theories and methodologies

Oceans of *Longues Durées*

SUSAN GILLMAN

ANYONE IN LITERARY STUDIES WHO HAS LOOKED RECENTLY AT TITLES OF BOOKS, CONFERENCES, RESEARCH CLUSTERS, AND EVEN SYLLABI across the field cannot have missed two key words, borrowed from historical studies, that are doing substantial periodizing duty for literary and cultural criticism: one a chronological unit, the *longue durée*, and the other nominally a geographic unit, the Atlantic world. While it may not be obvious, each of these terms has spatial as well as temporal dimensions that reflect their shared origins with Ferdinand Braudel. Braudel first developed an application of the concept of the *longue durée* (pioneered by Marc Bloch) during the 1940s when, as a German prisoner of war, he wrote the initial draft of his book *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*; later, in 1958, he published his famous conceptual piece on the *longue durée* in *Annales*. Braudel posits that time moves at different speeds, defined as geographic, social, and individual, each corresponding to a different *durée* (literally, a duration of time). The *longue durée* (usually translated as "long perspective" or "long term") is the slowest-moving, operating on the scale of centuries, in which historical changes are humanly imperceptible. Braudel's Mediterranean constructs a geography commensurate with his theory of time, the methodological and conceptual frameworks of his book—its geohistorical plan, its comparative approach, its macrohistorical, multidimensional perspective, shifting from the *longue durée* to the *courte durée* of political events, embodied in its tripartite division into structures, conjunctures, and events, each section proposing a different mode of periodization and time scale.[1] Braudel's Mediterranean thus consists spatially of multiple seas unfolding temporally over the *longue durée* and as such simultaneously provides literary studies with a flexible tool for revisionist periodization and Atlantic studies, both historical and literary, with the powerful model of a region as a unit of geographic and chronological analysis.

So it is to Braudel, whose Mediterranean book and famous article in *Annales* were originally published in French in 1949 and

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https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2012.127.2.328 Published online by Cambridge University Press

1958, that we owe these seemingly unrelated approaches to the spatiotemporal relation in literature and history. Unanswered as yet is a series of implicitly comparative questions that arise from the interdisciplinarity of the approaches. First, will the Atlantic find its own Braudel (Games)? Second, is the traffic in Atlantic studies between literature and history fully two-way, or is there what the critic Eric Slauter calls a "trade gap" between literary critics and historians working the field of the Atlantic, one that favors the goods—both the objects and the methods of study—of history over those of literature: if such a trade deficit exists, how to rectify the imbalance (154)? Finally, and most broadly, we in literary studies still don't know the fate, the ultimate outcome of the explanatory power of these historiographic models that we have borrowed from history, geography, and other fields and adapted to our discipline.

The ubiquity of the terms themselves offers a clue, reflecting the many efforts across literary subfields to think more flexibly, reflexively, self-critically about the study of national literatures and comparative literature (such as the so-called transnational turn, implicitly or sometimes reluctantly comparative). Titles from the last decade that use some variant of the *longue durée* often incorporate companion terminology of race, genre, gender, class, and nation as well. Essay collections are especially interdisciplinary and comparative, spanning performance and visual studies.[2] In the digital realm, the proliferation of such online sites for the long eighteenth century as *C18-L* is most striking for their efforts to reach across disciplinary and language boundaries.

If all this work has the effect of prolonging the long eighteenth century, as the title of one review essay would have it (Brier), then the multiplication effect of the Atlantic examples is even more extreme. The Atlantic turns out to be bigger and to last longer than even the long eighteenth. In 1993 one of the most important conceptualizations of the Atlantic appeared: Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, recognized by literary critics and historians alike as a model that foregrounds space and time. The next two decades produced an astonishing array of Atlantic world work that proliferated into new subareas and units of analysis, crossing regions, periods, languages, and disciplines. By the first decade of the twenty-first century, the titles focus on slavery, economics and cultural forms, memory studies, and genres ranging from women's writing to speculative fiction, while digital media sites are emerging quickly.[3]

What do these examples tell us about the limits and possibilities of our thinking now? As a body they demonstrate the desire we all recognize from our own literary subfields to think through and beyond the existing analytic categories of space (region, nation, empire) and time (periods, centuries, decades). We've got far enough that no one wants to throw out the baby with the bathwater, as Gilroy put it in 1993. In this era of the post- and transnational, the nation is neither simply assumed nor privileged but has become just one point on the spatial scale of literary studies along with locality, region, climactic zone, colony, empire, hemisphere, trade zone, and so on. The primarily spatial preoccupation of area studies, such as American studies, is displayed in the field's will to push beyond the nation's boundaries or (as the prominence of border and diaspora studies suggests) to think from its edges and peripheries. Although less often recognized within the frame of such revisionist area studies, it is equally important to move between temporal scales. How people conceive of the relations among past, present, and future is as crucially linked to nationhood as are geographic boundaries. Drawing connections along the scale of time marks out periodizations and implied causalities through the idea of influence, but often our units of time get in the way. How can we think the Americas together without

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2012.127.2.328 Published online by Cambridge University Press

considering the discrepant timing of modernity and modernization in Latin America?

