

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Discourses on “Indianness”

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Mixed bloods are neither here nor there, not like real bloods.

—Gerald Vizenor, *Griever: An American Monkey King in China*

In this introduction, I want to offer a survey of the diversity of understandings of “Indianness” that characterize contemporary Native American literature. Native American Indian literary study is based on the assumption that such a thing as “Native Americanness” or “Indianness” exists to define the category of literary expression that is the object of study. In this respect, all Native American Indian literary study rightly supports and is consonant with Native claims to sovereignty, self-determination, and self-identity. However, the claim to self-identity, to “Indianness,” is complicated by the long history of colonial relations that characterizes the contemporary United States. The right to define “Indianness,” to determine who can speak as a Native American Indian, is a matter of very considerable complexity as a result of centuries of federal U.S. intervention that compromise tribal self-government and the sovereignty of tribal nationhood. How the sovereign claim to determine tribal membership, by defining “Indianness,” affects the practice of literary scholarship and teaching is my subject here.

It may seem self-evident that Native American literature is that which is written by Native American authors. However, broad ethnic categories are problematic, and not only in a Native context. Issues of history, the political construction of the category, language, and questions of cultural specificity all come together to make ambiguous the answer to the question of whose work qualifies to be read under particular ethnic tags or banners. As with the category of Asian American writers, the issue of what is being hyphenated with America (and how) is an urgent question for students, scholars, and writers of Native American literature. The seemingly simple assumption that a Native American writer is someone legally defined as a Native American Indian is complicated by the many and highly politicized mechanisms by which that legal definition has been formulated and is applied. A blood quantum of a specified percentage of Native American Indian descent is the criterion most frequently invoked but this is a form of identification formulated and imposed by the U.S. federal government, not a form of self-identification arising out of Native lifeways. Alternative, culturally based forms of tribal identification based on the practicing of traditional lifeways and active engagement in tribal affairs have been adopted by some tribes in place of blood quantum; however, by divorcing tribal identity from issues of tribal blood and genetic inheritance this strategy opens the possibility that an individual who possesses no tribal blood can “become” a Native American Indian. As I will explore in more detail here, Wendy Rose’s critique of “whiteshamanism,” the form of cultural imperialism that appropriates control of Native cultures through the exercise of knowledge as power, brings this problem into sharp relief. We might also think here of the recent controversy concerning the authenticity of Ward Churchill’s “Indianness.” And a useful historical case study of the consequences of divorcing “Indianness” from tribal blood is provided by the experience of the Pueblo people who, as Jana Sequoya-Magdaleno describes, were declared non-Indians by the Supreme Court of New Mexico in 1869 and by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1877 on the grounds that they were:

“a peaceable, industrious, intelligent, and honest and virtuous people . . . , Indians only in feature, complexion, and a few of their habits.” However, this legal determination was less in recognition of common humanity than of federal and state economic interests in opening the land to settlement and development under the Homestead Act; for if the Pueblo

were not Indians, then they were not protected by rights of dependency established by John Marshall's Supreme Court decision (*Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, 1831). (90)

As this example highlights, the ways in which "Indianness," as tribal affiliation and traditional cultural practices, can be enacted are subject to interventions by the dominant colonizing influence of Euro-America and are historically contingent. Consequently, how "Indianness" is possible changes and is specific to places and moments in the ongoing colonial history of Native North America.

One way to avoid the pitfalls of any focus on "Indianness" as a tribal identity has been to refocus on the hyphenated status of Native American Indian writers in the colonized position in which they are placed in the contemporary United States. The focus of attention then moves away from issues of traditional, tribal cultural practices and life-ways toward the relationship between Native and migrant American identities and the complexities arising from that hybrid condition. Favored writers within this kind of scholarly framework tend to be urban rather than reservation-based writers, who explicitly claim a mixed-blood status and a heritage constituted by the complex history of Native American colonization and conquest. A significant difference between a mixed-blood writer and a writer of single tribal heritage is that the former is more likely to invoke a pan-Indian definition of Native American identity. In other words, the writer who sees him- or herself in terms of only one tribal heritage is less likely to address the diversity of Native American tribes. Geographical, linguistic, cultural, historical differences among the more than five hundred recognized Native nations of North America alone are effaced by the pan-Indian perspective in favor of a sense of "Indianness" that transcends the specificity of each individual tribe. "Indianness" becomes even more complicated when considered in this context of tribal diversity, for example, when we ask the question, Can the Native peoples of Alaska be seen as somehow the same as tribal nations in Florida, in the Pacific Northwest, in the Northeast, or in the woodland regions of the Great Lakes?

