Transpacific American Literature: Curriculum, Cartography, Crossover

Paul Giles

University of Sydney, Australia

Abstract

This essay considers the complications involved in constructing and delivering a university course on Transpacific American Literature. It analyses these complexities in terms of the intertextual relationship between transpacific and transatlantic literature. It also examines ways in which various forms of cartography have shaped ways in which the subject has been formulated. By focusing on the specific example of Maxine Hong Kingston's narratives, this essay suggests ways in which Southeast Asia operates as a fulcrum in her work for a reverse mapping of the subject, in relation to both space and time. In this sense, it argues that transpacific American literature sheds light on the constitution of the history and geography of American literature more broadly.

Keywords: geography, mapping, intertextuality, inversion, World Literature, Maxine Hong Kingston

Curriculum

Since moving from Oxford to Sydney in 2010, I have switched the main focus of my teaching and research on American literature from an Atlantic to a Pacific framework, and, as part of this enterprise, have now taught four times an undergraduate course entitled "Transpacific American Literature." When I first began teaching this unit, I imagined its intellectual agenda would be relatively straightforward. There would be scope to consider the significance of the voyage of the *Pequod* across the Pacific and through the Straits of Sunda in *Moby-Dick*, the engagement of Mark Twain with Asia and Australasia in his trip around the world portrayed in *Following the Equator*, and the various questions of immigration and assimilation raised by Maxine Hong Kingston in *China Men*. In addition, there are clear contextual analogues for these transpacific narratives, as outlined for example in Ian Tyrrell's work on how environmental concerns and expertise circulated between California and Australia in the middle years of the twentieth century, or Erika Esau's analysis of shared architectural styles in cities across the Pacific region, or Brian Russell Roberts's recent observations on how the "archipelagic" contours of Indonesia and other Pacific domains have impacted upon canonical ideas in the continental United States. Notwithstanding the availability of such rich material, this course has not been an unqualified success, with students often

protesting at the end that they still don't know what "transpacific" American literature really means or involves. Perhaps this is partly due to my own pedagogical inadequacies, or the typical anxiety of undergraduates to capture classifications in clearly marked boxes. Nevertheless, the difficulties they experienced in handling the subject have led me to ask whether there might not be particular structural problems associated with the delineation of this transpacific rubric, with these classroom issues perhaps suggesting more opaque complications linked to the representation of this topic. The purpose of this essay is to consider how such complications have arisen, and how they might continue to affect ways in which the subject is treated.

The idea of *transatlantic* American literature has of course been firmly established for many years now. Long before the advent of transnational criticism in the 1990s, examination questions on the American Literature optional paper at Oxford would ask whether Henry James (or T.S. Eliot) should be considered more of a "European" or "American" writer. And there was an enormous amount of critical material produced on both sides of the Atlantic—from Harry Levin, Dennis Welland, and many others—that considered canonical American authors such as James, Nathaniel Hawthorne, or Mark Twain in relation to their transatlantic affiliations. For the last hundred years or so, the transatlantic has thus enjoyed the benefit of familiarity, and this has meant students are not surprised at the idea of reading Twain in relation to European culture—his acerbic commentary on Italian religious relics in *The Innocents Abroad*, for example—in the way they still find themselves somewhat taken aback by the idea of him visiting Ceylon or New Zealand in *Following the Equator*. Fitting with this, there is not infrequently a belated quality inherent in transpacific writing itself, one that privileges the sense of disorientation and realignment endemic to the recalibration of planetary coordinates in accordance with a different orbit. Gary Snyder's poetry, for example, plays with the idea of a reversal of directions that arises from contemplating the world from the Buddhist precincts of Japan, while in "Arctic Midnight Twilight" he focuses specifically on the location "at the roof of the planet, / the warp / of the longitudes gathered" (93), that point on the Arctic Circle where North becomes South and East crosses over into West. But these conceptions of traversal and reversal only carry purchase when the normative force of regular coordinates are recognized, and in this sense the heterodox, transgressive force of a transpacific imagination might be said to depend paradoxically on the kind of Eurocentrism that, as Dipesh Chakrabarty argued, has remained central to most intellectual work in the humanities. To understand the significance of turning things around the other way, it is necessary to appreciate the valence of how they are positioned, supposedly, right way up. Hence it might be argued a course on transpacific American literature always bears an intertextual relationship to its predecessors on transatlantic

American literature, since students will only be able clearly to observe these dynamics and transpositions if they have some familiarity with that more traditional material.

