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## Liminality and Myth in Native American Fiction: *Ceremony* and *The Ancient Child*

KAREN L. WALLACE

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*There have always been the songs, the prayers, the stories. There have always been the voices. There have always been the people. There have always been those words which evoked meaning and the meaning's magical wonder. There has always been the spirit which inspired the desire for life to go on. And it has been through the words of the songs, the prayers, the stories that the people have found a way to continue, for life to go on. It is the very experience of life. It is the act of perception that insures knowledge. For Indian people, it has been the evolvement of a system of life which insists on one's full awareness of his relationship to all life. Through words derived from one's thoughts, beliefs, acts, experiences, it is possible to share this awareness with all mankind.*

—Simon Ortiz<sup>1</sup>

An indian<sup>2</sup> identity is a tricky thing to define. It is perhaps debatable whether it should be defined at all. As a construct imposed on the indigenous peoples of the Americas, the conceptualization of the indian is fraught with problems.<sup>3</sup> How does one determine who exactly is indian and, perhaps more importantly, who is responsible for that designation? Further, what is the distinction between, for example, a Sioux indian and a Cherokee indian? How can they both be indian yet not the same?

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The list of questions is infinite. Nevertheless, there are college courses on American indian studies and sections in bookstores on Native Americans that exist ostensibly to study this vague character. "In spite of its wide acceptance, even appropriation, by Native Americans," writes Louis Owens, "it should be borne in mind that the word *Indian* came into being on this continent simply as an utterance designed to impose a distinct 'otherness' upon indigenous peoples. To be 'Indian' was to be 'not European.'"<sup>4</sup> Indigenous peoples, now Indians, are all the same by virtue of this "othering." Pantribalism is based on this very concept of "sameness": In relation to the U.S. and its history of expansion, non-indians perceive native peoples as an undifferentiated whole, a view sometimes shared, though for different reasons, by indians themselves.

Thus there has been a tendency in American scholarship to cling to either the myth of the Noble Savage or the idea that indians are, in a social darwinistic kind of way, a dying race. These presumptions deny the diverse and continuing experiences of those natives who have survived, often thriving in our contemporary society. "Early novels by American Indian novelists," comments Paula Gunn Allen, "leaned heavily on the same theme of the dying savage partly because it was most acceptable to potential publishers. In addition, popular and scholarly images of Indians as conquered, dying people had deeply affected American Indian self-perception, leading even Indian novelists to focus their works on that stereotype."<sup>5</sup> This tendency is perhaps easiest to explain by virtue of the fact that it is difficult to talk intelligently about specific native groups, given pervasive ignorance and cultural myths. The indian—who is this simple and apparently doomed creature?

Stereotypes of Native Americans are, like other misconceptions, often based on some bit of truth. There were and are indians who drink just as there are indians who are noble or perhaps even savage. They are Cherokee and Navajo and Winnebago. They live in San Francisco or in Detroit, in Navajoland or at Jemez. They are full-bloods and mixed-bloods, "apple" indians and fancy dancers. Which of them is the most, or most authentically, indian?

Many authors, including the most frequently taught writers such as Leslie Marmon Silko, N. Scott Momaday, or James Welch, write of an indian who is invariably male and of mixed racial descent, apparently ill-equipped to function in either Native

America or Anglo America.<sup>6</sup> “[I]t is through isolated alienated men,” writes Judy Antell, “that the authors are able to demonstrate the negative severity of the twentieth century on the lives of Indian people. Indian men are more suited than Indian women to the notion of the ‘vanishing savage.’”<sup>7</sup> These novels are attempts to articulate the survival of those people who are known as Indians. In challenging the myths of the Noble Savage or the drunken Indian by contextualizing and historicizing them, these works are able to create a space within the margin that redetermines liminality and its potential for the reconstruction of self. In discussion of her own writing on marginality, bell hooks writes, “I was not speaking of a marginality one wishes to lose, to give up, or surrender as part of moving into the center, but rather as a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one’s capacity to resist. It offers the possibility of radical perspectives from which to see and create. . . .”<sup>8</sup> *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko and *The Ancient Child* by N. Scott Momaday are novels written according to this line of reasoning: By gaining competence in their tribal communities, the protagonists also acquire a renewed and secure sense of self that allows them to participate successfully in the dominant culture as well.<sup>9</sup>