In what follows, I want to offer a (necessarily selective) survey of the very rich field of approaches to the concept of "Indianness" in contemporary scholarly writings about American Native peoples. A history of colonial and neocolonial interventions on the part of governments, schools, churches, and missions has produced a complex array

of definitions of what it means to be Indian. As noted previously, the definition of tribal identity and tribal membership can be measured by blood quantum, by place of residence (reservation or off reservation), or by cultural identification—by descent or consent—with highly charged debates raging over the methods by which tribes are formed and known, and the place of mixed-blood people within this range of identity formations. In the case of indigenous communities that are not encompassed by definitions of U.S.-based Native American Indians, such as Canadian First Nations peoples, indigenous Mexican, and Native Hawaiian peoples, these questions of identity and identification become even more problematic. This introductory chapter, like those that follow, offers a wide-ranging account of the various theoretical positions that characterize the field of Native American literary studies: from tribal-centered to poststructuralist inspired positions.

Appropriating “Indianness”

In a manner that crystallizes the ironies, complexities, and politics of Native or indigenous self-naming, M. Annette Jaimes opens her essay “Federal Indian Identification Policy: A Usurpation of Indigenous Sovereignty in North America” with the following epigraph from the Native scholar and activist Ward Churchill:

I’m forever being asked not only my “tribe,” but my “percentage of Indian blood.” I’ve given the matter a lot of thought, and find I prefer to make the computation based on all of me rather than just the fluid coursing through my veins. Calculated this way, I can report that I am precisely 52.2 pounds Indian—about 35 pounds Creek and the remainder Cherokee—88 pounds Teutonic, 43.5 pounds some sort of English, and the rest “undetermined.” Maybe the last part should just be described as “human.” It all seems rather silly as a means of assessing who I am, don’t you think? (123)

As Jaimes goes on to point out, the appropriation of the right to determine membership of sovereign Native nations is a typically colonizing move: a move reminiscent of the Nazi quantification of “Jewishness” and of South African efforts to distinguish by blood “blacks” from

“coloreds” under apartheid. The effect of such imposed restrictions on membership of a cultural community is felt not only by the group itself, which finds itself truly powerless in such a fundamental matter as self-determination, but also by individuals who are seeking to define for themselves a sense of personal and cultural identity. The blood quantum standard for Native tribal membership was introduced as part of the 1887 General Allotment Act, which identified those Native people (of one-half or more Indian blood) who were eligible to receive a federal land grant. Those who did not meet the requirement were disenfranchised or dispossessed of their previous treaty entitlements to land, and other federal payments and benefits (Jaimes 126). The longer term consequences of this colonialist strategy include what Jaimes describes as a situation where “the limitation of federal resources allocated to meeting U.S. obligations to American Indians has become so severe that Indians themselves have increasingly begun to enforce the race codes excluding the genetically marginalized from both identification as Indian citizens and consequent entitlements” (129). The abolition of blood quantum identification in favor of self-identification, as part of the 1972 Indian Education Act, was seen by many Native people as “the federal attempt to convert us from being the citizens of our own sovereign nations into benign members of some sort of all-purpose U.S. ‘minority group,’ without sovereign rights” (Ted Means, statement to the South Dakota Indian Education Association, Pierre, SD, 16 November 1975; quoted in Jaimes 131).

Tribes such as the White Earth Anishinaabeg, the Haida of Alaska, and Oglala Lakota on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota have begun instituting their own processes for determining membership of the nation: by criteria such as residency, familiarity with tribal cultural practices, service to the tribe, by marriage to a tribal member, adoption into the tribal nation, and birth (Jaimes 134–35). One consequence of self-identification, however, is conflict with the federal and state authorities who refuse to accept any form of Native tribal membership except that validated by federal means, such as blood quantum. To confuse the situation even further, distinct federal and state agencies define “Indianness” quite differently: at one extreme the federal Census Bureau accepts self-identification, other agencies accept only residence on a federally recognized reservation, still others demand a minimum blood quantum that also varies: “one-half blood was the standard utilized in the case of the Mississippi Choctaws and adopted in the Wheeler-Howard Act;

one sixty-fourth was utilized in establishing the Santee rolls in Nebraska” (Jaimes 136).