It is now widely recognized that the rapid development of American Studies in Europe after World War II was driven in large part by American government funding, either overt or covert, which sought to prop up US soft power in an era when the chief military and ideological threats to its dominion were thought to emanate from the Soviet Union.[1] Similarly, the shift to transpacific American studies in the early twenty-first century has been shaped in part by realignments in world systems of power. Speaking in 2011 in Australia, Adam Garfinkle, a former speechwriter for both of George W. Bush's Secretaries of State, Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice, said the twenty-first century will mark the first time in 400 years that the globe has had a "normative environment" that is "non-Western." By 2050, according to a Pricewaterhouse Coopers report published in 2015 ("World"), it is projected that the United States will have only the third largest economy in terms of GNP, with America's 34 trillion being dwarfed by India's 44 trillion and China's 58 trillion, by which time China's rate of economic growth will be seven times larger than that of the United States. In 2050, the world's fourth largest economy will be Indonesia, a long way from the charmed circles of London, Paris, or Brussels.

Interaction in various ways between Asia and America is here to stay, in other words, and not just in relation to the older theories of US hegemony that have been promulgated in various examples of American Studies shaped by a hard-edged postcolonial critique. In 2003, for instance, John Eperjesi described the "American Pacific" as "a geographically specific form of American Orientalism" (14), one in which an apparatus of romance was requisitioned merely to bolster the dissemination of US commercial interests by putting a deceptively high-sounding gloss on their more material aspects. Two years later, Paul Lyons described Oceania as no more than a "theoretical playground for investigations of U.S. sexuality, masculinity, race, nation, or ecological movements" (8); Lyons punned on *pacifism*, in the title of his book *American Pacifism*, to suggest how the American appropriation of the Pacific effectively suppressed or pacified "Oceanian epistemologies" (9), as he called them, thereby turning the Pacific space into a site for "structured ignorances" (10) and "imperialist nostalgia" (148). There are many important dimensions to this kind of approach, of course, and John Carlos Rowe has written cogently about the collusion of Henry Adams and others with American imperialist narratives of the nineteenth century, and of ways in which the Philippine war of the 1890s has too often remained "unrecognized" (141) within an American Studies context. Yet it is clear that transpacific American studies in the twenty-first century will involve more than merely a lament for either the exercise or the loss of US power. When Kuan-Hsing Chen published *Asia as Method* in 2010, his assumption was that US cultural power had so much permeated Taiwan

during the Cold War years that to be "anti-American is like opposing ourselves" (186). America, wrote Chen, "as an object of identification […] has been so thoroughly integrated into our thoughts and practices that we have lost the ability to critically engage with the issue of U.S. imperialism at all" (178). But now, Taiwan is widely regarded as "the most militarily vulnerable U.S. partner anywhere in the world" (Landler and Perez), and as a likely flash point for future tensions between America and China.[2]

Unilateral assumptions of US dominance, in other words, have been succeeded by acknowledgment of how the Pacific constitutes a more contested and ambivalent space, one in which competing interests will be balanced against each other in a more unstable, uncertain fashion. In his 2011 essay "The Rising Tide of the Transpacific," Steven G. Yao noted how Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993) had effectively afforded Europe "a disproportionately prominent and centralized place in its efforts to map the terrain of global modernity" (132). Gilroy's emphasis on the historical legacy of slaves brought from Africa through Europe to the Americas, in other words, served to consolidate a traditional agenda in which the Atlantic was granted primacy as a discursive site for American cultural history, a formulation going back through Columbus and the Founding Fathers. But to shift the emphasis to a Pacific space, in line with current political priorities, is also to invoke an alternative lineage of US history, one that traces American cultural and environmental engagement with the Pacific region over the course of many centuries.

