

English Literature and the Antipodean Imaginary

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I have to admit that my own engagements with Australia when I was growing up in England were relatively sparse, being confined mostly to listening to test match cricket commentaries on the radio in the small hours of the morning, where the exploits of players called Booth or Burge were transmitted across the crackling language of the transistor radio as if all this were taking place on some distant planet far away in the solar system; indeed, the cricket commentaries of that era seemed to come from a place just as remote as the jerky television pictures sent back to Earth from Apollo expeditions to the moon, with which, so far as I was concerned, they were co-terminous. Much later, I remember driving to work at Oxford one Saturday morning while listening to Critics' Forum, a classical music review programme on Radio 3, and being completely startled by hearing, quite unexpectedly, a performance of Peter Sculthorpe's *Requiem*, which seemed brilliantly to re-invent a conventional liturgical tradition through a musical language of the didgeridoo in the most haunting and enigmatic manner. I myself first visited Australia on holiday only four years ago, partly it must be said out of a sense of intellectual curiosity, and during this trip I went to see the Australia-USA exhibition at the National Maritime Museum in Darling Harbour. Although it was I think not a particularly outstanding exhibition, I could see almost straightaway that there was an important cultural narrative here, about colonial legacies and the transpacific dimensions to the American experience, which had for various reasons been systematically occluded from US national culture. This became a starting point for the project on

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Antipodean American literature on which I began work during a fellowship at the ANU in Canberra last year.

After accepting the job here in Sydney, I naturally wanted to find out more about my predecessors here in the field of Humanities, starting with John Woolley, who gave his name to the building in which we're meeting this evening. I have to say, though, that this was not a particularly reassuring exercise, since Woolley himself seems to have experienced what can only be described as a chequered career. He was born in Hampshire, in England, in 1816, and went to Oxford, where in 1840 he became a fellow of University College, but he was subsequently obliged to resign his fellowship when he got married, something that was of course normal practice in the University of those days. He then became headmaster of Norwich Grammar School in East Anglia, but found Norfolk too stiflingly narrow for his academic talents, which included an Oxford textbook on logic and various published sermons which distinguished him as a notable scholar of liberal opinions. So Woolley decided to move out to Australia in 1852 to assume the position of principal and Professor of Classics at the new University of Sydney, where he found his scholarship generally admired, but his teaching style arousing only a mixed response among the local students, many of whom seemed to find his ideas a bit too abstruse. By 1864 Woolley was becoming oppressed by a sense of failure, feeling that he had lost touch with British scholarship, and indeed his new book on logic, which was a critique of John Stuart Mill's pragmatism, suffered the indignity of not being able to find a publisher. He did publish in 1862 his *Lectures Delivered in Australia*, but he clearly hungered for something more, and he returned to England late in 1864 to speak at the commemoration ceremonies of University College, London, obviously angling for a post there which, much to his disappointment, was not forthcoming. He then set sail again for Australia in 1866, apparently rather depressed in spirit, whereupon his ship the *London* foundered in a storm and went down in the Bay of Biscay, with all hands lost.

Whether or not John Woolley's melancholy fate should be seen as a symbolic harbinger of academic life here at Sydney I'm not sure, but it does seem a little odd that he is now revered here as a pioneering

hero and has this building named after him, although of course his achievement in getting this University off the ground in the 1850s was notable in itself. One thing that Woolley's personal history does raise is the question of links between Sydney and Oxford, and indeed the issue of colonial relationships within the academic world more generally. There was apparently an Oxford advisory influence from a safe distance on the appointments panel when John Le Gay Brereton was elected Challis Chair of English here in 1921, although Brereton didn't have as far to come as me, since at the time of his appointment he was already working here at Sydney as University Librarian at the Fisher Library. Brereton was succeeded in 1934 by Arthur Waldock, who was a much more prolific scholar, publishing books on *Hamlet* and *Paradise Lost* with CUP in 1931 and 1947 respectively, introducing classes on modern American literature, and also, quite remarkably, publishing one of the first books on James Joyce in 1937, when Joyce himself was still alive. Joyce's *Ulysses* had been seized by Australian customs in 1929 and banned completely in this country until 1937, and indeed access to the novel continued to be restricted here until 1953; but in his pamphlet *Some Recent Developments in English Literature*, published in 1935 by the Sydney University Extension Board, Waldock includes a chapter on experiment in the novel, with special reference to Joyce and quite an extensive discussion of *Ulysses*, which he calls here a 'remarkable work'. Waldock's book *James, Joyce, and Others* was also published in London by Williams and Norgate in 1937, and though of course there is a copy in the British Library there isn't one available in the Fisher Library; I wonder if the Sydney librarian of the time refused (or perhaps was not allowed) to stock it. I actually heard some years ago an anecdotal account of Arthur Waldock's teaching, since Joan Mackie, the mother of my first graduate student girlfriend, Nicola Mackie, read English here at Sydney in the 1940s – she went on to marry John (J. L.) Mackie, who was Challis Professor of Philosophy at Sydney between 1959 and 1963, before moving to the University of York and then on to Oxford. I have a distinct recollection of being round at their house in North Oxford in the early 1980s and, when the conversation turned to Joyce, hearing Joan talk about how Arthur Waldock would tell his students about *Ulysses* being the most

