New Models for Western Literary Studies

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You can never step into the same West twice, spatially or temporally. And yet the West is there, conceptually and geographically, complexly bordered while not contained within lines. Both the borders and the identities they help delineate have continued to change in response to shifting material conditions. Thus, Richard White opens his history of the West with, “The boundaries of the American West are a series of doors pretending to be walls” (3). Bordered spaces, whether doors or walls, embody power struggles, systematic oppressions, and a multitude of conflicting desires.

Today a controversial national wall dividing Northwest Mexico from the Southwest United States attempts to control dialectical engagements, including migration and return, across this line constructed in sand. Long delays and new requirements at the border between Canada and the United States indicate that all is not peaceful at the Peace Arch either. These, however, are not the only national boundaries that mark the West and its literary studies. Some nations have drawn lines to support their imperial interests, and others to maintain communal identity and protect themselves against invaders.
The Kashaya Pomo nation, for example, has experienced continual devastating threats to its borders from a series of nations intent on empire. For centuries they lived within clear political boundaries on the coast and hills of what became central California. Their external relations remained stable until the advent of the Russian Empire in 1811. Later, the enslavement and displacement that came with Mexican political control again altered the Kashaya Pomo’s political status. Threats to their right to self-determination only intensified with U.S. occupation and the dominance of capitalist forms of production. Stripped of land ownership, Pomo Indians were segregated onto rancheras. Some of these later gained federal status, but termination created another destructive change in their political position. When federal recognition was granted to the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, the Kashaya Pomo people became part of a new political arrangement. This is just one example of nations that have shaped and been shaped by the many borders that continue to intersect across the West.

National boundaries, however, are not the only ones that matter. Many borders are crossed and recrossed in this critical anthology. Cumulatively, the essays here engage the West as a complex process and place, with recognizable yet contentious and fluctuating lines that immigrants and emigrants, readers and writers, and saints and sinners continue to crisscross. All these border crossings carry with them cultural, political, economic, and moral structures that require adaptation as they traverse the lines of the West.

To better apprehend this region of complex borders, Western literary studies should look across disciplinary boundaries for new paradigms. The shifting perspectives of other regional studies, the hemispheric approaches of comparative American studies, and the steps and missteps taken within American studies to employ a transnational perspective can all offer new models for reconfiguring Western literary studies. Each offers strategies for better understanding the past and engaging contemporary conditions of the West.

In the special 2006 issue of American Literature, “Global Contexts, Local Literatures: The New Southern Studies,” Kathryn McKee and Annette Trefzer’s preface presents an important model for a new regional sense of place. Rather than defining the South in contradistinction to the North (or the West to the East), we might see both the South and the West as enmeshed in hemispheric relations. From this standpoint, regional divisions appear much more porous than is suggested by traditional studies caught up with issues of a unified regional identity. Also, hemispheric relations become a two-way process of exchanging goods, ideas, people, and much more.

The South becomes much more than an exporter of Faulknerian fictions, and the West more than a purveyor of national myths.

Tara McPherson argues in a later essay that Southern studies must “move beyond . . . fetishizing sameness in Southern studies” (698). This means, for example, recognizing Arkansas-based Wal-Mart as a modern reflection of traditional Southern labor strategies that are now exported around the world. Southern studies should be useful, she argues, in explaining “the complex histories of this reality and, I hope, in helping us maneuver for change.” This can be accomplished by extending Southern studies to include regional labor policies, commercial practices, demographic changes, as well as “vibrant models of resistance” that have been developed (696–97). As the essays in this anthology make clear, Western literary studies similarly face challenges in engaging a New West represented by Microsoft executives, Native uranium workers, or a black Los Angeles detective. The past is not left behind in this complexly diverse West but rather reconfigured, and so made more usable for creating productive new analytical models.

