

Canadian Literature in the Early Twenty-First Century: The Emergence of an Inter-American Perspective

One of the most exciting new developments in contemporary Canadian literature has to do with its growing self-realization as not only a rich and diverse national literature but comparatively, as an American, or New World, literature as well. Although Canadian writers and critics have long been aware of their status as being simultaneously both “Canadian” and “American” (that is, of the Americas), they have tended to be leery of rushing into a field I, for some time now, have described as inter-American literature, the systematic study of the literatures of the Americas from a comparative point of view (see Fitz). Rightly, Canadians have tended to be skeptical of what such a move might entail. For many Canadians, as for many Latin Americans, the worry has always been that if they entered into some sort of inter-American perspective, they would risk becoming subsumed by the powerful economic, political, and cultural leviathan that is the United States and lose their identity.¹ Beyond this, there is the old problem of nomenclature. In 1929, for example, in his collection of essays, *It Needs to be Said*, Canadian writer, Frederick Philip Grove, objects to the appropriation of the term, “America,” by a single nation as opposed to what he views as its more proper status as a descriptor of an entire hemisphere. This same issue has long irked Latin Americans, too, and for very similar reasons.

But with the establishment of inter-American literary study as a new and exciting subcategory of Comparative Literature as a discipline, one based on extensive language and literary study at the graduate level, it has become clear that our many American literatures can be studied individually, as separate and distinctive national literatures, at the same time that they are studied collectively, à la the comparative method, as New World cultural phenomena. Indeed, well trained professional comparatists do precisely this as a matter of practice. And, of course, one can use Canadian literature, of both English and French expression, or involving a Native American, or First Peoples, language and culture, as the basis for an inter-American study involving, say, Brazilian or Spanish American literature as well. In fact, as W. J. Keith has remarked, the “literary history of the North American continent looks different when Canadian materials are taken into consideration” (7), and this is why the Canadian perspective is so badly needed in the inter-American project. As Brazilian, Spanish American, and Caribbean writers and scholars are becoming increasingly aware, “Canada provides a North American experiment different from the one regarded as definitive (‘manifest’) by most residents of the United States” (Davidson 3), the one culture in the Americas that continues to lag behind in terms of its commitment to learning about its hemispheric neighbors. To put this another way, because, as a discipline, Comparative Literature demands extensive training at the graduate level in the languages and literatures of at least three different literary heritages (with one serving as the scholar’s primary area of specialization), Canadian literature, like Brazilian literature or Mexican literature, can enter into inter-American fray without fear of losing its identity as a distinct and identifiable national literature. Indeed, professional comparatists strive always to recognize, maintain, and embrace the very real differences, or unique qualities, that go into the composition of particular authors, texts, and national literatures. Difference, in fact, and not similarity, is the key ingredient in the comparative cake. Comparative Literature will not survive as an academic discipline if these demanding standards are watered down or dispensed with, and it is important to note that inter-Americanists, well trained in the languages, cultures, and literary histories of

¹ Canada, for example, was not a signatory to the original OAS (Organization of American States) charter, as set forth in 1948.

the Americas, are re-energizing and re-invigorating their parent discipline. I am confident that Canadianists, long accustomed to making use of the comparative method (see Blodgett, 1979; Valdés and Hutcheon) and to examining those qualities, themes, or forms they find most defining of their own national literary identity, will uphold these high standards, and particularly so as they apply to the inter-American project and their long-awaited participation in it. By the year 2010, Canadian literature has not only “survived,” to reference an important point made by Margaret Atwood back in 1972 (see Atwood), it has flourished and in both its English and its French-speaking traditions. The old “garrison mentality,” so elegantly outlined by Northrop Frye back in the 1960s, is giving way to a new sense of internationalism for Canadian letters, first in the Americas and then in the world.² And for enthusiasts of the comparative and inter-American perspective, this is an entirely felicitous turn of events, a point underscored by several eminent Canadianists, including David H. Hayne, Larry Shouldice, Eva-Marie Kröller, and Antoine Sirois, among others, back in 1982 as they participated in the Tenth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association held in New York City.³

