

Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
Introduction	xiii
ELVIRA PULITANO	
PART 1. THEORETICAL CROSSINGS	I
1. “They Have Stories, Don’t They?”: Some Doubts Regarding an Overused Theorem	3
HARTWIG ISERNHAGEN	
2. Plotting History: The Function of History in Native North American Literature	24
BERNADETTE RIGAL-CELLARD	
3. Transculturality and Transdifference: The Case of Native America	44
HELMBRECHT BREINIG	
PART 2. FROM EARLY FICTION TO RECENT DIRECTIONS	63
4. American Indian Novels of the 1930s: John Joseph Mathews’s <i>Sundown</i> and D’Arcy McNickle’s <i>Surrounded</i>	65
GAETANO PRAMPOLINI	
5. Transatlantic Crossings: New Directions in the Contemporary Native American Novel	89
BRIGITTE GEORGI-FINDLAY	
PART 3. TRAUMA, MEMORY, AND NARRATIVES OF HEALING	109
6. Of Time and Trauma: The Possibilities for Narrative in Paula Gunn Allen’s <i>The Woman Who Owned the Shadows</i>	111
DEBORAH L. MADSEN	

7. “Keep Wide Awake in the Eyes”: Seeing Eyes in Wendy Rose’s Poetry	129
KATHRYN NAPIER GRAY	
8. Anamnesiac Mappings: National Histories and Transnational Healing in Leslie Marmon Silko’s <i>Almanac of the Dead</i>	150
REBECCA TILLETT	
PART 4. COMPARATIVE MYTHOLOGIES, TRANSATLANTIC JOURNEYS	
171	
9. Vizenor’s Trickster Theft: Pretexts and Paratexts of Darkness in <i>Saint Louis Bearheart</i>	173
PAUL BEEKMAN TAYLOR	
10. “June Walked over It like Water and Came Home”: Cross-Cultural Symbolism in Louise Erdrich’s <i>Love Medicine</i> and <i>Tracks</i>	188
MARK SHACKLETON	
11. Encounters across Time and Space: The Sacred, the Profane, and the Political in Linda Hogan’s <i>Power</i>	206
YONKA KRASTEVA	
12. Double Translation: James Welch’s <i>Heartsong</i> of <i>Charging Elk</i>	225
ULLA HASELSTEIN	
13. Clowns, Indians, and Poodles: Spectacular Others in Louis Owens’s <i>I Hear the Train</i>	249
SIMONE PELLERIN	
14. Oklahoma International: Jim Barnes, Poetry, and the Sites of Imagination	268
A. ROBERT LEE	
List of Contributors	289
Index	295

ELVIRA PULITANO

Introduction

Transatlantic Voices: Interpretations of Native North American Literatures brings together fourteen scholars from Europe. These scholars have contributed original, critical studies of contemporary literature by Native North Americans in the past few years. The essays in this collection present their most recent critical interventions on Native North American literary studies.

European critical practices and theoretical discourses transcend the boundaries of nations, disciplines, and academic traditions. A collection of essays on Native North American literatures by scholars in Europe takes the Atlantic as a site of cross-cultural exchange and circulation of ideas, a bridge linking the Old and New Worlds, in the attempt to overcome historical and ideological differences. Reflecting the most recent critical debates surrounding the discipline of American Studies in the United States and Europe, *Transatlantic Voices* significantly points toward transnational and transcultural practices and methodologies.¹

Recent scholarship on the Atlantic has focused on the cross-cultural exchanges originating with the transatlantic slave trade, a rhizomorphic system that in the years between 1500 and 1800 would alter considerably the boundaries of the Old World. Greatly aided by Paul Gilroy's influential study of transatlantic modernity, *The Black Atlantic* (1993), scholars interested in transnational and intercultural perspectives have found in the Atlantic a fruitful, creative space around which to articulate ideas on ethnicity, race, gender, class, sovereignty, nationalism, migration, and language in an increasingly globalized world. As the editors of the jour-

xiv Introduction

nal *Atlantic Studies* point out: “Scholars genuinely interested in exchanges between the east and west coast of the Atlantic—Africa, South America, the Caribbean and Canada, as well as Europe and the United States—are coming to think that the project can best be managed in a multipolar world. In fact the Atlantic perspective is best perceived within older and currently evolving forms of globalization” (“Editorial”).

