

1

On the “Res” and in the “Hood”

Making Cultures, Leaving Legacies

ANGELA L. COTTEN

Research in aesthetics and philosophy has generated insightful and thought-provoking criticism of literature as a site of aesthetic innovation, philosophical critique, and consciousness-raising. Yet, there is a noticeable dearth of criticism on the writings of African American and Native American women in these fields. These women’s cultural productions and social activism reflect carefully reasoned perspectives on dilemmas of the human condition, knowledge and truth, structure and agency, history, and ethics. They often draw on and rework philosophical systems and literary genres to convey fresh, new perspectives on art and beauty, truth, justice, community, and the making of a good and happy life. This anthology features essays that use interdisciplinary, feminist, and comparative methods to make works by (both contemporary and historical) African American and Native American women writers more accessible for critical consideration in aesthetics and philosophy. While the works of many writers featured here have been analyzed in other critical contexts, in this volume their productions are treated for innovations in aesthetics, philosophy, and critical theory. It is a matter of extending the scope of issues and interests treated in other critical fields and thus broadening our understanding of aesthetic and philosophical formations in Native American and African American women’s literary traditions. This compilation of essays provides multiple openings for exploring the interplay between artistic values and social, political, and moral concerns that are mediated by sensitivity to the historical and cultural contexts of aesthetic values production. Some essays specifically provide a natural segue for discussions of value theory in aesthetics as they explore the continuities between cultural

production and social and political theory. All contributors, moreover, make connections between aesthetic experience in everyday life and analyses of art and artistic appreciation in ways that facilitate discussions of aesthetic agency as it applies broadly to lived experience.

The critical thrust of these women's cultural productions engenders irony in challenging the western tradition's most revered philosophies, as they deploy the same tools (discourse/language and artistic imagination) used by whites historically to rationalize the removal, enslavement, and extermination of Indians and Africans. Such resistance stands as a challenge to the claims of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophers and scientists such as Immanuel Kant, George W. F. Hegel, David Hume, and Francis Bacon, who argued that the indigenous peoples of Africa and the Americas lacked any capacity for rational thought and aesthetic ingenuity. To white Europeans and Americans this meant that blacks and Indians were less than human—primitives, savages, or subhuman links between whites and animals in the Chain of Being—and thus exploitable as chattel slaves. Subsequent eugenics and social Darwinist discourses in the nineteenth century reinforced these mythologies of blacks and Indians and served to legitimize social policies of segregating them in ghettos and reservations and of sterilizing the women of childbearing age. The rise of Hollywood and the emergence of "salvage" anthropology in the early twentieth century spawned new racial images, including the "extinct" or "dying primitive," to accompany the old racial mythologies in the American cultural imagination. It is within these discursive minefields of racialized negation that Africans, Indians, and their descendants have had to navigate and manipulate the written word in expressing their knowledge, spiritualities, and visions of beauty, truth, and eco-humanistic possibility. Native American and African American writings share a literary history of critical intervention in these discourses in ways that are insightful, ironic, playful, and transformative—for themselves, their communities, and the cultural traditions with which they engage.

AFRICAN NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURE AND CROSSBLOOD AESTHETICS

This collection encourages comparative investigations of African American and Native American literature to explore aesthetic similarities and intersections between both cultures. In fact, evidence reveals that the contact and shared histories of these groups led to the generation of a

third, syncretic culture of African Native Americans, whose very existence poses problems and challenges for those seeking to study strictly one culture or the other. To read the essays gathered in this book is to begin to recognize what might be called *crossblood literary aesthetics*.

The indigenous populations of the Americas and the Africans brought to America in the slave trade shared experiences of cultural dislocation and dispossession, enslavement, and exploitation. Together, many found common cause in resisting western imperialism. This led to the development of what have been termed "maroon societies." In colonial America, contact with Indians for many Africans and African Americans occurred through fur trading and mining in which they served as guides and interpreters for whites dealing with Indians (Porter 1971). Maroon societies were composed of fugitive slaves (both Indian and African) from plantations and defiant tribes of the Americas and Caribbean basin (Price 1973). Three of the largest known maroon groups were the Seminoles of Florida, the Garinagus of Saint Vincent, and the Dismal Swamp of Virginia and North Carolina. Others included the Seneca, Onodaga, Minisink, Powhatan, Chowan, and Susquehanna nations. They were often the sites of planned resistance and revolt against territorial expansion and white domination. Some indigenous nations also held slaves, such as the Cherokee, Creek/Seminole, Choctaw, and Chickasaw (Littlefield 1979). The conditions of enslavement and treatment varied according to tribal law and tradition. Cherokee captivity of slaves took a more repressive character, approximating the structures of white southern slavery, than Creek/Seminole enslavement of blacks, for example, which resembled indentured servitude although with fewer restrictions and more individual rights (Littlefield 1977; Perdue 1979). Seminole maroons grew out of Creek enslavement of Africans and African Americans, some of whom also became allies in the Seminole struggle against removal policies. Maroon societies were particularly significant in fomenting the Cherokee slave uprising of 1842.

Maroon societies and Indian enslavement of Africans are evidence of cultural mixing among Africans, people indigenous to the Americas, and their descendants, and of the formation of a syncretic African Native American culture. This historical intermingling confounds our attempt to theorize a black cultural tradition that is distinct from American indigenous cultural influences and vice versa. People of African and indigenous American descent intermarried and traded technology, food, clothing, and knowledge, among other things. They influenced one

another's language, ceremonial rituals, beliefs, and worldviews (Price 1973, 11–13). David Elton Gray, for example, considers how the rabbit trickster tales of both black and indigenous American oral traditions in the Southeast might be a product of mutual cultural influence: “Similar tales in different traditions that are in contact are likely to influence each other, creating new forms of the tales that do not have their origins in a single tradition” (2003, 104). Such cultural entwinement poses interesting questions for how scholars have conceived black and Native culture and identity, particularly when construed as discrete developments with little cross-cultural exchange.

