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Whither Inter-American Literature?

One of the most interesting developments currently taking place within the discipline of Comparative Literature has to do with the advent of what many scholars are calling "New World," "Inter-American" or, simply, "American" literature. Though their approaches and perspectives may differ, what these various descriptions share is a new and distinctly comparative concern for four of Western literature's most neglected literary cultures: English and French Canada, Spanish America (which, of course, sub-divides into sixteen separate national literatures) and Brazil. Of the five primary written "American" literatures, however, only that of the United States has so far been accorded a high degree of international visibility and attention. The other four are long overdue in gaining the world-wide recognition they deserve.

Traditionally, literary scholarship devoted to "American" or "New World" texts has been oriented in two basic directions: toward considerations of individual national literatures, such as Mexican literature, Canadian literature (of both French and English expression) or Brazilian literature, and toward literary relations with the European "mother country." Thus it is that Québécois authors (like Jacques Godbout and Anne Hébert) and works are often better known in France, for example, than in the United States, Chile or Brazil, while national literature departments throughout the Americas continue to offer courses in areas like English and American, Commonwealth, Luso-Brazilian and Ibero-American literature.

But as scholars have begun, in recent years, to look less at New World/Old World relations and more at "inter" and even "intra" American relations,¹ it has become clear that the Americas themselves, despite their

¹ This trend is especially evident in Canada, with its French and English heritage, but it is as true for countries like Mexico, Peru and Ecuador that still possess a vital and flourishing Native American culture. Within the Americas themselves, there are of course numerous sub-divisions, including such categories as Native American literature (by itself and in terms of its influence on other writers), American Hispanic literature, African American literature, feminist literature, Jewish American literature, Oriental American literature (especially in the United States and Brazil), and literature relating to men and women of racially mixed

real differences, also possess a great many historical, political and cultural ties, ties that, as we are beginning to see, have already generated a wealth of literary topics uniquely suited to the comparatist's supranational approach. Important studies like *Early American Literature: A Comparative Approach*, *Reinventing the Americas*, *Textual Confrontations: Comparative Readings in Latin American Literature*, *An Introduction to Literature: British, American and Canadian*, *Writing the Apocalypse*, and *Is There a Common American Literature?* all dramatically substantiate the possibilities inherent in this newly emergent trend.² Yet because of the vastness and complexity of even the concept of Inter-American Literature, much more work — both theoretical and exegetical — needs to be done. Indeed, it would not be excessive to say that we are only at the threshold of this challenging and exciting new area of comparative literary scholarship, one that, with the quinquennial celebration (1992) of Columbus' "discovery" of the New World, affords us with a unique opportunity to "rediscover" American literature.

As with any new and fast developing area of inquiry, however, there are both great opportunities to be taken advantage of and, as Larry Shouldice notes, great problems (most often of a theoretical or methodological variety)

heritage.

- 2 A. Owen Aldridge, *Early American Literature: A Comparatist Approach* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1982), *Reinventing the Americas: Comparative Studies of Literature of the United States and Spanish America*, Bell Gale Chevigny and Gari Laguardia, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986), Alfred J. MacAdam, *Textual Confrontations: Comparative Readings in Latin American Literature* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987), *An Introduction to Literature: British American and Canadian*, Lecker, David, and O'Brien eds. (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), Ruth Parkinson Zamora, *Writing the Apocalypse* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), Djelal Kadir, *Questing Fictions* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986), and *Is There a Common American Literature?*, Gustavo Pérez Firmat, editor, (Duke UP, 1991). Other important studies in this same vein include Stanley Williams' pioneering *The Spanish Background of American Literature* (Yale UP, 1955), Vera Kutzinsky's *Against the American Grain* (Johns Hopkins UP, 1987), and Marcia Kline's *Beyond the Land Itself* (Harvard University Press, 1970). However useful these excellent works are, they are limited in scope because they do not deal comprehensively with all the primary written literatures of the New World, those of French and English Canada, the United States, Brazil and Spanish America. My own book on this subject (*Rediscovering the Americas*, U of Iowa P, 1991) attempts to overcome this methodological shortcoming by considering all five New World literatures plus the question of the oral Amerindian literatures. The topics I deal with are the following: The Pre-Columbian Situation; The Narratives of Discovery and Conquest; The American Epic; The Theme of Miscegenation in American Literature; The Rise of the New World Novel; The Five (Six) Faces of American Modernism; The Quest for an American Identity; Regionalism as a Shaping Force in Inter-American Literature; Solitude, the Evolution of an American Motif; and The Conflict between Civilization and Nature.