What, nevertheless, necessitates more critical attention within emerging Atlantic perspectives is the importance of the Atlantic for contemporary Native North American Studies. In “Crossroads of Cultures” Shelley Fisher Fishkin mentions the research of Annette Kolodny on Viking contact with Native North American tribes in Canada and Maine, pointing out how “transnational questions and approaches can complicate Native American issues in American studies in fascinating ways” (29). Transatlantic journeys linking Europe to the Americas have significantly characterized the history of the two continents since Columbus’s first voyages. We know, for instance, that one of the admiral’s first gestures, upon arriving on the North American continent, was to ship a group of Tainos back to Spain so that they could “learn to speak” (quoted in Owens 3). And “famous” Indian historical figures such as Pocahontas, Black Elk, Luther Standing Bear, and others would travel to major European cities—whether to prove Europeans’ successful attempts at “civilizing” the Indian or simply to become a source of entertainment in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show. Undoubtedly, key moments in the history of the relationship between Indians and Europe, such transoceanic journeys are not, however, the primary concern of the present volume.

The essays collected in *Transatlantic Voices* take Gilroy’s idea of the Atlantic as a complex system of cultural and political exchanges in order to present the most recent, original interpretations on Native North American literatures by scholars on the other side of the Atlantic (Gilroy 4).²

Since the publication in the late 1960s and 1970s of four major Native American novels—*House Made of Dawn* (1968) by N. Scott Momaday, *Winter in the Blood* (1974) by James Welch, *Ceremony* (1977) by Leslie Marmon Silko, and *Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart* (1978) by Gerald Vizenor—to be followed, in the 1980s aftermath, by Louise Erdrich’s

Love Medicine, Native North American literary voices have stimulated a great amount of critical attention in Europe. Translations of some of the most critically acclaimed works of the so-called Native American Renaissance into European languages have been in circulation for the past twenty years or so; at the same time, essays and critical articles in English, often published by small European university presses and frequently included in American (and European) journals and essay collections, have initiated a serious critical tradition of European scholarship on Native North American Studies. Moreover, the regular annual gathering of these same scholars to discuss themes and issues concerning Native North American literatures and its place within contemporary American and world literature provide evidence of the growing interest in the Native American literary production by critics on the other side of the Atlantic.

In 1980, during the annual meeting of the European Association of American Studies in Amsterdam, a group of European scholars first discovered their common interests in “Indian issues” and decided to stay in touch. Such gathering of many of these scholars originated an informal American Indian Workshop (AIW), which would be held annually in a different European city and which would be organized around a single theme. It was out of the 1984 AIW in Rome that Christian Feest edited *Indians and Europe: A Collection of Interdisciplinary Essays*, published in 1987. The *European Review of Native American Studies* was established later that year. Despite the interdisciplinary approach (with essays ranging from anthropology to art history and sociology and from history to music and zoology) and despite the large breadth of the historical period covered (from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries), *Indians and Europe* remains essentially what its editor describes:

[It is a work that deals] specifically with European views of this relationship, with images that are part of the Old World’s cultural heritage. In those instances in which Native American visitors seem to offer their opinions on Europe and the Europeans (especially some of Catlin’s and Buffalo Bill’s Indians as described in

xvi Introduction

this volume), there is reason to believe that, either they themselves or those who wrote or spoke for them, stood firmly in a European tradition. (2)

Feest's historical and anthropological orientations undoubtedly account for the lack of critical attention to Native North American literary works in *Indians and Europe*. Today it isn't surprising why Feest's edited volume, published at a time when Native American literature was blossoming with creative and imaginative works and when critical analyses of this same literature had already been attempted in Europe, ultimately ignores Native American literary voices.³ It might be that, as we read in the editor's postscript, "a simple explanation for the reasons of the special relationship between Europeans and the native populations of North America is that no such relationship exists. Under closer scrutiny it becomes apparent that all that interested and interests Europeans is 'Indians,' a wholly fictional population inhabiting the Old World mind rather than the New World land" (609).

While these words might ring true for the essays gathered in Feest's 1987 interdisciplinary volume, they are not at all representative of critical approaches to Native North American literatures as we have seen them developing in Europe in the past two decades or so.⁴ Scholars in France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Turkey, Austria, Bulgaria, and Scandinavia have come a long way from a simply romantic fascination with "American Indians." Their critical and literary interpretations, often focusing on discourses of hybridity, intertextuality, and transculturation, have increasingly underscored the cross-cultural nature of Native North American literatures, a discourse that, in its essential "conjunction of cultural practices" (Krupat 18), has been powerfully challenging essentialist claims to identity and authenticity as well as romantic, stereotypical images of Indians.