Complementing analyses such as Jaimes’s of the legal disempowerment of Native people, in matters of defining tribal membership and “Indianness,” are studies of what Wendy Rose (1992), following Geary Hobson, calls “whiteshamanism.” The term refers to non-Native producers of cultural knowledge who claim a superior insight into Native customs and spirituality. Hobson names white American poets such as Louis Simpson, Charles Olsen, Jim Cody, John Brandi, Gene Fowler, Norman Moser, Michael McClure, Barry Gifford, Paul Steinmetz, David Cloutier and, above all, Jerome Rothenberg, who see themselves as poet-shamans (Rose 403). Wendy Rose extends the remit of whiteshamans to include anyone (not necessarily poets, not necessarily whites) with pretensions to the status of an expert on Native cultures despite a patent lack of knowledge of Native lifeways. She cites Carlos Castaneda and Ruth Beebe Hill as models of this kind of whiteshamanism, along with “‘Blackfoot/Cherokee’ author Jamake Highwater’s (aka: Jay Marks, a non-Indian) extended repackaging of Greek mythology and pop psychology in the garb of supposed ‘primal Native American legends’ ” (403). Ward Churchill, in a 1988 essay, relates this same phenomenon to what he calls “New Age Hucksterism.” The effect of this whiteshaman movement is seen by Rose, and others, as “part of a process of ‘cultural imperialism’ directly related to other claims on Native American land and lives. By appropriating indigenous cultures and distorting them for its own purposes . . . the dominant society can neatly eclipse every aspect of contemporary native reality, from land rights to issues of religious freedom” (404). These “wannabe” Indians are obviously playing at being Indian by impersonating stereotypical images and iconography of “Indianness,” or “the Indian,” and if the impersonation is sufficiently powerful as a way of embodying and animating those stereotypes then the whiteshamans may “become” “real” Indians, as Rose wryly comments, “even when actual native people are present. Native reality is thereby subsumed and negated by imposition of a ‘greater’ or ‘more universal’ contrivance” (405).

Against this extensive critique of the cultural imperialism of whiteshamanism, Rose provides a corrective that articulates many of the fears of non-Indian scholars of Native American literature and culture:

The fear exists among non-native writers that we are somehow trying to bar them from writing about Indians at all, that Indian people might be “staking a claim” as the sole interpret-

ers of Indian cultures, most especially of that which is sacred, and asserting that only Indians can make valid observations on themselves. Such fears are not based in fact; I know of no Indian who has ever said this. Nor do I know of any who secretly think it. We accept as given that whites have as much prerogative to write and speak about us and ours as we have to write and speak about them and theirs. The question is how this is done and, to some extent, why it is done. (415–16)

The emergence of critical emphases upon “tribally centered” literary critical praxis and methodologies of reading have exacerbated such fears as Rose describes, especially among non-Native scholars of Native American Indian literatures. What this might mean, in critical practice, is described by Kimberly Roppolo as a strategy for reading from the perspective of Native American cultural perceptions and understandings rather than working against Western cultural assumptions. Roppolo (2001) clarifies this proposition by quoting Kimberly Blaeser’s call for

a critical voice which moves from the culturally centered text outward toward the frontier of “border” studies, rather than an external critical voice which seeks to penetrate, appropriate, colonize, or conquer the cultural center, and thereby, change the stories or remake the literary meaning. (Blaeser quoted in Roppolo 263)

As Roppolo observes, this call brings into focus the relationship between individual tribal cultures and an intertribal culture that would provide the basis for this generalized tribal-centered approach to literary texts. Such intertribalism exists in movements like AIM (the American Indian Movement), the legacy of Native residential schools, the Native American Church, and educational Native American studies programs. What this intertribal critical method needs to oppose is the “anthropologism” of Western or non-Native approaches to Native American literature, the placing of the Native, and Native cultural artifacts, as the object of analysis rather than as a subject involved in the activity of analysis and meaning-making. This anthropologism should be seen as analogous to the whiteshamanism denounced by Wendy Rose.