The interstices of culture that these figures inhabit do not represent the exile that Edward Said describes as “the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home,”<sup>10</sup> but rather the site of resistance that bell hooks advocates. Some of these characters are conspicuous within their tribal communities by phenotype, distinguishable by traits such as light-colored eyes, like Tayo in Silko’s *Ceremony* or Grey in Momaday’s *The Ancient Child*, but all are marginalized by virtue of their acculturation, by immersion in non-Indian culture and its institutions. As such, they are, at first glance, modern versions of the Noble Savage who can attain mental and physical health only by returning to their traditions—ceremonies and lifeways that require a return to the reservation and an almost total rejection of modern cultural adaptations. The Indian is relegated to the past, to Said’s exile. As Gunn Allen comments,

Indians used the colonization theme coupled with the western plot structure of conflict-crisis-resolution to tell their own stories largely because these structures appeared to explain tribal life and its chaotic disorganization since invasion and colonization. In such westernized Indian novels the Indians are portrayed as tragic heroes, beset by an unjust but inexo-

nable fate. . . . In all of the novels that use the story of conquest, devastation, and genocide as their major theme, white civilization plays the antagonist and becomes imbued with demonic power reserved in classic literature to fate and the gods.<sup>11</sup>

While it is important, necessary, to reclaim and celebrate one's traditions and heritage, there is a significant danger if the cost is the refusal or even the inability to participate in the modern world. Thus the communities to which these protagonists return are vulnerable to the technological and political incursions of a twentieth-century United States, but they are not destroyed. They remain viable options as places of origin and of future for indians.

These authors also demonstrate the capacity indians have to process what is useful from both worlds to create a functional social system that incorporates both tradition and innovation. As Vine Deloria, Jr., comments, "[W]e have seen the appearance of young people who have found a way to blend the requirements of modern industrial consumer life with traditional beliefs and practices."<sup>12</sup> This, I would argue, is not a new phenomenon but rather a newly appreciated one. It is because of the success of indians writing about themselves that both indian and non-indian have had a basis from which to critique and also appreciate what it means to be indian. From D'Arcy McNickle to Wendy Rose, indians represent themselves in a variety of scenes that illustrate their achievements and concomitant survival.

"We are what we imagine," says N. Scott Momaday, "Our very existence consists in our imagination of ourselves. . . . The greatest tragedy that can befall us is to go unimagined."<sup>13</sup> Silko and Momaday, who are themselves acculturated and of mixed racial descent, write of indians who perhaps define themselves or allow themselves to be defined in this way. For those indians who are not, at first glance, recognizable as such, there is a need and at times a demand to assert their ethnic identification. Consequently, in the frequent controversy over who is "really" indian,<sup>14</sup> these novels are, in both content and structure, representative of a unique and evolving genre of writing particular to Native Americans in the U.S. that is in large part a response to this challenge to identity and cultural accommodation. They are in many ways a reclamation of the term *indian* and an

attempt to imbue the construct with positive and inclusive characteristics.

The characters presented in these texts occupy fluid positions within and between the cultural spheres they inhabit. They remain in the interstices of cultures yet are still able to function as liaison or at least mediator between more than one system of living in which they feel competent, in the manner of Malcolm McFee's "150% Man":

[I]ndividuals may learn new ways without abandoning the old. . . . Frequently they occupy important roles as mediators between white and Indian societies; they live with Indians and maintain Indian identity, yet are well educated and capable of competing successfully in the white community. . . . In the perspective of this article, the traditional problems of the "marginal man" can be seen as advantages rather than liabilities. Rather than being "lost between two cultures," those persons with bicultural capabilities can be seen as having unique combinations of skills which may serve the advantage of both Indian and white society.<sup>15</sup>

This perspective allows for a position within tribal society from which Indians who are acculturated or who define themselves as mixed-bloods can function without denying any aspect of their experience. These characters transform the margins from a space in which they are powerless to sites from which to resist. In turn, their liminality and the process of transformation force those in the center to acknowledge the margins as sites of action.