Clearly, scholars in Europe have learned to see Natives (not *indians*, in Gerald Vizenor's terms) inhabiting the "New World land" rather than the "Old World mind." A quick overview of the "Native American Voices" panel at the 2004 European Association of American Studies

conference in Prague (which included, among the others, papers focusing on the reappropriation of language in Linda Hogan's *Power* and Thomas King's *Green Grass Running Water* as well as a discussion of the Native American novel within the context of cosmopolitanism) clearly suggests European scholars' change of direction in their critical interpretations of Native North American literatures.⁵ From the earliest anthropological and historical approaches, the legacy of Europe's fascination with the myth of the noble savage, and from close textual readings often characterized by rigid (Western) aesthetic standards, scholars in Europe have turned increasingly to different theoretical approaches.

Discussions of Native North American literatures in the context of postcolonialism and globalization have characterized the nature and content of recent essays included in collections on world literature in English and multiethnic American literatures published by various European university presses. At the same time, considering the consistent erasure of Native American literary voices on the part of orthodox postcolonial theory, scholars in Europe have begun to critique the applicability of postcolonial methodologies to indigenous texts. Along with Native and North American critics, scholars in Europe have begun to question to what extent postcolonial theory, in its heavily Western, Eurocentric discursive modes, can indeed explicate the complex layering of Native American literary texts and the Native aesthetics within which such texts are deeply enmeshed. Moreover, considering the discursive parallels of Native North American literatures and the theoretical discourse of postcolonialism, some scholars have argued the necessity of "expanding the canon" of orthodox postcolonial literatures (Madsen, *Postcolonial Literatures*). A significant change of direction seems to be signaled by the most recent indigenist theoretical approaches. European scholars have become more sensitive to theoretical positions originating out of Native indigenous cultural contexts and epistemologies such as, for instance, the storytelling quality of Greg Sarris's *Keeping Slug Woman Alive* (1993) or the more radical and subversive trickster hermeneutics of Gerald Vizenor's critical narratives.⁶ By embracing Native writers' and critics' forceful call for a Native/indigenous theory as a le-

xviii Introduction

gitimate and commensurate tool of analysis and literary interpretation for indigenous texts, scholars in Europe have contributed and continue to contribute to the radical shift in theoretical approaches toward Native North American literatures. Such a change of direction inevitably concurs with the critical orientation we have seen developing in the United States and Canada over the past few years.

The purpose of *Transatlantic Voices* is to bring together, perhaps for the first time since Feest's edited collection, a wide number of European scholars with common interests concerning the study of Native North American literatures and to present the most recent, innovative critical approaches and directions.⁷ As my remarks hopefully suggest, I think it is time for a more "literary" collection from European critics, one initiating what I hope will become an original and stimulating conversation open to future scholarly collaboration. Due to the fact that very little, if any, attention is often given in the United States to the scholarship on Native American literatures produced in European countries, it is my hope that the essays collected in the present volume will direct American readers (Native and non-Native alike) to the growing, exciting body of scholarship generated across the Atlantic.

My objective is not to construct some kind of rigid binary system by means of which I argue that European scholars are generating critical approaches that depart substantially from interpretations of Native North American literatures as produced in the United States and Canada. My purpose in *Transatlantic Voices* has been to point out that recent critical interpretations offered on the other side of the Atlantic reveal indeed a level of sophistication comparable to the recent production in North America, a shift from ethnographic and anthropological studies to literary theory in a global context. Having said that, however, I cannot deny the fact that our "strategic locations"—to use Edward Said's famous epithet in describing the author's position with regard to his or her subject of investigation—does indeed matter in our approach to Native North American literatures. The fact that we do not have a Native/indigenous background, and therefore approach this material as outsiders, is certainly an important factor to take into account in our critical

interpretations. All the more important is the fact that we are not even Americans (no matter our complex heritage and/or personal history—as Americanists—of transatlantic travels), being therefore twice removed from the subject of our scholarly interest. Within this context I would concur with Alfred Hornung that there is indeed “a different political agenda in Europe,” with regard to the field of ethnic and cultural studies, from the ideological conception frequently emerging in the United States. The fact that Europeans’ interest in U.S. “minority” writers is often and inevitably linked to “the subaltern status of minority groups in the countries where we teach and work” inevitably calls for comparative, interdisciplinary approaches (Hornung, “Message”). And the fact that some of us do ultimately belong to such subaltern minority groups in various European countries is definitely another important factor to consider. In the light of Europe’s recent remapping of its own territorial borders—a remapping that has brought a significant reconceptualization in our ideas of nation and national identity—our approach to the study of Native North American literatures inevitably calls for transnational and transcultural discursive methodologies.

