olaudah Equiano, Thomas Jefferson, Frederick Douglass, Mark Twain, Gertrude Stein, Richard Wright, Ezra Pound, and Elizabeth Bishop, other centuries also bear witness to the commingling of near and far, with words and worlds continually in motion, fueled by large-scale forces such as colonialism, the transatlantic slave trade, the movement of capital, the movement of troops, the attendant diplomacies, and reproducing these within the contours of day-to-day living. To study these and countless other authors is to see that the United States

and the world are neither separate nor antithetical, but part of the same analytic fabric. American literature has always been energized by input from the rest of the world; it has played host to large disputes and wide cross-currents; its versions of the local have been sharpened and intensified by nonlocal events. These broad horizons, evolving over the course of several hundred years, make such works a durable prism to what lies beyond the nation, and an important counterpoint to the more recent examples of globalization in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. They remind us that this latest development is only one in a long line, one that must be seen in perspective against other, prior instances, suggesting more than one way to connect.

This anthology does not aspire to be a full-dressed alternative history. It does hope, however, to add complexity as well as clarity to the story, looking at American literature not as a self-contained archive underwritten by the jurisdictional map of a single nation, but as a multi-variable and tangent-producing network, with many layers of narrative, pulled in different directions by different contributing players. This large force field cautions us against any vainglorious or exceptionalist view of the United States. It invites us to see the nation not as a closed chapter but as one endlessly in flux, endlessly in relation. This body of material remains fresh and vibrant precisely because its geographical boundaries are not fixed, because its centers and peripheries can so easily trade places. This fluid landscape injects a corresponding fluidity into self-evident concepts such as the “United States” and indeed “American literature” itself, making each less a foregone conclusion than a heuristic occasion. Readers are invited to think further, to raise new questions, some coming from left field perhaps, and to be taken seriously for just that reason, not settling for a standard definition or explanation.

How exactly is *American Literature in the World* different from other anthologies? The simplest answer is also the most obvious: this is a web and print anthology, part of an online teaching initiative, <http://amlitintheworld.yale.edu>, the only anthology we know edited by a team of students and faculty. We will have more to say about this. Focusing for now on the print content, we would like to point to some experimental features that mark not so much a sharp break from existing practices as the beginning of a different roadmap, set forth by a different organizational structure. The three headings familiar to us—race, gender, and class—have done much to reshape the field in the past fifty years, with far-reaching consequences both for the curriculum and for scholarly research. At this point, though, they run the danger of

being automatic reflexes. To try something different, we have come up with an alternative playlist, with these five headings: “War;” “Food;” “Work, Play, Travel;” “Religions;” and “Human and Nonhuman Interfaces.” These five organizational nodes lend themselves to macro- as well as micro-analysis; they speak to systemic forces on the one hand, and minute local embodiments on the other. They highlight the dual focus of the anthology, our emphasis on the reciprocal constitution of the global and the local. Flexible and interconnected, they are meant to be remixed and recombined, used in different ways by different readers. Bringing together the large and the small, they bring into relief a networked field anchored by five elemental processes: the ruptures occasioned by armed conflict; the physical need for nourishment; the rhythms of everyday life; forms of spirituality; and the coevolution of the human and nonhuman worlds. Both the quiriness of American literature and the planet-wide processes of which it partakes come into play through these networks. Giving equal attention to both, we trace the tangled genesis of the intimate and the systemic across five centuries, shaped both by the dictates of large force fields and the minute confluences of local particulars.

MACRO AND MICRO

Interconnectedness is a key feature of American literature, with a long history across various scales and realms of experience. “War,” our first and most extensive section, highlights this phenomenon, focusing on the injurability and perishability of the human body as the most tangible, and most ironic, instance of global causation and local expression, at once non-negotiable and unavoidable. The literature on this subject is staggering; we have picked texts both for their individual salience and for the breadth of horizon they open up. Since what is required here is a working knowledge of several hundred years of armed conflict and the accompanying civilian life, involving the rest of the world as much as the United States, we have tried to provide basic orientation by listing each war individually, using the dates and the participants as signposts to create a relatively straightforward and easily graspable chronology. At the same time, the multilateral nature of war and the variety of ways they filter into noncombat zones make it clear that each war would need to be contextualized: studied from opposing perspectives, with an eye to accompanying effects such as food shortages,

ruptures in the daily routine, intensified religious conflict, and breakdowns in human and nonhuman ecologies.