These models need to include the hemispheric exchanges of people who are now central to the economy and culture of the New South as well as the New West. Immigrants with low-wage jobs are essential to both economies. Leon Fink’s The Maya of Morgantown: Work and Community in the Nuevo New South analyzes the establishment of a transplanted Guatemalan Maya community in North Carolina. Incorporating communities like this offers another new model for conceptualizing regions. In opposing long-established Southern employment relationships, these low-wage immigrant workers dialectically engaged Southern labor practices. Their story can prompt us to consider related issues in the West: the nature of immigration and resistance to it, the ways people accept and challenge dominant cultural and economic paradigms, the historical and contemporary experience of marginalized workers, and the struggles to change work relations. Essays in this volume’s first section offer models for Western scholars taking up many of these issues.

McKee and Trefzer in their preface explain another way that new regional conditions can impact literary studies: “A globally inflected Southern studies can productively defamiliarize texts and problems” (685). The essays here accomplish this for Western literary studies as they revitalize Western texts such as Ramona by placing them in a hemispheric context. They also challenge us to reconfigure our regional literary boundaries to include writers such as Brianda Domecq of Mexico and Isabel Allende of Chile. Paul Giles notes
that a hemispheric focus can shift historical attention from, for example, the Civil War to the U.S.-Mexican wars of the nineteenth century. Yet Giles is aware that these reconstructed stories work against “popular reactions against globalization” that support “nostalgic misrepresentations” that turn back to reassuring nationalistic stories (649). Desirée A. Martín’s essay makes the shift in historical attention by focusing on a borderland heroine while also confronting the issue of popular nostalgic reactions.

The essays by scholars from Germany and from areas of expertise other than English also globalize Western literary studies in important ways, for example, by deconstructing and reconstructing Western icons from alternative ideological perspectives. In his essay “The New American Studies: A Lesson from the Borderlands,” Robert McKee Irwin insists that scholars must learn the necessary languages for hemispheric work and then develop dialogues with scholars outside the U.S. academy (519). His present essay exemplifies this engagement. The global strategies of this anthology help resist the U.S. academic tendency toward “intellectual provincialism” (Fishkin 36).

Yet methodological dilemmas and dangers lurk in these new regional models, as in any analytical constructions. Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine, introducing a 2006 special hemispheric studies issue of American Literary History, caution that the United States too often is still accepted as the default unit in transnational American studies (400). We must consider to what extent we are willing to decenter Western literary studies. This shift in focus, however, is not without its own dilemmas. A number of scholars have addressed the danger of cultural imperialism inherent in crossing national boundaries (see, for example, Irwin’s “The New American Studies”). The essays in the last section of this volume, “Transnational Wests,” offer ways for redressing the usual imbalance while recognizing, as Levander and Levine encourage, the asymmetry and interdependency of nation-state development throughout the hemisphere (400). A transnational pluralism that overlooks power differentials is not the answer needed, as Cheli Reutter’s discussion of Allende makes clear.

Moreover, in its effort to combat intellectual provincialism, Western literary studies intent on crisscrossing borders must not forget what German scholar Winfried Fluck forcefully argues:

The United States is a paradigmatic, agenda-setting modern society and no talk about the crisis of the nation-state can distract from the fact that there is enough nation-state left to affect all of us

decisively…. American power is thus still a major issue for the rest of the world. (29)

Even if we resist making the United States “the default unit of intellectual engagement” (Levander and Levine 400), we must not ignore its position in the world. This means that transnational perspectives must recognize and analyze the multifaceted aspects of U.S. power while resisting hegemonic ideas of U.S. exceptionalism that recognize others as exotic markers of difference rather than as cultures and nations in their own right.

The role of the nation-state has other complex aspects for transnational Western literary studies. For non-Native scholars particularly, Native literature and culture must be afforded a similarly transnational analysis. As suggested by the above example of the Kashaya Pomo people, American Indians throughout the hemisphere often claim boundaries that establish tribal sovereignty. My essay recognizes Simon Ortiz’s engagement with the complex issue of sovereignty as he considers land and water rights. Many tribally centered writers and scholars aim to strengthen rather than dismantle national borders by claiming an international rather than an intranational or multicultural relationship with the United States. Nevertheless, they recognize that Native national borders also continue to be crossed and recrossed in both threatening and productive ways.

