

## Indigenous Literature and Comparability

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**Abstract:** In her article "Indigenous Literature and Comparability" Katherine Durnin discusses some of the barriers to the comparative study of Indigenous literature alongside non-Indigenous literature. These barriers include the Eurocentrism of traditional comparative literature, certain aspects of postcolonial theory and, above, all the assumption that Indigenous and Western epistemologies belong to separate and incommensurable worlds. Durnin examines some recent theoretical and critical approaches that offer ways to bridge the two worlds and make comparative literature an ethical space of mutual respect and understanding.

**Katherine DURNIN****Indigenous Literature and Comparability**

There are many barriers to the comparative study of Indigenous and non-Indigenous literature. Nevertheless, recent developments in Indigenous literary criticism and publishing, and in the discipline of comparative literature itself, suggest that those barriers are gradually giving way to a rethinking of the relationships between those literatures and the cultures that produce them. One of the main impulses behind the comparative study of literature is the recognition that literary forms and practices are shared across cultures, and the desire to discover what exactly is shared and how that sharing takes place. Consequently, some comparative studies focus on universals such as the nature of literary language or the fundamental features of narratives. Many literary categories — poetry, drama, narrative, and the genres and sub-genres within those broader categories — can be studied across cultures. This type of approach has been seen as a salutary corrective to nationalism in the study of literatures and indeed as the only means of establishing a truly scientific approach to literature (see Chow 289). Defining and studying national literatures has been a part of nation-building since the nineteenth century, but comparative literature counteracts the tendency to claim national superiority or precedence on the basis of the imagined "genius" or specificity of a nation. Where a British scholar would trace the origins of the novel to Richardson or Defoe, a French scholar to Madame de Lafayette, and a Spanish scholar to Cervantes, a comparatist traces cultural interactions to demonstrate that the novel actually has multiple origins in different cultures.

The traditional approach to comparative study has been under suspicion since the 1960s when poststructuralist theory began to discredit the notion of universality as a mask for Eurocentric hegemony exercised through master narratives and discourses. The antidote to those homogenizing pressures has been to lend greater value to differences than to the sameness of universals. In comparative literature, that shift of focus was acknowledged in the 1993 report of the American Comparative Literature Association entitled *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* with articles by US-American scholars in comparative literature. Henceforth — at least in the US — comparative studies would seek grounds for comparison within the realities of multiculturalism, which had itself emerged as a more potent counter-weight to nationalism than the idea of universals. The suggestion that multiculturalism — or, in current parlance and theoretical development "interculturalism" — should be a driver of comparative studies came as no surprise to Canadian comparatists, who had already been grappling with the multicultural nature of Canadian literature. E.D. Blodgett's entry on Canadian Comparative Literature in the *Canadian Encyclopedia* traces the development of the field from bicultural French-English studies toward more diverse studies premised not only on linguistic differences but also on cultural differences expressed within the same language. In *Five-Part Invention*, Blodgett sets out his vision of Canadian literature as a whole composed of French, English, ethnic, Native, and Inuit components. Theoretically, it should be possible to compare texts from any two or more of those groups, on the basis of a shared geographical space and history. Similarly, Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek postulates in his frameworks of comparative literature and comparative cultural studies explicit criticism of and opposition to Eurocentrism and the national approach of comparative literature and propagates in application the inclusion of all "Other," thus including Indigenous literatures and cultures (see, e.g., *Comparative Literature*, "From Comparative Literature"). However, in reality while studies covering Québécois, English, and ethnic texts in French, English, or heritage languages are common, they rarely involve comparisons with Indigenous (i.e., Canadian First Nations, Métis, or Inuit) texts.

The intellectual basis for the reluctance to compare Native and non-Native literatures directly can be traced to Edward Said's *Orientalism*, one of the founding texts of postcolonial theory. Said makes a point of examining European Orientalist discourse itself, without attempting to define the "real" Orient that is being misrepresented. The consensus is that all textual representations of "others" by European writers are Orientalizing because they are caught up in a pre-existing discourse that they cannot escape. Postcolonial literature is analyzed separately as a form of reaction and resistance to colonial representation and discourse. In North America (U.S. and Canada), a similar methodological architecture can be seen in the large number of works on "images of the Indian" that outline in detail the stereotypes and representations that have governed white people's views of natives from first contact onward (such studies include those by Monkman; Goldie;

