Conclusion

During the past several hundred years, Native American people have produced literature rich in diversity and imagery, ancient in tradition and universal in significance. For the past fifty years most interpretations of American Indian literature arose out of territories, theories and texts based on cultural conflicts and identity crisis. But in recent times there is a change in the velocity of Native American literary production. The authors began to look at various issues associated not only with their region and nations but also of global importance and collective indigenous social and literary concerns. The literature of the Native American writers has grown and matured considerably in the past few decades. It is not an easy struggle. They are to overcome the persistent stereotypes of the “noble savage” of the previous century and they must also go beyond the “social misfit” and “cultural conflicts” of the present. They must also achieve a mastery of non-Indian techniques and literary forms and, at the same time, maintain their Native voice and vision. Contemporary Native American writers have found themselves to have an intense and meaningful affinity with the modern problems. In their recent works, the authors have gone beyond the concepts of alienation and cultural conflict and looked at themselves as unique human beings. The humor and irony as well as the juxtaposition of events through time and space present a holistic vision of the Native experience. One of the earliest, which has stood the test of time rather well, is The Surrounded by D’Arcy McNickle. First published in 1936,
the novel tells the story of a young man, Archilde Leon, the son of a Spanish father and Indian mother, who returns to the Flathead Reservation in Montana after attending boarding school. He has no intention of staying on the reservation, but he is caught up in events he cannot escape. McNickle, who was a member of the Confederated Salish Kootenai tribe, was well known for his work as a historian, a scholar, and a politician. His book is historically and culturally authentic, and also very real and moving. It is interesting that even though the story takes place more than 70 years ago, it is essentially the same story of alienation and cultural conflict being told by contemporary writers until recent times.

Native American literature underwent a renaissance around 1968 with the publication of *House Made of Dawn*, and the current canon of novels written in the late twentieth century in American English by Native American or mixed-blood authors is diverse, exciting and flourishing. Despite this, very few such novels are accepted as part of the broader American Indian literary canon. In its consideration of American Indian literature as a rich and exciting body of work, *The Voice in the Margin: Native American Literature and the Canon* (1989) written by Arnold Krupat, invites us to broaden our notion of what a truly inclusive American literature might be, and of how it might be placed in relation to an international and cosmopolitan literary canon. The book comes at a time when the most influential national media have focused attention on the subject of the literary canon. Arnold Krupat argues that the
literary expression of the indigenous peoples of the United States has claims on us to more than marginal attention. Demonstrating a firm grasp of both literary history and contemporary critical theory, he situates Indian literature, traditional and modern, in a variety of contexts and categories. His extensive knowledge of the history and current theory of ethnography recommends the book to anthropologists and folklorists as well as to students and teachers of literature.

In a contentious field characterized by divergence of opinion, a recent book, *American Indian Literary Nationalism* (2006), written by Jace Weaver, Craig Womack, and Robert Warrior, intervenes in recent controversial debates on the role of hybridity, suggesting common sense strategies rooted in the material realities of various communities. It deals with issues the authors have been wrestling with throughout their careers. However, these authors do not believe at nationalism suggested in *American Indian Literary Nationalism* is the only possible approach to Native literature. All the Native and non-Native allies who support tribal national sovereignty and nationalist readings of Native literature are held significant.

Literature reveals the truth about the past and history fails to articulate. This is a truism with particular resonance in the Native American context because until the breaking point years of the late 1960s and early 1970s Indians were either ignored or grossly misrepresented by conventional histories. Typically, histories that did focus exclusively upon Indian concerns
limited their approach, either to the history of Indian policy or frontier conflict, or, in the case of anthropological studies, to tribal histories with narratives that ended before 1900. By comparison, Native American literature across time has voiced a different experience of American history. It has voiced a different relationship to historical “facts” and a different consciousness of the past itself. Some important themes evolve from this literature. Native American views of the world as represented in these mythologies contrast strongly with Euro-American perspectives. In other words, if one can identify these fundamental differences through the literature very early on, then later it becomes easier to explain the differences in outlook between Native American peoples and Anglo-American peoples that often lead to tragic consequences.

Some forty years ago Native Americans had little voice in literature. Folktales and legends, which entered American culture through movies, television and books written by outsiders, attempted to tell the stories of American Indians living on reservations, farms and in cities. During the 1970s, more authentic works by Momaday appeared, along with other novels, poetry and short stories. Narrating their own lives, religions and cultures, Native Americans built a genre that now fills bookstores and is taught in classrooms from kindergarten through Universities. Like other historically oppressed groups, Native Americans incorporated influences, traditions and personal experiences into their work.
In the first decade of the twenty-first century, readers of Native American literature have witnessed the emergence of a dynamic new generation of writers. Challenging political boundaries and essentialist notions of indigenous identity and culture, writers such as Eric Gansworth, Stephen Graham Jones, Laura Tohe, David Treuer, and Frances Washburn have sought to reclaim Native histories and stories, while redefining what it means to be an Indigenous person in the wake of 500 years of colonial oppression. This expansion of the Native literary canon has been accompanied by the development of a more nuanced and sophisticated critical discourse on Native literary production and oral tradition, addressing issues such as Native political and intellectual sovereignty, literary nationalism, Indigenous identities, peoplehood, and decolonization.

