THE HEALING POWER

MYTHOLOGY AS MEDICINE IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN INDIAN LITERATURE

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DISSERTATION SUPERVISOR: DR. LESLEY MARX

SUBMISSION DATE: 10 JANUARY 1998

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the symptoms of alienation witnessed in Indian characters and the healing they achieve through myth in three contemporary American Indian novels.

In James Welch's historical novel, *Fools Crow*, I explore the methods through which Welch tells the story of Fools Crow. I draw comparisons between oppositions such as oral and written language, oral and written history, and history and narrative. I examine the ideas of many theorists, including Walter J. Ong's *Orality and Literacy* and Hayden White's inquiry into historiography in *Tropics of Discourse*. My conclusions suggest that myth is the foundation of history and that Welch effectively uses myth to rehabilitate Fools Crow.

Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* presents its main character, Tayo, as alienated. He operates in a confusing world of dualities whereby the hegemonic culture brutalizes a feminine universe, and the counter-culture embraces a feminine universe. This study of *Ceremony* necessitates exploring the differences between Indian and Euro-American perceptions of landscape. Greta Gaard's studies on ecofeminism and Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* help to focus the theories

presented in this chapter. In addition, I consider the opposition between European patriarchal and American Indian matriarchal cultures, a difference that may affect the way the two cultures perceive the landscape. Finally I look at the Laguna captivity narrative that heals Tayo and compare the Laguna captivity genre to Euro-American captivity tales. The juxtaposition of cultural captivity narrative types reveals further differences in Laguna and Euro-American perceptions of the land. Annette Kolodny's theories on landscape and feminism prove useful in focusing my conclusions.

N. Scott Momaday's *The Ancient Child* explores the parameters of representation and struggles with the question of how an Indian author can effectively describe the condition of an alienated American Indian to an audience who is, for the most part, Euro-American. This novel ties together many of the themes explored in *Fools Crow* and *Ceremony*. Momaday shows myth as originating in oral language and oral language as invented by vision. The story's main character, Set, has to overcome his alienation by understanding the origin of a myth which exists in his 'racial memory.' As an Indian, Set must discover the importance of non-textual spatiality and not the spaces contained within and influenced by written texts such as the very one Momaday creates to depict this character. The term non-textual spatiality refers to the imaginative space created by oral language and myth and the notion of non-textual spatiality opens a path for Set's healing. W.J.T. Mitchell's *Picture Theory* and Nelson Goodman's *Languages of Art* are the main critical studies I use to amplify theories that grow out of *The Ancient Child.*

PREFACE

For four years I lived in Cape Town, South Africa. I grew interested in South African politics and frequently spoke to my South African friends about apartheid and the effects of such a governmental policy. All too often in these conversations, the apartheid question would invert itself. My friends would invariably ask of me, "what about America, doesn't apartheid exist there too?"

When I lived in Cape Town, I chose to turn my mind from this question. It was much easier to focus on the problems of others and the intricate political systems of other countries. However, upon returning to America, the apartheid question haunted me. This project is my own effort at grappling with certain aspects of the racial problems that exist in contemporary American society.

I say 'certain' because American racial issues are complex and involve many cultures and cultural interactions. Here I attempt to understand the American Indian situation through themes revealed in contemporary American Indian literature. I would like to thank all of those who helped to guide me on this search.

INTRODUCTION

THE MEDICINE WHEEL CIRCLE:

MYTH AS A RESTORATIVE POWER

But you know Crows measure wealth a little differently than non-Indians.... Wealth is measured by one's relatedness, one's family, and one's clan. To be alone, that would be abject poverty to a Crow.

Janine Windy Boy-Pease,
from the film *Contrary Warriors: A Story of the Crow Tribe*,
Rattlesnake Productions, 1985

CAUSES OF ALIENATION

When John G. Neihardt met with Sioux holy man Black Elk in 1930, his objective was to record the thoughts of "some old medicine man... about the deeper spiritual significance" of the Plains Indians. Instead, in Neihardt, Black Elk recognized the Wasichu (white man) sent to document in writing what was "given to me for men." Over the next two years, Black Elk told the story of his life during a tragic time for all Indians of the Western plains: the Custer battle, the Ghost Dance, and the Wounded Knee Massacre.[1] *Black Elk Speaks* (1932) is venerated today for its articulation of vision and lyrical eloquence. The orator's spiritual strength guides him through difficult times in the final chapter of American subjugation and colonial domination over the American Indians.

Throughout, Black Elk tells of the spiritual life of his people, but he also reflects upon the threat of ever-approaching Wasichus and the meanings their advance had for the Sioux and the members of other Plains tribes. Early on, Black Elk speaks of the whites, saying, "they have made little islands for us and other little islands for the four-leggeds [animals], and always these islands are becoming smaller, for around them surges the gnawing flood of the Wasichu" (*Black Elk* 9). Later he remembers the story of Drinks Water, a Lakota holy man who generations earlier

> dreamed that the four-leggeds were going back into the earth and that a strange race had woven a spider's web all around the Lakotas. And he said: "When this happens, you shall live in square gray houses, in a barren land, and beside those square gray houses you shall starve...." You can look about you now and see that he meant these dirt-roofed houses we are living in, and that all the rest was true. Sometimes dreams are wiser than waking (9).

The images of the rising waters, verdant but disappearing islands, and an enclosing web are spoken in a metaphorical language that is also the language of domination. Annihilation is the feared consequence.

There was reason to fear. In 1890, the Census Bureau declared the American frontier closed.[2] Joining the ranks of those already living behind the fences of numerous Indian reservations, the fighters who were not yet living there surrendered to white forces. Black Elk's story is one of constant war with the whites, war to keep the land of his people and to remain living there, outside the reservation. To end his telling Black Elk recounts his tribe's resigned submission after the Wounded Knee Massacre. Laying down their weapons, the men walked through the gates of Pine Ridge Indian Reservation (in South Dakota). "And so it was all over," Black Elk remembered forty years later, "I did not know then how much was ended.... A people's dream died there. It was a beautiful dream" (270).

As a modern memoir, *Black Elk Speaks* reveals certain intricacies in the longstanding American Indian and Euro-American relationship. Critics now approach the text bearing in mind that Neihardt at the very least oversaw the translation of Black Elk's words. However, Neihardt also decided which parts of Black Elk's life to include in the story and which parts to leave out. This is manipulation that reflects

similar trends in Indian/white culture contact. In the conclusion I will examine *Black Elk Speaks* in this regard and focus on the controversy the text has caused in recent years. I save this discussion for the conclusion because corresponding themes arise in the texts that I include in the body of the dissertation.

Here I would like to concentrate on *Black Elk Speaks* as a story that resembles myth. Despite its points of controversy, many contemporary Indian novelists and critics view the text as a crucial document that preserves American Indian culture. "It is sufficient that *Black Elk Speaks* is an extraordinary human document," says N. Scott Momaday, Indian author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *House Made of Dawn* (1966), "and beyond that the record of a spiritual journey, the pilgrimage of a people toward fulfillment, toward the accomplishment of a worthy destiny" ("To Save a Great Vision" 22). Indian lawyer and political activist Vine Deloria, Jr., believes that the most important effect of *Black Elk Speaks* is upon "the contemporary generation of young Indians who have been aggressively searching for roots of their own in the structure of universal reality. To them the book has become a North American bible of all tribes" (*Black Elk Speaks* xiii).

With the exception of the narrator, Black Elk's story functions as myth. It details the account of a holy vision and it emphasizes the importance of ceremonies and rituals used to reenact the vision. As American Indian writer and theorist Paula Gunn Allen observes, if the narration were shifted to the third-person omniscient,

> the vision would become identical in form and symbolic content to those great myths that have come down to us not only from the Oglala but from peoples as diverse as the Tlingit of Alaska, the Hopi of Arizona, the Cherokee of the

> Carolinas and Georgia, and the Iroquois of New York and Canada (108).

In many respects, *Black Elk Speaks* has already become what Allen calls a 'living myth.' By this she means a story that shapes consciousness and helps to empower action within contemporary society. *Black Elk Speaks* "tells us of ourselves and of all humankind," says Momaday ("To Save a Great Vision" 23). One of my goals throughout this project is to explore 'living mythology' and the way it shapes contemporary American Indian literature.

In addition to functioning as myth, *Black Elk Speaks* serves as a recollection of tribal lifeways; but, as Vine Deloria, Jr., suggests, by preserving tradition it helps to keep it alive. *Black Elk Speaks* is a useful aid in the study of contemporary Indian/white relations, and it locates the sharp definition between cultures that continues into the present. Describing his early boyhood, Black Elk says:

> When I was older, I learned what the fighting was about that winter and the next summer.[3] Up on the Madison Fork the Wasichus had found much of the yellow metal that they worship and that makes them crazy, and they wanted to have a road up through our country to the place where the yellow metal was; but my people did not want the road. It would scare the bison and make them go away (9).[4]

Black Elk's words articulate the recent and most cataclysmic event for Native Americans: the arrival of the restless and rational white man.

When Indians first observed whites, many perceived that, in addition to possessing great power, they also carried a strange spiritual sickness, one that many Indian holy men predicted would create great problems for their people. Charles

Alexander Eastman, a Santee Sioux, remembered speaking to his uncle about the race his people named the *wakan* (mysterious). Saying much about their power in war and invention, he also commented on the wakans' strange tendency to assess and calculate for no apparent reason: "They have divided the day into hours, like the moons of the year. In fact, they measure everything. Not one of them would let so much as a turnip go from his field unless he received full value for it" (Nabokov 22).

Observations like this flourished in all tribes. A tribesman of the Yaqui Indians of Southwestern Arizona, who referred to whites collectively as *gente de razones*, explained, "Yes, you are a people of reasons, you always have reasons for this, reasons for that" (Nabokov xxi). Focusing on the spiritual differences, the great Sioux medicine man, Sitting Bull, noticed over a century ago that "the love of possessions is a disease among them" (Nabokov xvii).

We might say that a mutation of this Euro-American spiritual illness spread among the Indians. It becomes the comprehensive condition which today still threatens Indian spiritual beliefs. The condition of cultural alienation is one focus of the following exploration.

When American officials began to implement the reservation system, they perceived the land as 'set aside' for Indians only as a temporary condition; it would function as the stepping stone into total immersion into European American society. Ulysses S. Grant's government believed that reservations would be the training grounds where God's 'other' children could earn the right to "live as white people" (Nabokov 191). After learning the basic tenets of 'civilized life,' the reservation lands could be subdivided into single-family homesteads where tax-paying citizens would take part in

the institution of American government. At least this was the vision. In order to win over the hearts and minds of 'savages,' politically appointed Indian agents (always men) were assigned to monitor the lives of those Indians encamped on 'his' reservation. The agent would actively discourage anyone from partaking in 'old time rituals' and he would help to enforce the rigorous Christianizing of all Indian children.[5] As the herds of buffalo, bison, and other fur-bearing trade animals began to vanish from the plains in the mid-nineteenth century, the reservation Indians became totally dependent on their agents.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Indian parents had virtually no control over their children's education due to an intricate system of boarding schools envisioned by former Indian fighter Colonel Richard Pratt. In 1879 his U.S. Training and Industrial School at Carlisle began to educate, rigorously and interactively, a large mix of children from many of the different Plains tribes. Ironically, Black Elk and Colonel Pratt both use the same metaphorical language (of drowning) to describe colonial domination: "I believe in immersing the Indians in our civilization," Pratt insisted, "and when we get them under, holding them there until they are thoroughly soaked" (216).

The system set the standard for providing the 'education' of European and American culture, values, history, and ideology to a 'savage' people who would, in the minds of the educators, at best achieve a conceptual *tabula rasa*: a mindset that could henceforth be filled with 'civilized' thought processes, and these taken home and shared with elders on the reservation.

Peter Nabokov's well-researched *Native American Testimony* (1992) gives a

description of the typical duties performed at the boarding schools:

> Their [the Indian students'] long hair was clipped to the skull, sometimes as part of a public ritual in which they renounced Indian origins. They were forbidden to speak native languages, often under threat of physical punishment. Daily routine followed a strict schedule of academic and vocational studies, mealtimes, intervals for prayer, housekeeping chores, and recesses. The costs of keeping up the buildings and grounds and food was defrayed by student labor. Learning by working was the creed (216).

Not surprisingly, this environment left the students rejected on both sides of the colonial fence. Voicing the opinions of many Indian traditionalists, an Iroquois elder taunted students returning home from school, saying, "What have we here? You are neither a white man nor an Indian. For heaven's sake, tell us, what are you?" (216).

This is the dilemma faced by the Indians since contact with the whites: how to remain faithful to cultural tradition while, at the same time, coping with the pressure to assimilate into white society. Rendered immobile and separated from the traditions and lands of their ancestral homes, Indians were subsequently to witness the large-scale disintegration of their traditions. In many instances, the repercussions led to the present conditions of the reservation Indians as described by Dee Brown in the introduction to his compelling Indian history of the American West, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (1970): "if the readers of this book should ever chance to see the poverty, the hopelessness, and the squalor of a modern Indian reservation, they may find it possible to truly understand the reasons why" (xix). Black Elk sums up the reasons why in the last sentence of his oration: "there is no center any longer, and the sacred tree is dead" (270).[6]

Nearly all of contemporary American Indian literature explores this deep-rooted sense of cultural disunion, a consequence of colonialism which I will examine further. Paula Gunn Allen remarks that integration into the whole is the primary movement in Indian writing, but it is a movement "fraught with pain, rage, and angst, beset by powerlessness, denial, loss of self, normlessness, and anomie, and often characterized by political and personal violence" (Allen 128). The novels I am studying here, James Welch's *Fools Crow* (1986), Leslie Silko's *Ceremony* (1977), and N. Scott Momaday's *The Ancient Child* (1989), describe their central characters, all men, as somehow lost, their souls wandering, searching for ways to relate to society both past and present. Why is it that Indian men, more often than Indian women, are characterized in this way?

Judith Antell offers speculation concerning this issue in "Momaday, Welch, and Silko: Expressing the Feminine Principle Through Male Alienation." "Indian men," she writes, "are more suited than Indian women to the notion of the 'vanishing savage,' exciting romantic nostalgia in the minds of readers" (214). Antell suggests that there is a prominent belief in Indian society that the nature of 'women's work' and 'women's place' has sustained the cultural lives of Indian women, while the lives of Indian men have become radically disrupted:

> This idea has most to do with an interpretation of the sexual division of labor, which suggests that women's responsibilities for children and homemaking have continuity regardless of historical era, while the roles of Indian men, which were related to trade, hunting, and tribal warfare, have

> been extinguished. Consequently, Indian men more than Indian women can be seen as tragic figures who have clearly suffered the more severe losses, albeit inevitable and ultimately desirable losses in the assessment of the dominant society (214).

Antell discusses Welch's *The Death of Jim Loney*, Silko's *Ceremony* and Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, three novels where the central characters struggle with postwar poverty, cultural separation, depression, and alcoholism. She asserts that the men in these stories are disconnected from the feminine principles that unite an Indian cosmos.

I am working with the same authors, but with only one of the same texts. The phenomenon of alienation is not my primary focus and the texts I have chosen show this: the end of each novel describes its isolated character as healed. My interest lies in the curative process that transforms alienated individuals into active and integrated cultural participants.

I will attempt to describe the ways in which Welch, Silko, and Momaday preserve their cultures despite the attempted physical and conceptual eradication by the hegemonic culture. In short, my objective is to reveal Indian alienation as an individual and a cultural illness, and Indian traditions of storytelling and mythology as a type of medicine. With a healing power that cures individuals at the margins of a particular society and thus heals one culture at the margins of another, facets of mythology are far-reaching. Myth has the power to preserve and regenerate in the face of harrowing opposition.

What presents itself as an opposition to Indian mythology? In each novel is evidence that the phenomena which cause alienation are technologies, ideologies, and

traditions imported from Europe to America. For example, *Fools Crow* suggests that the technology of written language is a fundamental cause of Indian alienation; thus, a struggle to remain close to oral traditions that 'tell' myths rather than write them is emphasized even though the novel is itself a written text. Furthermore, *Fools Crow* incorporates the antithetical Indian and European historical traditions that cause division and further separate Indian and European cultural ideologies.

Ceremony places its main character, Tayo, in a confusing conceptual thicket of ideologies: his Euro-American military training teaches him to interact with a feminine universe that is forcibly tamed and tampered with to the point of brutalization. His Indian heritage also perceives a feminine cosmos; however, this perception teaches Tayo to embrace, not to brutalize, the land. Tayo's cultural myths play a large part in shaping the end of his story.

The Ancient Child grapples with the problem of representation. How can the author represent Set—his alienated, mixed-blooded character—in a Western language and in literary traditions common to Europeans, but not to American Indians? Momaday creates a complex interplay between art and language in this, his most recent novel. A growing relationship with art, language, and cultural myths guides Set to his transformation by the end of the book.

I have structured the three chapters in a similar fashion. Each begins with an in-depth analysis of the causes of alienation for the particular characters in the text. I then move to theories of myth, and I consider theories of both tribalism and colonialism. The natural progression of theme in this project gets its energy from certain binary oppositions evident in each text—oppositions between oral and written

language, conflicting perceptions of feminine landscapes, and differences between textual space and non-textual spatiality. The progression of chapter themes seems naturally to move toward the means by which each character, and in certain aspects each author, achieves harmony within a complex world of oppositions.

WHAT IS INDIVIDUALITY?

I have found that perhaps the easiest way for the European mind to understand the concept of alienation from an Indian point of view is to juxtapose it with Western notions of individuality. For a white American like myself, the concept of individuality is emphasized and nurtured from the earliest years. The American government, with its longlasting Constitution, has endured perhaps because this concept exists at its foundation. Individuality is written into the *Declaration of Independence*, and because the colonists espoused their belief in certain unalienable rights for all, individuality in early American political theory came to mean the right to pursue liberty, with the ultimate aim being happiness. This is utopia. Indeed, what could be better than a state based on the celebration of individual liberty, founded and safeguarded by a government whose purpose would be to help promote and foster the doctrine?[7]

As if by osmosis, the political permeates the artistic world; consequently, notions of individualism are found in much American literature, art and music. Furthermore, this political doctrine has led to the belief and reliance on the single

family home system, to individual plot holdings, to the various laws of the constitution, to the American legal system as a whole, and of course, concerning Indians, to the doctrine of Manifest Destiny envisioned by American political theoreticians of the nineteenth century.[8] In short, individuality is sacred among European Americans. For students of literature, this fact is evidenced in those omnibus introductory American literature courses where masses of American literary studies students internalize Huckleberry Finn's desire to "light out for the territories."

But for American Indians, individualism, as such, takes a back seat to a faith of inclusion and of a shared reality. As Allen observes, the aim of tribal ideology is "to bring the isolated, private self into harmony and balance with this reality, to verbalize the sense of majesty... of all things, and to actualize, in language, those truths that give to humanity its greatest significance and dignity" (55). This is an ideology that creates a value system based on communal partnership not simply with the land, but also with experiences in all realms—adventures, dreams, and visions included. For instance, a piece of land is not 'mine,' it is 'ours.' The opposite is also true: not only do 'I' belong to the land, but also 'we all' belong to the land. Likewise, not only is a vivid dream about the dreamer's past experience, it is a vision which points to future directions and the well-being of the community, including all of the rocks, trees, earth, and the people who dwell within it; i.e., not only is it 'my' dream, it is 'our' dream.[9]

Many Indian creation myths illustrate this philosophy of holistic inclusion. Thus in one Cheyenne tale, Maheo, the All Spirit, creates water, the light, the sky-air,

and the inhabitants of the water out of a dark void, but he is not omnipotent like the Judeo-Christian God:

> "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 water to swim in. It sounds ungrateful to want something else, yet still we do. When we are tired of swimming and tired of flying, we should make 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."[10]

Implications in this myth provide many other points of comparison between the American Indian universe and the European Christian universe. When Yahweh creates the earth and its inhabitants, He makes all of the laws, too. In order to gain His respect, His followers must gain His blessing and follow His commandments, which create little room for a changing world or for varying circumstances. This is a universe in which human endeavor, perhaps because of this lack of space, blossoms only after the inevitable process of separation and loss—alienation, if you will. Indeed, eating the forbidden fruit was Eve's only avenue for exercising the human creative capacity. Everything else was perfect.

In the Indian cosmos, creative power is limited among creatures, but in turn, they all share and take part in the creative process. The fundamentals of this belief system are similar to the cultural features of tribal systems in Southeast Asia,

Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia, and Africa, and they predate western systems "derived from a 'civilized'" model.[11] Of course, there are differences among beliefs of the manifold Indian tribes, but the variances are much more similar to one another than they are to western views.

