Amériques transculturelles - Transcultural Americas

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All the buses to Aracataca were brightly colored”, Michael Ondaatje recalls in a 1978 essay on Gabriel García Márquez that he addresses to fellow Canadian writer Sheila Watson. Ondaatje writes that the vehicles en route to Márquez’s home town “would take a side road down into the river and soak in it like animals” and notes that he has “terrific slides of the pigs and of the men delivering ice at Aracataca”. Yet he finds himself wondering, “What am I doing in this South American town […] photographing pigs, photographing ice […]” (1978: 19). A good question, particularly for those of us interested in exploring Canada’s relationship to inter-American poetics. Ondaatje’s fascination with animals, his poetry portrayed pigs wallowing in muddy happiness, the easy transfer of qualities between humans, animals, and things; his penchant, finally, for the fantastic and the excessive are all familiar, especially to readers of his early work. But the keyword here is perhaps
“ice,” the frozen fluid whose childhood discovery Aureliano Buendía, in the opening sentence of Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (*Cien años de soledad*), is said to remember when facing the firing squad.

The contrast of heat and ice also opens Ondaatje’s *Running in the Family* (1982), a book set in Asia and Canada but illuminated nonetheless by his remarks about dreams, deciphering, writing, mirrors and death, as orchestrated by the author from Aracataca. Ondaatje’s essay on Márquez highlights in retrospect certain moments of his own earlier *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976), but also forecasts important details and structural features of *Running in the Family* and his subsequent works. Ondaatje observes, for instance, that in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* ghosts begin to replace the members of the Buendía family as they die. This comment introduces us to the temporal and narrative architecture of *In the Skin of A Lion* (1987) and *The English Patient* (1992). Both novels place keys to their reading roughly at their half-way point. At that moment, they send readers searching—ghost-like and returning (or revenants, as the French word for ghosts says literally) to earlier times in the text while also going forward, thus moving in two directions simultaneously. As Ondaatje writes of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*: “About halfway through the book you begin to feel that while you are still moving forward to the end you are simultaneously moving from midpoint to the beginning. Your consciousness is sliding both ways” (1978: 30).

Ondaatje further relates Márquez’s ghosts and his handling of narrative time to William Faulkner’s remark that “There’s no such thing as was, only is” (30), pointing to the transnational travel of the imagination behind this particular way of conceiving stories. With its rich observations about technique and formal correspondence, the essay thus tenders partial answers to Ondaatje’s question regarding what he was doing “photographing ice” in a South American town that birthed Márquez’s Macondo, a place on fictional maps that also show
Yoknapatapkh county. Reflections on frozen time and its fluid reversals and permutations (or on the fantastic or the marvelous) are of course neither the prerogative of any single literature or writer, nor the sole preoccupation of the essay’s author. Yet Ondaatje is clearly deciphering and transforming here formal filaments of a poetics that has traversed the Americas, a set of formal possibilities that individual authors reformulate to shape their individual imaginative worlds, and that literary studies seeks to explicate with respect to specific social times and places.

As the example of Ondaatje suggests, the poetics and traditions of other parts of the Americas are powerfully mediated by writers in Canada and Quebec whether they were born here or immigrated from other parts of the world. Indeed, a number of Canadian writers, including George Bowering, Jack Hodgins, Dany Laferrière, Jacques Poulin, and Guillermo Verdecchia, incorporate a hemispheric awareness into their poetics.¹ A succinct entry point for the Latin American dimension of such intercultural dynamics is Hugh Hazelton’s _Latinocanadá: A Critical Anthology of Ten Latin American Writers of Canada_, which helps us, in E.D. Blodgett’s memorable phrase, to open Canada “to its several selves” (2003: 20). The Americas comprise not only Latin America, however, but also the United States, whose literary importance for Canada has never been contested. Precisely because of the weight and political, economic, and cultural neocolonial tendencies of the United States, this dynamic has proven less than comfortable for the writers and theorists who achieved Canada’s declarations of cultural independence in the 1960s, and for those who have articulated them since. Despite (and also because of) this discomfort, it seems to us all but impossible to situate Canadian literature effectively without taking into consideration both its North American and its hemispheric contexts. Against this background, we are seeking here to map out a fresh examination of how Canadian culture locates itself—and can be located—
with respect to “its” Americas, those that it perceives and those
that it construes.  