Just as this whiteshamanism or anthropologism assumes and draws upon a generalized perception of Native American Indians, so too does the concept of “pan-Indianism” or intertribalism. Kathryn Winona

Shanley describes how “[p]aradoxically, pan-Indian movements preserve the sovereignties that keep the peoples distinct from one another. In other words, threats to cultural distinction and to self-determination drive pan-Indian movements and alliances that, in turn, tend to generalize identities and issues” (4). However, the late-twentieth-century wave of Native American writers, such as N. Scott Momaday, Gerald Vizenor, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Louise Erdrich, even when of mixed heritage, do write from a tribally specific setting and context. This suggests the need for scholarly negotiation between pan-Indian and tribally specific critical and cultural contexts.

Perhaps the Native American Indian scholar and critic who best exemplifies this move away from European critical paradigms of literary analysis toward Native inspired models is Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (Crow Creek Sioux). In her book, *Why I Can't Read Wallace Stegner and Other Essays: A Tribal Voice* (1996), she attributes the shape of her own academic career, as a tribally identified person working as a teacher and intellectual within the framework of the U.S. colonialist educational system, to the rise and fall of affirmative action. Cook-Lynn describes her career as a process of discovering the extent to which education operates in the United States as a form of imperialist socialization, educating Native children to a life of marginalization and subservience:

My work has turned out to be unabashedly based on the idea that there is probably nothing unhealthy in Indians dropping out of racist and damaging school systems to which they are routinely subjected. It appears instead that there is something systematically unhealthy in the schools, themselves, in their false history based on the assumptions of a European body of thought which suggests that the American Indian experience is somehow a lesser one. (x)

In a later essay she locates her experience in relation to the field of Native or Indian studies: “Indian Studies scholars who have been studying Indian histories and lifeways in the past two or three decades have been doing so for the purpose of petitioning for redresses of grievances in this democracy. In the process of that engagement they have helped everyone to understand that the need for transformation is urgent and compelling” (1996, 39–40). It is in this broader context of activism and social justice that Cook-Lynn argues that only tribal models of literary criticism can act

as vehicles of tribal intellectual empowerment (1996, xiv), not so much counteracting as providing an alternative intellectual methodology and environment for Native American Indian writers and critics. Working in a similar vein is Craig Womack, who addresses his book *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (1999) to “Creek people, specifically, and Native People, more generally” (1). This address supports what he calls “[m]y greatest wish . . . that tribes, and tribal members, will have an increasingly important role in evaluating tribal literatures” (1). Going further than this, though, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn claims that methodologies that do not arise out of this tribally specific context are necessarily inferior: “I maintain that when the ethical relationship between tribal nationhood and the imagination is ignored or falsified, flawed scholarship is the result” (1996, xiii). It is this kind of claim that non-tribal, and particularly Euro-American, scholars and critics find threatening.

The field of Native American literature is enriched by the increasing diversity of approaches. Few scholars would dispute this. However, the claim that non-tribal approaches must produce “flawed scholarship” can be alienating and threatening. In her introduction to *Why I Can't Read Wallace Stegner and Other Essays*, Cook-Lynn also offers a more modulated vision of the scholarly terrain of Native American literary studies, when she writes:

Now that this [Native American Indian] culture is being examined and criticized by those persons whose intellectual backgrounds are deeply embedded in the oral traditions of the native tribes of America, new visions are in the offing, mistaken ideas about the native past can be reexamined, and concerns that have not been part of the broad public dialogue can now be addressed. (xiii)

But this is not what Elizabeth Cook-Lynn does in the essays that follow her introduction; in these essays she is concerned to expose the consequences of colonialism for Native American literature and culture, rather than provide a proactive tribal-centered approach to literary texts. In her chapter entitled “The American Indian Fiction Writer,” for example, she offers a clear condemnation of contemporary Native American Indian “canonical” writers as collaborators with white American colonialist values. In an article entitled “Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism, the Third World, and First Nation Sovereignty” (1993), she contends that

The American Indian writers who have achieved successful readership in mainstream America seem to avoid that struggle [between tribal nation status and enforced denationalization] in their work and move into thinking about Indian populations as simply gatherings of exiles and émigrés and refugees, strangers to themselves and their lands, pawns in the control of white manipulators, mixed-bloods searching for identity. . . . (86)