Victor Turner writes in his discussion of ritual,

Liminality, marginality, and structural inferiority are conditions in which are frequently generated myths, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems, and works of art. These cultural forms provide men with a set of templates or models which are, at one level, periodical reclassifications of reality and man's relationship to society, nature and culture. But they are more than classifications, since they incite men to action as well as to thought.<sup>16</sup>

For the American Indian of mixed descent, the novel is a means by which to articulate and reconceptualize the social pressures affecting marginalized peoples. Due to the radical changes native peoples have undergone and continue to experience, the mixed-

blood often survives in this liminal position as a nonparticipant. Consequently, mixed-bloods in particular (again, often read as acculturated indians) are central to contemporary indian fiction as a new space in which to "act and to incite action."<sup>17</sup> They are able to reconcile the tensions between the dominant culture and native traditions by using a tribal perspective from which to view that which is alien to it and to themselves.

In each of these novels, traditional paradigms of ritual and myth mediate the dominant tropes of cultural incompatibility and psychological trauma. It is this synthesis that allows Silko and Momaday to recontextualize the interstices of culture as liminal space. The "indian novel" is a work by an indian writer that explores or reflects the difficulty of making the margins a site of resistance. Although it adapts various techniques of the *bildungsroman*, it is unique in that it retains much in the way of non-Western form and content (most generally referred to as the oral tradition). "Literature," as Gunn Allen stresses, "must, of necessity, express and articulate the deepest perceptions, relationships, and attitudes of a culture, whether it does so deliberately or accidentally. . . . What are held to be the most meaningful experiences of human life, from levels which completely transcend ordinary experience to those which are commonplace, are those experiences celebrated in the songs and cycles of the people."<sup>18</sup> Authors such as Silko and Momaday are successful in incorporating these aspects of their tribal heritages to redefine and affirm who indians are without qualification.

In the novels *Ceremony* and *The Ancient Child*, the mixed-blood protagonists are psychically split between cultures and, consequently, are unable to maintain any enduring sense of self. The ultimate solution in each comes to be an acknowledgment of tradition and of his own power in that context following a rupture or violent upheaval. Each character's process depends on the conscious assimilation of those elements in himself that are modern and/or "American" through a native framework. This resolution is most explicit in Leslie Silko's novel *Ceremony*.

As she constructs her story of Tayo, a Pueblo mixed-blood, Silko weaves a Laguna creation story into her narrative to illustrate Tayo's affliction. The stories are inseparable, yet remain distinct and parallel until the end, when Tayo's story enters the mythic framework, the very process reflecting Tayo's recovery. For example, Silko begins the novel by writing,

Ts'its'tsi'nako, Thought-Woman,  
is sitting in her room  
and whatever she thinks about  
appears.

...  
She is sitting in her room  
thinking of a story now

I'm telling you the story  
she is thinking. (p. 1)

...  
*What She Said:*  
The only cure  
I know  
is a good ceremony,  
that's what she said. (p. 3)

The structure of the narrative is thus self-referential and conspicuous, pointing to ritual; Silko reconstructs the protagonist's story in her vision of a native framework, as part of the Laguna worldview and experience. The two stories, so different in form, refer one to the other in content and emphasize the fact that Tayo's life depends on his mastering certain responsibilities within the Laguna community and reconciling them with his experiences off-reservation.

Modern indian texts tend to incorporate the oral tradition through a traditional paradigm.<sup>19</sup> Silko's novel *Ceremony* is ostensibly Tayo's story expressed through a Western narrative form, yet because Tayo cannot establish a sense of balance or belonging, Silko integrates clan stories of Reed Woman and Corn Woman. As Silko's narrative progresses, we can see how Tayo is living the stories and that his recovery depends on the completion of the proper ceremony. As Susan Perez Castillo writes, "[T]he text emerges, not as a passive mirror of reality, but as a space in which two or more distinct and often mutually exclusive worlds battle for supremacy."<sup>20</sup> Thus, in terms of the novel as a space for action, the story is Tayo's as well as Silko's own.<sup>21</sup>

Silko introduces Tayo as he returns to the pueblo from a veteran's hospital in Los Angeles. A veteran of World War II, he comes home to find the community devastated by drought. Tayo is sure that he is responsible, but he does not know how to repair the damage. He believes that his prayers, made so far from home, have caused the drought in much the same way that Corn Woman causes the water to disappear:



Corn Woman got tired of that  
she got angry  
she scolded  
for bathing all day long.  
Iktoa'ak'o'ya-Reed Woman  
went away then  
she went back  
to the original place down below.  
And there was no more rain then. . . . (pp. 13–14)

Tayo is significantly aware of his place as a Pueblo indian but is totally unable to express that identity because he is estranged from his family and their community.