I

As proof of this new, if still guarded, interest in a more inter-American context for Canadian literature, we have only to consider the spate of recently published books and essays that engage this issue. One of the earliest books to envision Canadian letters in both a national and inter-American is W. H. New’s *A History of Canadian Literature*. First published in 1989 (with a second edition appearing in 2003), Professor New’s discerning and comprehensive study carefully traces the sometimes fraught interweaving of Canada’s two great literary traditions, the English and the French, into a single, mutually enriching national literature. But more than this, New also examines how Canadian writers are more and more interacting with writers and texts from not only the United States but Latin America as well (see also Hazelton, 219-223). In this sense, New’s more integrated study departs from a longstanding and deeply rooted view of Canadian literature as being made up of two distinct, and separate, traditions, a view exemplified in Carl F. Klinck’s venerable *Literary History of Canada* (1965; 1976, 2nd ed.). While discussions of such figures as James, Whitman, Poe, and Faulkner are to be expected, New’s recognition of the importance (to Canadian writers) of such writers as García Márquez marks a refreshingly inter-American expansion of Canada’s critical perspective and sense of self. New’s cogent commentary on how the various drafts of Malcolm Lowry’s *Under the Volcano* (1947), which was partly composed in Mexico, dealt with issues of guilt, memory, and the weight of the past while also experimenting with a variety of “myths of narrative closure,” some of which

2 Interestingly, this very argument was alluded to in 1970, as the “Boom” period of Spanish American literature was reaching its zenith in the United States, by D. G. Jones, in his book, *Butterfly on Rock*.

3 This Tenth Congress was a historic event of considerable importance because it represented the first time that the ICLA, in a sense the governing body for the various national Comparative Literature associations around the world, officially recognized inter-American literature as a particularly promising new field for comparative scholarship, one that, while still resting on extensive language training, was also bringing our various American cultures and states together in ways hitherto not envisioned. That Canadian scholars were so profoundly involved in the proceedings highlights the extent to which Canadians were, and are, committed to both Comparative Literature as a useful humanistic and intellectual discipline and to the then emergent, and intrinsically comparative, field of inter-American literary study.

derive from Mexico's ancient Native American heritage (220). An earlier Lowry novel, *Ultramarine* (1933), had been written under the influence of the American writer, Conrad Aiken (220). New also notes how Canadian writers Dennis Gruending, Eli Mandel, Earle Birney, and George Ryga have found travel to Latin America a source of political and artistic stimulation, while Chile "figures politically in poems by Tom Wayman and Andrew Suknaski (227). One could also add to this list the name of Canadian poet, P. K. Page, whose *Brazilian Journal* (1987) and *Hand Luggage: A Memoir in Verse* (2006) both demonstrate how Brazil is rapidly emerging as a Latin American nation of particular importance to Canada. In discussing Daphne Marlatt, whose novel, *Zócalo* (1977), offers a Canadian-based inter-American perspective, New notes how lyrically charged and "genre-crossing 'journals' all extend the range of the autobiographical method" and how for Marlatt, as for the Brazilian writer, Clarice Lispector, "the world is phenomenological, an extension of consciousness. Perception is structure. Poetry and critical appreciation come essentially to be one" (246). New also reiterates the well-known influence exerted (along with that of Faulkner) by Colombia's Gabriel García Márquez and his practice of "magical realism" on Jack Hodgins (262) and how Audrey Thomas makes use of Mexico as a setting for a woman's story concerning "a failure of male commitment" and abandonment (253). And, in a short discussion that resonates deeply with Latin Americans, New also deliberates on how, in the 1980s and after, writers in Québec "constructed a kind of dialectic between a desire for separation . . . and a recognition that life goes on" and to look into how they "might engage with whatever a *pure laine* mind set had previously defined as 'other': a particular conception of 'Canada,' for instance, or allophone and Native cultures within Quebec, or 'America,' conceived of continentally and embracing Mexico and the United States" (291). Several excellent inter-American oriented books emerged from this cultural and political re-assessment, including Jacques Poulin's very teachable *Volkswagen Blues* (1984), Jacques Godbout's *Une histoire américaine* (1986), François Barcelo's inter-American trilogy, *Nulle part* (1989), *Ailleurs en Arizons* (1991), and *Pas tout à fait en Californie* (1992), Monique LaRue's *Copies conformes* (1989), and Nicole Brossard's fine *Le désert mauve* (1987). For LaRue, concentrating on what is presented as the Americanization of Québec, "the 'copy' is more 'American,' . . . than the 'original'" (New 291), a political and cultural sensibility often shared by Latin Americans as well. Brossard, like Clarice Lispector (a writer with whom she is often compared), tends to push against "syntactic and semantic conventions" and to blur the old boundaries between prose and poetry in a quest for a kind of language that disrupts, undermines, or even effaces the standard gender distinctions (New 254-255). And for "Native *Québécoise*" writer, Jovette Marchessault, as for both Clarice Lispector and her Brazilian compatriot, Helena Parente Cunha (particularly as evidenced in *Mulher no Espelho*, 1983), the vision of a culture in which men and women exist together but in which both benefit from an absence of male domination, in which the dangers of any rigidly controlling ideological system (conservatism, for example) are made manifest, and one in which female power, defined largely by "control over choice," looms large (New 250).