to be resolved.³ A reading list merely composed of texts written by New World authors does not, for example, necessarily constitute a valid comparative literature course or essay in this area. The selection of material must be carefully geared to the particular approach, or approaches, involved. The answer to the always fundamental question — "What is the basis of the comparison?" — must be made clear.

Yet within the context of comparative literary methodology, there are several approaches that, given the still basically inchoate nature of Inter-American Literature, seem particularly likely to yield useful results. Reflecting no particular order of importance, these would include: theme and motif studies; problems of form and genre development (the novel of the land, for example, or the immigrant novel); periods and movements; the role of the translator and of translations in the dissemination of Inter-American literature; literary relations; problems of writing American literary history;⁴ the situation of Pre-Columbian or Native American literature; and, finally, an illumination of the web of influence and reception relationships that have been evolving in the Americas at least since 1492 and perhaps even earlier.

Often relying on the principle of "rapprochement," thematological studies involving Inter-American texts (and oral literatures) offer the comparatist a wide range of possibilities. The quest for cultural identity, for example, which can be taken as the Ur-theme of New World letters, manifests itself throughout the Americas, from their origins up to the present day. The problem here is not with the justification of this key theme but with its scope; how can one limit the issue of identity to a discussion of certain texts and yet maintain the truly Inter-American comprehensiveness that this kind of study demands?

One particular dimension of this theme, the role miscegenation has played in the development of New World culture, yields some interesting insights, for example, when examined in a comparative context. Because of the vast number of works that have dealt with this theme, it is useful to divide it into two categories: those works that treat the issue of miscegenation as an issue of inter-racial sex and socio-political power (the white male master and the black, red, yellow or brown female slave) and those that treat it more symbolically, as the mechanism by which a new race

3 Larry Shouldice, "Wide Latitudes: Comparing New World Literature," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature/Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* 9.1 (1982): 46-55; this excellent essay was perhaps the first theoretical approach to the entire issue of Inter-American literature.

4 The journal, *American Literary History*, will be devoting an upcoming issue to problems of Inter-American literary history.

of people — one guided perhaps by principles of harmony, justice, equality and love — could evolve. If, in the first category, we place works as diverse as James Baldwin's *Another Country* (1961), Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* (1968), Antônio Callado's *Quarup* (1967), V.S. Naipaul's *Guerrillas* (1975) or Dany Laferrière's *Comment faire l'amour avec un negre sans se fatiguer* (1985), we could list in category two such texts as Jorge Amado's *Tenda dos milagres* (1969), William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (which, like Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie* and Rudy Wiebe's *The Scorched-Wood People*, might well figure into both categories), Vasconcelos' *La raza cósmica*, Cassiano Ricardo's *Marim Cererê*, and Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* (1974). If, among the several works mentioned here, Baldwin's pessimistic *Another Country* epitomizes the graphic depiction of inter-racial sex as rape (as opposed to the loving creation of children and, through them, of a new and more open-minded race of people), then Amado's 1969 thesis novel, *Tenda dos milagres*, represents an idealized version of the tact taken by the works in category two, the ones in which racial anger and violence are subverted by tolerance and love. While Baldwin's hate-filled black protagonist ejaculates "venom" from "his weapon"⁵ into the victimized and traumatized white woman who not unwillingly but pathetically functions as his sexual partner, Amado's gentler (if perhaps sexist) mulatto protagonist, looking to a better future, says to his white lover, "Gringa, ... let's make a mulatto together...." Their words crossed in the air, and all of them were words of love.⁶