Raised by his aunt, Tayo feels guilty, too, for having returned alive from the war in which his cousin Rocky, her son, was killed. The terms in which Silko defines his guilt are indicative of the trouble Tayo has reconciling vastly divergent cultural values and, therein, understanding his sickness:

It didn't take Tayo long to see the accident of time and space: Rocky was the one who was alive, buying Grandma her heater. . . . Rocky was there in the college game scores on the sports page. . . . It was him, Tayo, who had died, but somehow there had been a mistake with the corpses, and somehow his was still unburied. (p. 28)

Tayo had never been perceived as a contributing member of either the household or the community, having inherited the alienation his mother had both suffered and caused. Presented as a consequence of his mixed blood, Tayo's alienation is compounded by his inability to master either American or Laguna codes of behavior. Therefore, when Tayo returns, Rocky's death only aggravates his situation. It is Tayo, not Rocky, his aunt seems firmly to believe, who should have been sacrificed. Because of her anger and despair at having lost her only son, Tayo is left on the edges of both his aunt's and the community's life. He is denied because his presence only provokes the sorrow of their loss.

Following his return from the hospital, and in reaction to his liminal status, Tayo is emotionally paralyzed. He has no tools with which to ameliorate his situation, and he realizes the extent to which Rocky's success in school had neutralized his own perceived failure. Finally it is Tayo's grandmother who addresses his alienation and isolation and proposes a solution. She sends

him to a medicine man, Betonie, a mixed-blood who successfully negotiates the margins of cultures, maintaining a position in each through his liminal status. Betonie initiates the ceremony revealed at the start of the narrative; through his intervention and care, Tayo regains substance and power and ultimately becomes a significant and active force in his community.

Marked as "other" by his light eyes, Tayo is the legacy of an absent Mexican father. It is via this trait that he "sees" his marginality at Laguna:

"I always wished I had dark eyes like other people. When they look at me they remember things that happened. . . ." His throat felt tight. He had not talked about this before with anyone. . . . "They are afraid, Tayo. They feel something happening, they can see something happening around them, and it scares them. Indians or Mexicans or whites—most people are afraid of change. They think that if their children have the same color of skin, the same color of eyes, that nothing is changing. . . . They are fools. They blame us, the ones who look different." (pp. 99–100)

Tayo's identification with Betonie, a mixed-blood Navajo, intensifies his discomfort. An outsider because he is mixed and because he is Navajo, Betonie is able to utilize resources that Tayo does not know how to access. Cognizant as he is of his liminal position as well as its concomitant power, Betonie can articulate the need to synthesize seemingly disparate and, at times, contradictory modes of both thought and behavior; he is an outsider, but he is still Indian. His seemingly irrelevant collection of junk symbolizes his facility with the material information of Anglo culture:

(Tayo) could see bundles of newspapers, their edges curled and stiff and brown, barricading piles of telephone books with the years scattered among cities. . . . He wanted to dismiss all of it as an old man's rubbish, debris that had fallen out of the years, but the boxes and trunks, the bundles and stacks were plainly part of the pattern. (p. 120)

At first Tayo is reluctant to trust the man, but Betonie is reassuring:

All along there had been something familiar about the old man. Tayo turned around then to figure out what it was. . . .

He looked at his face. . . . Then Tayo looked at his eyes. They were hazel like his own. (pp. 118–19)

Tayo manages to describe his stay at the hospital in Los Angeles for Betonie, to explain the difficulty he is experiencing:

“They sent me to this place after the war. It was white. Everything in that place was white. Except for me. I was invisible. . . . Maybe I belong back in that place.” Betonie answers, “Die that way and get it over with. . . . In that hospital they don’t bury the dead, they keep them in rooms and talk to them.” (p. 123)

Betonie confronts Tayo’s insecurities and passivity in the face of his supposed worthlessness. He shows Tayo that he must reconnect with the memory of his mother as an Indian woman and with the landscape of his people. Only then can Tayo accept his liminality and transform it into a productive space: His is “a transformation from the ‘undead’ to marginal/powerful.”<sup>22</sup>

As Victor Turner states,

The attributes of liminality or of liminal personae (“threshold people”) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions.<sup>23</sup>

Accordingly, Betonie is literally between worlds, yet still participates in each. He lives alone in the hills above Gallup, New Mexico, a troubled community in the midst of Navajoland:

“People ask me why I live here,” he said, in good English, “I tell them I want to keep track of the people.” “Why over here?” they ask me. “Because this is where Gallup keeps Indians until Ceremonial time. Then they want to show us off to the tourists.” (p. 120)

He is on the edges of Gallup, but also of his own community, not because he is mixed, although this is the most convenient reason,

but because of his stable identity as a “breed.” In a ritualized context, as Turner indicates, difference takes on connotations of power as well as danger.