The concluding sections of New's ground breaking study in particular point to the various ways in which Canadian writers are engaging with a host of issues, ranging from questions of literary influence and reception to those of immigration, cultural identity, and the environment, that put them into close contact with writers, artists, and intellectuals from the Caribbean, Spanish America, and Brazil. We learn, for example, that writers, artists, and intellectuals with Latin American connections are fairly "recent arrivals," many of whom are emigrating to Canada as "political exiles:" the Chileans, Gonzalo Millán and Leandro Urbina, the Salvadorian, Alfonso Quijada Urías, and the Argentinian, Pablo Urbanyi (329). Two Brazilian

writers, Sergio Kokis and Marilú Mallet, both relocated to Québec, where, writing in French and Portuguese, they have enjoyed a warm and enthusiastic reception. “Kokis, in particular, attracted critical attention . . . for *L’art du maquillage* (1997; tr. as *The Art of Deception*, 2002), *Le pavillon des miroirs* (1995; tr. as *Funhouse*, 1999), and *Salimbanques* (1999)” (329). “Implicitly,” New notes, highlighting, from a Canadian perspective, an issue well-known to inter-Americanists, “Kokis’s writing asks about the parameters of cultural identity . . . : what is real when a person is displaced, or when a person acquires allegiances to more than one place?,” a complex question also taken up by Guillermo Verdecchia in *Fronteras americanas* (1993) (330). New concludes this section of his book with a discussion of another prominent “Latin American Canadian” writer, the Argentine, Alberto Manguel, who has gained an avid following in Canada as a gay rights commentator, an anthropologist, and as a broadcaster (330). He also notes the emergence, in Canadian letters, of the Chileans, Jorge Etcheverry and Carmen Rodríguez, both of whom work in Spanish as well as English, and the growing interest in Latin America that is being shown by a number of other Canadian writers, scholars, and investigators. Writers like Gary Geddes, Andrew Pyper, and George McWhirter have lived in Latin America and made it the subject and setting of much of their work while travel writer Ronald Wright has explored connections between Native Peoples in the Americas and “ethnoanthropologist and conservationist,” Wade Davis has done important work with respect to “toxic and narcotic practices in . . . the Amazon and the Caribbean,” among other places (330). As New makes plain, while Canadian interest in Spanish America and Brazil has been steady and growing for a long time, it is currently enjoying a period of pronounced activity, all of which augers well for Canada’s growing involvement in the inter-American project. Indeed, for the inter-Americanist, New’s history must be considered required reading.

II

Another important publication that needs to be noted in this same regard is *Americas’ Worlds and the World’s Americas/Les mondes des Amériques et les Amériques du monde*, edited by Amaryll Chanady, George Handley, and Patrick Imbert. Appearing in 2006, this collection of essays concentrates on how Canadian letters might contribute to the development of inter-American literature as a new and emergent field. One of the most thoughtful essays of this very fine collection is that of Márcio Bahia, a young Brazilian scholar about to earn his Ph.D. from the University of Ottawa and whose research agenda involves the core notion of *Américanité* in the development of our various national literatures in the New World. For our purposes here, perhaps the key point that Professor Bahia makes is that English Canadian writers and critics, along with their counterparts in the United States,⁴ have tended, historically, not to embrace the hemispheric concept of *Americanity* (known elsewhere in the New World as *Americanidade*, *Americanidad*, and *Américanité*) as enthusiastically or as naturally as have writers from Brazil, Spanish America, and Québec (23-26; see also Braz, 2008, 126-127). And while there are clear signs that this situation is rapidly changing in English Canada (see Braz 131-132), there is a continuing reluctance to embrace the inter-American perspective in the United States, and

4 Although it would indeed appear that English-speaking North America has tended to view with askance the inter-American project, it would be a mistake, I think, to assume that the reaction of writers and critics in the United States is identical to that of writers and critics in English-speaking Canada. While both groups have, seemingly, been slow to embrace this comparative and Pan-American approach to New World literary production, there would also appear to be a number of significant historical and cultural differences between them, differences that need to be explored in greater depth and detail.

particularly in its many departments of English and American literature, where “American” literature is still typically regarded as the exclusive province of the United States alone. It is quite possible to think that, in part, at least, this reluctance is more a matter of history, tradition, and linguistic training than anything else, though deeper and more divisive issues of supposed cultural inferiority and superiority do come into play as well. Regardless of how we come at it, however, this crucial question of *Américanité*, or “Americanness,” is one that Canadian scholars are now investigating in provocative and enlightening ways.