Standing somewhere between these two very representative works is Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*, a powerful tale of miscegenation, socio-political identity and male/female relations around which Laurence subtly weaves the tragic story of Louis Riel, the Métis people and their troubled relationship with white society. The primary focus of her story rests on the character, Morag, her love affair with Jules Tonnerre (a Métis man) and their illegitimate but dearly loved daughter, Pique. Pique's future especially is presented in terms of the history of the "Bois-Brûlés," the people of French and Indian ancestry who are treated as outcasts in their own land. When, for example, Jules Tonnerre comes to explain why his father was refused burial in the town graveyard, he says, matter-of-factly: "Yeh, well I guess I know why they really wouldn't have him. His halfbreed bones spoiling their cemetery. The Métis, once lords of the prairies. Now refused

burial space in their own land."⁷ Though at times Tonnerre's anger at the white establishment recalls that of Baldwin's hero in *Another Country*, by the end of *The Diviners* the emphasis has shifted to Pique and her determination to help build a more tolerant and humane society. In this sense, *The Diviners* moves closer to the position advanced by Amado's hero in *Tenda dos milagres*. Yet in its deft handling of the related issues of inter-racial sex, racism, male/female relations and the rearing of children, *The Diviners* must be regarded as one of Inter-American literature's most complete and affective presentations of the theme of miscegenation.

Appearing early in the colonial experience of each of the five New World cultures, the theme of identity, as we see in later writers like Margaret Atwood, Margaret Laurence, Alice Munro, Jacques Godbout, Jorge Amado, Luisa Valenzuela, Luis Valdez, Amy Tan, Louise Erdrich and James Baldwin, continues to generate poems, dramas and narratives that speak to that most quintessential issue of the American experience — "Who are we?"⁸ And when one expands the concept of thematology to include both motifs and the sundry socio-political issues inherent in the term *Stoffgeschichte*, the possibilities for meaningful comparative Inter-American studies would seem to be enormous. Under this rubric, then, such varied topics as the captive motif, the concept of the boundary or the wilderness, the development of slavery as a theme, and immigrant literature could all be shown to reflect a uniquely American, or New World, orientation.

In the category of form and genre study the situation is equally promising. There are, for example, viable comparisons to be made between the numerous discovery and exploration reports that characterize the rich pre-Columbian oral heritage notwithstanding the earliest beginnings, or foundations, of written American literature. As Hans Galinsky has shown,⁹ some fascinating comparisons can be made involving such diverse works as Columbus's *Diario de viaje* and letters, Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *Verdadera historia de la conquista de la Nueva España*, Pero Vaz de Caminha's "carta," Capt. John Franklin's *Narrative of a Journey to the Shores of the Polar Sea*,

7 Margaret Laurence, *The Diviners* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974) 219.

8 Margaret Atwood's *Survival* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972) reflects her abiding concern with the question of Canadian national identity, while Amado's newest novel, one currently in progress, will deal with Brazil's racially mixed society, its Amerindian, African and European heritage. Luis Valdez, a Chicano playwright, has given us, in works like "Zoot Suit" and "La Bamba," insights into this, until now, overlooked dimension of American society.

9 Hans Galinsky, *Literatur und Sprache der Vereinigten Staaten* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1989; *Amerikanisch-deutsche Sprach- und Literaturbeziehungen* (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1972; *The Transit of Civilization, From Europe to America: Essays in Honor of Hans Galinsky* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1986).