Many classics are included here, but there are also some pieces that will be new to most readers. The entries for World War II, for instance, include not only Kurt Vonnegut's account of the firebombing of Dresden and John Hersey's classic reporting from postwar Hiroshima, but also "Two Soldiers" (1942), a short story by Faulkner about the attack on Pearl Harbor as heard on the radio in Mississippi; followed by Norman Mailer's account of the maiming of a single insect against the massive suffering of human beings in the South Pacific. This is in turn followed by a hallucinatory sequence by Leslie Marmon Silko, recounting a traumatic encounter between a Native American and a dead Japanese soldier. The cluster ends with one other unusual perspective on the Pacific theater by Chang-Rae Lee, with an elderly doctor recalling his time as a medic among the Korean comfort women serving the Japanese army.

This abundance of material makes it easy for us to tell any story from several points of view, highlighting the fact that World War II was indeed a "world" war, a cataclysm affecting the entire planet, seen differently among different populations. For that reason alone, war needs to be studied as it is fought, which is to say, from opposing sides, across the divides among nations—a position at once immersive and contextualizing, asking the reader to zoom in to see how it feels to be personally touched by war, to be in the thick of it, and then to zoom out again to recognize, at the same time, that the very emotional and visceral intensity of being "in" makes that perspective unavoidably limiting. Ernest Hemingway seemed to have this dynamic in mind when, speaking of *In Our Time* (1925), he said that the interweaving of war in Europe with civilian life in America comes from his need to "give the picture of the whole between examining it in detail. Like looking with your eyes at something, say a passing coastline, and then looking at it with 15× binoculars. Or rather, maybe, looking at it and then going in and living in it—and then coming out and looking at it again."¹

NONSTANDARD HISTORIES

Nothing offers this dual perspective—the telescoping of large-scale events coupled with close-ups of sensory experience—better than works of literature.

They are not history textbooks for just that reason. Rather than giving us agreed-upon accounts of the past, they extend the resources of fiction to dimensions of the world too messy and uncertain to count as history: parallel universes, where not implausible events that never made it across the finish line can have a limited second hearing. Could things have been otherwise? Given the simultaneously arbitrary and terminal logic of war, with winning or losing often resting on accidental turns of events, alternative outcomes are hard to banish from our imagination. We are proud to have here an entire subgenre dedicated to these counterfactual exercises. Here we find various degrees of deviation from the historical record: some thoroughgoing, others less so, but with enough irregularities to trouble the thin line separating the realm of actualized facts from the vast penumbra of the possible, giving “what if?” a momentary place in the world.

Philip K. Dick’s science fiction account of World War II in *The Man in the High Castle* (1962)—with the Japanese and the Germans as victors—is a striking example of this subgenre, giving us an upside-down though oddly not unrecognizable landscape. This is probably one of the few occasions when World War II is experienced not as concluded, but as an open book, still in progress. Counterfactual histories resequence time, making the past not past, but an unconcluded force field extending into the present. Ursula Le Guin says that speculative fiction—her name for science fiction—is not a prediction of the future, but parallel descriptions of the present projected forward.² These parallel descriptions can be projected backward as well, which is why science fiction doubles so handily as alternative history. *The Man in the High Castle* works in just these dual capacities: its futuristic universe is also a rescripting of the past, reaching back to not unlikely scenarios and holding them up for our consideration. One such scenario is the “indigenization” of newly defeated groups: white Californians, for instance, are now the Native Americans of the PSA—the Pacific States of America—treated courteously enough by their Japanese rulers, but nonetheless treated as indigenous populations tend to be treated. Counterfactual fabrications of this sort serve as a prelude to the Mary Rowlandson/Louise Erdrich duo from the Food section: a rewriting of the past done with gusto, with a vengeance, and perhaps with a method as well. Together, they point to the heuristic value of thinking of literary works as “speculative fiction” in various shapes and forms, departures from the official record at once distorting and instructive, making us take a second look at the world by turning it first into undisguised fiction.

