

Reasoning Together

THE NATIVE CRITICS COLLECTIVE

by

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ter's degree in rural development from Antioch College. She has also been a fellow at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. A good, if brief biography is found in Jennifer Baumgardner's interview, "Kitchen Table Candidate" in the April/May 2001 issue of *Ms. Magazine*.

43. LaDuke, *Last Standing Woman*, 270, 269, 271, 274, 276, 278.

44. Of the several articles and special journal issues devoted to the issue of repatriation of Native American remains, the most succinct in terms of its treatment of government policy, legal objectives, and community concerns is by Rebecca Tsosie, who examines the issue in relation to the discovery of "Kennewick Man"; the development of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act; and the consideration of repatriation as a political policy in its historical, cultural, and legal contexts. See "Privileging Claims," 583-677.

Theorizing American Indian Literature

Applying Oral Concepts to Written Traditions

CHRISTOPHER B. TEUTON

The earth is a great island floating in a sea of water, and suspended at each of the four cardinal points by a cord hanging down from the sky vault, which is of solid rock. When the world grows old and worn out, the people will die and the cords will break and let the earth sink down again into the ocean, and all will be water again. The Indians are afraid of this.

Myths of the Cherokee
James Mooney, 1900

The old ones tell us this is how the world began. Above the arch of the Sky-Vault lay Galunlati, the sky world. A long time ago the ancient animals found themselves crowded in there; they needed more space to live. These animals were similar to those we have today. There were Rabbit, Bear, Possum, Bat, and all the others. But the animals were larger than they are now, and they could talk; this was before they were completely formed as the creatures we now know, before their forms were finally shaped by their actions.

The animals were curious about the world of water far below the Sky-Vault, which stretched as far as anyone could see. They decided to have a council in which all would have a voice in deciding what should be done about their collective problem. In the end, little Dayunisi, Beaver's Grandchild, also known

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as the water beetle, volunteered to search the waters, looking for land for the animals to live upon. Dayunisi searched all over, but there was no land to be found. Finally, he thought to dive underneath the surface. He dove a long way down, and at last came to the bottom. With his last bit of strength, he grabbed a handful of something and brought it back up. It was a clump of mud. When Dayunisi placed it on the surface of the water, it began to spread out in all directions.

I begin this essay concerning an ethical Native literary criticism with the Cherokee creation story because it reminds me what stories and criticism should do: enable us to create our worlds. I have read this story, read about it, and found it referenced in dozens of works, including those by James Mooney, Charles Hudson, Theda Perdue, Robert J. Conley, and Thomas King. I have heard it told. I have seen it in the form of an animated cartoon by Joseph Erb, and I have seen it depicted by a Hollywood actor. I have a painting of it in my home. I have talked about it with family and friends. I have thought about it many, many times, from as many angles as I have discovered. And I have felt it, when once I lay in the middle of a creek deep in the Smoky Mountains and watched out of the corners of my eyes water beetles skitter across the surface of the water all around me. If there is a story that lives in me, it surely is this one. I never tire of its beauty and its meanings; it is both a story and a constant source of reflection on the responsibilities of being. These two aspects of its reality are inextricable.

The creation of Elohi is not simply a material matter; it occurs within and through a complex social context that is structured by clear ethical codes. As the story goes, Elohi was created by the animals of the Ancient Time because they needed more space in which to grow. The animals' goal was survival, and they first approached this goal through harmonious discussion. In council, the animals communicated with each other as equals. In the end, the council of animals relied upon an apparently weak creature, little Dayunisi, who alone could search the great expanse of water and dive deep enough to find earth. Elohi is created as a world of self-sustaining harmonious relationships in which every creature is necessary to the survival of all. Engaging the story as I am doing here, thinking about what it may mean, making claims about its symbolism, and defining some contours of its ethics, is something that has been done for as long as the story has existed. Among the reasons the story is powerful is that it is richly theoretical. Just as Plato's allegory of the cave is about more than climbing out of a hole to catch some sun, the Cherokee creation story is about more than diving into water to bring mud to the surface.

To claim that American Indian oral traditional stories like the Cherokee creation story may be read as theories or may be used as theoretical templates invites critique. The critique begins as a methodological one founded upon an

argument that to interpret oral narratives as though they are equivalent to texts that are products of literacy is to confuse and obfuscate the methods and purposes of two very different forms of communication. The obvious differences between the transmission of Native knowledge in oral and written contexts are well known: The oral communicative context is communal, while writing "isolates" the reader; the oral communicative event is, at the very least, dialectic, but the reader's text never responds; the oral event exists in the present, writing exists as a record of past thought.¹ And there are other, well-noted differences between these forms of communication. For American Indian literary theory, what is most crucial about the ways in which orality and literacy have been theorized concerns the prevailing conclusions regarding the ways in which knowledge and critical methods exist in oral and literate thought.

Walter J. Ong makes strict distinctions between primary oral cultures and literate cultures, and those lines have been drawn on the level of conceptualizing critical thought: "Human beings in primary oral cultures, those untouched by writing in any form, learn a great deal and possess and practice great wisdom, but they do not 'study.' They learn by apprenticeship—hunting with experienced hunters, for example—by discipleship, which is a kind of apprenticeship, by listening, by repeating what they hear, by mastering proverbs and ways of combining and recombining them, by assimilating other formulary materials, by participation in a kind of corporate retrospection—not by study in the strict sense."² According to Ong, human beings in oral cultures lacked what literates would identify as a critical method. The capacity for innovative, iconoclastic, purposeful thought only came later with the technology of writing. From this perspective, to analyze the Cherokee creation story as I have done above is to reveal my own indebtedness to the technology of writing for enabling me to gain a necessary critical distance from the story in order to analyze it, as "Writing . . . serves to separate and distance the knower and the known and thus to establish objectivity."³ Taking his lead from Ong, literary scholar Arnold Krupat similarly argues, "Traditional cultures abound in philosophical thought, powerful verbal and visual expression, and deeply felt relations to the divine or supernatural. But traditional cultures neither conceptualize nor linguistically articulate the generalized abstract categories of philosophy, literature, and religion."⁴ While Ong's theories are thought-provoking, one danger in overextending the implications of the contrasts he describes has already been realized in Native American literary studies.