Archaeological evidence also suggests that the contact between indigenous Americans and Africans predated European colonization (Forbes 1993; Van Sertima 1976, 1992). Thus, the depths of African and indigenous American histories and the complexity of their cultures may be greater than our current knowledge reflects. If archaeological evidence points to cross-cultural interaction before contact with Europeans, how have African values and cultural practices been retained in the formation of African American culture? The work of Melville Herskovits (1958), John S. Mbiti (1970), and Albert Raboteau (1978) have brilliantly illuminated the ways in which African slaves and their descendants masked and preserved certain African values and customs in America. Yet, evidence about African Native American exchange before contact with Europeans raises speculation about *what kind* of African culture survived the Middle Passage in slave memory and culture. Are African slaves and their descendants the only bearers of cultural knowledge preserving precolonial Africanity in America? Or was some preservation also owing to an already existing network of cultural influence between Africans and Indians prior to the fifteenth century? Similar questions can be raised about Native cultures that survived conquest: How much of the culture has been influenced, not only by western/Anglo peoples, but also by Africans traveling to the Americas? These questions inevitably lead to methodological considerations regarding the formation and use of interpretive frameworks, and how their objects of analysis are constituted.



Cultural exchange between Africans and indigenous Americans occurred in European and Caribbean contexts as well, as both were shipped to slave markets and plantations (Forbes 1993). Black Carib communities (composed of Ebo, Efik, Fon, Yoruba, and Fanti-Ashanti)

and Island Caribs have been around since the early 1600s, migrating from Saint Vincent to other islands in the West Indies and Central America (Brennan 2003, 13–15). For example, the French shipped two hundred Natchez to Haiti in 1730, whose lives, interests, and cultures became intertwined with slaves from West Africa—mainly from the Dahomean region (13–15). Common beliefs in the power of ancestral spirits, herbal healing, and values of harmony and wholeness constituted a cultural lexicon of shared values and understanding among Indians and Africans outside North America—the remnants of which have survived in religions like Haitian voodoo.



By bringing together criticism on both African American and Native American women writers, this anthology encourages readers to explore similar literary aesthetics, philosophies, and expressive modalities, and to theorize points of overlap and continuity between these literary traditions. For example, AnaLouise Keating explores the broader horizon of Alice Walker's womanist concept in Paula Gunn Allen's work. She uses Walker's term as a point of departure for explicating Allen's writing on myth and the oral tradition, and shows how Allen's work articulates an indigenous womanist aesthetic of self-recovery. Comparative investigations can open up new intertextual sites of analysis and lead to the formation of new critical tools to study African, African American, and Native American literature, thereby providing possibilities for reassessing writers of these traditions and discovering ways in which they signify on each other's literary and oral traditions. This kind of signifying practice involves textual revision and rewriting of literary and oral traditions. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. explains that "this can be accomplished by the revision of tropes. This sort of Signifyin(g) tradition serves, if successful, to create a space for the revising text. It also alters fundamentally the way we read the tradition, by defining the relationship of the text at hand *to* the tradition. The revising text is written in the language of the tradition, employing its tropes, its rhetorical strategies, and its ostensible subject matter" (1988, 125). For a variety of reasons, such acts of signification have been critical for the women whose works and lives are considered in this volume. Many of the artists included here express frustration, insofar as they wish to embrace a cultural past from which they feel disconnected, and wish to tap into a sense of female empowerment that might be absent from contemporary characterizations of their cultural legacy. Jonathan Brennan observes the importance

of reevaluating ethnically mixed writers who have been positioned in one tradition by critics who are not sensitive to writers' mixed cultural heritages. "In order to really understand the tradition from which [ethnically mixed] writers create their works, one must also examine their parallel heritages without denying either one" (2002, 19). Alice Walker and Ann Plato are exemplary. Scholars have treated their works in African American cultural criticism, while simultaneously downplaying their Cherokee and Pequot cultural connections. Both Walker and Plato have demonstrated significant regard for Native Americans and their cultures in their works.

Alice Walker embraces her Cherokee and African heritages, and Native American worldviews are apparent in most of her writings; yet, few scholars have explored their impact on her critical thought and imaginative productions. Except for Patricia Riley (2003), Madhu Dubey (1994), and Daniel Turner (1991), who explore this angle, most scholars working on Alice Walker have glossed over the importance of indigenous ways of life to concentrate instead on her development as a writer and activist. Barb Tracy of this anthology suggests, however, that full appreciation of Walker's works cannot be had without analyzing her oeuvre for indigenous values and worldviews. Certainly, the emergence of environmentalist concerns in Walker's writings was underwritten (in part) by her appreciation for Native ethics regarding the land-earth and its underlying ontology of humans as inextricably connected to the natural world. Her critique of the African American appropriation of Christianity, moreover, is informed by more than by a Marxian suspicion of religion as an opiate of the masses. It is also supported by the ecohumanistic and life-affirming beliefs of certain Native cosmologies. Cherokee, Lakota, and *los indios de Mexico* figure importantly in Walker's second novel, *Meridian* (1976), which explores historical (including genealogical) connections between Africans, African Americans, and Native Americans and makes a case for the vital role of Native spirituality, ancestral traditions, and sacred places in blacks' struggles for justice. Her fourth novel, *Temple of My Familiar*, also explores the possibility of Indian-African cultural exchange before the fifteenth century and foregrounds many similarities between the two peoples.

Scholars position nineteenth-century writer, Ann Plato, in the African American literary tradition. Although she was of African Pequot descent (Brennan 2003), critics tend to downplay her Native heritage (in favor of an African American racial identity) and any influ-

ence it might have had on her writing. Because there is little information about Plato's life, scholars like Kenny J. Williams, who wrote the introduction to her productions in the Shomberg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers Series, must rely on her writings for biographical information. Plato's poem, "The Natives of America," hints at her Pequot cultural background and raises questions about how it might have affected her conception of nature, death, and the oral tradition. In his overview of Plato's life and in the mention of her poem, however, Williams does not discuss Plato's invocation of her Pequot father's spirit to tell the poetic persona the story of their people's demise. Informing readers of how to interpret the poem, Williams displaces the reference to Native suffering with the plight of blacks: "In some ways and with some obvious changes, the 'cruel oppression' suffered by the Indians could be transferred to the subjugated blacks" (1988, xlix). But isn't the whole poem (and not only one stanza) really about *Indians*? Frances Smith Foster does a similar elision in *Written By Herself: Literary Production by African American Women, 1746-1892*, but she (at least) allows that Plato might have been referring to both Africans and Native Americans (1993, 20). Both critics assume that Plato was thoroughly Christianized and do not explore how some of her writing might be concerned with Pequot/Native American issues and might express certain indigenous values of nature, human beings, and orality.