Hyemeyohsts Storm, author of the popular *Seven Arrows* (1972), describes the Indian belief system in terms of the Medicine Wheel Circle, a restorative and cyclical vision of the world:

> The Medicine Wheel Circle is the Universe. It is change, life, death, birth, and learning. This Great Circle is the lodge of our bodies, our minds, and our hearts. It is the cycle of all things that exist. The Circle is our way of Touching, and of experiencing Harmony with every other thing around us. And for those who seek Understanding, the Circle is their Mirror (15). [11a]

Storm reinforces the concept that "Any idea, person or object can be a Medicine Wheel, a Mirror, for a man. The tiniest flower... a wolf, a story, a touch, a religion" (5). He defines the Wheel in terms of different people standing on a mountaintop at night, one person might feel fear, one may be calmed, a third will be lonely (Storm 5). In each case, the mountaintop is the same, but it is perceived differently and reflects the feelings of the different people who experience it. Thus, paradoxically, the mountaintop is different for everyone who experiences it. Because the earth and its people are also Wheels, everything contained within—physical, theoretical, and conceptual—has "spirit and life" (5). Any *thing*—tangible or intangible—which helps to promote a better understanding of the Medicine Wheel Circle and of the self is a

Medicine Wheel: Storm's book is a Wheel, as is most fiction, and many other things in life.

Illness itself can be a Wheel if it helps to show patterns and conditions, which in turn reveal the paths of healing within the world. I believe that this is the case with alienation, and the reflection of alienation that Indian literature projects back into the characters in the fiction I explore here and within American society in general. The different reflections form themselves into new Wheels of understanding.[12]

Belief in the Medicine Wheel Circle and regenerative forces that sustain it (and that it sustains) leads the Indians to perceive life as a process grown out of the earth and its resources: "We are of the soil and the soil is of us," Luther Standing Bear once said of his Lakota (Sioux) people. Today, Allen echoes Standing Bear, remarking, "We are the land. To the best of my understanding, that is the fundamental idea that permeates American Indian life" (*The Sacred Hoop* 119). She remarks that the earth is not simply a source of survival; rather, "the earth is being, as all creatures are also being: aware, palpable, intelligent, alive" (119). It is a multi-tribal belief that through songs, ceremonies, legends, and mythologies, the individual human being is brought into harmony with the reality of the earth, its soil, its animals, the other humans; and this harmony, in turn, reflects the larger cosmic forces of the moon and the sun and the four seasons. Concerning ceremonial traditions, Allen notes that 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.... In this art, the greater self and all-that-is are blended into a balanced whole"(55).[13]

For me, the Circle begins to turn when observing the significance of mythology

and 'the story' among American Indians. After making contact with people who came from the East with new weapons, contracts, and signed treaties, people who came speaking in terms of exchange value, of buying and selling, and of individual ownership, Indian lifestyles deteriorated progressively. Parted from the lands that had nurtured them for thousands of years, the Indians were, in short, introduced to philosophies based on separation and disunion, doctrines diametrically opposed to their own convictions. However, in spite of the existing reservations and the present conditions of American governance, Indian culture has survived and continues to grow today. This is partly because at its base, storytelling, mythology (including ceremonies and rituals that celebrate mythology), and the language of the oral tradition exist. In this way 'mythology' must be read, not only as etiological, but also as metaphysical and rich with cosmological implication and applicable to the modern world. It is alive.

Located in the novels I discuss are the sacred and powerful influences of myth. In this regard they are, among many other things, fascinating. Within their pages the ceremonies and rituals celebrated evoke a special healing power that transcends time, that usurps the power of governmental oppression, and that finally acts as a catharsis for a stifling alienation imposed by outside forces.

At the same time, these novels are beautiful, though ugliness appears in places where a large European populace has, all too often, turned a blind eye. Positive in vision, but rife with negative implication, they are honest. And in the end they speak a truth about American society which deserves reckoning—one which must be discussed and understood—a truth which must be recognized.

NOTES

1. These three events secured the fate of the Plains Indians. The great battle of June 25, 1876, saw a large band of Indians defeat General Custer and the U.S. Army. Although this was a victorious battle for the last of the 'free' Indians, within fourteen years the Army would see that these Indians would either live on reservations or die (for an Indian point of view see James Welch, *Killing Custer*, 1994). In the late 1880s the Sioux began practicing a religion taught by Wovoka, a holy man who had envisioned that practicing the 'ghost dance' would result in the return of the native lands, the disappearance of the whites, and a future of peace and prosperity. Frightened by the rituals, nearby white settlers called for federal intervention. This led to the Wounded Knee Massacre, where the U.S. government attacked a Sioux encampment. The death toll varies considerably, but it is likely that soldiers killed between 150 and 370 Sioux men, women, and children (see Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*).

2. For more information about the American frontier, see Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History*.

3. Black Elk is referring to The Fetterman Fight, where Captain Fetterman and 81 men were killed on Peno Creek, December 21, 1866. See *Black Elk Speaks* 7.

4. This fight for land and natural resources continues today as "more than half of the continent's uranium, and much of its petroleum and coal lie beneath Indian land," (Matthiessen, *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse* xxii).

5. The intermixing of tribal children formed an unexpected camaraderie among the students that Nabokov refers to as 'Pan Indianism.' A sense of shared identity and experience in some respects helped the Indians strengthen their heritage across tribal boundaries. See Nabokov 217.

6. This is not to say that the Indians of today have tried to remain aloof from activism and politics. The romantic concepts of 'traditional Indians' were difficult to sustain. As Peter Matthiessen notes in *In The Spirit of Crazy Horse* (1980), "most reservation traditionals [have] resumed their traditions only recently" (xxiv). The American Indian Movement (AIM), begun in the late 1960s, has been vigorously involved in securing the legal rights of reservation Indians.

7. The *Declaration of Independence* is criticized today for its insistence on equality despite the institution of slavery, which existed when it was written. However, this criticism is mainly focused on black/white America. It is worth noting that there is a clause in the Declaration directed toward the Indian: "He [King George III] has excited domestic insurrections amongst us [the colonists], and has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions." Taken from *Encarta*, the Online Encyclopedia.

8. Manifest Destiny was the nineteenth century doctrine that the United States had the God-given right and duty to expand throughout the North American continent.

9. The notion of 'dream' for the Indian should not be confused with perceptions of the 'American Dream,' which is based on the successful fulfillment of individual pursuits, and in particular, the amassing of wealth to provide for the family.

10. See Allen 57.

11. There are numerous studies of mythologies from the inhabitants of these regions. For an in-depth look at these cultures, see various social anthropology studies, including Claude Levi Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, and *The Origin of Table Manners*.
11a (see below)

12. My exploration of Indian mythology and alienation is not intended to imply that the Medicine Wheel Circle functions as a means to justify colonial conquest. Mine is not a path of interpretation which proposes that global colonization and genocide are explicable, understood, and therefore have merit, or benefits in the long run. The premise of colonization is based on misunderstanding culture, or understanding only to the point of exploitation. For example, when Columbus landed on an island in the Bahamas in October 1492, he wrote of the natives: "they believe very firmly that I, with these ships and crew, came from the sky." Subsequently, he took ten of them for display at the court of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. Shortly thereafter, he shipped off five hundred West Indian natives as slaves (most of them succumbed to diseases and died quickly), and the virtual annihilation of Caribbean natives had begun (Nabokov 19).

Rather than serving as a method of justification, the Medicine Wheel Circle, and the mirrors into which it shines, proposes that because colonization is a global fact, and because the systematic exploitation and extermination of ethnic groups has occurred and still occurs, colonization must be contemplated, and understood in terms of another, more powerful cycle: the survival of culture despite colonization.

13. When Allen refers to Ceremonial Literature, she is considering the Indian tradition of myths, rites, and ceremonies reflected in the vast oral traditions. Now that many of these are chronicled in journals and various books of mythology, traditions can easily become *de*mythologized. For this reason it is important to take into account the entire spiritual process behind the language of oral tradition and mythology and not simply the isolated language of myths written and preserved in books. When I speak of literature here, I am referring to the contemporary American Indian literature that I am studying in this project. However, these texts preserve the rites and traditions (even though they are not conveyed orally), so in a sense, they too can be considered ceremonial.

11a Prof Anthony Vital notes that Hyemeyosts Storm is "a controversial figure, someone who was accused by Cheyenne elders as misrepresenting Cheyenne beliefs. An entry in the *Dictionary of Native American Literature* (Garland 1994) states neatly the case both for and against Storm's place in Indian literature -- and quotes Vine Deloria's sympathetic response: '*Seven Arrows* is a religious statement, not a statement about religion, if the difference can be understood.'" (Examiner's Report)

CHAPTER I

LANGUAGE, HISTORY, AND NARRATIVE: JAMES WELCH'S *FOOLS CROW* AS AN ACT OF CEREMONIAL RENEWAL

The storyteller keeps the stories
all the escape stories
she says "With these stories of ours
we can escape almost anything
with these stories we will survive."

The Storyteller's Escape, in *Storyteller*
Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna)

ALIENATION IN WELCH'S TEXTS: CODIFICATIONS OF MODERN SOCIETY

White Man's Dog looks out, thoughtfully engaged, in the opening pages of *Fools Crow* (1986), by James Welch. His eyes rise westward and follow the worn summits and gorges along the Backbone of the World.[1] They rest upon the sacred Chief Mountain, the site where great warriors of the Blackfoot[2] had visions that made them "strong in spirit and fortunate in war" (3). With his eyes fixed, he makes an earnest supplication; he hopes Chief Mountain will show him the way that is his birthright.

To say that this opening scene depicts only youthful aspirations and a wish for success is incomplete. Here Fools Crow, as White Man's Dog,[3] is placed in the center of his Indian universe peering over the Backbone of the World, where Old Man, creator of the Blackfoot Cosmos, resides. As he focuses on Chief Mountain, Fools Crow realizes his position in the Lone Eaters band of the Blackfoot, a tribe that was known to all other Plains Indians as a nation of warriors.

This scene places us in Welch's ancestral home, where we remain for the duration of the novel.[4] Unlike many Euro-American novels that begin at home and sweep outward into the frontier, Welch follows the trend of many contemporary Indian novelists by writing about his tribal home, a term that is inclusive of language, history, religion, landscape, and other cultural traditions.[5] Momaday's and Silko's works also

follow this paradigm; however, unlike their novels, which are set in post-World-War-II America, *Fools Crow* takes us back to the time when whites and Plains Indians were in the initial phase of culture contact. Thus, readers begin a story which itself starts with the prelude to Blackfoot cultural dispossession. Not surprisingly, *Fools Crow's* time span depicts the period when large-scale alienation appears (within Blackfoot society) as the by-product of the ever-frontiering Europeans' colonizing efforts.

Welch's earlier novels, *Winter in the Blood* (1974), and *The Death of Jim Loney* (1979), chronicle the full effects of comprehensive cultural alienation in contemporary America. Both stories relate the experiences of wayfarers who attempt to discover their identity. Never physically far from their tribal homelands, these characters are rootless journeymen who long to harmonize themselves to a cultural past. But because of their partial assimilation into Euro-American society and a heritage they have forgotten, they remain itinerant throughout most of their stories, confused in what seems to them an incomplete modern world: "the distance I felt came not from country or people; it came from within me," ponders the nameless narrator in *Winter in the Blood*, "I was as distant from myself as the hawk from the moon. And that was why I had no particular feelings toward my mother and grandmother. Or the girl who had come to live with me" (2).

Likewise, in Welch's more somber work, which depicts alcoholism, progressive isolation, and death, Jim Loney's hands shake while he tries to make sense out of lonely circumstances: "He wanted to believe that they trembled because of the cold," the narrator tells us,

> but he knew without thinking it that they trembled because there was no real love in his life; that somehow, at some time everything had gone dreadfully wrong, and although it had something to do with his family, it had everything to do with himself (134).

In an interview with Bill Bevis of *Northwestern Review*, Welch explains that individuals like Loney and the nameless narrator are representative of the Indian experience in general. "I've seen [them] all over the Highline," Welch remarks considering Jim Loney:

> At Northern College there would probably have been maybe sixty Indians fall quarter and then in two weeks probably fifteen or twenty of them would have gone home and maybe fifteen or twenty more would have gone home by the end of that quarter. They didn't really feel comfortable outside their own world (170).

On contemporary Blackfoot culture at large, Welch remarks: "there was some deep-seated defeat in these people, but I had never tried to really find out for myself [before he wrote *Winter in the Blood*] how this came about, what made them what they are today" (171).

The protagonists in Welch's first two novels are looking for significant connections to their ancestry. In *Fools Crow*, Welch steps into the crucial period in his culture's tribal past to explore the origins of "deep-seated defeat" experienced by the Blackfoot Indians. There, we follow Fools Crow from the first page, where he looks toward Chief Mountain full of readiness to join his heroic ancestors, to the last, where he sits watching the dark horns of the vanishing buffalo glisten in the rain,

"burdened with the knowledge of his people, their lives and the lives of their children" (390).

In his home of time, place, and tradition, Welch draws heavily on Blackfoot mythology. Myth brings direction to the author's characters and solidifies the theories of mythology that I will examine in this essay and throughout this dissertation. By joining Blackfoot myths with the nineteenth-century time frame, Fools Crow emerges as a new kind of Blackfoot warrior, one who has searched and found the spiritual tools for the cultural survival of his tribe. He learns and passes on the knowledge of ritual medicine of his spiritual mentor Mik-api, and he preserves the oral tradition that will inform future generations of an unwritten Blackfoot heritage.

The story spans about four years, from 1867 to 1870. At its start, the text presents the Blackfoot way of daily life—hunting, raiding, ceremonies, mores, beliefs, preparing hides and food—before the Napikwans (whites) make significant inroads into the culture. The text then progresses toward the inexorable cultural breach visible in the relationship between the Blackfoot and Napikwans. After a series of ideological arguments, skirmishes, battles, and massacres—paroxysms that signify intense instability in cultural relations—tribal unity is severed into compartmentalized and divided factions.

Throughout, Welch blends fiction with fact. For instance, he gives us characters like Fast Horse (fictional), who, angry with the Napikwans, leaves the tribe, preferring a rebellious and vigilante lifestyle; but Fast Horse loses his Indian identity in the process. He begins to mock his own heritage and to live more like the whites whom he despises. There are dissenters like Heavy Runner (factual), a chief who

befriends whites and is willing to overstep tribal traditions to please them. Within the extremes, Fools Crow and others struggle to preserve their traditions amid increasing numbers of cattlemen and frontier families, and the newly legislated Montana territorial government. "I wanted the freedom of making my main character and his band fictional," Welch comments, "so I would not feel constrained to follow any historical perspective" (McFarland 5). Welch thus creates his own perspective that succeeds in chronicling the origins of the alienation that possesses his modern characters like Loney and the nameless narrator of *Winter in the Blood.*

The main causes of alienation, for Welch, are language and history. Yet the striking irony is that, like a strain from a virus which acts as its own antidote, the text also reveals that the cures for wholesale alienation are the same phenomena that manifest and foment it in the first place. Language and history are also the panacea. To illustrate this, I split the term *language* into two parts: oral and written. For my purposes, the general term *history* includes for discussion areas of family heritage, large-scale history of mobilized Western cultures, and mythology.

The crisis point in *Fools Crow* centers on the Marias River Massacre of January 1870, when United States soldiers killed 173 men, women, and children in Heavy Runner's band. Welch comments:

> It was a great irony, but the Blackfoot were noted as a very fierce group of people who were most feared by the white people in the northern plains area. And yet they were the very first Indians, as far as I can tell, who laid down their arms. And it was because of that massacre. They just felt that their medicine had gone completely bad and that these white people were something different (In Bevis 173).

The massacre occurs in the last few pages of the novel. Before this, the story describes the complexities of Indian/white relations, including the ways in which language begins to evince both unity and division within Blackfoot society.

ORAL VERSUS WRITTEN LANGUAGE

Fools Crow belongs to a primary oral culture. From his earliest childhood he is connected to the rich Indian tradition of storytelling and mythology. He was named White Man's Dog because, as a child, he faithfully followed the old Blackfoot storyteller, Victory Robe White Man (218). Mad Plume, leader of the Black Patched Moccasin band, remembers Fools Crow as a child who listened well to stories (95). Fools Crow retains the stories, lives them, and retells them throughout the novel.

For people of all cultures, language is at least partly an oral experience, but for the Blackfoot in Fools Crow's time, communication, including education and the telling of history, is achieved through oral utterance. Thus, language occupies no textual space, it lives only in the ephemeral realm of sound augmented by the space of performance and ritual. Europeans moving westward brought with them the technology of writing and print that overwhelmingly shaped and differentiated their consciousness from the mind of the Indian.

Walter J. Ong notes in *Orality and Literacy* (1982) that, for both oral and chirographic (writing) cultures, knowledge is precious. But in oral society information cannot be stored in texts for easy reference: if the wisdom gained through tribal lore

is forgotten, it cannot be reaccessed and learned again through texts. Knowledge must be remembered; consequently, a primary oral society "regards highly those wise old men and women who specialize in conserving it, who know and can tell the stories of the days of old" (41). Memorizing through oral rhythms and mnemonics is perhaps the most sacred act in an oral society. Boss Ribs exemplifies this in *Fools Crow*. He keeps the sacred Beaver Medicine bundle, and he remembers the origin myth associated with the bundle and over four hundred songs that accompany the healing powers of the sacred artifacts within the bundle. He is greatly respected for this achievement. At one point, Fools Crow listens as Boss Ribs relates the origin of the sacred medicine (195-98).

The act of listening to stories is indicative of a participatory and communal system of interaction which, as Ong illustrates, is characteristic of oral cultures that "must conceptualize and verbalize all their knowledge with more or less close reference to the human lifeworld, assimilating the alien, objective world to the more immediate, familiar interaction of human beings" (42). In this way, oral cultures are attuned to the rain, wind, grass, and trees—elements which vivify both human and animal existence. Life is celebratory and conveyed in all Indian tribes through various rituals and ceremonies. Welch's close attention to the Sun Dance Ceremony, where White Man's Dog endures painful physical sacrifice (117-20), is a testimony to the oneness of Indians and the land in which they live.

Even though Welch's artistry is expressed upon the printed page, his means of conveying the ceremony, telling Fools Crow's story, and relating the various counter-narratives in the text, mimics certain techniques utilized in tribal traditions of oral

performance. In *Folklore Performance and Communication* (1975), theorists Dell Hymes and Bruce Rosenberg discuss thematic repetition and rhythmic presentation, common devices of ritual performance (11, 75). While Welch's novel is not 'repetitive,' the author does place importance upon certain Blackfoot myths by referring to them several times throughout the novel. For instance, Welch tells the tale of So-at-sa-ki that I discuss below, but he also has other characters discuss it and tell it, and he includes the Sun Dance Ceremony, which is a direct result of this tale. In fact, one could argue that the cyclical nature of the novel—we return to the morning star myth at the end—is itself a form of ritual repetition.

Repetition of the myth serves as a verse form common to those used in oral performance. However, the author's use of synecdoche and metonymy—features of Blackfoot language—creates linguistic rhythmical patterns. The moon is 'Night Red Light' (19), and the town of Helena in which Malcolm Clark runs a trading post is not a village or a city, but 'Many-sharp-points-ground' (15). As a youth, Fools Crow does not look over the Rocky Mountains, but the 'Backbone of the World.' This poetic naming process evokes a language familiar to oral performance and it creates rhythms that tie Welch's various stories together.

Welch's is thus a hybrid that textually records and presents its narrative in a manner consistent with the performance approach. Elizabeth Fine examines performance in print in *The Folklore Text: From Performance to Print* (1984). Although the scope of her study goes far beyond what I discuss here, her theoretical ground rules for securing the performance event in writing deserve elaboration. She believes that the specific event "may require a certain type of participant," "a certain

physical setting," "a specific psychological scene," "a certain cultural theme," "special genres (secret songs, pledges, dramatizations)," and "special interactional patterns (elders lead, youth follow)" (63). *Fools Crow* fulfills these requirements. As a Blackfoot, Welch is culturally close to the traditions and the ground rules that make his text a written example of performance art.

However, the author also demonstrates through his writing that, in fact, written language presents significant problems between Blackfoot and European cultures—it creates the breach between them. The art of writing thus serves a dual purpose in *Fools Crow*: it aids Welch in textualizing his performance, and self-reflexively, it exhibits the divisive qualities of its own makeup.