Claiming oral cultures do not analyze their worlds portrays our oral contemporaries and ancestors as incapable of objective analysis and critical thought. But apart from implicitly constructing a hierarchy of knowledge, one in which orality is a vehicle of static knowledge and literacy allows for empirical progress, the refusal to acknowledge that philosophical thought, "literary" expression, and religious traditions may have been, and may continue to be, expressed in oral cultures effectively denies scholars of indigenous philosophy,

literature, and religion the ability to define and assert what Robert Warrior calls, in another context, a Native American “intellectual patrimony.”⁵ The critical methodologies that could come from claiming such a patrimony are denied any reality from the outset, as not only the narrative products of Native peoples but the practice of doing “Native American literature” is tied up in non-Native forms of representation and criticism: “In varying degrees, all verbal performances studied as ‘Native American literature,’ whether oral, textualized, or written, are mixed, hybrid; none are ‘pure’ or, strictly speaking, ‘autonomous.’ Native American written literature in particular is an intercultural practice; moreover, so far as it is written for publication, it is offered to a general audience, all of whose members in their own ways ‘receive’ it, even though none of them can in any reasonable way be said to ‘own’ it.”⁶ To extend the logic of this rhetorical position, it can be said that contemporary American Indian critical thought that builds off of any Native utterance is a hybrid product, not simply because the audiences for these utterances may be “intercultural,” the texts may be written in English, or even that their authors may claim mixed racial or cultural heritages but because the practice of analyzing the world through linguistic expression is understood as *Western in origin*. As long as this rhetorical position toward Native critical thought prevails, the connections contemporary scholars make with linguistic expressions of the Native past will be labeled critically anachronistic. In a final bitter irony, should we scholars of Native literature assume the rhetorical position that is claimed for oral people—that oral stories exist outside of criticism and are self-evidently truthful—we are labeled “essentialist” thinkers.

The divisions between oral and literate cultures that so often constrain the ways in which Native American thought can be theorized may be specific to the field of literary studies, for it appears that scholars in history and anthropology claim Indians have always theorized their worlds. In his magisterial *The Southeastern Indians*, Charles Hudson states, “It is useful to think of this Southeastern Indian belief system as a kind of theory. Just as a theory in our natural sciences explains a certain range of phenomena, a belief system explains unusual events in everyday life, though it is expressed in terms we generally call religious or magical. But to regard the belief system of the Southeastern Indians as being merely religious or magical is to fail to appreciate it.”⁷ These “theories,” of course, are expressed in ceremonies, rituals, and stories. In *A Forest of Time: American Indian Ways of History*, Peter Nabokov argues that Native oral traditions do not simply replicate belief, but are a form of discourse that extends Native knowledge and history through their diversity of representations: “By identifying the multiple, often quarreling interest groups within any society, and by making each of their claims the measure of any given history’s intended relevance or ‘scale’ (rather than abstract concepts of time or genres of narrative), we arrive at oral tradition’s defining benefit and unending pleasure: multiple versions.”⁸ Nabokov’s analysis of oral expression contradicts the portrayal of oral cultures as necessarily conservative in

striving to preserve their knowledge: “Rather than being closed systems of fixed symbols, if myths are to remain relevant and recited they must be susceptible to internal tinkering and updating.”⁹ While Hudson and Nabokov approach their studies of Native orality with different methodologies, both scholars assume that oral peoples have concepts, theories, and systems of knowledge, including belief systems and forms of historicizing the past.

The literary scholar who feels compelled to defend within his/her own field a critical interpretation that in other fields is a nonissue is bound to intuit the debate as more concerned about the politics of Native literary interpretation than it is about accurately representing the genealogies of Native American cultural heritage. Maori scholar Graham Smith identifies the attempt to deflect discussion away from pressing indigenous issues as the “politics of distraction,” a political dynamic in which indigenous scholars are “drawn into engaging with and justifying ourselves to the dominant society.” As an example, in this essay I have been writing about a methodological issue concerning interpretation that, in my experience, has little relevance to the ways in which stories are actually told and valued in contemporary Native communities. The interpretive issue is an academic one, concerning as it does the ways in which texts are understood in an academic context, and, in light of the obvious power dynamics involved, it “puts the colonizer at the centre, and thereby we [indigenous academics] become co-opted into reproducing (albeit unintentionally) our own oppression.”¹⁰

Having justified as much as I feel necessary the reason I may engage the Cherokee origin story as a critical source, I now want to discuss the critical methods and ethics that may be drawn from such an engagement with oral tradition.

In the full origin story, layer upon layer of meaning is added as Cherokees articulate their worldview and model complex strategies for interpreting that world. One way of reading the story is as an allegory concerning the creation and application of knowledge. A tribally centered interpretation of the Cherokee origin story might conceptualize the reader as an analogue of Dayunisi. Like Dayunisi, the reader leaves the ordered world of stable, static knowledge, the Upper World, in order to dive deep into the unexplored depths of chaotic and mysterious potential meaning in the Under World. Like Dayunisi, each reader brings his/her own viewpoint, experience, and unique skills to the task of interpretation. The act of returning with new knowledge and fresh interpretations creates new terrain upon which the community may continue to grow. Knowledge is sought and valued in relation to the collective harmony and survival of the community as a whole.

Read as an allegory about the creation of new knowledge, the Cherokee origin story models criticism as a social practice. The story is built upon relationships: among the animals themselves, between the animals and Ga-

lunlati, and between the animals and the Under World. Crucially, the existence of all those relationships depends upon discussion and one individual risking his life for the good of the whole. Dayunisi dives into the water not because it is his duty but because he can; he has the specific tools needed to help others, and his sacrifice is an act of altruism. And it is that act of altruism upon which the world depends. It is the first Cherokee conceptualization of social responsibility, and, coming out of oral tradition, it is a clear articulation of an ethical purpose and motivation for creating new knowledge, which is also at the heart of critical thought.

In spite of the resistance to acknowledge the conceptual continuity between oral and literate modes of critical thought, recent critical works by scholars such as Jace Weaver, Taiaiake Alfred, Maureen Konkle, Lucy Maddox, and Robert Warrior reveal in diverse ways that since the first writings were printed by Indians in North America, criticism as a social practice has been embedded within these works. An apt term for these works is “communitist,” to use Jace Weaver’s term, as they are committed to community with an activist intent. But, rather than arguing that these works were communitist exclusively because of the social and political contexts in which they were produced, I want to suggest that the sources of the communitism in Native writing have their origins as a sociocritical practice in Native oral traditions.

Robert Warrior’s *The People and the Word: Reading Native Nonfiction* illustrates on multiple levels the ways in which Native writers have used their literary skills to serve the interests of Native people. Warrior focuses exclusively on the contributions of Native literacy, as he claims “the history of Native writing constitutes an intellectual tradition, a tradition that can and should inform the contemporary work of Native intellectuals.” While tracing out a genealogy of the contributions and effects of literacy in the work and lives of William Apress, the framers of the Osage constitution, N. Scott Momaday, and accounts of Native students in boarding schools, Warrior’s text illustrates the ethical dimension common to such temporally and culturally distanced subjects. Warrior is correct in asserting, “Nonfiction writers have brought us impassioned pleas on behalf of Native peoples, accounts of crucial moments in Native history, profiles of people in contemporary Native communities, and explorations of dysfunctions, like substance abuse, in the Native world. But what motivated writers such as Apress to dedicate their lives to support Native people through writing? The question is perhaps impossible to answer with any exactness, but it is worth asking, as Warrior claims: “This tradition of writing is the oldest and most robust type of modern writing that Native people in North America have produced as they have sought literate means through which to engage themselves and others in a discourse on the possibilities of a Native future.” What is key here is that Native American nonfiction writers, including scholars, continue to write in support of their communities and Native America as a whole, and they do so, as much as—and perhaps more than—any other group of scholars with an ethical dimension in

mind. Witness Warrior’s own purpose for writing this text: “My overarching concern is working out how doing the work of the critic and intellectual can contribute to improving the intellectual health of Native America, its people, and its communities.” And Warrior approaches his subject matter with a decidedly textual methodology, one soundly grounded in archival work, cultural and literary history, and close readings of texts and contexts.¹¹