important modern novel. Nicola herself had rather grim memories of growing up in the Sydney suburbs in the early 1960s, and during those Thatcher-dominated years in the UK, when there were very few jobs available in higher education, she used to say that she would prefer to go into another profession entirely rather than return to take a job in Australia. Nicola did eventually get a university lectureship in Scotland but died very young, though I'm sure she would have been highly amused at the way things subsequently turned out for me in relation to my move from Oxford to the Challis Chair here.

A common academic model during the slightly earlier period of the 1960s and 1970s, as outlined in Stephen Alomes's book *When London Calls*, was for ambitious Australians to migrate to Britain at the first opportunity and try to establish themselves in what was then thought of as the more stringent and professionally challenging conditions of British life.¹ This of course was the world of Clive James, Germaine Greer and many Australian academics, one of whom, Peter Conrad, taught me as an undergraduate at Christ Church, Oxford. Peter was a charismatic and extraordinarily engaging tutor, probably I would have to say still the biggest single influence on my academic career, particularly in the way he had no qualms about encompassing all of Western culture within his orbit; I had been taught at high school in a more Leavisite kind of way to revere the true creative spirit, but such intellectual deference characteristically cut no ice with Peter at all. Looking back now, though, what is interesting to me is how the Australian dimension was always implicit rather than explicit in the often antagonistic attitudes he expressed towards the pious norms of the English cultural tradition. The Dean of Christ Church was at that time a very tall clergyman called Henry Chadwick, a high Anglican in every sense of that term, and it should be said as well a very fine scholar; Henry's problem at Christ Church was not his scholarship, but that he was not enough of an academic politician to be able to keep the Christ Church governing body in check. Anyway, I remember going to a breakfast one Sunday morning at the deanery, as part of Henry's somewhat infrequent pastoral ventures, and hearing him proffer from on high such wisdom as that we shouldn't miss the opportunity to read Edmund Burke on the French Revolution, but

that we should take great care with the music of Gustav Mahler on the grounds that, as Henry put it, 'all that Viennese melancholy is very bad for you'. During the breakfast I attended, the conversation somehow turned to Peter Conrad, and one of the other students there said he had never come across him. 'Oh,' replied Henry, 'don't you know Peter Conrad? The little Tasmanian in the leather jacket'. What is interesting about this throwaway remark, I think, is not just its condescending tone, but its suggestion from a grandee's perspective that the vulgar signs of colonial origin should properly be suppressed in order to survive and prosper in the academic metropolis. There was a clear assumption here on Henry Chadwick's part of centre and margins, with Oxford and Cambridge at the heart of everything and other places merely reflecting their values to a greater or lesser extent, depending partly on their institutional capacities and partly on their distance from the imperial centre. I think Peter was torn by this paradigm, since clearly he had no great intellectual respect for such patronizing assumptions, but, on the other hand, his own successes, becoming a fellow of All Souls College through the competitive examination process and so on, had arisen from the ways in which he was able fully to master and appropriate the traditional English canon.

But Peter was, as I say, someone from an earlier academic generation. If I was to describe briefly the most important structural changes within the professional study of English literature since I graduated as an undergraduate thirty years ago, I would suggest that the most significant of them would have to be the worlding of the subject of English. There was a special issue of the journal *PMLA* ten years ago on the topic 'Globalizing Literary Studies', which Giles Gunn introduced by noting that departments of English such as his own at the University of California, Santa Barbara, 'have routinely redefined their responsibilities as all the literatures written in English', while acknowledging 'that all national traditions are plural rather than singular; that the pluralisation and heterogeneity, even polyvocality, of these traditions can be fully accessed and understood only through the use of critical methods from across the whole range of the human sciences; and that this widening and deepening, not to say thickening, of the category of the literary has produced problems