The Western Hemisphere, a cartographic concept going back to the 1600s, predates the stirrings of nationalism in the Americas, and therefore many call for a hemispheric analytical framework to take precedence over a nationalistic one. Used dialectically, however, both offer Western literary studies the necessary political and cultural categories for analysis. Thus transnational or hemispheric studies extend the insights of postnational analysis without reasserting the dominance of the United States and the U.S. West. Perspectives from across the ocean can do the same. If so, is there still a place for literary studies of a region so often used emblems of for the nation? The essays in the final section offer a positive answer by reconceptualizing the West transnationally. The authors recognize that regions, nations, and hemispheres are not based on intrinsic relationships between geography and politics, but are shifting cultural constructions that have acute political implications.

After these conceptual transformations, is there still a “there there” (to borrow Gertrude Stein’s phrase)? Martin Bone’s essay “(Re)inventing the (Post)southern ‘Sense of Place’” asks whether a sense of place can survive the postmodern challenge to referentiality,
a bedrock of much past work in both Southern and Western literary studies. And in its materiality, has the West become mainly an interchangeable collection of ranchettes, gated communities, managed parks, strip malls, and slums created by capitalism’s homogenizing efficiency? Bone suggests that we may be imprisoned by traditional ideas of place that do not reflect new realities.

Bone refers to Frederic Jameson’s comment that place no longer exists in our world, or it does only in a much feeble sense. Because of our loss of “thereness,” we need to recreate our sense of place, but in new ways. Jameson explains in *Postmodernism:*

Disalienation . . . involves the practical reconquest of a sense of place and the construction or reconstruction of an articulated ensemble which can be retained in memory and which the individual subject can map and remap along with moments of mobile, alternative trajectories. (51)

The conflict between loggers and environmentalists, now part of the Western collection of legends, exemplifies the deep alienation produced as both groups’ cognitive maps turn out to depict a narrowly static sense of place. These maps lack the dialectical outlook needed to help both groups grasp new conditions while not minimizing their real, material conflicts.

Western literary studies can help us create “articulated ensemble[s]” that engage a new sense of place for the West. The red/green approach of Rosendale’s essay is just one of this anthology’s dialectical investigations into the meaning of place. The contributors offer new micromaps or orienteering outings that reconceptualize a region that often seems alien from traditional perspectives. Shifting through time and space, their essays work to “disalienate[e]” us by providing satisfying standpoints from which to view an ever-changing West.

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The idea of maps, with their conceptualizations of regional space, brings us back to the place of the borders the essays here crisscross. Maps not only mark dividing lines but also show ways of negotiating them. In the preface to her seminal book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* Gloria Anzaldúa extends the new mestiza consciousness beyond the Southwest to include border regions of cultures, races, as well as individuals’ shared experiences. She then adds, “It’s not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions” (18).

Touring the other side of borders, however, is not the same as living in borderlands. Settings that cross national lines have long been a staple of Western U.S. literature. Cormac McCarthy’s *All the Pretty Horses,* a relatively recent example, makes clear the lack of mestiza consciousness in traditional Western border crossings. Mexico, the setting for most of the novel, is the protagonist’s heart of darkness, an exotic place of escape when his normal, U.S. world unravels. Rather than the primitivism of Conrad’s Congo, the Other side here is defined by brutal lawlessness and rigid social hierarchies. For the protagonist, crossing the Rio Grande means entering an alien world. Even if his home place has been lost, hope for recovery only exists on the northern side of the river. Going south is in the end only an excursion. Instead of touring the Other, the “Crisscrossing” of our title calls for mutuality. It is shorthand for the stance Anzaldúa makes in *Borderlands/La Frontera,* a manifesto that continues to challenge us.