While reaching for similar goals, Taiaiake Alfred’s *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto* utilizes the Rotinohshonni Condolence ceremony for its structure and methodology. It is fascinating to juxtapose these two texts. Warrior’s is dedicated to exploring the tradition of intellectual thought in literacy, while Alfred’s is dedicated to reinvigorating Native intellectual traditions through a renewed focus on oral traditional paradigms: “I am advocating a self-conscious traditionalism, an intellectual, social, and political movement that will reinvigorate those values, principles, and other cultural elements that are best suited to the larger contemporary political and economic reality.” Warrior focuses on critically neglected writings, and Alfred on critically neglected oral traditions: “The meanings of our traditional teachings are embedded in the structure of the narrative as much as in any words one might write in order to explain them.”¹² While on the surface very different, the two works share a commitment to Native community and a focus on the social responsibilities that are crucial aspects of both oral and literate traditions. Speaking of the purposes of intellectual thought, Warrior writes of his work, “These readings, then, are self-consciously committed ones that take seriously the social and existential implications of intellectual work and proceed from the idea that what intellectuals do ought to matter and ought to make a difference in the real lives of real people living in real time.”¹³ Similarly, Alfred places knowledge in a community context, but links it to a definition of identity: “However knowledgeable and rooted one may be, one cannot be truly indigenous without the support, inspiration, reprobation, and stress of a community as facts of life. Ideas transform when they make the journey from the mind of one person into the collective consciousness; and our peoples’ reality is communal.”¹⁴ Based on two very different methodological approaches, what ties together the work of Alfred and Warrior is their commitments to Native community within the context of knowledge production, and that ethos of social responsibility runs strong in both the written and oral traditions they discuss and model in their own works.

If writing isolates, creates individualism, then how is it that Native literary studies is so dominated by the concerns of Native community? The ethical dimension of Native literature owes much to the values expressed in oral traditions, values that are now shared and explored in Native nonfiction and fiction. So strong is the ethical dimension of Native American writing that the different ways in which criticism is performed as a social practice may serve as a rubric for defining several approaches to the study of Native American literature and the purposes of Native American literary criticism.

Three Sociocritical Modes of Interpretation

It is often claimed that American Indian literary criticism began as a field of study in the late 1960s and early 1970s during the blossoming of what Kenneth Lincoln named the “Native American literary renaissance,” but that system of dating Native American critical writing needs to be pushed back. While much debate surrounds what is considered “writing,” it is accepted that at least since the first century B.C. the Maya people of Izapan had systems of writing and iconography. There are assuredly other, more ancient forms of critical writing, but the Quiché Maya *Popol Vuh* stands out as one of the earliest and continuously influential works of critical writing produced in the Americas. Apart from being one of the most complex texts in human history, one that offers a fully integrated and layered astronomical, cosmological, epistemological, agricultural, and religious epic, the *Popol Vuh* is also a postcolonial text that calls attention to itself as both a record of a colonized people and a source of their resistance. Around 1558 it was translated from Quiché Mayan into Spanish by writers who refused to identify themselves, but whose work bears their defiance of the Spanish colonizers. One way of reading the *Popol Vuh* is as a book about a book, the Maya “Council Book,” or “The Light That Came from beside the Sea,” a text that was “the potential and source for everything done in the citadel of Quiché, the nation of the Quiché people.” One imagines that writing in secrecy, transcribing from “the original book and ancient writing,” the Quiché authors could see where the colonizers would lead their people. With the destruction of their books and their nation, and with their culture and belief system under attack “now amid the preaching of God, in Christendom now,” they used the weapon of language to serve the future needs of their people in order to remain a people. Nearly five hundred years after it was written in Quiché, the *Popol Vuh* continues to live within Maya culture as, among other functions, a Maya critical text that embodies a Maya critical methodology.¹⁵

The field of American Indian literary studies has only recently begun to reconceptualize what may constitute critical methodologies and the sources, such as the *Popol Vuh*, from which these methodologies may originate. But currently, the academic study of American Indian creative works may be divided into three critical modes of interpretation. These modes are not strictly chronological; all three styles of criticism continue to be published. The three modes may be differentiated not just by the central questions they ask, but by the ethical positions they define in relation to the social contexts they engage. The progression of the modes marks a gradual shift from non-Native-centered to Native-centered epistemologies employed in the analysis of Native literature. Mode one criticism has its roots in ethnographic and anthropological discourse and is inevitably concerned to some degree with issues surrounding the implications of Native American cultural authenticity and cultural identity. A tacit question that haunts mode-one criticism is

“Who and what is an Indian?” Mode-two criticism attempts to correct the misrepresentation of Native peoples and cultures. Functioning similarly to those Native American criticisms that Robert Warrior argues appeal to “idealism” and/or “essentialism” and that hope to provide a “strong counternarrative to received academic and popular understandings of American Indian people and cultures,” mode-two criticism often allows its discourse to be determined by that which it would argue against, asking, “Who can say who and what is Indian but an Indian?”¹⁶ Mode-three criticism bypasses questions of representation to theorize how academic work can be made accountable and put in dialogue with Native people, communities, and nations. Mode-three criticism is speculative and process-oriented, asking, “How are we Native people and nations to become who we want to become?” Although each mode asks different types of questions and addresses different audiences’ concerns, they often exist side by side; the borders between each mode are potentially fluid. A single article may contain examples of mode-one, -two, and -three criticism, sometimes necessarily so. Nevertheless, particular critical modes have dominated Native literary discourse at different points during the past thirty years or so, and this literary history needs to be explored in order for Native literary discourse to understand its present and future paths.

Mode-one Native American literary criticism began in the mid-1970s and is defined by criticism that applies mainstream critical theories and methodologies, with their epistemological roots in Western thought, to interpret American Indian literature. Works such as Kenneth Lincoln’s *Native American Renaissance* use an interdisciplinary methodology based on anthropological, ethnographical, and historical sources and attempt to translate Native cultural thought through analyzing literature: criticism as an act of cultural translation. The use of non-Native evaluative models that do not draw on Native worldviews or knowledge systems for their philosophical bases to critique Native American art is understandable when one considers the historical context. In the early 1970s, when Native literature was first recognized as a field of study, scholars struggled foremost to get Native literature recognized as a legitimate focus of scholarship, worthy of being taught in universities. To this end, Native literary scholarship was mostly interested in developing a canon of Native literature, focusing specifically on questions of definition: “What is Indian literature?” and “Who is an Indian author?”¹⁷ As the field moved into the 1980s, mode-one scholarship continued the process of cultural translation and provided important cultural background research, useful readings of specific texts, and important bibliographic and literary historical research.