Native American writers have used the novel to imagine the syncretism of literary and oral cultures and the construction of ethnic identity in the late twentieth century. For Native Americans, however, the history of colonial deracination has left sizable gaps in cultural history and marked that history with the intercession of external power intent on destroying tribal traditions. Thus, the materials of culture are insistently hermeneutical objects, and that much more complex because they bear a genealogical burden. A need to articulate a continuous and internal cultural identity can be expected for those whose people have felt the coercion to assimilate and who have been administered and represented as marginal peoples. Many Native Americans
however have believed that the articulation of their cultural identities has involved as much imagining anew as rediscovery. How to describe this doubled consciousness and polyvocality and still comprehend a coherent narrative has generated various formal responses. Hence the inclusion on the list below of a few early texts: *Joaquin Murieta* (1854) by John Rollin Ridge (Yellow Bird), *The Queen of the Woods* (1899) by Simon Pokagon, *Cogewea, the Half Breed* (1927) by Mourning Dove, and *The Surrounded* (1936) by D’Arcy McNickle, which together had offered some paradigms which later Native American writers revised or displaced. Since Native American fiction proliferates after N. Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* (1968), and *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969) in the late sixties, the bulk of the writers on this list are post 1970 and run parallel to the burgeoning of post modernism. James Welch, for instance, experiments with Psychonesque effects in his first novel, *Winter in the Blood* (1974) only to turn to the mode of classical tragedy in his next two works. N. Scott Momaday, on the other hand, borrows modernist strategies from William Faulkner to address the tension between orally transmitted and written history. If the postmodernists have made inroads in these novels, it is in Gerald Vizenor’s auto critical, self deconstructive texts or among the novels of Sherman Alexie, who has mined American mass culture for forms he has modified to make violent rhetorical gestures, dissenting from the cultural conservatism of more traditionalist authors. At that moment they are recognized and heard. In *Speaking for the Generations: Native Writers on*
Writing (1998), Acoma Pueblo poet Simon Ortiz brings together contemporary Native American writers to take their turn. Each offers an evocation of herself or himself, describing the personal, social, and cultural influences on her or his development as a writer. Although each writer’s viewpoint is personal and unique, together they reflect the rich tapestry of today’s Native literature. Of varied backgrounds, the writers represent Indian heritages and cultures from the Pacific Northwest to the northern plains, from Canada to Guatemala. They are poets, novelists, and playwrights. And although their backgrounds are different and their statements intensely personal, they share common themes of their relationship to the land, to their ancestors, and to future generations of their people. From Gloria Bird’s powerful recounting of personal and family history to Esther Belin’s vibrant tale of her urban Native homeland in Los Angeles, these writers reveal the importance of place and politics in their lives. Leslie Marmon Silko calls upon the ancient tradition of Native American storytelling and its role in connecting the people to the land. Roberta J. Hill and Elizabeth Woody ponder some of the absurdities of contemporary Native life, while Guatemalan Victor Montejo takes readers to the Mayan world, where a Native culture had writing and books long before Europeans came. Together these pieces offer an inspiring portrait of what it means to be a Native writer in the twentieth century. With passion and urgency, these writers are speaking for themselves, for their land, and for the generations.
Criticism of Native American literature is barely two centuries old, while criticism of Western literature boasts a history that is quite a bit longer. The questions on how to read and interpret tribal narrative and modern American Indian fiction are still urgent topics that trigger numerous debates among literary scholars. What theories to employ and what approaches to use to dispel misinterpretations of the literature are still matters open to debate. Postmodernism, the new world trend has influenced all spheres of life, not excluding literature. Although it does seem to better account for American Indian voices as it shifts attention to local narratives and re-evaluation of history, the issue of whether it is applicable and favorable to Native American literature and its cause is a debatable one. Postmodern theory claims to liberate the suppressed voices including those of Native Americans, but at the same time presents the danger of limiting Native American literature to another set of frames while denying it its purpose. Many American Indian scholars insist that American Indian literature should not be interpreted using mainstream approaches, such as postmodernism, since they have already done enough damage, but implementing American Indian philosophies instead, such as nationalism. It also seems premature to apply postmodern theory since it deconstructs history and identity, which are still to be constructed in Native American literature. Tribal literature and tribal realities are closely connected and, therefore, the fight for Native American literature and how to interpret it appears to be a part of a bigger fight, the one for sovereignty, both national and
intellectual. The “post” of postmodernism, as well as the “post” of post-colonialism, might simply not be present for Native American literature yet and, therefore, theories offered by nationalism can at the given moment be more promising to American Indian literature and its purposes. Momaday has been recognized not only as representative of Native American literature but also of American mainstream literature and of even universal literary concerns. He succeeded in consolidating indigenous people’s identity under the banner of Fourth World. In his vast and successful literary career and contribution, he has broken the barriers of representing regional and linguistic issues and transcended to a status of a universal spokesperson with his tribal wisdom. Native American literature has reached its zenith by the end of the twentieth-century with its extensive literary contribution and canon. The genesis of Fourth World concept has given an open platform for indigenous literatures across the globe to exhibit their cultural and literary legacies. Now, Momaday is presenting the problems such as indigenous sovereignty, land, ecological balance, environment and its importance and nature which are relatively more universal in outlook. After reading closely Native American literature and N. Scott Momaday’s works, I strongly feel that Native literatures are continuously transforming from time to time along with changing world in order to meet the literary demands and according to ever changing apprehensions of modern life.

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