In this context, as a pair, Braudel's *longue durée* and his Mediterranean indicate how a new and skeptical awareness of the dominance of space, region, and nation in literary criticism and area studies has shaped, on the one hand, a full-fledged turn to the transnational and global and, on the other, a nascent (potential and incipient) focus on time and temporal categories. There is, to be sure, a body of work that could be called temporality studies (Fabian; Kosselek; Osborne) but perhaps with less systematic literary and historical cross-fertilization than other fields (geography, anthropology, performance, eco- and environmental studies). Faced with the uneven influence of these different interdisciplines, some would surely say that the power of space, whether in the form of area studies or extended units of borders, diasporas, and hemispheres, has been thoroughly plumbed and may be nearly exhausted, while others might be equally critical of the thinness, thus far, of temporal thinking in literary studies. This may be the moment for a remarriage, to restore space and time as equal partners in literary history and criticism.

All the uses of the *longue durée* reflect efforts to stretch the concept of the time period, to get away from the rigidity of periodization thinking in units of decades and centuries. Atlantic studies, by contrast, is a region-based ocean term (a land-water system anomalous in multiple ways) with temporal underpinnings: the Atlantic world was initially defined chronologically by colonial history and the triangle trade and identified predominantly with the Anglo-American eighteenth century. Since those beginnings, the field has been gradually extended, or subdivided, notably linguistically and chronologically, into the black Atlantic, French Atlantic, and the long(u)est Atlantic of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which shades into memory and trauma studies and includes various "specters of the Atlantic" (Baucom). While some historians argue that it is "clumsy" to subdivide the Atlantic into "imperial or linguistic units" (Games 749), others take a wryer stance, describing a "'new' Atlantic historiography" where "a 'white,' a 'black,' a 'green' (Irish), and even a 'red' Atlantic may coexist in equilibrium" (Horden and Purcell 723). Other temporal issues raised by Atlantic studies include the oft-repeated point that oceanic labels are fundamentally anachronistic, modern inventions: what we call the Atlantic Ocean was seen at earlier times as several distinct seas. Missing altogether from current thinking on the space-time relation as developed by literary and historical studies, I argue, is any sustained consideration of a third axis, the dimension of language.

If the spatiotemporal relation as a whole is crucial to any explanatory program, then what is striking here is the dominance of spatial thinking, which has been well mined in contrast to the barely tapped potential of the time dimension. The literary-historical unit of the century, along with its various subdivisions into decades and turns, is hard to escape; the stubborn presence of century thinking underlies successive periodizations into subunits like the Renaissance, the American Renaissance, and the Harlem Renaissance. An aura of belatedness, a time lag and second-order status, inevitably dogs such implicit comparative formulations. The century as a periodizing unit can also be commandeered by special-interest groups, as in the imperial reach of Henry Luce's American Century. Even projects that talk back to this kind of nationalized time may work within a century counterdiscourse. Kenneth Warren's *What Was African American Literature?* takes just such a position, arguing that the *what was* is tantamount to a *when*: the turn-of-the-century era of Jim Crow was the age of African American literature, which by this temporal logic "ended" with desegregation in the 1950s. Whether we agree with the logic of delineating a separate African American

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or Latino nineteenth century, as suggested by the various "recovery" projects that seek to uncover the "first" texts of various hyphenated minority traditions ("Recovering the Hispanic Literary Heritage"), all these reclamations are marked by Benedict Anderson's specter of comparisons. As concepts, such projects are inherently limited in their integrity and independence, if not outright haunted by the unmarked and unspoken comparisons that they imply to the earlier period formulation on which they rely.

