Introduction

Paula Gunn Allen

The nature of literature emerges most clearly under the referential aspect. The center of literary art is obviously to be found in the traditional genres of the lyric, the epic, the drama. In all of them, the reference is to a world of fiction, of imagination. The statements in a novel, in a poem, or in a drama are not literally true; they are not logical propositions. There is a central and important difference between a statement, even in a historical novel by Balzac which seems to convey “information” about actual happenings, and the same information appearing in a book of history or sociology.

René Wellek and Austin Warren
Theory of Literature

IT'S WITH TERROR, SOMETIMES
THAT I HEAR THEM CALLING ME
BUT IT'S THE LIGHT SKIP OF A COUGAR
DETACHING ME FROM THE GROUND
TO LEAVE ME ALONE
WITH MY CRAZY POWER
TILL I REACH THE SUN MAKERS
AND FIND MYSELF AGAIN
IN A NEW PLACE.

Serain Stump
There Is My People Sleeping

One major commitment of the Modern Language Association of America in recent years has been the support of ethnic and racial minority literary studies in the university. Through its Commission on the Languages and Literatures of America, MLA has sponsored summer seminars on the study of minority languages and literatures and analogous programs designed to develop critical understanding of minority literatures and to serve the academic and ethnic literary communities simultaneously.
Studies in American Indian Literature

As part of its new direction in this effort, MLA and its commission are developing publications through the summer seminars on minority literatures. This is the second volume published under this program. Studies in American Indian Literature: Critical Essays and Course Designs begins to make available needed critical and pedagogical approaches. This volume features critical studies in American Indian literature that explain and/or use basic themes, motifs, structures, and symbols found in traditional and modern American Indian literature. In conjunction with the essays, the book provides basic course designs that instructors can implement singly or sequentially, as funding and policy allow. We believe that placing pertinent essays with those courses they most relate to will enable the reader more readily to perceive the critical foundations that underlie the suggested courses.

The suggested curriculum is wide-ranging. It includes the basic introductory and survey courses usually found at the university level in this area. Additionally, it goes beyond these with courses that allow specialized study. This broadening of the field of American Indian literature is necessary if students are to gain something approaching a realistic understanding of literatures that represent several hundred different tribes and cover several thousand years.

The book includes the following general categories: introductory and survey courses, regional studies in the oral tradition, transitional literature, feminist and interdisciplinary approaches to the study of these literatures, modern and contemporary American Indian literature, and Indian themes and perspectives in American literature. The courses incorporate many useful approaches to the study and teaching of American Indian literature, though they by no means exhaust the possibilities available for study and teaching in this rich area. The course designs will serve as guides; innovative instructors or researchers will make use of the resources unique to their region of the country and the local tribes and local contemporary Indian authors who live nearby.

The volume has several basic purposes:

1. To integrate American Indian literary traditions into the study of American literature at every level. We believe that American literature has drawn heavily on American Indian literature and philosophies. Two essays in this volume examine that contention at length.

2. To provide tools to broaden the scope, insights, and approaches of criticism. The writing of literary criticism is a dynamic process; the study of literatures that differ in aesthetics, structure, and style can offer new insights into the aesthetic and expressive dimensions of human experience, and these insights can expand our understanding of the varied modes of human consciousness and the alternatives for living that these differences imply.

3. To enrich university curricula by increasing the number of courses offered and by expanding the content of existing courses to include American Indian materials.

4. To acquaint scholars with the multitude of possibilities for further research presented by American Indian literature. Much necessary research remains to be done in this area.

5. To provide Indian and non-Indian Americans with an understanding, based on sound academic and disciplinary scholarship, of the depth and variety of literary experience to which we are all heir.

This volume grew out of the lectures and workshops of the 1977 Modern Language Association—National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminar on American Indian Literature, and out of a series of later exchanges among participants and staff of that seminar, along with their students and colleagues. The tasks of this volume are to address critical problems that arise in the study of American Indian literature, traditional or modern, and to design courses related to that study.

Wellek and Warren's comforting division of human experience into fact or fancy and of literary study into the obvious traditional genres is not a division that one can safely apply to the study of American Indian literature, traditional or modern. For within the tribal world of the contemporary or traditional American Indian, many statements that stem from the "imagination" are taken to be literally true, even though they are not based on sociological or historical "facts." Momaday, for example, says that "An Indian is an idea which a given man [and I might add, woman] has of himself" and goes on in that essay to discuss exactly what imagination means to an Indian. Having nearly completed his manuscript for The Way to Rainy Mountain, Momaday sat contemplating the last page. He writes of that moment: "Then it was that that ancient, one-eyed woman Ko-sahn stepped out of the language and stood before me on the page. I was amazed."

In his amazement, and because of his acquaintance with the world also inhabited by Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, he protests her presence:

"But all of this, this imagining," I protested, "this has taken place—is taking place in my mind. You are not actually here, not in this room."

"You imagine that I am here in this room, do you not? [she answers]

... You see, I have existence, whole being, in your imagination. It is but one kind of being, to be sure, but it is perhaps the best of all kinds. If I am not here in this room, grandson, then surely neither are you."

Ideas of beauty—intellectual harmony, structural balance, thematic or symbolic unity—differ in various American Indian and European-American
cultures, though, of course, both larger groups embrace responses and judgments that might properly be termed aesthetic. "Aesthetics," in a tribal context, takes on a meaning that necessarily includes utility or integration into daily pursuits. But if the aesthetic dimension is one aspect of literary significance, we must find a suitable way of critically evaluating that dimension in the literature of American Indians.

Significance, like beauty, is usually related to expectations, to emotional and intellectual patterns, and to deep values, all of which one learns within a cultural framework. Symbolic referents are not all that transferable from one society to another, nor do cognitive and imaginative processes seem much more so. But perhaps it is possible to agree on a definition, or definitions, of the word "significance" that will satisfy the critical judgments of both cultural groups and that will also apply to their literatures.

Significance is, of course, necessarily connected to specificity, or particularity, which is thought to be a distinguishing characteristic of good literature. Particularity triggers imaginative involvement and allows a reader to experience a literary work and thus appreciate, understand, and perhaps grow toward a new level of consciousness. Particulars of a definite sort are not necessary; what is particular to one set of people might be general to another.

Nor is the matter simply one of particulars or details, for the sequence in which these details occur, their juxtaposition to one another, and their relation to the total context are primary sources of meaning for writer (singer) and audience (participant) alike. Associations that are highly significant in one culture may be meaningless in another. The critic, therefore, not only must clarify symbols and allusions but also must define or describe whole perceptual-interpretative systems.

Simply put, the teachers and critics of American Indian literature must place the document within a context that allows readers and students to understand it in terms that do not distort it. They must use historical and traditional information in preparing students and readers to work with the materials under consideration. If they are teaching N. Scott Momaday, for example, they must introduce materials from Kiowa oral tradition, history, and contemporary life, along with information about contemporary literary standards and modes. House Made of Dawn is a complex novel that relies on Navajo, Pueblo, and Kiowa traditions, histories, and present situations, both on the reservation and in urban enclaves. Its structure derives from contemporary literary modes and from the oral tradition. To do the book justice, the teacher-critic must be aware of the multiple factors that combine to make it a singularly Indian book that is accessible to literate non-Indian readers.

Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony requires the same attention to Laguna traditions, history, and present conditions. Without such attention one could make a serious error such as that made by a critic who asserts that T'sits'ili'nako (Thought Woman—God) is a persona of Silko. The critic seems unaware that most of the "poems" in the novel are not poems in the European sense. The poem he refers to as "a central body of story with its own thematic variations" is actually a story from the Laguna oral tradition. As a result, the layout of the poem is the only choice Silko made and the only aspect on which she had any effect. Ignorance of Laguna lore leads the critic to say:

Silko has thus projected two voices of herself in the novel: we know she is the author of the wider narrative called Ceremony, yet she has secreted a second persona of herself into the poems . . . . The emphasis is upon the imagination—the poet's gift to the world.

While such a distortion represents an honest attempt to deal with the novel respectfully, it results in a misperception of what the author is up to, creates a misunderstanding of the story itself, and dislocates the writer and the book. By using only the techniques of explication, without seeking to understand the context from which the materials derive, the critic has removed the book and its author from the living web of the people and tradition from which they both arose. This removal allows the critic to feel sympathetic toward Indians and to defend them somewhat militantly against the evils of a greedy white world (as he sees it), but it denies the Laguna people their real humanity and the dignity that people in difficult circumstances most need.

Thus, the course designs, critical papers, and bibliography included in this volume were designed to demonstrate appropriate methods of approaching the study of American Indian literature. Professors who intend to embark on the teaching of courses using American Indian materials—traditional or modern—must study carefully the traditions, history, and present-day settings of the tribe from which the document comes or to which it refers. The faculty and participants at the Flagstaff seminar agreed that context and continuity are two of the most important areas to be taken into account in the study and teaching of American Indian literature. To this end, seminar leaders devoted lectures to historical and ethnographic accounts of American Indians and to the world views that characterize them and distinguish them from non-Indian Americans.

In terms of "pure" criticism, few definable sets of criteria are available to critics of American Indian literature, beyond the rather broad categories mentioned: significance and context, aesthetic quality and the interrelationship of structure, content, and the oral tradition. Universality of meaning may necessarily be required of all works of literature, but it may be that such universality must be got at from a very particular point of view. If this is so, the critic in American Indian literature becomes important—not as a scholarly adjunct to the creating and re-creating that are always the component
parts of the synergy between teller and listener, but as a mediator who allows teller and listener to share a particular understanding even though they come from widely divergent traditions.

Critics and teachers must avoid the danger of taking a paternalistic attitude toward the materials and the people they reflect. Many scholars find it difficult, given the history of Indian-white relations, to maintain a balanced posture toward Indians. The present political and social climate encourages an overly romantic response to Indians, their values, and their traditions, and teachers or critics must not allow natural sympathies or political biases to color their presentation of the materials.

There are several reasons for this caution. First, instructors should present these literatures as they were intended to appear to the primary audiences, so that the student or reader can enter into the universe in which the material belongs. Second, exercises in literary colonialism are dangerous to the Indian people, for they can lead to intellectual confusion, self-hatred, or rejection of the education such study is designed to further. And third, interpreting Indian cultures and artifacts as examples of unalloyed primitivism or nobility can lead to feelings of contempt for American Indians, feelings that can often result in political action against them. When Americans cannot view American Indians as people with histories, cultures, customs, and understandings worthy of study and dispassionate observation, they ignore the real plight of too many Indian people who must go without jobs, food, decent housing, or, far too often, the simple human right to survive. Far too many Indians are treated contemptuously, unemployed, sterilized without their knowledge, and murdered in today's United States, and their mistreatment goes unremarked and uninvestigated far too often. These abuses are frequently the subject of the works of contemporary American Indian writers.

Those who would study and teach American Indian literature consider these issues in the context of competent criticism of any literature. What American Indian literature is and how it functions are the central concerns of this volume. The essays and curriculum outlines illuminate a variety of subjects. This vast field offers challenging and consuming work to all who are psychologically and professionally able to devote the necessary time and thought to its study. Those who make this commitment will find themselves greatly enriched by their pursuit.

The materials in this volume were designed to create a coherent basic framework for such a pursuit, in the hope that serious, responsible critical studies will result.

Five scholars in the field of American Indian studies composed the staff of the seminar: Dexter Fisher of the Modern Language Association; Terry Wilson (Potawatomi), director of American Indian studies, University of California, Berkeley (history); John M. Rouillard (Santee Sioux), director of American Indian studies, San Diego State University, San Diego (musicology);

Larry Evers, University of Arizona, Tucson (literature, ethnography, and communications); and Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Sioux), poet and critic, former director of American Indian studies, San Francisco State University. Under the guidance of this staff, participants from all over the United States and Canada gathered to develop critical and pedagogical approaches to American Indian literature that would place it firmly within departments of literature and expand its use beyond studies in folklore, where it remained too long.

Because this seminar was the first of its kind, certain basic issues were discussed concerning viable approaches to criticism and curriculum design. The multidisciplinary nature of both the staff and the participants reflected the staff's desire to present American Indian literature in the total context from which it derives. As traditional literatures are generally sung or chanted, a musicologist was necessary. Since literature studied in the absence of historical information is often incomprehensible, a historian was necessary. And because the study of both traditional and contemporary American Indian literature rests squarely on the whole oral tradition, which includes nonliterary materials, an ethnographer was required. Further, as the study and teaching of American Indian literature are necessarily bicultural operations, an equal number of Indians and non-Indians participated.

The essays in this volume reflect diverse approaches to the study of American Indian literature. Evers originally delivered his "Cycles of Appreciation" at the seminar. Participants and other scholars wrote the other essays after the seminar, but all represent the kinds of concerns and approaches that the staff and participants, during the two weeks in Flagstaff, collectively agreed on as accurate, undistorted, and critically viable. Seminar participants wrote the curriculum designs during the seminar (with the exception of the nineteenth-century design by LaVonne Ruoff), and their contributions are gratefully acknowledged. They are Olga Arenivir, Joseph M. Backus, Helen Bannan, Gretchen Bataille, Barney Bush, Michael Castro, Bud Cochran, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Patricia D'Andrea, Sandra Davis, Lester Faigley, Joy Harjo, Helen Harris, Elaine Jahner, Victor Masayasva, Raoul McKay, Delilah Orr, Charles E. Roberts, Kenneth Roemer, LaVonne Ruoff, James Ruppert, Priscilla Russo, Kathleen Sands, Michael Taylor, and Andrew Wiget. Thanks also go to guest scholars and artists. Without them, much of this work, and the participants' understanding of it, could not have come about: Mike Kabotie and the Artists Hopid, Harold Littlebird, Kenneth Lincoln, and Leslie Marmon Silko. The tribes represented at the seminar included Navajo, Laguna, Hopi, Cherokee, Sioux, Creek, Chocottaw, Shawnee, and Cayuga, representing the northeastern, midwestern, southwestern, and southeastern parts of the country.