Cartography

Recent critical theory addressing the Pacific has tended to focus on how the phenomenological singularity of its environments resists being incorporated within a more traditional Western compass. Such an emphasis on "Our Sea of Islands," as Fiji scholar Epeli Hau'ofa famously described it, can operate as an important counterbalance to Eurocentric or US-centric assumptions. The Australian-born anthropologist Nicholas Thomas, for example, has cautioned against the simple transference of Edward Said's notion of "Orientalism" to a Pacific milieu, warning that what works well for area studies in the Middle East may not be so "helpful" (17) within the cosmopolitan, mobile communities of Pacific Islanders, which house a more fluid environment in every sense of that term.[3] But it is equally important to recognize how the Pacific has long played the role of disturbing or inverting the coordinates of a prior theoretical world mapped out according to more abstract Western models. Tamar Herzog, in her work on the colonial claims of Spain and Portugal in the late Middle Ages, tells the story of how in 1493, shortly after Columbus had returned from his first transatlantic voyage, the Catholic monarchs of the two Iberian nations secured papal bulls that entrusted them with the duty to convert Native Americans in

return for certain rights in territories west of the Azores, as far as Spain went, and east of the Azores, for Portugal. This agreement continued without incident until the two monarchs argued over who had the right to possess the Moluccas, a group of islands in the Pacific Ocean in present-day Indonesia (18). Clearly whether this Pacific location was west or east of the Azores depends entirely on which way round the world you approach it from, and Herzog's general point is that papal bulls and other Eurocentric models of canon law had difficulty in coming to terms with the geographical inclusion of a world atlas to include Pacific coordinates. The Pacific, in other words, has always encompassed disorientation as well as phenomenology.

As Bernard Smith noted, when the Royal Society in London promoted James Cook's voyages to the South Seas towards the end of the eighteenth century, they anticipated that Cook's scientists and seamen would gradually complete the picture of the universe as a vast ordered chain of being, only to find that this ancient preconception came into conflict with varieties of flora and fauna that were completely unknown to the Encyclopaedists of the Enlightenment in Europe and North America. The key issue here becomes an epistemological one, the question of whether particular phenomena have an integral existence prior to their inscription through language and mapping. The relative decline in intellectual prestige of post-structuralism in recent times and the corresponding increase in ontological status of non-human phenomena, as adumbrated through what Bill Brown calls "thing theory" and Jane Bennett "vibrant matter," have helped significantly to shift the emphasis in Pacific studies towards entities that supposedly enjoy a similar autonomy, rather than these objects seeming to be always already incorporated within language and discourse. But over the long arc of cultural history, it is clear that both sides of this equation, nominalism and alterity, have been intellectually significant, and transpacific studies consequently needs to attend carefully to both vectors.

This carries important implications for the ways in which any kind of transpacific field is framed. Chakrabarty argues as a matter of principle that "all history is cross-cultural history," and that it is "the in-between that mediates all experience of difference" (*Crises* 53). In this configuration, "the hybrid, and the interstitial" (*Crises* 52) operate as forms of language and culture that valorize unfamiliar landscapes by bringing them intertextually into dialogue and juxtaposition with inherited human designs. This is also the basis for Walter D. Mignolo's observation that shifts in the balance of world power in the twenty-first century are forcing a remapping of established cartographic systems, both the "'East/West' division" established by European Christianity during the Renaissance, and the North/South division promoted by the United States after World War II ("North"). In both of these cases, the subordinate term—East, South—supported a traditional model of Euro-American hegemony, but the remapping of the world in our contemporary era subverts such binary divisions. This is what

Mignolo has defined elsewhere as "border gnosis" (*Local* 95), a mode of inquiry predicated upon tracking how borders are drawn up and consolidated so as to reinforce hierarchies of power. After 1945, area studies played a crucial role in what Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson called a "new *production* of the world" (42), circumscribing specific geographical areas in line with the agendas of US social sciences, in order to gain a depth and mastery of local knowledge that would serve American political interests. Hence, as Mezzadra and Neilson have pointed out, a "transborder" analysis (47) allows us to see more clearly the inherent tensions and conflicts involved in the production of this kind of "knowledge geography," as the Ford Foundation described it (43). US social science after World War II characteristically preferred empirical methods and tended to disregard any reflexive theorization about borders as flimsy rhetoric without substance, but more recent cartographic theorists have emphasized how maps always operate as a way of organizing epistemologies rather than simply providing a neutral window on the world.[4]