We are happy to include another text in this vein, one that wears its counterfactual credentials on its sleeve: Michael Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* (2007). Detective fiction doubling as alternative history, this novel is set in a Yiddish-speaking refugee settlement established in Sitka, Alaska, in 1941 for a period of sixty years and now faced with imminent "reversion" to the State of Alaska. Apprehensive about this, and trying at the same time to solve a murder case, detective Meyer Landsman and his partner, the half-Tlingit, half-Jewish Berko Shemets, uncover a vast conspiracy, which gives Chabon a chance to spin out an entire fabricated history: with the Soviet Union crushed by Germany in 1942, and World War II coming to an end only in 1946, when Berlin is destroyed by nuclear weapons. Meanwhile, the new state of Israel, lasting only three years, is destroyed in 1948, and Jerusalem (as we learn in the excerpt) is now "a city of blood and slogan painted on the wall, severed heads on telephone poles." Against that distant nightmare, the unquestionably local, unquestionably funny, but also strangely haunting run-in between Landsman and the "prophet" Elijah (an echo of *Moby-Dick* as well as the Old Testament) gives a whole new meaning to detective fiction.

Popular genres are important to this anthology. Poetry is important as well. We see the two as complementary rather than antithetical, and have made a special effort to build around their partnership, hoping our colleagues might do likewise, integrating into their syllabi material at different levels of cultural elevation, poetry as well as prose. Alternative history shows just how easily this could be done, for poetry turns out to be entirely at home on this platform, comfortable next to science fiction and crime novels. We include here Jorie Graham's "Soldatenfriedhof" (2004), set in the computer terminal of the German cemetery in La Combe, Normandy. The poem is not science fiction, although by juxtaposing two time frames—1945 of Normandy and 2003 of the user-friendly computer screen—it is relying on the same backward-and-forward projections that give science fiction its special effects. "To find a fallen person, it says, 'push green key.' / Fill in name, last name, first name, I put in / Klein. 210 Kleins in the Soldatenfriedhof." World War II mediated by the computer screen is quantitative, matter-of-fact, but, in this context, also eerie, almost surreal:

I scroll. Klein stays the same.

The first name changes, rank, row, plot.

No. The graveyard changes too. At 88 Klein's in Colleville (US graveyard). At 93 he's in the British one (Bayeux). *Have you found your fallen person* says the program when I go back to the home page. No slot for nationality. None for religion. Just date of birth, then rank, row, plot, and field come forth . . .

It is that numbers-crunching computer program—with built-in limits, true even of new technology—that frees Graham up for a brief foray into the counterfactual. This program turns out to have no algorithm for either nationality or religion; Graham accordingly brackets both, paying her respects instead to a nation-less and religion-less “possible person,” a conjectural being who could be German, French, British, or American, Christian or Jew, as indeed the name “Klein” is. Distributed on both sides of the Allied/Axis divide, the name points to a forlorn hope that this stark dividing line would not inscribe itself in an equally stark military solution. History, of course, squelched that hope, resulting, among other things, in those 210 Kleins being found in the Soldatenfriedhof at Normandy. It is not till six decades later, with the help of the computer program, that the prematurely interred is able to show faint signs of life. Klein is by no means resurrected—he is in the cemetery and will always stay there—but the unactualized hope that he embodied is, at least within the space of this poem, real enough to be given a hearing.

INTERCONNECTED WORLD

What counts as the “reality” of World War II will be answered differently by different authors. Philip K. Dick, Michael Chabon, and Jorie Graham are unusually forthright about where their imaginations have taken them. Together, they outline alternate routes that are intriguing to contemplate, played out in a variety of genres and media. We celebrate this elasticity both in the range of our selections and sometimes in the multitasking of a single work. *Moby-Dick*, for instance, is part tragedy, part comedy, part metaphysics, part whaling yarn, part marine biology, a floating encyclopedia circumnavigating the globe. It is included in four of our five sections, which says something about the multitude of genres in that novel, and something

about the interconnections running throughout the entire anthology, a key feature of the world we present.