Calling on her Indian father's spirit to tell the story of their tribe's demise might be more than a poetic device by Plato. It might suggest something about the impact of Plato's African and Pequot background on her work: namely, that she might have embraced ancestral spirits and the mythic and oral tradition. Such beliefs, in turn, may reflect a more cyclic ontology in which death is viewed as a transitional passage into another state or form of being, instead of as the finitude of consciousness. The poem also recalls Native life before the conquistadors, when harmonious, cooperative relations with the land were possible. Plato's paternal spirit presents an idyllic scene that figures his people as an inextricable part of the land along with the buffalo, mountains, and prairies. For many indigenous peoples, their place of origin is a fundamental layer of identity, and losing connection to the land is akin to social and spiritual death. The poem closes on a pessimistic note with the spirit mourning the loss of place and the crisis of identity and meaning for his (now dispersed) people. Plato figures place and ancestral

proximity in ways that should stimulate explication of her work for indigenous American influences rather than eclipsing part of her heritage with another.

New sites of intertextual analysis and interpretive tools also open up possibilities for theorizing African Native American literary aesthetics and philosophies that are constituted not only by writers of dual African Native American identity, but also by writers of singular cultural heritage who signify on African American and Native American traditions. Leslie Marmon Silko, Toni Morrison, Louise Erdrich, and Nettie Jones are just a few writers who signify on both literary traditions. Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* (1992) treats the interwoven histories of blacks and Indians and recounts the geographical displacement and settlement of African slaves among indigenous peoples of the Americas. She explores similar cosmologies, mythic and oral traditions, and concepts of time and land-place of Africans and indigenous tribes. For her, cultural commonalities and centuries of comingling and intermarriage bind Africans, African Americans, and indigenous peoples in a larger common (and cosmically constituted) destiny of international uprisings. The black Indian character, Clinton, a figure connecting historical memory to a transnational revolution of tribal consciousness, is a testament to this history of red and black (erased but not silenced) crossings. Other characters in the novel such as the Hopi Indian, travel around the world meeting with other tribal peoples and planning international revolts. The groups share similar spiritual lexicons regarding the roles of serpent gods (Da or Damballah, Odoun, and Quetzalcoatl), prophecy, and ancestral power. For Silko, people of African and indigenous American descent are connected, not only through a shared history of white/western oppression and cultural similarities, but also by larger, unseen forces and cosmic entities.

Other historical black writers, such as Zora Neal Hurston, Olivia Ward Bush-Banks, John Marrant, and Olaudah Equiano, wrote about Native Americans in their works (Young 2002). Indians first began appearing in captivity, criminal, and slave narratives written by blacks in the colonial period. Representations of Indians in the works of Africans like John Marrant and Olaudah Equiano were notably different from those of whites writing in these genres. Besides the sense of shared struggle against white tyranny that united many blacks with Indians, similar cultural practices and beliefs also contributed to a sense of fellowship between them. Concerning the Mosquitos and his own Ido background, for example, Equiano recalls that "a few times they

offered to cut some trees down in order to build us houses which they did exactly like Africans; by the joint labor of men, women, and children . . . I do not recollect them to have any more than two wives. They accompanied their husbands when they came to our dwelling, and . . . then always squatted down behind their husbands" as in Ibo customs (Young 2002, 31). Olivia Ward Bush-Banks was a prolific poet, playwright, and essayist of the Harlem Renaissance who affirmed both her Montauk and African American heritage in her work. She maintained close connections with her Montauk origins after moving to Harlem, where she attended tribal ceremonies in traditional dress and composed a script, *Indian Trails, or Trail of the Montauk*, which portrays Montauk culture and life as it is and makes no apology for Native existence in America (Guillaume 1991).

In the twentieth century, black newspapers and periodicals reported Indian resistance—especially the American Indian Movement's recapturing of Wounded Knee—to galvanize the black protest. Rhetorical ingenuity in black journalism allowed journalists to interrogate the dominant culture's version of history and dispel racist myths of indigenous peoples (Gourgey 2001). Indians were often referred to as "first Americans," which deconstructed ideologies of Manifest Destiny and honored indigenous peoples as preexisting settlers. As the century and struggle for justice wore on, black newspapers increasingly employed the trope of memory to link black power to Native American insurrection.

The web of concern woven by African American and Native American writers for the fate of each other's peoples and correlative appreciation for each other's literary and oral traditions is a crossblood tradition. We draw on Sharon P. Holland's notion of "crossblood identity" to underscore the parameters and dynamics by which this tradition is constituted. Crossblood identity differs from multiracial categorization as construed (and arguably constructed) by the U.S. Census Bureau. Holland's concept recognizes *choice* of cultural alliance and appreciation as the primary value of crossblood identities when written proof of heritage is inaccessible. To identify as crossblood, in fact, is "to read the 'racial' categories on the U.S. census as bogus and to consistently cross the borders of ideological containment" (2003, 259). As explored above, some African American and Native American women writers' alliance with and appreciation for one another's cultures confound our attempts to draw sharp distinctions between literary/oral and other cultural traditions. Regardless of their racial and ethnic identifications, these writers demonstrate that literary and cultural borders

between these peoples are more porous and fluid than critics (other than Jonathan Brennan [2002, 2003] and Sharon Holland [2003]) have theorized. Crossblood aesthetics refers to both the textual practices of (self-identified) African Native American writers like Alice Walker and Nettie Jones and of writing that explores cultural connections and interactions between people of African and indigenous American descent like Leslie Silko and Louise Erdrich. Mapping crossblood literary aesthetics between African Americans and Native Americans reveals the syncretic, dialogical character of their cultural formation, exchange, and development in American history, which critics of literature and philosophy have elided. Many essays in this volume integrate traditional disciplinary methods to formulate unique interdisciplinary interpretive frameworks for decoding the multiple levels of complex cultural play between Native and black writers in America, and pave the way for innovative hermeneutic possibilities for making a crossblood literary aesthetic and tradition more apparent. Jonathan Brennan stresses that attending to differences within these traditions is also important (2003, 34–45). Issues of genre, historical period, language, and regional cultural differences play a significant role in understanding the composition, structure, direction, flow, and authorial intention of texts—both oral and written.