Indeed, writing can also manifest division. By separating "the knower from the known," the discipline sets up conditions for 'objectivity,' "in the sense of personal disengagement or distancing" (Ong 46). In fact, as Ong asserts, writing "initiated what print and computers only continue, the reduction of dynamic sound to quiescent space, the separation of the word from the living present, where alone spoken words can exist" (82). The mindset accompanying written language thus allows for "increasingly articulate introspectivity." This, in turn, makes those of us who live in chirographically and/or typographically (print) based cultures differentiate between the "external objective world" and the "interior self against whom the objective world is set" (105).

A chirographic culture sailed from Europe westward instilling the seeds of 'individuality' in the Euro-American mindset I mentioned in the introduction (See above 12). The colonists' objective, surrounding world became a 'wilderness' that had

the potential to become amenable to private and individual use, to be tamed and cultivated. It must be argued that the phenomenon of written language fomented the type of colonial ideology which Frederick Turner observes in *Beyond Geography*:

> The thing to do [for the colonists] was to take possession without becoming possessed: to take secure hold on the lands beyond and yet hold them at a rigidly maintained spiritual distance. It was never to merge, to mingle, to marry. To do so was to become an apostate from Christian history and so be lost in an eternal wilderness (238).

Because of their sacred texts, writing even makes possible the great introspective religions like Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam (Ong 105).

Ong notes that "by storing knowledge outside the mind," writing downgrades "the figures of the wise old man and the wise old woman, repeaters of the past, in favor of younger discoverers of something new" (41). During the early stages of culture contact, Boss Ribs, whose medicine evolved from myths connected to the beaver, might thus appear to a literate European as, at best, an eccentric old savant. Wrote Alexander Henry in 1811: "The greatest oath a Slave [Blackfoot] can possibly utter is that the earth [including its animals] and the Sun hear him speak." At worst, he might be depicted as Jeffrey Amherst, the English commander-in-chief during the latter part of the French and Indian War, thought of the Indians in general in 1763: "more nearly aligned to the Brute than to Human Creation" (*Killing Custer* 33).

With texts we can afford to forget information that is easily stored in print and allow the mind to explore undiscovered physical and conceptual realms. Hence, the ever-curious colonists crept steadily over the frontier that revealed itself, discovering conquerable wilderness and eliminating unwarranted obstruction. "I am fully resolved

whenever they give me an occasion," Amherst commented further, "to extirpate them [Indians] root and branch" (33). Amherst's remark amplifies the notion implied by Ong that written language extirpates reality. By removing the word from its sacred place in myth and ritual performance, writing places language into abstract forms and reduces "dynamic sound to quiescent space." Just as Amherst is motivated to silence the Indians, so writing silences language. In Amherst's culture of written technology, where he expresses his intentions toward the Indians in writing, Indians are removed from the reality of the "living present," not simply by violence, but by writing itself.

The ever-questing colonial mindset accounts for the popularity among Euro-American writers of themes that progress in concentric circles away from the home. In chiro/typographic cultures, something new is always out there, something that can be written and defined, preserved in texts made for easy reference, and used as an aid in the next cycle of discovery. Writing is the fundamental stepping stone for Western notions of progress—knowledge is not so precious as the dark realms which remain untouched. But it must be noted that writing may also be used to uncover the exploitation of those dark realms. This dissertation, and the assemblage of all research for that matter, is not free from this mentality.

Ong points out that it is difficult for any of us—anyone from a culture where written language is taught and emphasized—to comprehend what life is really like in a primary oral culture. But perhaps more than many writers in mobilized, highly literate societies, Welch understands the impact of vocalized, oral language and his roots which exist there. Red Paint, the wife of Fools Crow, is a characterization of Welch's great-grandmother. He speaks of her influence in *Killing Custer*:

> [she] had been a member of Heavy Runner's band and, although shot in the leg by the soldiers, had managed to escape upriver, to the west, with a few other survivors. Red Paint Woman had told my father many stories of that time when he was a boy. Although an old woman, who refused to learn even grocery-store English, she remembered everything that had happened to her and her people. It was her stories, related to me by my father, that informed the many stories I told in *Fools Crow* (39).

Of course, *Fools Crow* is written, but because of the oral tradition that exists in Welch's family, the novel is heavily influenced by oral thought patterns. Thus, it is largely about the power of orality: Welch uses literacy to restore the vocalized memories of his great-grandmother. Ong defines this style of writing as engaging in written technology to reconstruct "the pristine human consciousness that was not literate at all" (15).

Herein lies another influence of oral performance repetition. In addition to the inclusion of myths and the Sun Dance Ceremony, Welch repeats the memories passed down to him. A rich tradition involving repetition is unveiled as we must consider that Welch's great-grandmother certainly held on to the vocalized memories of others. In this respect, *Fools Crow* is a literal performance: not only language, but the human voice speaks. This voice is at once individual and collective, and a vocalization common to much contemporary American Indian literature. As Arnold Krupat suggests in *For Those Who Come After* (1985), Indian fiction relays the story to us in a similar way that "Indian narrators in successive performances not only convey but comment, adding, deleting, and supplying emphases that alter as well as reproduce the already given" (15).

Like a thief in the night, *Fools Crow* steals typography and with it captures the

memories of an oral society: "I'm writing it from the inside out," Welch asserts, "The white people are the real strangers. They're the threatening presence out there all the time" (McFarland 5). The author thus inverts the conventional 'self-other' dichotomy. In rewriting the *memories* of his own tribe, Welch reestablishes Blackfoot identity with language.

HISTORICAL DUALITIES

As I have noted above, repercussions of America's attempt to transform the Indian psyche create the alienation witnessed in characters like Loney and the nameless narrator. Yet gaps in their characters grow full of desire to attain the identity that neither figure personally possesses. By the end of their stories, they find solace in their own creative and traditional ways. Undoubtedly, this undertaking means triggering memory, either their own, or recollections of those close to them. They must get in touch with the past. Just as *Fools Crow* centers on the tales handed down to him, Welch's modern characters need history.

The author gives it to us in *Fools Crow*, but in doing so he shows that academic history, like written language, foments Blackfoot alienation. Tribal history must nourish Welch's characters. In a similar manner in which Welch manipulates the art of writing for dual purposes, he engages in history, uncovering antagonistic forms that play themselves out within the breach of Indian/White relations.

The dual forms of history, sometimes referred to as linear and cyclic, both

operate in *Fools Crow*; they are related to two opposing orientations of time in human society. Mircea Eliade observes the distinction in *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*: "the one traditional... that of cyclical time, periodically regenerating itself ad infinitum; the other modern, that of finite time, a fragment... between two atemporal eternities" (112).

Following principles of cyclical time, Welch writes the myths and traditions of his heritage; he creates a history flavored with personal qualities. Embracing a set of kinship relations, Welch writes the past of a family, the Lone Eaters—a band of close to eighty people—and tells their history in the way it was revealed within oral societies: a timeless rendering in which the cyclical world of myth is revealed.

The text also represents linear history. There is General Sully's treaty, signed January 1, 1870. The endorsement establishes the Blackfoot Indians as cooperative with the government and therefore 'friendly' (284). *Fools Crow's* climactic ending, centered upon the documented Marias River massacre, occurs later the same year (379). This is history segmented into dates which fix time into an outline that is ultimately the product of written language.

Both historical perspectives are fused with a complexity that creates tension between the already volatile Indian/White relations. But the more these historical perceptions intertwine, the more evident it becomes that myth forms the core of the novel's historical mode. What linear history Welch puts to use, he employs to present his own depiction of Blackfoot culture. *Fools Crow* thus rewrites textbook history: the American flag becomes not a symbol of freedom, but a piece of cloth with "white sharp-pointed designs" that represent "the many territories conquered by the

Napikwans" (274). Moreover, Welch contends with contemporary rewritten 'politically correct' histories that grapple with and underscore the unfortunate fate of the Plains Indians.

Today, apologists typically relate the issue of Indian history as an unforgiving tale of woe—"lo, the poor Indian"—committed by the Euro-Americans against the Indians.[6] This response objectifies Indians and makes of them anthropological artifacts that have no place in the modern world. The fact is that Indians have survived what might be considered racial genocide. Despite this obvious fact, Indian experience is most often conveyed in academic spheres, as thinker Calvin Martin puts it, "as a curious, even quaint sideshow within the larger panorama of Anglo-American performance and achievement in North America" (in Martin 9).

With more acidity, Indian author Gerald Vizenor makes a similar point:

> This obsession with the tribal past is not an innocent collection of arrowheads, not a crude map of public camp sites in sacred places, but rather a statement of academic power and control over tribal images, an excess of facts, data, narrative interviews, template discoveries. Academic evidence is a euphemism for linguistic colonization of oral traditions and popular memories... these images are discontinuous artifacts in a colonial road show (Martin, 183).

Equipped with the technology of typography, literates utilize strategies of objective distance, seek out the new, and chronicle the old within a complex system of dates, which creates a vast timeline, one that favors Western points of view and eschews culturally different modes of historical thought. "It is truly a dazzling machine, this behavioral-intellectual spectrophotometer of ours," Martin speculates, "a broad-band instrument whose program is Aristotelian, Augustinian, Calvinist,

Baconian, Cartesian, Newtonian, Darwinian, Marxist, and many others, or combinations thereof." Martin's conclusion is illuminating: "it furnishes us with both our questions and our interpretations of the responses we believe we receive" (7).

In his popular treatise *Europe and the People Without History* (1982), Eric Wolf shows the frightening potential of Martin's calculating machine. Wolf's polemic ties 'the people without history' (Native Americans, Asian Indians, Africans, and Chinese) and their modes of production to the mode of production in the industrializing West from about 1400 to the present. The project necessarily fuses the history of non-Western culture to Western history, and finally to a mobilized global history. Wolf believes that *production* is a global culture's primary *raison d'etre* (see Martin 11). Wolf's theories project what I consider to be dangerous manipulation of the Western 'behavioral-intellectual spectrophotometer':

> The ability to project symbolic universes may well be located in the structure of the human brain, driven... to resolve the irresolvable contradiction between nature and Culture.... This contradiction is dealt with not in pure thought alone ('myth making man'), but in the active transformation of nature through the social labor of human beings. Contrary to those who believe that Mind follows an independent course of its own, I would argue that ideology-making does not arise in the confrontation of Naked Man thinking about Naked Nature; *rather, it occurs within the determinate compass of a mode of production deployed to render nature amenable to human use*.... The manner of that mobilization ["the deployment of social labor, mobilized to engage the world of nature"] sets the terms of history, and in these terms the peoples who have asserted a privileged relation with history and the peoples to whom history has been denied encounter a common destiny (emphasis mine, 391).

Wolf proposes that the core of human consciousness possesses a drive to conquer Nature, to render it 'amenable to human use.' With this in mind, Wolf synthesizes the histories of Indians and Europeans until Indians become, by virtue of their inherently *productive* natures, clones of the industrializing, frontiering Euro-Americans.

His history depicts a world very similar to the Cosmos ruled by William Blake's rational God, Urizen—one of dividing scepters and measuring instruments. Taught in schools, it fosters the objective of colonialism: Euro-American history aims to create citizens who will operate and further utilize the academic mechanics to redefine and thereby rewrite the world in Euro-American terms.

Tribal forms of historical consciousness operate within an ever-flowing present connected to a supernatural moment of creation. One concept Welch uses to evoke timelessness is the idea of ritual sacrifice, which, Eliade tells us,

> repeats the initial sacrifice and coincides with it. All sacrifices take place at the same mythical instant of beginning; through the paradox of rite, profane time and duration are suspended.... Through such imitation, man is projected into the mythical epoch in which the archetypes were first revealed (35).

The act of sacrifice is intended as a gesture of gratitude to Nature for providing life: it repeats the sacred moment and aligns those operating within the mode of time, to timelessness.

While repetition of various verse forms and myths is integral in an oral performance, the reexperiencing of sacred moments also plays a key role in the performance process. Considering this, I would like to conclude the discussion of historical forms with a brief look at Welch's reenactment of ceremony.

Welch solidifies his role as performer by writing about the Sun Dance. The ritual transports his characters to the defining moment in their history and places the author, the various communal voices he represents, and the readers in line with the original act.

The Sun Dance is a common ceremony among many Plains tribes that honors life the sun has created. It takes place "during the Moon of Making Fat (June) or the Moon of Blackening Cherries (July), always during the full moon, for it lit up the ignorance of the black sky," says Welch (*Killing Custer* 49). "During the preceding year many men and women would have taken vows... to sacrifice before the holy tree. At the same time, youths were preparing to be initiated into manhood" (49).

In *Fools Crow*, Ambush Chief, overseer of the ceremony, prays to the sun and aligns present time with the mythic time: "We now honor you as Poia[7] taught our long-ago people. Grant that we may perform our ceremony in the right way" (113). At the appointed time in the ceremony Fools Crow, as White Man's Dog

> thanked the Sun for helping him on his raid and protecting him.... He thanked Sun for his fine new wife and vowed to be good and true to all the people. Finally, he asked Sun to give him strength and courage to endure his torture. Then he backed away from the pole and began to dance. He danced to the west, toward the lodge door. He danced to the drum and rattle. From somewhere behind him he heard the bird-bone whistle of a many-faces man [holy man], and he felt the sticky warm blood coursing down from his wounds (116).

When Fools Crow completes the dance, his spiritual mentor Mik-api looks upon him and says, "Now he is for certain a man, and Sun Chief will light his way" (117).

The ritual Fools Crow endures reverses Wolf's theory that all cultures render

nature "amenable to human use." The sacrifice is itself a form of gratitude toward the sun. Its purpose is to give back to the sun things that nature, through the power of the sun, has provided mankind.

Eliade writes that *anything* [for tribal cultures] which does not partake of or participate in archetypal models of tribal history is "unusual," "novel," and derives from "concrete time," or "duration," and is rejected as profane (154). The Western version of historic time is unfavorable to the Indian mind because of its "corrosive action" in "revealing the irreversibility of events"; time of this sort must be left unrecorded and forgotten (74-75). Oral history, on the other hand, is alive and remembered, passed down to each succeeding generation and fundamentally biological in nature: it is close to people personally and rooted in the human lifeworld.

HISTORY INTO NARRATIVE

Often, the scale of written histories is much larger than the scope of stories which chronicle a tribal past. The documentation of United States expansionism in the nineteenth century will be conveyed differently than the history of eighty Indians struggling against that westward movement. Momaday believes Indian history evokes a "spiritual sense so ancient as to be primordial, so pervasive as to be definitive—not an idea, but a perception on the far side of ideas, an act of understanding as original and originative as the Word" (in Martin 158). It constitutes, he says, "my deepest, oldest experience, the memory in my blood" (201). The tool that transports this living

knowledge in *Fools Crow*, annulling time in the process, is the narrative.

Today we often read narratives that fit neatly into "Freytag's pyramid," complete with rising action, a climactic point, and finally a denouement where plots and subplots resolve themselves. Aristotle noticed this trend in Greek drama; this is significant because Greek drama, though performed as an oral art, was composed as a written text. For centuries it "was the only verbal genre to be controlled completely by writing" (Ong 142).

Without written texts, oral cultures cannot manage the bulk of the long climactic linear plot of historical narratives, but they can "bond a great deal of lore in relatively substantial, lengthy forms that are reasonably durable—which in an oral culture means forms subject to repetition" (141). Welch fuses mythological and historical forms and creates a novel based on the implications and ramifications of the myth that establishes Blackfoot identity. The tale is of So-at-sa-ki, Feather Woman.

As she grows up, her friends marry while she remains alone. One morning, while gathering wood with a friend, she looks to the sky wishing to marry the bright morning star. Morning Star is the son of Sun Chief and Night Red Light. He appears to her not long after she expresses her wish and she goes to live in "the sky with him and his parents" (*Fools Crow* 111). Soon their infant son, Star Boy, is born.[8]

While living in the sky, Night Red Light cautions Feather Woman not to dig in the garden, for there is a sacred turnip there that has to remain rooted in the ground. But Feather Woman is curious. One day while the others are out, she takes her digging stick and uproots the sacred turnip, "creating a hole in the sky" (111). Through the hole she sees her parents and her friends on the plains, and she longs to

be there with them. Feather Woman is consequently sent back to live with her people. She takes her son with her because the Sun did not want him in the lodge:

> She hugged them [her family members] and rejoiced, for she was truly glad to be home. But as the sleeps, the moons, went by, she began to miss her husband. Each morning she would watch him rise up. She shunned the company of her mother and father, her sister, even her son, Star Boy. She became obsessed with Morning Star, and soon she began to weep and beg him to take her back. But each morning he would go his own way, and it was not long before Feather Woman died of a broken heart (111).

The myth continues with the story of Star Boy. As he grows, he develops a scar on his face and is thus known among his people as Poia, Scar Face. The boy leaves his home in search of a way to prove himself, perhaps to lose his debilitating scar, and to escape ridicule. He finds his way to the home of Sun Chief, and while in the sky he helps to rescue Morning Star while the two hunt together, even though neither Morning Star nor his father recognize Poia as Star Boy. In return for his heroic deed, Sun Chief "removed the scar and told the youth to return to his people and instruct them to honor him every summer and he would restore their sick to health and cause the growing things and those that fed upon them to grow abundantly" (112).

The different time parameters existing in oral and written cultures have led many scholars to define oral history, like the myths of Feather Woman and Poia, as a narrative-based method by which primitive cultures enable themselves to retain etiological stories. In the terms of many modern historians, Feather Woman and Poia represent an inexact science more aligned with art and literature than an 'accurate and historical' telling of the past; true history, many historians insist, consists of facts

aligned with specific points in time to verify the data. However, contemporary theories of history show facets of tribal ideology at the core of written, linear historiography.

Regarding the role of narrative in linear history, Hayden White, author of *Tropics of Discourse* (1978), makes a cogent argument. Theorists of historiography, he says, agree that all written history contains "an irreducible and inexpungeable element of interpretation" (51). First, White observes, the historian must exclude certain facts from the narrative representation because details pertaining to one particular incident are numerous, even infinite. But, in the attempt to reconstruct events in history, the historian also must include those details in the narrative for which "the facts that would permit a plausible explanation of its occurrence are lacking" (51).

Essentially, the historian fills in historical gaps with an 'inferential' and 'speculative' interpretation. In White's words,

> a historical narrative is thus necessarily a mixture of adequately and inadequately explained events... at once a representation that is an interpretation and an interpretation that passes for an explanation of the whole process mirrored in the narrative (51).

If this is so, then the modern historian presents us with a plot structure which, as Northrop Frye remarks, follows thus: the more comprehensive its details, the more mythical in shape it becomes (in White 57).

Claude Levi-Strauss argues in *The Savage Mind* that historical narratives are nothing but myth-like interpretations. In his estimation, "the historian and the agent of

history choose, sever and carve them [historical facts] up, for a truly total history would confront them with chaos" (257). What differentiates history from myth, in Levi Strauss's mind, is the chronological code accompanying all historical fact: "there is no history without dates... for history's entire originality and distinctive nature lie in apprehending the relation between before and after, which would perforce dissolve if its terms could not, at least in principle be dated" (258). If we drop chronology—the skeleton of historiography—we are left with a narrative that, though comprehensive and linear in appearance, distinctly resembles myth. Returning to Wolf's Marxist premise, we might say that mythology informs modes of social production. Various deployments of social labor, 'mobilized to engage the world of nature,' *are acting in response to a mythic base* which determines the manner of that mobilization.

Northrop Frye acknowledges this mythic base. He argues in *The Stubborn Structure* that mythology rather than history shapes a culture. He refers to the case of Euro-America and believes that, on the level of general education, mythology forms an initiatory pattern of education designed to promote "the traditional lore of one's society. The basis of [the pattern] is social mythology, the cliches and stock responses that pour into the mind from conversation and the mass media, including school textbooks" (20). In the end it is mythology which also shapes the mind of the Euro-American. Academic history and the classroom setting in which this history is conveyed are intended to create well-adjusted and obedient citizens. They use writing, but also mythology to preserve "the continuity of the dead, the living and the unborn, the memory of the past, the reality of the present, and the anticipation of the future which is the one unbreakable social contract" (21).[9]

Welch's blend of myth and linear history thus reveals mythology as the primary informant in human society. Because of Fools Crow's heroism and his resolve to live his life in the traditional way, Indian culture survives and enables Loney and the nameless narrator in *Winter in the Blood* to attain unity and connection by the end of their stories.