5 James Baldwin, *Another Country* (New York: Dell, 1960) 24.

6 Jorge Amado, *The Tent of Miracles*. Trans. Barbara Shelby (New York: Bard/Avon, 1971) 92.

Samuel Hearne's *Journey from Prince of Wales' Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean*, Cabeza de Vaca's *Naufragios*, the *Relations des Jésuites*, Anchieta's sermons and letters, Cartier's *Bref récit de la Navigation de Canada* and Champlain's *Des Sauvages*, ou *Voyage de Samuel de Champlain*.

A quick perusal of these and other "discovery narratives" suggests that they were of two great kinds: one, epitomized by Castillo's riveting eyewitness account of the Spanish conquest of the mighty Aztec empire, can be said to feature a bloody clash of human cultures while the other, prototypically represented in Franklin's telling of his expedition's epic struggle against the elements and against the ferocity of the New World landscape and climate, pits the human creature against nature.

Franklin's log entry for September 6, for example, vividly underscores the increasingly desperate struggle the ill-prepared and exhausted explorers were waging with the pitiless Canadian Arctic:

Heavy rain commenced at midnight, and continued without intermission until five in the morning when it was succeeded by snow on the wind changing ... to a violent gale ... we had nothing to eat ... the covering of our blankets was insufficient to prevent us from feeling the severity of the frost ... and ... the drifting of the snow into our tents.... Our tents were completely frozen, and the snow had drifted around them to a depth of three feet, and even inside there was covering of several inches on our blankets. Our suffering from cold, in a ... canvas tent in such weather, with the temperature at 20, and without fire, will be easily imagined; it was, however less than that which we felt from hunger.¹⁰

A no less formidable foe, however, was being encountered by the handful of Spanish "conquistadores" who were challenging the military might of the Aztec empire. Capturing the drama and peril of the Spaniards' situation, Bernal Díaz, who, like John Franklin, was directly involved in the events he chronicled, writes:

We fought very well, but they were so strong and had so many bands which relieved one another by turns, that if we had had ten thousand Trojan Hector and as many Rolands, even then we should not have been able to break through. I will describe the whole of the battle. We were struck by the tenacity of their fighting, which was beyond description. Neither cannon, muskets, nor crossbows were of any avail, nor hand-to-hand combat, nor the slaughter of thirty or forty of them every time we charged. They still fought on bravely and with more vigour than before.¹¹

10 Capt. John Franklin, *A Narrative of a Journey to the Shores of the Polar Sea* (Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle, 1970) 401.

11 Bernal Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*. J.M. Cohen, trans. (New York: Penguin, 1963) 289.

So while one group struggled with the challenges generated by a harsh and unforgiving environment and the other with a fierce and sophisticated human culture, the conquest narratives of both John Franklin and Bernal Díaz offer dramatic proof that the subjugation of the New World was, in all senses, a struggle of truly epic proportions.

Indeed, the epic, an ancient form ideally suited to the scale, scope and grandeur of the European conquest of the New World, also offers the comparatist some extraordinary texts with which to work. By including the little known Iroquois narrative, *Dekanawida*, in this category, the scholar can add a greatly enriching pre-Columbian dimension to the development of the American or New World epic, a genre that includes such notable works as Ercilla's *La araucana*, da Gama's *O Uruguai*, Barlow's *The Columbiad*, Fréchet's *La légende d'un peuple* and Pratt's *Toward the Last Spike*. Other generic approaches that lend themselves to the Inter-American perspective would include the nature of early American drama, especially in its didactic function, the evolution of the New World novel,¹² the New World sonnet, and the development of theory and criticism in the Americas.

