

The extraterritoriality of the literature for our planet.

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The Extraterritoriality of the Literature for Our Planet

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

The Extraterritoriality of the Literature for Our Planet DONALD E. PEASE THE GLOBALIZATION OF AMERICAN LITERARY STUDIES AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE PLANETARY LITERARY SYSTEM The field of American literary studies is undergoing a reconfiguration from a nationalist to a global analytic frame that has effected profound alterations in the concepts that the field depended upon, the institutional sites through which the field operated, the structures that guaranteed it, and the kinds of subjectivities that it required. American literary studies had formerly been organized around an agreed-upon set of theoreti cal assumptions and methodological procedures that underpinned Americanists' production of literary knowledge. Scholarship in American literary studies was grounded in a limited number of objects that were produced at the intersection of period and generic concepts. Americanist scholars rendered the field's theories and values compatible with an ideological consensus about what rendered the United States exceptional. But the

global flows of transnational capital and migratory labor responsible for the deterritorialization of nation-states have also disrupted the nationalist paradigm that interconnected American literary works, literary history, culture, and nation. The globalization of the literary real has resulted in a shift in interpretive attention away from explanations of how literary works function in relation to national cultures and toward an examination of how postnational literatures participate in the formation of deterritorialized contexts. In reinstituting American literary studies outside a nationalist denomination, these processes of globalization have disconnected American literary history from its exceptionalist orientation. Recent postnational iterations of the field of American literary studies, in their abrogation of the foundational statements correlating the scholarly prerogatives of American literature with the formative values of U.S. society, have also delegitimated the consensual fictions that had previously organized the American literary studies community. In posing insuperable challenges to each of the constitutive elements—the literary object, historical periodization, generic classification, literary practitioners—that formerly stabilized the field, globalization has also communicated the crisis in the nation-state to Americanists who required the mediation of U.S. nationalism as the grounds for the coherence of their field identities. The postnationalizing effects of globalization on the field of American literary studies has solicited intensely felt yet contradictory responses that have rendered the term "postnational" ideological in the Gramscian sense so that it has become an essentially contested category. A growing number of Americanist critics have taken up the term "postnational" as a banner under which to give expression to their allegiance to transnational formations—the Black Atlantic, transnational feminism, Aztlán, the Pacific Rim—that do not depend upon the territorial state as the most effective way to combat injustices in the global economy. But postnationalism has also fostered chauvinistic reactions from Americanists who have invoked the term to describe the United States as the superstate empowered to inscribe the foundational terms in the U.S. political vocabulary—capitalism, free enterprise, freedoms of expression and access, competitive individualism—within the newly globalized economic order. It is because it goes above the nation-state and goes below it at the same time that globalization has resulted in these contradictory manifestations of the postnational. When it is articulated to the conceptual needs of global relationships caused by shifts in the world economy, the term postnational describes the effect on the nation-state of the new global economic order that no longer finds in it a vehicle appropriate for the accumulation of capital or the regulation of labor. But when it describes the translocal solidarities of transnational advocacy networks like Oxfam or Amnesty International, or of the international projects of feminism, Act-Up, and the Green Party, that exist outside and work across territorial borders, the postnational signifies processes of resistance that keep globalization in check even as they simultaneously produce a very different sense of it. The one model demonstrates how a single planetary system tightens its grip on the most distant of global backwaters; the other model brings into view a more complex system that is at once decentered and interactive. The former depends on transnational capitalism and the global economy, the latter on peoplehood and imagined diasporic communities. Insofar as they are informed...

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