So, too, with the *longue durée* as a related temporal term that adapts existing period designations and hinders more experimental thinking about time periods. What are the limits of the *longue*? The very ubiquity of the term, detached from the Braudel context, free-floating and multiplying, suggests that it has become something of an automatic response, by now a gesture half empty that formulaically extends conventional chronological divisions without asking new questions about them or their assumed primacy. In this context the language question is often approached by historians and literary critics alike as an add-on, relegated to footnotes on sources and editions, decoupled from space and time, whether the time is that of the *longue durée* or any other chronological unit. In contrast to these *longue* limits are the possibilities of the Atlantic world, with its built-in bridge to Braudel and the *longue durée*, as well as its proliferating linguistic subdivisions and times, all of which point the way to the missing dimension of language in the spatiotemporal relation. Atlantic studies track the circulation of historical events and ideas, persons and commodities, and of literary-cultural artifacts in particular, foregrounding how texts move materially through translations, adaptations, and significant editions and republications, each instantiation punctuated along the scales of time and space. The flow of texts across borders and borderless oceans challenges dominant temporalities. Translation represents one *form* that this dynamic exchange among regions, nations, and other contact zones can take and a *figure* for that process.

The question is how to model a way of moving dynamically along all three of these scales—space, time, and language. One possible avenue that the Atlantic world points to is, tellingly, not new, a preexisting (though underused) explanatory account, grounded in the literary, associated with a mode of reading that the critic Donald Pease calls the "future anterior," and clustered contextually around Herman Melville, C. L. R. James, Haiti, and the question of revolution (xviii). Characteristically conceived through a chain of adaptations, the future anterior starts (only in the most untimely and counterfactual sense) as a negative, with a nonevent, Melville's imagining in *Moby-Dick* in the 1850s of a revolt on the *Pequod* that never happens; in turn, that negative was reimagined by James through a form of prophetic or proleptic comparative history, as a conjuncture of the 1850s, when Melville wrote *Moby-Dick*, and the 1950s, when James was writing *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways* and remembering *The Black Jacobins*, his "study of the French Revolution in San Domingo" (156); next in turn, fifty years later, Pease names the nexus formed by James's Melville the "future anterior"—and finally, though not last or even named in this chain, Jacques Derrida. The point is how we in literary studies might use the permutations of the future anterior to further the work of Atlantic studies by linking its spatiotemoporal coordinates to a third, linguistic dimension.

To that end, when we return to the Melville-James-Pease front, roads not yet taken open up. The Melville who poses the question "Why didn't the crew revolt?" is James's creation, a product of what Pease calls James's future anterior, the temporality that James enacts though his "conjectural" reading of *Moby-Dick*, in which "a fictive retroactivity" links "a past event with a possible future on which the past event depends for its

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2012.127.2.328 Published online by Cambridge University Press

significance" (xviii). In this case James represents his experience in the 1950s awaiting deportation as a detainee of the United States Department of Immigration on Ellis Island as both a conjuncture and a conjecture, the realization "in historical time of one of the national futures Melville had imagined a century earlier" (xxviii). So while Pease named the future anterior tense, James invented it, and while Pease limits it to a temporal concept, James's Melville goes farther, pointing to how the future anterior could be approached temporally, spatially, and linguistically. James's account of Melville works, like the title that conjoins "the story of Herman Melville and the world we live in," by a kind of temporal comparison that stresses its own speculativeness. James repeatedly pairs two spaces and times, Melville's and ours, in a prophetic litany of then/now: "the world as he knows it" and "what will take its place" (*Mariners* 76), "the world to come—our world" (90), "the period in which he wrote, the period which preceded the Civil War" and "the period in which we live, . . . our world, a world of wars" (123). The construct of paired worlds uses the strange force of the *will have*, both predictive and conjectural, to forge the temporal conjuncture, the realization through James's writing of Melville's future past. "The question of questions," James says at the beginning of a chapter titled "Fiction and Reality," "is how could a book from the world of 1850 contain so much of the world of the 1950s?" (69).

The answer, we might say, is the future anterior tense. The speculative force of the historical conjuncture in James's *Mariners* relies on a grammar of counterfactuals, of which the future anterior tense is just one indicator. More broadly, the whole text network of James's *Black Jacobins*, from the two editions (1938, rev. and rpt. in 1963) to his own paratextual commentary in the footnotes, bibliography, and appendix as well as in *Mariners* and elsewhere through his 1970s lecture tours in the United States (one lecture is entitled "How I Would Rewrite *The Black Jacobins*"), also depends on a variety of grammatical conditionals. In a series of "if . . . then" constructions and conditional and subjunctive tenses, James sets up a chain of prophetic relations, first in 1938 between the Haitian revolution of the 1790s and the decolonization of Africa, which was then yet to and bound to happen, and second in the 1963 edition, in the paratextual form of the appendix "From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro," between Haiti and Cuba. The appendix, James explains in the preface to the 1963 edition, "attempts for the future of the West Indies, all of them, what was done for Africa in 1938" (viii). Underscoring the reason for the counterfactual grammar in the imperative of speculative history, the 1963 edition retains the same conditional constructions and predictions in the body of the text, using once again the paratext of the footnotes to acknowledge the changed political landscape of Africa; to insist on retaining the force of the future past, used in 1938 when only the writer and a few others "thought, wrote and spoke as if the African events of the last quarter of a century were imminent" (vii); and to argue that the same historical force linking Haiti and Africa would reappear in the emancipation of the West Indies, already glimpsed in Cuba. The chain of paired times and spaces gives James access to historically missing links, the alternating presence and absence of a revolt that never happened, in the case of Melville, and of a revolution that remained prophetically unfinished, in the case of Haiti and its avatars.