Francis; and Therien in Canada, and Stedman; Berkhofer; and Macdonald in the U.S., to name just a few). Indigenous literature is then positioned in opposition to colonial ideology, an ideology understood to permeate and thus invalidate all white-authored representations of Native people. Strict barriers are set up to govern which texts can be brought together within the same critical space according to the ethno-racial identities of the authors. However, many white postcolonial critics have already shown themselves unwilling to do certain kinds of comparative studies. That is, they will not compare white-authored texts to Native-authored texts, not even to illustrate how resistance responds to specific details of colonial representation of Indigenous people. Terry Goldie, for example, makes his refusal to do so in *Fear and Temptation*. His argumentation is based on the notion that comparison involves inevitably passing judgment and that such a move is precluded by a sort of cultural hygiene: "Regardless of Arnoldian claims for the freedom of the disinterested liberal critic, I question the right of any person to judge another's representation of his or her own culture" (217). Certain kinds of comparisons by certain kinds of critics are judged unsuitable for a postcolonial approach. The cultural sovereignty claimed by formerly (or currently) colonized Indigenous peoples invalidates those comparisons as a matter of ethics. Followed to its logical conclusion, such a stricture would lead to the wholesale rejection of comparative literature. The flaw in the argument lies not only in assuming that cross-cultural understanding or close reading is impossible, but also that literary criticism involves a determination by the critic of whether a writer is "getting it right" (217) rather than a proposed reading or interpretation that may be accepted or rejected by others.

In the broader practice of comparative literature, the old approach of tracking influence or generic similarity as a basis for comparison has been discredited because it tends to take Europe as the centre from which influence flows toward the margins. Rey Chow notes that this "Europe and Its Others" paradigm for comparative study often leads to an "asymmetrical distribution of cultural capital and intellectual labor, so that cultures of Europe (the grid), such as French and German, tend to be studied with meticulousness while cultures on the margins of Europe, such as those in Latin America, Africa, or Asia, even when they are differentiated by unique, mutually unintelligible linguistic traditions, may simply be considered examples of the same geographical areas (and hence not warranting comparative study)" (294). The result is richly nuanced and historicized study on one side, while marginalized "others" are "lump[ed] together ... with scant regard to exactly the same kinds of details and internal dynamics of thought that, theoretically speaking, should be part of the study of any tradition" (294-95). This process sets up a vicious circle that favors the development of further imbalanced comparative projects in which European writing and thinking are examined more closely than non-European ones. For postcolonial critics, new forms of comparison stage a reversal of the old paradigm because the literature of postcolonial nations is always "writing back" to Europe in some sense. In this view, even writing that is insistently Indigenous is implicitly responding to the colonial experience. Indeed, says Chow, rather than placing languages on a plane of parity, as was the norm in the old comparative literature, comparison could include "a critique of *the uneven distribution of cultural capital among languages themselves* (303; emphasis in the original). Such a comparative practice would fit with one of the major concerns of contemporary cultural work in Indigenous communities, that is, the recovery of Native languages as a central component of their cultures. That such a recovery is well under way is evident in the fact that Indigenous writers are increasingly using Native languages as a means of expression. Métis poet Gregory Scofield and Cree poet Louise Halfe, for example, have recently published poetry collections that contain significant sections in Cree. As the use of Native languages develops in literature, comparatists will have to respond by studying those languages as a basis for their studies. That will require, in turn, that attitudes toward Native language learning accommodate the comparatist credo that "one does not learn languages to bolster identity. The opposite, if anything — one ventures out to touch the other" (Spivak 1612). For the time being, however, one of the enduring realities of colonialism in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States has been the widespread Anglicization of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous writers have struggled in the past with how to write in "the enemy's language" (see Harjo and Bird), but there is growing acceptance of it as just another of the languages of Indigenous expression: "While English — and other colonial languages — may be 'the enemy's language,' it can be helpful and useful to us just like any other languages we have the opportunity to learn" (Ortiz xiv). For critics, however, there is a danger that the apparent linguistic transparency of Indigenous texts in English can lead to a presumption of cultural transparency. That is, English speakers might assume that they

are authorized to consume and interpret texts written in English without attending to their undercurrents of cultural specificity and resistance.

