

Forward Editor's Introduction

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What did you do during the pandemic?

In the years following World War II, people, reunited after long absence and/or in the wake of unspeakable traumas, would ask each other: *How was your war? What did you do during the war?* It was a way to reestablish connection through a shared experience, but also a game of Who Had It Worse, an oppression Olympics, and an opportunity to judge who deserved solemn respect and who contempt. Who were the heroes and who the shirkers.

I wonder if our current moment will come to be defined by similar questions. If, moving forward, people will mark the time between 2020–2022 by their response to the Covid-19 pandemic. *I lost twenty kilos. I learned how to knit. I gained twenty kilos. I baked sourdough bread. I quit carbs. I quit my job. I reevaluated my life choices. I developed a drinking problem. I resented my spouse, my children, my laptop ... I binge-watched Tiger King ... I lost both my parents ... I had twins ... I wrote a book ...*

Will we be driven to quantify our experience, to account for those “lost” months of isolation and screen time? Will we feel as if we have to have something to show for our pandemic? And, when the dust has settled (assuming we avoid nihilistic doom), will we judge each other’s pandemic? Will those who lost no one, got promoted at work, or conquered the Peloton have their experience of collective trauma canceled? Will we raise our eyebrows at those who emerge with little to nothing to show for “all that extra time”?

I admit to a secret resentment of pandemic productivity. I low-key begrudge my colleagues who finished their books, strengthened their tenure files, freshened up their courses, created course “trailers” (yes, this is a thing) to boost their enrollment numbers ... Meanwhile I counted the days and weeks until restaurants and bars reopened in the European city where I lived. I went to the supermarket. I drank wine from a coffee mug during Zoom faculty meetings.

All of that is supposed to be over now, but it isn’t. It seems 2022 will look a lot like 2021. That strange end-of-year temporality where we look both backwards (in assessments, evaluations, and reviews) and forwards (to goals, resolutions, fresh

starts) simultaneously heightened by Omicron and a growing sense of “will-this-ever-end” despair.

And now we come to *Forward* and Transnational American Studies. Although the scholarship captured here was largely completed in times BC (before Covid), it’s a refreshing reminder that The Work continues. Compiling this year’s *Forward* helped me toss out (upcycle?) my resentment for productivity in exchange for a renewed sense of those oh-so-holiday-appropriate feelings of awe and wonder. No, not the naïve sentimentality of Hallmark Christmas movies and mid-century carols, but a rekindled admiration for the work that we put out there in the world. I am struck by the diversity of our transnational scholarship at the same time that I observe shared concerns.

In this small sampling, I encourage you to enjoy the way Timo Müller and Silvia Schultermanndl invigorate questions of form and aesthetics in “[The Sonnet and Black Transnationalism in the 1930s](#)” (Müller) and “[Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s Clarence, Sentimental Kinship, and the Transnational American Novel of Manners](#)” (Schultermanndl). These works identify transnational qualities while remaining grounded in the specific contexts of history. Recommendation: write an ambivalent sonnet. Be caught unprepared for how Annie Isabel Fukushima redefines acts of witnessing as radical, decolonizing, and ambivalent while she meticulously documents the migrant experiences and subjectivities involved in human trafficking; see “[Witnessing Legal Narratives, Court Performances, and Translations of Peruvian Domestic Work](#).” Take a deep breath and (pardon the pun) dive into Brian Russell Roberts’s *Borderwaters* for a paradigm-shifting theorization of the American archipelago (“[Introduction: Archipelagic Thinking and the Borderwaters: A US-Eccentric Vision](#)”). Recommendation: Practice your own archipelagic thinking.

I hope these selections reach you wherever you are in your pandemic. May they bring you a little of whatever it is you need.

Warmly,
Jennifer

Please keep in touch and let me know what you think. If you have a suggestion for a recent book-length publication in transnational American Studies that you’d like to see featured in this space, email me at: jennifer.reimer@osucascades.edu

Forward Selections

“The Sonnet and Black Transnationalism in the 1930s” from *The African American Sonnet: A Literary History* by Timo Müller. Copyright © 2018 by University Press of Mississippi.

“Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s *Clarence*, Sentimental Kinship, and the Transnational American Novel of Manners” from *Ambivalent Transnational Belonging in American Literature* by Silvia Schultermandl. Copyright © 2021 by Routledge.

“Witnessing Legal Narratives, Court Performances, and Translations of Peruvian Domestic Work” from *Migrant Crossings: Witnessing Human Trafficking in the U.S.* by Annie Isabel Fukushima. Copyright © 2019 Stanford University Press.

“Introduction: Archipelagic Thinking and the Borderwaters: A US-Eccentric Vision” from *Borderwaters: Amid the Archipelagic States of America* by Brian Russell Roberts. Copyright © 2021 by Duke University Press.