But it is not enough to stand on the opposite river bank shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions. A counterstance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed. . . . At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once. (100)

One important obstruction to this healing process is the “bourgeois fascination with ‘authentic’ and ‘exotic’ cultures” (Curiel 13). Scholars can resist exoticization and the trap of authenticity by acknowledging power differences and ideological implications when crossing cultural borderlands. We also need to recognize that within the United States and the West, class hierarchies may be the toughest borders to cross. Renny Christopher’s essay makes this point as she addresses mixed-blood and mixed-class identities in Louis Owens’s work.

To these two cautions we should add Pablo Vito’s fundamental corollary: “Almost all recent border studies and theory fail to pursue the possibility that fragmentation of experience can lead to the reinforcement of borders instead of an invitation to cross them” (qtd. in Andrews and Walton 615n4). In attempting to reinforce some borders, dismantle others, and traverse many more, we as scholars must self-reflexively recognize and take responsibility for the implications of our efforts.

As these cautions make clear, creating new maps or models for Western literary studies is perilous work. Sonia Salcido-Hull, introducing the second edition of *Borderlands/La Frontera,* observes
that the book “continues to offer a radical (re)construction of space in the Americas” (13). The essays here contribute to this important reconstruction project from a specifically regional point of view. The contributors’ maps, while created from previous ones, offer alternative, partial representations of a region. They are guides for creating a new sense of place in our time.

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As the essays here demonstrate, much has changed since the Western Literature Association published *Updating the Literary West* (1997). Now over a decade old, it registered an important shift in the field. SueEllen Campbell’s essay explains new developments in the field at that time:

> What’s new is a widespread critical rethinking of traditional stories (histories, myths, texts, interpretive paradigms) of the American West, a rereading and retelling of these stories as complex, multivocal fragments of discourse thoroughly embedded in equally complex and intertwined social, cultural, political, economic, and ecological networks. (6)

For this critical rethinking, Campbell recognizes the influence of American studies scholars like Richard Slotkin and Annette Kolodny, the New West History, environmental studies that include eco-feminism and deep ecology, the natural sciences, and geography. In the volume’s next essay, “Feminism, Women Writers and the New Western Regionalism,” Krista Comer describes a new emphasis on female sexuality, working class culture, environmental health, imperial conquest rather than heroic pioneer effort, and racial identity and the history of race relations. These developments created not just an updated field but a fundamentally refigured one.

The same year as the publication of *Updating*, Forrest G. Robinson edited a special issue of *Arizona Quarterly* on the New West History, a key influence at the time on Western literary studies. The fact that Robinson himself and most of the contributors are literary scholars suggested a close (though conflicted) connection between these fields. In their introduction, Jerome Frisk and Robinson note that New West historians “re-tell regional history from the point of view of the oppressed, colonized and conquered; they wish to speak out for the interests of women, minorities, and the environment.”

They also add urbanism to their list of new developments (11). This list generally matches the observations by Campbell and Comer. Frisk and Robinson astutely recognize the limitations of the New West history, which also find parallels in the essays of *Updating* as both historians and literary scholars participated in the social, cultural, and multicultural turns: “The New West Historians are not generally concerned with exposing the hidden economic and political interests that motivated actions, movements, and discourses” (6).

These limitations identify some of the new developments in Western literary studies as scholars have further expanded as well as transformed the methodologies and scope of the field. For example, the second section of this anthology, focusing on the working-class West, is indebted to the New West historians’ bottom-up approach. Yet these essays do confront the ideological investments and power dynamics of Western development. The claims of the New West historians are more assumed than argued in this anthology, even as a number of essays recognize the continuing ideological significance of Turner’s frontier thesis. Although rugged individualism and frontier divides have taken on new forms in contemporary society, their resonance in certain contexts remains strong.

Building on these past developments, *Crisscrossing Borders in Literature of the American West* offers new models for defining and analyzing the literature of the West. It represents a fast-changing field of crossings and recrossings with new possibilities and scholarly responsibilities. The three sections reflect important standpoints for considering Western literature; in each, the essays provide fruitful new models for engaging a reconfigured region.