The old insistence in comparative literature that texts must be read in the original language was a methodological shortcut: it assumed that anyone who had learned the language in question well enough to read the text would also be conversant with its culture of origin and thus able to engage in interpreting its meaning. That assumption is negated by histories of imperialism and colonialism, which have resulted in multiculturalism — that is, cultural distinctions that are expressed not in form (through different languages) but in content (through differences of theme, narrative scripts, characterization) and context. On the other hand, the fact that Indigenous people write in dominant languages has been central to their coming to voice since the 1970s. Their political self-fashioning and demands would have been more easily ignored by mainstream society if they had been confined to Native languages. Paradoxically, then, reading Indigenous literature as colonial resistance is in large part predicated on the fact that it is produced in the languages of colonial domination. The history of colonialism and the current centrality of identity issues within the literary realm are also having an impact on how comparative projects might be conceived. Kathleen Komar points out that "the growing feeling that only a member of a particular group is equipped to teach about the cultural sub-set is also problematic. In an age when identity, politics, and 'strategic essentialism' are stressed by scholars of various ethnic groups, comparatists must be very cautious about how they go about looking at two cultures in the context of each other" (288-89). While Komar suggests that the feeling of being "haunted by the other" may be as close as one can come to "fairness" in comparison (289), it is unlikely that such a criterion would satisfy Indigenous writers, given that this feeling is already a *sine qua non* of the postcolonial condition.

Indigenous literary critics and scholars (who are often writers as well) are concerned that white critical standards and theories do violence to Indigenous texts and constitute a continuation of colonial domination. Marie Battiste's comments on postcolonial theory are representative of this argument: "Postcolonial Indigenous thought should not be confused with postcolonial theory in literature. Although they are related endeavours, postcolonial Indigenous thought also emerges from the inability of Eurocentric theory to deal with the complexities of colonialism and its assumptions. Postcolonial Indigenous thought is based on our pain and our experiences, and it refuses to allow others to appropriate this pain and these experiences. It rejects the use of any Eurocentric theory or its categories" (212). At the same time, a refusal by non-Indigenous scholars to look at Indigenous texts could be seen as a denigration of Indigenous literature or an attempt to ghettoize it within the academy. Thus, says Renate Eigenbrod, "Although engaging critically with Indigenous texts is challenging and difficult, non-Indigenous scholars should not abdicate their responsibility of attempting to do so. Acquiring cultural knowledge is only a starting point of an ongoing process" (66). The question, then, is what stance non-Indigenous scholars should take when faced with demands for Indigenous critical sovereignty. In the introduction to her volume on "indigenist criticism," Joanne DiNova repeats the view that Indigenous scholars should "govern critical approaches to the literature of their own people," not only because of epistemological or historical differences, but also because of concerns that non-Indigenous scholars believe that Indigenous literature and scholarship "aren't any good" (3). In fact, non-Indigenous critics who are interested in studying Indigenous literature are hardly likely to dismiss it as inferior, and most would agree that the insights and priorities of Indigenous scholars are central to the field. Significantly, DiNova ultimately concludes that an inclusive form of Indigenous studies is more appropriate than identity-based scholarship: "Indigenous intellectualism, of which indigenist literary criticism is a component, is concerned with the well-being of the land (environmentalism) and the well-being of the people (social justice). Indigenist criticism works to dismantle the barriers between the disciplines ... The criticism proceeds as if academic barriers between the sacred and the secular were social constructs: its sense of connectedness is without limit. ... An indigenist criticism, then, does not abandon non-Native scholars; it simply abandons the intensely isolating and increasingly prevalent dance towards death into which colonialism urges all peoples of the earth" (180).

For comparative literature too, new theories and categories (what Chow calls "new terms") must be sought if it is to apply to Indigenous texts. What is not clear is whether a revamped methodology is enough: Battiste's suggestion that non-Native critics and scholars are apt to appropriate the pain and experiences of Native people is a commonly expressed concern. Nevertheless, the questions of language and readership must enter into the discussion. One might ask how