Appreciation also goes to Northern Arizona State University at Flagstaff for opening its doors to the seminar, and, for making possible both the
seminar and the publication of this volume, we are grateful to the Modern Language Association and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Notes

2. Larson, American Indian Fiction, pp. 158, 159. This "second persona" exists only if it is identified as Silko's tribal self.
3. In the five years since the seminar, much fine critical work has been published. Of this work the following should be mentioned as they will be particularly useful to scholars and instructors using the course outlines in this volume: Kenneth Lincoln's forthcoming comprehensive study of contemporary literature, Native American Renaissance, and Allen and Smith's overview of American Indian literature since 1968, "Chee Dostoyevsky Rides the Reservation: American Indian Literature since Momaday"; Lincoln's article, "The New Day Indians," and Johnson's American Indians Today; a collection of essays on arts, literature, and thought should be especially interesting to those studying and teaching modern American Indian authors.

For recent publications in oral literature, two volumes should prove useful: Brian Swann's Smoothing the Ground, a collection of articles by Jahner, Lincoln, Jarrod Ramsey, Barre Toelken, Karl Kroeber, and others, and Swann's Song of the Sky, traditional songs reworked from Densmore, Curtis, and other early collectors. For new materials from the Lakota oral tradition, see Jahner and De Maille's Lakota Religion and Ritual, De Maille's Lakota Society, and Jahner's Lakota Myth.
The Sacred Hoop: A Contemporary Perspective

Paula Gunn Allen

Literature is one facet of a culture. The significance of a literature can be best understood in terms of the culture from which it springs, and the purpose of literature is clear only when the reader understands and accepts the assumptions on which the literature is based. A person who was raised in a given culture has no problem seeing the relevance, the level of complexity, or the symbolic significance of that culture's literature. We are all from early childhood familiar with the assumptions that underlie our own culture and its literature and art. Intelligent analysis becomes a matter of identifying smaller assumptions peculiar to the locale, idiom, and psyche of the writer.

The study of non-Western literature poses a problem for Western readers who naturally tend to see alien literature in terms that are familiar to them, however irrelevant those terms may be to the literature under consideration. Because of this, students of traditional American Indian literatures have applied the terms "primitive," "savage," "childlike," and "pagan" to these literatures. Perceiving only the most superficial aspects of American Indian literary traditions, Western scholars have labeled the whole body of these literatures "folklore," even though the term specifically applies only to those parts of the literatures that are the province of the general populace.

The great mythic and ceremonial cycles of the American Indian peoples are neither primitive, in any meaningful sense of the word, nor necessarily the province of the folk; much of the literature, in fact, is known only to educated, specialized persons who are privy to the philosophical, mystical, and literary wealth of their own tribe.

Much of the literature that was in the keeping of such persons, engraved perfectly and completely in their memories, was not known to most other men and women. Because of this, much literature has been lost as the last initiates of particular tribes and societies within the tribes died, leaving no successors.

Most important, traditional American Indian literature is not similar to Western literature, because the basic assumptions about the universe and
therefore, the basic reality experienced by tribal peoples and by Western peoples are not the same, even at the level of folklore. This difference has confounded non-Indian students for centuries. They have been unable or unwilling to accept this difference and to develop critical procedures to illuminate the materials without trivializing or otherwise invalidating them.

For example, American Indian and Western literary traditions differ greatly in the assumed purposes they serve. The purpose of traditional American Indian literature is never simply pure self-expression. The “private soul at any public wall” is a concept alien to American Indian thought. The tribes do not celebrate the individual’s ability to feel emotion, for they assume that all people are able to do so. One’s emotions are one’s own; to suggest that others should imitate them is to impose on the personal integrity of others. The tribes seek—through song, ceremony, legend, sacred stories (myths), and tales—to embody, articulate, and share reality, to bring the isolated private self into harmony and balance with this reality, to verbalize the sense of the majesty and reverence mystery of all things, and to actualize, in language, those truths that give to humanity its greatest significance and dignity.

To a large extent, ceremonial literature serves to redirect private emotion and integrate the energy generated by emotion within a cosmic framework. The artistry of the tribes is married to the essence of language itself, for through language one can share one’s singular being with that of the community and know within oneself the communal knowledge of the tribe. In this art, the greater self and all-that-is are blended into a balanced whole, and in this way the concept of being that is the fundamental and sacred spring of life is given voice and being for all. American Indian people do not content themselves with simple preachment of this truth, but through the sacred power of utterance they seek to shape and mold, to direct and determine, the forces that surround and govern human life and the related lives of all things.

An old Keres song says:

I add my breath to your breath
That our days may be long on the Earth
That the days of our people may be long
That we may be one person
That we may finish our roads together
May my father bless you with life
May our Life Paths be fulfilled.

In this way one learns how to view oneself and one’s tradition so as to approach both rightly. Breath is life, and the intermingling of breaths is the purpose of good living. This is in essence the great principle on which all productive living must rest, for relationships among all the beings of the universe must be fulfilled; in this way each individual life may also be fulfilled.

The Sacred Hoop: A Contemporary Perspective

This idea is apparent in the Plains tribes’ idea of a medicine wheel or sacred hoop. The concept is one of singular unity that is dynamic and encompassing, including, as it does, all that is contained in its most essential aspect, that of life. In his introduction to Geronimo’s autobiography, Frederick Turner III incorrectly characterizes the American Indian cultures as static. Stasis, however, is not characteristic of the American Indians’ view of things. As any American Indian knows, all of life is living—that is, dynamic and aware, partaking as it does in the life of the All-Spirit and contributing as it does to the continuing life of that same Great Mystery. The tribal systems are static in that all movement is related to all other movement—that is, harmonious and balanced or unified; they are not static in the sense that they do not allow or accept change. Even a cursory examination of tribal systems will show that all have undergone massive changes while retaining those characteristics of outlook and experience that are the bedrock of tribal life. So the primary assumptions tribespeople make can be seen as static only in that these people acknowledge the essential harmony of all things and see all things as being of equal value in the scheme of things, denying the opposition, dualism, and isolation (separateness) that characterize non-Indian thought. Christians believe that God is separate from humanity and does as he wishes without the creative assistance of any of his creatures, while the non-Christian tribal person assumes a place in creation that is dynamic, creative, and responsive. Further, tribal people allow all animals, vegetables, and minerals (the entire biota, in short) the same or even greater privileges. The Indian participates in destiny on all levels, including that of creation. Thus this passage from a Cheyenne tale in which Maheo, the All-Spirit, creates out of the void four things—the water, the light, the sky-air, and the peoples of the water:

“How beautiful their wings are in the light,” Maheo said to his Power, as the birds wheeled and turned, and became living patterns against the sky.

The loon was the first to drop back to the surface of the lake. “Maheo,” he said, looking around, for he knew that Maheo was all about him, “You have made us sky and light to fly in, and you have made us water to swim in. It sounds ungrateful to want something else, yet still we do. When we are tired of swimming and tired of living, we should like a dry solid place where we could walk and rest. Give us a place to build our nests, please, Maheo.”

“So be it,” answered Maheo, “but to make such a place I must have your help, all of you. By myself, I have made four things. . . . Now I must have help if I am to create more, for my Power will only let me make four things by myself.”