Diverse and wide-ranging in scope and motifs, the essays gathered in *Transatlantic Voices* explore, for the most part, various aspects of the Native-European encounter as it can be traced in contemporary Native North American writing. While the emphasis upon fiction in the volume might raise some questions, I would like to point out that the term *fiction* in Native North American writing needs to be interpreted with a certain elasticity. Addressing this same issue in his comparative study of multicultural American literature, A. Robert Lee argues that the term *fiction* “is meant to embrace novellas, stories and story-cycles, autobiography as implicated in its own kind of fictionality, even a number of verse chronicles . . . all, and however different the one from the other, *ficiones* in the spirit of Jorge Luis Borges” (*Multicultural* 2). Considering the contributors’ “fictional” subjects of investigation in this volume—whose range include, among others, N. Scott Momaday’s “Man Made of Words,” Gordon Henry’s autobiographical “entries,”

xx Introduction

Louis Owens's mixed-genre collection, *I Hear the Train*, Wendy Rose's and Jim Barnes's poetic oeuvres, Gerald Vizenor's *Bearheart*, and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*—Lee's observation fits neatly the kind of genre crossing and boundary breaking that is a distinctive feature of Native North American literatures.

The first part of the collection introduces the idea of “Theoretical Crossings” as a locus for exploring notions of “story,” “history,” and “transculturality.” All crucial landmarks in contemporary debates on Native North American identity and authenticity, they become all the more controversial when viewed by critics operating on this side of the Atlantic. As critics not directly implicated in the politics involved in such debates, European scholars are often able to maintain a critical distance that, from within the perspective of tribally specific contexts, might at first appear inappropriate or misinformed.

Contextualizing the notion of story, or narrative, within the wider panorama of contemporary Anglophone literary theory and criticism, Hartwig Isernhagen's essay considers the implications of the frequently used (and abused) theorem “they have stories” for Native American literatures and identity. While tracing the essentially holistic nature of story, a conflation of what later on was referred to as myth and history, Isernhagen points out the paradox in the way critical orthodoxy has turned such holism into a dualism, “in a gesture of devaluating history and the written.” The term story, he argues, has been used to construct Native American literature (and identity) as essentially “other,” when that same theorem “is at the same time a key to central reflections on all cultures in our time.” Stretching his reflections to include contemporary debates on trauma—itsself a dangerous measure of authenticity (as we have seen in the case of Holocaust narratives)—and(auto-)biography, Isernhagen fuels a debate that, as I indicate later on, has recently drawn a significant amount of critical attention on both sides of the Atlantic.

Crisscrossing some of Isernhagen's reflections, Bernadette Rigal-Cellard explores the function of history in Native North American literatures, a process that becomes particularly challenging for Europeans because, as she puts it, ours is the continent that supposedly “brought

History to America and imposed it upon the Natives through the violence of the Conquest.” Whether Native writers reject History as being another Eurocentric weapon of colonization (such as, for instance, in the case of Vizenor) or rely on it in order to rehabilitate their past, the two strategies, she contends, ultimately and inevitably intersect. The fact that Vizenor, in *The People Named the Chippewa: Narrative Histories* (1984), draws from official books of history, which he imaginatively recreates as “Narrative Histories,” is for Rigal-Cellard a clear example of some of the ambiguities of History that Native North American writers inevitably face. If, in novels of the so-called Native American Renaissance, the fusion of the historical and the mythical ends up anesthetizing the potential “to operate active and open political rebellion against the domineering society,” more recent novels such as, for instance, LeAnne Howe’s *Shell Shaker* (2001) “reorient” the meaning of History as to point out the inextricable link with Myth. For Rigal-Cellard, Howe’s novel might signal a new phase in contemporary Native North American fiction, one in which History, along “with the benevolent assistance of mythic protectors” (including trickster, rabbit, and Mother Porcupine) help the protagonists shape and “self-define their future.” Such reorientation, for Rigal-Cellard, ultimately occurs in Vizenor’s work as well. Both his analysis of socialist China, in *Griever* (1987), and of imperial Japan, in the most recent *Hiroshima Bugi* (2003), skillfully blend fiction with nonfiction, Myth and History, and provocatively weave a complex “mythic thought fit for our times and our global community.”