Indigenous texts could even be intelligible to their readerships if the Indigenous world view is inaccessible to non-Indigenous readers. Indeed, Indigenous texts often address a non-Indigenous audience as well as an Indigenous one. According to Thomas King's categories of native texts, only tribal literature would be addressed solely to tribal peoples. The other three types of texts — interfusional, polemical, and associational — are intended to some extent for non-Indigenous readers (13-15). Moreover, even tribal literature need not be entirely beyond the purview of Western ideas, though these ideas must be carefully incorporated into and controlled by dominant tribal views. In a convincing demonstration of the need for critics to "venture out to touch the other," rather than to obtusely assimilate the other into their own paradigms, Paula Gunn Allen juxtaposes alternative readings of the Keres story of Kochinnenako to show how a standard Eurocentric feminist reading is mistaken, while a "ritual" reading detects a substantially different message. According to Allen, a "useful social function of traditional tribal literature is its tendency to distribute value evenly among various elements, providing a model or pattern of egalitarian structuring of society as well as literature. However, egalitarian structures in either literature or society are not easily 'read' by hierarchically inclined westerners" (140-41). Still, Allen's ideal reading is not what appears to be the most traditional ritual reading, because it is coloured by the patriarchal assumptions of the translator and teller of the tale, reflecting the longstanding imbrications of patriarchal attitudes in the Western reception of native materials throughout the history of conquest and colonization. She therefore proposes a "feminist tribal" reading that restores the "gynarchical" tradition (223) by acknowledging the power and centrality of women in Keres society. This process of comparative reading of a single text is an effective tool for revealing often hidden biases within a given cultural worldview. It also shows that a Western perspective such as feminism is consistent with traditional epistemology, so that (modern) Western and traditional epistemologies need not be constantly placed in opposition to one another.

Allen's approach goes against the grain of much current thinking on Indigenous epistemology, which tends to emphasize its incommensurability with Western epistemology. In what might be called the "two-worlds" model of Indigenous and white (or Western) culture, fundamental differences exist between pan-Indian and pan-European meta-cultures or "worlds," quite apart from any superficial differences between, say, Anishnaabe and Cree culture on one hand, for example, and between French and English culture on the other. In fact, the word "culture" is rarely used in this context, since it seems inadequate to express the depth of the gulf between Indigenous people and people of European ancestry. The world view of Indigenous people in the Americas, at least, involves complex cosmologies deeply enmeshed with nature, the unity of all living beings, egalitarianism, reciprocity, and the maintenance of harmony, versus a European world view that places the human individual at the centre and toward the top of a hierarchy so that nature is to be subjugated and controlled (Dickason 59-62). Yvonne Nadine Vizina postulates that many of the issues surrounding the use of knowledge would make it necessary that researchers' intentions be crucial to their attitudes toward knowledge and thus Vizina is critical of the non-Indigenous attitude toward knowledge. Kanien'kehaka (Mohawk) philosopher Taiaiake Alfred draws an even more pointedly negative conclusion in his discussion of Native self-governance: "Nowhere is the contrast between Indigenous and (dominant) Western traditions sharper than in their philosophical approaches to the fundamental issues of power and nature. In Indigenous philosophies, power flows from respect for nature and the natural order. In the dominant Western philosophy, power derives from coercion and artifice — in effect, alienation from nature" (60). This negative attitude toward Western epistemology and values is part of Indigenous peoples' resistance to the colonialism that was based on and buttressed by that epistemology and those values. The efforts to restore Indigenous communities and cultures depend on the ability of activists and elders to revive Indigenous practices and values, give priority to Indigenous ways of knowing, and ensure that they are passed on to younger generations. This attachment of the moral to the epistemological poses a new challenge for comparative literature, which has always assumed that comparative methodology offers its own guarantees of distance, objectivity, and cultural parity. It should be noted that the epistemological impasse of the two-worlds model is not unique to settler-invader societies. Natalie Melas's discussion of "versions of incommensurability" shows that many possible comparisons in postcolonial literatures cannot be made on the basis of either universals or specificities. She suggests instead a search for "equivalences that do not unify" (275). In Canada, a similar search for equivalences that do not unify can be seen in Willie Ermine's notion of "ethical space" and in Ted Chamberlin's "common ground."

Approaching the two-worlds problem from an Indigenous perspective, Ermine characterizes it as originating in the misunderstanding and division that began with the arrival of Europeans in the Americas. There are a number of central ideas conveyed in this characterization of Indigenous/Western cultural contact: firstly, that contact was universally disastrous from the outset. No concession is made here to the recent turn in anthropology toward the notion that cultures are never pure entities but are always already hybridized and in the process of becoming further hybridized (a view most clearly articulated by such anthropologists as Jean-Loup Amselle, Serge Gruzinski, and James Clifford). Indeed, Ermine suggests that the continued entanglement is part of the pathology of relations between the two worlds. It should also be noted that this description of Indigenous/Western cultural contact encompasses all of colonial history as a dark and disastrous process for Indigenous people. That is, it is more concerned with offering an explanation of Indigenous peoples' current status and the strain in Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations than with examining the historical details of cultural contact. According to Ermine, the two world views are distinct and although he is speaking of Canada in particular, his ideas are obviously applicable to other countries). The consequence of Ermine's postulates and explanation is, logically, that the Eurocentric order must first be broken down and Indigenous peoples need to use "community models" to regain voice and vision, reassert their identities and remake themselves as a prerequisite to participating with non-Indigenous people on an even footing rather than in a position of subordination. And thus the next step in the process is the spontaneous appearance of ethical space. What Ermine is outlining is a form of cultural relativism in which ongoing cultural contact nevertheless requires that the distinct cultures in question arrive at some form of mutual recognition, and a *modus vivendi* based on respect and dialogue rather than conflict, domination, and resentment.