In this passage we see that even the All-Spirit, whose “being was a Universe,” has limited power as well as a sense of proportion and respect for the powers of the creatures. Contrast this spirit with the Judeo-Christian God, who makes everything and tells everything how it may and may not
function if it is to gain his respect and blessing and whose commandments make no allowance for change or circumstance. The American Indian universe is based on dynamic self-esteem, while the Christian universe is based primarily on a sense of separation and loss. For the American Indian, the ability of all creatures to share in the process of ongoing creation makes all things sacred.

In Paradise, God created a perfect environment for his creatures. He arranged it to their benefit, asking only that they forbear from eating the fruit of one particular tree. In essence, they were left with only one means of exercising their creative capacities and their ability to make their own decisions and choices. Essentially, they were thus prevented from exercising their intelligence while remaining loyal to the creator. To act in a way that was congruent with their natural curiosity and love of exploration and discovery, they were forced to disobey God and thus be exiled from the perfect place he had made for them. They were severely punished for exercising what we might call liberty—Eve more than Adam, for hers was the greater sin (or so the story goes):

And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever.

The Cheyennes’ creator is somewhat wiser. He gives his creatures needs so that they can exert their intelligence and knowledge to satisfy these needs by working together to solve a common problem or attain a common goal. Together Maheo, the creator, and the water-beings create the earth, and with the aid of these beings, Maheo creates first man and first woman and the creatures and environment they will need to live good and satisfying lives. These creation stories demonstrate the basic ordering principles of two different cultures. The Judeo-Christian view is hierarchical. God commands first; within the limits of those commands, man rules; woman is subject to man, as are all the creatures, for God has brought them to Adam for him to name (Genesis ii. 18–24; iii. 16). In this scheme, the one who is higher has the power to impose penalties or even to deny life to those who are lower.

And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever.

Therefore, the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden to till the ground from whence he was taken. (Genesis iii. 22–23)

The sin Adam and Eve committed in the Garden of Eden was that of attempting to become knowledgeable. Their attempt opened the further possibility that, with knowledge, they might become immortal. This, apparently, was not acceptable, not because knowledge and immortality were sinful, but because the possession of them by human beings would reorder the hierarchical principles on which the Judeo-Christian universe is posited. Those reared in a Christian society are inclined to perceive social relationships—and literary works—in this context; they order events and phenomena in hierarchical and dualistic terms. Those reared in traditional American Indian societies are inclined to relate events and experiences to one another. They do not organize perceptions or external events in terms of dualities or priorities. This egalitarianism is reflected in the structure of American Indian literature, which does not rely on conflict, crisis, and resolution for organization, nor does it merit depend on the parentage, education, or connections of the author. Rather, its significance is determined by its relation to creative empowerment, its reflection of tribal understandings, and its relation to the unitary nature of reality.

The way the loon prays in the Cheyenne creation story is indicative of that difference. The loon looks around him as he addresses Maheo, “for he knew that Maheo was all about him,” just as earlier in the story the snowgoose addressed Maheo in these words: “I do not know where you are, but I know you must be everywhere.”

Another difference between these two ways of perceiving reality lies in the tendency of the American Indian to view space as spherical and time as cyclical, whereas the non-Indian tends to view space as linear and time as sequential. The circular concept requires all “points” that make up the sphere of being to have a significant identity and function, while the linear model assumes that some “points” are more significant than others. In the one, significance is a necessary factor of being in itself, whereas in the other, significance is a function of placement on an absolute scale that is fixed in time and space. In essence, what we have is a direct contradiction of Turner’s notion about the American Indian universe versus that of the West: the Indian universe moves and breathes continuously, and the Western universe is fixed and static. The Christian attitude toward salvation reflects this basic stance: one can be “saved” only if one believes in a Savior who appeared once and will not come again until “the end of time.” The idea “once a saint always a saint” is another expression of the same underlying perception and experience.

The notion that nature is somewhere over there while humanity is over here, or that a great hierarchical ladder of being exists on which ground and trees occupy a very low rung, animals a slightly higher one, and man (never woman)—especially “civilized” man—a very high one indeed is antithetical to tribal thought. The American Indian sees all creatures as relatives (and in tribal systems relationship is central), as offspring of the Great Mystery, as cocreators, as children of our mother, and as necessary parts of an ordered, balanced, and living whole. This concept applies to what non-Indian Amer-
icans think of as the supernatural, and it applies as well to the more tangible (phenomenal) aspects of the universe. American Indian thought makes no such dualistic division, nor does it draw a hard and fast line between what is material and what is spiritual, for it regards the two as different expressions of the same reality, as though life has twin manifestations that are mutually interchangeable and, in many instances, virtually identical aspects of a reality that is essentially more spirit than matter or, more correctly, that manifests its spirit in a tangible way. The closest analogy in Western thought is the Einsteinian understanding of matter as a special state or condition of energy. Yet even this concept falls short of the American Indian understanding, for Einsteinian energy is believed to be unintelligent, while energy, according to the Indian view, is intelligence manifested in yet another way.

Many non-Indians believe that human beings possess the only intelligence in phenomenal existence (often in any form of existence). The more abstractionist and less intellectually vain Indian sees human intelligence as rising out of the very nature of being, which is, of necessity, intelligent in and of itself, as an attribute of being. Again, this idea probably stems from the Indian concept of a circular, dynamic universe in which all things are related and are of one family. It follows that those attributes possessed by human beings are natural attributes of all being. The Indian does not regard awareness of being as an abnormality peculiar to one species, but, because of a sense of relatedness to (instead of isolation from) what exists, the Indian assumes that this awareness is a natural by-product of existence itself.

In English, one can divide the universe into two parts: the natural and the supernatural. Humanity has no real part in either, being neither animal nor spirit—that is, the supernatural is discussed as though it were apart from people, and the natural as though people were apart from it. This necessarily forces English-speaking people into a position of alienation from the world they live in. This isolation is entirely foreign to American Indian thought. At base, every story, every song, every ceremony tells the Indian that each creature is part of a living whole and that all parts of that whole are related to one another by virtue of their participation in the whole of being.

In American Indian thought, God is known as the All-Spirit, and other beings are also spirit—more spirit than body, more spirit than intellect, more spirit than mind. The natural state of existence is whole. Thus healing chants and ceremonies emphasize restoration of wholeness, for disease is a condition of division and separation from the harmony of the whole. Beauty is wholeness. Health is wholeness. Goodness is wholeness. The Hopi refer to a witch—a person who uses the powers of the universe in a perverse or inharmonious way—as a two-hearts, one who is not whole but split in two at the center of being. The circle of being is not physical, but it is dynamic and alive. It is what lives and moves and knows, and all the life forms we recognize—animals, plants, rocks, winds—partake of this greater life. Acknowledgment of this allows healing chants such as this from the Night Chant to heal (make the person whole again):

Happily I recover.
Happily my interior becomes cool.
Happily I go forth.
My interior feeling cool, may I walk.
No longer sore, may I walk.
As it used to be long ago, may I walk.
Happily, with abundant dark clouds, may I walk.
Happily, with abundant showers, may I walk.
Happily, with abundant plants, may I walk.
Happily, on a trail of pollen, may I walk.
Happily, may I walk.