The mythic structure that Silko juxtaposes with Tayo’s story supersedes a world in which most Indians are poor and trapped in circumstances not of their own making. “[In the] fusion of the universal and the personal, the spiritual and the secular,” writes Kristin Herzog, “identity is established and rootedness revealed. But it is seldom an individualistic identity, and Tayo, after being reintegrated into his tribe, in no way resembles the isolated, individualistic male protagonist of many American novels.”<sup>26</sup> As he regains his health, Tayo becomes aware of himself as being responsible to and part of his community. Thought Woman’s words then envelop a history with which Tayo must come to terms and in which it is crucial that he participate.

In *Ceremony*, the consequences of European/Anglo expansion are never far from the consciousness of the author and do much to inform the text. When Tayo searches for his uncle’s stolen cattle, for example, he finally understands his position in the superficial hierarchy that he had never before thought to question:

(Tayo) was thinking about the cattle and how they had ended up on Floyd Lee’s land. If he had seen the cattle on land-grant land or in some Acoma’s corral, he wouldn’t have hesitated to say “stolen.” But something inside him made him hesitate to say it now that the cattle were on a white man’s ranch. . . . Why did he hesitate to accuse a white man of stealing but not a Mexican or an Indian? (p. 190–91)

As he becomes aware of his increasing power, Tayo is able to articulate for himself the circumstances against which the pueblo is struggling and, through this articulation, make it a part of the story over which he is beginning to exert influence.

The factors that necessitate acculturation—for example, leaving the reservation to seek work, or accepting severalty and attempting to master non-Indian systems of land management—put into question tribal affiliation and, concomitantly, rights or access to federal aid.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, due to the legal definitions of *indianness* that recognize native peoples by their relationship to the federal government, of which Silko is as aware as she is of Laguna constructs regulating social/cultural mores, mixed-bloods were and are in a necessarily awkward position. It is by establishing the legacy of U.S.-Indian relations within the context of a

Laguna narrative structure that Silko redefines what it is to be indian and the extent to which the boundaries of definition can be pushed: Tayo is indian not because of the color of his eyes or skin, but because of his inherent connection to the story Silko presents and therein to his people and their land.

Tayo's experience is analogous to the experience of the Laguna people as a whole, as tribal nations are forced to enter—often unsuccessfully and certainly with difficulty—into the mainstream of American culture.<sup>26</sup> As Tayo relearns his own heritage and traditions, he adapts them to current circumstances without ignoring the purposes for which they were initially created. Tayo's experience with the ceremony represents his transition from a passive, disenfranchised position to an active and powerful, liminal one in which he is aware of his own agency. Thus, as Tayo re-engages with Laguna society through the bear cure,<sup>27</sup> Silko mirrors the process of his healing with her story of the emergence of evil into the world and the pueblo's subsequent efforts to protect against it, if not to control it. We see the history of interaction between the U.S. and Laguna Pueblo through Silko's vision of Laguna cosmology. She writes, for example,

Long time ago  
in the beginning  
there were no white people in this world  
there was nothing European.  
And this world might have gone on like that  
except for one thing:  
witchery.  
This world was already complete  
even without white people.  
There was everything  
including witchery. (p. 132)

The myths she creates, told as a related series of events that shape the Laguna worldview, confirm each time the self-referential and thus ritual nature of the book as well as Tayo's experience as a Laguna. As Betonie comments in response to the horrific circumstances in Gallup,

"It strikes me funny, . . . people wondering why I live so close to this filthy town. But see, this hogan was here first. Built long before the white people ever came. It is that town down there which is out of place. Not this old medicine man."  
(p. 118)

Tayo overcomes his suspicions by accepting what seem to him at first to be serious contradictions. Yet Betonie remarks to him,

"That is the trickery of witchcraft. . . . They want us to believe all evil resides with white people. Then we will look no further to see what is really happening. They want us to separate ourselves from white people, to be ignorant and helpless as we watch our own destruction. But white people are only tools that the witchery manipulates." (p. 132)