The move that Ermine calls for is a laudable and in some ways an achievable ideal, notably for scholars working in fields that bring them into direct contact with Indigenous people. However, it will be more difficult to achieve the sort of change that Ermine envisages in the overwhelmingly dominant model of Western science. It is difficult to imagine how the two epistemological systems could be brought into sync with one another on this basis, however, especially in the so-called hard sciences which are based on direct observation and objectivity and according to Ermine Indigenous epistemology is juxtaposed to them because it is based participatory consciousness and personal experiences with human, natural, and supernatural relationships. A possible solution to this problem is offered by Ted Chamberlin's notion of stories — including the stories of the Western sciences — as "ceremonies of belief" (239). By finding expressions that allow the Western mind to capture the notion of the sacred in culture — without the usual religious associations — Chamberlin shows that incommensurability could be overcome, or at least seriously diminished, by shifting the epistemological frame to show the points of conjunction between the Indigenous and Western worlds: "Ted's project is to persuade non-Aboriginal Canadians how much we ourselves already are like Aboriginals. White Canadians also spend our years as a tale that is told. It is a mistake, says Ted, to think that We have reason and They have myth; We have science and They have magic; We have history and They have story" (Kortenaar 3). Chamberlin is careful, in sketching out the "common ground" between the Indigenous and Western world views, to avoid the sort of binaristic thinking that too easily becomes categorical and exclusive. He asserts, for example, that the idea that Indigenous people think in a circular manner while Westerners think in a linear fashion is "nonsense, but it's stubborn nonsense" that creates conflicts "that are dependent on choices that we should not be making" (215).

Again, in outlining two different ways of thinking about the group — one in which individuality is valued above group identity, and the second in which people derive their individuality from the group to which they belong — Chamberlin defines them in neutral terms that do not implicitly place greater value in one view than in the other. In his very tone he demonstrates the sort of even-handed treatment of the two worlds that is often missing from discussions in which one is being defined and defended against the other. A truly ethical comparison of the two requires that neither be considered inherently superior. Further, an important aspect of Chamberlin's argument is his demonstration of how a search for common ground through a shift of frame can have more than purely theoretical effects. His most radical suggestion is that underlying title to the land should be given to aboriginal peoples. On one hand, he points out that this would be a "fiction," just as Crown title is a fiction, so that "The facts of life would remain the same." Yet, because this would mean a change of the story we tell ourselves about the land, everything would change fundamen-

tally: "Our understanding of the land would change. Our understanding of aboriginal peoples would change. Our understanding of ourselves would change. Our sense of the origin and purpose of our nations would change. And underlying title would finally provide a constitutional ceremony of belief in the humanity of aboriginal peoples in the Americas" (231). This is an example of how settler societies could find common ground with Indigenous people by shifting the story they tell themselves about the land itself. Perhaps most importantly for the study of literature, Chamberlin offers a way of thinking about stories — Indigenous or non-Indigenous — on the same plane, as ceremonies of belief rather than as opposed and antagonistic views of the world.