of comprehension we are still struggling to formulate'.² Shakespeare scholar and Harvard University professor Stephen Greenblatt, in another contribution to this special issue of *PMLA*, discussed how traditional literary figures such as Jane Austen and William Faulkner are now customarily read in relation to questions of race, gender and colonialism, so that 'English literary history,' said Greenblatt, 'has ceased to be principally about the fate of the nation' but is rather 'a global phenomenon'.³ This expansion of the conceptual field of English has gone hand in hand over the past fifteen years with a revolution in the field of information technology, since the widespread introduction of the Internet to universities around 1994, which has of course made communication with geographically remote scholars and libraries much more straightforward and archive material generally more accessible. In a 1996 essay in *Cambridge Quarterly* which was a tribute to F. R. Leavis and looked back on the Sam Goldberg controversies here in the English department at Sydney in the early 1960s, John Wiltshire, who had come at that time as a lecturer to Sydney from Cambridge, made the point that these bitter ideological disputes arose to some extent out of the old 'tyranny of distance'. 'If you have huge classes and work twelve thousand miles away from your source of supply,' wrote Wiltshire, 'you must decide for your students what texts they are to study. "Set books" are the norm. This meant that what was read, what was "set", was indeed set, hardened; there was a canon, not only because certain works, and authors, were the favourites of these powerful personalities, but because these texts were the only ones readily available.'⁴

It would be naive to assume these problems of supply and distance have been altogether alleviated, of course, but certainly the context of information technology and cultural production is radically different now from what it was fifty years ago. These developments have helped to reshape the global map of literary studies accordingly. In 1961, Bernard Smith, who of course worked in the Art History department at Sydney for many years and whose work I admire inordinately, suggested that the notion of Australia being isolated was always a mythic rather than a historical conception, one dependent more upon a certain romanticized mystique of the land rather

than on any social or geographical realities associated with it.⁵ For example, in the early nineteenth century, when commercial trade routes from Britain through the Indian Ocean were quite frequent and continental interchange was commonplace, Australia was not regarded as so isolated as it came subsequently to be imagined in the early twentieth century, the federation period, when doctrines of social and environmental purity involved keeping the supposedly corrupt modern world, the world of war and of artistic modernism, firmly at bay. It was this, of course, that led to the extraordinary censorship regimes in Australia during the first half of the twentieth century, which banned not only *Ulysses* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* but also works now considered mainstream, such as Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, and even in the late 1960s Columbia University Professor Steven Marcus's famous critical work on the nineteenth-century publishing underworld, *The Other Victorians*. The point is simply, as Smith says, that this myth of distance has fluctuated over time and has often been used punitively to proscribe supposedly dangerous ideas that might be thought putatively to undermine the morality and integrity of Australia, not only in relation to sexual matters, but also with respect to European and (particularly) American culture more generally. These issues of course still reverberate today, not only in the context of government forms of media and Internet regulation, but also in relation to wider academic questions of how international critical and cultural theory might be reconciled with, or integrated within, native Australian traditions.

Given this expanded global context for English that Giles Gunn describes, however, my sense is that Australian scholarship is increasingly emerging out of its largely self-imposed isolation and becoming an increasingly visible and significant player on the world stage. There are many interesting areas in which this is happening, and I cannot possibly do justice here to all of them. Nor do I want to be prescriptive by suggesting that particular critical positions are necessarily tied to geographical locations: my friend Tony Badger, Professor of American History at Cambridge, argues that his job is essentially the same wherever he is, which is to study American