Helmbrecht Breinig focuses on two concepts of cultural and individual identity formation, *transculturality* and *transdifference*, as they were originally formulated in European discussions of cultural contact and applies them to Native America. Unlike models of *mestizaje*, *creolization*, and *transculturation*, and essentially different from Homi Bhabha’s (in)famous notion of *hybridity*, *transdifference*, Breinig argues, “does not refer to an ongoing and basically Derridean deconstruction of difference,” but quite the contrary. Rephrasing Wolfgang Iser’s notion of *transculturality*, according to which “there is no longer anything absolutely foreign” in his globalized version of *transculturation*, Breinig

xxii Introduction

ultimately contends that in the history of Native and European Americans as it has been developed for more than five hundred years there has been and will always be “something absolutely foreign.” In other words, phenomena of transculturality and transdifference are not mutually exclusive but, rather, are complementary. Using the witty self-positioning of Anishinabe novelist and critic Gordon Henry as well as narratives from the boarding schools experience, Breinig points out how the overwriting of Native cultures on the part of Eurocentric America “has not resulted in a total and permanent erasure” but, rather, in “a kind of palimpsest” (Klaus Lösch’s concept).

The essays in part 2, “From Early Fiction to Recent Directions,” trace the development of the Native American novel from the 1930s to the present while exploring some interesting facets of the Native-European encounter. Gaetano Prampolini’s essay provides a contrastive reading of John Joseph Mathews’s *Sundown* (1934) and D’Arcy McNickle’s *Surrounded* (1936), novels that, for the first time, “activate the paradigm of realism” centering on the protagonists’ more or less successful journey back into Indianness (a paradigm that was widely adopted by native North American novelists of later generations well into the 1980s). As novels of great—although not yet fully recognized—literary merit, *Sundown* and *The Surrounded*, Prampolini argues, master the rhetoric of a distinctively Western narrative genre while giving it some significant “subversive twists.”

In the attempt to answer the question of how “American” or “cosmopolitan” Native American novels ultimately are, Brigitte Georgi-Findlay traces interesting “new directions” in recent novels by Leslie Marmon Silko, James Welch, and Louise Erdrich, directions that inevitably add to recent debates on multiculturalism.⁸ Both *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999) and *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* (2000) ironically portray the Native “discovery” of Europe, as Silko and Welch, respectively, send their protagonists on a transatlantic journey that, to a certain extent, reverses Europeans’ arrival in the New World. In *The Master Butchers Singing Club* (2003), Georgi-Findlay argues, the transatlantic encounter occurs in an immigrant context, as Erdrich explores the German part of her mixed-blood

heritage. And in Erdrich's novel *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* (2001) Georgi-Findlay detects a "more intense questioning of culturally constructed gender roles" through the "heavily manufactured" pose of the character Agnes / Father Damien. Georgi-Findlay concludes her overview by arguing that "all four novels explore the boundaries of cultures by pointing to transcultural connections and the instability of ethnic and national identities." More important, these four novels significantly rewrite the concept of "American" by pointing toward a cosmopolitan, transnational dimension in the narratives produced today by Native mixed-blood authors in North America.⁹

A transnational perspective, as it appears more prominently in the prose and poetry of Native North American women writers, becomes the focus of part 3, on "Trauma, Memory, and Narratives of Healing." The fact that trauma studies (with its most focal object of discussion, the Holocaust) have not found, at least until recently, easy applicability in interpretations of Native North American literatures is indeed intriguing, all the more so—as Isernhagen accurately remarks in his theoretical investigation—if we consider that Native American writers frequently and consistently "have preserved the strong connection between story and healing" ("They Have Stories"). A certain resistance (especially among Jewish scholars) to explore the meaning of the Holocaust in relation to other genocides might obviously account for such a "critical silence."¹⁰ And yet, as new clinical approaches to trauma blend Western tools with indigenous knowledge and methods, comparative critical approaches to trauma might become all the more necessary and productive. Within this context recent critical debates on both sides of the Atlantic clearly suggest that theoretical accounts of trauma can indeed offer an interesting lens to approach Native North American texts.¹¹

Entering such an embattled critical field, Debora L. Madsen reads Paula Gunn Allen's *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* (1983) as a novel that "actively engages and disputes dominant Western fictions of 'trauma' in a Native American context." Focusing on the narrative's treatment of time, Madsen questions the position of influential trauma theorists who have conceptualized a "belated temporality" to explain

xxiv Introduction

the narrative nature of trauma and its representation. Through a close reading of Allen's fragmented narrative, which takes into account a tribally informed perspective, Madsen ultimately argues for a revisionist approach in current debates on trauma. Such an approach, for Madsen, "can uncover for us a larger truth about identity de/formation under conditions of trauma."