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The essays in the opening section, “A Postnational West,” challenge the traditional borders that have often delineated both national and Western narratives. Postnational analysis certainly does not assume that the concept of nation will soon become obsolete (Guriel 1). Rather, it challenges the adequacy of a singular, unified national story that privileges some by excluding others. This project is particularly important since the U.S. national identity has so often been grounded in Western stories and icons set in the West that gain their explanatory power through strategic exclusions. Postnational analyses that engage previously excluded peoples and stories are not completely new since other approaches, Ethnic and Women’s studies, for example, have
questioned unified national stories for some time. Yet its self-reflexive questioning of borders is particularly relevant to contemporary Western literary studies. The undoing of previous exclusions, however, requires caution so as not to equate and thereby confuse linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and national categories" (Rowe 24).

The four essays in this opening section engage in new ways the foundational story of westward expansion, the pioneer story. The first two consider new occupational or racial stories that transform frontier space. The second pair reframes or defamiliarizes traditional stories in challenging new ways.

Jeffery A. Sartin finds that middlebrow histories of the computer industry, from Tracy Kidder’s *Soul of a New Machine* to Tom Wolfe’s “Two Young Men Who Went West,” consistently reuse the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century language of westward expansion to describe new technological developments. These narratives construct the computer industry as a new masculine proving ground by adapting the idea of the rugged individualist to techno creators and entrepreneurs. Yet the traditional Western story has considerable variation, from individual odyssey to building a community, and Sartin finds similar variations in the accounts of Silicon Valley, Silicon Alamo, and the men who led the charge.

Robert Crooks reconsiders Frederick Jackson Turner’s concept of the frontier as the dividing line between civilization and savagery to establish a new analytical framework for the African American detective fiction of Chester Himes and Walter Mosley. He traces the use of frontier ideology as a justification for Indian wars and land expropriations to the present urban racial divide. The power dynamics in these two contexts are similar even if the forms of oppression and segregation differ. Recognizing detective fiction as descending from James Fenimore Cooper’s frontier novels, this essay also shows how in this new context the basic western formula can generate, at least to some degree, strategies for resisting dominant economic and racial power structures embodied in the continuing frontier ideology of individualism. With a focus similar to the New West historians, this essay looks at the urban racial frontier from the Other side. Crooks compares the different possibilities for resistance that Himes and Mosley present. He finds in the West Coast novels of Mosley more tensions and ambiguities than resolutions to the problem of the urban color line.

As with the first two essays in this section, Rüdiger Heinze’s “American Outsiders at the Center: Mormons and the West” questions Turnerian constructions of the West. His essay, and Homestead’s, which follows, challenges common assumptions about historical or literary status. Heinze analyzes the integral yet liminal place Mormons hold in the story of the West and the nation. Although in many ways prototypical pioneers, they also challenged the Western individualistic ideology and took the vaguely religious underpinnings of Manifest Destiny much too seriously for an increasingly secular nation suspicious of a theocracy in its midst. For other Americans, consequently, Mormons continue to be “not-quite-other and too close to home.” Heinze explores this “central outsider” paradox using two markedly different texts, the feature-length movie *Legacy*—currently the official Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints version of their pioneer past—and Tony Kushner’s play *Angels in America*. Yet, for all their different ways of perceiving Mormons, both works acknowledge the paradoxical status this group has within Western and national narratives.

One might argue that the “central outsider” social position has a parallel in the literary hierarchy. Caught between the popular and the literary, middlebrow works sit on an uneasy border. Both Sartin’s essay on computer industry histories and Crooks’s on detective fiction raise postnational questions about middlebrow fiction as they question the nationalist assumptions in the texts they consider. The Cather scholar Melissa Homestead offers a different critique through her analysis of middlebrow writing strategies, marketing and circulation, and readership. Focusing on Willa Cather’s *My Antonia* and Bess Streeter Aldrich’s *A Lantern in Her Hand*, Homestead acknowledges the power the pioneer story in both novels has for a national audience. At the same time she questions the literary hierarchy that values high art produced apparently without concern for the market while deeming middlebrow works that find a wide readership through sentimental engagement. Homestead undermines this hierarchy by strategically linking Cather to Aldrich, arguing that both authors embraced literary markets and middlebrow readerships. In addition, Homestead’s essay challenges the usual exclusive focus on writers rather than readers. In a region (and nation) marked by the ideology of individualism, valorization of the author continues nearly unabated. Homestead’s focus on readers and markets offers an important corrective.

