



# Through Other Continents: American Literature across Deep Time

By Wai Chee Dimock

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**Through Other Continents: American Literature across Deep Time** By Wai Chee Dimock

What we call American literature is quite often a shorthand, a simplified name for an extended tangle of relations." This is the argument of *Through Other Continents*, Wai Chee Dimock's sustained effort to read American literature as a subset of world literature.

Inspired by an unorthodox archive--ranging from epic traditions in Akkadian and Sanskrit to folk art, paintings by Veronese and Tiepolo, and the music of the Grateful Dead--Dimock constructs a long history of the world, a history she calls "deep time." The civilizations of Mesopotamia, India, Egypt, China, and West Africa, as well as Europe, leave their mark on American literature, which looks dramatically different when it is removed from a strictly national or English-language context. Key authors such as Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Ezra Pound, Robert Lowell, Gary Snyder, Leslie Silko, Gloria Naylor, and Gerald Vizenor are transformed in this light. Emerson emerges as a translator of Islamic culture; Henry James's novels become long-distance kin to *Gilgamesh*; and Black English loses its ungrammaticalness when reclassified as a creole tongue, meshing the input from Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

Throughout, Dimock contends that American literature is answerable not to the nation-state, but to the human species as a whole, and that it looks dramatically different when removed from a strictly national or English-language context.

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## Through Other Continents: American Literature across Deep Time By Wai Chee Dimock Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1009209 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Princeton University Press
- Published on: 2008-11-09
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.02" h x .58" w x 5.98" l, .81 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 264 pages

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**Editorial Review**

Review

**Honorable Mention for the 2007 Harry Levin Prize, American Comparative Literature Association  
Honorable Mention for the James Russell Lowell Prize**

"Offering new ways of reading, analyzing, and critiquing literature, Dimock's book will be invaluable to scholars of American literature, literary theory, comparative literature, and cultural studies."--**Choice**

"*Across Other Continents* is a brave attempt at reading outside the box. Dimock's archive is idiosyncratic and her reading practice, as befits her thesis, rhizomatic. She roams broadly over fields of philosophy, science, ethics, anthropology, art history, philology, and religious history to create links between far-flung elements. Occasionally the tendrils that link disparate texts are gossamer thin, while others are startlingly resilient."--**Michael Davidson, *Novel***

"Wai Chee Dimock's provocative and original new book should serve as a methodological manifesto for the burgeoning field of transnational American literary studies."--**Mark Pedretti, *Emerson Society Papers***

"[S]tartlingly original and compelling studies of a diverse array of authors . . . [A] groundbreaking book . . . Dimock's sheer knack for linking abstract theoretical issues with concrete historical illustrations . . . is an impressive display throughout."--**Robert Kern, *Modern Philology***

From the Back Cover

"In *Through Other Continents* Wai Chee Dimock has created a provocative and altogether compelling vision of American literature as a global phenomenon. At once a set of wide-ranging illustrations and a map for the future, her study will permanently alter the boundaries, and therefore the national implications, of American literary scholarship."--**Eric J. Sundquist, UCLA**

"This is a wonderful book, of the highest importance, which brings to fruition Dimock's recent proposals in a number of articles. I expect the book to be very widely read, discussed, and no doubt debated. The book offers a model not merely for a new way to study American literature, but also the beginnings of a new relation between comparative literature and the study of American literature."--**Jonathan Arac, Columbia University**

"Dimock's timely and wide-ranging book will change the discussion of the effect of globalization on the field of American literary studies. Invoking the historical depth of what she calls planetary literature to redraw the map of American literature, Dimock argues that this literature has not been disrupted by globalization. Rather, American literature is one of the tributaries of the planet's literary system."--**Donald E. Pease, Dartmouth College**

"*Through Other Continents* makes good on Dimock's proposal for a more imaginative and more capacious reading of not only American literature, but literature in general. It adds a unique voice to current discussions of global culture, literary studies in a postnational frame, transnational cultural studies, and the disciplines of American studies and comparative literature. This is a highly original and thoroughly engaging piece of scholarship."--**David Palumbo-Liu, Stanford University**

"In a series of bold and brilliant thought experiments, *Through Other Continents* extends the horizons of 'American literature' as no one has done before. It accomplishes nothing less than the creation of a genuinely new critical framework and idiom for reconceiving the field on a planetary scale. For years Americanists have been calling for a new transnationalism. No one has responded to that call more eloquently and originally than Wai Chee Dimock."--**Lawrence Buell, Harvard University**

#### About the Author

Wai Chee Dimock is William Lampson Professor of English and American Studies at Yale University. She is the author of "Empire for Liberty: Melville and the Poetics of Individualism" (Princeton) and "Residues of Justice: Literature, Law, Philosophy".

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#### **Dorothy Jaramillo:**

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#### **Priscilla Garcia:**

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**Andy McNeil:**

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