If the connection between the Holocaust and Native American genocide can provide interesting venues for critical debates at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the same is true for the relation between the plight of Native North American peoples and other indigenous communities around the world. In her essay on Wendy Rose's poetry Kathryn Napier Gray explores the analogy of "looking" and "seeing" as a means by which Rose engages her Indian invisibility, her European heritage, and the invisibility of indigenous peoples across continents. While previously concerned mostly with her American Indian heritage, only recently, Napier Gray argues, has Rose come to terms with her European lineage—as her most recent collection of poems, *Itch Like Crazy* (2002) clearly suggests. At the same time, by considering Rose's anthropological background, Napier Gray explores the transnational perspective of Rose's traveling "eye/I," as it engages with the practice of placing indigenous peoples "in museum display cases" across the hemispheres. By telling the story of Truganinny (the last of the Tasmanian people) and Julia Pastrana (a mid-nineteenth-century Mexican Indian and circus performer), Rose, according to Napier Gray, "travels across continental, political, and 'genetic' borders . . . and imaginatively re-creates the experience of different indigenous and mixed-blood women." Upholding the strength of her "wide awake eyes," Rose ultimately constructs a "contact zone" that allows her to face the most painful elements of her complex mixed-blood existence.

The final essay in this section explores the transnational dimension of Leslie Marmon Silko's monumental novel *Almanac of the Dead* (1991). Responding to those critics who have attacked Silko for losing sight of "tribal sovereignty" in her multicultural, visionary approach, Rebecca Tillett focuses on the transcultural, hybrid space that Silko's narra-

tive creates in order to discuss the novel's recovery of tribal "histories/memories" as a powerful counterforce against America's historical amnesia. By erasing all borders—"between time and space; between history and geography; between living and dead; between forms of oppression; between nation-states; between continents"—*Almanac of the Dead*, Tillett suggests, grounded as it is on a Native indigenous epistemology that promotes a holistic approach, ironically becomes the most "indigenous," or "tribally conscious," novel written by a mixed-blood author with an eye toward the transnational/global scenario.

Focusing mostly on Europe but moving beyond Europe's bounded territory, the essays in part 4 of *Transatlantic Voices* follow two distinct but interrelated themes: comparative mythologies and transatlantic journeys. So far, comparative readings of Native and European mythologies have received considerably scarce critical attention in scholarship of Native North American literatures on both sides of the Atlantic. Myth and mythic language go back to the origins of Native and Western cultures and in both convey the generic, creative force that shapes the communal identity of the cultures (*múthos* in Greek meaning both "word" and "story"). Within this context critical interpretations of the mythological interlacing of Native and Indo-European worldviews, rather than functioning as a further act of (Western) epistemic imperialism—with European scholars always trying to impose Eurocentric discursive modes on indigenous material—might illustrate, instead, the essentially heteroglot and dialogic nature of Native American literatures as well as its subversive character. Crucial in such an interpretative process is the concept of "conjoining," a term—as Paul Taylor suggests—used by French medieval criticism "to identify the artistic process of changing a traditional form by appropriating it for a new use." By *conjoining* Native and Western mythological discourses, Native American authors forcefully articulate the political and subversive nature of their writing in terms of "abrogation" and "(re)appropriation" of Eurocentric discourse while forcing Eurocentric readers to consider indigenous Native epistemologies.¹²

Authors such as James Welch, N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon

xxvi Introduction

Silko, Louise Erdrich, Gerald Vizenor, Aaron Carr, Louis Owens, to mention a few, consciously or not have superbly and subversively appropriated Greek and Roman mythology as well as European Middle Age and Renaissance cultural myths and fused them with Native American mythic lore. If, as the Jorge Luis Borges's epigraph to Momaday's novel *The Ancient Child* (1989) reads, "myth is at the beginning of literature, and also at its ends," it might be useful to investigate in detail the nature of such a statement and its relevance for contemporary Native North American writers (and European critics) operating at the crossroads of cultures. Such is the scope of the first three essays in part 4.

