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Paul Jay, *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010, \$65.00). Pp. 248. isbn 978 0 8014 4900 0.

WINFRIED FLUCK

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works, in the last decade rather more effort has gone into theorizing the “transnational turn” in US historiography than into actually practising its methodologies. The product of a 2008 conference at the Newberry Library in Chicago, *Workers across the Americas* presents the efforts of a group of labour historians seeking to redress this imbalance. The book opens with a series of short methodological reflections from established scholars on the importance of transnational labour history, several of which attempt to explain why historians have recently come to adopt approaches that deemphasize or complicate the centrality of the nation-state. Essays by John D. French and Vic Satzewich, for example, highlight how waves of migration during the 1980s and 1990s, as well as the rapidly developing sense of the importance of globalization, drew US labour historians to the realization that, in Benedict Anderson’s phrase, the nation-state is no more than an “imagined community” whose boundaries are constantly brought into question by the experiences of workers and migrants. At the same time, however, the essays in this section demonstrate that whilst its intellectual underpinnings may be attractive precisely because they speak to contemporary political and social concerns, there is “nothing historically unprecedented about present-day transnationalism” (44), and that its insights are consequently applicable across a broad sweep of pan-American history.

This observation is borne out by the main bulk of *Workers across the Americas*. Six thematic sections contain extended versions of fourteen of the papers given in Chicago, which range widely in scope, both geographically, from Guatemala and Canada to the United Kingdom and Australasia, and temporally, from the Seven Years War (1756–63) to the United Nations International Women’s Year Conference (1975). Outstanding contributions include a chapter by Eileen Boris on maternity leave and US exceptionalism, and Steven J. Bachelor’s analysis of the effects on Mexican workers of developmental conceptions of what constituted an “American way of life.” However, the collection’s most significant essays are contained in its final two sections, which deal with transnational labour politics and internationalism. For example, Shelton Stromquist’s bravura chapter on workers’ engagement with the politics of urban space and municipal socialism in regions as diverse as Christchurch, New South Wales, Manchester and the American Mid-west is methodologically and conceptually akin to (but by no means derivative of) Daniel Rodgers’s pioneering *Atlantic Crossings* (1998), whilst Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie’s excellent cross-national analysis of attempts by fugitive slaves to find “pathways to freedom” provides a much-expanded context for discussions of labour internationalism in the nineteenth century (364). Ultimately, then, *Workers across the Americas* presents its reader with a set of clear, theoretically aware and perceptive essays that succeed in placing the “labour question” front and centre in contemporary debates in US historiography. In doing so, the book approaches both the theory and the practice of transnational history with great aplomb.

University of Nottingham

NICK WITHAM

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Paul Jay, *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010, \$65.00). Pp. 248. ISBN 978 0 8014 4900 0.

Paul Jay sees the recent transnational turn in literary studies as a logical extension of critical theory. Thus transnational literary studies should not be seen as primarily a

response to globalization. Instead, Jay argues that the transnational approach is rooted in the political and social movements of the 1960s that played a key role in the rise of “minority, multicultural, and postcolonial studies” (6) and decisively transformed the study of literature at American universities. The common theoretical link between these approaches is the concept of difference. Transnationalism, then, is of special interest, because it opens up new possibilities for the conceptualization and description of difference. The word here refers to “differences that locations, ethnicities, genders, race, and sexualities make in the production of identities” (6). (Class is occasionally mentioned but never seriously considered.) Given these premises, transnationalism stands for disciplinary progress, because it “liberates” differences from the confinement of national borders.

Jay’s starting premises must also affect his view of globalization. Obviously, it is of crucial importance for him to argue that globalization is not reducing difference but increasing it. In the three chapters that he devotes to discussions of the concept of globalization he concedes many of the critical points that have been raised against globalization, including the charge that it is dominated by transnational corporations and may above all serve the needs of transnational capital. However, ultimately he regards globalization as an empowering phenomenon. Two points are especially relevant in this respect: one is that globalization does not lead to homogenization, the other is that globalization is not merely a contemporary phenomenon. Although it has recently accelerated, globalization has a long history, so it cannot simply be attributed to the rise of neoliberalism, or to capitalism, and not even to modernity, since Asian powers already ushered in global expansions before. This means that “cultures all over the world have always evolved syncretically in the context of complicated interactions” (49) and that globalization has been a key factor in the multiplication of differences from the beginning. It is easy to see how welcome this view of transnational literary studies must be for someone who emphatically supports critical theory’s emphasis on difference and who considers diversity studies its most important recent manifestation. As long as we stay within the boundaries of a nation-state like the US, the possibilities for diversity studies, no matter how much progress has been made, remain limited by national borders. In contrast, transnationalism provides access to a whole new “multiplicity of differences” (91).