Because of the basic assumption of the wholeness or unity of the universe, our natural and necessary relationship to all life is evident; all phenomena we witness within or “outside” ourselves are, like us, intelligent manifestations of the intelligent universe from which they arise, as do all things of earth and the cosmos beyond. Thunder and rain are specialized aspects of this universe, as is the human race. Consequently the unity of the whole is preserved and reflected in language, literature, and thought, and arbitrary divisions of the universe into “divine” and “worldly” or “natural” and “unnatural” beings do not occur.

Literature takes on more meaning when considered in terms of some relevant whole (like life itself), so let us consider some relationships between specific American Indian literary forms and the symbols usually found in them. The two forms basic to American Indian literature are the ceremony and the myth. The ceremony is the ritual enactment of a specialized perception of a cosmic relationship, while the myth is a prose record of that relationship. Thus, the wiwanuyag wachoipi (sun dance) is the ritual enactment of the relationship the Plains people see between consecration of the human spirit to Wakan Tanka as manifested as Sun, or Light, and Life-Bestower. Through purification, participation, sacrifice, and supplication, the participants act as instruments or transmitters of increased power and wholeness, which bestows health and prosperity, from Wakan Tanka.

The formal structure of a ceremony is as holistic as the universe it purports to reflect and respond to, for the ceremony contains other forms such as incantation, song (dance), and prayer, and it is itself the central mode of literary expression from which all allied songs and stories derive. The Lakota view all the ceremonies as related to one another in various explicit and implicit ways, as though each were one face of a multifaceted prism. This interlocking of the basic forms has led to much confusion among non-Indian collectors and commentators, and this complexity makes all simplistic
treatments of American Indian literature more confusing than helpful. Indeed, the non-Indian tendency to separate things from one another—be they literary forms, species, or persons—causes a great deal of unnecessary difficulty and misinterpretation of American Indian life and culture. It is reasonable, from an Indian point of view, that all literary forms should be interrelated, given the basic idea of the unity and relatedness of all the phenomena of life. Separation of parts into this or that category is not agreeable to American Indians, and the attempt to separate essentially unified phenomena results in distortion.

For example, to say that a ceremony contains songs and prayers is misleading, for prayers are one form of address and songs are another. It is more appropriate to say that songs, prayers, dances, drums, ritual movements, and dramatic address are compositional elements of a ceremony. It is equally misleading to single out the wiwanyag wachipi and treat it as an isolated ceremony, for it must of necessity include the inipi (rite of purification) and did at one time contain the hanblecyeyapi (vision quest), which was how the Lakota learned about it in the first place. Actually, it might best be seen as a communal vision quest.

The purpose of a ceremony is to integrate; to fuse the individual with his or her fellows, the community of people with that of the other kingdoms, and this larger communal group with the worlds beyond this one. A raising or expansion of individual consciousness naturally accompanies this process. The person sheds the isolated, individual personality and is restored to conscious harmony with the universe. In addition to this general purpose, each ceremony has its own specific purpose. This purpose usually varies from tribe to tribe and may be culture-specific. For example, the rain dances of the Southwest are peculiar to certain groups, such as the Pueblos, and are not found among some other tribes, while war ceremonies, which make up a large part of certain Plains tribes' ceremonial life, are unknown among many tribes in California. But all ceremonies, whether for war or healing, create and support the sense of community that is the bedrock of tribal life. This community is not made up only of members of the tribe but necessarily includes all beings that inhabit the tribe's universe.

Within this context the dynamic characteristics of American Indian literature can best be understood. The structures that embody expressed and implied relationships between human and nonhuman beings, as well as the symbols that signify and articulate them, are designed to integrate the various orders of consciousness. Entities other than the human participants are present at ceremonial enactments, and the ceremony is composed for their participation as well as for that of the human beings who are there. Some tribes understand that the human participants include members of the tribe who are not physically present and that the community as a community, not simply the separate persons in attendance, enact the ceremony.

Thus devices such as repetition and lengthy passages of meaningless syllables take on significance within the context of the dance. Repetition has an entrancing effect. Its regular recurrence creates a state of consciousness best described as "oceanic," but without the hyper-sentimental side effects implied by that term. It is hypnotic, and a hypnotic state of consciousness is the aim of the ceremony. The participant's attention must become diffused. The distractions of ordinary life must be put to rest and emotions redirected and integrated into a ceremonial context, so that the greater awareness can come into full consciousness and functioning. In this way the person becomes literally one with the universe, for he or she loses consciousness of mere individuality and shares the consciousness that characterizes most orders of being.

In some sense repetition operates like the chorus in Western drama, serving to reinforce the theme and to focus the participants' attention on central concerns, while intensifying their involvement with the enactment. One suits one's words and movements (if one is a dancer) to the repetitive pattern. Soon breath, heartbeat, thought, emotion, and word are one. The repetition serves to integrate or fuse, allowing thought and word to coalesce into one rhythmic whole, which is not as jarring to the ear as rhyme.

Margot Astor suggests that this characteristic device stems from two sources, one psychic and one magical:

...this drive that forces man to express himself in rhythmic patterns has its ultimate source in psychic needs, for example the need of spiritual ingestion and proper organization of all the multiform perceptions and impressions rushing upon the individual from within and within... Furthermore, repetition, verbal and otherwise, means accumulation of power. She finds evidence that the first, the need to organize perception, predominates in the ceremonies of some tribes, such as the Apaches, and that the second, a "magically creative quality," is more characteristic of others, such as the Navajo. In other words, some tribes appear to stress form while others stress content, but either way the tribe will make its selection in terms of which emphasis is best likely to bring about fusion with the cosmic whole in their group and environment. This fusion depends on the emphasis that is most congenial to the aesthetic and psychic sense of the tribe.

One should remember, when considering rhythmic aspects of American Indian poetic forms, that all ceremony is chanted, drummed, and danced. American Indians often refer to a piece of music as a dance instead of a song, because song without dance is very rare, as is song without the use of a drum or other percussion instrument. One must also note that the drum does not "accompany" the song, for that implies separation between instrument and voice where no separation is recognized. Words, structure, music, movement, and drum combine to form an integral whole, and accompaniment per
se is foreign to the ceremony, though it is common in Western music. The ceremony may be enacted before people who are neither singing nor dancing, but their participation is nevertheless assumed. For participation is a matter of attention and attunement, not of activity.

Repetition is of two kinds, incremental and simple. In the first, variations will occur. A stanza may be repeated in its entirety four times—once for each of the directions—or six times—once for each lateral direction with above and below added—or seven times—once for each direction plus the center “where we stand.” Alternatively, the repetition may be of a phrase only, as in the Yei be chi, or of a phrase repeated four times with one word—the ceremonial name for each of four mountains, say, or the names of significant colors, animals, or powers—inserted in the appropriate place at each repetition, as in this Navajo Mountain Chant:

Seated at home behold me,
Seated amid the rainbow;
Seated at home behold me,
Lo, here, the Holy Place!
Yea, seated at home behold me.
At Sisnajinni, and beyond it,
Yea, seated at home behold me;
The Chief of Mountains, and beyond it,
Yea, seated at home behold me;
In Life Unending, and beyond it,
Yea, seated at home behold me;
In Joy Unchanging, and beyond it,
Yea, seated at home behold me.