Though not an essay, Patrick Imbert’s cogent Introduction comes at this same question by asking two closely related questions, both of which are fundamental to the entire inter-American project, its conception as well as its praxis: “How has the development of new inter-American networks transformed Latin American, Canadian and U.S. cultures and what is the status of their efforts being made to protect their cultural values and to preserve their history?”/“De quelle manière le développement de nouveaux réseaux inter-américains transforme-t-il les cultures des Amériques latines, du Canada et des États-Unis, et quel est l’état présent de leurs efforts pour protéger leurs valeurs culturelles et leur patrimoine historique?” (4/5). The easier of the two, the first question leads us to re-consider the old question of identity, but this time from a distinctly comparative and newly inter-American perspective. How is it that we are simultaneously Canadian, Brazilian, and Mexican and “American,” and what does this mean for our futures, as individual nations and as parts of a collective whole, this thing we call America? We have, as Herbert Bolton demonstrated at the beginning of the twentieth-century, if not a common history, then certainly a New World history that unites us all. It is clear that we have all been transformed by this uniquely “American” history – by deeply inter-connected experience of it – and we are going to continue to be transformed by it. This American history that we all share is our common heritage, and while we know how it has been in the past (too often deceitful, exploitive, and shameful, but often enough noble and inspiring to remind us of how we *ought* to conduct our affairs and our relations with each other), what remains to be seen is how we will wish it to be in the years to come, and it is here that the inter-American project could help us – all of us – become less provincial and more respectful of others. Whether we will or not remains, of course, to be seen; a lot of ugly truths will have to be confronted about our shared American experience, and a lot of prejudices and bigotries will have to be jettisoned. But this can be done and, in its own modest way, the study of inter-American literature can help bring it about.

The second part of Professor Imbert’s question relates to questions of methodology, to how, exactly, we will do this, how we can study a newly expanded and hemispheric “American” literature and how we can do so without sacrificing the unique “cultural values”/“valeurs culturelles,” national identities, and histories that are involved. How, in short, can, say, Canadian literature be a definable, recognizable national literature while also being an American literature? For me, the answer lies the methodology that defines Comparative Literature as an academic discipline, one whose *sine qua non* rests not on literary theory, as many outside the profession believe, but on demonstrable fluency in at least three languages and on extensive graduate seminar work done in these languages. A professionally trained comparatist has in-depth training, at the level of the graduate seminar, in at least three different languages and literatures, one of which will be selected by the student as her primary area of specialization. Though demanding, the beauty of this curriculum is that it gives the doctoral student serious training in the authors, texts, and traditions of at least three national literatures and literary cultures, thus assuring that the student is prepared to speak of these literatures as separate, individual entities and to speak of them (and others) in a larger, more comparative framework, one built, moreover, not on any

spurious sense of hegemonic hierarchy or supposed “status” but on such *literary* issues as theme and motifs, genre and form, period and movement, theory and its manifestation, literature and another discipline (like music, film, history, or philosophy), issues of influence and reception, or translation. As opposed to the scholar trained, basically, in the language and literature of a single culture (the United States, for example), the professionally trained comparatist expects to work in (and in the language of) a single national literature department (French, for example, or Spanish and Portuguese), just as a narrow specialist would, but while also teaching classes, and conducting research projects, that involve writers, texts, cultures, and literary histories of other nations. In terms of inter-American literary study, then, the issue is not so much an *interest* in the other literatures of the New World (which we should all have) as one’s professional training and preparation, the languages one speaks, writes, and understands well enough to have successfully undertaken perhaps six or more graduate seminars in the languages presented as areas of expertise and who can therefore speak, in the language in question, as authoritatively as a narrow specialist would of authors, texts, and traditions concerning that national literature and language. The professional comparatist, in short, is the epitome of the teacher/scholar who brings both breadth and depth to a national literature department, and in the process both protects and nurtures it while also connecting it, in specific, concrete ways, to other literatures and cultures. Fortunately, as an abundance of recent work by a new generation of professionally trained comparatists in Canada, the United States, Spanish America, and Brazil⁵ clearly shows, the newly emergent field of inter-American literature is fast progressing in precisely this direction. And this bodes well for its continuing development as an exciting new academic field.