On the theoretical side, then, the work of developing what might be called "bridging theories" is already well under way. At the same time, the development of comparative literature as a cross-cultural or cross-epistemological practice will be aided by practical developments in publishing. Indigenous writers and editors are beginning to provide materials with which to build on some of the work already done in comparative studies of Indigenous literatures amongst themselves. In a recent review of two poetry collections containing texts by Native authors from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States, Cheryl Suzack identifies the very quality that comparatists consider a virtue in itself: the transcending of national boundaries. These publications are "pan-indigenous" in nature, and according to Suzack, this retreat from the normative category of the nation-state to pose questions of identity and narration marks a significant turning point in the development of writing by First Nations' communities, a departure that attends to shared characteristics that focus on "homelands," "histories of colonization," "genocide," "displacement," and "survival," and still recognizes the politics of representation and self-expression attendant upon differently-constituted First Nations' territories (1). Any one of those themes, as well as the different political and formal issues Suzack alludes to, would offer fruitful directions for comparative study. So would the sort of work that Greg Lehman calls for, studies that "dig deeper into the 'unstable positioning' that characterises cultural identity, and unpack further the way we continue to differentiate ourselves, perhaps a little too neatly, as a clearly defined Other presence in Australian [or other] literature[s]" (22). Yet, another direction for study that incorporates white-authored texts is offered by a collection such as Witi Ihimaera's *Where's Waari? A History of the Maori through the Short Story*. Ihimaera avoids the absolute compartmentalization of colonial images of the Aborigine and Indigenous resistance writing by including stories by Pakeha and Maori authors in a single anthology. As Sarah Shieff points out, this collection shows that the stereotyping of early Pakeha representations of the Maori can be seen alongside current tendencies to essentialize "authentic" Indigenous identities, and "reminds us that even though stereotypes may have a dangerous half-life in political and popular discourse, the diversity of Maori experience in contemporary Aotearoa extends far beyond a single fundamental identity that a search for Waari implies" (19).

Along the same lines, a comparative study might be envisaged as the sort of postcolonial study that Nicholas Harrison has done on texts about/from Africa. In *Postcolonial Criticism*, Harrison compares works by (Europeans) Joseph Conrad and Albert Camus and (North Africans) Assia Djebar and Driss Chraïbi, noting that the works of the latter show "what may be oversimplified or lost if one allows one part of the critical agenda to apply to 'colonial' works and another part to the 'postcolonial' (137). In particular, novels such as Chraïbi's "us[e] specifically literary strategies at once to address and to frustrate those readers/critics who would approach his work as naïve realism and seek to recuperate from it certain social and political themes" (138). Focusing more attention on literary strategies offers comparative potential that is stifled by political correctness and the barriers set up by the orthodoxies of postcolonial criticism. Going beyond documentary or socio-political readings of Indigenous texts and comparing them with non-Indigenous texts on the basis of literary parity or comparability would help avoid the ghettoization of Indigenous literature and allow Indigenous writers to be treated precisely as writers first rather than as Indigenous people who happen to write.

Just as early comparatists saw comparative literature as a counter-weight to European nationalism, so it can function now, not as a replacement for Indigenous nationalism but alongside it as a further conduit for the sort of ethical conversation that Willie Ermine tells us must take place between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples living side by side. We must recognize, however, that Indigenous nationalism is a new kind of nationalism in which literature plays an important role. Where literature was an adjunct to nation-building in nineteenth-century Europe and twentieth-century settler-invader colonies like Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, today's Indigenous



nationalism places literature at the forefront of nationalist activism. The difference, and the sensitivity around the issue, derives from the relationship between culture and nationalism. The European model was able to assume a unified culture identified by a distinct language. Nationalism in settler-invader countries involved a process of defining the new culture and detaching it from the European matrix. Colonized Indigenous peoples face a much more complex task in asserting nationalist claims because their territories, languages, and cultures were precisely the targets of generations of systematic colonial erasure. While efforts are underway to reclaim land, languages and cultural practices, Native epistemology itself has for now become the privileged means of asserting Native distinction. Where territorial and linguistic borders are unavailable, "Indian country" is a history, an experience, and a state of mind as much as it is a place. Simon Ortiz puts it unequivocally: "The consciousness of ourselves as Indigenous cultural beings is very important to our Existence as speaking-writing Indigenous people. In fact, cultural consciousness as Indigenous people *is* the bottom line" (xi).

Much of the work of Jace Weaver, Craig Womack, and Robert Warrior (as set out in their book *American Indian Literary Nationalism*) is directed at showing that "Native literature proceeds from different assumptions and embodies different values from American literature" (17). Comparative study need not be seen as a cosmopolitan practice intent on erasing those differences: comparative methodology needs difference as much as it needs comparability to proceed. Far from acting as a barrier to comparative study, then, Indigenous nationalism — literary or otherwise — promises to build the foundation for new forms of comparison based on epistemological, thematic, and formal distinctions that may or may not be expressed in different languages. Comparative literature may be a counter-weight to nationalism, but it also needs to recognize the local.

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