This volume provides an opening to theorizing crossblood aesthetics by bringing together criticism on African American and Native American writings for critical comparisons. Myth, ritual, linguistic ingenuity, storytelling/oral traditions, and the transgression of conventional literary genres are typical features of both African American and Native American women's literature and poetry. Indigenous and black American writers often share beliefs in the concept of identity as relational and myth as ritual-processional and in continuity and fluidity between flesh and spirit, mind and body, individual and society. Exploration of mixed-race subjectivity and problematization of hegemonic racial categories and civil rights protest are also features of African American and Native American literature. Issues of belonging and roaming are common to both traditions and their innovations. For example, in this collection, AnaLouise Keating observes that for black and Native writers, recovery from personal/individual and historical/collective trauma extends to social responsibility: personal transformation engenders and encourages outward efforts for more extensive social change. Individual and communal survival is interdependent and mutually sustaining rather than oppositional and strained by different interests. The com-

monalities explored here constitute points of analysis for a crossblood literary aesthetic and for its philosophical underpinnings of African American and Native American textual practice, including conceptions of nature, human beings, community, social totality, time, history, art, and beauty.

CROSS-FERTILIZING U.S. ETHNOCRITICAL AND POSTCOLONIAL INTERPRETIVE PARADIGMS

Cultural Sites of Critical Insight also encourages readers to draw on postcolonial literary theory while exploring the criticism on Native American and African American writings in this collection. The meaning and parameters of postcoloniality have been outlined by several scholars. In this study we combine multiple definitions of the postcolonial as a reference to the complex, multilayered matrix of economic, political, social, and ideological structures of formally colonized peoples, and the current global financial institutions and neoconservative economic programs that undermine their struggles for sovereignty and self-possession (Singh and Schmidt 2000; Dirlík 1997; During 1987). Postcolonial also refers to writing that contests the trauma and legacies of colonial domination and offers alternative visions of rebuilding culture from the ruins (Ania Loomba 1998; Fawzia and Seshadri-Crooks 2000). Such projects usually entail rediscovering cultural practices and values and oral traditions that existed prior to colonial conquest, and/or inventing new ones of self-affirmation and cultural pride that lie outside Eurocentric cultural norms.

To qualify here, we are not proposing a postcolonial categorization of African American and Native American literature, for technically, North American Indians have never been granted formal sovereignty and have, since conquest, been subjected to the rule of the U.S., Canadian, and Mexican governments. They have never regained sovereign control over stolen ancestral lands. (See Arnold Krupat [2000] for a discussion of this issue.) While this may be the case, postcolonial literary theory nonetheless offers a rich depth of hermeneutic concepts, which may illuminate certain (heretofore inconceivable) dimensions and features of Native American literatures. Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt observe several areas of commonality between U.S. ethnic, cultural, and postcolonial critical discourses: deconstructing the politics of whiteness and its genealogy, explicating the complexly constituted subjectivities of "Third World" women of color, and theorizing

transnational/diasporic traversals and connections (Singh and Schmidt 2000; see also Madsen 1999 and Owens 1998). They also believe that interpretive paradigms of U.S. cultural studies are enriched by the employment of postcolonial concepts to explore ethnic American cultural productions. Drawing on a conception of borders as “internal stratification within an ethnicity or a nation and the ways in which cultural differences may be used to define transnational connections and tensions” (2000, 7), Singh and Schmidt offer an example:

Consider the idea of borders as applied to Native Americans in their interactions with others and with themselves. There are over 500 recognized Native Americans within the U.S. alone, with many registered members who do not reside exclusively on a “reservation”; in what ways must our current understanding of all the above terms be revised or discarded when Native American cultural production is viewed as central? Or to what degree may the necessity of borders and transnational emphases be truly confirmed—especially when debates about “authenticity” and identity and who may claim to speak on behalf of tribal communities have such huge consequences? (2000, 42)

There are several areas of overlap in the conditions of African Americans and postcolonial peoples, the cultural productions of African American and postcolonial writers and artists, and the critical discourses engaging them. While African Americans did not endure territorial colonization like Native Americans, Africans, Southeast Asian and Australian aborigines, to name a few, they nonetheless experienced internal colonization that included forced migration and dispossession, slavery and economic exploitation, cultural repression, political disenfranchisement, and genocide (Singh and Schmidt 2000, 20). It is more difficult to pinpoint a historical date of formal independence for African Americans than for Nigerians, Kenyans, Hindus, Algerians, and Philipines, for example. Does the Emancipation Proclamation and end of slavery constitute the beginning of African American postcoloniality? Or do the Civil Rights and Black Power struggles? Whichever the case, scholars observe how systemic oppression and structural violence against African Americans share similarities with colonial oppression of peoples outside the U.S. (Fleischmann 2000; Singh and Schmidt 2000; Han 2004; Locke 1997; Du Bois [1903] 1996).

Black and Native writers who take up their peoples' struggles in their works share with many postcolonial writers several commonalities of narrative and rhetorical strategy, ideological affinity, and aesthetic creativity. Both give voice to the suffering of their peoples brought by European modernity, like the transatlantic slave trade, imperialism and colonialism, world war and military occupation, the neoconservative New World Order, and so on. Many also explore the conditions of racial/ethnic liberation, wanting to heal the peoples' spirit by countering racist stereotypes with more humanizing images. The Signifyin' Monkey is the master trope of tropes of African American discourse. Like much of the black vernacular theorized by Gates, it derives from the Yoruban tradition of Esu-Elegba, mythic figures of writing, speaking, and interpretation that survived the Middle Passage and informed much of African Diaspora expression. While Esu refers to textual discourse, the Monkey has also evolved (by way of the Afro-Cuban figure of *guije*) to mean the rhetorical strategies of textual composition. Taken together, these figures manifest as satire, parody, irony, double-voicedness, magical realism, indeterminacy, ambiguity, chance, and uncertainty, to name a few. Chinua Achebe has discussed aspects of his own writing along similar lines (Williams and Chrisman 1994). The hybrid modalities of such texts force a rethinking of Eurocentric/western literary standards as the norm for measuring and appreciating the literary aesthetics of other cultures. Tensions between nationalist and coalitionist approaches to liberation, which are explored in both anticolonial and postcolonial writings, also appear in the African American literary tradition. These are just a few of the similarities between African American and postcolonial literature. We encourage readers to think about the writings of black American women authors discussed in this volume in a comparative postcolonial framework, mapping areas of aesthetic, ideological, and philosophical continuity and difference between African American and postcolonial literary traditions.