Nothing demonstrates those interconnections more vividly than the next section, “Food,” designed with just this in mind, meant as an index both to world markets and to everyday life, and in the negative form of hunger, as a shared lack known to much of the world’s population. This section opens with a cluster of three texts: Cabeza de Vaca’s 1542 *La Relación*, giving pride of place to the prickly pear, crucial to the survival of the native populations of Florida. This is followed by Mary Rowlandson’s likewise starvation-driven and food-obsessed *Sovereignty and Goodness of God* (1682); this is in turn followed by Louise Erdrich’s poem “Captivity” (1984), an upfront rewriting of Rowlandson. The conflict generated by these three seems to us an ideal moment to discuss the changing conventions of literature, bringing into focus a key genre of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—the captivity narrative—written in Spanish as well as English, with Native Americans alternately demonized and humanized. These early generic conventions are then contrasted with the vastly different ones of the late twentieth century. A Native American author now takes over, also dwelling on the scarcity of food and the wild urges of hunger, but otherwise telling a new story in every way.

Not all the selections are clustered to such good effect, but we have tried hard to make juxtaposition a spur to thinking. “Work, Play, Travel,” which comes after “Food,” also features many texts meant to be discussed together. This section explores the increasingly globalized organization of labor, with leisure-time activities sometimes reflecting that development, and sometimes running counter to it, giving a different meaning to globalization itself. One of the highlights of this section is a textual cluster beginning with Walt Whitman’s “Proud Music of the Storm” (1900), a tribute to the sounds of nature as a mysterious repository and mixture of the sounds of “all the world’s musicians”—French and German, Irish and Italian, Persian, Arabic, Egyptian, Hindu, and Chinese. An excerpt from Claude McKay’s *Banjo* (1929) then takes us to one particular place, the waterfront of Marseilles, France, to witness another sonic fusion, bringing together black seamen from Martinique, Senegal, Cameroon, Algeria, Madagascar, and the United States. Sonic fusion is, of course, not limited to adults, nor to one ethnic group, a point underscored by the next selection from Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon* (1977), an origins story claiming joint descent from

Native Americans and “flying” Africans, immortalized through a song sung by children. Finally, this cluster ends with Robert Pinsky’s “Ginza Samba” (1996), a poem that, in its very title, names jazz as a music at once Asian, European, African, and American, with cross-currents from every corner of the planet.

As with music, so too with spirituality. In “Religions,” the fourth section of the anthology, we follow authors from the seventeenth century on as they chart the trajectories of their faiths across continents and oceans—sometimes staying mainstream, but also straying when they go native, which is indeed more often the case. The “vernacularization” of devotional practices is one of our highlights. Olaudah Equiano’s folk belief in the kinship of Africans and Jews; Zora Neale Hurston’s Haitian Moses, renamed Damballa Ouedo Ouedo Tocan Freda Dahomey; Denise Levertov’s tribute to Buddhist altars on the streets of Saigon during the Vietnam War; Gloria Anzaldúa’s bold equation of the Virgin of Guadalupe with the Aztec Coatlicueh—these and much more bear witness to the global footprints of religions and the crucial input from the ground up, making the reciprocity between these two a long-running saga, a testimony to the shared ecologies of the far and the near.

Shared ecologies become the explicit and explosive focus in the last section, “Human and Nonhuman Interfaces.” How should our species dwell among other life forms? What sort of classifying mechanisms enable us to make sharp distinctions among those living in close proximity, extending group membership to some but not to others? The instability of these mechanisms has always been a fault line in American life, exploding with traumatic force when some subgroups—African Americans, for instance—hitherto not granted full membership, suddenly show troubling signs of full-throated humanity. In the twenty-first century, these unstable boundaries have exploded yet again—prompted, on the one hand, by the growing co-dependency of humans and intelligent machines, and on the other hand, by the growing co-vulnerability of humans and other species as we jointly face the effects of climate change: rising sea levels, more extreme weather, greater frequency of floods and droughts.