History in the most disinterested way he can, although even Tony has qualified this idealization of objectivity by admitting that, 'consciously or not', temporal and spatial perspectives always operate as lenses through which certain scholarly assumptions are 'shaped'.⁶ To put this another way, that even the most empirical scholarly practices are refracted, overtly or covertly, by theoretical assumptions; the famous economist John Maynard Keynes once remarked that those who say they care nothing for theory are usually the mental slaves of some dead economist. In the medieval field, for example, the large-scale projects in which Australians have been heavily involved that are concerned to examine the question of how past relates to present offer an illuminating light on ways in which the concept of medievalism itself has always been retrospectively reconstructed. Back in 1908, the English historian F. W. Maitland ascribed the very idea of the feudal system not to any original source but to the ingenuity of the seventeenth-century antiquary, Henry Spelman; Maitland sardonically located the 'moment of its most perfect development' in the middle of the nineteenth century, and he remarked that a good answer to the examination question 'When did the feudal system begin?' would be '1850'.⁷ Similarly, the establishment of an English Language and Literature Honours school at Oxford in 1893 was predicated upon a nostalgic idea of Victorian gothic that was then projected back to establish an imaginary point of origin for the English literary canon, so that Victorian Gothic became correlated with the historical designs of medieval gothic.⁸ In this sense, the elaborate artifice of Gothic that manifests itself so clearly within an Australian context, not least in our quadrangle here at Sydney, sheds a parallel light on how hegemonic national traditions become established: Australian gothic works as a kind of intertextual reflection or parody of English gothic, but this also functions ironically to highlight how English Victorian gothic itself served both conceptually and aesthetically to echo medieval gothic, and indeed how all gothic forms involve a kind of epistemological *mise-en-abîme* where the whole question of origins becomes radically problematized. All of this effectively deconstructs older paradigms of centre and margin, dominant and subordinate colonial cultures, and replaces them instead with a model in which these forces can

be seen dynamically to interact with each other, as many Australian medievalists are exploring these days.⁹

We also see this antipodean paradigm operating in the Renaissance trope of a world turned upside down, in Enlightenment discourses of exploration and discovery, and in the Victorian elaboration of financial and political power that manifests itself in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, where the transported convict Magwitch returns from Australia to haunt Pip, or in George Gissing's 1889 novel *The Nether World*, where the commercial activities of Michael Snowdon in London are underwritten economically by his son's sheep farming business in New South Wales (part of the meaning implied by the 'nether world' of the book's title), or in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 1856 poem 'The Burden of Nineveh', which envisages future travellers from Australia digging up the massive Assyrian bull-god sculpture from the British Museum and assuming it to be an object of worship by native Britons. Just to give you one more detailed example from my own field, American Literature, of how this antipodean presence has been both textually manifest and institutionally occluded, Herman Melville's novel *Omoo*, published in 1847, is based on the author's own experience of serving on an Australian whaling ship, the *Lucy Ann*, in 1842, and the inherent ambiguities of this Australian dimension inform all aspects of the novel. Writing to his publisher John Murray in July 1846 about *Omoo*, the author said it 'includes an eventful cruise in an English Colonial Whaleman (a Sydney Ship)', and it is of course interesting that Melville describes this Australian ship here as an 'English' vessel.¹⁰ Indeed, this is probably one of the reasons there has been hardly any critical discussion of Melville and Australia: for American critics, this Australian dimension is simply subsumed into a composite category of imperial Britain. But that sense of Pacific space as always haunted by an ambiguous colonial imaginary permeates the novel: the fictional *Julia* is said to have been '[f]itted for a privateer out of a New England port during the War of 1812' before being subsequently 'captured at sea by a British cruiser', and at the time the narrative takes place it is being 'employed as a government packet in the Australian seas'.¹¹ The ship's mixed provenance, moving from America to Australia via England, thus

epitomizes the colonial *métissage* that structures Melville's novel. The ship's captain is said to be 'a young cockney, who, a few years before, had emigrated to Australia' (10), while the narrator's companion Long Ghost, who resigns his post as the ship's doctor and installs himself instead as a simple passenger, had also originally gone out to Sydney as the assistant surgeon of an emigrant ship. After 'a few months' wanderings' in the Australian outback (12), Long Ghost returned to Sydney where he accumulated 'an old file of Sydney papers', from which the narrator Paul 'soon became intimately acquainted with the localities of all the advertising tradesmen there' (36). When deliberating over the mutiny on the *Julia*, Mr Wilson, acting British Consul in Tahiti, denounces Long Ghost as a typical 'Sydney Flash-Gorger' (103); and, in the eyes of this government official at least, what John Carlos Rowe called 'Euroamerican colonialism' is not of an equal and consistent measure.¹²