Postcolonial, Native American, and African American literary criticism all seek to uncover the rich literary histories of their people (usually originating in mythic and oral traditions) that existed before European imperialism. Scholars such as Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Ann DuCille, Houston Baker, Hazel Carby and Michael Awkward (among others) have contributed to the unveiling of a black American literary tradition and the establishment of a critical discourse on African American literary aesthetics. Some of these uniquely African American inno-

vations include the black vernacular, blues matrix, call and response (such as in the black church and blues traditions) and rifting (in the melodic progressions of jazz improvisation). Double-voicedness is another feature of this tradition in which tension between the written (Esu) and the oral (the Monkey) is played out in texts like Zora Neal Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Oscillation between oral and written voices and first and third person narration in this novel highlight the play between Esu and the Monkey that characterizes much black literature in the Diaspora. At the same time, this discourse interrogates the hegemony of white/western metaphysics and standards of literary appreciation in the explication of both African American and white/western literature. African American literary criticism is as concerned with reading (and deconstructing) white/western literature for its "racial" constitution (Morrison 1992) as demonstrating the creative genius of black writers. Postcolonial cultural criticism has also contributed to this end. The work of Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak is representative. Homi Bhabha's work explores Orientalism for its hegemonic control over colonial peoples, as well as its generative possibilities of opening seams of anti-colonial resistance. Concepts such as "hybridity" and "third space," for example, emerged from his work on postcolonial cultures, which highlights the dialectic of human agency in discursive and non-discursive practices of colonial subjugation, and has contributed to the development of subaltern studies. These concepts foreground the subject's instability, yet, also allow for appreciation of its creative ingenuity through cultural production. Gayatri Spivak's speculations on the subaltern explore how speech-agency of the post-colonial subject is always interpolated, determined, and appropriated by hegemonic discursive positions and practices before its arrival.

What postcolonial critics also share with black American literary scholars is the appropriation of western methods of philosophical and literary critique such as structuralism, poststructuralism, deconstruction, and psychoanalysis, which, for better, has enhanced the critical scope and evaluative depth of investigative projects in the field. It is worth noting, however, that both African American and postcolonial criticism also have come under fire for uncritically integrating western systems of thought that are disconnected from the existential realities of black masses and complicitous with neocolonial regimes of power and knowledge (Ahmed 1992; Adell 2000; Boyd 2000; Awkward 1995; DuCille 1994). In keeping with the black vernacular's appreciation of language as

inventive and manipulatable, the texts as polyvalent and performative, and of meaning as open-ended, we have allowed authors leeway to use language creatively in their analyses. For example some contributors capitalize "Black" while others use the lower case designation "black." Still, others mainly prefer African American over "black/Black."

Noelle Morrisette's approach to the significance of Toni Morrison's works for Black feminist literary criticism resembles certain readings of Native American and African American literature for their *post*departure from nationalist aesthetics and ideology to a more transnational vision. Tracing textual aporias and contradictions that characterize Morrison's love for the indeterminacy of language, Morrisette shows how the novel articulates a "post-Black feminist practice that is both critical of its own processes and creative beyond its own named limits and terms." This "post" for Black feminism, she observes, "marks more than a departure from the 1970s moment that initiated the theoretical parameters of Black feminist criticism. It encompasses the global experience of colonialism and the self-consciousness of form that defines the post-modern . . . not just national in scope, but global; not "pure" but fluid and complex, both person and context."

In "Postcolonialism, Ideology, and Native American Literature," Arnold Krupat uses Anthony Appiah's topology of African novels to characterize Native literature on a continuum of ideological themes (2000). Works published in the 1960s and 1970s, such as Scott Momaday's *A House Made of Dawn* (1968) and Silko's *Ceremony* (1977), are written in realist modes and espouse values of nationalism and the return to tradition. Narrative tones are usually nostalgic yearnings for (and the privileging of) ancient ways over modernization. Changes in narrative modes—from realist to postrealist—and ideology begin emerging in Indian novels produced in the 1980s, according to Krupat, so that Betty Louise Bell's *Faces in the Moon* (1994) did not so much authorize a "return to tradition, as, instead, the necessity of writing, of producing tradition and community" and "shows a move to memory and language as important in the maintenance of tradition" (2000, 86). He reads Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* as an example of postrealist and postnativist writing that champions transnational solidarity over nationalist sentiment and enacts an "anti-imperial translation." Her use of south-to-north/north-to-south directionality for temporal movement in the novel displaces the trope of historical progress in east-west/west-east movement that celebrates western cultures as superior over others.

In addition to subverting such narratives and resisting the violence of translating an oral tradition into writing, I would argue, Silko's use of this direction entails a deeper ironic reversal of western epistemologies. She encircles (and enfolds) the Hegelian dialectical pattern of history within a larger Mayan prophecy (or cosmic history) unfolding according to a cyclic pattern of birth-death regeneration. This casts European history as merely one stage among others in the development of worlds as forecast by the ancient almanacs. Thus, Europeans who had pronounced Indians and Africans as being mere children (because of their oral cultures) in comparison to themselves as accomplished scientists and artists, are now revealed by Silko to be children with merely rudimentary knowledge of the whole.

Other commonalities include foregrounding the limitations of western aesthetic norms and exploring the relationship between place, vision, and cultural dislocation in Native identity formation. An important motif of Native writing is how separation from ancestral lands wreaks havoc on multiple levels, including the personal through loss of identity (or sense of belonging to a place) and lack of visionary guidance. Like many others' experiences of imperialism and colonialism, Indians' forced (or involuntary) migrations, enslavement, and ecological exploitation have combined to affect an identity crisis and alienation of vision. "Land and people are interdependent," explains Simon Ortiz. "In fact," he continues, "they are one and the same essential matter of Existence" (1998, xii). In contemporary Native American literature, Robert M. Nelson observes that "whoever wishes either to recover or to sustain a healthy state of existence, then, must enter into some working identity not only with the cultural tradition, but also with a particular landscape" (1997, 267). Recovery usually occurs in a circular plot structure called "honing in" in which the alienated protagonist wanders away from home, encounters visions and/or supernatural entities of personally transforming significance, and returns to the community reinvigorated by a sense of purpose and direction (Moser 1997, 286-87). As in many postcolonial literatures, mythic and oral traditions are instrumental to this narrative movement. They "depict, assert, and confirm the natural evolvment—or the origin and emergence—of Native people from the boundless creative energy of the universe," and remind us "that we have always lived here . . . as lands and waters and all elements of Creation" before our human forms (Ortiz 1998, xiii-xiv).