Recent works of mode-one discourse have begun to reimagine the relationships between Native American art, culture, and politics in relation to Western culture. Arnold Krupat’s *The Turn to the Native: Studies in Criticism and Culture* is indicative of this development, advocating a form of “cross-cultural translation or ethnocriticism” as a “critical language that might mediate”

between texts as different as “Proust and Native American fiction.”¹⁸ In *Red Matters: Native American Studies*, Krupat argues once again for a cosmopolitan literary pose, one that “cobble . . . [a] criticism out of a variety of perspectival possibilities” and whose purpose of “cross-cultural translation” claims that the nationalist, indigenist, and cosmopolitan perspectives need each other to “achieve [their] full discursive effectivity.”¹⁹ Recently, however, critics such as Maureen Konkle have begun to challenge what they see as an inherent privileging of cultural contexts over political contexts in the study of Native American literature. In her analysis of the politics of Indian intellectual discourse, *Writing Indian Nations*, Konkle writes of the nineteenth-century Cherokee writer Elias Boudinot’s use of his education in the struggle to preserve the sovereignty of the Cherokee Nation prior to removal: “The two main points that Boudinot as a Cherokee spokesman tried to get across to whites were, first, that the Cherokees formed a political entity that was separate from and not subordinate to U.S. authority and, second, that the Cherokees and other Native peoples had been misrepresented by whites as static primitives locked in time, when they in fact had changed over time like whites themselves.” A Western education equipped nineteenth-century Indian intellectuals like Boudinot to “reject racial difference, claim history and therefore political equality for themselves, and, often through the use of sustained textual analysis, refute whites’ knowledge about them as politically self-interested misrepresentations.”²⁰ Konkle shows that not just literacy, but the use of “textual analysis” specifically has an historical precedent in the Cherokee Nation as a crucial tool of decolonization. While mode-one criticism continues to make important contributions to Native literary studies on the academic level, its Western methodological orientation and focus on an academic audience was one of the factors that gave rise to a second mode of criticism that sought to make American Indian literary studies more accountable to Native concerns and to address American Indian audiences directly.

Mode-one and mode-two scholarship developed side by side. Critics such as Vine Deloria, Jr., Paula Gunn Allen, Ward Churchill, and Gerald Vizenor wrote mode-two political, cultural, and literary theoretical criticism throughout the ’70s, ’80s, and ’90s. Despite what may at first appear focused on an academic audience, a great deal of mode-two criticism is addressed to mainstream readers. While often differing widely in terms of methodological approach, mode-two scholarship is defined by two differing critical paths that attempt to reach similar goals. Concerning issues of representation, writers such as Vizenor attempt to show the ramifications of Euroamerican stereotypes on the self-perceptions of Native people. Vizenor’s philosophical idealist position attempts to persuade readers of his trickster discourse to reimagine who they are, in all their historical, cultural, and racial complexity, with the aim of freeing them metaphysically. More concerned with the struggles over Native American material reality, mode-two works by scholars such as Elizabeth Cook-Lynn attempt to keep the central focus and goal of Indian studies

as a field and scholarship about Indians actively committed to supporting the sovereignty of Native nations and cultures. Cultural critics such as Deloria, whose 1969 groundbreaking work, *Custer Died For Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, laid bare the systems of power and repression that have served to subjugate Indians, turned the critical gaze back on mainstream American culture. An important function of this struggle has been the creation of Native critical neologisms, concepts, and strategies, such as Vizenor’s “terminal creeds,” introduced in his first novel, *Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart* (1978); Allen’s terms “gynocentric” and “gynocratic,” discussed in *The Sacred Hoop* (1986); and Cook-Lynn’s term “anti-Indianism,” articulated in *Anti-Indianism in Modern America* (2001). When mode-two discourse is focused on psychic liberation, it has largely been supported by mainstream literary criticism, but when discussions of real-world political struggles over land and Native nationhood infuse mode-two scholarly works, those texts often draw critiques from scholars who claim they reduce the world-changing effects of cross-cultural exchanges on Native America.

Offering a postcolonial critique of Paula Gunn Allen’s *The Sacred Hoop*, Elvira Pulitano writes, “Instead of participating in the critical dialogue from within, showing how it is possible to create new ways of theorizing while adopting the discursive tools offered by the metropolitan center, Allen steps outside, into the margin, and opts for a separatist solution. Such a separatist solution, however, ironically ends up legitimating the binary categories of Western/Eurocentric thinking.”²¹ Pulitano attempts to recenter the study of American Indian literature within mainstream critical discourse by claiming that a Native critical perspective is untenable. One could imagine a similar critique of Janice Acoose’s essay in this volume. In attempting to articulate a culturally specific critical position, such as Allen’s Laguna feminist mode of cultural critique, critics who do not foreground and privilege the supposed hybrid nature of Native cultural productions have been labeled essentialists. This tension between what have been called the “essentialist” and the more fluid ideas of Native tradition is a touchstone for the way mode-two criticism has been perceived.

Similarly, some mode-two works such as Ward Churchill’s *Fantasies of the Master Race: Literature, Cinema and the Colonization of American Indians* seem reactive and might give the impression that mode two-criticism is more concerned with critiquing misrepresentations of Native cultures than with actually developing Native conceptual models. Seen in historical context, however, it has been crucial that mode-two scholarship create a space in which Native critical thought could develop in its own terms, and, in spite of the charges of “essentialism” leveled at writers of mode-two texts, mode-two scholarship has done this through articulating the differences between Native and non-Native worldviews. Mode-two scholarship has focused on the continued colonial subjugation of American Indian nations by the United States, exposing unlawful land claims, abuses of federal power, and the misuse of

Native lands. By following this course, however, mode-two scholarship at times risks overstating the divisions between the Native and non-Native, and has thus been perceived as overly ideological. Mode-two scholarship has accomplished a great deal in creating Native-centered academic spaces for the articulation and exploration of tribal knowledge systems, worldviews, and political theories. It has not, however, freed itself from an adversarial relationship to the Western institutional world, a fact that limits its interpretive reach.

In the 1990s, a third mode of American Indian literary scholarship began to reshape the field. Building on the work initiated within mode-one criticism, but sharing with mode-two criticism a dedication to bridging the gap between Native American critical writing and the concerns of Native American communities, mode-three criticism focuses on developing American Indian conceptual, theoretical, and methodological discourses to be used in the study of Native American art, culture, and politics. To varying degrees, and sometimes in direct conflict, critical texts by Native intellectuals—Gerald Vizenor, Robert Warrior, Greg Sarris, Craig Womack, Louis Owens, Jace Weaver and, among others, the contributors to this volume—build upon the work of mode-two scholarship by acknowledging the differences between Western and Native worldviews, but they endeavor to shift the focus of Native American literary discourse from a reactive critical position to one that may be both theoretically sophisticated and culturally grounded. Mode-three criticism engages a process of culture-building by imagining the place of critical scholarship within Native communities and by providing terms that may be used to create a space for the articulation of Native epistemologies within academia but are accessible and informative to mainstream audiences. Craig Womack, for example, articulates several important mode-three concerns in his article in this volume: “What is the relationship between our theories and the people we are theorizing about? Do the subjects of our theorizing see themselves in the same way as we describe them in books, journal articles, classroom lectures, and so on? How do we bring their self-representations into our theorizing? I see this as one of the most salient, as well as the most difficult, ethical questions in my life as a scholar.”

