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Antipodean America



*Australasia
and the
Constitution of
U.S. Literature*

PAUL
GILES



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AUSTRALASIA AND THE CONSTITUTION
OF U. S. LITERATURE

Paul Giles



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Antipodean America

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Antipodean America

Paul Giles

"The people through the whole world of Antipodes,
In outward feature, language, and religion,
Resemble those to whom they are supposite.
They under Spain appear like Spaniards;
Under France, Frenchmen; under England, English
To the exterior show; but in their manners,
Their carriage, and condition of life,
Extremely contrary."

(Richard Brome, *The Antipodes*, 1638)

"They are justified, they are accomplish'd, they shall now be turn'd the
other way also, to travel toward you thence . . ."

(Walt Whitman, "A Broadway Pageant," 1860)

"'Tis well you'll be looked after from last to first as yon beam of light
we follow receding on your photophoric pilgrimage to your antipodes in
the past, you who so often consigned your distributory tidings of great joy
into our nevertolatetolove box, mansuetudinous manipulator, victim-
isedly victorihoarse, dearest Haun of all, you of the boots, true as adie, step-
walker, pennyatimer, lampaddyfair, postanulengro, our rommanychiel!"

(James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 1939, 472)

"The sky, which looks so still, is always in motion, full of drama if you
understand how to read it. Like looking into a pond. Hundreds of events
happening right under your eyes, except that most of what we see is al-
ready finished by the time we see it—ages ago—but important just the
same."

(David Malouf, "Southern Skies," in *Antipodes*, 1985)

{ PREFACE }

Although any kind of academic work creates its own kind of stresses and challenges, this book has been, for the most part, an unmitigated pleasure to write. It has also had a somewhat unusual provenance, which it may be worth recounting here briefly. In December 2006, just a few weeks after publishing *Atlantic Republic*, the final installment of my trilogy on transatlantic literary relations, I visited Australia for the first time on holiday, mainly to see friends and watch cricket, though also with half an eye on what I thought might be, from my perspective, the country's intellectual possibilities. Though the weather was unseasonably cold and the cricket disappointing, I also came across at the Australian National Maritime Museum in Sydney's Darling Harbour an exhibition on transpacific links between Australia and the United States, where I realized, despite having recently published three books on transatlantic culture, how little I knew about this alternative scenario. No doubt this was due in part to my own ignorance, but it struck me that this story was not widely known, certainly not within the institutional annals of American literature, and that there was a different kind of narrative waiting to be extrapolated here. At the invitation of Gordon Hutner, I published an essay in the Spring 2008 issue of *American Literary History*, where I explored this theme primarily in relation to Benjamin Franklin and the revolutionary period, but I was then busy with other projects and did not return to this topic until early 2009, when, during a sabbatical year from Oxford, I spent three months as a visiting fellow at the Humanities Research Institute of the Australian National University in Canberra. This gave me an opportunity to explore the dimensions of this antipodean America theme more thoroughly, and it soon became obvious that this was a large topic that had, for various complicated reasons that I discuss in this book, been badly neglected. In March and April of that year I gave initial exploratory papers at ANU and, at the invitation of Julian Murphet, at the University of New South Wales, where many audience members offered helpful comments and suggestions. I continued my research during the northern summer of 2009 back in Oxford, consulting books on the Australian gold rush and the like exhumed from the bowels of Rhodes House under the bust of Cecil Rhodes's uncomprehending, stony gaze. Meanwhile, I decided to accept an offer from the University of Sydney to move from Oxford to their Challis professorship of English, a position I took up in January 2010. This book, then, ultimately encompassed not just a change of intellectual direction, but a radical change of lifestyle.

