Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature

Volume 41 | Issue 1 Article 14

4-6-2017

Stephen M. Park. The Pan American Imagination: Contested Visions of the Hemisphere in Twentieth-Century Literature. Charlottesville and London: U of Virginia P, 2014. 269 pp.

Maria José Somerlate Barbosa
The University of Iowa, maria-barbosa@uiowa.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://newprairiepress.org/sttcl

Part of the Latin American Literature Commons, Modern Literature Commons, and the Spanish Literature Commons

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License.

Recommended Citation
Somerlate Barbosa, Maria José (2017) "Stephen M. Park. The Pan American Imagination: Contested Visions of the Hemisphere in Twentieth-Century Literature. Charlottesville and London: U of Virginia P, 2014. 269 pp.," *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*: Vol. 41: Iss. 1, Article 14. http://dx.doi.org/10.4148/2334-4415.1935

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact cads@k-state.edu.

Stephen M. Park. The Pan American Imagination: Contested Visions of the Hemisphere in Twentieth-Century Literature. Charlottesville and London: U of Virginia P, 2014. 269 pp.

Abstract
Review of Stephen M. Park. *The Pan American Imagination: Contested Visions of the Hemisphere in Twentieth-Century Literature*. Charlottesville and London: U of Virginia P, 2014. 269 pp.

Keywords
Pan American Imagination

This book review is available in Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature: http://newprairiepress.org/sttcl/vol41/iss1/14

Stephen M. Park. *The Pan American Imagination: Contested Visions of the Hemisphere in Twentieth-Century Literature*. Charlottesville and London: U of Virginia P, 2014. 269 pp.

The Pan American Imagination tenders an historical overview of the House of the Americas and the Pan American Union (PAU) and questions the development of a system of knowledge in the United States that rendered Latin America and the Caribbean as objects of study. Stephen M. Park discusses the ideological precepts of U.S. exceptionalism and the complexities involved in hemispheric relationships. In his analytical stances, he uses an interdisciplinary approach, intertwining historical outlines with literary readings and presenting social, racial, and gender analyses of objects of art and performances, as well as the economic and cultural representations of a selected number of countries situated south of the U.S. borders. The author explains that he limits discussions to Cuba, Haiti, and Mexico because of their proximity to the United States and that he only addresses the historical period encompassing the 1930s and 1940s because of "the social and political upheavals during this time—the Mexican Revolution and its aftermath, U.S. involvement in Cuba and the 1933 revolution, the U.S. occupation of Haiti" (13). In addition, he chooses one author and/or artist from each of the three countries discussed to illustrate specific forms of knowledge production during the historical period he analyzes. Those selections work as case studies and have the purpose of streamlining the hemispheric relationship North/South as far as the United States, Cuba, Haiti, and Mexico are concerned. As a result, the book offers extensive research and careful analyses of William Carlos Williams' and Alejo Carpentier's writings, Diego Rivera's murals, Walker Evans' photographic projects, Carleton Beals' travel journalism, Ana Castillo's feminism, and Katherine Dunham's dance performances. By carefully analyzing their works, Park traces the tensions in the North/South connection, explores samples of "hemispheric" relationships, and analyzes areas of confluence.

Park divides the book into three parts and six chapters and also offers an introduction, an epilogue, a list of illustrations, an appendix, notes, a bibliography, and an index. In the first part ("Hemispheric Identity and the Uses of Indigenous Culture") he focuses on "Mesoamerican Modernism" and "Hemispheric Mythologies." In the first chapter, he examines the writing of William Carlos Williams "within the context of the Mayan Revival," discusses the author's "sustained interest in archeology" (21), and his fascination with the Aztec culture. To contextualize Williams' writing, Park offers an overview of Mesoamerican archeology and discusses prominent studies in the field. He also analyzes the construction of American indigeneity. As the title of the second chapter of this part indicates, Park reevaluates "the history of the Americas through Simón Bolívar and Quetzalcoatl" (55).

In the second part of the book, he addresses "Cuba, Race, and Modernity." In chapter three, he analyses the academic discourse in Havana, focusing on Alejo Carpentier's *¡Écue-Yamba-ó!* ('Praised be the Lord!'), the First Pan American Conference on Eugenics (which took place in Havana), the United States 1924 Immigration Act, Afro-Cubans, the sugar industry, and transnational capitalism. In the fourth chapter, "The Pan American Progress," he focuses on criminality, economic development, and representations of the "South." This chapter addresses comparative discourses about the Southern United States and some Caribbean and Latin American countries, discussing the representations of poverty and centering on the works of Carleton Beals and Walker Evans. "Women, Migration, and Memories of Pan Americanism" is the third part of the book and centers on some intellectual and artistic contributions made by female writers and performers. Chapter five addresses "Pan Americanism Revisited: Hemispheric Feminism and Ana Castillo's *The Mixquiahuala Letters*" and discusses her dialogue with travel narratives by Erna Fergusson (who wrote extensively about the U.S. Southwest, Mexico, Guatemala, Venezuela, Chile, and Cuba). The sixth chapter, "Decolonizing the Dance," addresses Katherine Dunham's travels in the Caribbean, her approach to anthropology and performance, her repertoire of dance styles, her Pan-American politics of race, and the U.S. occupation of Haiti.

Park skillfully highlights the intersections where history, politics, popular culture, literature, art, photojournalism, and performance come together to form the larger discourse of what has been labeled Pan Americanism. By providing overviews and analyzing concepts and terminology, at first, the book seems to target a general reading public, less familiar with the academic debates on Pan Americanism. However, a closer examination reveals that by combining those overviews with in-depth analyses of a limited number of countries and case studies, the author also allows readers who are already familiar with the topics discussed to have a deeper understanding of "the ideological project of Pan Americanism" (221). The writing flows easily, and the materials are carefully researched and well documented.

There is a general tendency in the United States to place the study of a limited number of countries south of the U.S. border under the Latin America umbrella term. Therefore, at times, a more appropriate use of terminology for geographical references could have rendered *The Pan American Imagination* extra academic credentials. As he explains in the Epilogue, the idea of a totalizing vision of the Americas is unconvincing. Therefore, what I question is the use of the term Latin America or South American when his object of study is the U.S. relations with Cuba, Haiti, and Mexico. My concern aside, *The Pan American Imagination* has undeniable academic and analytical merits. Park often raises thought-provoking arguments and heightens the scholarship on the "hemispheric" relationship the United States developed with Cuba, Haiti, and Mexico.

Maria José Somerlate Barbosa
The University of Iowa