

## Book Reviews.

Cox, James. *The Red Land to the South. American Indian Writers and Indigenous Mexico*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

One of the major points of interest in recent literary scholarship has undoubtedly been the transnational dimension of literature, whether re-visited in a number of familiar contexts (such as re-analyzing what used to be called internationalism as transnationalism) or as a way of re-tracing genealogies and interconnections previously unexamined. Over the past few decades, and even further back to the canonical beginning of the period hailed as the Native American Renaissance, most of the hotly debated issues have centered on the question of tribal specificity, literary nationalism, the decolonization paradigm and variously defined cultural identity constructs. With the recent move in the postnational arena, suggested initially by John Carlos Rowe, literary studies have opened up towards new possibilities of transnational indigenous articulations of culture, further encouraged by Philip Deloria in his 2008 ASA presidential address, published in *American Quarterly*<sup>1</sup>. Chadwick Allen, a long-time proponent of transnational comparativism, authored *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies* in 2012, while various other studies have focused on a multiplicity of aspects pertaining to transnational contact and cooperation.

Another remarkable example is James Cox's book, *The Red Land to the South. American Indian Writers and Indigenous Mexico*, published in the series *Indigenous Americas*, edited by Robert Warrior and James Weaver, two of the foremost proponents of the nationalist approach in Native American Studies. The transition from nationalism to transnationalism has been fueled by the re-strengthening of transcontinental connections through increased participation in the civil society sphere, through intense engagement in social movements crisscrossing the Western hemisphere. Thus, Sabine Kradofler remarked in 2010 that "when we approach the transnationalisation of indigenous movements, we are referring to the various phenomena which have affected these peoples, notably the creation of extensive collaborative networks which, thanks to information and communications technology, are still expanding on the five continents and are now able to articulate localised social struggles at international level" (378)<sup>2</sup>. One such outburst of interest took place long before the recent wave of interest in the indigenous Mexico – indigenous USA connection, with the publication of Leslie Marmon Silko's provocative novel, *Almanac of the Dead*. Salvador Martí i Puig<sup>3</sup> (2010) relates the

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<sup>1</sup>Deloria, Philip. "Broadway and Main: Crossroads, Ghost Roads, and Paths to an American Studies Future." *American Quarterly* 61.1 (2009): 1-25.

<sup>2</sup> Kradofler, Sabine. "The Transnationalisation of Indigenous Peoples' Movements and the Emergence of New Indigenous Elites." *International Social Science Journal* 61.202 (2010): 377-388.

<sup>3</sup>Martí i Puig, Salvador. "The Emergence of Indigenous Movements in Latin America and Their Impact on the Latin American Political Scene: Interpretive Tools at the Local and Global Levels." *Latin American Perspectives* 37:6 (2010): 74-92.

impetus behind the wave of transnational scholarship to the the formation of the Transnational Indigenous People's Movement as well as other factors such as the creation of an international framework encouraging the protection of indigenous and minority rights, in which "among the areas of transnational power that were conquered were the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations (1982), the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (1989), and the UN Special Rapporteur (1980)" (80).

James Cox, however, takes the field in a slightly different direction. Instead of pursuing the more common avenue, outlined above, he focuses on a period of time typically absent from major critical works and usually deemed as less provocative, due to its perceived adherence to the principles of assimilationism. Cox, therefore, re-examines precisely those texts that have never before been regarded as actively engaged in a contestation of power relations as imposed on the native peoples of the United States. To put it in his own words, he writes about the "four decades" that "are part of a longer era of Native writing from 1900 to 1967, defined, in the words of Jace Weaver (Cherokee), by assimilation, apocalypticism, and reform and by Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) as the "hyperassimilative post-allotment years" (1-2). The focus of Cox's book is on showing how these texts, from novels to plays to non-fiction, approached Mexico as a larger indigenous land base (i.e. the "Greater Indian Territory"), which was seen as providing abundantly more significant avenues for revolt and indigenous subversion, if not even insurgency.

Thus, Cox discusses the texts authored by Todd Downing, Lynn Riggs and D'Arcy McNickle following what Robert Dale Parker called a "transnational indigenous gaze" in his comment on *The Red Land to the South*. Mid-20th century American Indian authors are shown to have re-articulated a field of indigenous empowerment by projecting hopes of self-determination and colonial contestation onto the cultural landscape of Mexico, thereby creating a "transnational imaginary" of indigenous resistance and ongoing struggles. It is therefore highly significant to note that Cox adequately focuses on a period of time in Native American literary history usually regarded as lacking in political commitment, only to show that the underlying imaginative processes at the core of seemingly non-political literary productions reflect, in fact, a deep-seated longing for indigenous revival. For instance, Todd Downing's detective novels set in Mexico dwell on the perspective of a neocolonial American presence south of the border, which is nonetheless countered in many ways, including through the resilience of indigenous speakers: "Strategic linguistic separatism and bilingualism are the primary tools of cultural preservation and anti-colonial resistance in the novel" (47). Refreshingly, *The Red Land to the South* is not only about fictional (re)creations of indigenous spaces of contestation. Its methodological approach connects dots in a manner which is similar to the purpose of its enterprise. By seamlessly blending studies of fiction and nonfiction, theater and diplomacy, journalism and historiography, *The Red Land to the South* makes a bold claim and successfully defends it with a well-documented discussion of the anticolonial, transnational reach of mid-twentieth-century American Indian writers.

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