In spite of its centrality to Western experience, class as an analytical category continues to receive only sporadic critical attention. Rowe argues,
economic opportunities. Class hierarchies, in other words, are far more divisive... than language or culture. (24)

Immigrants are not alone in confronting class barriers. The essays in the second section, “Intersecting Stories: The Working-Class West,” focus on this key aspect of the postnational critique.

In traditional constructions of the West, work has usually been associated with fur trapping, cowboysing, and gun-slinging, occupations that are hardly even considered work. Similarly, Turner claimed that with the West functioning as a national safety valve, the steam would clean away the dangerous class consciousness associated with, say, Carnegie’s steel mills or Pullman’s manufacturing complex. As the three essays make clear, however, the West is not a class-free zone. Yet working-class concerns do not stand alone: this section’s essays link class analysis with other important approaches. This is a key quality in their modeling new Western literary studies. For example, each essay acknowledges the important relationship between economic and environmental exploitation as it impacts the working class. In the first two, class analysis intersects with Native issues of identity, discrimination, and the destruction of the land. The third emphasizes the environmental justice critique in proletarian novels.

My own essay, “Indigenous Ways of Knowing Capitalism in Simon Ortiz’s Fight Back,” explains Ortiz’s critique of capitalism as antithetical to Native values and survival. More than any other Native North American writer, Ortiz has confronted the structural causes of poverty and looked closely at work culture. This essay analyzes the way Fight Back depicts continuing racial and economic exploitation while at the same time celebrating the continuance of the Acoma people.

Renny Christopher, a leading scholar in working-class studies, focuses on identity by situating Louis Owens as both a mixedblood and mixed-class writer. Unlike much work on multiculturalism, “Louis Owens’s Representations of Working-Class Consciousness” negotiates the common conceptual gap between individual subjectivity and the power relationships embedded in class structures. Owens’s writing refuses to celebrate the possibilities of upward mobility. Instead, Christopher argues that it favors working-class values of community, interdependence, and connectedness, which are all allied with indigenous values. Wofsong in particular focuses on work, with its protagonist caught between economic necessity and environmental destruction. The workplace in Owens’s writing is a key location where Native identity and class status cross.

In a wide-ranging analysis of proletarian novels, “The American West in Red and Green” asserts that these 1930s works confront the prevailing social order by depicting the environmental destruction caused by capitalist production. Steven Rosendale, an author and editor who has challenged the boundaries of ecocriticism, first considers the way Eastern proletarian novels use idealized pastoral and pioneer tropes as a critique of and alternative to the barrenness of urban environments. However, Western proletarian novels, Rosendale demonstrates, challenge the pioneer legacy as they explore the relations between environmental and human exploitation. These novels, particularly Arnold B. Armstrong’s neglected Parched Earth, presciently present a critique that predated by decades the work of the New West historians and ecocritics alike. In recognizing the environmental dimension of U.S. proletarian literature, this essay develops a new perspective both for environmental justice ecocriticism and for the history of social activist literature.

The essays in the final section, “Transnational Wests,” recognize that this region of study is not just of, by, or for the United States, but rather has historically been contested and traversed territory. Thus the “America” of our title references more than just the United States; it includes “Nuestra América,” or “Our America,” Cuban independence activist José Martí’s term that includes Latin America in resistance to U.S. hegemony. Irwin’s essay in this volume details the ways in which transnational analysis extends the postnational critique of the United States or the Western unified story of its origins and present condition.