I had originally intended to include my earlier essay on Franklin as the last chapter in *The Global Remapping of American Literature*, a book I published with Princeton University Press in 2011; but one of the readers for Princeton, Leonard Tennenhouse, made the astute observation that the colonial context of this material effectively differentiated it from the historical and geographical frameworks that theoretically shaped the rest of that book. It subsequently became clear that a revised version of the Franklin article would work much better as a chapter in *Antipodean America*, and during the three years I spent writing this book in Canberra, Oxford, and Sydney I was amazed, time after time, at how a rich seam of antipodean material impacting upon classic American authors had generally been overlooked. I was fortunate in Australia to have access to library sources that would not have been so easy to obtain in Europe or America, notably the Christina Stead archives at the National Library of Australia in Canberra, the Lola Ridge and Miles Franklin papers at the Mitchell Library (the State Library of New South Wales), and the wealth of material scattered around the Fisher Library at the University of Sydney. I am grateful to the Mitchell Library and to the executor of Lola Ridge's estate, Elaine Sproat, for permitting me to quote from Ridge's unpublished work. I was helped also by a Discovery Project grant from the Australian Research Council, which supported the costs of travel and a research assistant, and by a range of useful comments and suggestions from my new colleagues in Australia. David Carter, Robert Dixon, Hilary Emmett, Debjani Ganguly, Bruce Gardiner, Sarah Gleeson-White, Margaret Harris, Susan Lever, David Malouf, Iain McCalman, Meaghan Morris, Brigid Rooney, Rodney Taveira, John Tranter, Ian Tyrrell, and Gillian Whitlock all made observations that materially affected the ultimate shape of the book, as did various friends and colleagues in the United States, particularly Paul Crumbley, Wai Chee Dimock, Cristanne Miller, Carrie Hyde, and Shirley Samuels. I am especially grateful to an invitation from Saree Makdisi to present an early version of this book's first chapter at a UCLA Mellon seminar on transatlantic cultures in May 2009, not only because the feedback there from Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Felicity Nussbaum, and others was most useful but also because UCLA's excellent library held different versions of Charles Brockden Brown's pamphlet *An Address to the Government of the United States on the Cession of Louisiana to the French*. I also took advantage of the location of the American Studies Association meeting in Baltimore in October 2011 to visit the Library of Congress, which holds rare material relating to the scientific writings of Charles Wilkes.

Besides the Franklin essay, various other fragments from this project have appeared in earlier versions, in either oral or written form. At the invitation of Tim Minchin, I had the pleasure of delivering the annual Bernard Bailyn lecture in American Studies at La Trobe University in October 2010, which was subsequently published in their pamphlet series as "Transpacific Republicanism: American Transcendentalism, John Dunmore Lang, and the Gold-Rush Circuit." I also delivered by videolink a plenary address to the Emily Dickinson

International Society Conference held at the Rothermere American Institute, Oxford University, in August 2010, and this appeared in revised form as “The Earth reversed her Hemispheres: Dickinson’s Global Antipodality,” in the *Emily Dickinson Journal* 20, no. 1 (April 2011). An earlier version of the discussion of Joel Barlow in chapter 3 was published as “‘To gird this watery globe’: The Universal Order of American Neoclassical Poetry,” in *Transatlantic Literary Studies, 1680–1830*, edited by Eve T. Bannet and the late lamented Susan Manning (Cambridge University Press, 2012), while, at the kind invitation of Ranjan Ghosh, an exploratory version of the Coetzee discussion in chapter 11 was incorporated into “Aesthetic Matters: Literature and the Politics of Disorientation,” my contribution to a special issue of *SubStance* 42, no. 2 (2013), addressing the topic “Does Literature Matter?” I also gave a plenary address to a conference at the University of Sydney on the topic of “Australian-United States Intellectual Histories” organized by Robert Dixon and Nicholas Birns, and contributed a chapter titled “Antipodean America: Charles Brockden Brown, New Holland, and the Constitution of U.S. Literature” to the book of conference proceedings, *Reading across the Pacific*, that Robert and Nicholas subsequently edited for Sydney University Press. Part of the discussion of Anthony Trollope appears in much abridged form in “America and Britain during the Civil War,” my essay in *The Cambridge Companion to Abraham Lincoln*, edited by Shirley Samuels (Cambridge University Press, 2012), while a shorter version of the Irving discussion in chapter 4 was published in *The Oxford Handbook to Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, edited by Russ Castronovo (Oxford University Press, 2011). Some of this Irving material was presented earlier at the invitation of Andrew Hemingway at a Transatlantic Romanticism symposium held in October 2009 at University College, London, and also at the Australia and New Zealand American Studies Association conference in Adelaide, July 2010, and the International Association of University Professors of English conference held in Malta during the same month. Particular thanks are due to Jonathan Arac, Shira Wolosky, and my former University of Nottingham colleague Peter Messent for helpful comments on the latter occasion. I also delivered a paper on “Lawrence’s Modernist Triangulations” at the D. H. Lawrence International Society meeting in Sydney, June 2011, where Paul Eggert offered some especially valuable insights about the textual history of *Studies in Classic American Literature*. The material on Melville I first tried out during a series of lectures in Japan during October 2011, at the kind invitation of Katsunori Takeuchi of Kagoshima University. Thanks also to Naoyuki Mizuno of Kyoto University and Takayuki Tatsumi of Keio University for their hospitality during this trip.