Southeast Asia offers a particular insight into ways in which these world maps become twisted and inverted, since its mobile geographies and land formations have never settled comfortably into any fixed pattern. Roberts's recent work on the "archipelagic" nature of Indonesia, whose geographical extent is as wide as the continental United States though made up of multiple islands and water rather than just land, is prefigured in Melville's *Moby-Dick*, where the voyage of the *Pequod* through the Straits of Sunda in present-day Indonesia epitomizes all the inversions, geographic as well as epistemological, that occur during that narrative. By dispatching Captain Ahab's crew away from the East Coast of America towards the Southern Hemisphere and into the Pacific Ocean, Melville exposes his mariners to an environment in which their conventional charts and systems of classification become of increasingly uncertain value. Again, the Pacific operates for American writers in a counter-suggestible fashion, and Southeast Asia in particular appears an environment difficult to subjugate to standard forms of US control. Environmental critics have pointed out how the oceanic nature of the Pacific as a "sea of islands" functions as a threat to American continental designs, but oceans are also political entities, and the tangled legacies of political power in this region ensure that the Pacific, like the Atlantic, is not "*aqua nullius*," but rather a phenomenon liable to a "haunting of the past" (DeLoughrey 703). In addition, the languages of Southeast Asia have traditionally been more difficult for Anglophone speakers to master, and this is one reason that Asia has so far been under-represented in US-dominated theories of World Literature.[5] The transpacific introduces a sense of alterity that remains difficult to accommodate within Anglophone norms.

The history and culture as well as the geography of this region thus have a tendency to decentre American perspectives. Masao Miyoshi's *Off Center* (1991) specifically discussed "Power and Culture Relations between

Japan and the United States," arguing that it was possible to understand Japan's encounter with America "from an oppositionist perspective," while discarding any notion of "imaginary symmetry" (2) between these two countries and acquiescing instead in the idea of a world without an "ordering center" (5). The same principle could be applied, mutatis mutandis, to Southeast Asia in general, whose very multiplicity of centres evokes a multipolar world that cannot be reduced to dialectical polarity or unidirectional power plays. At the same time, a sense of engagement and interaction with the wider world is crucial for writers and activists in all historically subordinate regions, not only because such dialogues enhance the scope of their imaginative works and political activities, but also because any retreat into a state of national or ancestral purity is socially regressive, if not ontologically impossible. When Cuban intellectual José Martí was living in exile in New York in 1882, he was visited by Oscar Wilde, who was then on a speaking tour of the United States. Wilde urged Martí to encourage his fellow Latin American intellectuals to break out of narrow Hispanic traditions and engage more fully with "diverse literatures" from around the world, and in Martí's own case it was precisely such a combination of literary influences that allowed him productively to reimagine American Transcendentalism from a different angle (Siskind 107). Though intertextual interaction with literary tradition is sometimes regarded as a conservative gesture involving a demeaning disregard of local or Indigenous authenticity, it also has the capacity to impact the wider world in a more expansive way by representing its global coordinates in a disruptive, scrambled fashion. Philipp Schorch and Eveline Dürr conceived of the Pacific as an "assemblage or relational space" (xi), drawing on an idea of assemblage initially inspired by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to suggest how disruption and displacement become crucial to a transpacific dynamic, and this indicates how transpacific studies should involve something more than merely another version of postcolonial power plays or a nostalgia for self-authenticating identity. It is the intersection with a wider world that, as in *Moby-Dick*, offers the prospect of shedding an alternative perspective on traditional Western ways of thought.

Crossover

Maxine Hong Kingston, whose work we studied on my transpacific course, is sometimes considered to be an author who forfeits authenticity in the name of an intertextuality linked to an obsequious regard for the literary canon, and she has on occasions been indicted as unduly conservative on this account (Arthur 80). There is no doubt that her narratives are both self-reflexive and self-consciously playful, with Rufus Cook comparing her fiction to that of Salman Rushdie in the way it addresses "the cultural contradictions of the modern world" by "mingling fantasy and naturalism" (141). Generic mixing forms part of this equation: *The Woman Warrior* (1976)