Firmly committed to the idea of tribal sovereignty, mode-three criticism debates the best means to be used in decolonizing Native American critical studies. As Womack makes clear, one method is to enter into dialogue with one’s tribal community. Still, while some mode-three critics argue with Elizabeth Cook-Lynn that Native national sovereignty and community survival should be the goal of Native literary criticism, others, such as Louis Owens, support a more exploratory and transformational critical ethos in keeping with Gerald Vizenor’s trickster discourse. In a similar vein, Tol Foster’s essay on Will Rogers in this volume argues that a strength of Native American literature has been its ability to have a cosmopolitan constituency and intellectual reach. At the same time, Owens himself acknowledges the skepticism some Native writers have concerning the application of mainstream theory,

such as postmodern theory, in Native textual studies.²² While mode-three criticism continues to work out how, and to what extent, American Indian literary discourse may benefit from judicious use of Western academic theory, it has consistently remained focused on the articulation of Native conceptual models in the struggle for Native national rights and cultural self-actualization. As a part of this process, many works of mode-three criticism return to ideas and concepts first expressed within Native oral traditions, but developed and adapted by Native writers, for models of how to read and understand contemporary Native American literatures.

While all three modes of American Indian literary criticism address, and are informed by, mainstream critical theory, the postcolonial theoretical concept of hybridity has been particularly influential in the development of Native American literary criticism. As articulated in such canonical works as *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (1989), hybridity and syncretism have deeply influenced the development of post-colonial literatures.²³ If only because Native American writers usually publish in English, a language of American colonization, those who advocate the concept of hybridity argue that these writers occupy a hybrid, mixed, cross-cultural space that forever separates them from the precolonial past and undercuts any “separatist” political positions they may or may not advocate.²⁴ The political implications of how hybridity is understood have profound ramifications in the study of Native American literatures. Those who advocate hybridity as a concept argue that Native writers and critics delude themselves when they claim to write in support of decolonizing Native nations, for they are already deeply shaped and influenced by colonial power. Once again, this is an argument that is founded upon the idea that the practice of critical thought is Western in origin and is inextricably linked to literacy. Instead of resisting the label “hybrid,” those who advocate hybridity might argue, Native Americans should celebrate it, for “cultural syncreticity is a valuable as well as inescapable and characteristic feature of all post-colonial societies and indeed is the source of their peculiar strength (Williams 1969).”²⁵ However, from the perspectives of mode-two and a growing contingent of mode-three critics, this issue of culture-sharing has little to do with cultural purity/impurity and more to do with the production and aims of knowledge within a colonial context.

Mode-three criticism makes use of, without allowing its purposes to be defined by, academic theory. Robert Warrior illustrates a mode-three critical stance when, in his introduction to *Tribal Secrets*, he justifies privileging Native voices and discourses, stating that while his position may “seem overly separatist to some, [it] accepts the influences and complexities of contemporary and historical American Indian life and prepares the ground for more fruitfully engaging non-Native critical discourses.”²⁶ Despite Warrior’s careful defense of his “Blackjacks discourse,” an “intellectual space” that “regulate[ed] the process by which visitors entered that space” and allowed him to “sort through the

cacophony of voices competing for critical attention,” critics such as Pulitano interpreted Warrior’s “intellectual sovereignty” as separatist.²⁷ But to pigeon-hole mode-three criticism as separatist is misguided. The real defining characteristic of the mode has less to do with any separatist intellectual agenda than it does with making Native American critical thought respond to the needs of Native communities in a nonreactive, intellectually sophisticated manner. In *The People and the Word*, Warrior proposes the concept of “intellectual trade routes” as something different from but complementing “intellectual sovereignty.” Linking the ancient Native tradition of trade across cultural and geographic borders, Warrior argues that the concept of intellectual trade routes enables scholars to find commonalities, differences, and “new knowledge from new places.” This new knowledge comes out of the juxtapositions of wildly diverse histories, stories, and even discourses. As Warrior acknowledges, “intellectual trade routes” is a term for a “different agenda” than the “withdrawing into an intellectual space” that the Blackjacks discourse and “intellectual sovereignty” initially depended upon. While this intellectual dynamic of closing in with the Blackjacks discourse and opening up with “intellectual trade routes” may seem like a contradiction, that is only the case if one does not understand that the impetus for exploring these works remains the same: a “genuine love and passion I have for the modern development of intellectualism among indigenous people and the figures who have been instrumental to that development.”²⁸

Mode-three scholarship strives to create theories that respond to the issues and concerns of Native communities, and in doing so it has expanded the horizon of American Indian critical study by daring to articulate, and then privilege, Native perspectives. Works such as Sarris’s *Keeping Slug Woman Alive* develop critical terms and methodologies to interpret Native literature and culture. These new terminologies are opening up ways of reading Native texts from within sociocritical frameworks that support the idea that criticism is a social act. This act of critical self-determination is a philosophical statement that asserts the value of culturally specific ontologies, epistemologies, and critical paradigms.

Mode-three criticism is just beginning to explore the field of Native American critical thought, but as the field develops it is important to recognize one crucial commonality within this form of intellectual engagement: its understanding of criticism as a social practice with the potential to impact material reality. While as of yet mode-three criticism has been largely focused on printed texts, its commitments to studying Native written literature, literary history, and critical theory are informed by the concepts and traditional values articulated within tribal oral traditions.