II

Inter-American literary and cultural connections have certainly
not gone unexamined. As early as the late 1970s, some U.S.
critics were calling for a redefinition of “American Literature”
that would allow for a more comparative, hemispheric approach
(see Spengemann 1978; Scott 1980). Such calls to reconsider
the traditional insularity and exceptionalism of U.S. American
studies, frequently made with reference to Latin American
critics and texts, have been echoed with increasing urgency
from the mid-1990s through to the present. At the heart of
these appeals has been a critique of the term “America” itself—
a recognition of the “arrogance”, in the words of one scholar
(Scott 1980: 635), through which the term has been co-opted
by one national literature to the exclusion of other literatures of
the hemisphere. Thus the “new American studies” work tends
to echo the question posed by John Muthyala in his article on
“Reworlding America: The Globalization of American Studies”:
“By what historical fiat [...] did the term ‘America’ come to
refer only to a certain region in North America, its history
originating in New England, and the term ‘American’ to refer
solely to the English settlers in the seventeenth century and,
later, to the people of the United States?” (2001: 96).

Coupled with this critique of the imprecision of the phrase
“American literature” has been a related concern with the
parochialism of U.S. American studies. Kirsten Silva Gruez,
for example, sets out in her *Ambassadors of Culture: The
Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing* “to imagine a new
form of U.S. cultural history in general, which would unseat the
fiction of American literature’s monolingual and Anglocentric
roots and question the imperial conflation of the United States
with America” (2002: 4). In an effort both to restore the
phrase “American literature” to its broader meaning, and “internationalize” U.S. American studies—to renegotiate the boundaries of U.S. American studies and resituate it in a global context—, the field has seen a rapid expansion in geographical, linguistic and conceptual terms (see Porter 1994; Wald 1998; Patell 1999).

This hemispheric turn results from the convergence of a number of trends in literary and cultural criticism. It follows remappings of the field of U.S. American studies by African American, feminist, Asian American, and Chicano critics (Porter 1994: 468), in keeping with which hemispheric American studies in its current configuration has tended to pay particular attention to minority and marginalized discourses (Patell 1999: 169). In addition, the emergence of hemispheric American studies has been encouraged by the quincennial “rediscovery” of the Americas and the recent growth of Caribbean studies, both of which have called attention to alternative visions of the meaning of America such as José Martí’s “Our America” and Édouard Glissant’s the “Other America.” Finally, like the popularity of borderlands studies, the hemispheric turn reflects a broader interrogation of the nation as a unit of cultural analysis and a growing interest in processes of transculturation. A particularly telling index of this paradigm shift, then, is the extent to which border zones have displaced the frontier as the key site within U.S. American studies, with the American West itself recast as a multiethnic and hybridized contact zone (see Saldívar 1997: xiii; Patell 1999: 172).

Following these transformations of U.S. American studies and cultural criticism, comparative studies has trained its sights on “New World” literary connections. Works like Kirkpatrick Sale’s *The Conquest of Paradise* (1990) and Stephen Greenblatt’s *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (1991) have re-examined Columbus and the foundations of “New World” narratives. Literary histories like *The Columbia History
of the American Novel (1988, ed. Emory Elliott) and the recent Literary Cultures of Latin America (ed. Mario Valdés and Djelal Kadir, 2004) have made it their task to offer perspectives on the literatures of the Americas that exceed the circumference of one nation or culture alone. So too, studies by such scholars as Lois Parkinson Zamora, José David Saldívar, Kirsten Silva Gruesz, Earl Fitz, Patrick Imbert, Roland Walter, Margaret Turner and Marie Vautier have demonstrated on a number of different fronts the value of employing a hemispheric approach to the study of the Americas, an approach that is also currently being explored in conferences, journal issues, and publications series.

While a variety of models and rationales for hemispheric American studies have been advanced, generally speaking such work has rejected an exceptionalist view of U.S. cultural production and has moved away from an exclusive focus on New World-Old World axes in order to uncover inter-American relations of influence, exchange and correspondence (primarily between the U.S. and Latin America). In the hemispheric paradigm, American literatures and cultures become plural rather than singular, multilingual rather than monolingual. At the same time, the hemispheric turn is very much a pedagogical enterprise that entails a broad rethinking of institutional and disciplinary structures. This perspective has drawn attention to writers, both historical and contemporary, whose literary production lends itself to—and seems to call for—a hemispheric reading. Critics and writers such as José Martí, Herman Melville, William Faulkner, Edmundo O’Gorman, Gloria Anzaldúa and Édouard Glissant are fast emerging as touchstones of this field of study in literatures of the Americas scholarship and course syllabi.