REVIVIFICATION

Near the end of his story, Fools Crow embarks on a vision quest to seek out possible remedies for the increasing disease, alienation, and death suffered by his tribe. He crosses time and space until his journey places him in a "green sanctuary between earth and sky" (360). Here Feather Woman survives, living in a timeless and mythical world, alone, except for her dog and the digging stick that helped her dislodge the sacred turnip. Fools Crow sees in her face "a grief so deep it would always be there and no words from him could help" (337). Like many characters in Welch's novels, Feather Woman lives a sentence of alienation both from both her husband and her tribe, and yet she lives on and tells Fools Crow: "one day I will rejoin my husband and son. I will return with them to their lodge and there we will be happy again—and your people will suffer no more" (352). Her survival serves as a metaphor for the Blackfoot experience in general.

She speaks to Fools Crow and, on a piece of tanned leather, she offers him the future of the Pikunis in a series of moving images:

> He was powerless to keep from seeing, and so he saw inside the lodges and he saw the agony of the sick ones, the grief of the mothers and fathers, the children, the old ones. And he saw the bundled bodies of the dead, slung across the painted horses being led from camp. He saw inside the lodges of all the Pikunis and he saw suffering and crying and wailing. He saw mothers mutilate themselves, men rush from lodge to lodge, clutching their young ones, the elders sending up their futile prayers (354).

Fools Crow sees "the end of the blackhorns and the starvation of his people" which he is unable to stop. After the apocalyptic vision, he tells Feather Woman that he does not fear for his contemporaries; he knows they will go to the Sand Hills and continue to live as they once did. "But I grieve for our children and their children," he says, "I see them on the yellow skin and they are dressed like the Napikwans, they watch the Napikwans and learn much from them, but they are not happy. They lose their own way" (359).

Fools Crow fears that his culture will die, and he sees death consume the Blackfoot. Feather Woman helps him to understand that within the larger framework of cyclical time, there will be a rebirth in future generations, similar in manner to the lunar and seasonal cycles. There will be a process of ceremonial renewal.

Eliade underscores the kind of renewal that Feather Woman perceives:

> The death of the individual and the death of humanity are alike necessary for their regeneration. Any form whatever, by the mere fact that it exists as such and endures, necessarily loses vigor and becomes worn; to recover vigor, it must be reabsorbed into the formless if only for an instant; it must be restored to the primordial unity from which it issued; in other words, it must return to 'chaos' (on the cosmic plane), to 'orgy' (on the social plane), to 'darkness' (for seed), to 'water' (baptism on the human plane).... We may note that what predominates in all these cosmico-

> mythological lunar conceptions is the cyclical recurrence of what has been before, in a word, eternal return (88).

Fools Crow looks directly into the wintry void of alienation and death, and from the other side Loney and the nameless narrator stare back, like plants waiting to flower in the spring, ready to begin the process of revitalization. Linear time dissolves.

"Much will be lost to them," Feather Woman says of future Pikunis, "But they will know the way it was. The stories will be handed down, and they will see that their people were proud and lived in accordance with the Below Ones, the Underwater People—and the Above Ones" (360). Just as Feather Woman knows she will be reunited with her family, Fools Crow knows, as his father, Rides-at-the-Door, understands earlier in the novel: "Some die but there are others to take their place.... We will go on, he thought; as long as Mother Earth smiles on her children we will continue to be a people" (347).

From Welch's great-grandmother come the stories that inform his novel *Fools Crow*. In shaping his historical narrative around these stories and Blackfoot mythology, Welch inverts the colonial phenomenon that helped cause alienation. Language and history are flipped 'inside out,' and thus, they act as restorative powers. Fools Crow is itself an act of ceremonial renewal. The novel is set within Welch's ancestral home, and from this location, it is evident that the language and history of his novel originate in the tribal mind. Looking out from Welch's imaginative dwelling place, one can see interpreters fondling the delicate mechanics of an academic colonial house built on stilts—one which furnishes itself with its own renditions of the language and history that were to cause alienation among the Blackfoot. While *Fools*

Crow focuses largely on Blackfoot culture, it occasionally glances toward that house from its own biological position, solid in the earth, knowing that the anthropological house is also rooted there.

NOTES

1. The 'Backbone of the World' is now commonly known as the Northern Rocky Mountains.

2. The Blackfoot are also known as the Pikunis. In her introduction to Clark Wissler's and D.C. Duvall's *Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians*, Alice Beck Kehoe notes that the Blackfoot "comprise three allied nations on the northwestern plains of southern Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan, Canada, and adjacent north-central Montana" (xii). Regarding the Blackfoot language, Kehoe tells us that the tribe as a whole "call themselves *niitsitapii*, 'Indian real people.' The members of the confederation are the *káinaa* 'many chiefs,' but called in English 'Bloods'; *siksiká*, 'black foot'; *piikánii*, divided into two groups, *aamsskáapipiikánii* 'south Pikunis' and *aapátuxsipiikánii*, 'north Pikunis.'" (see Wissler xii). Kehoe also notes that, although the U.S. reservation uses the spelling 'Black*feet*,' 'Black*foot*' is the Canadian and preferred spelling today.

3. White Man's Dog has his name changed to Fools Crow after he fights heroically in a battle against the Crow Indians (see *Fools Crow* 150).

4. James Welch is a member of the Blackfoot tribe.

5. Bill Bevis notes in "Native American Novels: Homing In" that American whites keep leaving home: "*Moby Dick*, *Portrait of a Lady*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Sister Carrie*, *The Great Gatsby*—a considerable number of American 'classics' tell of leaving home to find one's fate farther and farther away.... A wealth of white tradition lies behind these plots, beginning with four centuries of colonial expansion. The Bildungsroman, or story of a young man's personal growth, became in America, especially, the story of a young man or woman leaving home for better opportunities in a newer land" (581).

Bevis looks to early American writer St. Jean de Crevecoeur, who, in *Letters from an American Farmer*, defines the quintessential American as one who leaves the old to take the new: "He is an American, who, leaving behind all his ancient prejudices and manners, takes new ones from the mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new land he holds" (Bevis 581).

6. This still reflects linear history. Martin looks closely at 'lo the poor Indian' accounts of Indian history in *The American Indian and the Problem of History*.

7. Poia is the mythic man who showed the Blackfoot how to celebrate the Sun Dance Ceremony.

8. Momaday makes references to this myth in *The Way to Rainy Mountain* and *House Made of Dawn*.

9. To be sure, Euro-American mythology and Indian mythology create very different ideologies of living. This essay is focused upon the way Indian myth heals the alienated character within Indian literature; however, for an extended discussion of Euro-American mythologies and the way they shape white culture, see Richard Slotkin's *Regeneration Through Violence* and *The Fatal Environment*.

CHAPTER II

PERCEPTIONS OF LANDSCAPE

IN LESLIE MARMON SILKO'S *CEREMONY*

I was fearful of traffic
trying to keep my steps and the moon was east,
ballooning out of the mountain ridge, out of smokey clouds
out of any skin that was covering her. Naked.
Such beauty.
Look.
We are alive. The woman of the moon looking
at us, and we are looking at her, acknowledging
each other.

from "September Moon," Joy Harjo (Creek)

DISLOCATION OF SPIRIT

Tayo links his spirit to the land at the start of Leslie Silko's *Ceremony* (1977). A Laguna-Mexican, he believes that the reservation's drought following the Second World War is related to his curse upon the "unending rain" that fell in the Philippine jungle during the war. Perpetual cloud cover, dampness, and incessant flies plagued Tayo and his injured cousin, Rocky, while the two fought as United States soldiers against the Japanese. In an effort to aid Rocky's health, Tayo prayed for conditions like the sand and sunniness that fill Laguna landscapes, but he would return to a thirsty New Mexico desert with Rocky in a coffin. Home, Tayo is dislocated in the barrenness of a once fruitful plain. His inner soul, like Loney's, is lost.

Like the dry reservation land, the lifeblood of Tayo's spirit is drained after the war. Lee Schweninger and Robert Nelson both observe that there is an important congruence between Tayo's "interior landscape" and the external, "the physical terrain, the fundamental geography, of the Place" (Schweninger 52). Silko elaborates on this relationship in a recent essay entitled "Interior and Exterior Landscapes: The Pueblo Migration Stories" (1996): "Pueblo potters, the creators of petroglyphs and oral narratives, never conceived of removing themselves from the earth and sky" (27). The people of the Pueblo seek holistic unity, but Tayo has lost this connection, and he and the land both languish, undernourished. "The land is dry because the earth is suffering

from the alienation of part of herself," notes Paula Gunn Allen; "her children have been torn from her in their minds; their possession of unified awareness of and with her has been destroyed, partially or totally" (119). Thus, we see Tayo back from war with the Japanese, home, though distant—still fighting wars within his conscience.

The function of landscape and nature is important in Welch, Momaday, and other native American authors, but it is rather special in *Ceremony* because Silko contrasts Euro-American and Indian attitudes toward the land. Hence, the reader witnesses a similar dichotomy in *Ceremony* to that which the author demarcates in "Interior and Exterior Landscapes":

> So long as the human consciousness remains *within* the hills, canyons, cliffs, and the plants, clouds, and sky, the term *landscape*, as it has entered the English language, is misleading. "A portion of territory the eye can comprehend in a single view" does not correctly describe the relationship between the human being and his or her surroundings. This assumes the viewer is somehow *outside* or *separate from* the territory she or he surveys (27).

Silko draws heavily on Laguna myth and exposes a difference in cultural land/landscape perspectives in *Ceremony*. Thus, the novel derives its narrative source from Laguna traditions of storytelling. Tayo's story and his ties to a ritual past are strengthened by way of interspersed poetry and myth: when Hummingbird and Bluebottle-Fly go to Old-Turkey-Buzzard in the fertile fifth world, they request food and storm clouds for the human realm, above ground. But they are first sent on a quest with meticulous instructions from the buzzard before water is granted (82, 105). In them we see a reflection of Tayo in a postwar search through the desert drought of land and soul, for life amidst the powder-dust soil.

Tayo places growing importance on the relationship between myth and circumstance as the novel progresses. He glimpses the balance and harmony of the universe:

> Everywhere he looked, he saw a world made of stories, the long ago, time immemorial stories, as old Grandma called them. It was a world alive, always changing and moving; and if you knew where to look, you could see it, sometimes almost imperceptible, like the motion of the stars across the sky (95).

The Laguna stories that Tayo finds influential, and certain narratives and attitudes reflecting Euro-American culture, possess an intriguing similarity: they indicate that both societies internalize and interact within a feminine universe. Allen describes a feminine land (in her comments above), and Silko writes that "The ancient Pueblo people called the earth the Mother Creator of all things in this world. Her sister, the Corn Mother, occasionally merges with her because all succulent green life rises out of the depths of the earth" (27). It is my intention to explore this: the *different* ways Laguna and Euro-American societies interact within their version of *She*—Mother Earth.

I will illustrate in detail below how European explorers and early American settlers also identify the land as woman. However, it is important first to stress that, as a result of the different ways Indians and Americans perceive a land/gender association, Tayo becomes alienated. *Ceremony* thus displays a breakdown in the way Indians and Euro-Americans act/interact within a feminine land.

Tayo's United States Army military training and his moderate European acculturation lead him to perceive the land through European eyes. Throughout the

novel, Tayo's quest is to rediscover the cycles of balance and age-old necessities, a sense of origin and place, that his ancestors had. If he can accomplish inner healing, we reason that his consciousness and the outer landscape will refertilize and bloom again.

In the opening pages Tayo appears confused, swimming among beer labels and hopping between rat-hole cantinas. While flashes of Laguna insight light up his memory, he mainly reasons in the terms of a Euro-American world. He lives with his Aunt, a Christian and a strong proponent of Indian assimilation. Thus exposed to cultural duplicity, Tayo lacks the self-assurance to organize his experiences in terms of the traditional stories passed down through his family. Tribalism and colonialism entangle his mind until

> all of creation suddenly had two names: an Indian name and
> a white name. Christianity separated the people from
> themselves; it tried to crush the single clan name,
> encouraging each person to stand alone, because Jesus Christ
> would save only the individual soul (68).

Tayo's name even suggests the character's quest to reunite his split personality and to harmonize his soul to himself as Laguna stories are rooted to the land. Kenneth Lincoln proposes that 'Tayo' derives from a *kashare* song that tells of spirits emerging from the earth and migrating east to join with the *kopishtaya*, or 'angels' in the house of the sun:

> I came out
> first early morning
> yaa ayo
> there in the east
> at sunrise the sun's house;

the sun's (bird)
TYOWI TYOWI he sings;
KAYO KAYO he is singing. (235).

"Tayo's name-story," asserts Lincoln, "rises from the sun bird's dawn song, 'TYOWI TYOWI/ KAYO KAYO,' to reintegrate a split personality and cultural schism" (235).

Tayo's name presents further implications when considering the sunrise motif throughout *Ceremony*. In the poem above, sunrise is important: the bird sings while looking east toward the rising light. In Silko's novel, Tayo's growing cultural insights reflect the dawn of a new understanding. He comprehends the unity of story, place, and being. Silko's cadences on sunrise serve as a strophic pattern from beginning to end; much like the oral rhythms Welch uses in *Fools Crow*, the repeated theme of sunrise links Tayo's development with myth and the natural world.

Amid ideological and spiritual malaise, Tayo is encouraged to seek help from an old Navajo medicine man named Betonie. A collector of calendars and phone books—times, names, and places—Betonie reminds Tayo of stories: "All these things have stories alive in them" (121). When Tayo recognizes pictures from 1939 and 1940 that predate his illness, the power of medicine through memory is invoked, as it is throughout the structure of *Fools Crow*.

While with Betonie, Tayo begins to restore his health, and his memory, and he relearns the many myths which teach Laguna perceptions of land. Perhaps the most important of these concerns the 'destroyers.'

Created at an ancient Indian witch ceremony, the destroyers were described into existence by a mysterious witch, unknown to the other participants, who said that each detail of his/her (this witch's gender is inconclusive) story would become true as

it was told. The witch then tells of a "white skinned people" who interact with the world, yet, simultaneously annihilate it:

> They see no life
> When they look
> they see only objects.
> The world is a dead thing for them
> the trees and rivers are not alive
> the mountains and stones are not alive.
> The deer and bear are objects
> They see no life.
>
> They fear
> They fear the world.
> They destroy what they fear.
> They fear themselves (135).

In the end, the witch suggests that destroyers will put an end to all of life and the earth itself:

> Up here
> in these hills
> they will find rocks,
> rocks with veins of green and yellow and black.
> They will lay the final pattern with these rocks
> they will lay it across the world
> and explode everything (137).

The rocks are uranium, and the final pattern implies nuclear annihilation.

The story casts the destroyers as Europeans who colonize the Laguna landscape. But because destroyers were created at an Indian ceremony, Silko makes it clear that Euro-Americans do not maintain exclusive rights to the origins of evil. In fact, Tayo's struggle with the destroyers is centered on his relationship with Emo, an Indian and a fellow war veteran.

Throughout *Ceremony*, Emo cherishes and recounts war tales. At one point he boasts of heroic deeds while rattling his pouch of teeth—souvenirs carved from the head of a Japanese war victim. Emo has a passion for the

> big mortar shells that blew tanks and big trucks to pieces;
> jagged steel flakes that exploded from the grenades; the way
> the flame throwers melted a rifle into a shapeless lump....
> some men didn't like to feel the quiver of the man they were
> killing; some men got sick when they smelled the blood.
> But he was the best; he was one of them (62).

Tayo struggles against perceiving the world in similar terms, but after the war, he is unable to relate to the earth and its inhabitants in the traditional Laguna way.

Though he learns to hate the destroyers, Tayo becomes a destroyer himself through this hatred. "He wanted to follow them as they hunted the mountain lion, to shoot them and their howling dogs with their own guns." Tayo reasons that "the destroyers had sent them to ruin this world, and day by day they were doing it. He wanted to scream at Indians... that the white things they admired and desired so much... all these had been stolen, torn out of Indian land" (204).

In order to complete successfully the healing process enacted by Betonie, Tayo must learn not to hate. Finally, through Betonie, Tayo understands that he cannot view the land as a destroyer; rather, he must regard it as "mysterious, certainly beyond human domination, and yet as something to be met and spoken with rather than confronted."[1] The question is, how will Tayo go about enacting this healing process?

As a start, Betonie instructs Tayo to locate his Uncle Josiah's herd of drought-resistant cattle that had wandered the plains, lost, after Josiah's death. Tayo meets a mountain spirit woman named Ts'eh on his quest. We eventually discover that her

name is short for Tse-pi'na—in Keres, "Woman Veiled in Clouds"—the Laguna name for Mount Taylor. She is "a Montano," she says, and a member of "'a very close family.... I have a sister who lives down that way. She's married to a Navajo from Red Lake.... Another lives in Flagstaff. My brother's in Jemez" (234).

With Ts'eh, Tayo begins his earthly reunion in lovemaking: "He felt the warm sand on his toes and knees; he felt her body, and it was as warm as the sand, and he couldn't feel where her body ended and the sand began" (222). Tayo's love for Ts'eh becomes the central healing process that enables him to resist an overwhelming temptation to perpetuate witchery in the final climactic scenes of *Ceremony*. After he and Ts'eh leave each other, Tayo symbolically embraces her and the land by planting flowers:

> He would go back there now, where she had shown him the plant. He would gather the seeds for her and plant them with great care in places near sandy hills. The rainwater would seep down gently and the delicate membranes would not be crushed or broken before the emergence of tiny fingers, roots, and leaves pressing out in all directions. *The plants would grow there like the story, strong and translucent as the stars* (emphasis mine, 254).

Plant growth reflects Tayo's recovery from the infertile stagnation of a dry soul. Yet this passage also connects the land, language, and the Laguna story. As Lee Schweninger points out, "the earth, the word, the speaker of the word, and the story are inseparable. They exist within the same lines of dependence as the biosphere" (57).

Silko's account of language and story is analogous to her account of nature: just as "they [the destroyers] attempt to dominate nature, Native Americans, and the

land, they attempt to destroy the story" (57). A ceremonial song in the beginning of *Ceremony* warns that stories must be remembered:

> Their evil is mighty
> but it can't stand up to our stories.
> So they try to destroy the stories
> let the stories be confused or forgotten.
> They would like that
> They would be happy
> Because we would be defenseless then (2).

The stories describe a feminine land, and they teach a valuable lesson: how to live in accordance with the cycles of balance, the kinships of rain and drought, the spiritual accompaniment of life and death. Tayo begins his regeneration through learning the stories. By understanding them, he can accept the destroyers, and hard times, as part of the larger pattern of the sun, moon, and stars; he can unite with the land, and love, not hate.

LAND-AS-WOMAN METAPHORS

I would like to apply the connections between Tayo, the destroyers, and the land to Tayo's interaction with the land. Paula Gunn Allen believes *Ceremony* is a tale of two forces: "the feminine life force of the universe and the mechanistic death force of the witchery" (119). However, this observation must be reconciled with the fact that the destroyers, who embody the force of witchery, also understand a feminine universe. *Ceremony* presents the roots of diverging ideologies, or the conceptual

differences that enable Laguna thought to embrace a feminine universe and allow Western thought systematically to destroy it. Why do the destroyers brutalize the feminine land? Why does Tayo need to relearn how to love it?

Ts'eh enables Tayo to love her and to reunite himself with himself; she inspires a warmth and passion, and the two engage in a ritual interplay with the land presented in sexual terms. Annette Kolodny assures us in *The Lay of the Land* (1975) that this kind of relationship is not exclusively Native American. Her book is concerned with what she terms "America's oldest and most cherished fantasy: a daily reality of harmony between man and nature based on an experience of the land as essentially feminine... the total female principle of gratification" (4). Kolodny reinforces her argument with the writings of the earliest explorers, who declared themselves

> "ravisht with the... pleasant land" and described the new continent as a "Paradise with all her Virgin Beauties." The human, and decidedly feminine, impact of the landscape became a staple of the early promotional tracts, inviting prospective settlers to inhabit "valleyes and plaines streaming with sweete Springs, like veynes in a naturall bodie," and to explore "hills and mountaines making a sensible proffer of hidden treasure, neuer yet searched" (4).

Sexual metaphors were easily made when explorers, mainly men, penetrated into a wilderness which, considered unspoiled, seemed Edenic and virginal. The 'discovery' of such a place offered relief from "the cares of adult life and a return to the primal warmth of womb or breast in a feminine landscape" (6). Western shores provided beauty and sustenance that became at once the entire spectrum of femininity from the male point of view, from mother to virgin, both innocent and mysterious.