Echoing the vocabulary of Wendy Rose's whiteshamanism and Kimberly Roppolo's anthropologism, Cook-Lynn argues in the chapter entitled "End of the Failed Metaphor" that "Indigenous people are no longer in charge of what is imagined about them, and this means that they can no longer freely imagine themselves as they once were and as they might become. Perhaps a separation of culture and place and voice has never been more contextualized in modernity than it is for Indians today" (1996, 143). The specific "failed" metaphors that Cook-Lynn discusses are the tropes of Mother Earth and the Trickster. Of all contemporary writers, it is Rudolfo Anaya, "The New World Man," who is condemned as a "collaborator" with European colonialists for celebrating the figure of the Native woman Malinche:

To accept the indigenous woman's role as the willing and cooperating recipient of the colonist's seed and as the lone repository of culture is to legitimize the destruction of ancient religions, the murder of entire peoples, the rape of the land, not to mention the out-and-out theft of vast native homelands. To do so dismisses the centuries of our modern American Indian histories when our fathers fought and died and made treaties in order to save us from total annihilation. (147)

Against images of the critic as "collaborator" with the colonizing "enemy," Native scholars like Greg Sarris propose understandings based on dialogue, with the critic attempting not to "possess" or "master" Native literary texts, but instead attempting to move toward the writer in a common goal of intercultural communication. In *Keeping Slug Woman Alive* (1993), he opposes critical paradigms that seek explanatory meta-discourses, which distance the scholar from the subject or text under study. Using a performative as well as expository method, his essays, as

he describes, “collapse the dichotomy between personal narrative and scholarly argument . . . to create a document representing exchanges that open the world people share with each other” (6). It is this opening of dialogues that Sarris stresses; he recognizes that storytelling, including the creation of critical narratives, is a complex process that can be variously oppressive or liberating. What Sarris seeks is a dialogical or conversational strategy that will open up possibilities: “that can open the intermingling of the multiple voices within and between people and the texts they encounter, enabling people to see and hear the ways various voices intersect and overlap, the ways they have been repressed or held down because of certain social and political circumstances, and the ways they can be talked about and explored” (5).

From “Indianness” to “Postindianness”

The power of stories shapes the work of critics like Jana Sequoya who, in her 1993 essay “How(!) Is an Indian? A Contest of Stories,” locates the debate over “Indianness” explicitly in the context of the politicizing and prescriptive power of competing cultural discourses that impact upon the material conditions in which Native American Indian people must formulate identities:

The question of who and how is an Indian is an ongoing context of stories in North America, a contest in many ways emblematic of global struggles to contain and control difference in modern societies. At stake are the social, political, and economic conditions of possibility for Indian identity within the encompassing national context. Who, what, where, and when can that Indian be, which the founding narratives of the North American nation construed as either absent—the empty land scenario—or inauthentic. Inauthentic, that is, by comparison with the imagined “Original” Indian, whether of the Golden Age or demonic variety; inauthentic because rather than vanishing, American Indians in all our diversity are still here, alive and kicking against the odds. (453)

She goes on to argue that what is at stake as Native communities and individuals struggle with imposed stereotypes is “the replacement of

traditional Native American structures of identity with those of Euro-America" (455). In a later essay, "Telling the *différance*: Representations of Identity in the Discourse of Indianness" (1995), she makes the telling point that in fact the entire debate concerning "Indianness" is an artifact of the colonization of Native people and the subsequent "Othering" process of discursive marginalization to which they are subject: "Insofar as American Indians have been taken apart as peoples and reinvented as discourse, the referent of the category 'Indian' is a matter of much dispute. The premise of this essay is that, first of all, this condition of disputation is an effect of the 'Othering' province of the category itself" (88). Sequoya-Magdalenó's second argument is the ironic observation that the debate over "Indianness" is largely a consequence of historical engagements by Native people and communities with U.S. strategies of acculturation and regulation. This is not to say that Native people are responsible for the stereotyping of "Indians," but that U.S. colonizing strategies have seen the emergence of an administrative category of "Indian," validated by such measures as tribal blood-quantum, or what Sequoya-Magdalenó calls "administratively produced difference." This "difference" has been "inscribed as the standard of identity cohering American Indian diversity; strategic identity-in-difference is adopted as the political basis for nationalist claims to 'self-determination' and tribal 'sovereignty'" (88). Ironically, then, Native people find themselves represented by a category that produces that very subject position of "Indian": the stereotype that is the product of colonialist discourses of "Othering" is projected as the representative Native subject of claims to sovereignty. Sequoya-Magdalenó's distinction between the process of *identification* that produces the category "Indian" and the *identity* that this category is assumed to represent offers a productive context in which to consider Gerald Vizenor's concept of "postindian" identity formation.