III

If hemispheric American studies has by now become established in the U.S. academy as an approach and a field of study, a much
less discussed question is Canada's place and participation within such projects and perspectives. Canadian culture and criticism is frequently marginalized in hemispheric comparative work, in borderlands criticism, and even in North American studies, partially because of institutionalized pathways and habits that continue to impede scholarly access to this rich material, thus reinforcing traditional disciplinary blindspots. Essay collections dedicated to a hemispheric American studies have paid little attention to Canada, implicitly suggesting that if the Americas do have a common literature, it is one that largely excludes Canadian writing. Indeed, the invisibility of Canada in discussions of the literatures of the Americas would appear to confirm Richard Rodriguez's assessment in Brown: The Last Discovery of America that from the United States' point of view, “Canada is the largest country in the world that doesn't exist” (2002: 161).

Our interest in resituating Canadian literature in a hemispheric framework is prompted by our desire to make an intervention into comparative American studies that will address this invisibility. Several possible access routes into a hemispheric contextualization of Canadian literature—including indigenous remappings of the continent, post-slavery routes, and Quebec's connections with Latin America—seem to us to be particularly promising in this regard. Such material has the potential to compellingly demonstrate how a comparative, border-crossing approach can produce rich results for the study of the literatures and cultures of both Canada and the Americas. It seems to us unavoidable and necessary, however, to preface any such case studies with a consideration of two related areas of concern that are intrinsic to Canadian literary studies themselves. These concerns may complicate the engagement of scholars of Canadian literature and culture with North American and hemispheric perspectives, and may indeed have contributed to the still limited visibility of Canadian literature within those fields.
The first and more general of these concerns regards future directions of Canadian literary and cultural studies at a time when transnational and transcultural methodologies have moved to the forefront of critical inquiry (Siemerling 2007). In many respects, the study of Canadian literature is flourishing as never before. The field designates a recognized area of specialization within literary studies, Canadian studies associations around the world promote it, and Canadian authors are internationally successful and garner important prizes. Yet only a few decades after it has secured its place in the field of recognized academic endeavours, Canadian literature as an institutionalized field of study is currently facing a number of challenges to which it may be more vulnerable than other comparable fields, including the increasing problematization of “nation” as a category of literary analysis. This problematization of nation would appear at ational to transnational perspectives such as North American studies or hemispheric studies of the Americas.

A second, more specific challenge for Canadian studies that arises from the hemispheric turn is the necessary hesitation of many scholars of Canadian literature to risk the advances of their hard-won field by engaging in a hemispheric studies that is dominated by a country that, under the designation of “American Studies,” tends to appropriate for nationally limited purposes the name of a continent. With Martí’s “Nuestra América” as its central text and with its emphasis on alternative histories and minority discourses, hemispheric American studies is conceived by many critics as oppositional and contestatory. However, some have questioned whether the hemispheric turn is itself an imperializing move. Patricia Wald, for instance, asks: “To what extent [...] is the transnationalizing trend a critique of the limitations of a nation-based analysis, and to what extent does it participate in—and reinforce—the politics of the TNC [transnational corporation]?” (1998: 201). In her study of the Monroe Doctrine, Gretchen Murphy echoes these concerns when she urges us to “interrogate the construction of
the hemispheric frame, and examine the powerful tradition that defines America spatially with reference to ‘its’ hemisphere.\footnote{2005: 1}

If such questions trouble U.S. Americanists, they become of particular concern to scholars located outside the United States, who may note with some alarm that “America” tacitly continues to signify “United States” in a surprising number of avowedly hemispheric academic treatises. Indeed, it often appears to be taken for granted that the United States will remain at the center of this academic enterprise and that the aim of hemispheric American studies is to rehabilitate U.S. American studies rather than to decenter it. Not surprisingly, then, the suspicion that hemispheric American studies is driven by an imperializing impulse on the part of the United States reinforces a certain reluctance from some Canadian quarters to engage transnational hemispheric or North American approaches. This resistance is understandable in the context of the difficult circumstances that attended the full emergence of “Canadian literature”—both discursively and institutionally—in the 1960s, as well as that of a littérature québécoise, a term circulated roughly from 1963 onward.