Building on Paulo Freire’s concept of “praxis,” Warrior utilizes Deloria’s concept of tribal sovereignty as “process-oriented,” “constructive group action” that “recognizes that American Indians have to go through a process of building community and that that process will define the future.” Instead of

defining “sovereignty” as the political act of preserving Native national autonomy, Warrior uses “intellectual sovereignty” to refer to a *tribal discourse* that is founded on constructing “communities and social structures through which those communities exercise political, economic, and spiritual power along with responsibility.”²⁹ The understanding of community and discourse that is “process-oriented” and focused on building group solidarity is not a description of a social commitment immediately associated with a written discourse. As Ong is so often quoted, “Writing and print isolate. There is no collective noun or concept for readers corresponding to ‘audience.’”³⁰ But the ways in which Warrior theorizes intellectual sovereignty assumes that there is a collective group, a readership, an audience that can be united by their commitments and their participation within a written discourse. What is in many ways amazing is that writing as if there were a collective has made that collective come together as it is doing in this volume, speaking to and with each other—and to the other audiences who may engage our discussion. Using this concept of sovereignty as a process of communal self-determination, Warrior applies his ideas to American Indian intellectual and critical discourse: “I contend that it is now critical for American Indian intellectuals committed to sovereignty to realize that we too must struggle for sovereignty, *intellectual sovereignty*, and allow the definition and articulation of what that means to emerge as we critically reflect on that struggle.” In keeping with this community-centered critical approach, Warrior emphasizes the relevance of Native critical studies to “issues of economic and social class, gender, and sexual orientation,” which have often been ignored.³¹

While sharing the same social commitments as Warrior’s *Tribal Secrets*, Jace Weaver’s *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community* uses values articulated first within Native oral traditions as the basis for what he calls “communitist” literature: “It is formed by a combination of the words ‘community’ and ‘activism.’ Literature is communitist to the extent that it has a proactive commitment to Native community, including what I term the ‘wider community’ of Creation itself.”³² Weaver’s communitism avoids judgments based upon the explicit political ideology of a text, instead expanding his interpretive apparatuses to include a definition of Native literature that is inclusive of multiple diverging viewpoints and voices, both from the past and the present.

Craig Womack’s *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* extends Warrior’s and Weaver’s work on Native intellectual and theoretical traditions by focusing on a particular indigenous nation, Womack’s Creek Nation. Through studying the relationship between Muscogee Creek oral traditions, Muscogee writers, and their ties to Creek notions of nationhood, Womack argues for the existence and importance of tribally specific Native national literatures. Womack shows how oral traditional stories and Creek written narratives provide the concepts upon which Creek nationalism is built, arguing explicitly for the interpretive use of oral traditional models of nationalism

when analyzing written literature: "Critics create literary theory in relation to literature, and one would expect nothing less from national literatures—that the oral tradition would generate vital approaches for examining Native literatures. Oral tradition, then, becomes central to Native political analysis and the development of Native literary theory rather than fodder for backing up critics' pet theses on performance and translation, a discussion that has become largely redundant."³³ Like Warrior's and Weaver's, Womack's work argues that the relationship between Native literature and Native communities is arguably the greatest concern of current criticism.

In her essay in this volume, "Land Claims, Identity Claims: Mapping Indigenous Feminism in Literary Criticism and in Winona LaDuke's *Last Standing Woman*," Cheryl Suzack illustrates the directions mode-three criticism may take when it maintains its dual focus on intellectual sophistication and commitment to Native communities. Suzack identifies an oppositional space in which gender identity becomes "an analytical category" through which "discussions of tribal politics and community values" may be engaged. What is both powerful and insightful about Suzack's methodology is that she is able to borrow both from mainstream notions of criticism, including feminist theory, and from theories of Native community and gender relations that are expressed in the form of the novel. Suzack does not simply apply a theory to LaDuke's novel or retrofit mainstream feminism to serve as a critical lens; instead she approaches *Last Standing Woman* as a source of theory, perhaps one of the better explorations of the ways Native American women activists come to "recognize their common identity and are moved to political action." But, beyond theorizing, Suzack challenges mainstream notions of the common boundaries between criticism and the world beyond academia by anchoring her discussion of gender in terms of the real ways the White Earth band of Chippewa Indians was categorized within the White Earth Land Settlement Act (WELSA). Criticism, theory, and practice come together in such a way that they mutually support each other.

Essays such as Suzack's share with some of the most influential works of Native American literary studies in the past ten years an expressed goal of clarifying not just the connections, but the responsibilities that Native writers, Native writings, Native communities, and critics of Native literature all share. Terms such as Warrior's "intellectual sovereignty" and, just recently, "intellectual trade routes"; Weaver's "communitism"; Cook-Lynn's "anti-Indianism"; Womack's "Red Stick" approach—all these terms, which are the markers of literary theoretical concepts, are unintelligible outside the context of Native community history, politics, and needs. They are critical terms used in theorizing the relationships between indigenous peoples and colonial powers, and as such they may be applicable to the struggles of indigenous communities around the world.

The directions in which mode-three criticism is headed require considering a general definition of Native American literary theory. In some ways, a definition of "theory" may be a little late in coming for Native American

literary studies, since scholars of Native literature have surely been theorizing, creating concepts, and defining terms for years. But as the contours of the field become clearer in focus, it is certain that there is no general understanding of what constitutes theory as it is applied. And, in light of the topic of this volume, it is important to at least suggest one working definition of theory as it applies to American Indian literatures. As an example of a mainstream definition of theory, I quote Jonathan Culler:

1. Theory is interdisciplinary—discourse with effects outside an original discipline.
2. Theory is analytical and speculative—an attempt to work out what is involved in what we call sex or language or writing or meaning or the subject.
3. Theory is a critique of common sense, of concepts taken as natural.
4. Theory is reflexive, thinking about thinking, enquiry into the categories we use in making sense of things, in literature and in other discursive practices.³⁴

Glaringly absent from this definition, and what makes it, as it stands, an inappropriate definition of theory as applied to Native literary studies is a reference to the social existence and obligations of theory. A fifth characteristic would perhaps read: "Theory arises out of the dialectical relationship among artists, arts, critics, and Native communities." In Culler's definition, the subject and object of theory is itself. In Native theory the subject is Native experience, the object, Native community.

What is crucial at this moment in the field of Native American literary studies is to continue to develop terms and concepts that can further the study of American Indian experience in all its richness. And just as many contemporary writers, including Lisa Brooks in this volume, are more than ever revisiting early Native writers with an eye toward constructing a genealogy of Native critical thought, it is also important to return to more recent canonical texts and replace them within the paradigms of contemporary Native American literary criticism. What increasingly seems to be the case is that writers, both creative and nonfiction, are always at least a couple critical steps ahead of the work of scholars in our field. A reading of the concept of "vision" in N. Scott Momaday's well-known *The Way to Rainy Mountain* illustrates more clearly the potential for developing alternative interpretive strategies and critical terms drawn from reading Native literature through the lens of oral traditional paradigms. In *The Way to Rainy Mountain* Momaday shows performatively how a concept may be constructed within a sociocritical context.

Reading a Concept of "Vision" in *The Way to Rainy Mountain*

In *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, the concept of "vision" entails movement from alienation to knowledge, from lack of connection to a relationship with place, from a lack of cultural identity to a deeply felt cultural identity. More

than an extension of physical sight, vision is a process of mediation that includes both physical sight and intellectual and emotional insight. As a story about the migration of the Kiowas from the mountains to the plains, *Rainy Mountain* is not just about the narrator's identity, but also about the Kiowas' quest to reconceive themselves, to increase their "stature" as a people and to imagine who they could be. Throughout the text, metaphors of sight conceptualize the way the Kiowas and, eventually, the narrator understand themselves. When the Kiowas come down from the mountains and onto the plains, the newfound ability to see into the "distance" answers a fundamental need. Expressing their living relationship with the places that would become their homelands, the ability to "see far" is the physical expression of a worldview. The intellectual counterpart of this worldview theorizes insight as an ever-deepening exploration and understanding of life through the mind's eye. When the capacity for sight and insight is honed and kept vibrant, the members of a culture may attain a sense of vision that encourages actions that contribute to health and survival. In *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, this type of vision lies near the core of the culturally specific Kiowa idea of imagination that is first expressed in language and is intertwined with the relationship between a people and a land.