As with the other sections, we have made a special effort to suggest clusters of texts that could be read together. One of the highlights here is a six-text sequence beginning with Henry David Thoreau’s humorous account of a battle of ants in *Walden* (1854): “as important and memorable to those

whom it concerns as those of the battle of Bunker Hill, at least.” This musing is followed by Marianne Moore’s “fastidious ant carrying a stick,” and then six lines from Ezra Pound’s Canto LXXXI, a lyrical interlude occasioned by an ant, in a situation otherwise not in the least lyrical. Robert Lowell comes next, with an explicit reference back to *Walden*. From there we move on to a breathtaking passage from *Tar Baby* (1981), with Jadine, Toni Morrison’s protagonist, ensconced in her first-class seat on a flight to Paris, momentarily conjuring up a queen ant, somewhere between “the thirtieth and fortieth generation” of her reproductive labor, allowing herself briefly to see herself as she once was: “airborne, suspended, open, trusting, frightened, determined, vulnerable, girlish, even.” This melancholy but relatively nonlethal scene of cross-species identification then gives way to Barbara Kingsolver’s horrendous account of the attack of the *nsongonya* (driver ant)—nature up in arms, perhaps a parable for a newly independent Congo, erupting with violence on multiple fronts as it tries to cast off its colonial yoke. For Kingsolver, the African setting, both historical and metaphoric, offers insights into the relation between human and nonhuman ecologies as few other places can. We honor that perspective, adding as a further reference Elizabeth Alexander’s terse lyric about rebellious slaves on the *Amistad*, and Dave Eggers’s and Valentino Achak Deng’s searing account of the politics of oil in the Sudanese Civil War. As we move on to other nonhuman ecologies—from the debris field defined by bullets and bombs, to a computer capable of taking a PhD qualifying exam, to extraterrestrial aliens who need humans to reproduce—the long shadows of Africa remain of undiminished importance in our present moment.

Though the authors who show up here are, for the most part, familiar names, some of the selections that represent them might be new to many of us. What the anthology offers is not so much a brand-new canon of American literature as a different kind of field guide, reorienting the pieces we have grown used to, pairing them with ones less well known, calling attention to parallels and overlaps, and pedagogic possibilities newly arisen. The global networks that we now take for granted have long been an animating force in American literature. This volume brings their linked ecologies to the foreground.

While poems, short stories, letters, pamphlets, field reports, and other compact prose pieces are included in their entirety, novels necessarily have to be excerpted, often featured here as cliffhangers. We see this as

a heuristic spur. Students are invited to read further on their own, and teachers to use these excerpts as handy material to update their existing syllabi or design new ones. Our five interconnected nodes, and the clustering of texts throughout, are meant to be suggestive rather than prescriptive, outlining possible combinations, and encouraging readers to come up with others. The selections can certainly be read in their current order, but just as easily they can be separated and re-sequenced, used in classes with other objectives in mind. A course on the environment, for instance, could use material not only from “Human and Nonhuman Interfaces,” but also from “War” (to highlight the environmental impact of armed conflict), as well as from “Food” (to explore the ways dietary habits can affect the health of the planet no less than the health of individual consumers). The entire anthology is meant to be cross-cut and cross-referenced in this way, assembled for particular effects and calling for other arrangements to serve other purposes.

HEMINGWAY, FITZGERALD, HUGHES

The Great Gatsby (1925), that quintessential American story about a self-made man, speaks directly to such complex networks, trailing a tangled web from a European past that shapes the here and now of its two protagonists. It is this that comes into play when Nick meets Gatsby for the first time, before he even realizes that it is Gatsby:

“Your face is familiar,” he said, politely. “Weren’t you in the Third Division during the war?”

“Why yes. I was in the ninth machine-gun battalion.”