and *China Men* (1980) both explicitly blend autobiography and fiction, just as Kingston stated in a 1990 interview with Shelley Fisher Fishkin that she was seeking explicitly to "break through pigeonholes of what's fiction and what's nonfiction," in order to "figure out a way to integrate fiction and nonfiction" (Fishkin 791). Part of this generic hybridity involves an attempt to include in autobiography "the truth about dreams and visions and prayers," rather than just the "exterior things" traditionally addressed by "the standard autobiography […] like when you were born and . . . big historical events that you publicly participate in" (Fishkin 786). Kingston specifically associated the transgressive possibilities of this "new autobiographical form" with "the inner life of women" and "minority people" (Fishkin 786), and also with her own sense as an author of not feeling "constrained to being just one ethnic group or one gender […] I can now write as a man, I can write as a black person, as a white person. I don't have to be restricted by time and physicality" (Fishkin 784-85). By extension, it could also be argued that the geographical dynamics of Kingston's narratives, traversing and criss-crossing place, contribute to this idiom of hybridity and reversal. It is of course well-known that Kingston's writing portrays the culture of the Chinese immigrant community in the United States, but, more importantly, it represents this world in relation to a two-way reciprocal process, where no position is ever quite settled.

In this sense, Kingston deploys inversion as a structural principle, reversing the axis of East and West, past and present. In *The Woman Warrior*, where "ghost forms are various and many" (83), the narrator sees "the river turning in circles, the trees upside down" (88). In *China Men*, the narrative voice asks "what topsy-turvy land formations and weather determine the crops on the other side of the world" (43), and in an idiom of self-contradiction she says: "I have gone east, that is, west, as far as Hawai'i" (89). All geographical coordinates appear provisional, just as in *Tripmaster Monkey* (1989) the fictional hero, Wittman Ah Sing, cites lines from his prototype Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself:* "Backward I see in my own days where I sweated through fog with linguists and contenders" (53). This "backward" motion, itself a function of the intertextual process of reverse-facing, manifests itself throughout *Tripmaster Monkey* in the way Kingston takes the American literary tradition and deliberately turns it round the other way. The novel cites Rudyard Kipling as "the first white explorer to write an account of crossing America from west to east" (299)—rather than the more orthodox direction for American pioneers, East to West—and the book itself thrives on such a rhetoric of transposition. Such transpositions manifest themselves in thematic as well as merely syntactic terms. Arguing with the premise of *Song of Myself*, Kingston's multifaceted novel takes issue with the principled self-reliance of figures such as Walt Whitman—"An American stands alone. Alienated, tribeless, individual" (246)—by placing emphasis instead on Chinese family values and the way they bring "something communal against isolation" (141). It is also important to note

how Wittman Ah Sing himself resists being categorized as "an oriental antipode" by declaring: "I am not oriental. An oriental is antipodal. I am a human being standing right here on land which I belong to and which belongs to me" (326-27). Yet self-authenticating identity here is always immersed in cross-cultural rhetoric, just as in *The Fifth Book of Peace* (2003) Kingston draws again upon rhetorical contradictions to rewrite the history of American involvement in Vietnam. Inverting William Carlos Williams's "No ideas but in things" to "No things but in ideas" (21), Kingston represents the Vietnam War as a cyclic, enduring trauma: "Can't love it, leave it" (65). She also records a Vietnam veteran admitting that he "really liked" the experience of bombing during his time as a bomber pilot (344), and this introduces a more complex version of Vietnam as a disturbing and ambiguous legacy within the US collective psyche. It is by delving into meditation and dreams, according to Kingston, that people are empowered to face their own discomfiting memories: "Writing, you shine light—the light of your intelligence—into a scene of the past, into the dark of forgotten things, fearful things" (266).

Rather than just confronting a difficult period in US history, however, Kingston's title—"The Fifth Book of Peace"—invokes an alternative cosmology, one that refracts American consciousness through different dimensions of time and space. This narrative ranges across experiences of American wars over the past half century, up until the invasion of Iraq in 2003, but one particularly interesting aspect of Kingston's text is the way it presents the Buddhist forms of meditation that she associates with Vietnam to conjure up a reverse perspective on American domestic values. Westerners, she suggests, do not "care about ancestors" in the same way that they "care about children," whereas for the Vietnamese, as Thây says here: "Our ancestors, our roots, always are calling us home" (380). This is commensurate also with temporal reversal—Thây claims "You can stop time" (380)—and also with the projection here of Vietnam as "a state of mind" rather than "just another place" (393). Such a notion that the Vietnam War is not over but is being carried on in other sites fits with the inverse spiral of spatial and temporal cartographies adduced in this narrative: "Time and space are impossible one without the other" (92). While corroborating what cultural critics such as Viet Thanh Nguyen have observed about how the memory of the Vietnam War lingers—"All wars," wrote Nguyen, "have murky beginnings and inconclusive endings" (5)—Kingston's *Fifth Book of Peace* expands this kind of psychoanalytical model into a cross-cultural domain, whereby the space of Vietnam itself, located in the liminal realm of Southeast Asia, stands as a corrective to both unilinear temporal passages from past to future and unilinear spatial trajectories that would simply impose American dominance over Asia. In this way, Kingston draws on a specificity of place, the scrambled spatial and temporal cartographies linked to Southeast Asia, to project a reverse perspective on American space and time,

