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time. After all these years what did I know about how poets support themselves, what a literary career meant, how great publishing houses become great, how Nobel Laureates are chosen, what it would mean to try to live in the West Indies as a poet or a dramatist?" (626) Midway through his book, King comments that in his essays Walcott's prose style resembles "a series of evocations in which plot of narrative is hidden, ignored" (431). In comparison with the *bel canto* of Walcott's prose poetry, King's recitative maintains its steady rein on an explicit story line.

Robert D. Hamner

Wai Chee Dimock. *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006. Pp. 264. \$35 cloth.

Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time charts a necessarily far-ranging course, both chronologically and geographically: we find Emerson keeping company with the fourteenth-century Persian poet Hafiz, both of whom embrace Islam's hybrid history; Henry James meditates, along with Veronese and Plutarch, on Alexander's victory in the Battle of Issus (333 B.C.E.); Robert Lowell uses Horace to comment on the Vietnam War. Wai Chee Dimock proposes a new paradigm for American literary studies, one that seeks to wrench Americanists out of their habit of thinking in national terms, their periodizing according to nationally-sanctioned dates (e.g., 1776). Instead, she takes the *longue durée* view and wonders "[w]hat would American literature look like restored to a . . . scale enlargement along the temporal axis that also enlarges its spatial compass?" (4). This book both keeps company and parts way with other recent work in American literary studies on globalization: like this other work, hers considers American literature in a global, often imperialist, context, but, unlike theirs, *Through Other Continents* abandons "American" as a potentially fruitful category of analysis: "Deep time is denationalized space" (28), Dimock insists. Yet her own chapters revolve around canonical American authors, a principle of selection whose value is both rhetorically apparent and, if we are convinced by her own claims, ultimately untenable.

How revolutionary is this book? Certainly it aims to be: most obviously, Dimock wants to revolutionize American literary studies by asking those of us working within it to relinquish our dependence on the category of the nation to generate our claims about the literature we analyze, but she also asks

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us to break out of our disciplinary boundaries (or even our usual interdisciplinary boundaries). Woven in with her analyses of particular authors come meditations on the nature of time inspired by her reading in the hard sciences. Fractal geometry and Newtonian physics play as large a role in this book as close reading. Yet she uses these theories more as a source of metaphors than a source of truth, e.g., fractal geometry provides her with a vocabulary for describing the epic rather than as a source of accurate knowledge about the world: “[The linguistic fabric of the epic] is a rough cut, with dents and bumps, each representing a coil of time, a cystlike protuberance, in which an antecedent moment is embedded, bearing the weight of the past, and burrowing into the present as a warp, a deformation” (84). Elsewhere, Aristotle’s notion of non-serial time is given as much credence as Einstein’s: both provide fruitful metaphors. To ask Dimock to evaluate these scientific theories according to scientific protocols seems absurd: she is, after all, using them to analyze something—literature—that is not amenable to double-blind studies. Yet in order to accept a claim as radical as hers, one that would completely re-draw the map of American literary studies, we need to have some evidence that the theories she uses, which are not limited to scientific theories but extend to philosophical and linguistic ones, are not just suggestive but right. They need to be right in the sense that they are accepted as definitive by scholars in the field they are drawn from (and if not, we need to be given some idea of the controversial status of these theories) and right in the sense that we are given some evidence that these theories can do more than provide metaphorical credence to Dimock’s own claims.

Dimock’s new paradigm of American literary studies is a provocative, alternative paradigm, but is it a better one? Her argument for the value of her revolutionary paradigm is, at bottom, a political one. This book begins with an anecdote about the looting of the Iraqi National Library and the Islamic library in the Religious Ministry of Iraq soon after the U.S. invasion. The work as a whole seems inspired by this war: “Using ‘American’ [as a category of analysis], we limit ourselves . . . to an analytic domain foreclosed by definition, a kind of scholarly unilateralism” (3). Dimock’s book offers a political admonishment that seems to go something like this: if we were to recognize the kinships between East and West, Christianity and Islam, present and past, such a war as America’s present one in Iraq, motivated by a false sense of American centrality, would be impossible. Yet this claim rests on a dubious though widely-shared bit of associative logic: how we pursue and disseminate literary studies will influence how the general citizenry thinks about politics. Even granting they do, our way of using “American” as a category of analysis in literary studies might not be as unproductive or as politically suspect

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as Dimock implicitly claims. At one point, Dimock quotes Emerson, who is describing the value he imputes to a variety of Eastern religious texts: “Do we not feel in reading these elemental theories that these grotesque fictions are globes and diagrams on which the laws of living nature are explained?” (35). Dimock sees this quotation as showing Emerson’s embrace of these texts’ “parallel descriptions [alongside Christian accounts] of the planet” (35). In praising Emerson’s recognition of hybridity, Dimock ignores Emerson’s use of the words “elemental” and “grotesque.” In these adjectives we might find grounds for understanding these authors not as conduits for Dimock’s admirable message about America’s off-center and deeply intertwined relationship to the span and duration of the world but as writers whose own understandings of this relationship was shaped by their sense, however problematic, of their status as Americans.

Faye Halpern

Kenneth Mostern. *Autobiography and Black Identity Politics: Racialization in Twentieth-Century America*. Cambridge UP, 1999. Pp. 276. \$54.95 cloth.

Autobiography offers obvious access to representation of identity, subjectivity, and conceptions of community, and Kenneth Mostern aims through the venue of life narratives to provide, in his words, “a genuinely radical analysis of political identities” (8). Mostern’s project is to recuperate identity politics from the suspicion in which it is held by infusing the concept with a Marxist structural analysis. Although Paul Robeson, bell hooks, James Baldwin, Barbara Smith, Michel Wallace and others get respectful attention, Mostern selects the autobiographies of W.E.B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, Malcolm X, Nikki Giovanni, and Angela Davis for the main focus of his argument, and it is his reading of these texts and their contexts that is the great strength of this study. He names the three arguments that make up “the key political content of this book: the relationship of feminism to the contemporary revision of black identity politics; the bifurcations of race and culture and the confusion over terminology that results from this bifurcation; and the question of narrative as a fundamental moment of political action” (13). The promise of this assertion is sometimes muddled by Mostern’s theoretical entanglements, but the weight Mostern gives to specific historical contexts and to the particular elements at play in the narratives of his main authors makes the torturous reading of theoretical jargon worthwhile. Mostern really