The introduction to *Rainy Mountain* explores how vision is nurtured by charting the narrator's process of developing a Kiowa way of seeing. As the text makes clear, vision is not pre-given. As we see and think, we are interpreting the world. This process of reflection and self-reflection is characterized by its mutability; it represents an ever-expanding dialectic between sight and insight, place and human beings. The more we see, the more we think; the more carefully we think, the more deeply we see. Although an individual may initially base his acquisition of vision on the sight and insight gained from the physical experience of a place, this process cannot be abstracted from culturally specific uses of language, memory, thought, and emotion. As the narrator finds out, vision is necessarily a communal concept, one that depends upon the concept of relationship and finds its most complete expression in the shared vision of a people.

In *Rainy Mountain*, the narrator's quest focuses largely on learning to "see" the lands that have shaped Kiowa identity from within a Kiowa perspective. In the opening paragraph of the introduction, the narrator describes the land surrounding Rainy Mountain, geographically placing it and then naming it. The narrator states: "The hardest weather in the world is there. Winter brings blizzards, hot tornadic winds arise in the spring, and in summer, the prairie is an anvil's edge." Despite his attention to changes in the land, the narrator's vision of Rainy Mountain at first lacks a sense of interrelationship that the storytelling tradition so deeply values. The narrator claims that "Loneliness is an aspect of the land" and "All things in the plain are isolate; there is no confusion of objects in the eye, but *one* hill or *one* tree or *one* man." Analyzed from the perspective of physical sight, the narrator's perceptions are clear;

objects do stand out more clearly on the plains. But, from the Kiowa cultural perspective, the narrator's understanding of Rainy Mountain is misinformed. His reading of the land as lonely, isolating, and divided into singular objects shows his limited understanding of both relationship and place. While he uses the dialectic of sight and insight to create a partial vision of Rainy Mountain, he does not yet have the cultural tools—such as stories, histories, and even his own reevaluated experiences—to understand his ancestors' relationships to that very land.³⁵

The narrator's misapprehension of place grows. In the next line he says, "To look upon that landscape in the early morning, with the sun at your back, is to lose the sense of proportion. Your imagination comes to life, and this, you think, is where Creation was begun." Once again, the narrator's physical sight is clear; his interpretation is not so clear. While a loss of proportion could be read as a way of seeing all things in creation equally, in relation to a tribal worldview predicated on balance it marks a sickening loss of dimension, a disruption of proper relationships. Gradually, the narrator's perceptions move from sight to insight. By actively reading the land, he engages in a process of creating a vision of Rainy Mountain; thus, his imagination does "come to life." But vision gained through individual experience alone is not powerful enough to create the culturally informed understanding of place the narrator seeks. While the narrator might "think" creation began at Rainy Mountain, we later learn that the Kiowa creation story is older than their relationship with that place. Because the narrator does not yet fully understand the cultural processes from a Kiowa perspective, his interpretation of Rainy Mountain is his alone. Thus, it is fitting that, at this stage in his development, the narrator stands with his "back" to the sun, looking away from the source of light that is the Kiowa god.³⁶

While developing vision is important to the narrator's cultural growth, the ability to imagine what one cannot physically see is equally crucial. Momaday argues that the imagination can stand in as a surrogate for sensation as a whole, including physical sight, and he gives several examples of this process. Of the narrator's grandmother, Aho, Momaday writes, "the immense landscape of the continental interior lay like memory in her blood. She could tell of the Crows, whom she had never seen, and of the Black Hills, where she had never been." Aho's way of seeing is deeply informed by her immersion in Kiowa oral tradition, which sees no contradiction between valuing both experiences of the body and experiences of the mind. For Aho, stories are as vivid as physical reality; her imaginative construction of reality is not bound by space, time, or sensation. The "memory" that lives in Aho's "blood" suggests that Aho understands herself as continuous with the past by means of body, mind, "blood," and "memory." The blood and the memories have been passed down to her in a chain of stories that have transformed her body and mind. Lacking this understanding of the oral tradition, the narrator has a limited concept of reality. His imagination is not yet expansive enough to imme-

diately accept the reality of his mind as seamless with the reality of the physical world. Still, he builds on the thoughts he has gained through physical sight and states, "I wanted to see in reality what she had seen more perfectly in the mind's eye, and traveled fifteen hundred miles to begin my pilgrimage." The difference between his sight and Aho's imaginative vision signals cultural, epistemological, and perceptual differences between him and his grandmother. Recognizing these differences, the narrator sets out on a literal and figural "pilgrimage" to try to understand Aho's culturally constructed Kiowa vision.³⁷

In the Yellowstone country of the Kiowas' origin, the narrator attempts to engage the epistemological processes his ancestors used to construct and understand their world. He begins by exploring his emotional responses to the land: "Yellowstone, it seemed to me, was the top of the world, a region of deep lakes and dark timber, canyons and waterfalls. But, beautiful as it is, one might have felt the sense of confinement there." The narrator's ability to imagine what his ancestors "might have felt" on their journey from the Rockies to the plains shows his evolving trust in the epistemic status of his emotional responses. As his vision grows, he becomes more confident in his speculations, claiming, "There is a perfect freedom in the mountains, but it belongs to the eagle and the elk, the badger and the bear." The narrator creates a nascent theory of "freedom" as a creature's suitability to its environment, which has a direct impact on the creature's ability to become what it desires to become. Empowered with this knowledge, which began as intuition, a feeling, a hunch, the narrator is able to make a full-fledged epistemological claim about his people: "The Kiowas reckoned their stature by the distance they could see, and they were bent and blind in the wilderness." The narrator's cultural understanding has been transformed through his experience of the Rockies and through theorizing the meaning of those experiences. The dialectic between sight and insight transforms his epistemology. He can now offer a more culturally integrated Kiowa theory of place. The experience of a place and the epistemology of a people are coextensive; physical "distance" and metaphysical "freedom" are dependent on each other for definition. By theorizing his emotions in relation to the land, he imaginatively constructs a theory of how the Kiowas "reckoned" themselves as a people.³⁸

As he continues to trace the journey of his ancestors, the narrator intuits the motivational force behind the Kiowa migration: the feelings of wonder and delight. Descending from the mountains, he writes, "the earth unfolds and the limit of the land recedes. Clusters of trees, and animals grazing far in the distance, cause the vision to reach away and wonder to build upon the mind." As with Aristotle's concept of beauty and Kant's concept of moral duty, the Kiowan concept of the "good life" begins with wonder. The physical ability to see far into a limitless landscape is linked metaphorically to intellectual openness and curiosity, imagination motivated by wonder. As the narrator's vision grows, so too does his capacity to imagine not only what his people might have felt looking upon the plains, but *how* they felt it.³⁹

