



Review: Deborah L. Madsen (ed.). 2016. *The Routledge Companion to Native American Literature*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge. 524 pp. ISBN: 978-1-315-77734-4 (ebk)

Deborah L. Madsen's edition of *The Routledge Companion to Native American Literature* is an expansive and comprehensive introduction to the different and multiple contexts essential to reading the literatures of the Indigenous peoples in the United States. The volume, which is intended for any reader interested in the development of Native American literature, is instrumental in providing literary, historical, cultural, political, religious, anthropological and ethnographic context to approach and understand the different manifestations of Native American literature. This collection of more than forty essays is based on extensive research carried out by leading and international scholars and covers a wide range of topics related to identity, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, sovereignties, traditions and languages, while also exploring new perspectives and new directions for the development of the field.

Madsen starts out this collection by writing an "Introduction" in which she explains what the aim of the book is, provides some background information about Native American literature and the harmful consequences of the dominant colonialist views, whilst expounding clearly and conscientiously on the complex nature of the terms used in the title of the book: "Native", "American" and "Literature". The explanations that Madsen offers for each term are certainly useful and well-grounded as she provides accurate definitions and descriptions for each word, while also drawing upon proper cultural, historical and literary contexts that help readers understand the concept and category of Native American literature.

After this introductory section, the main corpus of the book is constituted by five different sections: "Identities", "Key Moments", "Sovereignties", "Traditions" and "Literary Forms". The first section of the volume covers the topic of Indigenous identity by focusing on different complex aspects and Native American literary works. To start with, the first three chapters in "Identities" are strong in dealing with the importance of developing a transnational orientation in Native American literary studies, an aspect that many scholars have recently been exploring and calling for (Madsen 2010, Barrenechea and Moertl 2013, Fitz 2013, Cox and Justice 2014). The section opens with Earl E. Fitz's "Indigenous American Literature: The Inter-American Hemispheric Perspective", a riveting essay that stresses the importance of reading Indigenous American literature comparatively and from a hemispheric perspective. Fitz's analysis of different Indigenous cultures and literary works from the Canadian Arctic to Argentina is

very convenient to highlight the common heritage of Native cultures throughout the Americas. The need to see Indigenous cultures across the hemisphere is also central to Brandi Nālani McDougall's work on "Pacific Literatures", which offers an overview of Pacific Island nations considered a part of the United States and focuses on distinct works and authors from three islands: Hawaii, Guam and American Samoa. Although not exactly a review of Alaska Native literature, Susan Kollin offers an essay that presents the growing national and international interest in the Indigenous literature of the state of Alaska through the analysis of two popular memoirs—Haye's *Blonde Indian* and Hensley's *Fifty Miles from Tomorrow*—which "provide different understandings of Indigenous Alaskan identity" (37), and establish a connection between Indigenous Alaskan communities and other Indigenous cultures in the nation and the world. The importance of Native identity is further explored through Chris Lalonde's "Clear-Cut: The Importance of Mixedblood Identities and the Promise of Native American Cosmopolitanism to Native American Literatures", which is one of the strongest contributions in this first section of the companion volume. This remarkable piece addresses the complex issue of mixed-race identity and focuses on some novels from the 1930s to the 1990s that feature mixed-blood characters. Lalonde definitely succeeds in making clear the importance of identity to understand Native American literature, but it is certainly disappointing not to find more chapters that explore further the question of hybrid identity through other literary genres. In the case of the short story and theater, for example, mixed heritage characters also appear and, in most cases, they seem to reflect the authors' journey towards understanding, accepting and exploring their mixed status. The issue of Indigenous identity is taken up in Judit Agnes Kádár's work on the importance of "The Problem of Authenticity" in contemporary American ethnic writing in relation to blood quantum and cultural heritage. Also, Alicia Cox's and Leah Sneider's essays on "Two-Spirit Writers" and "Indigenous Feminism", respectively, jointly contribute to the complex and controversial question of Indian identity by focusing on issues of gender, sexuality and race which are said to be "intimately and equally connected to national identity and self-determination" (Sneider 97). Both approaches are very good in offering a comprehensive overview of current research on berdache (Cox) and feminist studies (Sneider).

The second part of the volume is comprised of eight essays centering on "Key Moments" in the history of Native American peoples that have influenced and provided central themes in Native American literature. Of these, David J. Carlson's "US-Indian Treaty-Relations and Native American Treaty Literature" succeeds in illustrating how treaty-making has influenced the development of Native American literature. Similarly, Sabine N. Meyer's chapter on "The Marshall Trilogy" is especially rewarding in making readers perceive the importance of viewing literature and Federal Indian law together. The rest of the contributions are quite strong in dealing with selected key moments in the history and literature of Indigenous upheavals. Oliver Scheiding's essay, for instance, deals with Native Americans' responses to warfare throughout Native letters, poetry, accounts and drama, whereas Mark Rifkin's chapter on "The Politics of Native Self-Representation" focuses on the "Periods of Removal and Allotment" using Native literary texts that demonstrate that allotment, "rather than indicating the loss of Native nationhood", becomes the vehicle for maintaining "tribal relations" (153).

Particular mention should be given to Tova Cooper's "Assimilative Schooling and Native American Literature", a work that elaborates on those literary genres emerging from Native Americans' assimilative education at religious and government schools. By focusing on the autobiographical accounts of three widely-known Sioux writers—Zitkála-Šá, Charles Eastman and Luther Standing Bear—Cooper efficiently brings into view the continuous debate between the advocates of assimilation and those who favored some form of traditional tribal self-determination. To round off this section, Amelia V. Katanski's and Eric Cheyfitz's chapters on "NAGPRA" and the "UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples", effectively highlighting the importance of Indigenous sovereignty, human rights and communal identity as expressed throughout Native American literature.