To illustrate the continued hegemonic power of this story, Shelley Fisher Fishkin, in her 2004 American Studies Association presidential address, tells of her work on a literary guidebook for the National Parks Service and Oxford University Press trade publication division. Along with including sites such as the New Bedford Whaling District and Whitman’s house, Fishkin wanted to include Angel Island, Wounded Knee, and the cabbage fields where Anzaldúa worked as a child. These sites did not fit the national story the publishers had in mind, and Fishkin finally withdrew the manuscript (17-18). One easily images that the publisher would have been even less inclined to include transnational Chilean and Californian sites from an Allende novel or a description of the border crossings of Teresa Urreuela, the Saint of Cabora.

Later in her address, Fishkin usefully explains transnationalism as a field and method. “We’ll pay increasing attention to the historical roots of multidirectional flows of people, ideas and goods and the
social, political, linguistic, cultural, and economic crossroads generated in the process," she argues (22). Particularly relevant for Western literary studies in a transnational mode is her assertion that we must not only focus on immigrants but recognize "the endless process of comings and goings that create familial, cultural, linguistic and economic ties across national borders" (24). Yet, in considering the relationships between local and global or hemispheric spaces, we need not overlook the continuing power and diverse meanings of nationalism. Robert Warrior, reminding us that Native peoples have political status as nations, also cautions that transnational economic relations are grounded in the structures of capitalism, a material reality that must be considered (808).

The first three essays in "Transnational Wests" take a hemispheric approach, the first two by focusing on the boundary between Northwest Mexico and Southwest United States and the third reaching from Chile to California to the U.S. Midwest. The fourth crosses the Atlantic to explore the ideological critique embedded in German reconstructions of U.S. westerns. While recognizing asymmetries of power, transnational studies provide new opportunities for cross-border comparisons.

Robert McKee Irwin, a Mexicanist and leading scholar in hemispheric studies, challenges Western literary studies to take seriously the culture of the Mexican side of a shared boundary. His strategy is to first consider the Cuban poet and independence activist José Martí’s use of the canonical Western novel Ramona. As Irwin challenges Martí’s interpretation of Latin American racial harmony, he situates the novel within the context of the Northwest Mexican borderlands. Irwin uses Ramona as a case study that challenges the field to broaden its outlook so that it includes, in nonimperialist ways, intercultural relations in the Americas.

Martín embraces this challenge as she examines representations of Teresa Urrea, the popular border-crossing “Saint of Cabora.” Martín’s essay, “Possessing La Santa de Cabora,” explores intercultural relations by following the historical character and her fictional representations as she crosses racial, class, religious, and national lines. Alienated from both Mexican and U.S. national identities because she is an Indian, a migrant, and a saint who is a woman challenging traditional sacred and human roles, Teresa Urrea exposes both the policing function of boundaries and the ways transnational identities can contest the universal national identities those boundaries work to sustain. Using the Mexican novelist Brianda Doméncq’s La insólita historia de la Santa de Cabora (The Astonishing Story of the Saint of Cabora) (1990) as well as other contemporary sources, Martín calls us to embrace the contradictions of shifting border identities, as the borderland between Mexico and the United States continues to develop its own transnational culture.

Reutter’s essay “Manifold Destinies” raises questions about the national and hemispheric implications of manifest destiny as it focuses on two works and authors not usually associated with Western literature. Both Isabel Allende’s Daughter of Fortune and Toni Morrison’s Paradise are set in the West but transgress its traditional borders, in part by having women of color as protagonists. However, Reutter finds Allende’s novel to be only superficially transnational in spite of the multinational settings. Although its pluralism crosses national, racial, and gender borders, Daughter of Fortune sustains the traditional tropes and ideologies of the traditional Western and national constructions by, for example, endowing Chilean women characters with the role and stature traditionally held by the cowboys of western fiction. On the other hand, Paradise does challenge traditional stories by presenting an African American community struggling with its settler past and its own form of Manifest Destiny. Desperate to enforce community cohesion through their self-serving version of the past, the patriarchal leaders destroy their own revered story in attacking others who in many ways embody the town’s desire to find a home in a foreign land. As with the women they attack, these men want to maintain their distinctive community. Ironically, they want to access a nationalist paradigm borrowed from the culture at large. Yet, by attacking a perceived threat from the outside, they undermine rather than preserve their own distinctiveness. Unlike Allende, Morrison does challenge traditional stories that without self-reflection present a utopian vision of a unified society.