There was, of course, a problem with Western explorers sexually defining the

land: early exploration was itself the beginning of colonization and the land ethic accompanying colonization was one of power, control, and domination over a wilderness and the indigenous people who dwelled within. Kolodny elaborates: "the success of the settlement depended on the ability to master the land, transforming the virgin territories into something else—a farm, a village, a road, a canal, a railway, a mine, a factory, a city, and finally, an urban nation" (7).

Eric Wolf's theories prove useful here. For reasons upon which I elaborated in the previous chapter (see above 36), I disagree with Wolf's *synthesis* of European and Indian histories. I concluded that these modes of history are fundamentally different. However, if we apply Wolf's concepts only to American linear history (not to ceremonial Indian history), they coincide with Kolodny's premise regarding European mastery over the land. She might agree with Wolf's argument that Europeans in the New World deployed a mode of production that would "render nature amenable to human use" (Wolf 391). Her conclusions suggest that, at least in the case of American colonial history, "the deployment of social labor" is indeed "mobilized to engage the world of nature" (391). Kolodny takes this idea and inserts the sexual component: because the land was sexualized from the start, the deployment of labor set about controlling not just land, but *land as woman*.

How is this sexual metaphor extended after the land is mastered, violated, and transformed into something which, after domination, can by definition no longer be virginal?

According to many feminist theorists, colonial modifications of land and rape are analogous. Willful *exploitation* of the same land that at first promised relief from

the necessities of Western living resulted in the large-scale transmogrification of 'wilderness' into settlement, of garden into homestead. Kolodny notes that the consequence of continued colonization became inevitable "despoliation of the land" (7). Yet, despite the failure to keep the land in its original, pristine condition, the sexual gratification fantasy which initially drew European men to the land shifted from the landscape itself to codifications in art and literature. Kolodny believes that after the metaphorical rape of the land, the symbolic land/sexual fantasy impelled men simply to pursue land

> in daily life, and, when that failed, to codify it as part of the culture's shared dream life, through art—there for all to see in the paintings of Cole and Audubon, in the fictional "letters" of Crevecoeur, the fallacious "local color" of Irving's Sleepy Hollow, and finally, the northern and southern contours clearly distinguished, in the Leatherstocking novels of James Fenimore Cooper..." (7-8).

The terms 'exploitation' and 'rape' may be unavoidable when considering the colonial transformation of land and the accompanying fantasy dreams that characterize much American art. Feminists and psychologists alike have established that rape, like colonization, is itself an extreme form of domination and control. However, by using terms like 'rape,' 'colonization,' 'Edenic,' and 'virginal' in conjunction with nature, it is clear that we are viewing a feminine landscape with a very masculine eye.

Ecofeminist Greta Gaard asserts that "In *Western* culture, to feminize nature is to sexualize nature. Phrases like 'virgin forest' and 'rape of the land' suggest various 'uses' and 'potentials' for nature" (emphasis mine, 304). Rape becomes a phenomenon

that simply 'happens' to nature and to women.

Euro-American masculine treatment of land is often accompanied by anger and violence—a desire to control no matter what the cost—even today. Gaard cites an agricultural perception of farmland that Brian Ahlberg describes in *Statewatch*:

> There has been "a virtual explosion of products with military-associated names," such as "Surefire, Colonel, TopGun, Marksman, Salute, Bladex, Scepter, Squadron, and Bayonnet".... For example, the ad for Commando depicts a hand grenade with the pin pulled out, set beneath a weed; it is captioned, "Everything you've ever wanted to do to a weed." Going one step farther, a magazine ad for the SIGCO seed company encourages farmers to "ruin Mother nature's reputation," depicting a young, tough-looking Mother Nature who's "made it her business to challenge farmers" (304).

N. Scott Momaday makes a similar analogy to these in *House Made of Dawn* by comparing Indian and Euro-American farming methods. The white farmer responds to the land with disdain: working by day, "[he] began to hate the land, began to think of it as some kind of enemy, his own very personal and deadly enemy" (123). By contrast, the Indian hoes by night: he knows the depth of the row by "the feel of the blade against the earth" and "the touch of the [corn] fronds and tassels on his neck and arms" (65). The result of these hostile and amicable attitudes reflects antithetical perceptions of land. One conquers a feminine landscape; the other embraces it.

Tayo's interaction with Ts'eh represents embracing. Sexual encounters between them help Tayo to learn that the land is not an objectified and dead entity. With Ts'eh, Tayo learns to interact with the land in terms other than exploitation and rape.

Patricia Clark Smith writes of Indian literature in an essay on women writers and landscape:

> In such comings together of persons and spirits, the land and the people engage in a ritual dialogue.... The ultimate purpose of such ritual abductions and seductions is to transfer knowledge from the spirit world to the human sphere, and this transfer is not accomplished in an atmosphere of control or domination (120).

Laguna narrative is concerned with the interrelatedness of man and nature; it teaches how to work with, not against, the land.

Ultimately, Indian respect for land creates a subsistence Christopher Vecsey observes in "American Indian Environmental Religions":

> In the middle Rio Grande, perhaps the oldest continuous area of human habitation in America, the Indians worked their corn and other food plants so as to preserve their environment. They prevented flooding; they kept grass in the arid climate; they did not deplete wood supplies. White innovations in the same area brought about floods, erosion, and other natural disasters which seriously damaged Indian subsistence (10).

The differences between Indian and Euro-American land perceptions and ethics lead to the question already posed above: If the same land is defined by Indians and whites as feminine, why is there such a contrast in how the land is depicted, farmed, and internalized in each society? "One effect of the technological revolution," says Momaday in "An American Land Ethic," "has been to uproot us from the soil" (*Man Made of Words* 47). Why is this so?

MATRIARCHY/PATRIARCHY

A possible explanation exists in the differences between matriarchal and patriarchal societies. Tayo is born into a matrilineal Laguna community. Silko elaborates in an interview with Kim Barnes: "In the Pueblo, the lineage of the child is traced through the mother.... The houses are the property of the woman, not the man. The land is generally passed down through the female side because the houses belong to the women" (56). Concerning family relationships, Silko points out that "the female, the mother, is a real powerful person, and she's much more the authority figure [than the male]" (58). Perhaps because of this relationship, the creator of the Laguna universe is the feminine spider grandmother, who thinks the world into existence:

> Ts'its'tsi'nako, Thought-Woman,
> is sitting in her room
> and whatever she thinks about
> appears.
>
> She thought of her sisters,
> Nau'ts'ity'i and I'tcts'ity'i,
> and together they created the Universe
> this world
> and the four worlds below.
>
> Thought-Woman, the spider,
> named things and
> as she named them
> they appeared (*Ceremony* 1).

The mother has authority in the Laguna community. She is thus regarded in a different way than are mothers in patriarchal Western society. Since the Laguna mother figure metaphor extends to the Laguna landscape, we can pass her authority on

to the land: the human mother is treated in a similar manner to the supernatural mother. "I grew up with women who were really strong," Silko asserts, "women with a great deal of power, let us say, within the family" (Barnes 58). Judith Antell speculates further on the connection: "Indian mothers, like the earth, endure; women's rituals and symbols—earth, moon, fire, and water—emphasize continuance rather than destruction, survival rather than extinction" (217). Tayo, confused with opposing cultural ideologies, must understand his as a matriarchal culture in order to prevent his transformation into a destroyer. His awareness grows with Ts'eh. She is not a mother figure, but she acts within the maternal landscape. Though he is male, Tayo learns through Ts'eh to observe nature with a feminine eye.

Patriarchal Euro-American societies also perpetuate the land-as-mother metaphor. However, in them, the role of human 'mother' is defined differently than in Laguna society. Hence, the Western expression 'Mother Nature' codifies a unique set of meanings.

Most theorists agree that white Western cultures characterize the archetypal mother as selfless, generous and nurturing. Greta Gaard observes that "Mothers [in Western society] are expected to give endlessly, even after their children are grown. This maternal giving merits no economic value.... In fact, the institution of mothering has been a primary locus of women's subordination" (302). Gaard believes that Western culture actually delineates a 'deep hatred' of women's fertility:

> Women who have more than two children are somewhat disdained by the middle class; their fertility is regarded even more harshly if they are nonwhite mothers. Moreover, if a woman's body becomes more matronly as a result of multiple births, this bounty of flesh is also despised" (303).

Gaard's theories are, of course, open to speculation. Is it not extreme to say that the West, America in particular—a place where 'freedom' is celebrated—projects *hatred* of fertility? To clarify Gaard's remarks I feel it necessary to observe them from an angle that begins outside of the 'land-as-woman' argument.

In his polemical study, *The History of Sexuality* (1978), Michel Foucault develops the theory that Western discourses distinguish "four great strategic unities" that form "specific mechanisms of knowledge and power centering on sex" (103). The latter three of these unities are not applicable in the present discussion.[2] However, his first is illuminating. Foucault names this unity "A hysterization of women's bodies" and defines it as

> a threefold process whereby the feminine body was analyzed—qualified and disqualified—as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality; whereby it was integrated into the sphere of medical practices, by reason of a pathology intrinsic to it; whereby, finally, it was placed in organic communication with the social body (whose regulated fecundity it was supposed to ensure), the family space (of which it had to be a substantial and functional element), and the life of children (which it produced and had to guarantee, by virtue of a biologico-moral responsibility lasting through the entire period of the children's education) (104).

If we juxtapose Kolodny's theories regarding land exploration and Foucault's analysis of the hysterization of women's bodies, we return to Gaard's argument. It seems as if Kolodny's colonial explorers (who transform "virgin territories into something else," and who make of the naked land a productive 'road,' 'canal,' or 'railway,' upon which the success of the settlement depends) are similar to Foucault's scientists (who analyze and study the feminine body for the 'betterment,' the forward

progression, if you will, of Western society). Are explorer and scientist not achieving the same goal? Are their results not similar?

Just as Gaard believes that Euro-American masculine treatment of land is accompanied by the negativity of anger and violence, Foucault suggests that the hysterization of women's bodies projects a negative image of the Western Mother. It casts her as the "nervous woman," at times even afflicted with "vapors"—characterizations that constitute "the most visible form of this hysterization" (104).

Furthermore, Gaard illustrates that violence is directed toward the land when, to agriculturists, the land seems stubborn and opposed to human will (as in the agricultural examples cited above 62). Foucault demonstrates that the medicalization of women's bodies is a literal violation of the human body, and ironically, this violation projects negative images of hysterization back upon the woman.

I propose that Gaard's summation of Western society's 'hatred' of women's fertility and Foucault's theory on the violation of the female body are themes that both relate to the agriculturist's obsession with control of the land. Abundant fertility, 'multiple births,' and a 'bounty of flesh' are the signs that science—and the obsession with the medical testing of women's bodies—cannot control the "mystique" that exists within a masculine society's impression of women. Experimentation falls back on itself: mystery is the power that provokes experimentation; mystery is the power that frustrates it to violence.

I would like to turn to one of Foucault's specific points to further the argument. He believes that Western society places on the shoulders of women a 'biologico-moral'

responsibility which perforce guarantees a certain ethical responsibility which lasts throughout "the entire period of the children's education" (104). Interesting comparisons arise when extending this responsibility to the earth: Mother Nature also possesses infinite nurturing capabilities; yet, at the same time, she is tested, analyzed, and violated.

Gaard elaborates: "The idea that old-growth forests are inexhaustible... has authorized unrestrained logging for industry. Because there is always 'more' in mother's generous apron, human children have not worried about dumping raw sewage or garbage into the waters" (303). We might compare this despoliation of nature to Western society's curiosity/frustration surrounding the notion of fertility. *Ceremony's* destroyers fit the paradigm. They are uncomfortable with the notion of fertility; thus, their entire existence is consumed by negative anti-energy: they seek only to destroy the positive energy of life, to capture it—to conquer it.

This issue of fertility is best illustrated in *Ceremony* when Tayo contemplates the destroyers' frightening power:

> The destroyers had tricked the white people as completely as they had fooled the Indians, and now only a few people understood how the filthy deception worked; only a few people knew that the lie was destroying the white people faster than it was destroying Indian people. But the effects were hidden, evident only in the sterility of their art, which continued to feed off the vitality of other cultures, and in the dissolution of their consciousness into dead objects: the plastic and neon, the concrete and steel. Hollow and lifeless as a witchery clay figure. And what little still remained to white people was shriveled like a seed hoarded too long, shrunken past its time, and split open now, to expose a fragile, pale leaf stem, perfectly formed and dead (204).

Tayo's reflections show us that, because of the seductive influences of the destroyers, the historic and ideologic trap of our particular cultural background promotes plunder rather than preservation, elicits fear rather than fun, and encourages us to see the trees for their timber rather than for the essential stimulation they may provide. This tradition has the potential not only to undermine the essentials for our survival, but also to diminish the potential for life among our own and other cultures.

THE CAPTIVITY NARRATIVE

Despite the descriptions of paradise by early settlers and explorers in America, the wilderness outside individual settlements—unknown territories—was often depicted as threatening, alien, the realm of Indian and animal, and "prowled by howling beasts" (*The Land Before Her* 9). Like the "mysteries" that shroud the feminine body, the land is, before exploration, unknown. Written as woman, it is beautiful, even hypnotic, but potentially emasculating. Why?

The mysteriousness of unmapped land posed certain threats. The captivity narrative is a literary technique which depicts threats lurking in the wilderness. Captivity narratives are also an important part of Laguna mythology.

Considering formulaic patterns, we might say that Euro-American accounts warn about a threatening forest where helpless 'damsels in distress' must be rescued by heroic Europeans and Americanized Indians. Laguna captivity tales reflect spiritual knowledge and growth with nature. This dichotomy deserves analysis.

Tayo's sexual union with Ts'eh illustrates the latter narrative type. Ts'eh steals Tayo from the influence of harmful destroyers. More importantly, she keeps him isolated with her, where he cannot interact with family, friends, or destroyers. His captivity is a variation on themes in the *Yellow Woman* stories popular in Laguna society. "Ts'eh is *Ceremony's* Yellow Woman," says critic Melody Graulich.

Silko retells these tales in *Storyteller* (1981), a collection of stories, lyrical and narrative poems, anecdotes, and photographs of the author and her family in the New Mexico landscape. In *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* (1996), Silko writes that Yellow Woman is her favorite of the many traditional hero types

> because she dares to cross traditional boundaries of ordinary behavior during times of crisis in order to save the Pueblo; her power lies in her courage and in her uninhibited sexuality, which the old-time Pueblo stories celebrate again and again because fertility was so highly valued (70).

The straightforward formula for Yellow Woman stories follows thus: human women are abducted by spirit men, or, as in the case of *Ceremony*, human men are taken by spirit women (the woman, whether she is human or spirit, is the Yellow Woman). Patricia Clark Smith believes that within this flexible viewpoint

> The human protagonists usually engage willingly in literal sexual intercourse with the spirits who simultaneously walk the land and embody it. This act brings the land's power, spirit, and fecundity in touch with their own, and so ultimately yields benefit for their people" (120).

Importantly, either a man or a woman can be the captive. Also, both man and woman achieve the same end: interaction with a life-spirit, and increased awareness of clouds

and sky, stones, plants, and flowers.

Ts'eh's sexuality extends far beyond the act of intercourse. She is a healer. While Tayo is her captive she reveals the relationship between man and nature to him. She is at once feminine in the human sense and Mount Taylor with its "blue summit swathed in clouds" (141). Ts'eh is Yellow Woman, but her name "does not refer to her color, but rather to the ritual color of the east" (*Yellow Woman and a Beauty* 71). She is a cadence on sunrise; she attracts Tayo toward life, rain, love, spirituality, and generative stories that link the world together. After they first make love, Tayo chants an old Laguna song and ponders dawn: "The power of each day spilled over the hills in great silence. Sunrise. He ended the prayer with 'sunrise' because he knew the Dawn people began and ended all their words with 'sunrise'" (182).

The captivity narrative as an American literary genre emerged in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American literature. These tales are diametrically opposed to Yellow Woman narratives because they derive from early captivity accounts told, usually by men, about women like Mary Rowlandson, Hannah Dustin, and Hannah Swarton. There were more male captives in the early settlements, however, and more accounts told by males, so the very fact that the popular narratives *more often* centered on the female captive is worth exploring.[3]

According to Annette Kolodny in *The Land Before Her* (1984), early captivity tales were analogous to the Old Testament *Judea capta* type, or the image of Israelites suffering under Babylonian rule (19). "Nowhere in the American experience," Kolodny writes, "would the authors of these jeremiads find a more affecting image of New England as *Judea capta* than in the languishing figure of a Puritan woman held

Though the wilderness was just as unknown for men as it was for women, male exploration was encouraged, and the mysterious ever-unfolding frontier continued to be founded, settled, and populated by whites.

For women, the wilderness remained a place full of dangers. About 40 years after Filson's Boone, Cooper writes *The Last of the Mohicans*, a tale that, in part, concerns itself with the lives of Cora and Alice Munroe, white sisters who are threatened and captured by hostile Indians and forcibly taken to hostile wilderness haunts.

When juxtaposing Laguna and Euro-American captivity narratives, counter-approaches to land are revealed. In the Laguna stories, the land is the abductor. Whether in the form of a male or female spirit, the land captures a human, man or woman, in order for humankind to learn proper farming/hunting methods. In this way, the subsistence of the tribe continues.

A final thought: the Laguna hierarchy of beings places humans at the bottom. We are created last, and thus we have the most to learn about survival; indeed, we are the lowest form of life. Indian actor/writer Chief Dan George concludes:

> All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. Even the white man cannot be exempt from the common destiny. We may be brothers after all; we shall see. This we know: the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth (58).

The Euro-American captivity narratives employ traditional usage of the Christian 'Great Chain of Being,' where, below the divine beings comes man, then woman, and then the natural world, with insects and rocks at the bottom. Because

men are positioned above the landscape and animals, the land is there for our use. When men tell of women's capture by Indians, no form of ritual exchange is relayed. The chronicled suffering endured by female captives gives further support to the notion that landscape, Indians, even animals, must be pacified, and placed where they belong in the hierarchy. In contrast, male captives succeed in achieving cultural exchange, but they always return to embark on quests, stake out new frontiers, and establish systems of exchange value: cloth for furs, guns for land.

A CONTEMPORARY SYNTHESIS

Today, an interesting variation on the Euro-American captivity narrative is popular among environmentalists and nature conservationists alike. 'Mother Nature' is depicted as a hostage, and in need of a valiant rescue from annihilation. Greta Gaard gives many examples of 'Save our Mother Earth' campaigns popular in American culture (303). Ultimately, these campaigns depict 'Mother Nature' as controlled by us. They tell us that human intervention can save the earth. Then who are the abductors? Of course *we also hold the earth hostage*. Gaard writes that 'save the earth campaigns' "rely upon the same mentality that is responsible for so much environmental destruction: the notion that humans have the power to save the earth, that we are in control, and that the earth is depending on us. This is a gross inversion of fact" (304).

Near the end of *Ceremony*, this attitude is demonstrated by Silko as she places Tayo in a Laguna landscape that appears as the nexus of all history, modern and

ancient. While he rests in a desert hideout, retreating from his former friends and Emo, who long to crush his rejuvenated spirit, Tayo realizes the significance of his location:

> Trinity Site, where they exploded the first atomic bomb, was only three hundred miles to the southeast, at White Sands. And the top-secret laboratories where the bomb had been created were deep in the Jemez Mountains, on land the Government took from Cochiti Pueblo: Los Alamos, only a hundred miles northeast of him now, still surrounded by high electric fences.... There was no end to it; it knew no boundaries; and he had arrived at the point of convergence where the fate of all living things, and even the earth, had been laid (246).

Here Silko combines the Euro-American attitudes toward land I have described above and fuses them to the final plan the destroyers envision for the living world. As he gazes at the stones containing uranium with streaks like 'mountain ranges and rivers across them'—models of the earth itself—he knows the destroyers "had taken these beautiful rocks from deep within earth and they had laid them in a monstrous design, realizing destruction on a scale only *they* could have dreamed" (246).

The theft of Indian land and the excavation of elements reconfigured to lay waste to land and people express the results of colonial power and domination: the Euro-American Great Chain of Being places mankind above nature until the earth is exploited, held hostage in chain reactions, by the very people who believe they can save the earth from disasters of their own making. Tayo's epiphany joins his old war enemies, the Japanese, with his ancestral roots linked to the Japanese in the Far East:

> From the jungles of his dreaming he recognized why the Japanese voices had merged with Laguna voices, with

> Josiah's voice and Rocky's voice; the lines of cultures and worlds were drawn in flat dark lines on fine light sand, converging in the middle of witchery's final ceremonial sand painting. From that time on, human beings were one clan again, united by the fate the destroyers planned for all of them (246).