It is Tayo's responsibility to learn enough about Laguna tradition to challenge the witchery. Silko impresses upon the reader that, because Tayo embraces Laguna culture as a means by which to understand the world as a whole, his experience both on and off the reservation is conflated into one and thus is intelligible. In the end, as a liminal being and a ritual transgressor, Tayo must survive a crisis that foments the moment of his ascension to power: "He knew why he felt weak and sick; he knew why he had lost the feeling Ts'eh had given him, and why he had doubted the ceremony: this was their place, and he was vulnerable" (p. 242–43).<sup>28</sup> To be healthy, Tayo must reconcile the fragments of his past. Thus he recalls the history of the pueblo, of uranium mining, and of the detonation of the atomic bomb:

[Tayo] cried with the relief he felt at finally seeing the pattern, the way all the stories fit together—the old stories, the war stories, their stories—to become the story that was still being told. He was not crazy; he had never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time. (p. 246)

From this realization comes the decision to accept his place in the story and guard against the witchery and the destroyers. Unfortunately, it is not the U.S. government or even the Navajo who are the enemy, but Laguna people themselves. Tayo must resist his supposed friends to overcome the drought:

He smelled a fire and saw three figures bending over a small fire . . . Leroy, Pinkie, and Emo . . . The destroyers. They would be there all night, he knew it, working for drought to sear the land . . . leaving the people more and more vulnerable to the lies." (p. 248–49)

Tayo, who is sick and afraid, watches as his three friends kill Harley, the man who failed to secure Tayo as the sacrificial victim and must therefore take his place. It is finally clear to Tayo that the ritual of the Laguna Pueblo and adherence to tradition are his cure. The problem, Silko demonstrates, is not white people but rather those Laguna who refuse to trust in their community and the history that binds them. Tayo's failure, in other words, would not have made the dominant culture, but rather the pueblo itself, culpable:

At home the people would blame liquor, the Army, and the war, but the blame on the whites would never match the vehemence the people would keep in their own bellies, reserving the greatest bitterness and blame for themselves, for one of themselves they could not save. (p. 253)

Thus Tayo can reclaim power and agency for himself and for his people.

In light of the implicit refusal or even inability of many indian people to participate off-reservation, Tayo and Betonie, "threshold people," are powerful and essential to their communities as they mediate between cultures. They transform the margins into powerful space, allowing for a self-awareness from which indians may assert themselves. Thus Silko writes, "The witchery would be at work all night so that the people would see only the losses . . . since the whites came. . . . [T]he old priests would be afraid too, and cling to ritual without making new ceremonies as they always had before" (p. 249). "He had seen them now and he was certain; he could go back to tell the people" (p. 250). Tayo, in completing his cure, sees the position he may occupy within the tribe as a liminal and active one. After this crisis of identity, Tayo returns home, literally and figuratively:

His body was lost in exhaustion; he kept moving, his bones and skin staggering behind him. He dreamed with his eyes open that he was wrapped in a blanket in the back of Josiah's wagon. . . . Josiah was driving the wagon, old Grandma was holding him, and Rocky whispered "my brother." They were taking him home. (p. 254)

Ku'oosh invites Tayo to tell his story to the "old men" and, as his grandmother comments later, "It seems like I already heard these stories before. . . . [O]nly thing is, the names sound differ-

ent'" (p. 260). Much of Tayo's anguish stems from the fact that he is a mixed-blood; his aunt took him in because of his mother's alcoholism, but she never lets him forget what he owes her or the shame he keeps in the family. Mixed-bloods, a real consequence of colonization, are in a position to bridge the chasm between cultures. However, before Tayo can act in this capacity, he must come to terms with the fact that he equates his Indianness with loss. Therefore, he makes the whole of his experience, including the time spent in the Pacific Islands, part of a liminal context: Tayo can never change the color of his eyes or the circumstances of his birth, or even his exposure to the dominant culture, but he possesses and acts upon the ability to make his marginality a part of his identity as a Laguna. His aunt, too, despite herself, accepts Tayo as family and they are able to move forward together:

Auntie talked to him now the way she had talked to Robert and old Grandma all those years, with an edge of accusation about to surface between her words. But after old man Ku'ooosh had come around, her eyes dropped from his face as if there were nothing left to watch for. (p. 259)

The invitation to enter the kiva and participate in the ceremony signifies acceptance and integration. Tayo reestablishes kinship and community ties, emphasizing the significant relationship between the two, and secures himself as an integral member of the pueblo.