In the case of the New World novel, for example, a great many critics have cited the following narratives (listed here in chronological order) as constituting the first novels of their respective cultures:

1. *The History of Emily Montague* (1769; Frances Brooke, English Canada)
2. *The Power of Sympathy* (1789; William Hill Brown, the United States)
3. *El periquillo sarriento* (1816; Fernández de Lizardi, Mexico)
4. *L'Influence d'un livre* (1837; Philippe Aubert de Gaspé fils, French Canada)
5. *A moreninha* (1844; Manuel de Macedo, Brazil)

Frances Brooke, the author of the earliest of these works, was born in Great Britain. She spent the years from 1763 to 1768, however, in and around Québec, where her husband was the chaplain to the British garrison stationed there. An epistolary novel that would seem to owe much to Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), *The History of Emily Montague* is made up of a series of letters between two couples, one in Canada and one in England. Following the example set by her British models, Brooke uses the epistolary form to make a number a commentaries on life and times in Canada. Implicit nearly always in these comments, however, is what one takes to be a certain disdain on the author's part for what she presents as a rather rustic Canadian culture. In letter 45, for example, we read that, "Québec is like a

12 See Earl E. Fitz, "The First Inter-American Novel: Some Choices and Some Comments," *Comparative Literature Studies* 22.3 (Fall 1985): 361-76.

third-or-fourth rate country town in England; much hospitality, little society; cards, scandal, dancing, and good cheer."¹³ The harshness of the Canadian climate (which functions for Canada in a way that parallels the "tropicalism" often associated with certain parts of Spanish America and Brazil) is even portrayed as inhibiting cultural development:

The strongest wine freezes in a room which has a stove in it; even brandy is thickened to the consistence of oil: the largest wood fire, in a wide chimney, does not throw out its heat a quarter of a yard.... I no longer wonder the elegant arts are unknown here; the rigor of the climate suspends the very powers of the understanding; what then must become of those of the imagination? ... Genius will never mount high, where the faculties of the mind are benumbed half the year.... (Brooke, *The History of Emily Montague* I 216-17)

Although Brooke had written an earlier narrative work, (*Lady Julia Mandeville*, 1763), it is *The History of Emily Montague* that has established itself as the first New World novel.

The question of literary periods and movements, an issue long debated by scholars, also offers the comparatist a variety of possibilities for critical study. Although, as A. Owen Aldridge observes in *Early American Literature: A Comparatist Approach*, it is tricky indeed to attempt an explanation of American literary phenomenon in terms of what are such essentially European concepts or trends as the baroque, neoclassicism and romanticism, even comparative studies of American texts written under the sign of European intellectual constructs can, nevertheless, be revealing of uniquely American problems or of a uniquely New World consciousness. This can be clearly seen in numerous works from the so-called "romantic" period, which varies considerably, in its chronology as well as its philosophic, political, and aesthetic underpinnings, throughout the Americas. A comparison of the "Indian" in Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok*, Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, Richardson's *Wacousta*, Echeverría's "La Cautiva" and Alencar's *O Guarani*, for example, shows how varied and problematic was the concept of the "Bon Sauvage" in the American romantic imagination. Other interesting studies of this type might focus on the nature of colonial literature in the Americas, on the impact of neoclassical thought on New World letters, or on what I feel has been the special socio-political significance of naturalism in the American republics.

The elusive period widely known as "modernism" also proves responsive to the American comparatist's approach. Involving such iconoclasts and

innovators as Rubén Darío, Emile Nelligan, Arthur Stringer, Dorothy Livesay, Vicente Huidobro, Mário de Andrade, Oswald de Andrade, A.J.M. Smith, F. R. Scott, Harriet Monroe, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, Saint Denys-Garneau, and Alain Grandbois, the entire concept of American modernism, from its poetics to its politics, offers an array of fascinating comparative possibilities, including (as between Dorothy Livesay, Raymond Knister, Arthur Stringer, Pound and the Imagists) some "rapports de fait" that deserve further investigation. And much the same thing can be said for American romanticism, the relationship between Cooper, Richardson, Alencar and Juan León Mera being a case in point.