“I was in the Seventh Infantry until June nineteen-eighteen. I knew I’d seen you somewhere before.”³

For F. Scott Fitzgerald, World War I combat isn’t just background information, it is a still-vital and still-pertinent part of the story, framing the action now unfolding in New York. The prior enlistment in the war, the fact that these two had dutifully fought and gone through what most would agree was a new and unprecedented kind of hell, goes a long way toward explaining why there should be an instant bond of friendship, the only one either

Nick or Gatsby is privileged to have. The fact that Tom Buchanan has not fought also goes a long way toward explaining why, in the end, he has no place in the affections of someone who, ever since his return “from the East last autumn, [has] wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever.”⁴

World War I stands as a kind of ethical road map to both Nick and Gatsby in at least two senses: marking the linked locales that have seen action, and anchoring the moral compass issuing from that fact. Gatsby later says to Nick: “In the Argonne Forest I took two machine-gun detachments so far forward that there was a half mile gap on either side of us where the infantry couldn’t advance. We stayed there two days and two nights, a hundred and thirty men with sixteen Lewis guns, and when the infantry came up at last they found the insignia of three German divisions among the piles of dead. I was promoted to be a major, and every Allied government gave me a decoration—even Montenegro, little Montenegro down on the Adriatic Sea!”⁵ Gatsby’s moral biography is a biography of place names. Beyond these, there are also the numbers: the Third Division, the ninth machine-gun battalion, the Seventh Infantry, not to say the year 1918. It is Fitzgerald who is writing here, not Hemingway, although it is Hemingway who said that “abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates.”⁶ For both, these names and numbers are the only reliable cues to the twentieth century. Without these geographical and numerical markers, American literature would have been lost indeed, would have been ungrounded, unmoored.

Hemingway and Fitzgerald, most canonical of authors, are not in this anthology for a simple reason: high permissions fees. *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) would of course have been splendid for this volume, although when it comes to the organic interweaving of action overseas and action back home, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) is still more impressive. Hemingway probably had a deeper connection to the Spanish Civil War than to any other war he covered. He had been working as a correspondent in Europe since 1922, initially for the *Toronto Star*;⁷ his dispatches from Spain then went to the North American Newspapers Alliance.⁸ With the defeat of the Republicans in 1939, he left Spain for Cuba, eventually settling down with Martha Gellhorn in Finca Vigía, a one-story villa fifteen miles from Havana, his home for the next twenty-one years. Three of his best-known

works—*For Whom the Bell Tolls*, *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), and *A Moveable Feast* (1964)—were written there. The archives from that period, thanks to a collaboration with the Cuban Council of National Heritage, are now housed in the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.⁹

A Cuban Hemingway writing about the Spanish Civil War makes it clear just how unwise it is to separate the United States from the rest of the world, or to imagine that its territorial borders could govern the associative webs generated by its literature. This anthology would certainly have benefited from his presence, and from Fitzgerald's, although, since the works of these two are regularly taught in their entirety, we feel that the inclusion of a few pages here is less crucial. Indeed there is much to be said for ceding their places to figures somewhat less canonical and more likely to spark fresh responses. Langston Hughes strikes us as an especially vital alternative here, rich in interpretive possibilities. Working in a nonfictional genre, working in haste, under the pressures of siege and bombardment, he experienced the Spanish Civil War as civilians did, with a sense of unreality alternating with a shock of recognition that gives his writings a visceral rhythm, grounded as much in physiology as in geopolitics.

Hughes had gone to Spain with the Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén to write a column for the *Baltimore Afro-American*. We are able to include two of those essays, "Harlem Swing and Spanish Shells" and "General Franco's Moors." The former, about the lack of food in shell-racked Madrid and the jazz-flavored exquisiteness of the little that was available, seems to us as much a feast as any in Hemingway, suggesting that the physical needs of the body remain the anchoring coordinates even in the most unhinged of contexts, linking Harlem and Madrid both on the macro scale of political allegiances and on the micro scale of taste, smell, and sound. The other essay, recounting Hughes's disconcerting encounter with one of the Moorish troops brought over by General Franco and fighting on the Fascist side, shows just how unfamiliar race can look when it is mapped onto a new setting. Prejudices in Spain, equally entrenched but differently aligned, and inflamed by centuries of religious conflict and now the bitter passions of the civil war, can make race every bit as toxic as it is in the United States. In such a country, supposedly without color prejudices—"Color? *No le hace nada en España*"—it is not only the Moors that are the Negroes, but Hughes himself is in danger of being racialized anew, projected back to North Africa rather than North America.