Trading in this speculative grammar, James's paratexts further indicate how we might approach the future anterior mode temporally and linguistically, thinking of it as a verb tense that marks time and demonstrates how language—considered linguistically and culturally, as a set of internal grammatical structures and external relations to culture and region, nation and empire—provides a broadly available resource for thinking about

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2012.127.2.328 Published online by Cambridge University Press

literary time and space. The literary context foregrounds how language can be said to have time, both internally, in the grammatical sense of tenses for past, present, future, and externally, in the relations of originals and translations that unfold over time. As a verb tense, the future anterior points to how different languages differently construct tense (the subjunctive is more widely used in Spanish and French than in English, for example) and therefore may differently conceptualize time as well. Translations then can be figured into the equation, not only as footnotes or sidelines but also as central to the three-dimensional scale of space-time-language. Translations, too, are timed in a variety of ways, often implicit or unspoken. Foremost among these temporal markers is the assumed primacy of birth order, the aesthetic standard of fidelity to the original that still dominates translation studies, notwithstanding Walter Benjamin's diametrically opposed view in "The Task of the Translator." For this reason as well, the phenomenon of the "invisible translator" has emerged, the subordination of the act and fact of translation through a transparent "domesticating" of the target language (Venuti).

As a sometime unspeaking and/or transparent translator himself, James points to all the ways we might use language, more literally and broadly defined than it is by Pease, as a third dimension on the scale of literary space and time. The text network of *The Black Jacobins*, itself a series of changing translations of the texts in the network and of the Haitian revolution, in response to different historical moments, displays a pattern of incomplete, inconsistent, or imperfect translations, such as the misnomer "French San Domingo," that are only partially acknowledged *as* translations or are presented as transparent translations. James is known both for decrying, in his annotated bibliography, the inadequacy of his sources, whether in English or French, and for silently translating or paraphrasing those sources in the body of the text, only intermittently footnoted. Finally, in one more instance, also paratextual, this one from the 1963 appendix, James translates part of Aimé Césaire's poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, ending with the famous line he translates as "and no race possesses the monopoly of beauty, of intelligence, of force, and there is a place for all at the rendezvous of victory" (*Black Jacobins* 401). James translates Césaire's "conquête" as "victory" instead of "conquest," although Césaire does not use "victoire" here and in the previous stanza James translates Césaire's verb "conquérir" as "conquer." It would be a mistake to call this a mistranslation, given the ongoing presence of Césaire in the James canon, particularly in the essay collection *At the Rendezvous of History* (1940). However we might read the significance of such anomalies, we cannot miss what they all have in common: a will to open-ended and unfinished translation as yet another manifestation of the speculative history James is writing.

James and the future anterior may strike some as a flimsy foundation for such an elaborate edifice, so I'll conclude by pointing to the May 2010 issue of *PMLA* as the final evidence for my case. Featuring a series of essays on "Oceanic Studies," the issue opens with an editor's column by Patricia Yaeger on "thinking ecocritically" about oceans as metaphors and polities and closes with a section on "Aimé Césaire: Poet, Politician, Intellectual." Yaeger's column ends with a map of the oceans and seas of the world along with the principal bays and gulfs and a brief comment about how some place-names are disputed. What better evidence could there be for the unfinished revolution of ocean studies in literature and for their future?

Notes

1. Each of Braudel's three *durées* provides a different historical framework with which to study history, and each *durée* makes visible structures and processes that are not

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2012.127.2.328 Published online by Cambridge University Press

apparent when the other two are used. The most readily apparent events, the material of politics and newspaper headlines, are the *événementiel*; durations of intermediate length, lasting no more than half a century, are conjunctures, cycles during which, e.g., economic events resolve themselves.

2. See, e.g., Kaul; Nussbaum; Lamb; Ionescu and Schellenberg; Milling and Lowerre.

3. For examples from the 1990s, see Potkay and Burr; Roach. Later examples include Baucom; Hartman; Sweeney; Chedgzoy; Miller; Watson; Diouf and Nwankwo; Thaler. Online see *Atlantic World Research Network*.

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https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2012.127.2.328 Published online by Cambridge University Press