CRITICAL SCOPE

This collection is divided into three main sections, "Transformative Aesthetics," "Critical Revisions," and "Re(in)fusing Feminism." These groupings are organized by analytical focus and are meant to be helpful in offering schemes for making cross-cultural connections and comparative considerations of black and Native American women's writing. Each section contains essays on work by at least one writer of each cultural tradition. Readers will invariably encounter many other connections between the writers and cultures besides those most apparent in focus. For example, although the poetry of Luci Tapahonso and Phillis Wheatley are discussed with different interpretive emphases and are thus located in different parts of this collection, for example, they are nonetheless connected by certain poetic practices. Both treat written poetics as ritualistic or ceremonial calls. Wheatley's eulogies are (written) enactments of certain African rituals of celebrating the dead and death. Tapahonso infuses poetic verse with the Navajo oral tradition so that each reading of her poetry initiates ceremonial healing and restoration. Emphasis on cultural recovery, healing, and wholeness connect Ellen Arnold's reading of Linda Hogan's work in "Critical Revisions" and AnaLouise Keating's analysis of Paula Gunn Allen's aesthetics of self-recovery in "Transformative Aesthetics." The woman-centered politics of womanism, black feminism, and gynocentric culture are also discussed.

Part II. Transformative Aesthetics

Contributors to "Transformative Aesthetics" read Native American and African American women's literature and poetry to identify the creation of new literary and poetic forms, motifs, and techniques that testify to unique experiences, visions of human possibility, self-recovery, and spiritual celebration. AnaLouise Keating uses a politicized conception of aesthetics in showing how Paula Gunn Allen's *Grandmothers of the Light* (1991) draws on the oral traditions of "gynocratic" (woman-centered) tribal cultures as guides or ritual maps of self-renewal and healing for which Keating coins the term "womanist self-recovery." Typical of Native tribal storytelling traditions, Allen's concept of self-recovery spirals outwardly in ever-widening circles that connect the self to family,

tribe, ancestors, nature, the cosmos, and the Great Mysterious. Keating identifies six forms of “outward movement” of healing toward wholeness in Allen’s emphasis on storytelling and initiates a long overdue discussion of the philosophical and aesthetic import of Native American women’s writing. Belief in the performative power of thought and language in stories to affect healing at the individual, collective, and global levels is a cultural value that Allen shares with the other Native American and African American writers explored here. Keating explains that Allen’s project sets readers on a journey of personal self-transformation that, founded on the metaphysics of interconnectedness, extends outwardly to embrace family, community, land, and cosmos in a larger web of healing and restoration.

Keating’s exploration of how Allen uses mythic and oral traditions in a performance aesthetic of self-renewal foregrounds the differences of indigenous epistemologies from western metaphysics. Allen’s project is “transcultural” in that it celebrates a number of spiritual disciplines and oral traditions and enables us to formulate complex systems of empowering knowledge and alternative, holistic modes of perception without eliding cultural particularities. In doing so, Keating points out, Allen redefines Enlightenment concepts of the universal and the subject in more “expansive, open-ended terms” that are founded on “the metaphysics of interconnectedness,” which “posits a cosmic, fluid spirit or force . . . manifest[ing] itself as material and nonmaterial forms.”

Keating continues with the pragmatic potential of Allen’s project for healing and wholeness on the personal, communal, global, and cosmic levels. In fact, this project is similar to others by Alice Walker and Patricia Hill Collins, both of whom Keating also identifies as part of the womanist self-recovery tradition. She draws on Walker’s womanism as a point of departure to show how Allen’s writing articulates an indigenous womanist aesthetic of self-recovery. Keating’s insights about the conceptual continuities between African American and Native American women’s visions and activism encourage a rethinking of womanism as a cross-cultural web of creativity and critique spun by many writers outside African American literary traditions.

Whereas Keating concentrates on the transformative aesthetics of Native mythic and oral traditions, Michael Antonucci examines the blues poetics of Sherley Anne Williams, whose work has yet to be fully appreciated for its critical contributions to the discourse on black music and culture. Focusing on her *Peacock Poems*, he shows how she creates

a unique aesthetic blend of cathartic self-expression, historical testifying, and social critique. By incorporating certain features and practices of the blues aesthetic (such as the black vernacular, syncopated cadences, improvisation and appropriation, call-and-response, riffing, repetition and difference), Williams bends written poetics into an *orallaural* medium of rendering the concrete texture of black women's lives as they work, love, daily confront challenges in the world, and look toward a better day tomorrow. In this respect, Williams is part of a poetic tradition that includes Langston Hughes, Nikki Giovanni, and Amari Baraka, to name a few, who incorporated blues idiom in their poetry. Antonucci argues that Williams's call-and-response tribute to the Empress of the Blues, Bessie Smith, should be "understood as transposing a blues-rooted conversation about poetics into a poetic conversation about the blues." By the same token, Williams's poetic blues or bluesy poetics recast black women's classic blues as a "toolkit of survival" and self-transformation. Like Angela Davis and Hazel Carby, Antonucci makes a strong case for seeing (and hearing) black women's classic blues as something more than a folk medium of sorrow and hopelessness.

Language has always played a significant role in black and Native Americans' sense of self and cultural identity. Many Indians were forced to assimilate in boarding schools and resettlement houses by the U.S. government, and the slave trade cut most Africans off from their land and culture. These circumstances conspired against blacks and Indians from developing a healthy sense of self, particularly since the English lexicon was used to offer only negative valuation of Africanity and indigeneity as savage, irrational, and subhuman. Hence, acquiring proficiency in the English language, while liberating in the sense that it provided a certain social access, also carried the risk of becoming ensnared in an ideological minefield of racial and ethnic negations and cultural shame. Many Native American and African American writers adeptly navigated the journey, circumventing racism and producing literature that affirms their black and red selves while preserving significant parts of their culture. According to Elizabeth West, this is the case with Phillis Wheatley, an African slave in colonial America who drew on the vocabulary of evangelical Christianity and Roman and Greek mythology in her poetry to preserve African spiritual values.