With respect to the first concern, it is crucial to note that the almost offhanded dismissal, on the part of many literary theorists, of the “nation” or the “nation-state” as category of literary and cultural analysis, remains problematic despite all theoretical arguments against essentialisms, for literatures that had to fight under postcolonial circumstances for national status as late as the 1960s. Are not the projects of “Canadian Literature” and littérature québécoise, for instance, on the verge of being re-marginalized after having existed as fully institutionalized fields for only a few decades since the 1960s? Since alternative professional designations in job ads and scholarly self-identification include “postcolonial studies” and, increasingly, “globalization studies,” it may indeed be tempting to shrug off such presumably postnational developments with
an air of theoretical sophistication. And yet the question arises whether certain varieties of cosmopolitanism, postcolonial or otherwise, do not begin to play into the hands of geopolitically dominant nationalisms and power structures. This question becomes particulary pertinent for those who share the hemisphere with the United States, as has been pointed out not only by scholars in Canada, but also by some in the United States who are interested in “internationalizing” American Studies (see for example Sadowski-Smith and Fox 2004).

Parallel concerns to those that attend the current vogue for the transnational may also be raised with respect to transcultural methodologies. The concept of transculturation was originally and famously articulated by the Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz in his *Contrapunteo Cubano del Tabaco y Azúcar* (*Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, 1940). Ortiz developed the concept to critique previous models of deculturation and acculturation, and in an effort to account for processes of selection and invention. As the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski argued in his introduction to Ortiz’s book, the concept of transculturation served as a corrective to earlier models that assumed the assimilation of new cultures to a dominant norm that remained essentially unchanged. Rejecting this model, Ortiz called attention to the mutual processes of exchange and transformation between “new” and “old” cultures that come into contact with one another.

The term *transculture* has gained significant currency in Quebec, where it was introduced primarily through the journal *Vice Versa* (see Siemerling 2007). One author, Jean Lamore, celebrated Ortiz’s concept and called for a return to its original, specific meaning in an influential passage in *Vice Versa* in 1987:

> En fait, le sens exact et créateur de la transculturation selon son “inventeur,” F. Ortiz, est clair et doit être réhabilité: la transculturation est un ensemble de transmutations constantes; elle est créatrice et jamais
achevée; elle est irréversible. Elle est toujours un processus dans lequel on donne quelque chose en échange de ce qu’on reçoit: les deux parties de l’équation s’en trouvent modifiées. Il en émerge une réalité nouvelle, qui n’est pas une mosaïque de caractères, mais un phénomène nouveau, original et indépendant.

(Lamore 1987: 19)

(In fact, the precise and creative meaning of transculturation according to its “inventor,” F. Ortiz, is clear and needs to be restored: transculturation is a series of constant transmutations; it is creative and never ending; it is irreversible. It is always a process in which something is given in exchange for what is received: the two parts of the equation are therefore altered. A new reality emerges, which is not a mosaic of characters, but a new, original, and independent phenomenon.)

While less commonly employed in the Anglophone Canadian academy, the concept of transculturation was popularized in Anglophone criticism by Mary Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes* and in her earlier article in *Profession* on the “Contact Zone.” For Pratt, perspectives of transculturation attempt to account for procedures of selection, intervention, and invention. In her terms, transculturation “is a phenomenon of the contact zone”: “While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for” (Pratt 1992: 6).

Yet without denying the explanatory power of Ortiz and Pratt’s models, it is important to note that just as critics of transnationalism often fear that the category of “nation” may disappear entirely into an all-too-easy transnationalism that simply overlooks or marginalizes the discursive and factual realities of nation, so too the current focus on processes of
transculturation may risk marginalizing or obscuring the specificity of particular cultures. Although these specificities may appear to be residual, they are nonetheless effective and continue to significantly shape our lived experience. As some critics have noted, the term transculturalism can invite a celebratory sense of seamless hybridity in the contexts of migration and crosscultural interaction that elides this reality.

Both impulses—to move to the foreground the transnational and transcultural contours of literary production, and the impetus to reassert the significance of nation and local cultures—can be traced in recent scholarly discussions in North America. It is not as if the “end” of national literatures, for example, has not been discussed with respect to Canadian and Québécois literature. The 2005 “TransCanadas” conference in Vancouver dedicated a session to “The Ends of CanLit,” and Pierre Nepveu, a leading scholar of littérature québécoise, asked as early as 1988 whether, from a position of consolidated strength, it was not time to think about “la fin de la littérature québécoise” and a “littérature post-québécoise” (1988, 14). U.S. scholar Gregory Jay, by contrast, suggested in 1991 that it was “time to stop teaching ‘American’ literature” (264), and instead to turn to “Writing in the United States.” When challenged by Carolyn Porter (1994) that his project reasserted nationalist boundaries, he defended the retention of national parameters by offering the following caveat:

[...] we should recognize that calling for an end to the study of a national American literature means calling for an end to the study of a national Mexican or Canadian or Colombian literature as well. Do “we” in the United States want to prescribe such an abandonment of local and regional cultural traditions? Do we have the right? Would this call for postnationalism return us to the widely discussed observation that the criticisms of identity politics arise just at the moment when
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those whose identities have been marginalized demand recognition? (1997: 182)

We think that this question is indeed pertinent, but we do not believe that it should close off all possibilities of Canadian engagements with transnational hemispheric studies, especially if the continued efficiency and reality of “nation” is recognized as a discursive, institutional, and political reality. This recognition, of course, is a key concern of Canadianists who are understandably anxious that a newly-won CanLit specificity may be lost or compromised through an engagement with hemispheric or North American studies. Little is gained by splendid isolation, however, either for U.S. Americanists or for Canadianists. On the contrary, the very fact of routine marginalization of Canadian culture in hemispheric scholarship requires active intervention. Articulations of Canadian vantage points in literary and cultural discussions of the Americas offer important opportunities to increase the visibility of Canada in these debates.  

After all, the countries of the Americas, including Canada, share, beyond geographical adjacency, a number of comparable historical parallels and differences, common legacies as white settler societies that derive from their relationships with indigenous societies, slavery, and the imperial powers against which they sought to define their emergent cultural and political identities. In this respect, it seems entirely appropriate to study aspects of not only Canada but also the United States within the problematic of the postcolonial, as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin suggested in The Empire Writes Back back in 1989. But some critics feel that more emphasis should be placed on the neocolonial pursuits of the United States, and therefore postcolonial work concentrating on United States cultures has focused on Black, Native, or ethnic issues within the United States rather than on its “national” culture. These critical divergences and national and
transnational categories of subalternity make it perfectly clear that, at the very least, hemispheric approaches to the Americas, like other postcolonial projects, cannot simply proceed on the basis of parallels and commonalities. They must account for uneven temporalities and power relations, and thus more than ever retain the category of the local—of which the historical specificities of the nation are a crucial mediation.

IV

Given the issues we have outlined above, our aim is not to propose an undifferentiated, unqualified transnational North American or hemispheric studies that declares issues of nation and state to be obsolete, nor do we want to abolish entirely the study of “U.S. literature” or “Canadian literature” as such. Rather, we suggest a contrapuntal approach that carefully reconstructs contextual mediations, including those of nation and state (and of nation-defined literary institutions, in addition to mediations of race, ethnicity, class and gender), and yet does not limit itself to one national literature in its contextual and comparative reach. Such an approach demonstrates the advantages of bringing a wider comparative perspective to bear with respect to Canada’s relationship, for example, to First Nations cultures, to postslavery writing, or to multilingualism. Indeed, this approach seems particularly applicable to Native North American and Black writing, where national boundaries are both relevant in establishing particular nation-state-defined contexts and insufficient or outright counter-productive as delimiters of the field of study. But our belief is that these examples can be multiplied beyond those cited here, and that the discourses themselves which structure our fields of study should be as much the subject of our research and attention as the objects that they constitute and analyze. Our hope in developing this approach is to map other possible routes and pathways that would open up hemispheric readings
of Canadian literature, thereby helping to render Canadian cultures and literatures more visible within the burgeoning field of hemispheric American studies.

Cited References


Ortiz, Fernando. *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y azúcar*. Havana: Jesús Montero, 1940.


**Notes**


2. We are grateful to Rachel Adams for her earlier work on this topic, both in co-organizing a 2003 American Comparative Literature Association seminar and in co-editing the special issue of *Comparative American Studies* on “Canada and the Americas” that resulted from this seminar. The present discussion builds on the introduction to the CAS special issue that Rachel Adams and Sarah Phillips Casteel co-authored in 2005.

3. The impact that a transnational perspective has had on American studies is illustrated by Paula M. L. Moya and Ramon Saldívar’s following statement written in introduction to the 2003 special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies*: “The trans-American imaginary is ‘transnational’ to the degree that ‘American’ fiction must be seen anew as a heterogeneous grouping of overlapping but distinct discourses that refer to the US in relation to a variety of national entities” (1).
4 See Siemerling 2005: 8–12; Adams and Casteel; Fox and Sadowski-Smith.