Paul Beekman Taylor's essay explores the "mythic connections" in Vizenor's *Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart* (1978). As a novel that "emanates and constitutes three overlapping mythic and post-mythic genre paradigms: exodus, pilgrimage, and quest," *Bearheart* bears overt echoes of the biblical tale of Moses, medieval morality plays, as well as of Chaucer's fourteenth-century human comedy, *The Canterbury Tales*. Taylor's journey into Vizenor's "prototexts" and "paratexts" is indeed far-reaching, as he also considers "European mythic searches for tokens of eternal life," exemplified by, among others, the Greek myth of Theseus's and Demeter's descent to the Underworld and by the Celtic quest for the Holy Grail. "Conjoining" not only Greek myths and medieval quest narratives but the overall corpus of European literature, "taking off where Cervantes ended," *Bearheart*, Taylor argues, has its literary correspondences in classical American literature as well: *Leaves of Grass* (1855), *Moby-Dick* (1851), and, most prominently, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). These are all texts with which Vizenor's "mythopoeia" effectively and all the more ironically converses. As he plunges more and more into his close reading, *à la recherche* of Vizenor's "pretexts and paratexts," Taylor ultimately characterizes *Bearheart*'s chronicle as "a manual of escape," one that tells us "how to emigrate" from "terminal beliefs and blinded visions to a non-mixed-blood universality of being."

Christian and Native water imagery in Erdrich's early novels are the focus of Mark Shackleton's essay. Along with those critics who read Erdrich's fusion of Western and Native mythologies "as an instance of

cross-fertilization,” Shackleton cross-reads Christian and Anishinabe water symbols in *Love Medicine* (1984, rev. 1993) and *Tracks* (1988) and illustrates how “the two cultures contrast, interpenetrate, and at times ironize each other.” Drawing on Greg Sarris’s comments on reading *Love Medicine*, Shackleton also addresses the critic/reader’s position in making these kinds of cross-cultural transactions. While acknowledging his Eurocentrism, his “greater knowledge of the Bible than Anishinabe myths and legends,” Shackleton is, nevertheless, willing to take up the challenge of cross-cultural reading, ultimately arguing that Erdrich’s “Christian and Native mythologies mak[e] large but rewarding demands on her readers” while challenging epistemological assumptions for both Native and Western audiences.

Following a discussion with N. Scott Momaday, in which the Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist recounted his visits to Bulgaria while the country was still under Communist rule, Yonka Krasteva “began to perceive a mode of reciprocity between Bulgarian traditional literature and that of Native peoples.” By taking such a comparative approach, Krasteva reads Linda Hogan’s *Power* (1998) as a borderland text, a novel conveying a cosmic message of healing. While critiquing Hogan’s overt binary thinking in her validation of Native American spirituality versus Judeo-Christian religion, Krasteva maintains that “the dynamic symbiosis between cultural epistemologies and symbolism in the construction of the sacred” that the novel promotes ultimately defies such a separatist ethos. Addressing the “rewriting of ancient myths” in Bulgarian culture, defined by Krasteva as “another marginalized, non-Western culture,” and in the ceremonial literature that draws from it, Krasteva’s cross-cultural reading, which takes into account recent perspectives in Native Christian discourse, ultimately complies with Hogan’s primary intent in her art: “I think of my work as part of the history of our tribe and as part of the history of colonization everywhere” (qtd. in Wilson, *Nature* 233).

The last three essays in the collection turn to the motif of the transatlantic journey while pointing out Native American writers’ reinvention of Europe. Ulla Haselstein reads James Welch’s final novel, *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*, as a form of “double translation,” with the protagonist

xxviii Introduction

taking up residence in Europe while maintaining “an unbroken commitment to Lakota cultural tradition and spirituality.” Unlike Native American Renaissance novels, which focused around the “homing in” trope (Bevis), Welch’s novel, Haselstein maintains, clearly suggests a significant change of direction. While focusing on the protagonist’s adventures in France, Haselstein also addresses the “cultural politics of Welch’s novel in the context of American minority histories” and briefly compares it with another, previous novel also set in Marseille—namely, Claude McKay’s *Banjo* (1929). While arguing that “there is no equivalent to the black Atlantic of multiple transatlantic journeys” in the experience of Native Americans, Haselstein nevertheless maintains that Welch’s protagonist does experience the conditions of other immigrants in nineteenth-century France, his life ultimately providing “the narrative framework for an interpretation of Native America identity as diasporic.”¹³