Wheatley draws on both neoclassic aesthetics and the religious discourse of the Great Awakening for negotiating and preserving an African self and worldview in a white western cosmology that was (and

continues to be) antagonistic to blackness and Africinity. West shows how the conflation of memory with spirit and the repetition of sun imagery and elegy in Wheatley's oeuvre indicate cultural preservation of certain African values regarding nature and being. Some scholars have interpreted Wheatley's poetry as an acquiescence to western values and a negation of blackness, but she defies the view of Africans held by Hume, Kant, and Hegel by privileging her own African conception of memory as spirit and grace over the western conception of it as a repertoire of past events. The intricately interwoven relationship between nature, humanity, and God in her poetry echoes the metaphysics of interconnectedness in Paula Gunn Allen's work as identified by Keating.

Repetitions of sun imagery and elegies in Wheatley's corpus of writings also signal her transposition of African customs and values relating to the cycle of life and death and project a view of (human) beings that differs radically from her lettered contemporaries of philosophy. Wheatley's poetics, West observes, cloak the Christian God in an African conception of the sun as divine being, and thus preserve animistic emphasis on nature as an inspirited manifestation of the divine principle. Repetitions of the continuity between death and the life-giving sun, moreover, point to an African understanding of death as a transition "to a new life medium."

Part III. Critical Revisions

Essays in "Critical Revisions" explore African American and Native American women's writings for their innovative and insightful revisions of varying literary and critical traditions. Here, subalterns are shown to speak back critically to proponents of psychoanalysis, feminism, and Marxism and inscribe their own subjectivity in these critical traditions. Drawing on African and Native American cultural traditions, they also retell their peoples' history to inspire a vision of black and red coalition struggle.

Ellen Arnold reads Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* as signifying on ecofeminist and Lacanian psychoanalytic discourses of individual, cultural, and ecological recovery. In this reinsertion, Arnold explains, Hogan seeks to "heal the wounds of conquest by deconstructing the discourses that serve colonial interests and 'indigenizing' them." To indigenize them is to "rewrite them within more complex contexts that include tribal worldviews," but in ways that do not replicate the binary classifi-

catory schemes of western culture. Hogan presents the journey of personal recovery and reintegration from the viewpoint of First Nations' peoples in Canada (who merely haunt the margins of Margaret Atwood's novel, *Surfacing*) and thus brings to life vital indigenous worlds and living traditions that are silenced in *Surfacing*. Arnold shows that Hogan challenges western conceptions of subjectivity and language, as well as the epistemological and ontological systems on which they rest, making apparent the complex matrix of interconnected relations between humans and the natural world and between signs and their referents that *Surfacing* and Lacanian psychoanalysis ultimately deny.

Hogan also challenges some of Jacques Lacan's writings on recovering psychic wholeness. Unlike him, she believes that language severs humans from original contiguous relations with creation by virtue of induction into the symbolic, but it also can be a portal through which humans can reconnect with the natural world and experience original unity. For Hogan, violence and alienation are spawned by the broken covenant, originating in abstraction, between cooperative living and mutual regard between humans and the natural world. The oral tradition heals and can return us to this covenant, however. Through storytelling, both Arnold and Hogan explain that "the author 'puts together' a disconnected life through a step-by-step process of visualization,' a 'seeing' that enables character and reader 'to understand the dynamic interrelatedness in which all things exist and which heals'. By 'unify[ing] the inner and the outer', stories help humans rediscover the ability to see into the abyss between signifier and signified and thus remake the covenant that binds word to world." The multiple levels of healing in the novel depend on extending the power of signification to the natural world and recognizing that all beings inhabiting it are co-constructive of the world. Arnold observes that "Angel thus comes to see *through* her image as an isolated, fragmented victim of history and split identity to an image of herself as whole and in process."

Barbara Tracy and Angela Cotten explore how Alice Walker's second novel *Meridian* signifies on the Cherokee-Lakota cultural and Marxian critical traditions respectively. Drawing on different interpretive paradigms and literary, oral, and critical traditions, these essays present two entirely different, yet compatible, readings of the same novel—even of some of the same passages. This underscores the extent to which texts are polyvocal—composed of multiple strains of meaning—and how interpretive foci constitute their objects. Interpretations

of Walker's writings tend to stress her connections to the African American literary tradition and overlook her complex African Cherokee identity and how it manifests in her productions. Henry Louis Gates Jr., Barbara Christian, and Mary Helen Washington have emphasized Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) as a revision of Zora Neal Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). Barb Tracy opens a new interpretive angle in this discussion by showing how Walker's *Meridian* signifies on John Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks* ([1932] 1992) and the story of Wild Boy in the Cherokee oral tradition. Walker writes from all her cultural heritages (Anglo, Cherokee, and African American) and treats the overlapping histories and interwoven genealogies of African Americans and Native Americans in much of her writing. Applying tools of Native cultural criticism, Tracy sheds a spotlight on objects of literary analyses that have not heretofore been explored in Walker's writings and provides a new reading of previously examined themes. The land is sacred and significant for Walker: transformative and retentive of the people's history.

Angela Cotten explores Alice Walker's critique of Karl Marx's method of historical materialism in *Meridian* and contextualizes her womanist philosophy within the black radical tradition. Like the Native American cultural expressions in Walker's writings, philosophical systems of thought have also remained an unexamined area of her oeuvre. Studying philosophy at Sarah Lawrence was a formative experience for Walker, and she takes up several issues in existentialism and Marxism in regards to blacks' and Indians' situation in America. Cotten shows how Walker uses literature to identify problems in some of Marx's ideas of revolutionary struggle, including the diagnostic capacity of historical materialism as a critical tool, the role of the *lumpenproletariat*, the dialectical character of racial ideology, and the conception of power in terms of capital. What emerges is a compelling argument for revising historical materialism so that it reflects how capitalism (in conjunction with racism) has shaped class struggles differently in America than in Europe and thus created conditions of systemic oppression that Marx could not have anticipated.

