

## MYTH AND INTERTEXTUALITY IN NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURE

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**Abstract.** In this article, the usage of elements like myth and intertextuality by writers of Native American literature is analyzed. Myth and intertextuality are integral elements that weave a rich tapestry in literature, adding layers of meaning and depth to narratives. The interplay between these two concepts not only enriches storytelling but also establishes connections across cultures and time periods. In this article, we delve into the significance of myth and intertextuality in Native American literature, exploring how different authors masterfully used them in their writings.

**Key words:** myth, intertextuality, mythic traditions, culture, symbolic meaning, indigenous people, spiritual intertextuality, past and present, reinterpretation and transformation.

Native American literature, rooted in the diverse cultural tapestry of Indigenous peoples, intricately weaves together myth and intertextuality to create a dynamic and multifaceted storytelling tradition. This literary exploration draws from the rich oral traditions of various tribes, incorporating myths, legends, and cultural narratives into written works. In this realm, intertextuality serves as a bridge between different cultural stories, engaging in a dialogue not only within Indigenous traditions but also with external texts. The interplay between myth and intertextuality is not merely a literary technique but a profound reflection of the complexities, continuities, and transformations within Native American experiences. The integration of myth and intertextuality in Native American writing is a powerful means of preserving cultural heritage, fostering a sense of identity, and addressing contemporary issues. This introduction will delve into how Native American literature navigates the realms of myth and intertextuality, offering unique insights into cultural identity, historical reflections, and contemporary challenges. In essence, the exploration of myth and intertextuality in Native American literature is a dynamic journey that encompasses the continuity of oral traditions, intertribal conversations, transformative trickster figures, cultural critique, innovative syncretism, and the use of mythic frameworks to illuminate contemporary narratives. Through these literary techniques, Native American authors contribute to a rich and evolving tapestry that reflects the resilience, diversity, and ongoing vibrancy of Indigenous cultures. Native American literature often draws upon the oral traditions of storytelling, passed down through generations. Several Native American authors have skillfully incorporated myth and intertextuality

into their works, blending traditional narratives with contemporary storytelling. The most prominent authors of Native American literature are Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich, N. Scott Momaday, Sherman Alexie, and Thomas King. These authors skillfully navigate the complexities of intertextuality and myth, creating narratives that resonate with both their cultural heritage and contemporary experiences. Through their works, they contribute to the broader understanding of Native American literature and provide a platform for diverse voices within the literary landscape.

An influential scholar and poet of Laguna Pueblo and Sioux heritage, Paula Gunn Allen wrote extensively on Native American literature and spirituality. Her book "The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions" explores the role of myth, intertextuality, and the feminine in Native American cultures<sup>1</sup>.

Robert Warrior, a member of the Osage Nation, is a scholar known for his work in Native American and Indigenous Studies. His writings often explore the intersection of literature, politics, and identity. "Cultural Sites of Critical Insight: Philosophy, Aesthetics, and African American and Native American Women's Writings" is an example of his scholarship in this area<sup>2</sup>.

Arnold Krupat is a leading scholar in Native American and Indigenous literary studies. His work often delves into the complexities of representation, identity, and cultural memory. "Ethnocriticism: Ethnography, History, Literature" is one of his influential books that touches on these themes<sup>3</sup>.

These scholars have played significant roles in shaping the academic discourse around myth and intertextuality in Native American literature. Their works provide insights into the cultural, historical, and literary dimensions of indigenous storytelling.

The analysis of myth and intertextuality in the works of Native American writers is a rich and complex area of study that involves examining the ways in which indigenous authors draw on traditional myths, oral traditions, and cultural symbols to create contemporary literary expressions. Intertextuality, the relationship between different texts, also plays a crucial role in understanding how Native American writers engage with both their own cultural heritage and the broader literary traditions.

Intertextuality in Native American literature involves references, allusions, or dialogues with other texts, both within and outside indigenous literary traditions. Here are examples that illustrate the use of intertextuality:

"House Made of Dawn" by N. Scott Momaday: Momaday's novel engages with Kiowa oral tradition and tribal history. The text is interwoven with Kiowa myths,

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<sup>1</sup> Paula Gunn Allen. *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*. - US: Beacon Press, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Warrior. *Cultural Sites of Critical Insight: Philosophy, Aesthetics, and African American and Native American Women's Writings*. – UK. SUNY Press, 2012

<sup>3</sup> Arnold Krupat. "Ethnocriticism: Ethnography, History, Literature"

songs, and stories, creating a rich tapestry that connects the contemporary narrative to the cultural heritage of the Kiowa people. The novel's structure and language reflect a deep engagement with both Native American and Western literary traditions.

"Monkey Beach" by Eden Robinson: Robinson's novel references Haisla myths and legends, but it also incorporates intertextual elements from popular culture, such as horror movies and music. This blending of indigenous and mainstream cultural references reflects the contemporary experiences of the characters and adds layers of meaning to the narrative.

These examples demonstrate how Native American writers use intertextuality to create multi-layered narratives that engage with a variety of cultural, historical, and literary sources. Intertextual references can serve to amplify indigenous voices, challenge stereotypes, and contribute to a more complex understanding of Native American experiences.

Myth, as a cultural cornerstone, holds profound significance in indigenous communities, serving as a repository of wisdom, identity, and spirituality. Within the realm of Native American literature, the utilization of myth transcends mere storytelling; it becomes a means of navigating the complexities of cultural continuity, challenging misrepresentations, and asserting agency over narratives. Certainly, here are examples of how Native American writers incorporate myth into their works:

"Love Medicine" by Louise Erdrich: Erdrich's novel draws on Ojibwe mythology and folklore. The character of Nanapush, for example, embodies the trickster archetype found in many Native American myths. Through interwoven narratives and the use of mythic elements, Erdrich explores the complexities of familial and community relationships.

"The Surrounded" by D'Arcy McNickle: McNickle, a Salish-Kootenai writer, integrates tribal myths and cultural elements into "The Surrounded." The novel explores the clash between Native American and Western cultures, and the protagonist's journey is intertwined with traditional stories that highlight the challenges of cultural preservation.

These examples demonstrate how Native American writers skillfully infuse their works with myths, creating narratives that bridge the gap between the traditional and the contemporary while addressing issues relevant to their communities. The use of myth adds layers of meaning, cultural resonance, and a sense of continuity to these literary works.

Preservation of Cultural Heritage: Native American writers often use myths and oral traditions to preserve and transmit their cultural heritage. These myths may be drawn from creation stories, legends, and folklore, providing a connection to the past and a means of cultural continuity.

Intertextuality:

Cultural Dialogue: Native American writers engage in a cultural dialogue with both indigenous and non-indigenous literary traditions. Intertextual references to other works, whether native or Western, contribute to a broader conversation that enriches the understanding of Native American literature

Environmental and Spiritual Themes: Connection to Nature: Many Native American myths are deeply connected to the natural world. Contemporary writers often use these themes to address environmental concerns and emphasize the importance of ecological balance.

### CONCLUSION

The analysis of myth and intertextuality in Native American literature provides insights into the dynamic relationships between tradition and contemporary expression. It sheds light on the ways in which indigenous writers navigate complex cultural landscapes, asserting their voices while engaging in broader literary conversations. Consider specific Native American authors and their works, such as Leslie Marmon Silko's "Ceremony," Louise Erdrich's "Love Medicine," or N. Scott Momaday's "House Made of Dawn." Analyze how these authors incorporate myth and intertextuality to address cultural, social, and political issues.

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