one analogous to the generic reversal between fact and fiction implied by the oxymoronic presentation of this narrative in the book's Table of Contents as "A true story" (vii).

David Palumbo-Liu complained that the split term "Asian American" tends effectively to subordinate the first part of this equation (Asia) within an all-encompassing American domain, but this is not what we find with Kingston, who deploys strategies of reversal to reconfigure such standard directions. Nguyen and Janet Hoskins suggested that one of the aims of transpacific studies should be a "humbling of U.S. area studies" (17), since the latter tend to assume they contain all the most significant knowledge about the world's problems; but such a belligerent stance does not fully accord with Kingston's more quizzical pacific stance. Standing as she does in *The Fifth Book of Peace* for "peace and cooperation" rather than "competition and nationalism" (12), Kingston seeks a more speculative voice that "time-travels the past and the future, and pulls the not-now, not-yet into existence" (62). In this way, she uses her transpacific vantage point to make new connections among disjointed entities.

One of the risks run by World Literature in any of its academic manifestations is the projection of itself as a top-down phenomenon, through which an apparent embrace of the globe effectively occludes the implicit dominance of Anglophone (and especially US) interests.[6] Equally reductive is the conventional model of centre and periphery, which would seek to rebut Eurocentrism by replacing "one center with another" (Shih 430), rather than disturbing this logic of centre and marginalization altogether. More attention to ways in which Asian languages intersect or operate as a counterbalance to English interests might help to orient World Literature in a different direction, but so might the kind of geographical materialism adduced by Kingston's appropriation of Southeast Asia, seeking as it does to deliberately turn normative US models on their head. The idea of a "New Pacific," wrote Rob Wilson in 1999, involves "writing from the inside out" (1), introducing structures of reversal that disturb and decentre established formations: "creatively perplexed, upside down, out of whack, reversible" (2). In this way, the landscapes and culture of Southeast Asia provide scope for reconfiguring a specific geographical space as an epistemological method, one that takes its liminal directions, its crosscurrents of competing forces, to explore the force of their convergences, divergences, and contradictions. For Édouard Glissant, all critical thinking issues from a particular place—"il y a un lieu incontournable de l'émission de l'oeuvre littéraire" [there is an inescapable place of the literary work's production] (28)—but for Glissant it was precisely the intersection between locality and philosophical abstraction that engendered the paradoxical, recursive patterns through which turning inward and turning outward occurred simultaneously.[7] In his essay "Comparative Cosmopolitanisms," Bruce Robbins described a move among radical geographers to study smaller,

subregional localities, so as to illuminate how cosmopolitanism might be understood not as "a paranoid fantasy of ubiquity and omniscience," but as operating "in its full theoretical extension […] (paradoxically) in its local applications" (259). It is precisely such a reimagining of the contours of place that transpacific American studies brings into play, elucidating ways in which vectors of discursive power and the apparatus of phenomenology overlap. Neither the ecological nor the archipelagic can operate plausibly in isolation, but, combined with a model in which their relation to historical and cultural trajectories is made apparent, the capacity of the Pacific Ocean to reorient the compass of American studies becomes more viable and, indeed, compelling.