Part IV. Re(in)fusing Feminism

Historically, Native and African American women's relationship to white/western feminists has been both productive and problematic. On the one hand, they have worked together to achieve substantive gains

for women, poor people, and people of color, especially in the 1960s and 1970s social protests era. On the other hand, Native American and African American women's skepticism of feminism is born out of several factors, including white women's reluctance to wage an all-out attack against the racist capitalist patriarchy from which they (in part) benefit. Additionally, many women of color find feminism's nearly exclusive focus on gender and sexuality too narrow for the myriad problems of racial and ethnic domination, colonialism structural violence, and poverty, and position themselves in more culturally appropriate traditions such as womanism and gynocentric ideals. Many women of color reject the narrow focus of much feminism by (ironically) infusing their writing with their own ideas about language and literature, social struggle, and wholeness. None of the next three writers discussed in this section have identified with feminism or called themselves feminists. Yet, their works have been read for woman-centered themes and insights for various schools of feminist thought.

Toni Morrison distances herself from feminism and resists categorization of her work in either racial or gendered terms. Despite this, however, Morrissette observes that her work has been read for feminist values and aesthetics by black feminist literary critics, who appreciate Morrison's explorative depth into black feminine subjectivity. Morrissette takes an approach to *Paradise* that is similar to Antonucci's treatment of Sherley Anne Williams's poetry by assessing Morrison's work through her own critical commentary. She reads *Paradise* for contributions to black feminist literary criticism regarding its parameters, arguing that Morrison's novel raises questions about what constitutes black feminist literature and its defining features. Who and what are the subjects of black feminist literature? And how are these criteria derived? What is the relation of ideology to aesthetics in these standards? Deborah McDowell, Barbara Smith, and Barbara Christian, to name a few, have considered these issues. Morrissette shows how Morrison takes us beyond some of the more traditional characteristics defining black feminist literary criticism by using a "self-described strategy of writing in a 'race-specific yet race-free prose.'" *Paradise* reminds us that the critical process of black feminist literary criticism must be fluid "to the extent of avoiding the Name, the Letter. Black feminism must avoid residing in the letter of the law; it must reside in the spirit of the law, where imagination is supreme."

Maggie Romigh analyzes Navajo poet Luci Tapahonso's "Leda and the Cowboy" within the context of western critical and poetic traditions

that have grown up around the Greek myth of Zeus's rape of Leda and W. B. Yeats's treatment of it in "Leda and the Swan." She shows how Tapahonso draws on the gynocratic principles and oral traditions of her own culture to recast Leda as a powerful supernatural agent who restores harmony and balance to the world. Leda's supernatural agency in Tapahonso's work is especially poignant, because poets and critics have been so focused on Leda as a powerless victim and so intent on expressing outrage for Zeus that they have neglected to treat the domino effect of the violence and alienation generated by his assault. In "Leda and the Cowboy," explains Romigh, Tapahonso recasts Leda in Navajo feminine vestige according to the traditional knowledge that sexual unions between supernatural entities and mortals entail transferring knowledge from the spirit world to the human realm. In traditional historical Navajo society, women have not been systemically oppressed like women in most western cultures, for patriarchy was not institutionalized among the Navajo. In fact, Navajo culture is matrilineal, organized according to a "gynocratic principle" and governed by childbearing women (Allen 1991, xiii–xiv). It is recognized that the nation's lifeblood depends on the mother/earth. Social roles in many historical Native cultures were determined more by one's relationship to the spirit world—the gifts of creativity, hunting, craftsmanship, and so on, which are bestowed by the ancestors—rather than on biological sex differences (Allen 1986).

Drawing from her own oral tradition, Tapahonso's poem infuses the poetic, critical tradition of Leda, poems with new directions for healing, overcoming alienation, and restoring balance to the world. Romigh reads Tapahonso's verse as a ritual and ceremonial restoration of *hózhó* (balance, harmony and beauty) to the universe that Zeus's original violation disturbed. A similar performative poetics is also explored in Michael Antonucci's interpretation of Sherley Anne Williams's blues poems. "Deliberately, skillfully, and beautifully," Romigh explains, "Tapahonso has used 'Leda and the Cowboy' to create a new story, with all the power of her own Navajo culture's old stories, to look again at the Greek myth that became a famous Irish poem, to transform that myth into a Navajo story set within the context of her own matrilineal society, and to offer an answer to Yeats's poetic question, "Did she put on his knowledge with his power . . . ?"

Margot Reynolds shows how early twentieth-century writer, Zitkala-Sa's (Yanton Sioux), treatment of the mother figure forms a gynocentric "justice song" that protests imperial conquest and racist

patriarchal imagery of Indians—especially Indian women. The work of Zitkala-Sa has received little attention by feminist literary critics. She uses the mother figure to critique imperial Christian patriarchy and exposes how Euro-American conquest depended on destruction of women's central role in tribal culture. Reynolds helps us understand how Native women's struggle encompasses a broader range of concerns and issues than the scope of liberal, socialist, and lesbian feminism. For many women of color, feminism entails fighting an *imperialist* patriarchy.

Reynolds's investigation of motherhood in Zitkala-Sa's writings reminds us of its primacy for women of other cultural traditions as well. Oyeronke Oyewumi suggests that motherhood is perhaps even more meaningful for women of African and Latin descent than "sisterhood" (2003). Stemming from cultures that recognize the importance of multiple mothers and co-mothers in communal life, the relational dynamics of the mother-daughter bond for many women of color is transmutable to other kinds of relationships outside the family (Collins 1990; Oyewumi 2003). The maternal ethic, with its values of mutual support, trust, and protectiveness and its practice of mutual nurturing, expresses more authentic solidarity among women than the "sisterhood" that they have felt in white women's organizations. To this mix of values and practices, the maternal bond of Zitkala-Sa's gynocentric prose articulates a concern for justice, reparations, and cultural survival.

Gynocentrism is an indigenous feminism that focuses on women's traditional primacy in tribal life and on oral traditions as a way of resisting Euro-American hegemony and restoring self-governance. "Gynocentrism as a framework for understanding cultures, their histories, and collective knowledge," explains Reynolds, "comprises a powerful song in praise of Native worldviews." In this way gynocentrism shares certain values and interests with black feminism as articulated by Patricia Hill Collins. Both assert truths about Indians and blacks that counter Western mythologies and are grounded in epistemologies that depart from positivism and rationalism. Revering the mother figure, these traditions esteem "mother wit" (practical/ethical and spiritual/cosmic) as an important source of knowledge. Ethics and morality are approached pragmatically and are conveyed in terms of individual responsibility to tribal and ancestral traditions, the land, and the Great Mysterious, rather than by reference to abstract a priori principles.