Australasia is accordingly represented in *Omoo* as a key strategic point in the cultural and political economy of the novel, unfolding as it does across colonial as well as transpacific circuits. The narrator learns that provisions for the *Julia* 'had been purchased by the owners at an auction sale of condemned navy stores in Sydney' (14), and the novel counterpoints its description of 'the immense blank of the Western Pacific' (33) with an account of various forms of commercial trade and cultural exchange: cocoa-nut oil exported from the Society islands to Sydney; the British consul to Tahiti's 'several voyages to Sydney in a schooner belonging to the mission' (75); the Englishwoman, Old Mother Tot, who has travelled 'all over the South Seas', from 'New Zealand to the Sandwich Islands ... keeping a rude hut of entertainment for mariners' (146); the Irish sailor M'Gee, 'whose prospects in life had been blasted by a premature transportation to Sydney' (142); the presence among the *Julia*'s crew of 'Sydney Ben – said to be a runaway Ticket-of-Leave Man', or, as Melville explains in a footnote, one of the 'promising' convicts in New South Wales who had absconded from his parole as a government ward (87). All of this positions Australasia in Melville's eyes as a radically unstable zone, oscillating between conventional categories of civilization and primitivism, and the description of Bembo, the Maori harpooner in

this novel, as emerging from 'a race of cannibals' (71) consolidates the author's sense of what he calls the 'irreclaimably savage' aspect endemic to the landscape of New Zealand (93). At the same time, Melville is drawn here by the masquerade of colonialism, the ways in which conventional social scenes in Tahiti and other venues in the South Seas are incongruously juxtaposed with more traditional social identities, thereby implying analogically how the rituals of so-called civilized and primitive peoples are, in fact, not so far apart. The narrator comes across in Taloo a 'beautiful young Englishwoman' who 'came from Sydney' (295), and the fact that Mrs Bell is categorized here as English testifies to the confused, hybrid nature of the Pacific by which Melville was aesthetically so attracted. It also indicates ways in which for Melville the transpacific was intertwined conceptually with the transatlantic; within this colonial paradigm, discrete geographical zones become superimposed upon each other.

This confusion of national identity reaches its climax at the end of *Omoo*, when the narrator, becoming 'weary somewhat of life in Imeeo' (312), comes across a sea captain from Martha's Vineyard and pleads to be taken home to America. The 'noble Vineyarder', however, initially refuses this request on the grounds that he believes Paul and Long Ghost 'were both from Sydney' and not to be trusted, since the 'Sydney gentry' are notorious among American sea captains as 'riotous' troublemakers: 'Is there a mutiny on board a ship in the South Seas, ten to one a Sydney man is the ringleader.' Although Paul eventually convinces the captain that he is, as he puts it, 'an American - thank Heaven!', the Vineyarder swears he will have nothing to do with Long Ghost, whom he writes off as a 'bird' [a jailbird or convict] from Sydney' (313-14). What is noticeable here, however, is that Paul's protestations of American national identity are contradicted by his acknowledgment of the provisional nature of all such identities within a maritime context: 'As for our country, sailors belong to no nation in particular; we were, on this occasion, both Yankees.' Such a chameleonic capacity is reinforced by his anxiety 'to conceal the fact of our having belonged to the *Julia*' (313) and thus to repress the fact of any Australian connection, a mode of strategic amnesia that might be seen as more generally emblematic of how

U.S. national identity in the nineteenth century was predicated upon the misremembrance of colonial antecedents. Yet *Omoo* flourishes formally through a systematic structure of antipodean reversal, heralded in the first chapter by an image of the world upside down – ‘the vessel going before the wind, rolled to such a degree, that every time my heels went up and my head went down, I thought I was on the point of turning a somerset’ (7–8) – and exemplified later by the way the ‘excessively ugly’ ship’s carpenter is known ‘by the ironical appellation of “Beauty”’ (16). The novel’s topsy-turvy reorganization of colonial hierarchy in the unfathomable shadow of ‘the mild, blue, endless Pacific’ (257), in other words, is correlated with a rhetorical form of inversion within which the recognizable world spins on its axis and turns into its opposite. In its September 1849 review of *Omoo*, the *London Times* admitted that it found Melville as an author difficult to place: ‘the man puzzles us’, wrote the *Times*, since he seemed to be ‘quite as familiar with English literature and London streets’ as with America.¹³ Yet it is precisely such a sense of puzzlement that *Omoo* seeks to convey, the recognition of how under the stress of the Pacific Ocean national categories of every kind coalesce and converge in discomfiting ways.