Seated at home behold me,
Seated amid the rainbow;
Seated at home behold me,
Lo, here, the Holy Place!
Yea, seated at home behold me.
At Tsosdchil, and beyond it,
Yea, seated at home behold me;
The Chief of Mountains, and beyond it,
Yea, seated at home behold me;
In Life Unending, and beyond it,
Yea, seated at home behold me;
In Joy Unchanging, and beyond it,
Yea, seated at home behold me.

Seated at home behold me,
Seated amid the rainbow;
Seated at home behold me,
Lo, here, the Holy Place!
Yea, seated at home behold me.
In Life Unending, and beyond it,
Yea, seated at home behold me;
In Joy Unchanging, and beyond it,
Yea, seated at home behold me.

Some critics have said that this device results from the oral nature of American Indian literature, that repetition ensures attention and makes the works easy to remember. If this is a factor at all, however, it is a peripheral one, for nonliterate people have more finely developed memories than do literate people. The child learns early to remember complicated instructions, long stories—often verbatim—multitudes of details about plants, animals, kinship and other social relationships, privileges, and responsibilities, all “by heart.” For a person who can’t run to a bookshelf or a notebook to look up either vital or trivial information, reliance on memory becomes very important in everyday life. This highly developed everyday memory is not likely to fail on ceremonial occasions, so the use of repetition for ease of memorization is not important.

Astrov, in her discussion of the “psychic” basis of the device, touches on another reason folklorists give for the widespread use of repetition in oral ceremonial literature:

A child repeats a statement over and over for two reasons. First, in order to make himself familiar with something that appears to him to be threateningly unknown and thus to organize it into his system of familiar phenomena; and, second, to get something he wants badly.

Astrov implies that repetition is childish on two counts: that it (rather than rational thought) familiarizes and defuses threat and that the person, irrationally, believes that oral repetition of a desire will ensure its gratification. Let us
ignore the obvious fact that shamans, dancers, and other adult participants in the ceremony are not children, and concentrate on actual ceremonies to see whether they contain factors that are or might appear "threatening" to the tribe or whether they simply repeat wishes over and over. Nothing in the passages quoted so far could be construed as threatening, unless beauty, harmony, health, strength, rain, breath, life unending, or sacred mountains can be so seen. Nor are any threatening unknowns mentioned in the songs and chants Astrov includes in her collection; there are threats implicit in death or great powers, but while these constitute unknowns to many civilized people, they are familiar to the tribes. And, by Astrov's own admission, the works approach death or severe illness in positive ways, as in this death song:

> From the middle
> Of the great water
> I am called by the spirits.15

"Light as the last breath of the dying," she comments, "these words flutter out and seem to mingle with the soft fumes and mists that rise from the river in the morning"—hardly a threatening description. She continues:

> It is as though the song, with the lightness of a bird's feather, will carry the departing soul up to where the stars are glittering and wonder where the rainbow touches the dome of the sky.16

Nowhere in her discussion of Indian songs does Astrov indicate that the singers feel threatened by the chants. Instead, she points out that they express serenity and even joy in the face of what might seem frightening to a child. Nor do there appear any passages, in her extensive collection, that are the equivalent of "Lord, Won't You Buy Me a Color TV," and the absence of such material weakens the childhood-magic theory of repetition. In fact, the usual American Indian perception of humanity (collectively, not individually) as co-creator discourages the people from perceiving the deity as a sort of cosmic bellhop who alone is responsible for their personal well-being. This perception simultaneously discourages people from setting themselves up as potentates, tyrants, dictators, or leaders of any other kind.

The failure of folklorists to comprehend the true metaphysical and psychic nature of structural devices such as ceremonial repetition is a result of the projection of one set of cultural assumptions onto another culture's customs and literatures. People of the Western cultures, particularly those in professions noted for their "objectivity" and "intellectual commitment to Freudian tenets, are likely not to interpret psychic components of ceremonial literature in its extramundane sense but rather in its more familiar psychological sense. The twin assumptions that repetition serves to quiet childish psychological needs and to assure participants in a ceremony that they are exerting control over external phenomena—getting something they want badly—are projections. The participants do indeed believe that they can exert control over natural phenomena, but not because they have childishly repeated some syllables. Rather, they assume that all reality is internal in some sense, that the dichotomy of the isolate individual versus the "out there" only appears to exist, and that ceremonial observance can help them transcend this delusion and achieve union with the All-Spirit. From a position of unity within this larger Self, the ceremony can bring about certain results, such as healing one who is ill, ensuring that natural events move in their accustomed way, or bringing prosperity to the tribe.

The Westerner's bias against nonordinary states of consciousness is as unthinking as the Indian's belief in them is said to be. The Westerner's bias is the result of an intellectual climate that has been carefully fostered in the West for centuries, that has reached its culmination in Freudian and Darwinian theories, and that only now is beginning to yield to the masses of data that contradict it. This cultural bias has had many unfortunate side effects, only one of which is the deep misunderstanding of tribal literatures that has so long marked the learned and popular periodicals that deal with tribal culture.

In his four-volume treatise on nonordinary reality, Carlos Castañeda has described what living in the universe as a shaman is like. Unfortunately, he does not indicate that this experience is rather more common to ordinary than to extraordinary people, that the state of consciousness created through ceremony and ritual and detailed in mythic cycles is exactly that of the "man of knowledge," or sage. He makes the whole thing sound exotic, strange, beyond the reach of most persons; yet the great body of American Indian literature suggests quite a different conclusion. This literature can best be approached as a psychic journey. Only in the context of the consciousness of the universe can it be understood.

American Indian thought is essentially mystical and psychic in nature. Its distinguishing characteristic is a kind of magicalness—not the childish sort described by Astrov, but rather an enduring sense of the fluidity and malleability, or creative flux, of things. This is a reasonable attitude in its own context, derived quite logically from the central assumptions that characterize tribal thought. The tribal person perceives things, not as inert, but as viable and alive, and he or she knows that living things are subject to processes of growth and change as an necessary component of their aliveness. Since all that exists is alive and since all that is alive must grow and change, all existence can be manipulated under certain conditions and according to certain laws. These conditions and laws, called "ritual" or "magic" in the West, are known to American Indians variously. The Sioux refer to them as "walking in a sacred manner," the Navajo as "standing in the center of the world," and the Pomo as "having a tradition." There are as many ways of referring to this phenomenon as there are tribes.
The symbolism in American Indian ceremonial literature, then, is not symbolic in the usual sense; that is, the four mountains in the Mountain Chant do not stand for something else. They are those exact mountains perceived psychically, as it were, or mystically. The color red, as used by the Lakota, doesn't stand for sacred or earth, but is the quality of a being, the color of it, when perceived "in a sacred manner" or from the point of view of the earth itself. That is, red is a psychic quality, not a material one, though it has a material dimension, of course. But its material aspect is not its essential one; or as the great metaphysician Madame Blavatsky put it, the physical is not a principle, or, as Lame Deer the Lakota shaman suggests, the physical aspect of existence is only representative of what is real:

The meat stands for the four-legged creatures, our animal brothers, who gave of themselves so that we should live. The stream [from the stewpot] is living breath. It was water; now it goes up to the sky, becomes a cloud again . . . .