A strong feeling for the American idiom is another viable linkage between a number of the American modernists, prominent among whom, in this regard, are the Brazilian "Pope of Modernism," Mário de Andrade, Vachel Lindsay, William Carlos Williams, Carl Sandburg, Robert Finch, A.M. Klein; A.J.M. Smith, Rubén Darío, Vicente Huidobro, César Vallejo, Jacques Renaud, Claude Jasmin and Michel Tremblay (the latter three, though not necessarily in the context of modernism, being specifically concerned with the "acceptability" of "joul" in French Canadian literature). Indeed, as Marine Leland, David Habery and others have shown in this regard, the long struggle toward linguistic self-affirmation has been a major force in the larger struggle for American culture independence.¹⁴

Finally, even in an introductory discussion such as this, a few words should be said regarding the increasingly complex network of influences and receptions that, for some five hundred years, has been developing within the context of the Americas. Traditionally, the lines of influence have been seen as running from Europe to the Americas, with each Old World "mother country" exerting a dominant influence on the evolution of arts and letters within its New World colony. The influence of both Góngora and Quevedo, for example, is clearly present in the poetry of Mexico's extraordinary Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. What is not so well-known, however, is that the brilliant Brazilian orator, theologian and political leader, Antônio Vieira, had, though indirectly, also exerted a significant influence on Sor Juana's development as a colonial poet and intellectual. Other problems of this type, as Stanley Williams points out, include the Puritans' anxieties over the opulence of Mexico City and Cotton Mather's subversive 1699 decision to

14 Marine Leland, "Québec Literature in Its American Context," *The Canadian Imagination*, David Staines, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1977) 188-225; David Habery, "The Search for a National Language: A Problem in the Comparative History of Postcolonial Literatures," *Comparative Literature Studies* 11.1 (March 1974): 85-97; see also, David William Foster, "Varieties of Urban Colloquiality in the Contemporary Latin American and American Novel," *World Literature Today* 59.4 (Autumn 1985): 556-60.

13 Frances Brooke, *The History of Emily Montague* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1974) II 205.

learn Spanish in order to "Puritanize" Catholic America.¹⁵ Finally, as Chevigny and Laguardia rightly suggest, Manuel Puig's passion for Hollywood movies has provided a key to interpreting many of his fine novels.¹⁶

As the several American cultures began (at different points, to be sure) to separate themselves from a close identification with their European progenitor, the importance of the mother country's influence began to wane. Colonial artists undertook to expand their horizons and to absorb trends and developments from different cultures. It is in this regard that the influence of the United States, politically as well as culturally, began, early on, to have a dramatic effect on the other New World societies. Though in terms of its neighbors it was relatively late to be settled and permanently colonized (the first American republic to gain its political freedom from the Old World). But even before its political emancipation had been obtained, the United States, for a variety of reasons, had begun early on to exert a powerful cultural influence throughout its hemisphere. After 1776, this influence would grow steadily greater, a fact verified by a close reading of numerous other New World writers, many of whom were painfully aware of the United States's rapid and hegemonic development. In Latin America and in Canada, for example, the presence of the United States has been — and continues to be — a virtually constant, if not always welcome, feature of cultural and political life. Among its writers, however, Whitman, perhaps because of his vitality, his generosity of spirit, and his championing of not only a distinctly American language but reality as well, has played an especially prominent role in the evolution of the other American cultures. Poe has had a similar effect, as have several other authors such as Cooper, Steinbeck (on Jorge Amado), Faulkner,¹⁷ Eliot, Hemingway (on Morley Callaghan and Ruben Fonseca, for example), Arthur Miller (whose influence on the Brazilian dramatist, Jorge Andrade, is well-known), Eugene O'Neill (*The Emperor Jones* had a significance influence on the development of the Black Experimental Theater in Brazil), and John dos Passos. The old bugaboo of "verifiability" should not prevent scholars from investigating this fast-

changing area which one day might well lead us to speculate about whether there is or could be a particular "American" consciousness.