Authored by Amaryll Chanady, another essay from this same collection continues to explore the possibilities inherent in inter-American literary study. “An inter-American approach,” Chanady observes, “shifts the focus on the Americas as a hemispheric region which should be studied as a whole and sheds light on the way in which forms of community and self-representation have emerged in specific ways in this part of the world” (35). “An inter-American approach,” Chanady continues, to the literatures of the New World (an important part of which includes our still vital First People or Native American cultures and traditions) will open up a plethora of teaching and research possibilities for us, including comparative discussions of “commonality and divergences, of North-South influences, conflict and differentiation, and the emergence of new models emphasizing transnationality, hemispheric networks, border communities, and emerging social movements” (35). Overall, Chanady’s point is that Canadian letters, just as surely as Brazilian or Spanish American letters, has a “rich corpus of literary texts and essays” (Chanady 42) to draw upon in setting up new inter-American courses and research projects. What we must do next, of course, is take the time to read these works and to learn to appreciate them as Canadian texts, that is, as parts of the fascinating whole that is Canadian literature, while also learning to read them comparatively, as important pieces of our larger inter-American mosaic. And, although she does not state this explicitly, the path that Chanady would send us down to achieve this end is that of Comparative Literature as a discipline and of its distinctive methodology, one based on a recognition of similarities but one also designed to recognize *and embrace* the all-important differences that exist between texts and their expression of common themes, issues of periodization, theory, and forms. It is in this recognition and celebration of difference, textual as well as historical and cultural, that, coupled with extensive graduate level course work in at least three different languages and literatures, that defines the

5 The Brazilian Comparative Literature Association, for example, is very strong and may well boast the largest membership of any such group in the Americas.

comparative methodology and sets it apart from other forms of literary study.

III

Finally, attention must be paid to another important book that has just appeared, *Canada and Its Americas: Transnational Navigations*, edited by Winfried Siermerling and Sarah Phillips Casteel. Published in 2010 by the McGill-Queen's University Press, this collection of incisive and challenging essays greatly advances the place of Canadian literature in the inter-American project. But, importantly, even as it also takes up the question of Canada's existence as a national literature, in a age when the very notion of a "national" literature is being questioned (Siermerling and Casteel 9-10). As the editors correctly note, "Inter-American literary and cultural connections have always – and somewhat nervously – been monitored in Latin America . . . and in Canada, mostly with respect to the powerful United States," with the heart of the matter having to do with "a critique of the term 'America' itself" and its co-opting "by one national literature to the exclusion of other literatures of the hemisphere" (5). But the heart of Canada's complex relationship with its hemispheric neighbors is even more tangled than this. Indeed, as Carlos Gabriel Argüelles Arredondo has argued, seeking to explain Canada's never unfriendly but never overly engaged relationship with Latin America, it has basically accepted, historically speaking, the argument that the United States has effectively viewed Spanish America and Brazil its private sphere of influence. As Arredondo puts it, "les États-Unis considéraient l'Amérique latine comme leur aire d'influence exclusive" (qtd. by Braz, 131). For Braz, the long term effect of this position has resulted in "the almost universal equation in Canadian discourse of America with the United States," the result of which is that "most Canadians do not see themselves as part of the full continent" (131) and they are chary about being identified, in the narrow, nationalistic sense of the word, as "Americans" (Bahia 29-31). On the other hand, there are clear indications that this old attitude is now changing, with many Canadian writers and intellectuals engaging with their Latin American and Caribbean counterparts as never before.