The forte of the third section of the book, titled "Sovereignities", is focused on seven chapters that cover the issue of Indigenous sovereignty from multiple perspectives, such as diplomacy (Tammy Wahpeconiah), physical environments (Lee Schweninger), animal rights (Briand Hudson), food (Janet Fiskio), health (Hsinya Huang) and religion (Susannah Hopson). Noteworthy is Lee Schweninger's overlapping of literary and environmental issues in "What Can I Tell Them That They Will Hear': Environmental Sovereignty and American Indian Literature", a contribution which is especially welcome given that ecocritical themes are inherent to Native cultures. Native Americans' sacred connection with the land is also explored in Susannah Hopson's engaging chapter on "Religious Sovereignty" by focusing on Indigenous fiction works that deal with one of the most popular spiritual movements in Native American history, the Ghost Dance. The issue of Indigenous sovereignty is also complemented with two more contributions at the end of this third section that are particularly prolific in offering a concise review of American Indian activism (Bruce E. Johansen) and an impressive concise overview of Native American literary theory since the 1970s until the present day (Kirby Brown).

The fourth part of the book is dedicated to Native American "traditions", starting with the early modes of writing (Birgit Brander Rasmussen), including relevant aspects of Native American cultures such as spirituality (Kathryn N. Gray), storytelling and orality (Susan Berry Brill de Ramirez), and finishing with a focus on the visual literacy of texts (David Stirrup) and Native American intellectualism (Cari M. Carpenter). One of the great strengths of this section lies on the significance of Native oral traditions. In fact, Rasmussen's chapter deals with the importance of pictographic accounts and establishes a clear relationship between speech and graphic signs, which contributes to demonstrate that Native peoples were able to write down their history and preserved Native traditions. Along this same line, Brill de Ramirez's essay on the "Role of Folklore, Storytelling and the Oral Tradition" approaches the distinction between the oral and the literate. It makes much of establishing the precedence of orality over literacy, and provides different examples to demonstrate that "orality has the potential to be even more complex than writing" (329). The dichotomy or distinction between orality and writing is also addressed in Drew Lopenzina's "Early Native American Writing", a very fitting and illustrative chapter that explains the shift from Native oral cultures to Western literacy "not for leisure or

entertainment” (326), but as a way to “turn the tide for struggling Native communities, affording a new consideration of their rights and privileges as the people who first occupied this land” (326). While this section thoroughly examines Native oral traditions, we would welcome a more profound analysis of Native American storytelling, its multiple forms (stories, accounts, tales, myths, legends, epic narratives and songs) and even its relationship to performance.

Finally, the fifth and last section of the volume, “Literary Forms”, focuses on the different and multiple literary works of Native American literature from its early beginnings to current trends. This section of the book opens with Iping Liang’s “Crossing the Bering Strait: Transpacific Turns and Native Literatures”, a well-polished chapter on the transnational turn in Native American literatures that certainly helps identify and demonstrate the points of confluence between Native American and Asian Indigenous writers. The rest of the works are especially strong in dealing with different literary genres in Native literature such as autobiography (Stephanie A. Sellers), the short story (A. Robert Lee), theater (Birgit Däwes), poetry (Kathryn W. Shanley and David L. Moore) and the novel (John Gamber). Of these, Sellers’s piece is groundbreaking in that it provides a new terminology or categorization for those autobiographies that take into consideration “consultation and collaboration with the nation’s Tribal Council, nation-specific historians and scholars, and his/ her living descendants” (406). Sellers refers to this type of autobiographies as “Indigenous Communal Narratives” and she provides a case study through Annette Kolodny’s *The Life and Traditions of the Red Man: A Rediscovered Treasure of Native American Literature* (2007), which certainly exemplifies the characteristics of this new emerging literary genre that she had previously explored in *Native American Autobiography Redefined: A Handbook* (2007).

Birgit Däwes’s “Native North American Performance and Drama” is a very fine piece in itself that provides a panoramic overview of Native American and Native Canadian theater and the literary analysis of two outstanding Indigenous plays: Hanay Geigomah’s *Body Indian* (1972) and Mary Kathryn Nagle’s *Manahatta* (2013). Although in this companion volume Native theater plays are not mentioned or analyzed as often as other literary works, especially the novel, the inclusion of a chapter on Indigenous North American drama certainly contributes to the visibility of a genre which has gone through a long history of silence and oppression and that remains “the most overlooked genre in Native American literatures” (Hunhdorf 2006: 13). In addition, the last two pieces of “Literary Forms” make reference to multiple works in other genres and media, such as film (Theodore Van Alst, Jr.), comics, graphic novels and digital media (Susan Bernardin). Theodore Van Alst, Jr.’s essay is very rewarding as it focuses on the cinematic adaptation of some literary works of the Native American Renaissance—a field of research that has not been very much explored yet—whilst also considering the differences between Native and non-Native filmic adaptations. At the same time, the chapter by Susan Bernardin is also very enlightening because it draws attention to the existence of works that engage in collaborative interplay between literary genres and image, suggesting a clear “tradition of innovation” in Native American literary studies (480) and reflecting the convergence between comics in the United States and the Native American visual storytelling tradition (481).

To conclude, *The Routledge Companion to Native American Literature* amply fulfils its goal in providing multiple and different critical issues essential to reading Native American literature. This companion volume is highly recommended for teachers and scholars of Native American literature, though not so much for readers interested in the development of Native American literature. The volume succeeds, however, in offering a whole array of essays that focus on important issues and aspects related to the complex landscape of American Indian literature, even if a basic knowledge of the field is a pre-requisite. For those new to Native American literature, I would recommend *The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature* (2006), or else risk disappointment or even confusion. But that may not necessarily be a problem.

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