Here Silko empowers Laguna perceptions of land as Tayo realizes the role storytelling plays in connecting humans to earth. They all fit together, he thinks, "the old stories, the war stories, their stories—to become the story that was being told" (246). The words Tayo's grandfather, Ku'oosh, speaks early in the novel take on a heightened meaning here as the protagonist is pursued by his friends-turned-destroyers in the climactic scenes. Ku'oosh uses the word "fragile" to describe the earth. It is a word

> filled with the intricacies of a continuing process, and with a strength inherent in spider webs woven across paths through sand hills where early in the morning the sun becomes entangled in each filament of web. It took a long time to explain the fragility and intricacy because no word exists alone, and the reason for choosing each word had to be explained with a story about why it must be said this certain way. That was the responsibility that went with being human, Ku'oosh said, the story behind each word must be told so there could be no mistake in the meaning of what had been said; and this demanded great patience and love (35, 36).

In such a world, a single destroyer can "tear away the delicate strands of the web" (38). Silko suggests, through Ku'oosh's words, that we cannot, nor should we even try to 'save' the earth, but we must instead *understand* its fragility. A language must be utilized to connect inner and outer forms, to align spirit with matter, land, and life. Silko becomes part of the web. By telling, she refuses to allow the destroyers to

annihilate the interconnectedness of language and land; Tayo is her messenger. As he goes out to face his final challenge, he relies on "the position of the sun," and "the pattern of the stars." "He had only to complete this night, to keep the story out of the reach of the destroyers for a few more hours, and their witchery would turn, upon itself" (247).

Emo and his gang of destroyers tempt Tayo to come from behind the rocks. Tayo's former friend Harley is strung up on barbwire and tortured, for all that had been intended for Tayo was happening now to Harley, and Tayo watches, himself out of sight, sweaty hands gripping a screwdriver.

> He was certain his own sanity would be destroyed if he did not stop them and all the suffering and dying they caused—the people incinerated and exploded, and little children asleep on streets outside Gallup bars. He was not strong enough to stand by and watch any more" (252).

Tayo nearly runs from behind the rocks and thrusts the screwdriver into Emo's skull, but he stops himself, realizing, "The witchery had almost ended the story according to its plan." If he had killed Emo, "He would have been another victim, a drunk Indian war veteran settling an old feud" (253).

Tayo resists, and the witchery dissipates. He looks to the early morning sky: "In the west and in the south too, the clouds with round heavy bellies had gathered for the dawn" (255). With land and soul nourished, Tayo journeys home. He crosses a river and engages in a cathartic washing at sunrise: "we came out of this land and we are hers," he thinks, giving himself to mountain and desert (255).

Silko amalgamates Tayo's end with the mythic tale of Hummingbird and

Bluebottle-Fly who complete their quest and return to the fifth world bringing old Buzzard tobacco to purify the town. In the final pages, fertility is celebrated in the symbiosis of myth, story, and land: "The storm clouds returned/ the grass and plants started growing again./ There was food/ and the people were happy again" (256). Tayo's journey is complete. His spirit sanctified, he rediscovers Laguna traditions and is able to unlearn colonial conditioning—an influence of the destroyers. Tayo perceives a feminine universe with clear vision in the terms of his own culture. The ritual is thus closed. In the end, his interaction with Ts'eh is gracefully memorialized in the simple song: a final cadence on dawn,

Sunrise,
accept this offering,
Sunrise.

NOTES

1. From Patricia Clark Smith, "Earthly Relations, Carnal Knowledge: Southwestern American Indian Women Writers and Landscape" 120.

2. Foucault names the latter three of his unities as "A pedagogization of children's sex," "A socialization of procreative behavior," and "A psychiatrization of perverse pleasure." For his analysis of these, see *The History of Sexuality* 103-105.

3. For more on this see Kolodny's *The Land Before Her*, Chapter One, "Captives in Paradise" 21-27.

4. In *The Land Before Her*, Kolodny mentions that in Mary Rowlandson's narrative, the Indians, first described as 'hell-hounds,' gradually take on individual personalities. Subsequently, "Rowlandson manages to carve out an economic niche for herself with her knitting skills." She receives "extra food" and "special favor... in exchange for her stockings and caps" (18). In fact, Kolodny believes that it is not the Indians themselves who drive Rowlandson to desire her home; rather, it is the harshness of the land: "On her own, Rowlandson's narrative strongly hints, she could not survive. The landscape into which she has been taken is one she believes cannot sustain her and whose physical hardships might well destroy her" (19). We can see from her narrative that, though Rowlandson did not 'become native,' she did assimilate with the Indians to a certain extent.

CHAPTER III

THE ART OF REPRESENTATION

IN N. SCOTT MOMADAY'S *THE ANCIENT CHILD*

what syllable then can best convey
the ochre/umbers of that ground?
and choking dust that's interspaced
        with sunburst prism
        on window glass?

i swell with visions
erupting rocks and clouds
within my mind.
i know   this wilderness in my blood
and cannot sing it
into line.

        from "the Song the Dance the Poem"
        Carol Lee Sanchez (Laguna/Sioux)

COLLABORATION AND ALIENATION

David Murray opens his study *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing & Representation in North American Texts* (1991) with an intriguing analysis of a 1905 painting by Frederic Remington. The picture shows a meeting of whites and Indians gathered out in the open. Whether the different cultures meet to exchange goods, to sign a treaty, or to make peace, is unclear. However, the attention of all concerned is focused on the man standing in the center, who points at a younger man on horseback on the left of the painting. Remington's work is entitled *The Interpreter Waved at the Youth*. We learn from a story Remington includes beneath the picture that the man pointing is a mixed-blood, of Indian and European heritage, who serves as the interpreter in the scene.[1]

I open this chapter on N. Scott Momaday's *The Ancient Child* with attention to Remington's painting because the piece highlights several important themes in Momaday's novel. Whether Remington intended it or not, his story/image constructs an important link between language, art, and interpretation. The man in the center is a translator; language is his art. But, of course, the exchange is presented in iconographic language: we see the man only in lines and shapes. Visible below them is Remington's linguistic description, which defines a similar story for us in words.

The painting, as well as *The Ancient Child*, exemplify a collaboration of artistic disciplines that underscore new theories and a growing awareness of the relationship between art and language. The awareness first poses questions: What kind of artistic discipline is revealed when verbal language and pictorial representation are combined? Is it possible that words and images can reflect the same story? Do they work together to add a multi-dimensional dynamic to the narrative? Alternatively, can words and images, as different signifying practices, have a unifying theoretical base?

W. J. T. Mitchell's *Picture Theory* (1994) describes the emergence of theories concerning the art/language connection as "the pictorial turn"—a movement that explores the underlying codes and conventions manifest in nonlinguistic symbol systems. Recent theories of language, including Derrida's *Of Grammotology*, Mitchell tells us, "do not begin with the assumption that language is paradigmatic for meaning" (12). *The Ancient Child* fits Mitchell's pictorial turn insofar as Momaday's text serves as a "postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality" (Mitchell 16).

The Ancient Child gives us a cast of characters who participate in a kind of pictorial turn that also involves a turn to American Indian mythology. Grey, a young Indian woman, symbolically "points" and guides Locke Setman, a mixed-blood artist. His nickname, Set, is the Kiowa word for bear: he is a representation of Tsoai-talee, the mythic Kiowa youth who, while playing with his sisters, trembles, begins to run upon his hands and feet, and becomes a bear. He chases his seven sisters and, when

they arrive at a tree, climbs after them, but they are "borne into the sky, and become the stars of the Big Dipper" (*Rainy Mountain* 8). The tree grows into Devil's Tower, a striking mesa in northeast Wyoming.

The myth combines image with language by the simple fact that the story evokes certain literal/figurative visions: literally, we can see Devil's Tower and the Big Dipper in paintings, photographs, and reality. Figuratively, it is possible to visualize the picture of a boy becoming a bear from the language of the myth. But what does this language/image thicket mean in terms of Set?

Momaday describes this particular Kiowa creation myth as a response to the land in which the Kiowas live. "There are things in nature that engender an awful quiet in the heart of man," writes Momaday, "Devil's Tower is one of them... because they could not do otherwise, the Kiowas made a legend at the base of the rock" (*Rainy Mountain* 8).[2] The story, connected to the land, partly tells the Kiowas who they are; it is a link in the makeup of a culture. Set is removed from this ancestral landscape, removed from the link, and lost to himself. He needs myth, and Grey helps him to realize this.

Although Grey is not a spirit woman like *Ceremony's* Ts'eh, she guides Set to his own safety, just as Ts'eh helps to pull Tayo from his drunken postwar malaise. Catherine Rainwater observes references to pointing in *The Ancient Child* which help to solidify the importance image plays in the text. After her grandmother Kope'mah dies, Grey assumes the traditional role of medicine woman. She takes it upon herself to instruct Set in the ways of Kiowa tradition: "Kneeling, she [drew] lines on the red

earth, describing where she and her man must go" (260). Her map, carved in the dirt, points to Lukachukai in Navajo country, the location where Set and Grey begin a phase of their spiritual journey together. Rainwater notes that "Grey becomes for Set the one who guides and instructs. She teaches him to heed and interpret images—bear, centaur, and the like—that he, like she, encounters in dreams, imagination, and reality" (384).

Set must internalize these images because, like Tayo, he is alienated from his Indian heritage. Set is a mixed-blood estranged from his tribal roots through European acculturation. He was raised in an urban center by Bent Sandridge, his white stepfather, and he became aware of his Indianness through unclear memories of his parents. Set remembers certain stories his real father told, but they are decontextualized and stripped of their significance by Bent. Hence, he has no idea how to interpret them, or how to decode them in terms of the ideals and cultural information that the stories impart.

Set is thus ill while he lives in the white world: "there was a certain empty space, a longing for something" (45). He describes himself as a piece on a checkerboard, an isolated, merely material pawn of some larger, vaguely sensed, but unseen power. Like Tayo, Set is disoriented in European America. Because he was never immersed in American Indian traditions, he has no idea that a Kiowa myth portrays his unique identity. Through his penchant for art and painting, however, Set salvages a link, at least on a subconscious level, with his tribal roots.

Set believes that his life is imbued with a certain undefined power, and he

knows that part of that energy lies in his artistic awareness: "Art—drawing, painting—is an intelligence of some kind, the hand and eye bringing the imagination down upon the picture plane; and in this a nearly perfect understanding of the act of understanding" (132).

In a conversation with Charles Woodard, Momaday claims that Set's consciousness is emblematic of the "aesthetic perception" of the Indian, who is "sure to perceive an order in the objects he beholds, an arrangement that his native intelligence superimposes upon the world." Momaday believes that the Indian "sees with both his physical eye and the eye of his mind; he sees what is really there to be seen, including the aesthetic effect of his own observation upon the scene, the shadow of his own imagination" (*Ancestral Voices* 152). Throughout *The Ancient Child* Set learns how to see this way.

The "act of understanding" that Set considers (and Momaday defines) is his imaginative source for the representations he creates on canvas. Because Set is not fully in touch with the "shadow of his imagination," or the foundation of his artistic inspiration, he is divided from the roots of his imagination. Momaday might name this source one's "racial memory." This is an idea I will discuss in more detail below.

Representation is also paramount to Momaday. His literature explores the parameters of artistic representations by examining the ways that American Indians are encoded and decoded in the visual and verbal arts. *House Made of Dawn* initiated this search. This is a text that codifies Euro-American Indian representations and reveals the fundamental problems that occur when attempting to write about an Indian. For

instance, how can we truly understand Abel, the confused and alienated mixed-blood Walatowan who is the focus of *House Made of Dawn*, when he is presented to us in *written* language and in literary forms common to Western literature and tradition? Welch and Silko also struggle with this problem throughout their texts.

House Made of Dawn's Abel searches for his own cultural traditions which exist outside of these forms in an oral-based Navajo belief system. However, as readers, it seems inevitable that we will interpret Abel from the Western textual traditions that encapsulate his character. How can we interpret him otherwise?[3]

House Made of Dawn uses many forms and styles to expose this linguistic and literary dilemma. In the end we may never discover who Abel really is, but his problems of acculturation are discerned through the difficulties in representing him to the Western world.

The Ancient Child carries on the motifs Momaday begins in his early award-winning novel. However, the author extends his examination of Indian representation to include not only language and literary form, but also image. We are thus presented with a text that investigates the relationship between art and language. In addition, in *The Ancient Child* can be found a comparative analogy between the art/language and the myth/narrative relationships.

I place this discussion after *Fools Crow* and *Ceremony* because *The Ancient Child* offers a wide range of aesthetics that ties the three novels together. Perhaps the most obvious comparison is this: visual images are important aspects of *Fools Crow* and *Ceremony*. When Fools Crow visits Feather Woman, he 'sees' the tribe's future

painted on the yellow skins that the mythical woman dons. His is a future depicted in images, not words. *Ceremony's* Tayo is intrigued by the "patterns of storm clouds in white and gray" which decorate Ts'eh's hand-woven blanket (177). Soon after he observes the blanket, he looks into the sky and sees the stars, an image Silko captures by including a reprint of the stars Tayo sees on page 179.

Like *Fools Crow* and *Ceremony*, Momaday's most recent novel focuses on an alienated male Indian. The author's use of written language in *The Ancient Child* captures the essence of oral representation in myth; Welch does the same in *Fools Crow*.[4] However, Momaday suggests that the origin of oral myth exists in the icon, or image. The comparison extends to *Ceremony*: Momaday shows that iconographic representation is largely influenced by interaction with the landscape. Throughout the text, Set grows closer to internalizing these purer forms, or the origins of language and image. He does so by engaging in a spiritual reunion with land that was mythologized by his forefathers. We might say that Set begins to understand Momaday's theory that the origin of myth exists in image and landscape.

PURE FORMS OF ART AND LANGUAGE

What are pure forms of art and language? Are there pictures that exist entirely outside of language? Can language escape the power of image? This sort of purity, says Mitchell, is "both impossible and utopian" (*Picture Theory* 96). Purists define an image free of contamination "by language and cognate or conventionally associated media" as pure (96). Mitchell believes this is not possible because "visual representations routinely incorporate textuality in a quite literal way, insofar as writing and other arbitrary marks enter into the field of visual representation." Likewise, from the moment texts are printed in visible form, they "incorporate visuality" (94). Writing is itself an image.

How can *The Ancient Child* portray purer forms of art and language when the book is itself a written text? Indeed, it cannot exist outside of writing in order to convey its theories. "The medium of writing deconstructs the possibility of a pure image or pure text, along with the opposition between the 'literal' (letters) and the 'figurative' (pictures) on which it depends," suggests Mitchell; "writing, in its physical, graphic form, is an inseparable suturing of the visual and the verbal, the 'imagetext' incarnate" (95).

Mitchell believes that all arts are "composite" arts (both text and image) which combine "different codes, discursive conventions, channels, sensory and cognitive modes" (95). *The Ancient Child* is emblematic of this response in that it effects a collaboration between linguistic and pictorial codes and it draws on the conventions of

Indian mythology and Western language. Set is himself a perfect example of a contemporary artistic and realistic collaboration: he is a mixed-blood Indian, he is an artist, his persona is linked to an old and very visual Kiowa myth (a myth that includes visual landmarks), he lives as a Euro-American, and his story is written. However, this kind of spatial/cross-cultural collaboration confuses Set and makes it difficult for him to interact in the modern world. We might even say that the artistic collaboration that Momaday employs to convey Set's story in *The Ancient Child* disrupts the character's sense of self. In Momaday's mix of Western and Indian linguistic forms and his grouping together of art and language, Set wanders, looking for more direct means of self expression. He needs to simplify the intense composite of language and art that reveals his self to himself; it is imperative that he search out the purer forms, even if they are, as Mitchell believes, nonexistent in a contemporary world.

Momaday's vision of Set transforming into the bear may well be utopian. To be sure, the bear is a creature of utopian perfection for Set and Momaday. However, the entire process behind Set's transformation is one of collaboration: the images of a boy (or Set) becoming a bear are not understood without the accompanying myth. Because Momaday writes the myth for the readers on the first page of the novel we 'see' the words (as symbols) before we translate them into a linguistic code. We then visualize the images that the words represent. However, a case can also be made that we visualize after we read. If the concept of words as symbols is dropped, we then read language and subsequently visualize. The connection between language and

visualization is a tricky chicken-and-egg conundrum. Nevertheless, it is clear that Momaday attempts to consolidate words and images in *The Ancient Child*. How, then, do we reconcile the suturing of word, myth, and image if this blend confuses Set?

I suggest that Momaday constructs a theory that looks toward a purer form of collaboration: one that does not exist in the space of writing.[5] In other words, he combines notions of oral language and vision. Language spoken, as is the case with oral myth, need never be written and transferred to the printed page. Likewise, the concept of vision takes place in the mind's eye. While *The Ancient Child* very clearly occupies textual space, Momaday uses that space to develop a theory of what I will name non-textual spatiality, an artistic composite that begins and ends with oral myths and the imaginative visions they create. The definition of non-textual spatiality refers to the oral tradition that exists outside of the physical, material domain of the written word.[6] Although Momaday's text must perforce take up physical space with written language, this space gestures toward the purity of non-textual spatiality.

Why does Set need this aesthetic to help cure him? Why should he avoid the material and physical space of written language, why does the discipline of painting confuse one who is a painter himself? Theories elaborated upon in *Fools Crow* and *Ceremony* offer a convincing answer. The space occupied by written language, as we have seen in *Fools Crow*, is replete with Euro-American "academic power and control over tribal images," (see above 35). Written, there are timelines, studies, hypotheses, the obsessive drive to measure, calculate, and research. In American literature there is

a rich tradition of words that project exotic images of American Indians. Martin's conceptual 'spectrophotometer' (see above 36) fills the space to form a spatial aesthetic that controls Set, which tells him who he is. It writes him away from his culture. Painted, or drawn in the space of canvas, are the images Annette Kolodny associates with a colonial rape of the land (see above 61). Set attempts to work around these influences as he paints and interacts, but they prove strong. He has difficulty competing with the society that creates material space which, among other things, defines Indians. Set's illness, which leads to a nervous breakdown, is a result of outside pressures and oppositions projected by Euro-American society (*The Ancient Child* 241). For Set, the avenue of cure is an abstract realm that remains unaffected by the stereotypes perpetuated in writing and paint—a utopia, if you will. This idea of a place that exists outside of writing and print begins with myth; in the case of *The Ancient Child*, it begins with the boy/bear myth.

The epigraph to *The Ancient Child* is a quote from Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges which reads "For myth is at the beginning of literature, and also at its end." In a sense the novel fulfills this equation. It begins with a retelling of a Kiowa myth in which Tsoai-talee becomes a bear. Momaday also tells this myth in *House Made of Dawn* and in his book of Kiowa mythology, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. In its final pages, *The Ancient Child* shows Set in the midst of his transformation.

The text moves in the direction of myth, and Set moves with it throughout. Momaday comments on this movement in an interview with Gaetano Prampolini:

> The way I take that quotation from Borges is that one cannot finally escape myth. It is encompassing, all encompassing. It is at the beginning of literature; *literature begins somewhere back in mythology and finally it is there at the end as well* (emphasis mine, 197).

In his essay "The Native American Voice in American Literature," Momaday speculates upon a related origin of literature:

> If writing means visible constructions within a framework of alphabets, it is not more than six or seven thousand years old.... Language, and in it the formation of that cultural record which is literature, is immeasurably older. *Oral tradition is the foundation of literature* (emphasis mine, 14).

If we compress these ideas, it is clear that Momaday believes myth and the oral tradition are 'the foundation of literature.' But the author also has an interest in the origin of myth and orality: he proposes that both are inextricably linked to his concept of vision, or to seeing with the mind's eye.

In "The Native American Voice in American Literature," Momaday clarifies this idea with his impression of an early man's relationship to the land and visual art:

> Imagine: somewhere in the prehistoric distance a man holds up in his hand a crude instrument—a brand, perhaps, or something like a daub or a broom bearing pigment—and fixes the wonderful image in his mind's eye to a wall or rock. In that instant is accomplished really and symbolically the advent of art. That man, apart from his remarkable creation, is all but impossible to recall, and yet he is there in our human parentage, *deep in our racial memory*. In our modern, sophisticated terms, he is primitive and preliterate, and in the long reach of time he is utterly without distinction, except: he draws.... For all the stories of all the world

> proceed from the moment in which he makes his mark. All literatures issue from his hand (emphasis mine, 13).