I think that the long-term challenge for Australian literary criticism, then, is to enter into dialogue with the canonical narratives of English so as to make a real critical difference to the way in which the field is shaped. Celebrated American critics such as Greenblatt, or earlier figures such as Maynard Mack and D. W. Robertson, have fundamentally revised exclusively Anglocentric ideas about how familiar writers such as Shakespeare, Pope and Chaucer should be understood, and there is no reason why in time the Australian academy should not come to carry a similar kind of important revisionist influence. It is well-nigh impossible today properly to consider the English literary tradition without taking into account the work of American scholars, but it is by and large still possible to consider it without taking into account the work of Australian scholars, and that is not because of any intrinsic aspects of the field itself but because of the more general institutional politics associated with Australian higher education. If I were to suggest one reason

Australia has been relatively slow to engage with these global issues, it would not be distance but, rather, money. The contributions of the major American research universities in the years after World War II, when they developed vast industries of textual scholarship that produced meticulous editions of all kinds of literary works, was in academic terms a very expensive enterprise, one underwritten by the country's enormous wealth, by its willingness to invest a much greater percentage of the GNP in higher education, and also by the way its combination of private and public institutions brought still more resources into the university sector. Europe in general has lagged behind this model, and in Australia funding is under more pressure still. Symptomatically, postgraduates in the United States typically do two to three years coursework before embarking on their Ph.D. thesis – often a two-year Master's, followed by a year of coursework leading to comprehensive exams. In the UK, the so-called 'one plus three' model has established itself over the past decade – a one-year Master's course, followed by a three-year research thesis. But in Australia, this preparatory coursework is usually lacking, which typically means that students are expected to progress from an undergraduate degree to writing a doctoral thesis without having had any real opportunity to familiarize themselves with current critical work in the field, often with deleterious results.

This system of postgraduate education does I think need redress fairly urgently, since to undertake literary research these days without knowing what's going on in the wider academic environment would be like trying to work on biogenetics without knowing anything about the latest worldwide developments in this field: it's just a waste of time for all concerned. Graduate research everywhere has morphed over the last twenty years from being an essentially private affair, based around the student's own private interests and his or her relationship with an individual supervisor, to a booming graduate-school industry which is organized instead around the proliferation of postgraduate fellowships, information networks, electronic databases, article banks, and the like. It is important not to lose that old sense of personal investment in scholarship, of course, but it is also important that anyone entering the academic profession these days should be able

to negotiate the contours of any given field successfully. None of us, I would imagine, would feel comfortable consulting a medical doctor who was not aware of the key developments in his or her field over the past ten years, and similarly doctors of philosophy in the Humanities always need to be conversant with current issues in the profession, although of course such familiarity does not imply, or indeed require, any simple sense of compliance with particular theoretical models. But of course such changes in university organization are expensive to bring about and also politically sensitive, since they imply a model of academic professionalization that is difficult to reconcile with the more general framework of undergraduate education, whose customary emphasis is on training the workforce to participate effectively in an information economy. I have no qualms at all about the desirability of increasing participation rates in higher education, but I have also professed the discipline in enough higher education institutions across the world to know that local paymasters are not usually the best judges of academic excellence. When I worked in Oregon, the civic norms there manifested themselves in a series of so-called academic 'benchmarks,' sponsored by the denizens of the Far Western National Bank and other such local worthies, whose priorities involved turning out graduates focussed on corporate team-work rather than any kind of disciplinary expertise. Oxford over the past twenty years has similarly undergone a painful transition from a primarily undergraduate, college-based institution to one organized more around faculties offering a much broader range of undergraduate and postgraduate degree courses. This is a challenge that many universities around the world are confronting today: the problem of how to make undergraduate education widely accessible and economically relevant, while maintaining at the same time that commitment to knowledge as a universal enterprise that is inherent etymologically within the very name of a university, and which has sponsored inspired intellectual work under such an aegis since the days of Peter Abelard.

All of this is for deans, vice-chancellors and education ministers to consider, but it does seem clear to me that over the long term the presence of the University of Sydney's English department on the

world stage is more likely to be hindered by economic impediments than by any intellectual insecurity about the wider significance of its antipodean allegiances or any lack of substantive conceptual material to engage with. Over the most twenty years, the most significant work in the field of English studies to have emerged from Australia in relation to a global domain has almost certainly been in the area of Cultural Studies, broadly conceived, where hard-edged scepticism about the political interests invested in the upholding of traditional literary canons has exerted widespread influence, particularly in the United States. Australia became internationally recognized in American English departments during the 1990s for its Cultural Studies contributions to literary and critical theory, and Meaghan Morris, who herself graduated from the English department at Sydney, was a pivotal figure in these debates. I think this work has been interesting and at times powerful, and I was on a panel in Korea a few years ago with John Frow from the University of Melbourne where some of these issues were discussed; but there is also a feeling that is, I think, shared in many quarters of the academic humanities community in the twenty-first century that the methodological impetus of Cultural Studies has now run into something of a brick wall. The objects of scrutiny in the work of popular culture theorists of the 1990s have not always repaid sustained and continued attention, with the contingency of their commodities bearing an uncomfortably close relation to the critical discourses those narratives are framed by; it might be one thing to read about contemporary television soap operas, for instance, but it is hard really to interest yourself in critical essays about soap operas that were popular ten or fifteen years ago. By contrast, for example, the work of Edward Said, which combined cultural politics and textual aesthetics in equal measure (in relation to classical music as well as literature) continues to resonate across a broad spectrum, even seven years now after his death. I remember going to a symposium at the University of London in 1986, where Said and Raymond Williams were both speaking on critical practice, and it was clear that the primary difference between them was that Said was more committed to literature as an art form (as we see in his work on Joseph Conrad and other writers) than was Williams,

