

# TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURE

***The Routledge Companion to Native American Literature*, edited by Deborah L. Madsen (Routledge, 2016)**

This collection of essays offers an expansive and accessible guide to engaging with the rich and complex landscape of Native American Literature. Orientating the reader towards the contemporary debates and concerns of Native American Literary studies, the companion also clarifies and condenses the historical contexts of cultural, military and legal oppression needed to apprehend the various artistic works, events and methods presented in the book. By demythologising and contextualising Native American histories and cultures, the *Companion* prepares readers to approach Native American Literature which opens up more inclusive avenues to appreciate the complex relations amongst modes of Native American being and representation. The *Companion* positions Native American literature as a site of engagement and resistance, serving as both testimonies to ‘vanished’ trauma and as an assertion of Native American continuity and sovereignty.

In the first section, ‘Identities’, the various contributors outline and engage with the ways in which Native American literature operates to counter stereotypical representations and to produce narratives reiterating the worth and significance of Native American subjectivity in the contemporary moment. These aesthetics and narratives are shown to destabilise repressive settler logics through the representation and recovery of Native American cosmologies. Earl E. Fitz’s essay challenges the settler-centric, colonial production of history through tracing – linguistically and geographically – how Native American culture can be read as the foundation of collective American identity. In her contribution, Susan Kollin provides an overview of the current trajectory of Alaskan Native literature and scholarship, emphasising the efforts of Alaskan Native scholars and experts who are leading a process of cultural recovery in the effort to restore and reaffirm sovereignty. Chris LaLonde’s work examines the position of being ‘mixed-blood’ or ‘crossblood’ and argues that ‘crossblood’ individuals mobilise their subject position as an articulations of personhood as well as a celebration of community in order to counter the discourses that render Native Americans absent or ‘vanished’. Through an analysis of contemporary fiction written by Native storytellers, Carol Miller outlines how the Native experience in, and representation of, urban settings acts to collapse the binaries between nature and the city. Miller emphasises the broader implications of this application of Native cosmology for both Native and non-Native individuals in terms of the current environmental crisis.

The second section, ‘Key Moments’, takes a pragmatic and wide reaching approach to the impact of legislatures of oppression including treaty-relations, the Marshall trilogy, the Indian Removal Act, Termination policies and jurisdictional attempts at colonial redress. David J. Carlson posits the existence of a ‘treaty literature’ derived from the impact that treaties and treaty-making have had on American Indian cultural history and literary production. Carlson’s work frames the historical context, scholarly overviews and cultural productions informed by the history of US-Indian Treaty-Relations in terms of their impact, not only on Native American independence and sovereignty, but also on emerging forms of transnational indigenous studies.

Book reviews: Deborah L. Madsen (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Native American Literature*. Emma Laubscher.

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In focusing on policies of displacement and forced incorporation, Mark Rifkin outlines how the Removal Acts (and subsequent displacement policies) resulted in Native peoples altering their forms of self-representation. His chapter surveys the shift in self-articulation and points to the range of strategies adopted by Native writers in their attempts to assert and defend their personhood, communities and histories. Eric Cheyfitz's chapter systematically addresses, outlines and problematises the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. He focuses on how its attempts to ratify indigenous peoples' claims to equality, dignity and the right to land paradoxically reproduces and validates colonial authority. In examining these insufficiencies alongside various Native American texts, he illustrates the limits and promise of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as well as suggests ways in which these texts demonstrate the meaning of 'rights' and 'self determination' in a world of Indigenous being.

The third section is titled 'Sovereignty' – a recurring theme throughout the *Companion* – and grapples with the issues of recognition, acknowledgement and freedom that plague the relation between tribal nations and the United States. As Tammy Wahpeconiah acknowledges, sovereignty is a particularly fraught term for Native Americans because it is tied into ideas of cultural integrity and identity which are vital to the sustained existence of both the individual and the nation. Brian K. Hudson's contribution explores the implications of Native American stories involving animals on the political representation of non-human animals. Hudson argues that many of these narratives are not merely anthropomorphic depictions of human cultural stories but can actually be understood as reformulating human-centred definitions of sovereignty to include other animals. This essay calls for a practical reconceptualisation of how current understandings of sovereignty can be revised to include the interests of animals. In Kirby Brown's work, the history of Native American literary studies is surveyed alongside the current debates and perspectives in the field. Brown focuses on theoretical and intellectual conversations which articulate and problematise the conceptions of community and nationhood across the Native American experience, whilst stressing the very real material and embodied implications of intellectual and activist work.

The essays drawn together under the heading of 'Traditions' present a diverse set of perspectives relating to issues of form, representation, language and literacy. By picking through the incomplete and uncertain origins of writing in the Americas, Birgit Brander Rasmussen charts the revival of pictographic expression and gestures towards the exciting implications of early Native American symbolic representations for linguistic and ethnographic studies. Susan Berry Brill de Ramírez unpacks and delineates the unique position of Native American oral tradition in relation to literature. She works to destabilise a chronological understanding of the relationship between the oral and written traditions by pointing to the flourishing state of oral storytelling in Native American cultures today. David Stirrup demonstrates how petroglyphs, pictographs, geoglyphs and visual-verbal art forms present a challenge to ethnographic and literary studies through their transgression of the boundary between visual and literary representation. This essay points to how Native American visual culture and literary aesthetics necessitate a reconceptualisation of form and symbolic relationships simultaneously illustrating the productive potential of indigenous hermeneutics.

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In the final section, titled 'Literary Forms,' the authors engage with new directions in narrative form and representation through a variety of Native American cultural productions. For example, Stephanie A. Seller's essay delineates the movement from 'As-Told-To' style stories to a new genre of writing she terms 'Indigenous Communal Narratives'. Sellers outlines the potential of these new stories to redress cultural and historic misrepresentations as well as the inclusive possibilities of these multi-voiced, Native-centered forms. A. Robert Lee's contribution illustrates and investigates the centrality of storytelling to Native American culture by unpacking the legacy and contemporary position of the Native American short story. Susan Bernardin's chapter grapples with the expanding field of comics, graphic novels and digital media in contemporary Native arts and literatures. Bernardin argues that the flexibility, informality and relative novelty of these forms allows for the refusal of rigid boundaries thereby creating space for a reframing of the fraught legacy of Native American representation.

**Emma Laubscher**

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