We Sioux spend a lot of time thinking about everyday things, which in our mind are mixed up with the spiritual. We see in the world around us many symbols that teach us the meaning of life. We have a saying that the white man sees so little, he must see with only one eye. We see a lot that you no longer notice. You could notice it if you wanted too, but you are usually too busy. We Indians live in a world of symbols and images where the spiritual and the commonplace are one. To you symbols are just words, spoken or written in a book. To us they are part of nature, part of ourselves, even little insects like ants and grasshoppers. We try to understand them not with the head but with the heart, and we need no more than a hint to give us the meaning.  

Not only are the "symbols" statements of perceived reality rather than metaphorical or poetic statements but the formulations that are characterized by brevity and repetition are also expressions of that perception. One sees life as part of oneself; a hint as to which particular part is all that is needed to convey meaning. This accounts for the "purity" and "simplicity" that apparently characterize traditional American Indian literatures. The works are simple in that they concern themselves with what is known and familiar, not in that they are childlike or unsophisticated.

In a sense, the American Indian perceives all that exists as symbolic. This outlook has given currency to the concept of the Indian as one who is close to the earth, but the closeness is actual, not a quaint result of savagism or childlike naiveté. An Indian, at the deepest level of being, assumes that the earth is alive in the same sense that human beings are alive. This aliveness is seen in nonphysical terms, in terms that are perhaps familiar to the mystic or the psychic, and this view gives rise to a metaphysical sense of reality that is an ineradicable part of Indian awareness. In brief, we can say that the sun or the earth or a tree is a symbol of an extraordinary truth.

This attitude is not anthropomorphic. No Indian would regard personal perception as the basic, or only, unit of universal consciousness. Indians believe that the basic unit of consciousness is the All-Spirit, the living fact of intelligence from which all other perceptions arise and derive their power:

1. I live, but I will not live forever.
   Mysterious moon, you only remain.
   Powerful sun, you alone remain.
   Wonderful earth, you remain forever.
   All of us soldiers must die.

This attitude is not superstitious, though it can degenerate into superstition when the culture disintegrates. It is based very solidly on experience and most members of the tribe share that experience to some degree. The experience is verified by hundreds and thousands of years of experience and is a result of actual perception—sight, taste, hearing, smell—as well as more indirect social and natural phenomena. In the West, if a person points to a building and says, "There is a building," and if other people looking in the direction indicated agree, and if that building can be entered, walked through, touched, then the building is said to be really there.

In the same way, traditional American Indians encounter and verify metaphysical reality. No one's experience is idiosyncratic. The singer's tells of journeying to the west and climbing under the sky speaks of a journey that many have taken in the past and will take in the future. Every traveler will describe the same sights and sounds and will enter and return in like fashion.

Generations of Western observers have noticed this peculiarity of psychic travel, and many attempt to explain it in psychoanalytic terms, referring to Jung's "collective unconscious," for example, or to Freud's notion of the projection of repressed conflict. Nevertheless, the evidence, however one interprets it, suggests that the psychic life of all humanity is the same. Western sophisticates presume that the experiences—sights, sounds, and beings encountered on psychic journeys—are imaginary and hallucinatory; they are equally inclined to presume that thoughts are idiosyncratic events of no real consequence. Nowhere in the literature on ceremo

dinal all have I encountered a Western writer willing to suggest that the "spiritual and the commonplace are one." Many argue that these "hallucinations" are good, others that they are the product of a diseased mind, but none suggests that one may actually be "seated amid the rainbow."
The many kinds of American Indian literature can be categorized in various ways, but, given the assumptions behind the creation and performance of the literature, a useful division might be along functional lines rather than along more mechanical ones.

It might be said that the basic purpose of any culture is to maintain the ideal status quo. What creates differences among cultures, and literatures, is the way in which the people go about this task, and this in turn depends on, and simultaneously maintains, basic assumptions about the nature of life and humanity's place in it. The ideal status quo is generally expressed in terms of peace, prosperity, good health, and stability. Western cultures lean more and more heavily on technological and scientific methods of maintenance, while traditional cultures such as those of American Indian tribes tend toward mystical and philosophical methods. Because of this tendency, literature plays a central role in the traditional cultures that it is unable to play in technological ones. Thus, the purpose of a given work is of central importance to understanding its deeper significance.

We can divide traditional literature into two basic genres: ceremonial and popular, as opposed to the Western prose and poetry distinction. Ceremonial literature includes all literature that is accompanied by ritual actions and music and that produces mythic (metaphysical) states of consciousness and/or conditions. This literature may appear to the Westerner as either prose or poetry, but its distinguishing characteristic is that it is to some degree sacred. The word "sacred," like the words "power" and "medicine," has a very different meaning to tribespeople than to members of technological societies. It does not signify something that is of religious significance and therefore believed in with emotional fervor—"venerable, consecrated, or sacrosanct," as the Random House unabridged has it—but something that it is filled with an intangible but very real power or force, for good or bad, as Lame Deer says in his discussion of symbolism:

Four is the number that is most wakan, most sacred. Four stands for Tatuye Tope—the four quarters of the earth. One of its chief symbols is Umane, which looks like this:

![Symbol](image)

It represents the unused earth force. By this I mean that the Great Spirit pours a great unimaginable amount of force into all things—pebbles, ants, leaves, whirlwinds—whatever you will.

This force is symbolized by the Umame. In the old days men used to have an Umame altar made of raised earth in their tipis on certain special occasions. It was so wakan you couldn't touch it or even hold your hand over it.\(^{11}\)

Lame Deer is not saying that one was forbidden to touch the altar; he is saying that one could not touch it. The Umame does not represent the power; it is the power. "Sacred," "power," and "medicine" are related terms. Having power means being able to use this extra force without being harmed by it. This is a particular talent that human beings possess to greater or lesser degree, and "medicine" is a term used for the personal force through which one possesses power. Medicine is powerful in itself, but its power can be used only by certain persons, under certain conditions, and for certain purposes.

Ceremonial literature is sacred; it has power. It frequently uses language of its own: archaism, "meaningless" words, or special words that are not used in everyday conversation. It can be divided into several subcategories, some of which appear in some tribes but not in others, and others that can be found throughout Indian America. Ceremonial literature includes songs for many occasions: healing, initiation, planting, harvesting, and other agricultural pursuits; hunting, blessing new houses, journeys, and undertakings. There are also dream-related songs; war songs; personal power songs; songs for food preparation, purification, and vision seeking. The subjects of the major ceremonial cycles include origin and creation, migration, celebration of new laws, and commemoration of legendary or mythic occurrences. Each serves to hold the society together, create harmony, restore balance, ensure prosperity and unity, and establish right relations within the social and natural world. At base the ceremonies restore the psychic unity of the people, reaffirm the terms of their existence in the universe, and validate their sense of reality, order, and propriety. The most central of these perform this function at levels that are far more intense than others, and these great ceremonies, more than any single phenomenon, distinguish one tribe from another.

