

“Mediation” is the term James Ruppert uses to describe his theory of reading Native American fiction. Focusing on the novels of six major contemporary American writers—N. Scott Momaday, James Welch, Leslie Silko, Gerald Vizenor, D’Arcy McNickle, and Louise Erdrich—Ruppert analyzes the ways these writers draw upon their bicultural heritage, guiding Native and non-Native readers to different and expanded understandings of each other’s worlds.

While Native American writers may criticize white society, revealing its past and present injustices, their emphasis, Ruppert argues, is on healing, survival, and continuance. Their fiction aims to produce cross-cultural understanding rather than divisiveness. To that end they articulate the perspectives and values of competing worldviews, creating characters who manifest what Ruppert calls “multiple identities”—determined by Native and non-Native perceptions of self. These writers might incorporate Native oral storytelling techniques, adapting them to written form, or they may reconstruct Native mythologies, investing them with new meaning by applying them to contemporary situations. As novelists, they also include characteristic features of western European writing—such as the omniscient narrator or the detective story. Ruppert demonstrates how a rich blending of different traditions is producing extraordinary breadth and innovation in Native American literature.

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