One subject, racial and cultural hybridity (sometimes engaging the related issue of multiculturalism), has emerged as an obvious and fruitful point of comparison for Canadian inter-Americanists. In one of the book's most interesting essays, Albert Braz notes that while the Cuban scholar, Roberto Fernández Retamar (following José Martí), argues for viewing *meztizaje* as the taproot of "nuestra América," he fails to mention Canada's considerable experience with this same topic. More specifically, he fails to even note the intriguing case of Louis Riel, who, in the 1880s, was espousing "racial hybridity" and "mixed race" identity as a positive thing (Braz 130; 123⁶), a position that was being advocated in both Spanish America and, most pointedly, in Brazil. Citing the work of both Roberto Schwarz and Neil Besner, Braz suggests that Brazil and Canada, the two nations that are "routinely ignored in hemispheric discussions," could be referred to as "Outer America" (120), though one wonders whether to do so might also suggest, erroneously, that they are somehow marginal in terms of their importance to the inter-American project. According to Braz, however, the only Latin American writer known to be aware of Riel

6 Braz cites, as an example of Riel's pride in his "*Canadien* ancestry," the poem, "Le peuple Métis Canadien français:"

Métis et Canadiens ensemble
Français, se nos trois éléments
S'amalgament bien, il me semble
Que nous serons un jour plus grande.
(1985, vol. 4, 324)

was the nineteenth-century Brazilian poet, Mathias Carvalho, whose knowledge of the *Métis* nationalist was scanty indeed (130). In the United States, however, the same issue, miscegenation, was regarded by much of the prevailing white, male power structure as not only horrifying but (until the 1960s) but illegal in many states as well. To get a sense of the fear, loathing, and violence that even the thought of racial mixing could engender in some citizens of the United States, one has only to read Faulkner's *Light in August* or *Absalom, Absalom!* Why such a glaring difference exists, between the ways miscegenation is viewed in Canada, Brazil, Spanish America, and the Caribbean and the way it has long been viewed in the United States would make for a most useful and informative inter-American study. In Canada, to sharpen the contrast, an interesting distinction is often made between the English-speaking and Protestant "Halfbreeds" and the French-speaking and Catholic *Métis*, the grouping associated with Riel, whose anti-Canadian Confederation stance led him to urge President Grover Cleveland to annex Canada's Northwest provinces and make them part of the United States (Braz 122-123). While the issue of racial hybridity in the Americas is not exactly a new idea (see Fitz, 70-94), it is unquestionably a crucial issue and one that needs more comparative inquiry, particularly with respect to its Canadian manifestations. In noting the important contributions of such Canadian leaders and writers as Riel, Pauline Johnson, William Arthur Deacon, Uma Parameswaran, George Elliott Clarke, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, and, most recently, Suzette Mayr to this very fundamental New World topic, Braz's essay offers the inter-Americanist a wealth of possible research projects.

Two other essays from this collection deserve special mention as well, Monika Giacoppe's comparative study of Québécois and Chicano/a literatures and Hugh Hazelton's examination of transcultural and national identity in Alejandro Saravia's *Rojo, amarillo y verde*. While Professor Giacoppe considers the relatively marginal status of Québécois and Chicano/a literature within larger, more influential literary systems, their affinity for particular themes (biological and cultural *métissage*, for example, the Native American tradition, or female sexuality and language), for the genre known as the "novela de la tierra" and the "roman du terroir," and for the striking preponderance of women writers in each tradition, Professor Hazelton offers both a historical overview of literary relations between Canada and Latin America and a close reading of a significant work of recent "Hispanic Canadian" literature, *Rojo, amarillo y verde* (2003). Written by the "Bolivian Canadian" author, Alejandro Saravia, this novel "stands out as emblematic of the position of Canada within Latin America and of Latin America within Canada" (222). Of particular value to literary historians, Hazelton also notes that the "earliest known anthology of Canadian writing published in Brazil . . . was a selection of Quebec poetry edited by Jean Désy, a Canadian diplomat, and published in French in São Paulo in 1943" (219) and that the "first major Canadian novel to have an impact in Latin America was Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano* . . . , which caused a considerable stir in Mexican letters" (220). Hazelton also remarks that "almost forty institutions and universities . . . in Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, Mexico, and Cuba" currently have Canadian Studies programs, and that the "Brazilian association publishes the review *Interfaces Brasil/Canadá*, which publishes comparative pieces," as does the Mexican journal, the *Revista Mexicana de Estudios Canadienses* (221). Divided into four sections, "Defending the Nation?," "Indigenous Remappings of America," "Postslavery Routes," and "Québec Connections," and strengthened by a detailed and provocative introduction, entitled "Canada and Its Americas," Siermerling and Casteel's book opens up fertile new lines of inter-American literary discourse even as it concretizes the many contributions, real and potential, that Canadian literature is making to it.