Every tribe has a responsibility to the workings of the universe; today as yesterday, human beings play an intrinsic role in the ongoing creation. This role is largely determined by the place where the tribe lives, and the role will change when that tribe moves. In the Southwest, for example, the Zuni dance Shalako every winter at the solstice so that the sun will turn in its course and move once again toward summer. Cosmic cycles such as Shalako or Wuwuchim relate to life processes on earth and, by virtue of natural relationship, within the universe. They aim toward forces far bigger than the community or the individual, though each is inescapably dependent on the other—"circles within circles," as Lame Deer says, "with no beginning and no end."\(^{22}\)

The greater and lesser symbols incorporated into the ceremonies take their meaning from the context of the ceremony—its purpose and its meaning. Attempts to understand ceremonial literature without knowledge of this purpose often have ludicrous results. The symbols cannot be understood in
terms of another culture, whether it be that of Maya or of England, because those other cultures have different imperatives and have grown on different soil, under a different sky within the nexus of different spirits, and within a different traditional context. "Owl" in one situation will have a very different significance from "owl" in another, and a given color—white or blue—will vary from place to place and from ceremony to ceremony in its significance, intensity, and power. In other words, the rules that govern traditional American Indian literatures are very different from those that govern Western literature, though the enormity of the difference is, I think, a fairly recent development. Literature must, of necessity, express and articulate the deepest perceptions, relationships, and attitudes of a culture, whether it does so deliberately or accidentally. Tribal literature does this with a luminosity and clarity that is largely free of pretension, stylized "elegance," or show. Experiences that are held to be the most meaningful—from those that completely transcend ordinary experience to those that are commonplace—are celebrated in the songs and ceremonial cycles of the people.

The more commonplace experiences are celebrated in popular tales and songs, which may be humorous, soothing, pedagogical, or entertaining. In this category are lullabies, corn-grinding and ditch-digging songs, jokes, pourquoi tales, "little" stories, and stories with contemporary settings. Included here, too, are those delightful dances called 49s. All but the 49s appear in collections of Indian lore, sometimes masquerading as true myths or simple songs. This masquerade, of course, does little to clear up misunderstandings regarding American Indian literature, for frequently those "myths" that seem childlike are forms developed for children and bear only a slight resemblance to the true mythic chains from which they derive.

Between the trivial, popular forms and the ceremonial works are songs and stories such as the various games; incantations and other simple forms of magic; prose cycles such as the Trickster tales recorded by Paul Radin; some journey and food-related songs and legends.

Individual songs may be difficult to classify, though the level of symbolism they contain and the amount of prescribed ritual and associated ceremony, the number and special qualifications of the celebrants, and the physical setting and costume used can help distinguish one kind from another. In order to classify any given song, though, one needs more than a nodding acquaintance with the locality and the tribe whose song or story is under consideration.

Another important factor to consider in classification of a song is the relative secrecy of parts or all of the ceremony, especially when tourists, cameras, or tape recorders are present. The amount of secrecy will vary to some extent from tribe to tribe, some being more open than others, but some secrecy is nearly always the rule.

Another such indicator, particularly valuable for classroom work, is the source of the song or story. Only very erudite tomes are likely to have much that is really sacred, and even those have usually been altered in some way. Popular books are likely to carry mainly popular literature, with a few selections from the next more powerful category. It would be well to mention, in this connection, that the use of really sacred materials by ordinary mortals and publishers is generally forbidden. Also, these works do not make good classroom materials for a variety of reasons: they are arcane; they are usually taboo; they tend to confuse non-Indian students; they may cause resentment among Indian students; and they create questions and digressions that are usually beyond the competence of the teacher or of the academic setting. Frequently they lead to ridicule, disrespect, and belittlement; non-Indian students are not inclined by training or culture to view the sacred as that which has power beyond that of economics, history, or politics.

Underlying all their complexity, traditional American Indian literatures possess a unity and harmony of symbol, structure, and articulation that is peculiar to the American Indian world. This harmony is based on the perceived harmony of the universe and on thousands of years of refinement. This essential sense of unity among all things flows like a clear stream through the songs and stories of the peoples of the Western Hemisphere. This sense is embodied in these words of an old man:

There are birds of many colors—red, blue, green, yellow—yet it is all one bird.
There are races of many colors—brown, black, yellow, white—yet it is all one horse.
So cattle, so all living things—animals, flowers, trees. So men: in this land where once were only Indians are now men of every color—white, black, yellow, red—yet all one people. That this should come to pass was in the heart of the Great Mystery. It is right thus. And everywhere there shall be peace.

So Hiawatha said, more than fifty years ago. It remains for scholars of American Indian literature to look at this literature from the point of view of its people. Only from this vantage can we understand fully the richness, complexity, and true meaning of a people's life; only in this way can we all learn the lessons of the past on this continent and the essential lesson of respect for all that is.

Notes

1. Mythic; 1. narratives that deal with metaphysical, spiritual, and cosmic occurrences that recount the spiritual past and the "mysteries" of the tribe; 2. sacred story. The word in its cosmic, creative sense. This usage follows the literary meaning rather than the common or vernacular meaning of "fiction" or "not real narrative dealing with primitive, irrational explanations of the world." 3. transatlantic.

2. Storm, Seven Arrows, p. 4.
Cycles of Appreciation

Larry Evers

Patterns of interest in American Indian oral literature have been cyclic. One indication of these cycles has been the publication of anthologies of American Indian literature. Thus, a first cycle may be recognized by the publication of George Cronyn's *The Path on the Rainbow* in 1918, a second by the appearance of two anthologies around midcentury—Margot Astrov's *The Winged Serpent* and A. Grove Day's *The Sky Clears*—and a third by the anthologies that flooded bookstores in the late sixties and throughout the seventies, epitomized, I suppose, by Jerome Rothenberg's *Shaking the Pumpkin* and William Brandon's *The Magic World.* As these anthologies have been the vehicles through which American Indian verbal art—narratives, prayers, and songs—has been offered to a wider American audience, their character is of special interest to those of us concerned with teaching American Indian literature. They imply a course of study that we often follow in our classrooms. At the same time, the anthologies have served as friction points around which ethnologists, folklorists, poets, and literary critics have regularly gathered to gnaw at critical issues the anthologies raise. Much of this discussion has been territorial and it is usefully ignored, but at its best it highlights problems and issues that have remained with us through three generational cycles. I will look first at the anthologies and then sketch some problems they raise.

In 1883 Daniel Brinton published a wide-ranging survey of American Indian verbal art of his time, including selections intended to "engage in their presentation and publication the interest of scholarly men, of learned societies, of enlightened governments, of liberal institutions and individuals, not only in [this] country but throughout the world." What followed Brinton's call, chronologically if not causally, was one of the most intense periods of collecting oral literature in anthropological history. During the last years of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth, Matthews,