5 See for example *Do the Americas Have a Common Literature?* (1990), edited by Gustavo Pérez Firmat, and *Poetics of the Americas* (1997), edited by Bainard Cowan and Jefferson Humphries. One rare exception to this trend is John Carlos Rowe’s observation in the January 2003 issue of the *PMLA* entitled “America: The Idea, the Literature”: “Too often in nineteenth-century United States culture, Canada figures primarily as an imagined place of ultimate freedom and its border a sort of psychic double for the internal border dividing South from North.” Rowe insists, arguing that “The new comparative American studies must include Canada as a crucial and distinct multiculture [...] [...] the study of nineteenth-century transnationality must include not only the Canadian border but also the different and shifting borders imposed on native peoples by the systematic violence of enclosure we know as imperialism” (2003: 85). More sustained attempts to incorporate Canadian material within a broader hemispheric context include Casteel 2007.

6 Fox and Sadowski-Smith approach this question somewhat differently when they suggest that because of Canada’s historically weak nationalism, Canadian studies may be especially well positioned to reconceptualize the category of the nation: “Because of its complex relationship to questions of state-sponsored nationalism and the nation-state as well as its long history of US domination, Canada constitutes an important location from which inter-Americas scholars in Canada, the United States, and other locations could rethink the role of the nation within theories of globalization” (2004: 19–20).

7 Accordingly, Fox and Sadowski-Smith caution that “If Americanists are to internationalize their field without becoming unwitting ambassadors of a US-inspired ‘world without boundaries’ (Cumings, 2002: 286), they need to travel abroad, engage in scholarly dialogue in languages other than English, and interest themselves in scholarship produced outside the United States and outside their own field. Until they do so, we fear that an Americanist-led hemispherism will only promote a vision of
the Americas in which all academic disciplinary configurations are subordinate to those of the United States and in which every region outside of the United States is collapsed into a monolithic other” (2004: 23).

Recent rearticulations of cosmopolitanisms are undertaken mostly in order to theorize globalization and/or to counter exclusions that deny refuge, as for instance in Jacques Derrida’s *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (1997/trans. 2001). And yet cosmopolitanism—like the transnational—is a double-edged term than can also elide the particular and the local. If the transnational is not to be conceived by means of falling back upon uncritical versions of cosmopolitanism or universalism, then it has to be derived from some kind of relationship with instances of the particular and the local and their mediated constructions, such as nationally or regionally or culturally specific constructions of race, ethnicity, or gender. Hence the current attempts at critical reconstruction of these terms by many theorists—such as in Walter Mignolo’s “critical cosmopolitanism” (2000) or Anthony Appiah’s “rooted cosmopolitanism” (2005)—or the recent Canadian critiques of cosmopolitanism by Brydon (2004) and Moyes (2007). Instructive in this respect remains the older Canadian native/cosmopolitan debate, launched by John Sutherland’s “Literary Colonialism” (Sutherland 1944), in which he attacks A. J. M. Smith’s use of that distinction in the introduction to his 1943 *Book of Canadian Poetry* (Smith 1943); for detailed discussions, see Kokotailo (1992) and Sugars (2001).

Moreover it is worth emphasizing the perhaps obvious point that a hemispheric American studies need not always or inevitably route itself through the United States (cf. Fox and Sadowski-Smith 2004: 23). One model of inter-American work that does not route itself through the U.S. are the comparative Latin American/Canadian essays by Mary Louise Pratt and several other scholars that are collected in the proceedings of the tenth congress of the International Comparative Literature Association under the heading “Canadian and Latin American Literatures and their Interdependence” (Balakian and Wilhelm ed. 1985).
In her introduction to *The Usable Past*, Zamora eloquently captures the interplay of difference and commonality that necessarily textures comparative analyses of the literatures of the Americas: “The relative scarcity of comparative studies of literature in the Americas suggests the difficulty of establishing appropriate bases for comparison. Literary production in the hemisphere is vast and various; its traditions and forms did not develop in tandem, nor are its political and social purposes parallel. Comparatists are likely to uncover critical grounds that are comparable but not equivalent, different but not symmetrically so. Thus, I will be exploring differences in order to recognize the outlines of identity, and weighing historical and cultural diversity against shared forms of literary expression. Differences, too, bring texts and writers and readers and cultures together, for in recognizing specific differences we also recognize the shared experience of difference as such—of finitude, limitation, locality” (1997: xii).

See the volume edited by Singh and Schmidt, *Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature* (2000); Buell discusses in a footnote to his contribution here the sceptical reception of some of his previous work (Buell 2000: 214 n.2).