Canada and Its Americas is also useful because it highlights what I see as essential question we all have to think carefully about as we think about entering our various New World literatures into the forum of inter-American literature. The question is simple: How, exactly, will we do this? But, as is often the case with simple questions, the answer turns out to be considerably more complicated. In the United States, we are already seeing programs in Comparative Literature taking the lead in developing this new field, as well they should since, in 1982, the world governing body, the ICLA (the International Comparative Literature Association), officially designated inter-American study as a promising new area of study for comparative work. Inherently comparative themselves, however, departments of Spanish and Portuguese, most of which offer extensive course work in the languages and literatures of both Spanish America and Brazil, are also emerging as innovative leaders in inter-American scholarship. Departments of French that offer extensive course work in the literatures of Québec and the Franco-phone Caribbean could also become key players in this same game. And because something very similar can also be said of departments of, or programs in, Canadian literature, it seems natural that such academic units as these will lead the way in terms of developing fruitful inter-American scholarship. Possessed of two of the New World's richest, most diverse, and most imaginative literary cultures, in fact, Brazil and Canada have a great deal to contribute to the inter-American dialogue.

The fly in the ointment, as far as inter-American studies are concerned, lies, in my opinion, here in the United States (see Bahia 23; 26; 28), a culture still suffering from a stubborn and too often truculent insularity that, as manifested in the rise of a particularly toxic form of conservatism between 1970 and the present time, is rendering it less and less able to deal with a rapidly changing world. Feeling themselves trapped, perhaps, by their long standing claim to "own" the ideas of "America" and "American" literature (a foolishly arrogant claim and one long decried by their hemispheric neighbors, north and south) and by their obdurate tendency toward monolingualism (in fact if not in theory), English departments in the United States are struggling over how they want to relate to the emergent field of inter-American literary study (see Scott; Siemerling, 2005). As part of this debate, some are militating in favor of what has been proposed as the "International American Studies" approach, arguing that since the term "American" really does apply not merely to one New World nation but to all of them, we are justified in using the term, "International American Studies," to organize our studies of the literatures of the Americas. Although there is an undeniable logic to this argument, one must nevertheless wonder if, in realistic terms, any form of the term, "American Studies," can really ever escape its original and defining connection to the United States. Though this thorny problem may well be less severe in an English and American literature department located, say, in Montréal, Buenos Aires,⁷ Mexico City, or Rio de Janeiro, where the concept of "American Studies" would likely be understood in a more hemispheric and comparative way, it is still an issue with which we will all have to deal.

But beyond the problem of "American Studies" as a function, first and foremost, of the United States alone (and as a product of the Cold War era), there is the even greater, and perhaps intractable, problem of disciplinary training: How likely is it that, as administrative components

7 During the 1950s, for example, Borges was a Professor of English and American literature at the University of Buenos Aires and wrote many provocative essays about such canonical writers as Hawthorne, Emerson, Twain, Poe, and James. In addition, he also translated into Spanish such notables as Faulkner [his recasting of *The Wild Palms* was instrumental in the conceptualization of the "nueva narrativa hispanoamericana" during the 1940s], e. e. cummings, Hart Crane, Wallace Stevens, and Delmore Schwartz.

of English departments, programs in “American Studies” will ever demand the kind of extensive, multi-year foreign language study (in Spanish, Portuguese, and French, for example) that is routinely required by inter-American doctoral students in Comparative Literature programs? And lacking this kind of graduate seminar level language and literature training (where all work is done in the language being studied), how can effectively English-only “American Studies” scholars ever expect to understand the authors, texts, and literary histories of these other New World literatures? Looking toward the future, can the training demanded by the “American Studies” approach, which simply does not demand the same kind of substantive foreign training demanded by good Comparative Literature programs, be expected to produce scholars of inter-American literature who can work with the texts of our different New World literatures as closely as they need to? The question is not an idle one, as it relates to the future of our discipline and the ways differently trained scholars approach it. To claim a smattering of, say, Spanish, Portuguese, or French is simply not sufficient to read Borges, Clarice Lispector, or Nicole Broussard in their languages, to understand their aesthetic importance and literary evolutions, or their relevance to the larger literary histories of their respective nations. This type of integrated, in-depth knowledge comes only from sustained study, over a stretch of years and academic semesters, at the graduate seminar level. While it is most assuredly a good idea to study more Spanish if one wants, in 2010, to be a serious scholar of the literature and culture of the United States (that is, as an “Americanist” in the old sense of the term), to claim *only* English and Spanish, and to claim expertise *only* in terms of the literature and culture of the United States alone, is simply not sufficient to make one a true inter-Americanist, where a more authentically comparative approach is required. Nor would one be a true inter-Americanist if one chose to study *only* the literatures of Canada (both traditions), of Mexico, or of Brazil. To be an inter-Americanist, as opposed to someone who (laudably) has an interest in our hemispheric neighbors, one must cross borders, linguistically and culturally, and study the language of the “Other” to the extent that its literature, history, and culture can be read in its own language. Always valuable, translations can help, but, for a variety of reasons, they are limited in terms of what they can do for the would-be inter-Americanist who is restricted, in realistic terms, to the language, literature, history, and culture of a single nation. Scholars who concentrate on the writers and literary histories of a single nation are immensely important, and their work is always valuable, but it is, by nature, different from those scholars who are trained comparatists. And while the two can, and do, work closely and comfortably together, they come at the same texts and authors with different critical perspectives and different expectations.