The concept of "mirage," the literary and cultural presence one country generates, rightly or wrongly, in another, could also provide a valid basis for some rewarding comparative scholarship. Special attention might also be profitably given to artistic and cultural inter-relationships involving such closely related fields as the cinema, politics and history. Examples of this type of study would include the role Hollywood movies play in Puig's narratives as well as Mario Vargas Llosa's inventive use of Euclides da Cunha's *Os sertões* in his *Guerra del fin del mundo*, Barlow's borrowings from Prescott's *The Conquest of Peru* (in his epic, *The Columbiad*), Sara Jeannette Duncan's *The Imperialist*, Carlos Fuentes's imaginative retelling of Ambrose Bierce's mysterious trip to Mexico in his *Gringo viejo*, Jacques Godbout's *Une histoire américaine*, Walter Bénéke's *Funeral Home*, Pablo Neruda's *Fulgory muerte de Joaquín Murieta*, Arsène Bessette's *Le débutante*, and Leo-Paul Desrosier's *Nord-Sud* (the latter two works involving young French-Canadians who leave Québec to emigrate to the United States).

What is much less known, and what needs a great deal more attention, is the surprising extent to which these established or traditional lines of influence are changing. More and more, we are seeing how American cultures other than the United States are beginning to exert influences on each other. The presence of Colombia's Gabriel García Márquez in the postmodernist fiction of Canada's Robert Kroetsch, for example, is a case in point, as is what would seem to be the presence of *Cien años de soledad* in Mordecai Richler's *Solomon Gursky Was Here*, in John Nichols's *The Milagro Beanfield War*, and in W.P. Kinsella's *Shoeless Joe*. Also, more and more writers from Canada (Margaret Atwood and Robertson Davies, for example) and Latin America are having an impact on writers in the United States. The ties between Jacques Roumain, Nicolás Guillén and Langston Hughes, between Jack Hodgins, John Nichols and Márquez, between Machado de Assis and John Barth,¹⁸ between Bernal Díaz and Archibald MacLeish (*Conquistador*), between Borges and Thomas Pynchon¹⁹ and between Julio Cortázar and Robert Coover are all clearly indicative of this trend.

18 See Earl E. Fitz, "The Influence of Three Novels by Machado de Assis on John Barth's *The Floating Opera*," *The Comparatist* 10 (May 1986): 56-66, and "John Barth's Brazilian Connection," *New World* 2.1-2 (1987): 123-38.

19 Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "A Game of Shifting Mirrors: The New Latin American Novel and the North American Novel," *Proceedings of the Seventh Congress of the ICLA* (1973) 1: 1979 269-75; see also, Emma Marras's "Robert Bly's Reading of South American Poets: A Challenge to North American Poetic Practice," *Translation Review* 14 (1984): 33-39, and Sherry Simon's "Dissymmetries in Canadian Translation," *Translation Review* 27 (1988): 40-43.

15 Stanley T. Williams, *The Spanish Background of American Literature* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1955; see also, "Focus: U.S.," *Review* (Spring 1976)).

16 Bell Gale Chevigny and Gari Laguardia, eds. *Reinventing the Americas: Comparative Studies of Literature of the United States and Spanish America* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 30.

17 See Mary E. Davis, "The Haunted Voice: Echoes of William Faulkner in García Márquez, Fuentes, and Vargas Llosa," *World Literature Today* 59.4 (Autumn 1985): 531-35.

As befits a fast developing field of such vast potential, the possibilities for substantive comparative scholarship in the domain of Inter-American literature are virtually limitless. This is that serendipitous case of an area of literary study that badly needs attention and, fortuitously, that, in a truly comprehensive sense, has seen as yet very little work done. The field is wide open and, for scholars who possess the requisite linguistic tools, sure to yield fruit.

