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Review of *Deep Waters: The Textual Continuum in American Indian Literature* by Christopher B. Teuton

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Christopher Teuton's study of four American Indian writers—N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa), Gerald Vizenor (Anishinabe), Ray A. Young Bear (Meskwaki), and Robert J. Conley (Cherokee)—offers a useful model for theorizing the interdependence of oral and written traditions within Indigenous communities. In Teuton's view, a limiting separation between oral and written discourse has prevented scholars from recognizing the balance among various forms of signification that, reflecting community histories and identities, has long been a mainstay for Native peoples amid contexts of both tradition and change. This unnecessary divide, which he terms the “oral-literate binary,” has informed scholarly practice, comprising “oral-literate theory.” Despite their efforts to acknowledge the importance of oral traditions within well-known works of published literature, critics writing about Native American literature have nonetheless failed to problematize this model. Teuton thus intervenes in order to set this critical conversation to an appropriate equilibrium.

In dialogue with theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Walter Ong, Teuton describes Indigenous signification as a tripartite exercise of impulses: oral, graphic, and critical. His specification of “graphic” as the written form of signification is an important choice, as it includes forms of writing that have gone mostly unconsidered in studies of Indigenous literacy. In tracing a balance between oral and graphic expression, Teuton assesses the importance of Mesoamerican hieroglyphics, Diné sand paintings, and Haudenosaunee wampum belts in a traditional—and continual—interplay among forms along a textual continuum between the oral and the graphic. He asserts that this interplay must be maintained actively and, importantly, socially. This social, community-driven process for balance is what Teuton identifies as the critical impulse. This critical impulse, described and asserted within Indigenous discourse, is a valuable decolonial strategy in light of the fraught position of writing in relationships between tribes and their colonizers.

Having established the critical impulse as a signature feature of American Indian cultures, Teuton uncovers its predominance in contemporary literature, shedding light on texts that have provoked confusion or even scholarly neglect among academics. Particularly significant are Teuton's chapters on Ray Young Bear's *Black Eagle Child* and *Remnants of the First Earth* and on Robert J. Conley's *Real People* Series. Teuton is able to contextualize Young Bear's innovative incorporation of oral, literary, historical, and popular observations within and without the writer's Meskwaki community in Iowa in a way that, informed by a more open understanding of Indigenous signification, will be especially valuable for students. In Conley's series, Teuton finds a compelling example of the popularity of literature among Cherokee citizens in North Carolina and Oklahoma, who, as Teuton has documented and experienced, participate in the critical impulse through their encounters with fiction as well as with oral storytelling. These examples point
toward fulfillment of our call as scholars to challenge and replace ineffectual paradigms in ways that ring true for the communities whose cultures we study.

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