

Reflection on 2013 Hughes/Robbins Transatlantic Seminar
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Thinking back on it, I don't believe that before our class on Transatlanticism, I'd ever taken a literature course that featured works from both American and British traditions. During my undergraduate career, I took classes such as British Novel, Contemporary American Literature, and of course the surveys from each, in separate chronologically discrete periods. During my Master's I took seminars on D. H. Lawrence and Dickens, balanced by courses on American Environmental Literature and the Desert in American Literature. Here, while enrolled in TCU's PhD Program, I've taken a seminar on Faulkner, a class in American Epistolary Studies, and a course on the Latino/a Diaspora (I could have alternately taken a course on Shakespeare or Victorian literature, had I been inclined).

For better or worse, our literature program invites—requires?—us to choose between the British and American; there is no “hybrid” option. Whether this is a product of the dictates of the profession (since undergraduate courses are aligned along the aforementioned binary, our training follows suit) or an intentional mandate of our disciplines (professors are trained to teach in only one tradition so undergraduate courses follow suit) probably belongs to the chicken/egg school of unsolvable dilemmas. Rather than attempt to tease out that bramble, it's more fruitful to speculate on the effect the American/British binary has had on scholarship and pedagogy, and how Transatlantic thought has and will influence me in years to come.

Rather than separate, divergent disciplines, I've come to consider American Literature and British Literature as two branches of the same tree, and as such, related in such a foundational way that they are essentially inseparable. One watershed, epiphanic moment for me occurred while reading Paul Giles' *The Black Atlantic*, when he described the British-American War not as a Revolution, but instead as a civil war. This subtle though significant shift in perspective encouraged me to consider literary history from a plurality of perspectives, thereby opening to a plurality of interpretations and connections. Thus, what we term “early American literature” should probably, in fact, be categorized under British literature as well; the term “post-colonial literature,” which we Americans usually take to mean those works written by African, Caribbean, and Asian ex-colonies, should probably be used to describe the antebellum United States as well; English-language literature produced during the Modern era, given the close collaboration of Americans and Britons during and between the World Wars, probably has more in common than we have been conditioned to believe.

Taking Transatlanticism this semester has irrevocably affected my research focus. I'd previously planned on studying American fiction written between the World Wars, and to concentrate primarily on the most salient of these American writers: Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, etc. But upon further reflection, consideration of the inextricable links connecting thought, commerce, and the arts—especially in conjunction with my research paper—has shown me that it would be impossible to do so. How can I focus only on “American” literature when many of the predominant writers were producing these works from, or about, places across the Atlantic? That many of these authors belonged to the Lost Generation and felt they needed to relocate to Europe for intellectual and aesthetic renewal surely suggests that I must consider their work in tandem with that produced by the British, French, and others during the period.

Although it admittedly complicates matters, Transatlantic thought will have profound implications on my exam and dissertation focus.

Transatlanticism will have a significant impact upon my teaching as well. Most immediately, I'm currently engaged in advance planning for the course I will teach in Spring 2014 entitled *Utopias: the Quest for the Perfect Society*. When I envisioned the course, I immediately looked to the familiar American tradition, seeking to incorporate the classic notion of America as a utopia by featuring texts by Jonathan Edwards and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, as well as case studies of American groups such as the Quakers, Mormons, and Transcendentalists. After reading some of the secondary materials from our Transatlanticism class, however, I've begun to reconsider my reading list, and have diversified our study by incorporating texts by Sir Thomas More, Jonathan Swift, and the British authors Brian Aldiss and Roger Penrose. It's my hope that these additions will open an extra dimension from both sides of the Atlantic. In addition, even when teaching future American Literature classes, I plan to seek inclusion of British or Irish texts to give additional perspective. In an ideal world, I'd love to have the opportunity to teach the Literature of the American Revolution I proposed for our earlier assignment, especially since I've already developed many of the necessary materials.

Though I will probably be solely an "Americanist," in my future career, it'd be great to have the opportunity to pair my work with a British Victorianist or Modernist and teach a class via collaborative pedagogy. It will be impossible for me not to think Transatlantically now. While the field is still emerging, I'll be closely following its trajectory, hoping that transatlanticism can shed its red squiggly and earn its capital T.