Before concluding our survey of this field, one final dimension of New World literary study must be at least noted — the immense reservoir of oral literature that has long existed and that continues to exist in the Americas. Often overlooked in our myopic tendency to define literature purely in terms of written material, the extensive oral tradition of the New World is both rich and varied. This same oral literature, however, much of it deriving from the ancient Pre-Columbian past, has itself begun to exert a profound influence on a growing number of twentieth century American writers, notable among whom are Rubén Darío, Miguel Ángel Asturias, Octavio Paz, Julio Cortázar, Robert Kroetsch, Rudy Wiebe, Emily Pauline Johnson, W. P. Kinsella, Darcy Ribeiro, José de Alencar, Raul Bopp, Yves Thériault, Gary Snyder, Scott Momaday, James Welch, Leslie Silko, Paula Gunn Allen, and Louise Erdrich, to name only a few. This, too, is an aspect of Inter-American literature that is in need of much more critical work.²⁰

A comparative approach to the literature of the New World is unsettling to a great many people because, theoretically speaking, it is both unorthodox and daunting. It is, moreover, vast in both scope and opportunity. Yet for the scholar who is methodologically prepared to handle the problems, the possibilities are not only enormous but growing. As comparatists begin to pursue it, however, we do well to remember that this newly emerging field must be seen as an addition to or extension of existing Western (and in some cases, as with the African works of Antônio Olinto, Luis Palés Matos, and Margaret Laurence, non-Western) literature, and not as a substitute for it. The place of Inter-American literary study within the larger context of Western and non-Western literature thus parallels the often misunderstood but essentially symbiotic relationship between departments of national literature and the discipline of Comparative Literature; these two approaches to literary study, the nationalistic and the comparative, can and should work together to produce a more complete appreciation of authors

20 One highly recommended work that begins to move in this direction is in Brian Swann, ed., *Smoother the Ground: Essays on Native American Oral Literature* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1983); see also, Jarold Ramsey's *Reading the Fire* (U of Nebraska P, 1983) and Paul Zolbrod's *Diné Bahané* (U of New Mexico P, 1984).

and texts. It is toward this end that comparative studies of New World literature should seek to make their contributions.

When in 1982 the Tenth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association elected to designate Inter-American Literary Relations as one of its three primary focuses,²¹ it gave official sanction to a trend within comparative letters that had been developing for some time. This same kind of official recognition of Inter-American literary study has also been made apparent by its now regular inclusion in such august professional bodies as the American Comparative Literature Association,²² the Southern Comparative Literature Association, and the Modern Language Association (including its regional affiliates, such as NEMLA, SAMLA, and MMLA), which now regularly offers multiple sessions dealing with diverse aspects of this burgeoning field. As they develop this marvelous new field of inquiry, however, comparatists are well advised to consider carefully their methodologies and their sense of New World literature as being both of the European tradition and a departure from it. It is only in this more complete context that Inter-American literary scholarship will gain the balanced perspective it both needs and deserves.

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21 At the 1982 ICLA Congress, hosted by New York University, no fewer than eleven separate sessions were devoted to Inter-American issues, as were numerous other discussion groups and workshops. Canadian scholars and literatures were prominent in the proceedings, as were those from the United States and Latin America. See, the *Proceedings of the Tenth Congress of the ICLA* (1982), M.J. Valdés, ed. (New York: NYU, 1985) 3, and the *Proceedings of the Seventh Congress of the ICLA* (1973) M.V. Dimić and E. Kushner, eds. (Stuttgart: Kunst und Wissen Erich Bieker, 1979) 1. In the series of *Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages*, the *ICLA/AILC* is also sponsoring multi-volume works on Latin American and Caribbean literatures.

22 The 1987 ICLA's titular division was, "Comparative Approaches to the Literature of the New World." The 1988 SCLA's division for this issue was entitled, "North-South Literary Relations: Latin American Connections," Robert Smith, Chair, while the 1989 ACLA featured an area on, "Latin-American Literature and Culture in the European Context."