If the major gain in transnationalism is the multiplication of difference, those literary texts must be of greatest interest that represent and express difference in especially powerful and instructive ways. The second half of Jay’s book offers five chapter-long discussions of contemporary novels in English “that exemplify the transnational character of this new body of literature” (92), written by a “transnational, multicultural group of writers, working in disparate parts of the world, whose work explores the intersecting effects of colonialism, decolonization, migration, and economic and cultural globalization” (91). In chapter 5, Jay discusses three contemporary novels by South Asian writers – Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997), Vikram Chandra’s *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* (1995), and Mohsin Hamid’s *Moth Smoke* (2000) – that deal with questions of colonialism, postcolonialism, and globalization. Chapter 6 focusses on Kiran Desai’s critique of globalization in her *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), and chapter 7 analyzes Zakes Mda’s post-apartheid South African novel *The Heart of Redness* (2000). Chapter 8 deals with the construction of postcolonial subjectivities in Zadie Smith’s contemporary London novel *White Teeth* (2000), while the book’s final chapter is devoted to Junot Diaz’s 2007, Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of*

Oscar Wao, which “incisively explores new forms of mobility and migration in the age of globalization” (93). No matter whether or not one considers the theoretical perspective presented in the first half of the book convincing, this second half is helpful in making the reader acquainted with a body of literature that illustrates important new trends of novels written in English.

However, what on the one hand can be seen as a major merit of the book also creates a problem on the other, because transnational literary studies here remain tied to the analysis of literary texts with a transnational agenda. I agree with Jay’s assessment that the transnational turn is here to stay, but precisely because of that it would appear necessary for a book in support of this approach to demonstrate how a transnational perspective can also be productively applied to literatures historically linked to the nation. At one point Jay claims that “English literature in the age of globalization is increasingly transnational” (25). But he himself has argued that globalization has been in place since, or even before, Columbus, and that in consequence “cultures have always traveled and changed” (50). The conclusion can only be that all of English literature should be analyzed from a transnational perspective. For the development of transnational forms of literary and cultural analysis it would thus seem to pose a major challenge to show how and to what extent a transnational perspective can be productively applied to English and American literary history at large, instead of taking the easy way out by focussing on programmatic examples of transnationalism. In the form presented here, transnational literary studies remain a hall of mirrors: critics interpret texts transnationally that pursue a transnational agenda.

I see one reason for the self-confirming circularity of Jay’s argument in his firm link between transnationalism and difference. At the very end of his book, he acknowledges a possible problem with the term “difference”:

One danger of the kind of focus on difference I have been discussing throughout this book is that it can lead to a hardening of identity categories that can divide groups off from one another, so that the older structures of division connected in the study of literature under a nationalist paradigm get replicated in the very context of its critique. (199)

However, the problem here is not so much that Jay’s identity categories are rigid (I take it that he refers to identity politics) but that they remain limited to the difference categories on which the new social movements have focussed. Despite his last-minute doubts, Jay has presented us with a version of transnational literary studies that is of diminished usefulness because it restricts a transnational approach to the analysis of “differences related to gender, ethnicity, race, and sexual orientation” (31). There is no reason, however, why the transnational turn in literary studies should conceive of itself as mainly an extension of diversity studies across national borders. Using a phrase of criticism Jay directs at Paul Gilroy, one may say that he “fails to capture the historical complexity of cultural syncretism” (86), because his focus lies exclusively on his own multicultural romance with mobility, migration, and diaspora. Important as these may be, transnational literary studies have more to offer, and this book, despite the promise of its subtitle, unfortunately does not make any attempt to outline this potential in a more comprehensive and systematic fashion.