The final essay, Hubertus Zander’s "The Lonesome German Cowboy," analyzes changing German cultural constructions of Western myths and icons as representations of German national desires. Central to them is a skepticism about U.S. foreign policy. In parroting to Karl May’s widely read western novels, Michael “Bully” Herbig’s 2001 movie, Der Schuh des Manitu (Manitou’s Shoe), negotiates contemporary German skepticism about the new post-Cold War role that the United States has taken in world politics. May’s novels themselves reflect earlier German dissent from the ideologies embedded in U.S. westerns. May challenged American exceptionalism with German Romanticism, and in doing so offered the more civilized Edelsmensch (westman) as an alternative to the American cowboy. The 1960s film versions offer a different critique based on changing
relations between Germany, the United States, and the Eastern Bloc. In these movies, the westman Old Shatterhand and his Apache blood brother Winnetou share a cooperative relationship rather than the antagonistic one between cowboys and Indians in U.S. Cold War westerns. This cooperative relationship suggested German hopes for a peaceful future threatened by U.S. imperialism. Herrig's *Manitou's Shoe* spoofs these 1960s movies and their hope for a new cooperative world. In this contemporary version of the western, Herrig acknowledges German skepticism about U.S. efforts to fulfill its Manifest Destiny by attempting to bring democracy to the rest of the world.

U.S. national stories that are rooted in the West, Manifest Destiny for example, continue to shape its relation with the hemisphere and the world as well as mark its own sense of identity. Too often this means that scholars from dominant groups and positions see only single consciousness, while forcing a double consciousness on others. Yet it is possible to have double consciousness without a veil? By implication, is it possible to have a Western literary studies that recognizes the many forms of difference that create borders within and around the region while neither relying those borders nor discounting their power? In using W. E. B. Du Bois's terminology, I want to emphasize the high stakes in drawing lines. Du Bois, however, did not advocate erasing the color line any more than Anzaldúa advocated erasing borders. Our use of the term “crisscrossing” is intended to suggest that the essays here likewise do not erase borders but rather explore new perspectives and offer new models for understanding both the strength and the permeability of borders. Space without borders cannot become place, yet borders without crossings become walls rather than doors.

**Notes**


2. Nina Baym contextualizes *Updating the Literary West* by explaining the limitations of its earlier incarnation, *Literary History of the American West*. This volume, she argues, was outdated on its arrival in 1987, with its Turnerian focus on the frontier as key to national character. Baym suggests the same outdatedness for the field itself at that time (81-16). Max Westbook's preface to *Updating offers a positive view of the previous volume*, and by implication the field as well, by emphasizing continuities rather than radical shifts.

3. Robinson's 2004 review essay, "We Should Talk: Western History and Western Literature in Dialogue," explains that while literary scholars want to break down disciplinary barriers, historians are resistant in part because this move "directly challenges their disciplinary foundations" (132-33). At heart is the problem of representation, the relationship between the “imagined” and the “real” West. Krista Comer in "Literature, Gender Studies, and the New West History" offers a more thorough analysis of the relationship between these disciplines from a feminist perspective.

4. Warrior includes the following quote from Wai Chee Dimock:

> Transnationality... points to the emergence of a new collective unit... but to the persistence of an old logic, the logic of capitalism. Market born and market driven, it is infinite in its geographical extension but all too finite in its aspirations. It offers no alternative politics, poses no threat to the sovereignty of the state. (808)

Dimock's view of transnationalism, focusing on economic structures, offers few possibilities for resistance. See my references in this essay to Anzaldúa for a more positive, cultural perspective. The challenge is to include both perspectives in our analysis.

**Works Cited**


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