Identities are always based on stories in Vizenor's work, so the reinvention of Native American Indian people as discourse, conceptualized by Jana Sequoya-Magdalenó, is the basis of Vizenor's treatment of identity issues. Some stories are "terminal creeds," such as the stories told by the colonizing forces of U.S. culture, which position Native people as "Vanishing Americans" and other romantic confections. Other stories embody a "survival hermeneutic," Vizenor's term for the hybrid of survival and resistance (survival) that is enacted, and continually reenacted, in the performance of meaning. In the collection of interviews with A. Robert Lee published as *Postindian Conversations*, Vizenor

describes “Indians” as “simulations of an absence” (161). In the absence of ontologically “real” persons that conform to the stereotype of Indians circulating in the hegemonic U.S. culture, Native American people simulate those images. Vizenor deliberately evokes Jean Baudrillard’s vocabulary of simulacra and simulation to situate these performances of “Indianness” as identities with no “authentic” origin in tribal cultures. The word “Indian” names then not people but a category of identity formation under conditions of ongoing U.S. cultural imperialism. In *Manifest Manners* (1994), Vizenor’s ironic gaze deconstructs all the categories of “Indian” definition that we have seen herein: “nationalism, pan-tribalism, new tribalism, and reservation residence” (59). A sustained oppositional and ironic perspective on the vacant subject position of the “Indian” characterizes what Vizenor calls the “postindian”: the subject who dares to play with and beyond the stereotype of Indian identity. He proclaims the fact that “postindians renounce the inventions and final vocabularies of manifest manners [and are] the advance of survivance hermeneutics” (167). What he means here is that the figure of the “postindian” represents resistance and survival; survival through the refusal of tragedy, resistance through the refusal of “victimry,” and the refusal of all simulations of the “Indian” that represent false assimilation to, or acculturation in, the culture of U.S. dominance. The postindian at once exposes the ontological absence that is constitutive of stereotypes of the “Indian,” but at the same time makes present a trace of what it is that is absent. Vizenor explains:

Native American Indians are the originary storiers of this continent, and their stories of creation, sense of imagic presence, visionary memories, and tricky survivance are the eternal traces of native modernity. . . . Native stories are an imagic presence, the actual tease of human contingencies, but indians are immovable simulations, the tragic archives of dominance and victimry. Manifest manners favor the simulations of the indian traditionalist, an ironic primitive with no cultural antecedence. (ix–x)

This trace, or excess of meaning that exceeds the empty cultural category that is the “Indian,” is revealed in what Vizenor calls, in the essay “Shadow Survivance” in *Manifest Manners*, the “postindian turns in literature.” In the absence of the “Indian,” the traces or shadows of tribal

survival appear, along with the potential for different kinds of identity. “The traces are shadows, shadows, shadows, memories, and visions in heard stories” (63). The repetition of the word “shadow” indicates the multiple and diverse nature of these residual traces of tribal meaning that exist outside the culture of dominance. In the stories of the postindian, as in the discourses of survival, language functions performatively to actively organize knowledge of ourselves and our world; this discursive performance is participatory, multiple and never fixed, always already in creative transformation.

Vizenor’s deconstructive hermeneutic discourse of survival provides a powerful strategy for subverting monologic U.S. colonial structures of oppression. His figure of the postindian offers to take control of Native American Indian identity formations by actively though ironically and “trickily” (often in the guise of the tribal Anishinaabe trickster figure) playing with and subverting those stereotypical images. The postindian then adopts a position of presence in the tribal traces of meaning and being, rather than the absence that is the position in which Indians are placed by the discourses of colonial dominance. In the interview “Visionary Sovereignty” included in *Postindian Conversations* (1999), he comments:

The indian is ironic, to be sure, and a conveyance of manifest manners. Natives must overturn the simulations of the indian and leave the treasuries of that slave name to the arbiters of colonial authenticity. (156)

Vizenor offers a position, characterized by irony, from which tribal and non-tribal scholars of Native American literature can speak. This is a position of resistance to those colonizing images to which all of us are subject. By refusing to replicate disempowering and demeaning stereotypical discourses of the Indian, all scholars of Native American Indian literature can find a position from which to engage this body of literature.