Transnational race opens up issues that continue to vex us today. At the same time, the replacement of Hemingway by Hughes also raises questions about the impact of copyright, weighing as much as literary merit. We call attention to both to reflect on the task of anthology-making against the challenges posed by intellectual property and by the daunting vastness of the field. Why Hemingway—or for that matter, why Hughes? The overabundance of material that is more than acceptable, more than selection-worthy, points to a virtually unlimited pool of resources; it also points to the need for the anthology to be continually added to, if only to keep up with the new works continually appearing.

DIGITAL PLATFORM

It is beyond the capability of the printed book to update itself in this way. We use this intractable problem to argue for the crucial importance of the accompanying digital platform, turning the medium-specific limits of print into an occasion for online experimentation. And indeed, even as it now stands, the anthology is very much the outgrowth of its many online iterations. Part of a digital initiative at Yale, <http://amlitintheworld.yale.edu>, it was a Facebook page, a conference site for an annual graduate conference, and an open-source teaching platform before it became a printed book. The world-linking properties of the Internet are as important here as the world-traversing properties of the material that appears in these pages. Online connectivity offers a new environment for the literature gathered here; it has also been a catalyst for many of the questions we ask, highlighting the layers of mediation that create reciprocal play between the local and the global, between site-specific efforts and system-wide developments. The defining coordinates of American literature, the force fields animating it and threaded through it, also look very different as a result.

These force fields, in turn, ask of us a new kind of literacy, a new set of navigational skills made necessary by the continual emergence of new digital forms and the increasingly frequent movement of material across media. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin refer to this phenomenon as “remediation”—a process of transposing and remixing, by which the new media absorb, extend, and update their predecessors.¹⁰ What results is a field-wide synthesis, a revamping on multiple fronts, making the old media

as freshly equipped as the new. Literature is no exception to this development: it too is part of this networked field—which is to say, experienced not as purely text-based but as transmedia extensions into the visual, auditory, and digital realms. Literary scholars need to follow suit. As instructors facing changing demographics, we can go forward only by keeping pace with practices outside the classroom, taking advantage of the technology-enabled mediascape to better connect with our students, and with our objects of study.

In this context, we are especially proud of the open-source platform that accompanies the print anthology. Syllabi from several classes, paper topics and outlines, peer comments, sample papers, and class highlights are all featured on this platform, along with annotations that try to do digitally what we cannot do in print. As a crowdsourced mechanism, an unsupervised but reliably incremental aggregate of background information, audio and visual material, and often inspired readings, these annotations try to give some sense of the literary ecologies revolving around any given text. Through the force of example they show just how much could be brought to bear on this material. And, by doing so from one particular vantage point, through a determined marshalling of evidence, and using sound recordings as well as visual images to make their case, the annotations collectively point to the multiple and often conflicting possibilities within any piece of writing, infinitely more complex than any single interpretation. The totality of literature can never be fully grasped, yet we can surmise that its baseline at the moment is already quite different from what it was just a couple of decades ago. The literary field is being reconstituted from the ground up. Our project both exemplifies that process and hopes to contribute to it.

“From the ground up” is not a mere turn of phrase: horizontality is an important feature of our digital platform, just as it is of the Internet as a whole. Though hierarchies are never entirely absent online (in fact, search engines such as Google have for years been customizing our information to stream hierarchically—which is to say, according to our preferential search histories),¹¹ web-based input networks and participatory forums nonetheless remain significantly more egalitarian than those organized by more traditional means. Facebook is a case in point. This social network is often criticized for violating privacy and promoting faux friendships, yet its effectiveness as a grassroots instrument in many parts of the world suggests that its low-bar flatness nonetheless serves an important function, providing

a communicative forum at once non-governmental, and to some extent, unpoliceable.¹² Facebook is “democratic” in this sense: the excellence or not of the postings, the depth or shallowness of the affections, the rightness or wrongness of the politics—these qualitative distinctions are beyond its call. This content-neutrality has made it a valuable resource to activists and a perceived threat to some governments, banned in Syria, Iran, and China for just that reason.¹³

