

# Forward Editor's Introduction

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In physics, spacetime refers to mathematical modeling that fuses the three dimensions of space with the one dimension of time. In literature, we understand configurations of space and time through Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope. The year 2020 is a chronotope for the particular suspension of space and time under conditions of a global pandemic. Space and time are simultaneously compressed and elongated. We can hardly tell the difference between days that stretch into months. We have spent months with one eye on a better future and the other eye turned backwards in nostalgia. At times, this double state can feel like inertia. But, as I think about what the *Forward* section of the journal does, I am reminded of the potential energy stored in that suspension between past and present. Far from a frustrating stasis, the following recent publications showcase exciting new scholarship in Transnational American Studies reflecting the dynamic productivity between memory and promise.

In looking backward to look forward, two of this section's featured texts offer fresh takes on American literary standards. Edited by Tracy C. Davis and Stefka Mihaylova, *Uncle Tom's Cabins: A Transnational History of America's Most Mutable Book* tracks the global reception of Harriett Beecher Stowe's famous nineteenth-century novel, focusing specifically on how diverse reading publics accessed a transnational vision of social equality through the novel's sentimental critique of slavery. The contributors show how local and national contexts, as well as which permutation of the story (print book, stage play, or film) influenced how the novel's moral-ethical-civic lessons challenged or perpetuated existing racial policies in different countries.

Marcy J. Dinius's contribution, "I Go to *Liberia*': Following *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to Africa," recovers the close connections between the Liberian response to the novel and the world's response to the new nation of Liberia. She analyzes how the Liberian political elite used the novel to mediate the country's international image, comparing the hopefulness of Stowe's recolonization vision with the social realities of the segregated nineteenth-century Liberian society (14).

Across the Atlantic, Kahlila Chaar-Pérez considers how the Cuban translation of the novel by Andrés Avelino de Orihuela intervened in the racially fraught colonial pol-

itics of Cuba through a translated transmission of secular republicanism and cosmopolitanism (9). In “The Bonds of Translation: A Cuban Encounter with *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*,” Chaar-Pérez reads Orihuela’s “Cubanization” of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as articulating “an ambivalent racial politics” and producing a “critique of how both Stowe and the Cuban elite approached the representation of Blackness” (141). I recommend the author’s careful examination of how Orihuela translates American English words used to designate race in the United States into Cuba’s much more variegated racial lexicon.

Between 1954 and 1988, Bulgaria churned out eleven editions of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (translated by the Bulgarian novelist and translator Anna Kamenova). The novel has been and remains mandatory reading for Bulgarian middle schoolers. Stefka Mihaylova’s essay, “Raising Proper Citizens: *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and the Sentimental Education of Bulgarian Children During the Soviet Era,” dissects Kamenova’s transformation of a sentimental novel, steeped in a uniquely US system of Christian morality and racialization, into a social realist narrative fit for molding generations of Bulgarian children into model subjects of Soviet internationalism.

Mihaylova’s discussion of what happens to perceptions of racial difference when one’s primary source of information about the history of African Americans and race relations in the United States comes from one heavily translated nineteenth-century novel offers unexpected insights into contemporary Bulgarians’ racial vocabulary for Blackness.

A new anthology edited by Emron Esplin and Margarida Vale de Gato similarly looks backward to look forward. *Anthologizing Poe: Editions, Translations, and (Trans)-National Canons* unites single-author and anthology studies by examining how Edgar Allan Poe’s extreme popularity has been packaged and repackaged around the world. In their Introduction, excerpted here, the editors consider the consequences of simultaneously translating and anthologizing a text or an author. In the case of Poe, the French writer Charles Baudelaire casts a long shadow over Poe’s global reputation. Baudelaire’s prescient understanding of Poe’s appeal affected not only how French audiences received Poe but also, according to the contributors, his influence on Spanish and Argentine literary traditions.