although Williams of course also at times combined cultural and literary analysis brilliantly, particularly in his work on the English novel.¹⁴ But it is clear that there is a great deal of cutting-edge intellectual work going on throughout Australia at the moment in many different fields, and a theoretically fluent and intellectually confident discipline of English studies should, I believe, be able to negotiate its way eclectically through these different areas – postcolonialism, environmentalism, indigenous studies, religious studies, gender studies, film and media, and so on – in order more usefully to examine the specificity of aesthetic forms and the ways in which questions of textual meaning intersect with wider concerns.

In this sense, the Sydney English department is, I think, in a unique position, flying the flag as it does in Australia for the academic study of literature across a broad historical range. Indeed, I would go further and suggest that, given the cutbacks in literature programmes across other Australian institutions under the joint impact of economic and ideological pressures, the English department here at Sydney finds itself with a historical responsibility to build on its established tradition so as to describe and establish in a more globally recognizable way the antipodean dimension to English literature; put bluntly, if this department does not do it, no-one else will, and the profession of English Studies worldwide will be the poorer for it. It is an honour to have the opportunity to build on the legacy left by more recent Challis Chairs of English, Gerry Wilkes and Margaret Harris, and to look forward to working with many others both around this country and internationally to resituate Australian English on the world map. Since I was lucky enough to pick up several of her second-hand books very cheaply at the recent Woolley book fair, I know that Margaret and I share a great fondness for Anthony Trollope, whom I, somewhat heretically perhaps, actually consider the greatest English Victorian novelist, partly because of his extremely skilful treatment of time and internalization of temporal principles within the structure of his novels, and partly because of his enormous geographical scope: many of Trollope's novels are set partly in America, Australia or other British colonies, and he deploys the formal double-plot principles of Elizabethan and Jacobean dramas, of which he was so enamoured,

to traverse the multiple sites of British imperial culture.¹⁵ Though I haven't got the scope to do so properly here, I would argue quite seriously, having read Trollope now for over twenty-five years, that beneath the bluff exterior his work encompasses a more profound understanding of negative capability than George Eliot, and a more sardonic sense of the vacillations of human comedy than Dickens; and indeed in my book *Transatlantic Insurrections* I wrote a chapter comparing Trollope's ambiguous representations of the national body politic to similar kinds of structural ironies in the novels of American author Nathaniel Hawthorne, whose work Trollope much admired.¹⁶ This suggests, I think, ways in which the study of English today can and perhaps should transgress national boundaries, and since Gerry Wilkes also made such an important contribution over many years to the development of Australian literature I want to end by saying just a few words about Peter Carey's novel *Parrot and Olivier in America*, published of course just last year, and to suggest how this work, an Australian novel written in New York, says something about the transnational reconstruction of national literary traditions in the twenty-first century. (*Parrot and Olivier* was, I notice, short-listed last week for this year's Booker Prize in the UK.)¹⁷

As many of you will know, Carey's novel, which takes its epigraph from the work of the French aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville, who published in 1835 his classic account of *Democracy in America*, represents a fictionalized account of the Tocqueville paradigm of transatlantic engagement in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. The character of Parrot, who comes from an English working-class background, is shown here as being transported to Australia as a child in the 1790s, and through ventriloquizing a series of alternative narratives the book subsequently triangulates Europe, America and Australia, playing off Parrot's conceptions of democracy against Olivier's French aristocratic assumptions. When he visited the Sydney Writers Festival earlier this year, Carey suggested this was a book about Australian origins as much as America, about how convicts were sent to Port Jackson because the British Empire could no longer dispatch them to Virginia, and he also suggested that by reformulating the Tocqueville myth in relation to