This ancient painter's source of inspiration is his internal, life-blood visions. Stories and language also emanate from visions such as this one.

The Ancient Child uses language as a tool which mimics the process by which vision is presented to the mind's eye. Its section titles—"Planes," "Lines," "Shapes," and "Shadows"—are the linguistic instruments the author manipulates to represent a character whom we can 'see' moving, almost in a three-dimensional realm, from an "incomplete" to a complete "idea of himself" (52). As Set begins to understand the shadow of his imagination, Momaday manipulates the reader's eye to see Set realize himself in his visions. These emanate from his 'racial memory,' a part of spirit that Momaday believes helps to form a fully dimensional concept of self.

Catherine Rainwater observes that *House Made of Dawn's* Abel 'remembers' scenes of water, some of which have actually occurred in his life and some of which "have happened to him on a spiritual plane as the embodiment of 'Born for Water,' Younger Brother of the Stricken Twins." (388). For Abel, no healing is possible until he incorporates these images into his own identity. Until he understands the dual knowledge of self and self as a product of myth and cultural tradition, Abel's spirit is confused.

Likewise, Set is attracted to images of bears from his early childhood, even during his time spent at a Roman Catholic orphanage. Before he learns the story of the Seven Sisters and the "boy bear" (who spiritually inhabits him), Set seizes upon

these images and reproduces them in some of his paintings. His inner visions are derived from a 'racial memory' that defines himself in spite of academic history and "broad-band spectrophotometers."

For instance, his *Venture Beyond Time* visually depicts the "deepest part of [himself he] had imagined" (161). According to Set, the painting gives the impression of a "horseman passing from time into timelessness" (159), however, the painting may also be a graphic representation of the ending of Momaday's novel—a prescient production by an artist who 'feels,' but does not yet know what the future brings for him.

Alais Sancerre, the woman who purchases *Venture Beyond Time*, compares the painting to Kafka's piece in "Meditation" entitled *The Wish To Be a Red Indian*. This is a brief description of one's wish to be an Indian who does not simply ride a horse, but who blends with and becomes part of the horse. Sancerre also mentions Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, in what is clearly an internal reference to the plot of *The Ancient Child*. Kafka's very visual and surreal modernist forms often touch on the theme of man-becoming-animal. Kafka's words create a surreal language that experiments with images and even warns about the power of images, a concept that *The Ancient Child* also points toward.

Image dominance is also part of Mitchell's pictorial turn. Momaday's story about Set's bear transformation is a postmodern text written during the era of video and the age of electronic reproduction—a time when "new forms of visual simulation and illusionism" possess "unprecedented powers" (Mitchell 15). Mitchell writes of a

modern culture anxious over the seemingly global dominance of images:

> The fantasy of a pictorial turn... has now become a real technical possibility on a global scale.... CNN has shown us that a supposedly alert, educated population (for instance, the American electorate) can witness the mass destruction of an Arab nation as little more than a spectacular television melodrama, complete with a simple narrative of good triumphing over evil and a rapid erasure from public memory (15).

We might say that there is a certain politicization behind these video images. In the same way that academic history attempts to write the story of Indians on a brief page in the history of westward colonial expansion (see above 35, 36), modern images flashed on the screen give us similar stories rife with politically biased interpretations and implications.

Set operates within this global culture, often creating paintings for a public eye rather than his own. His agent, Jason, presses him to paint the images that others feel compelled to purchase, paintings similar to a neatly packaged television melodrama. When he tells Set not to get daring in his art—"it's not the time for disturbing them.... We'll disturb them later when we're famous" (106)—Jason plays into the power of image dominance. He desires that Set paint what the public eye craves, what they wish to see, purchase, and display in houses and museums. Disturbing them means painting images that merit no exchange value in terms of public appeal. Set's 'racial memory' pushes him toward the deep and somewhat refreshing images of his ancestry. These are reflections of the deepest part of his soul, not impressions flashed upon a

screen through electronic imaging. For Set, the pure form of the bear epitomizes his reluctance to participate in modern society's movement toward the mass politicization of images.

AMERICAN MYTH VERSUS INDIAN MYTH

As stages of narrative development, the words "Planes," "Lines," "Shapes," and "Shadows" not only define Set's development, but they also serve as references to the author's personal identity and to his own visual art. Momaday's self-portraits are somewhat similar to the images in *Venture Beyond Time*. They suggest the emergence of personal identity from a "black infinity," a space informed only by the mysterious 'racial memory' of which he speaks in "The Native Voice in American Literature."[7]

In his *Self Portrait with Leaves*, Momaday reproduces himself as a bear. The graphite etching shows a bear running toward the viewer. The left side of the bear's head appears as if a human head emerges, though we cannot be sure. It seems that the bear may be turning into a man, though it could depict the opposite process—the case with Set. Similarly, in *Set-angria*, Momaday etches his own face over the shadowy image of Sitting Bear.[8]

Its section titles make *The Ancient Child* a linguistic model of a visual icon inside of which we see intertextual and further iconographic references. Clearly,

Momaday places himself inside the icon in an autobiographical connection to his main character. As Rainwater suggests, "By writing, drawing, and painting, Momaday has invented himself as the bear in response to an inner vision, an 'idea' that he has about himself as an Indian" (389).

But we also see Grey inside the image. As a young viewer of art, Grey holds naïve notions about art and Indians. She models herself after pieces of art such as the Indian dolls she sees in museums, and when she writes in her journal, she characterizes herself as a blend of fictional conventions, including the descriptions she reads of Indian women popular in the Cooperesque tradition:

> I am a bonny lass. I have enjoyed eighteen wondrous summers, all of them in the vastness of the wilderness, which is my incomparable element. I am tall and limber and well formed. My mind is clear. I am as trim and graceful as a doe, and I am free of the strictures of "civilization," so-called. I have dark, lustrous hair, gathered becomingly behind my shell-like ears, sparkling green eyes, an aquiline nose, a small, shapely, delicate mouth like a Cupid's bow, and a whole, symmetrical, and lovely face. My profile is comely and well defined, classical. My skin is olive and translucent, and my bearing is graceful and dignified. My unpretentious attire is altogether appropriate. It consists of a chamois sheath, with leggings beautifully made by hand, and a tunic, woven of wolf's hair, similar to garments worn by kings and queens of yore. My small alabaster feet are encased in tiny moccasins, elaborately decorated with bright beads, and a string of iridescent shells encircles my long, curved, unblemished throat (18-19).

Grey's rather clichéd imagery reveals a variety of texts and stereotypes that have shaped her own perceptions—images which also highlight the cross-culturalization that inevitably occurs when *writing* about American Indians. In Grey's self-description,

Momaday parodies his own language and thematics: his knowledge and art, he shows us, is shaped by Western culture as much as they are by the various Indian cultures he represents in his literature and poetry. He could not write *The Ancient Child* without Western aesthetics complicating his vision.

Through Grey, Momaday also parodies postmodernism. "The cliché is that [postmodernism] is an epoch of the absorption of all language into images and 'simulacra,' a semiotic hall of mirrors," writes Mitchell (*Picture Theory* 28). Grey's self-description gives us a consortium of images, but they are common Euro-American image-stereotypes of Indians. In discussing herself, Grey tacitly points to Euro-America's inability to escape the images of Indians it creates. Similar to the 'spectrophotometer,' these images define Indians.

For instance, Grey's 'dark, lustrous hair,' her 'chamois sheath,' her 'tunic, woven of wolf's hair,' and her 'tiny moccasins' create the visual specter of Pocahontas, a persona most recently portrayed in a Disney animated film. This film represents an example of the kind of collaborative medium that creates anxiety concerning the globalization of image. Like CNN, film is a medium where "political, institutional, and social antagonisms play themselves out in the materiality of representation" (*Picture Theory* 91). *Pocahontas* (1996), the movie, combines language and music[9] with a series of animated cartoon pictures to reveal deep American stereotypes. Immortalized in American culture, Pocahontas supposedly helped to rescue John Smith from Chief Powhatan, though as fact this is inconclusive. Her story falls into the category of American myth. The Disney movie secures it as such. Although it

appears politically correct with its portrayals of the evil Captain Radcliffe unearthing the New World in his relentless search for gold, the story is about the capture and rescue of John Smith. As viewers, we are led to believe that John Smith's life is paramount to the future of America; thus, the possibility of his death is the overriding concern. When two Indians are killed, their deaths seem peripheral to the story; they are not characterized as being as important as a living John Smith. Pocahontas helps to rescue John Smith, so she plays a fundamental role in perpetuating the early tales of American frontier mythology. Grey is a surface image of Pocahontas, and she acts very much like Disney's Pocahontas in the beginning of the novel. However, toward the end she accomplishes exactly what Pocahontas does not (at least in Disney's rendition): she rescues Set from a Euro-American culture that creates and cherishes images like that of Pocahontas.

This is not to say that Grey is not influenced by American mythology. From the beginning of the text she has an obsession for Billy the Kid, the American frontier 'living legend.'[10] Her attraction toward him reveals the extent to which Grey is herself under the spell of the spaces carved out by Euro-American cultural myths. Grey holds a youthful fascination for Billy. In a counternarrative to Set's story, she frequently interacts with Billy in her imaginative vision quests. Grey's visions of the American legend are another reference to Momaday's own Western influences, "I fantasized as a boy that I rode with Billy the Kid and what a wonderful thing that was," he says in an interview with Dagmar Weiler.

When Grey is on the verge of womanhood she writes an elegy, a farewell to

the "hero of her girlhood." Her memorial is a collection of short prose and poetry that canonizes the American frontier legend. She names the work "The Strange and True Story of My Life with Billy the Kid" (175). Momaday includes the same collection (with the same title) as his own in his recent *In the Presence of the Sun*, a work which includes Momaday's poetry, prose, and painting.

Grey's counternarrative with Billy becomes most significant when, early in the novel, she is raped by a white man, her lover's father. Jolted from a vision of making love with Billy the Kid, she awakens to the realization of being brutalized:

> In this unspeakable happening she was forced for the first time to a hatred of the world, of herself, of life itself.... In some feeble resistance she thought of Dog [her horse], of how Dog would trample into dust the flesh and bones of this despicable, vicious man (97).

This assault becomes the catalyst for Grey's development into a medicine woman. The various identities she assembles as the blended fictional and iconographic representation of herself merge into one distinct identity after the rape.

Mirroring Tayo's confrontation with the destroyers in *Ceremony* and Set's total disintegration of self, Grey's rape is a moment of transgression which blurs the boundaries with the once multi-faceted impression she has of herself. In the same way that Set discovers that he can no longer divide and compartmentalize the disparate aspects of his life, Grey's dream vision—her participation in American frontier mythology—is shattered by her waking life. Karen Wallace observes in "Liminality and Myth in Native American Fiction" that it is from the crisis of Grey's rape that she

perceives and finally accepts her powers as a medicine woman. Indeed, not until she commits herself totally to her Indian heritage can she accept the responsibilities that come with healing others.

Once she comes to terms with the devastating circumstances of her rape, visions of a feminine landscape finally sustain Grey and reconfirm her power: "Then, still naked, she rode the horse Dog hard to the river and bathed herself for a long time. There was an orange moon. There was the voice of the grandmother on the water" (101).

But why does Momaday use rape as a threshold image for Grey? To say the least, this is a bizarre, disturbing nexus. Would it be correct to say that Grey has been violated by Euro-American myths? Her entire life up to the point of the rape is dominated by the images of frontier myth, visions of Billy the Kid, and active participation in the stories that make up modern Euro-American society. Until the rape, she resembles Disney's Pocahontas insofar as she acts as an agent who unwittingly engages in the stories that define Euro-American culture. In her visions, she becomes part of these stories, even rescuing Billy the Kid, just as Pocahontas rescues John Smith. We might say that frontier myths take possession of her and attempt to make of her an inside agent who redefines the world in Euro-American, colonial terms. This is a kind of metaphorical rape that subtly exploits her, violates her culture, and denies her the right to participate exclusively in her own Indian myths. Grey's literal rape is a powerful image which may reveal to her that she has been defiled by Euro-American transgressions all along.

After she composes the work which bids farewell to her active participation in American frontier mythology (her elegy to Billy the Kid), Grey becomes deeply enmeshed in her own native traditions. This is most noticeable in a replacement of her fantasies of Billy the Kid with dream visions involving the landscape of her ancestral home:

> She dreamed of Lukachukai, "place of the reeds bending eastward," of the red cliffs there and of the night sky, so brilliant it had never faded in her memory, which challenged even *diné bizaad*, the Navajo language. The many words and names, all the rich sounds and silences, the shades of meaning, all the images and abstractions, the rhythms and melodies and harmonies, all the aspects of given objects—color, size, feel, shape, taste, age, power, *being*—which in *diné bizaad* are precise beyond the precision of other languages, were reduced to simplicity in the presence of the stars over Lukachukai (245).

A non-textual, unwritten space that combines language and image is most noticeable in Grey's description of the Navajo language: it does not exist in the space of pages. Yet, for Grey its words contain images, rhythms, and even music. *Diné bizaad* is a diachronic and synchronic mode of aesthetic representation. It may help to imagine that its form is like that of an orchestral score. The language conveys meaning like the notes of a score are meaningful to the conductor and musicians. But it also combines different aesthetic instruments to evoke meaning, just as a score contains the notes of individual musical instruments. There is a major difference: a score occupies textual space. *Diné bizaad* combines melody, harmony, rhythm, image, and orality to enhance meaning without doing so. The language exists in the

ephemeral sphere of pure sound; Grey understands this language as simple compared to the land that surrounds her.

A QUESTION OF REPRESENTATION

Grey contemplates the expanse of land and reflects upon the simplicity of language as an artistic representation, a model, of her surrounding landscape. As Set's guide and mentor throughout his initiation into tribal life, Grey directs Set to appreciate the surrounding landscape, the land where his familial roots exist.

He begins to paint at Lukachukai, but his style changes significantly from his earlier productions. He dwells on light and shadows, and mirrors the shifting colors he sees at Lukachukai. His paintings become "strong and simple, primary, like those of a child. He listened to the wind and the birds and thunder rolling on the cliffs" (291). He looks to the sky "in which light played upon plane after plane to infinity—glancing motes and streaks and facets of the sun" (291). The mix of shadow and color reconfigures Set's idea of artistry. He interprets the deep blue honestly; he paints as the eye of his imagination sees the sky.

Set's style changes at Lukachukai, until he begins to depict his surroundings in the way that his early art instructor, Cole Blessing, taught him years before: "You can *affirm* what is there," Blessing tells Set,

> You can look at this model, and you can look again, and you can keep on looking until you have seen her more clearly and completely than you have ever seen anything before, and then you can—maybe—conform your hand to your eye in such a way as to affirm her being on the picture plane. You can—maybe—describe a shadow that is worthy of the substance (55).

As Set paints, he imagines his own identity. He creates a picture of himself discovered in the images he sees at Lukachukai. Through truthful and simple renderings of his immediate surroundings, Set journeys to the origin of myth and language—his own inner vision. He affirms what is there, and in the process he acknowledges Momaday's deepest convictions about language, art, myth, and landscape:

> In the natural order man invests himself in the landscape and at the same time incorporates the landscape into his own most fundamental experience. This trust is sacred. The process of investment and appropriation is, I believe, preeminently a function of the imagination. It is accomplished by means of an act of the imagination that is especially ethical in kind. We are what we imagine ourselves to be. The Native American is someone who thinks of himself, imagines himself in a particular way. By virtue of his experience, his idea of himself comprehends his relationship to the land ("A First American Views his Land" 39).

Momaday's icons, and his stories about the relationship of language and art as aesthetic forms, contain a story, or a fragment of a story, like Remington's *The Interpreter Waved at the Youth*. The reader must interpolate these images into the ongoing story of Set and Grey. Like the two main characters, the reader has to look

for patterns that the images presented compose. The reader can 'look' at Momaday's fiction as well as read it, just as Grey and Set 'see' into their surrounding landscape and perceive through vision and dream quest.

Momaday believes that to resist the images that are passed on through one's 'racial memory' will bring spiritual and physical illness. If they are incorporated into one's experience, however, they can lead to spiritual and intellectual paths of knowledge. With Grey as his guide, Set learns to use and understand his own painted images which move him along a path of mythology to spiritual wellness.

As previously noted, representation is Momaday's key concern. *House Made of Dawn* is an amalgamation of European and Indian myths and stories and a synthesis of elaborate structures which encapsulate them. This novel uses writing to relay these tales, *not in order to describe the world of the Indian, but to signify the type of world in which many Indians live.*

Though *The Ancient Child* grapples with the notion of inner vision, it also manipulates the reader's vision: the reader sees certain images that Momaday describes. From Mitchell's theories, we know that image and text are linked. Considering this, it is important to ask how Momaday brings about a collaboration of image and text within the pages of this novel. By utilizing forms similar to those employed in *House Made of Dawn*, *The Ancient Child* asks an important question: how does Momaday's text represent its images to the reader through written language?[11]

Artistic imitation and its relationship to language is the key issue theorist

Nelson Goodman explores in his *Languages of Art* (1968). Goodman ties words and images together by asking another question: "What does pictorial denotation have in common with, and how does it differ from, verbal or diagrammatic denotation?" (5). His answer is that pictures are "syntactically and semantically 'continuous,' while the text employs a set of symbols that are 'disjunct,' constituted by gaps that are without significance."[12]

In *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (1986), Mitchell clarifies Goodman's differentiation by calling language a system with a 'finite' number of characters; "the gaps between them are empty." On the other hand, a dense (or visual) system contains "an infinite number of marks with no absences like those present in verbal constructions"(68).

Momaday presents his own verbal/visual philosophy in *The Ancient Child.* His is a point of view which sees image as the basis for semantic and syntactic representation. It might read thus: from the imagination grow images that are painted; these become the stories remembered and retold through verbal art. Language conveyed in words is thus a continuation of artistic representation. These stories and images bear a fundamental relationship to the landscape.[13]

Mitchell reasons along similar lines in the introduction to *The Language of Images* (1974): "verbal language [is] a system informed by images, literally in the graphic character of writing systems or 'visible language,' figuratively in the penetration of verbal languages and metalanguages by concerns for patterning, presentation, and representation" (3).

Momaday's montage of words and art raises an important question that theorists pose. "Language works with arbitrary, conventional signs," writes Mitchell, "images with natural universal signs. Language unfolds in temporal succession; images reside in a realm of timeless spatiality and simultaneity" (3). The question is this: is it possible to make such a collaboration as Momaday does with fundamentally *different* modes of expression?

Nelson Goodman's answer is no:

> Some have proposed that the way the world is could be arrived at by conjoining all the several ways. This overlooks the fact that conjunction itself is peculiar to certain systems; for example, we cannot conjoin a paragraph and picture. And any attempted combination of all the ways would be itself only one—and a peculiarly indigestible one—of the way the world is (6).

However, Goodman's reasoning poses questions of itself. For instance, what is the way the world is? Just as many artists will represent the same object in different ways, the world is perceived differently by different cultures and peoples. Goodman, an astute theorist and critic, makes this very point:

> The eye comes always ancient to its work, obsessed by its own past and by old and new insinuations of the ear, nose, tongue, fingers, heart, and brain. It functions not as an instrument self-powered and alone, but as a dutiful member of a complex and capricious organism" (7).

Within the organism, Momaday would include his ancestors and his tribe in the present and past, all of whom make up an idea of the way their world is seen and

depicted. His productions may be conjunctions, amalgamations, or a new unique form of artistic representation. However we define it, Momaday's work reaches into his tribal past.

For Kiowa culture, visual art is a tradition that is especially close to Momaday:

> My father was a painter, and I watched him paint as I was growing up. He belonged to that tradition of Plains Indian art which proceeds from rock paintings to hide paintings to ledgerbook drawings to modern art, so called.... As he matured his work became mythical and abstract, moored to story and visions.... I observed him at work. I learned to see the wonderful things in his mind's eye, how they were translated into images on the picture plane (*In the Presence of the Sun* xix).

Momaday, like all writers, brings his own eye to his stories. For him, language must necessarily fuse descriptions of image with verbal text. In a multi-medium capacity Momaday represents himself and his culture in his own aesthetic terms until image fills the vague interstices left by words alone.[14] His own art fills the void between language and art. However, Set's mission is not the same as Momaday's in the end of his story.