Polyglot and multi-cultural in their training and intellectual experience, many Caribbeanists, Canadianists, and Latin Americanists are deeply wary of even an internationalized “American Studies” approach to the study of inter-American letters, one that stresses, and rightly so, our common *Americanité* (an issue itself problematic for many). As is painfully clear to anyone who wishes to study it, our often violent, unjust, and conflicted New World historical experience, a recognition of which must be part of every inter-Americanist’s training, bears this skepticism out. There is, unfortunately, a stigma associated with the term, “American Studies,” that still rankles a great many writers and intellectuals outside the United States and that, with good reason, renders them suspicious of the entire inter-American project. This suspicion is one of the obstacles we must all work to overcome. Although the “International American Studies” approach could, conceivably, be successful, in the long run, I believe that the more neutral, more democratic, and more language intensive methodology of Comparative Literature offers the best, and most lasting, solution to this fundamental problem. And it is in this fashion, the comparative

approach, that Canadianists, like the Latin Americanists (see Valdés and Kadir), will find themselves able to continue to develop as guardians of distinct national literatures even as they enter into new and exiting inter-American configurations. The former need not be subsumed by the latter. Indeed, even a cursory exploration of the current bibliography shows that two of the most active sub-categories of inter-American scholarship at the present time have to do with comparative studies involving Canadian letters, from both its French and English-language traditions, and Latin American letters, including both Spanish-speaking Spanish America and giant Portuguese-speaking Brazil. The new scholarly works mentioned above make this new trend quite clear, and there is no reason to think that it is going to abate anytime soon. Though the literature of the United States will always be a likely player in the inter-American game, there is no doubt that literary, cultural, and historical relations between Canada and Latin America offer a hitherto unexplored wealth of opportunities for exciting comparative teaching and research. I would say, in fact, that Canadian and Brazilian studies hold particular promise for the budding inter-Americanist, a path already being explored by scholars like Zila Bernd,⁸ W. H. New, Albert Braz, Hugh Hazelton, Yvan Lamonde, Walter Moser, and Márcio Bahia.

In conclusion, then, let me say that the entrance of Canadian writers, scholars, and critics into the inter-American game (which we could characterize as some sort of effervescent fusion of *fútbol*, *futebol*, and hockey, where Lionel Messi, Garrincha, and Pelé sit down over beer with Maurice and Henri Richard, Gordie Howe, and Wayne Gretzky) is a most welcome and invigorating event. Let me also say, or reiterate, that it is the non-hierarchical, non-hegemonic methodology of Comparative Literature, where texts and authors are studied not in terms of their “nationality” but in terms of common themes, genres, or patterns of influence and reception, or in terms of how well (or how differently) they reflect the defining characteristics of a certain period or literary movement, that is going to allow Canadian literature to continue to grow and develop as a distinctive national literature at the same time that, as an equal player (a new line coming onto the ice, as it were), it enters into the inter-American paradigm. As a rational and relatively objective method for selecting specific texts for close scrutiny, the comparative method allows the scholar a uniquely successful way to avoid the pitfalls of nationalistic hegemony. The comparative methodology has worked well for the other national literatures of the Americas and it will work well for Canadian inter-Americanists, too.

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⁸ Bernd, for example, in collaboration with Michel Peterson, has brought out *Confluences littéraires Brésil/Québec: Les bases d’une comparaison* (1992), a collection of essays that illustrates just how useful and productive the comparative approach can be to the study of inter-American literature.

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