In the introduction to *Ethnocriticism* (1992), Arnold Krupat offers two stark alternatives: “we must either imperialistically ‘tell our own story’ as the other’s, or imperialistically speak *for* the other, violent translation or insidious ventriloquism, the only alternatives” (9). In response to this rather Manichean allegory of reading Native American literature, Krupat promotes a third space akin to Homi Bhabha’s concept

(in Rutherford 1990) of a cosmopolitan space that is located between imperialistic U.S. neocolonialism and tribal separatism. This would be a space of transculturality or what Helmbrecht Breinig calls “transdiference.” The kind of cosmopolitanism that Krupat champions is quite distinct from liberal cosmopolitanisms that promote a universal humanistic ideology, which obscures the material conditions of inequality and absence of social justice between and among discrete ethnic groups. Instead, Krupat encourages the critic of Native American Indian literature to “seek to replace oppositional with dialogical models” (26) of scholarly interaction, to resist the dangerous essentialism of discourses of “victimry,” stereotypical “Indian” images, and Native American tribal cultural separatism. In this respect, Krupat offers an approach that is similar to Greg Sarris’s conversational strategy, outlined previously. In his later book *Red Matters* (2002), Krupat elaborates on this ethnocritical approach to develop what he calls “cosmopolitan comparativism,” a kind of intercultural translation that negotiates between or among the three critical approaches presented in the chapter “Nationalism, Indigenism, Cosmopolitanism: Three Perspectives of Native American Literatures.” This essay has received notable critical comment, suggesting that Krupat’s formulation, while not receiving universal acclaim, has been very significant in shaping the ongoing debates about “Indianness” and cultural sovereignty. Krupat acknowledges that these categories are identity categories that have been used variously for both colonialist as well as anticolonialist causes and participate in complex cultural, social, and historical contexts. He defines these critical categories as follows:

The nationalist grounds her criticism in the concept of the nation and uses tribal/national sovereignty, a legal and political category, to guide her examination of Native cultural production. The indigenist foregrounds what is instantiated as a pan-Indian geocentric epistemology, a knowledge different from that of dispersed Europeans and other wanderer-settlers. It is this Other knowledge that subtends the indigenist’s critical perspective. The cosmopolitan is more nearly—to coin an oxymoron—a well-organized *bricoleur*. Aware that casual eclecticism can lead to critical and political irresponsibility, and doubting the flexibility of a true *ingénieur*’s systematicity, the cosmopolitan would cobble her criticism out of a variety of perspectival possibilities. (ix)

Appropriately, Krupat sets his discussion of cosmopolitanism against the claims to Native separatism made by scholars like Elizabeth Cook-Lynn and Craig Womack, who pursue the study of Native cultures within the context of developing and supporting tribal sovereignty. He complicates our understanding of what is meant by the terms “nation” and “culture,” opening the scholarly conversation to include the multiple voices of different nationalisms and different cultures not for the purpose of appropriation or assimilation but to make possible what Greg Sarris describes as “enabling people to see and hear the ways various voices intersect and overlap, the ways they have been repressed or held down because of certain social and political circumstances, and the ways they can be talked about and explored” (1999, 5).

As Jace Weaver remarks in the first chapter of *Other Words: American Indian Literature, Law, and Culture* (2001), the negotiation of agreement about what constitutes “Indianness” is “a process rendered more dysfunctional by the fact that for many years, for its own colonialist reasons, the United States government intruded itself into the questions of definitions, an intrusion that still has a significant impact on Indian identity politics” (4). This, in conjunction with the kind of network of disciplinary and other relations that comprise the scholarly field of Native American and Indigenous studies, for which Weaver and Robert Warrior, among other powerful voices, have called, means that this issue of “Indianness” cannot be ignored by anyone involved in the field. Writers, readers, scholars, communities, everyone concerned with the achievement of social justice and the right to self-determination for Native people must make this question of “Indianness” in all its complex historical determination a question to which they devote significant attention.

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