Because the writing of this book involved for me a change of location as well as an intellectual transposition, there seemed here to be more at stake personally than in the production of a regular academic work. I am very pleased to have been able to work again with such supportive and knowledgeable editors: the series editor Gordon Hutner, who has been sympathetic to this project from

the start, and Brendan O'Neill at the Oxford University Press offices in New York. One distinguishing feature of OUP at the present time is its willingness to take on big books that less established presses would not be able to handle, and I became uncomfortably aware while awaiting reports on the manuscript that I did not really have a plan B. However, both anonymous readers made remarkably helpful comments, stringent and challenging but fully engaged with the book's arguments, and they made a serious contribution to improving the final product. My research assistant, Lucas Thompson, was also of great assistance in checking textual details and securing permissions for the illustrations. Particular thanks for their help in this regard should be extended to John Maynard, professor of indigenous studies at the University of Newcastle, New South Wales, whose grandfather, civil rights activist Fred Maynard, is shown in the photograph with Jack Johnson reproduced in chapter 7; Patricia Piccinini and her studio agent, Roger Moll; Nadiah Abdulrahim at the National Gallery of Victoria; Nick Nicholson at the National Gallery of Australia; Gerard Hayes at the State Library of Victoria, who was very helpful with the Helmut Newton images; Carol Dodge, museum curator at the California State Parks; Jane England, of the England Gallery in London; Dietgard Wosimisky at the Hein Heckroth Society in Giessen, Germany, along with Heckroth's grandson and the administrator of his estate, Jodi Routh.

In conclusion, as someone, who never set foot in Australia until the age of forty-nine, I would like to acknowledge the profound if circuitous influence on my intellectual development of two Australians whom I encountered back in England: Peter Conrad, a powerfully charismatic tutor when I was an undergraduate at Oxford—indeed, a greatly abbreviated version of chapter 1 appeared as “American Literature and the Antipodean Imaginary” in a tribute volume on Peter's retirement, *Where We Fell to Earth: Writing for Peter Conrad*, edited by Michael Dobson and James Woodall (Christ Church, Oxford, 2011)—and Ian Donaldson, whose *The World Upside Down* I remember being impressed by as a student without fully understanding why, and with whom I later had the pleasure of working in the Faculty of English at Cambridge. My biggest Australian intellectual debt, however, is to someone I never met, Bernard Smith, whose writings on the “antipodean” imagination were an inspiration when I first began to think about this topic, and on whom I delivered a talk at a symposium on “The Legacies of Bernard Smith” organized by Mark Ledbury and Jaynie Anderson at Sydney in November 2012. More personally, I should like to acknowledge the contributions of Harriet Smith, who first encouraged me to visit the Great Southern Land, and Christine Long, who first minded my upwardly mobile Oregonian stray cat Saturn, for whom Australia was his third and final continent, and who subsequently extended her feline sympathies into the human realm.

Glebe, NSW
January 2013

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Antipodean America

American Literature and the Antipodean Imaginary

IMPERIALISM, TRANSNATIONALISM, SURREALISM

The focus of *Antipodean America* is on ways in which the southern continent of Australasia has shaped the trajectory over the past 230 years of what is now known as American literature, since this latter category's first appearance in the 1780s, in the aftermath of the new nation's political separation from Great Britain.¹ The word *Australasia* was originally coined by Charles de Brosses in his *Histoire des navigations aux Terres Australes* (1756), though by the late nineteenth century the meaning of this term had shrunk from its original, literal description of a world "south of Asia" and had come to denominate more simply the British settler colonies of Australia and New Zealand. *Australasia* is of course itself a loaded term—Philippa Mein Smith and Peter Hempenstall have suggested that, apart from anything else, it tends to diminish the visibility and significance of New Zealand—but the historical word will be useful as a starting point here, although of course the contested nature of this nomenclature is always important to bear in mind. As Mein Smith and Hempenstall observe, the name "Australasia" in fact preceded "Australia," which was depicted by its more traditional name of "New Holland" until well into the nineteenth century.²

I argue here that Australasia has profoundly, if indirectly, helped to shape the direction of American literature, from the late eighteenth century through the present. In the aftermath of the War of Independence, American writers and thinkers like Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and Charles Brockden Brown regarded Australia warily as a geopolitical extension of England, a new base in the Pacific from which it might seek to threaten the new United States. For Herman Melville and Henry David Thoreau, this political antagonism gets extended into a more theoretical awareness of Australia as America's alter ego, the colonial continent the latter might have become had it chosen

¹William C. Spengemann, *A Mirror for Americanists: Reflections on the Idea of American Literature* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1989), 152.

²Philippa Mein Smith and Peter Hempenstall, "Rediscovering the Tasman World," in *Remaking the Tasman World*, ed. Philippa Mein Smith, Peter Hempenstall, and Shaun Goldfinch (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2008), 17.