In this sense, intertextuality might be understood not merely as a hermetic device of literary criticism, but as a way of reconfiguring the world more broadly. Recent criticism of Whitman has taken his poem "A Passage to India" as a surreptitious claim upon the Pacific for commercial trading purposes and thus an implicit hymn to American exceptionalism.[8] But the poet's imaginative reconceptualization of this transpacific space, as in "Facing West from California's Shores," involves a more complex state of transposition, one in which the transnational becomes aligned with the crosstemporal. The focus here upon a "circle almost circled" (111) involves a rotation of the spatial axis with a corresponding rotation of the temporal axis, deflecting the linear future into a more spherical shape that embraces the past. Both past and future, East and West, are thus brought into alignment:

> Facing west, from California's shores,
>
> Inquiring, tireless, seeking what is yet unfound,
>
> I, a child, very old, over waves, towards the house of maternity, the land of migrations, look afar,
>
> Look off the shores of my Western Sea, the circle almost circled;
>
> For, starting westward from Hindustan, from the vales of Kashmere,
>
> From Asia, from the north, from the God, the sage, and the hero,
>
> From the south, from the flowery peninsulas, and the spice islands;
>
> Long having wander'd since, round the earth having wander'd,
>
> Now I face home again, very pleas'd and joyous;
>
> (But where is what I started for, so long ago?
>
> And why is it yet unfound?) (110-11)

This suggests how a different approach to the relationship between America and Asia can open up new questions for American Studies, not just because it offers an alternative angle on either Asia or America as a discrete geographical space, but because the connections that it adduces enable us to project planetary history in a different kind of way. Just as Kingston in *Tripmaster Monkey* represents her hero as quoting Whitman's "Backward I see in my own days" (53), so Kingston herself correlates this "backward" vision with a broader treatment of reverse spatiotemporal directions in her own fiction. Extrapolating this into a curriculum design, transpacific American literature might best be regarded not so much as a distinctive set of authors or texts, but as a way of rereading and remapping American literature more generally: not so much a classification as a method. By reconfiguring the subject's cartographies, it becomes possible to elucidate the latent geographies of imaginative scope and cultural power that have always remained embedded, for good or ill, at the heart of American literature.

Notes

1. On this issue, see Saunders.
2. This newspaper article is cited by Wang and Cho, 443.
3. Thomas here also attributes this "judgment" of Said's *Orientalism* to Bernard Smith (16).
4. On this issue, see Tina Chen.
5. For a discussion of the relationship between Anglophone and Asian languages in the definition of World Literature, see Johnson.
6. On the tendency to make "a largely unacknowledged Americentrism" the default norm for this subject, see Damrosch 13.
7. On the significance of place for Glissant, see Wiedorn 19.
8. For an example of this critical reading of Whitman, see Hsu 148-49.

Works Cited

Arthur, Jason. *Violet America: Regional Cosmopolitanism in U.S. Fiction*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013.

Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.

Brown, Bill. "Thing Theory." *Critical Inquiry* 28.1 (Autumn 2001): 1-22.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *The Crises of Civilization: Exploring Global and Planetary Histories*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018.

---. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.

Chen, Kuan-Hsing. *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.

Chen, Tina. "Context, Coordinate, Circulation: The Postrepresentational Cartographies of Global Asia." *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 3.1 (Spring 2017): vi-xiv.

Cook, Rufus. "Cross-Cultural Wordplay in Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men* and *The Woman Warrior*." *MELUS* 22.4 (Winter 1997): 133-46.

Damrosch, David. "How American Is World Literature?" *The Comparatist* 33 (May 2009): 13-19.

DeLoughrey, Elizabeth. "Heavy Waters: Waste and Atlantic Modernity." *PMLA* 125.3 (May 2010): 703-12.

Eperjesi, John R. *The Imperialist Imaginary: Visions of Asia and the Pacific in American Culture*. Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2005.

Esau, Erika. *Images of the Pacific Rim: Australia and California, 1850-1935*. Sydney: Power Institute Foundation for Art and Visual Culture, 2010.

Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. "Interview with Maxine Hong Kingston." *American Literary History* 3.4 (Winter 1991): 782-91.

Garfinkle, Adam. "The Decade Ahead." In "The 9/11 Decade: How Everything Changed." U.S. Studies Centre, University of Sydney, 7 June 2011.

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Glissant, Édouard. *Introduction à Une Poétique du Divers*. Montreal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1995.

Hau‘ofa, Epeli. “Our Sea of Islands.” In Vijay Naidu, Eric Waddell, and Epeli Hau‘ofa, eds., *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands*. Suva: School of Social and Economic Development, The University of the South Pacific, 1993. 2-16.

Herzog, Tamar. *Frontiers of Possession: Spain and Portugal in Europe and the Americas*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015.

Hoskins, Janet, and Viet Thanh Nguyen, eds. *Transpacific Studies: Framing an Emerging Field*. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2014.