questions of social class he was effectively demystifying the anodyne version of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* familiar from too many American Studies classes in the United States, where patriotic college professors, said Carey, typically read only the 'good' bits of *Democracy in America*, that is to say the sections where Tocqueville gives a positive account of the American democratic experiment, while ignoring the tenor of the whole book, which is, he said, 'much more mixed'.¹⁸ In effect, then, Carey's novel is intertextually revising the American myth of Tocqueville from an Australian perspective, introducing a transnational dimension to problematize the simplistic notions of national narrative that have for too long held sway in every cultural environment. At the Sydney festival interview that I attended, there was at the end the kind of inane question that Carey seems frequently to attract from someone in the audience who got up and asked why he wasn't writing about Australia today, a question the author laughed off by saying that he had not lived in this country for twenty years and now knows very little about daily life here. The point is, of course, that the metafictional impulse in this novel is analogous on a theoretical level to the metacritical strain that would seek always to frame narratives in terms of their discursive formations and crossovers, and that to assume (as did the questioner) that a naive form of mimesis or representation of lived experience represents the only possible form of literary or cultural engagement is to fall into journalistic populism and academic reductionism at their very worst. To resituate the study of English literature in relation to an antipodean imaginary is not to fetishize narratives of a separatist native experience, but rather, as Carey recognized, to interrogate ways in which the antipodean dimension circulates discursively and has, for many centuries past, crucially entered into the construction of English literature in the most central and compelling manner.

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Canberra, and Julian Murphet from the University of New South Wales.

Notes

- 1 Stephen Alomes, *When London Calls: The Expatriation of Australian Creative Artists to Britain*, Cambridge, 1999.
- 2 Giles Gunn, 'Introduction: Globalizing Literary Studies', *PMLA* 116.1 (January 2001): 16–31 (p. 18).
- 3 Stephen Greenblatt, 'Racial Memory and Literary History', *PMLA* 116.1 (January 2001): 48–63 (p. 53).
- 4 John Wiltshire, 'F. R. Leavis', *Cambridge Quarterly* 25.4 (1996): 415–20 (p. 417).
- 5 Bernard Smith, 'The Myth of Isolation', in *The Antipodean Manifesto: Essays in Art and History*, Melbourne, 1976, pp. 57–69.
- 6 Heidi Slettedahl Macpherson and Will Kaufman, 'The State of (Dis)Union: American Studies in Britain', *Prospects* 30 (2005): 27–43 (p. 32).
- 7 R. C. De Prosopo, 'The Patronage of Medievalism in Modern American Cultural Historiography', in Bernard Rosenthal and Paul E. Szarmach, eds, *Medievalism in American Culture: Special Studies*, SUNY Binghamton: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1987, p. 9.
- 8 Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*, Cambridge, 2003, p. 222.
- 9 See Stephanie Trigg, ed., *Medievalism and the Gothic in Australian Culture*. Carlton, Vic., 2005.
- 10 Herman Melville, *Correspondence*, ed. Lynn Horth, Evanston-Chicago, 1993, p. 58.
- 11 Herman Melville, *Omoo: A Narrative of Adventures in the South Seas*, 1847. Ed. Harrison Hayford *et al.*, Evanston-Chicago, 1968, p. 9. Subsequent page references to this edition are cited in parentheses in the text.
- 12 John Carlos Rowe, 'Melville's Typee: U.S. Imperialism at Home and Abroad', in Donald E. Pease, ed., *National Identities and Post-Americanist Narratives*, Durham, NC, 1994, p. 255.
- 13 Watson G. Branch, ed., *Melville: The Critical Heritage*, London, 1974, p. 135.
- 14 'Media, Margins and Modernity: Raymond Williams and Edward Said', in Tony Pinkney, ed., *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, London, 1989, pp. 177–97.
- 15 On Trollope and double plots, see Robert Tracy, *Trollope's Later Novels*, Berkeley, 1978, p. 9.
- 16 Paul Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections: British Culture and the Formation of American Literature, 1730–1860*, Philadelphia, 2001, pp. 164–86.
- 17 According to the London *Daily Telegraph*, quoting one of the judges,

Parrot and Olivier ultimately lost the Booker Prize to Howard Jacobson's *The Finkler Question* on a 3–2 split vote. Susan Wyndham, 'Undercover', *Sydney Morning Herald Spectrum*, 23–24 October 2010, p. 35.

18 Peter Carey, in conversation with John Freeman, Sydney Writers' Festival, 22 May 2010.