As with vision, wonder is a culturally dependent concept that grows with and builds one's knowledge of how to see and interpret the world. Recounting the Kiowas' journey from the mountains to the foothills, the narrator states, "There the Kiowas paused on their way; they had come to a place where they must change their lives." As with his own previously inadequate theory of place, the narrator claims that the Kiowas were at first metaphysically unequipped to understand the land they saw: "[T]hey must wean their blood from the northern winter and hold the mountains a while longer in their view." Their conception of themselves was rooted in an epistemology born of their relationship with the mountains. But by acquiring the sun-worshipping Tai-me religion from the Crows, they also acquired the intellectual and emotional means to understand the plains, for "Precisely there does it [the sun] have the certain character of a god." The process of building relationships in a foreign land and transforming it into a homeland requires arduous intellectual and physical work.⁴⁰

Experiencing an unfamiliar place can be dangerous and frightening. As the narrator's initial experiences at Rainy Mountain show, in the absence of a culturally grounded understanding of a place, the natural features of a landscape may seem lonely, isolating, and proportionless. With a more developed sense of vision, the narrator comes to understand the Kiowa cultural imperative of confronting the unfamiliar with story, thereby integrating it into an existing web of relations. Seeing Devil's Tower, the narrator writes, "Two centuries ago, because they could not do otherwise, the Kiowas made a legend at the base of the rock." This story tells of seven sisters who are chased by their brother, who has turned into a bear. They climb a tree to escape their brother, and the great tree carries them into the sky where they become the Big Dipper. The seven sisters, the bear, the rock tree, and the stars all play a necessary role in explaining a cosmology that reaches from earth to sky and is defined by interconnectedness. Experiencing a new land compelled the Kiowas to reconsider their world, but that reconsideration retains a sense of fundamental relationships: "From that moment, and so long as the legend lives, the Kiowas have kinsmen in the night sky. Whatever they were in the mountains, they could be no more." Telling a story in response to a new place creates an interrelationship between the land and the Kiowas; their cultural identity is changed through relating to the land upon which they live. In a reciprocal relationship, their perception of the land is also forever changed.⁴¹

Once he develops his understanding of how Kiowa vision is composed of many elements—thought and emotion, imaginative reality, story, and the concept of wonder—the narrator can interpret the most imaginative of Kiowa conceptualizations, their origin story. As Momaday writes, "According to their origin myth, they entered the world through a hollow log. From one point of view, their migration was the fruit of an old prophecy, for indeed they emerged from a sunless world." Moving from darkness into the light, from the mountains to the plains, the Kiowas engage in the process of growth embedded within this story. By coming to understand the story, the narrator brings

his concept of vision into accord with a Kiowa explanation of their origin. Like his ancestors' journey before him, the narrator's journey to Rainy Mountain contains elements of both the contingent and the determined. Called out onto the plains by their origin story that is at once a mandate and an invitation to wonder, the Kiowas define their epistemology as a process of growth.⁴²

Employing a socially constructed and culturally informed process of seeing and thinking, the narrator revises his understanding of the landscape. As the introduction draws to a close, the narrator's vision of Rainy Mountain has changed. Whereas before the narrator saw a proportionless, isolating, and lonely land, he now says of the houses on the plain: "They belong in the distance; it is their domain." The narrator's maturing vision allows him to see objects on the plains as ordered and having their place, rather than as contingent and disconnected. His vision signals a development of a Kiowa sense of imagination: "There, where it ought to be, at the end of a long and legendary way, was my grandmother's grave. Here and there on the dark stones were ancestral names." His grandmother's grave, like everything else at Rainy Mountain, has its rightful place on the land, and the narrator's new knowledge of where things "ought to be" shows his developed understanding that the land and the people are one. As imagination develops, story shapes insight into a way of seeing into the distance, as the Kiowas intuited when they looked out onto the plains. That sense of imagination is carried within a person, for as the narrator states at the end of the introduction, "Looking back once, I saw the mountain and came away."⁴³

As American Indian criticism continues to develop, it becomes increasingly important for scholars of Native literature to create linkages between diverse forms of linguistic expression and critical thought. This process should begin with acknowledging the ways in which critical thought comes out of social relationships articulated both orally and in print, in the past and in the present. Exploring what those terms and concepts are gives us the tools to do our work well and to give back to those communities to which we are indebted. Native literary concepts such as Momaday's "vision" need to be drawn out and contextualized from within the oral traditional paradigms that Native texts both engage and articulate, and mode-three criticism should explore and use such terms. Native American literatures, both oral and written, have been theorizing, but too many of us have had our heads in the clouds for too long. Like Dayunisi, its time we critics dive into the deep waters.

Notes

1. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 74; Havelock, *Muse Learns to Write*, 120; Brill de Ramirez, *Contemporary American Indian Literatures*, 6.

2. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 9.

3. *Ibid.*, 113–14.

4. Krupat, *Turn to the Native*, 17.
5. Robert Warrior, *People and the Word*, 6.
6. Krupat, *Turn to the Native*, 21–22.
7. Hudson, *Southeastern Indians*, 120.
8. Nabokov, *Forest of Time*, 47.
9. *Ibid.*, 92.
10. Smith, "Protecting and Respecting," 210.
11. Robert Warrior, *People and the Word*, xiii, xx, xiv.
12. Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, xvii, xviii.
13. Robert Warrior, *People and the Word*, xv.
14. Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, xvi.
15. Tedlock, *Popol Vuh*, 22, 56, 21, 63, 17.
16. Robert Warrior, *Tribal Secrets*, xvii.
17. Wiget, *Native American Literature*, 13.
18. Krupat, *Turn to the Native*, 48.
19. Krupat, *Red Matters*, x.
20. Konkle, *Writing Indian Nations*, 50, 51.
21. Pulitano, *Toward a Native American Critical Theory*, 22.
22. Owens, *Other Destinies*, 19.
23. Ashcroft et al., *Empire Writes Back*, 15.
24. Pulitano, *Toward a Native American Critical Theory*, 22.
25. Ashcroft et al., *Empire Writes Back*, 30.
26. Robert Warrior, *Tribal Secrets*, xxiii.
27. Robert Warrior, *People and the Word*, 184; Pulitano, *Toward a Native American Critical Theory*, 188–91.
28. Robert Warrior, *People and the Word*, 181, 185, 187.
29. Robert Warrior, *Tribal Secrets*, 91, 97–98.
30. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 74.
31. Robert Warrior, *People and the Word*, 97–98, xii.
32. Weaver, *That the People Might Live*, xiii.
33. Womack, *Red on Red*, 67.
34. Culler, *Literary Theory*, 14.
35. Momaday, *Way to Rainy Mountain*, 5.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*, 7
38. *Ibid.*, 7.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*, 7, 8.
41. *Ibid.*, 8.
42. *Ibid.*, 7
43. *Ibid.*, 11, 12.