Hsu, Hsuan L. *Geography and the Production of Space in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Johnson, Ryan. *Transnationalism and Translation in Modern Chinese, English, French and Japanese Literatures*. London: Anthem Press, 2020.

Kingston, Maxine Hong. *China Men*. London: Picador, 1981.

---. *The Fifth Book of Peace*. London: Secker and Warburg, 2003.

---. *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*. New York: Knopf, 1989.

---. *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*. New York: Knopf, 1977.

Landler, Mark, and Jane Perlez. “Trump’s Call with Taiwan: A Diplomatic Gaffe or a New State?” *New York Times*, 5 Dec. 2016. Online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/05/world/asia/china-donald-trump-taiwan-twitter.html>, accessed 13 Oct. 2020.

Lyons, Paul. *American Pacifism: Oceania in the U.S. Imagination*. New York: Routledge, 2005.

Melville, Herman. *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*. 1851. Ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle. Evanston-Chicago: Northwestern University Press-Newberry Library, 1987.

Mezzadra, Sando, and Brett Neilson, eds. *Border as Method: or, The Multiplication of Labor*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013.

Mignolo, Walter D. *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.

---. “The North of the South and the West of the East: A Provocation to the Question.” *Ibraaz*, No. 8 (6 Nov. 2014). Online: <https://www.ibraaz.org/essays/108/>, accessed 13 Oct. 2020.

Miyoshi, Masao. *Off Center: Power and Culture Relations between Japan and the United States*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991.

Nguyen, Viet Thanh. *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016.

Nguyen, Viet Thanh and Janet Hoskins. "Introduction. Transpacific Studies: Critical Perspectives on an Emerging Field." In Hoskins and Nguyen 1-38.

Palumbo-Liu, David. *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

Robbins, Bruce. "Comparative Cosmopolitanisms." In Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, eds., *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998. 246-64.

Roberts, Brian Russell. *Borderwaters: Amid the Archipelagic States of America*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021.

Rowe, John Carlos. "Transpacific Studies and the Cultures of U.S. Imperialism." In Hoskins and Nguyen 134-50.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

Saunders, Frances Stonor. *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War*. London: Granta Books, 1999.

Schorch, Philipp, and Eveline Dürr. "Transpacific Americas as Relational Space." In Eveline Dürr and Philipp Schorch, eds., *Transpacific Americas: Encounters Between the Americas and the South Pacific*. New York: Routledge, 2016. xi- xxv.

Shih, Shu-Mei. "World Studies and Relational Comparison." *PMLA* 130.2 (March 2015): 430-38.

Siskind, Mariano. *Cosmopolitan Desires: Global Modernity and World Literature in Latin America*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2014.

Smith, Bernard. *European Vision and the South Pacific, 1768-1850: A Study in the History of Art and Ideas*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960.

Snyder, Gary. *Mountains and Rivers without End*. New York: Counterpoint, 1996.

Twain, Mark. *Following the Equator: A Journey around the World*. 1897. In *Following the Equator and Anti-Imperialist Essays*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

---. *The Innocents Abroad*. 1869. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Tyrrell, Ian. *True Gardens of the Gods: Californian-Australian Environmental Reform, 1860-1930*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

Wang, Chi-ming, and Yu-Fang Cho. "Introduction: The Chinese Factor in American Studies, Here and Now." *American Quarterly* 69.1 (Sept. 2017): 443-63.

Whitman, Walt. "Facing West from California's Shores." In *Leaves of Grass* 110-11.

---. *Leaves of Grass*. Ed. Sculley Bradley and Harold W. Blodgett. New York: Norton, 1973.

---. “Song of Myself.” In *Leaves of Grass* 28-89.

Wideorn, Michael. *Think Like an Archipelago: Paradox in the Work of Edouard Glissant*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2018.

Wilson, Rob. “Introduction: Toward Imagining a New Pacific.” In Vilsoni Hereniko and Rob Wilson, eds., *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific*. Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 1999. 1-14.

“The World in 2050: Will the Shift in Global Economic Power Continue?” Pricewaterhouse Coopers, Feb. 2015. Online: <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/the-economy/assets/world-in-2050- february-2015.pdf>, accessed 13 Oct. 2020.

Yao, Steven G. “The Rising Tide of the Transpacific.” *Literature Compass* 8.3 (2011): 130-41.