The end shows Set symbolically evaporating into non-textual space, or the empty spaces which written language leaves. We are led to believe that Set tranforms into a bear, though the actual transformation is inconclusive. The reader sees Set running, becoming a representation of his own senses: "it was as if he could detect each and every vibration of sound in the whole range of his hearing.... He could smell a thousand things at once and perceive them individually" (313). Here Set is seduced

by the three-dimensionality of sound; it is everywhere, yet nowhere, like the deep tones of *diné bizaad* that captivate Grey. His sense of smell grows acute, highlighting his appeal for another sense outside that which exists on pages or canvases. Finally, Set is incorporated into shadows that form the very core of his existence: "He moved on, a shadow receding into shadows" (314).

In a recent interview, Momaday says that the substance in painting and writing is often less important than the shadow of the reflection. "You have a core of reality and then a circumference of appearance," Momaday insists, "and that's what the writer works with, as well as the painter.... Shadows are frequently more interesting, and more engaging, and more meaningful than is the substance" (Prampolini 198). We see Set's circumference of appearance in the end—shadows: images as elusive and intangible as the senses of sound and smell.

The shadows that envelope Set's being allow him to become his imagination. Oral myth redefines him. Immersed in a world of sound, smell, and imagination, Set vanishes from the words upon the page. Yet, paradoxically, he appears in the world of myth and inner vision. He is transformed from an emblem in writing into what Momaday sees as the purer collaborative form of art and language.

NOTES

1. Remington's story is named "The Way of an Indian." This story and the painting can be found in *Cosmopolitan Magazine* (1905); 40(2):125-35

2. Momaday's complete description of Devil's Tower in *The Way to Rainy Mountain* follows thus: "A dark mist lay over the Black Hills, and the land was like iron. At the top of the ridge I caught sight of Devil's Tower upthrust against the gray sky as if in the birth of time the core of the earth had broken through its crust and the motion of the world was begun. There are things in nature that engender an awful quiet in the heart of man; Devil's Tower is one of them. Two centuries ago, because they could not do otherwise, the Kiowas made a legend at the base of the rock" (8).

The legend is the boy/bear myth that Momaday retells following his description of Devil's Tower: "Eight children were there at play, seven sisters and their brother. Suddenly the boy was struck dumb; he trembled and began to run upon his hands and feet. His fingers became claws, and his body was covered with fur. Directly there was a bear where the boy had been. The sisters were terrified; they ran, and the bear after them. They came to the stump of a great tree, and the tree spoke to them. It bade them climb upon it, and as they did so it began to rise into the air. The bear came to kill them, but they were just beyond its reach. It reared against the tree and scored the bark all around with its claws. The seven sisters were borne into the sky, and they became the stars of the Big Dipper" (8).

3. *Fools Crow* and *Ceremony* also grapple with this problem; however, more than Welch or Silko, Momaday suggests that language as a means of Indian representation is problematic. In "Cultural Difference and the Problem of Form in N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*," I argue that the book—an art form which chronicles stories, events, and data in writing—is itself an unsuitable medium to represent one who attempts to operate outside the influences of this artistic form. Perhaps for this reason, Momaday focuses on the importance of image in *The Ancient Child*.

4. For a description of this process, see Chapter I 30-33.

5. Momaday's use of written words to describe a purely oral language is similar to Welch's use of written language to restore the oral language of his ancestors (see Chapter I 33).

6. There are numerous critical and theoretical studies that discuss the spatiality of both fictional and non-fictional texts. Carl Darryl Malmgren writes in *Fictional Space in the Modernist and Postmodernist American Novel* that "Inscribing a narrative text constitutes a spatial act in at least three senses.... a text occupies a material space, the text of spatiality. A text displaces so much physical space, consists of so many pages, which in turn are filled up with sentences, which are composed of words that occupy their grammatically prescribed places. The book has an existence as a total object.... Second, there is the imaginal space projected by the unfolding fictional world, the terrain 'excavated' by the representative function of fictional signs. This is the space that the reader must 'concretize' or 'actualize' in the process of decoding the text. And, third, the fictional world itself evokes an interpretive space as its signifieds become second-level signifiers of a totalized reading of (extratextual) reality" (26). All three senses of Malmgren's definition of fictional space stem from the material space carved out by the written word.

What I mean by 'non-textual spatiality' is the phenomenon of oral language that occupies no textual space, or that exists outside the material printed page. In pictorial arts (and here perhaps the term should be adapted to non-painted space), the term, in Set's case, applies to the visualizations that take place within his imagination, not the paintings and/or electronic reproductions that are influenced by Western aesthetics, and Western conceptions and theories of art. This 'non-textual spatiality' is itself a kind of space which we might call the imagination, or the space of the soul. In fact, one might argue

that imagination is the very space from which all authors create and envision what eventually becomes fictional space. However, I believe that in modern society, with such a vast canon of literature and writing on all subjects, it is difficult to operate in a world that is not, in some way, connected to textual influences (for more on this see Ong's theories which I discuss in Chapter I 31).

In his own fictional space, Momaday attempts to show Set descending into a world that is not influenced by the literate mind. By the end of the novel, Set moves within a kind of imaginary space that is indeed influenced by Indian perceptions of land and Indian 'racial memories,' (for more on Momaday's concept of 'racial memory' see pages 93-95) but not texts.

In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard explores the connection between space and the imagination. He poses questions in the introduction that are applicable to the ideas I elaborate upon in *The Ancient Child*: "How can an image, at times very unusual, appear to be a concentration of the entire psyche? How—with no preparation—can this singular, short-lived event constituted by the appearance of an unusual poetic image, react on other minds and in other hearts, despite all the barriers of common sense, all the disciplined schools of thought, content in their immobility?" (xix).

Bachelard goes on to discuss the imagination as part of cultural and psychic space. He compares consciousness (including the unconscious) to a house to explain this concept. Bachelard's theories are similar to Jung's notion of the collective unconscious and to Momaday's own concept of 'racial memory': "An entire past comes to dwell in a new house.... And the daydream deepens to the point where an immemorial domain opens up for the dreamer of a home beyond man's earliest memory.... In this remote region, memory and imagination remain associated, each one working for their mutual deepening. In the order of values, they both constitute a community of memory and image" (5).

I refer to Set's need for non-textual language and art because his psychic and cultural imagination is trapped inside 'the house' of Western memories and images. Indeed, Western writing and painting influence his spiritual development. His location within Euro-American ideology inhibits his own painting and places restrictions on his imagination because Western ideology is not contained within the deepest part of his soul. Non-textual spatiality is a part of the imaginative space of the Indian culture that he seeks. For example, the oral boy/bear myth and the bear images in his racial memory provide a direct link to his own cultural home. On the other hand, European written language and European art are both one step removed from the Indian cultural aesthetics to which he is drawn throughout the novel.

Another way to characterize Set is to say that he needs to discover the cultural space that is relevant to his own heritage and past. As I write in the chapter (110), Set is searching for the "shadow of his imagination." He first needs to shed, or decolonize, the house of an artificial heritage—Euro-American traditions that leave him alienated because his roots do not exist there. Once Set successfully departs from the channels of Western aesthetics, he is free to internalize and familiarize himself with the imaginary space of his own cultural roots.

Indeed, once he internalizes the boy/bear myth (or once he realizes that this myth is deeply embedded in his consciousness) and the space of his Indian cultural memories develops, his journey within and into the interior space of his soul grows extensive. We might say that by the end of the novel, when it appears that Set has transformed into the bear, Set operates entirely in the realm of this interior space. Momaday's use of the words "Planes," "Lines," "Shapes," and "Shadows" creates for the reader a spatial model of the psychic space toward which Set moves. In order to get there he needs to internalize and incorporate into his psychic inner space the non-textual language and unpainted images that he sees in his racial memories.

For an extensive discussion of internal and external space in literature and poetry, see Bachelard, Chapter 9, "The Dialectics of Inside and Outside."

7. Rainwater discusses the theme of autobiography in *The Ancient Child* in more detail.

8. The paintings I discuss here can be viewed in Momaday's *In the Presence of the Sun*.

9. For a discussion of the connection between language, music, and aesthetics, see Goodman, *The Languages of Art*, or Mitchell, *Picture Theory*.

10. For a discussion of American frontier "living legends," see Slotkin's *Regeneration Through Violence*.

11. Here I discuss Momaday's use of textual spatiality and his collaboration of image and written word. Unlike his character, Set, who enters a non-textual world, Momaday must use textual space to reveal Set. My observations in this section concern Momaday's textuality and not Set's world of non-textuality, which I discuss earlier in the chapter.

12. This is Mitchell's description of Goodman's philosophy. See his *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, 68.

13. Among the authors I discuss in this dissertation, it is believed that the landscape has had a fundamental influence in creating their cultural traditions. However, it could be that based on their cultural traditions, these authors and their ancestors create the landscape through their reflections and representations of it.

14. In his "When Artifacts Speak, What Can They Tell Us?" Paul Zolbrod notes that visual representation is also incomplete without verbal description: "Imagine looking at the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel without knowing the Bible. Imagine being unfamiliar with the Gospels and seeing a Madonna by Raphael. Visual splendor is incomplete without the use of language, whether spoken, sung, or written.... We profess to admire Native American art by placing it in museums.... But we persist in knowing too little about Native American artifacts and the poetry that supplements them" (15).

Momaday's is an art that tries to smooth out the gaps left by both art and writing.

CONCLUSION

THOUGHTS ON INDIAN/WHITE RELATIONS

The old people used to tell us that when the end of the earth is coming all the water will begin to dry up. For a long time there will be no rain.

There will be only a few places, about three places, where there will be springs. At those three places the water will be dammed up and all the people will come in to those places and start fighting over the water.

That's what old Nani used to tell us. Those old Indians found out somehow, I don't know how. And the way it looks, I believe it is the truth.

Many old Chiricahua used to tell the same story. They say that in this way most of the people will kill each other off. Maybe there will be a few good people left.

When the new world comes after that the white people will be Indians and the Indians will be white people.

Anonymous (Apache)

Throughout this project, I have attempted to search out the truths that contemporary American Indian literature reveals about American society. In reviewing the material that precedes these concluding words, perhaps the most revealing truth of all concerns a form of captivity.

The way American Indian authors perceive the world, the way the Indian characters I study here come to terms with alienation, and the preservation of culture that is evident in modern Indian literature interested me from the start. However, the theories and ideas in this project and my own perception of American Indian culture may be yet another form of subtle captivity. Do I compartmentalize Indian experience to the extent that I place restrictions upon it? Are my own theories and the theories I borrow from others—others who are, to a large extent, European thinkers—sufficient to convey American Indian experience? If truth is the goal, these questions must be asked.

All areas of this study have broadened my perceptions of modern American and American Indian cultures. Themes of alienation and American Indian literature as Post-Colonial literature were the initial seeds. The research presented here ultimately reflects conceptual areas which for me were previously unexplored. I have attempted to look at culture from both sides of the colonial fence, but in writing down these

ideas am I not accomplishing the same dubious feat as those early European explorers, men who stumbled upon the New World and subsequently conquered Indians in order to pursue their own adventures in what they considered a palace of green frontiers? In my research, speculations, and literary efforts, do I not place Indian experience within the "larger panorama of Anglo-American performance and achievement in North America" (see above 35)?

Just as Fools Crow, Tayo, and Set discover creative paths to access their cultures, it seems that a final truth in this essay presents itself thus: the author cannot escape his own culture. Indeed, this project might be read as a subtle form of colonial conquest.

For a moment I would like to reconsider *Black Elk Speaks*.

In the Introduction, I speak at length about Black Elk and his story as a form of myth. However, we must not forget that what Black Elk relates through Neihardt is, first of all, translated. A large collaborative team was involved in making it the text that it is today. We must also remember that Neihardt recorded the thoughts and reminiscences over a two-year period (Couser 192). Neihardt, for his purposes, necessarily severed and edited out certain details of Black Elk's life. He likewise included only those aspects that he considered fitting for the story that he, Neihardt, wanted to convey. Neihardt ends the telling at the point of the Wounded Knee Massacre, but Black Elk had lived only half of his life up to that point.

Neihardt neglects to tell us that Black Elk "became a Roman Catholic early in this century" and "served as a catechist and missionary to other Sioux for a period of

decades thereafter" (Couser 200). Church pamphlets "prominently displayed pictures of him, dressed in tribal clothing, giving religious instructions to his daughter" (200). Neihardt neglects to mention the various "Indian shows" in which Black Elk participated, including Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show, a show that brought the world of cowboys and Indians to curious Europeans. Buffalo Bill's show and others like it portrayed Indians as cultural novelty pieces who could function only in the shadow of Western progress. Couser tells us that

> after Black Elk's death, Neihardt became a medium in a different sense—the living person who answered questions on behalf of the deceased. He increasingly emphasized his own role in the production of the book when interviewed. In his proprietary attitude toward the published book, as well as in his editing of the transcripts, he tended to assume the authority of origination rather than that of augmentation (198).

When considered in this manner, *Black Elk Speaks* serves as a spectacular colonial performance. It secures for contemporary readers the romantic image of an intensely spiritual noble savage resisting an opposing culture. The remaining 40 years of Black Elk's religious and cultural assimilation are nonexistent in the book. Black Elk is a captive of Neihardt's rendering. While it seems that those years of struggle with the U.S. Army may have been the most distressing time in Black Elk's life, adopting the ways of another culture must have been painstakingly difficult.

Like Neihardt's production, my words also reflect an editing job. I have attempted to retell the stories that the three novels have revealed to me. But, there are themes and issues which perforce are absent. The story of Indian and Euro-American

relations continues far beyond the point where I conclude. Neihardt's rendition of Black Elk's life is an enlightening commentary on language: characters, themes, cultures, and races can become captives of words that are *omitted* from the story as well as from the words heard and seen. But what is the alternative to this nearly inevitable process—the captivity created by words and the empty spaces before, after, and between them—silence?

If Black Elk and Neihardt had remained silent, there would be an unfortunate absence in the canon of American literature, and there would be an important text missing for both Indian and non-Indian students of literature. To reiterate a point made in the introduction, *Black Elk Speaks* is extolled by such Indian writers as N. Scott Momaday and Paula Gunn Allen. Indian lawyer and political activist Vine Deloria, Jr., declines to discuss the problems of authorship and editing in his introduction to the Bison Book edition. In addition, as Couser notes in *Altered Egos* (1989), *Black Elk Speaks* "was invoked in the mid-1980s by Sioux attempting to regain control of sacred lands from the federal government" (189).

We might read *Black Elk Speaks* as Neihardt's attempt to understand Sioux culture. "As an amateur historian of the West," writes Couser, Neihardt "was knowledgeable about Native American history and religion; as a mystic, he felt a spiritual affinity with Black Elk; and as a regional epic poet, he was equipped to translate the dictations into compelling narrative" (190). But Black Elk also *agreed* to tell his story to Neihardt. The holy man "exercised a rare degree of initiative in proposing the narrative, in choosing his collaborator, and in arranging the time and

circumstances of the dictations" (190). Thus, the end product of Neihardt's search is a bicultural collaboration. Neihardt uses his Western literary education to bring to life the memories of Black Elk. Although Neihardt's telling holds Black Elk a captive within Western discourse and stereotypes, we can see beneath the parameters of linguistic captivity: the story is one of an Indian and a European attempting to acknowledge one another and grappling with the truths of Indian/White relations. In this way, *Black Elk Speaks* has depth.

Momaday's collaboration theme offered in *The Ancient Child* is perhaps an appropriate theory with which to conclude the body of this project. In my opinion, culture is a form of art. In the contemporary world, multiculturalism is a global fact. Neihardt's book is a clear example. In America, South Africa, and many other countries, people of all cultures and backgrounds must, by necessity, interact with one another. *Fools Crow*, *Ceremony*, and *The Ancient Child* signify this condition in that they are composed in English by American Indians, published, and available for anyone, of any culture (so long as they can read English) to read, consider, and interpret.

These texts give anyone who desires the opportunity to discern the cultural rifts that still exist in American society. As collaborations, the texts show that people often have difficulty in this modern milieu of multicultural interaction. I have jumped into the rift, if only to soil my hands from ink printed on the page.

This much is true: the matrix of colliding cultures is not an easy one for any party. Clearly, it is difficult for the characters I study here to retain cultural roots.

Theirs are cultures that the American government attempted to eradicate, to silence. Their alienation is a contemporary condition, and one which is clearly visible in *Fools Crow*, *Ceremony*, and *The Ancient Child.*

Like *diné bizaad*, the Navajo language that Grey contemplates in *The Ancient Child*, culture is three-dimensional. It must be understood both vertically and horizontally: vertically in the sense of our own heritage proceeding generationally down to us; horizontally in the sense of us interacting side by side with members of traditions different from our own. The third dimension is depth. Welch, Momaday, and Silko show us that depth is realized by taking to heart those cultural stories which make up an idea of a people.

Considering this model we can understand Tayo and Set as initially alienated in a two-dimensional world. They operate in white society, on a point somewhere far off on the horizontal axis. Away from their heritage, they have no spiritual foundation in Euro-American society. By the end of their stories, Tayo and Set achieve harmony and balance by internalizing the cultural myths important to their circumstances. Their alienation is effectively healed by their understanding myth and their successful incorporation of stories into their lives.

Fools Crow is different in that he foresees the alienation that will disrupt the lives of contemporaries like Tayo and Set. He is one who recognizes the importance of myth—one who sees that the preservation of stories will provide healing to future generations.

Fools Crow, Tayo, and Set are reflections of all of us. If we try to understand

them and the stories that heal them, we will add depth and three-dimensionality to our own lives, and we will gain a better understanding of those cultures that exist in proximity to our own. Their stories may also lead us to ask of ourselves: what are the stories and myths that exist at the base of our perceptions and ideas? What are our own racial memories? Are there narratives prevalent now that may be lost to future generations?

The attempt to understand culture is similar to the words of *Ceremony's* Ku'oosh, who ponders the earth and uses the word "fragile" to describe it. Human relations, too, are fragile. We might adapt Ku'oosh's words to describe "culture": it is a word "filled with the intricacies of a continuing process, and with a strength inherent in spider webs woven across paths through sand hills where early in the morning the sun becomes entangled in each filament of web" (*Ceremony* 35).

By the same token, we might look at 'culture' and say that we are all, in a sense, captives of it. Yet, where cultural webs form connections tempered with understanding, restrictive captivity gives way to open-ended multiculturalism. Knowing ourselves and others stems from understanding the stories alive on every turn of the network of cultural paths. If one listens to the stories, certain truths are revealed. And, as stories show us certain designs contained within the three-dimensional fabric of culture, a pattern of the way the world appears may develop. We might visualize this pattern, only to realize that, growing ever more intricate, its complexities and details are part of a larger story that has no end. Rather than tear multiculturalism's unifying threads, we might, in our own way, patch those places on

the multicultural tapestry which were torn in the past.

A concrete example of a such a culturally unifying process was recently aired as a news item on ABC News with Peter Jennings. The story concerns Long Wolf, an Oglala Sioux chief. Like Black Elk, Long Wolf was a member of Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show. In 1892, he traveled to London with the group, but he caught pneumonia there and realized that he would die far away from his ancestral home. His last wish was for his family to return his remains to South Dakota. However, over the years, the grave's location was lost.

In 1993, more than 100 years after Long Wolf's death, American Indian enthusiast and British housewife Elizabeth Knight bought an old book on her favorite subject. One passage caught her attention: "in a lone corner of a crowded London cemetery, just at the end of the smoke-stained Greco-Roman colonnade, nestles a neglected grave." Mrs. Knight sought out this grave, which, she discovered, was Long Wolf's.

Like many American Indian tribes, the Sioux believe that until the deceased is given a proper burial, at home, the spirit cannot rest. According to the Sioux, Mrs. Knight found more than a lost grave, she found the lost soul of Long Wolf. Mrs. Knight set about locating Long Wolf's family by sending a letter to a Sioux newspaper. The letter eventually made its way into the hands of John Blackfeather, Long Wolf's great grandson, who "had been raised hearing the legend of his great grandfather." Together, John Blackfeather and Mrs. Knight arranged to have the remains of Long Wolf moved from London to South Dakota. Mrs. Knight visited the

family in South Dakota and helped to raise money to move Long Wolf. She also attended the reburial where Long Wolf's spirit will finally rest and where she was an honored guest at a Sioux family gathering.

Long Wolf's reburial is the point at which I will end my search. His is a story that emphasizes the importance of the returning home motif visible in *Fools Crow*, *Ceremony*, and *The Ancient Child*, but it also highlights the necessity and importance of cultural collaboration. And it is a story that will now be added to the stories told among the Sioux and the English, and one which positively links cultures together. John Blackfeather and Elizabeth Knight have done more than find peace for Long Wolf's soul, they have added depth and understanding to the continuing relationship between Indians and Europeans.

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