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"Trans-Atlantic American Studies and the Trans-Atlantic Archive"

ABSTRACT

Recent trends in cultural, literary, and diplomatic history of the U.S. have clustered around the concept of the *Trans-Atlantic* as a category (or as a matrix) for a renewed understanding of the American experience in a relational and post-nationalist perspective. Putting the Atlantic at the center of a network of non-linear exchanges between the American and the European continents has proved promising in opening up fresh venues of inquiry into cultural and historical phenomena taking place across the Atlantic and involving several, dislocated sites, temporalities, processes and effects. However, it has also raised questions about the identification of a body of works, documents, and records that constitutes its specific, unique object of analysis and on the development of pedagogical practices that address the issues such an object of analysis opens. On the one hand, scholars have returned on an established canon of literary works to which additions have been only rarely made. On the other hand, thou, trans-Atlantic American Studies has clustered around themes, issues, and works of literature and culture that are making a profound impact in resituating American Literature in the context of wider global contexts and relations. This process has raised the question of what exactly an "Atlantic archive" is, how it relates to non-Atlantic and global networks of exchanges, to our understanding of Western modernity, and finally to our contemporary ideologies and/or epistemologies. It prompts heuristic and methodological questions such as, for instance: What are the objects of an Atlantic archive? How are they constituted? How are they interrogated by scholars situated in different places around the Atlantic? What are the limits and potentialities for nuanced descriptions of the relation between our understanding of U.S. centered phenomena and the long thread of connections – watery and terrestrial – that situate them in a much wider perimeter and longer historical trajectory?