Simone Pellerin’s essay explores issues of racialism, class, stereotype, and spectacle in narratives by Louis Owens. Focusing on the “French pieces” included in *I Hear the Train: Reflections, Inventions, Refractions* (2001), Pellerin “travels” along the reversed “racial gazes” Owens in turn adopts in the attempt to make sense of the extravagantly maddening experience of his French publishing tour. Reading between the lines and making very clear that her reaction to Owens’s narratives is dictated not so much by her being “more or less French” but, rather, by the memory of a brief personal encounter she had with Owens himself in Paris, Pellerin, in her retroactive reading (following Owens’s tragic death in 2002), is deeply disturbed by Owens’s painful honesty in these pieces. The story “The Dancing Poodle of Arles,” for Pellerin, clearly “illuminates” the autobiographical essay about Owens’s French travels. With echoes from Van Gogh’s paintings and Van Gogh’s life, this story, Pellerin maintains, seems to explain why she cannot see “any irony” in Owens’s “discoveries in France” but only a powerful, disturbing inability “to cope with that incoherent power over the self that seems to overcome even the bravest of strong words on the page and colors on the canvas.”

ELVIRA PULITANO xxix

A. Robert Lee explores the “different geographies of Jim Barnes’s life” in an essay that presents one of the first, if not the first, critical analyses devoted to Barnes’s distinctive poetry. From the Great Southwest to the Pacific Northwest and to Missouri, all the way to a European traveling experience that has included brief residences in Como, Lausanne, Munich, and Paris, among various other places, Barnes’s poetry is significantly characterized by all these locales, “sites” that become, Lee argues, “at once exterior but intricately, and always, inward landscape.” As he travels through the rich repertoire of Barnes’s poetry, briefly referring to the poet’s work-in-progress—the story collection “A Good Place in the World” and new poetry to be titled *Visiting Picasso* (2007)—Lee maintains that Barnes’s Europe is appropriately linked with his America, “the mutuality of both sites” providing a “wholly distinctive signature.”

This is not a comprehensive collection of critical ideas or theoretical interpretations. Rather, the essays here serve as a forum, a discursive venue by means of which scholars in Europe contribute to a debate on Native North American literatures while calling attention to the most recent, original interpretations offered on the other side of the Atlantic. From Finland to Germany and Italy, from the United Kingdom and France to Switzerland and Bulgaria, contributors to *Transatlantic Voices* favor “the inescapable hybridity and intermixture of ideas” proposed by Gilroy that, far from affirming nationalistic, ethnically absolute approaches—European approaches—ultimately point toward the transnational and transcultural (xi). Such a critical orientation, I argue, is compatible with the ideological message that Native North American writers themselves have been sending for the past few decades and which now, at the beginning of the new millennium, seems to have become their most distinctive feature. In my view a collection such as this should invite attention in North America if only to suggest to both Native and non-Native readers that European scholars invested in issues concerning Native North American literatures and theory have, surely no less than their American colleagues, come a long way from earlier anthropological approaches and stereotypical views on Indianness.

xxx Introduction

More important, a collection such as this might indeed, in the era of increasing transnationalism, bridge the distance between two continents and worldviews kept apart by centuries of colonial history and cultural dominance.

This collection is dedicated to the memory of Louis Owens, a valued friend to some of the contributors, a generous mentor and friend to the editor. It was July 2002 when Louis and I first began discussing the potential for this volume. In a series of e-mail exchanges Louis encouraged me to pursue the project, adding that my upcoming appointment in the English Department at the University of Geneva (to start that fall) would have put me in an ideal position to initiate, develop, and complete a collection of essays on European criticism of Native North American literatures. A few days after his last message, in which—as I recall now—he had offered additional advice on editorial matters, I found out about his tragic, sudden death, as all of us did. Today I regret that I have lost those messages, magically and mysteriously disappeared in the meanders of cyberspace. More important, of course, I regret Louis's decision to end his life in such a tragic manner. I regret the fact that he could not ultimately find an alternative way to get rid of that “outside shadow” (a Choctaw expression Owens frequently used to explain his life) that determined his life. As A. Robert Lee points out, “His self-loss was our loss, untimely to a fault” (“Outside Shadow” 21).

Louis Owens first gave me the idea for this edited collection. Today, four years after his death, I can only be pleased that his idea has come to full completion. Louis Owens was and remains an important, original voice in Native North American Studies. As I hope these fourteen essays show, his legacy has not remained in vain. Thanks to all the contributors for making this project come true. Along with them I present, from both sides of the Atlantic, my belated, heartfelt tribute to Louis.

Genève, June 2006;
San Luis Obispo, December 2006