The essays in the collection’s fourth section will be of particular interest to *JTAS* readers. Fernando González-Moreno and Margarita Rigal-Aragón’s chapter offers an “interpretative tool of narration” of the images that have accompanied Spanish Poe anthologies since 1887, “demonstrat[ing] how Spanish artists render their visual understanding of Poe’s works” autonomously from the French reception of Poe (293). In his contribution, Emron Esplin documents “a century-long proclivity for Poe’s tales of terror, ratiocination, and the supernatural” by both lesser-known (Carlos Olivera and Armando Bazán) and internationally renowned (Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar) anthologizers, editors, and translators of Poe’s fiction in Argentina.

The volume concludes with a non-Western exploration of the anthologizing process by Takayuki Tatsumi, *JTAS* editor and Poe scholar. Tatsumi invites readers on

a double journey—the journey of Poe’s literature in Japan and the personal journey of a Poe anthologizer, from childhood readings and graduate studies to international scholar and curator of Poe for a Japanese reading audience (12). Read this on your next midnight dreary.

Dixa Ramírez D’Oleo’s *Colonial Phantoms: Belonging and Refusal in the Dominican Americas from the 19th Century to the Present* “explores how Dominicans have negotiated the miscomprehension, miscategorization, and misperception—or what [Ramírez D’Oleo] call[s] ghosting—of this territory” through literature, government documents, music, the visual arts, public monuments, film, and ephemeral and stage performance (2). In “Following the Admiral: Reckonings with Great Men’s History,” Ramírez D’Oleo pits the spirit of Columbus and national-imperial history-from-above against the cultural work of novelist Junot Díaz and actor-screenwriter Manny Pérez in a battle of performative masculinities within hemispheric hierarchies. Counternarratives in their attempts to dismantle official history by infusing layered colonialism with the language of the supernatural, “both *Oscar Wao* and *La Soga*,” Ramírez D’Oleo argues, “showcase how Dominican subjects, especially men, struggle against or support the unrelenting violence necessary to maintain Eurocentric, patriarchal conceptions in both national contexts and the wider neocolonial context of U.S.-Dominican relations” (148). Amongst many other moments of fine analysis in the chapter is, perhaps, my all-time favorite Question Asked in A Scholarly Work: “What is it about Columbus that leads writers to paroxysms of hyperbole?” (115). Read this if you want to know what a mongoose, a lighthouse, and the bones of Christopher Columbus have in common.

The layering of imperial spacetime gets a new look in Nadia Nurhussein’s *Black Land: Imperial Ethiopianism and African America*. The book explores the African American fascination with a mythic and fantastic Ethiopia—an imperial Abyssinia whose apparition in African American literature and culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries paradoxically and supernaturally symbolized both Black resistance and the spiritual center of an imagined Black Empire (7). Nurhussein’s “Chapter Four: Imperial Embellishment” examines the case of Harry Foster Dean, whose *The Pedro Gorino: The Adventures of a Negro Sea-Captain in Africa and on the Seven Seas in His Attempts to Found an Ethiopian Empire* recounts the tale of his ambition to build a Black empire in Africa (17).

Nurhussein’s close reading links the text’s formal embellishments to a doubled, layered concept of imperial spacetime. Dean tries hard to convince audiences, and perhaps Dean himself, of his authenticity—in relation to both his ancestral connection to Ethiopia and his right to rule a new, imagined, future empire: “Everything in Dean’s future-Africa is determined by ancient Africa” (98). Dean’s narrative, torn between the present fantasy of empire-building and the fantasy of empires past rebuilding, requires so much adornment that “the narration itself becomes costume” (92). Someone has sold this would-be Emperor some new clothes, indeed.

As we continue to navigate the strange configurations of space and time while the end of one year and the beginning of another approaches, I wish everyone safe and energetic explorations of our own potential—transformative—energy.

Would you like to see your new work featured in a subsequent edition of *JTAS's Forward* section? Or maybe you would like to promote someone else's outstanding recent scholarship in Transnational American Studies? Please write to me:

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### **Notes**

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