Even in the United States, Facebook has untried potential, especially when it comes to dissemination and participation. As of March 2016, Facebook has more than 1.65 billion monthly active users, 84.2 percent of whom live outside the United States. Most who join are young (the median age is twenty-two), with the largest numbers coming from India, Indonesia, Brazil, and Mexico.¹⁴ So from the first, we had thought of a Facebook page as a demographic statement of sorts, highlighting the youthfulness even of works with venerable dates. These works are “news that stays news,” as Ezra Pound said. To capture that newsworthiness, we post photos of authors; announcements from libraries about newly acquired manuscripts and digitalized collections; and updates about film adaptations, musical renditions, and art exhibits associated with these works. In doing so, we rub shoulders with countless other Facebook users, claiming this broad-based venue as a rallying cry for the project as a whole.

What kind of pedagogy might be gleaned from Facebook as an index to the strengths and limits of online experience? Taking a page from its playbook, we make a virtue of its low-bar flatness, reasoning that while there is learning to be done here and information to change hands, who should be doing the instructing and who should be instructed are not foregone conclusions. Pedagogic bi-directionality is worth considering, especially when knowledge is removed from its customary setting and configured anew in the freewheeling arena that is Facebook, where work and play are not so easily distinguishable, and where expertise is not only less well defined but also more likely to be in need of renewal. Professors who received their PhDs years ago have much to gain by conceding that there is, once again, a learning curve ahead, while those still in training could perhaps take on tasks they are preparing for sooner rather than later, and in being responsible for the knowledge they gather and disseminate, developing a close, lifelong commitment to it. With these two goals in mind, we have tried to make this project philosophically as well as pragmatically multi-generational,

channeling the creative energies of those at different stages of their careers. From decisions large and small regarding the graduate conference to the free-for-all annotations, this digital platform is an attempt to create a half-work, half-play environment, premised on equal participation and ease of input as the key to innovation, and creating structural guarantees that separate this project as much as possible from asymmetries in past accomplishment and academic rank.

The coeditorship of the print anthology by students and faculty is very much in that spirit. One of us has been teaching since 1982; two are in the graduate program; one has just received his PhD and is now a tenure-track assistant professor at the University of Chicago. The youngest—Kyle Hutzler, an economics major—meanwhile knows more about the globalized world than the rest of us, having worked for the U.S. International Trade Commission as well as McKinsey & Co, where he is now employed full time. We see these generational differences as generative. Kyle brings the perspective of a non-English major who has taken an American literature course, and who chooses to stay with the project because of his love of the material. Jordan Brower, Edgar Garcia, and Nick Rinehart come with the energy and enthusiasm of young teachers. Since this is a Yale teaching initiative, most of us are from that school, but we are especially proud that our collaboration with Nick has developed through the annual graduate conference. Nick, a graduate student at Harvard, brings with him a different institutional culture while enlisting the help of his family in the final stages of the editing. This has grown to be a project unlike anything we have seen. We are thrilled to experience firsthand all the benefits and surprises of online connectivity.

Beyond this immediate collaboration among the five of us, the online platform points to a coeditorship in another sense: a long-term partnership with any reader interested enough to spend time with the anthology. One advantage of our five flexible nodes is that they are meant to be interactive, meant to yield to those who engage them. Readers are encouraged to experiment with different clusters, different connecting threads, and indeed different pedagogic goals altogether. User-generated input of this sort is the lifeblood of this undertaking. While the print format is fixed, online input will produce as many variants as there is need for them. To facilitate these input streams, we will be adding new features to our website, offering possible syllabi, and inviting readers to share information wherever relevant.

This is the best way for the anthology to stay networked. In his essay “Fate,” Emerson says: “But to see how fate slides into freedom and freedom into fate, observe how far the roots of every creature run, or find if you can a point where there is no thread of connection. Our life is consentaneous and far-related.” There are no better words to sum up this project. The proceeds from the anthology, to be donated to Doctors Without Borders, offer our final token and commitment to being in the world and of it.