In his novel *The Ancient Child*, N. Scott Momaday also attempts to resolve the conflicts of the mixed-blood by melding the traditions of native and Anglo America. Like Silko, Momaday structures his novel to incorporate myth and weave the past with the present. For example, book 1 of *The Ancient Child*, entitled "Planes," exposes the multiple levels of consciousness that inform the story. The narrative traverses time and space to allow for the mythic framework that determines the fate of Momaday's protagonists. He begins, following a list of the characters, with the "Kiowa story of Tsoai," the story of the genesis of the Big Dipper: The transformation of the boy into the bear, whose metamorphosis is the catalyst for the formation of the Pleiades, is the focal point of Momaday's narrative. He therefore presents the bear, "the mythic embodiment of wilderness," from the worldview of the Kiowa, establishing a native cosmology as normative before beginning his own narrative.



Set, like Tayo, is estranged, yet the integration of past with present, and Anglo with Indian lore, creates a liminal space for Set to occupy within Momaday's story: "The main protagonist and the major turning points of his life," writes M.M. Bakhtin, "are to be found *outside everyday life*. He merely observes this life, meddles in it now and then as an alien force, he occasionally even dons a common and everyday mask—but in essence he does not participate in this life and is not determined by it."<sup>29</sup> As in Silko's text, there is a larger sacred narrative of which these characters are a part and with which they must be reconciled, which in turn determines their mundane, daily experience.<sup>30</sup> Set's fate depends on his acting within Kiowa narrative space, not within "everyday life." "As in traditional storytelling," comments Louis Owens,

we know the outcome of the story at the beginning, a fact that should shift our attention to the performance itself, to the way the story is told. An audience schooled in Native American storytelling will recognize in the prologue the typical pattern of the questing culture hero and realize that the well-known outline of a traditional story is being adapted to comprehend contemporary circumstances.<sup>31</sup>

Momaday's manipulation of a variety of perspectives is consequently an interesting example of Bakhtin's chronotope as the defining feature of the novel: Set's ultimate transformation into the bear depends on the fluidity and confluence of space and time within the narrative.<sup>32</sup>

Momaday reinforces the centrality of ritual by framing his narrative with both historical and mythic stories. From the mythic time during which the world was first created, Momaday jumps to the more recent past of Billy the Kid, circa 1881, and on again to the present. In this novel, Set and Grey occupy the margins and make them into a productive space, their combined experience effecting a change similar to that in *Ceremony*. They are both outside everyday life, yet they are able to participate and they are expected to do so.

Locke Setman—Set—a middle-aged painter of Kiowa descent, was raised in California by his Anglo guardian, Bent Sandridge, "a retired man, humane and wise." His father's death estranged Set from his heritage and prevented his connecting with or integrating the past. The theme of the indigenous man estranged from his tribal roots through acculturation is emphasized in this work far beyond Silko's novel. Set, raised in an urban center, is

aware of his indianness through a somewhat haphazard recollection of his parents and the stories his father told, decontextualized and thereby stripped of significance. He has no idea how to implement the ideals or cultural information the stories impart. Significantly, Set's mother, who was not indian, represents his despair. It is in terms of her absence that Set perceives his sickness. Momaday introduces Set in the throes of some psychic illness brought on by this estrangement from his traditions:

In Loki [Set] there was a certain empty space, a longing for something beyond memory. He thought often of his mother, dead almost the whole of his life. He knew she was not the pale, lewd ghost of his dreams; she was the touchstone of his belief in the past. Without knowing her, he knew of her having been. . . . Her reality was that of everything on the bygone side of his existence. (p. 45)

A singular awareness of his power as it is manifested in his art supplants the success by which Set has learned to measure his life: "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" (p. 132). Yet, as the first signs of his transformation begin to show, Set becomes afraid and disoriented, bereft of any source of self-definition. His Anglo upbringing and concomitant alienation cause his transformation to be something foreign and frightening: Locke Setman had not thought of himself as indian before and must become Kiowa, using his artistic talents to process that identity. Although he has a vague awareness of the Bear through the myth his father told him about the boy/bear and his sisters, Set, in San Francisco, is surrounded by people for whom his "illness" means little more than a loss of revenue. It is next to impossible, then, for his metamorphosis to be completed in the city:

[T]here was insinuated upon his consciousness and subconsciousness the power of the bear. It was *his* bear power, but he did not yet have real knowledge of it, only a vague, instinctive awareness, a sense he could neither own nor dispel. He was afflicted. He was losing his physical strength . . . or he was losing control over the strength within him. . . . He could not tell anyone what was wrong, for he did not know. (pp. 213–14)

Before his role is revealed to him, Set necessarily withdraws. Never having known his native community, he becomes less and less sure of himself without understanding why:

[T]here was a conviction in him, and a commitment to be his own man. And therefore he struggled. Now, at forty-four, he found himself in a difficult position. He had compromised more than he knew. . . . [H]e had become sick and tired. . . . Yes, he had become sick and tired. And he did the only thing he could think to do under the circumstances; he withdrew—not completely, not all at once, but deliberately. . . . He would endeavor to save his soul. (p. 38)

Unlike Tayo, who is socialized in a system with which he is familiar and to which he returns, Set resists “becoming” indian because it seems so thoroughly foreign. Ultimately, however, he has no choice. Despite himself, and very much like Tayo, he is overcome by the process:

I did not let the unknown define my existence, intrude upon my purpose, if I could help it. But now there was an intrusion that I could not identify and could not resist. Something seemed to be taking possession of me. It was a subtle and pernicious thing; I wasn't myself. . . . I began to feel helpless now. (p. 145)

Set's identity is broken down almost completely and reconstituted under Grey's influence. Ritualizing his experience is the way to reconceptualize and then reintegrate his past in terms of an unfamiliar cultural framework. Once he “returns” home to Oklahoma, it is his identity as a painter and the skills he perfected as an artist that allow him to make a successful change. From the crisis he survives, Set emerges as a person of power.

With more complex concerns about her European heritage than either Set or Tayo, Grey is an indian woman, a powerful seer, who has embraced and takes pride in her difference. A mixed-blood of Navajo, Kiowa, and Scottish descent, she remains outside the core existence of her family, despite her power and the apparent ease with which she traverses boundaries. “In Grey,” suggests Owens, “Momaday illustrates the act of appropriation essential to the marginalized culture that would wrest authenticity away from the authoritative center. Within the rich heteroglossia of her Kiowa-Navajo-Euramerican life, Grey rejects the world's deadly

narrative of epic 'Indianness' with its tragic implications."<sup>33</sup> As a seer, she is of course susceptible to visions, and it is significant that they include Billy the Kid. Throughout the novel, there is an ongoing, supplementary story in which Grey is Billy the Kid's lover and sometime accomplice. Momaday has said that Grey "finds great satisfaction in assuming the dimensions of the stereotype. So she goes around affecting western dialect. She fantasizes about Billy the Kid and talks about him a lot."<sup>34</sup> Thus, while Momaday never explicitly states the purpose of this counternarrative in his plot, it seems indicative of a struggle over which Grey has little control, although it is not necessarily disruptive.

The counternarrative becomes most significant when, early in the novel, Grey is raped by a white man, her lover's father. She is jolted from a vision of Billy the Kid into 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, of how Dog would trample into dust the flesh and bones of this despicable, vicious man. In her delirium, because she so needed, she saw Dwight Dicks looking up into the muzzles of the gun in Billy's hands, seeing beyond them the expressionless, nearly colorless, steady, steady eyes. . . . (p. 97)

The catalyst for Grey's maturation as a medicine person is this assault, precipitating a moment in which her various identities merge. Mirroring Tayo's confrontation with the destroyers in *Ceremony* and Set's total disintegration of self, Grey's rape is a moment of transgression, the blurring or even obliteration of boundaries. Her vision of love-making with Billy the Kid merges with the brutality of Dwight's attack. Thus, in the same way that Set is no longer able to compartmentalize disparate aspects of his life and is thereby incapacitated, Grey's dream life is shattered by the violence of her waking life. Just as Set must confront his identity as the Bear, Dwight's assault on Grey provokes the fusion of the discrete fragments of her perception. It is from this crisis that she perceives clearly, and accepts, her power as a liminal being.

Grey, in imposing order on her world, is able to exact revenge on the man, but it is thoughts of Billy the Kid, not any traditional native culture hero, that sustain her. Once she has freed herself from this devastating scene, it is a feminine image from her

heritage that reconfirms 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" (p. 101).

In his treatise on eroticism, Georges Bataille writes that the violence inherent in the sex act foments an instance of the continuity that he claims is the dissolution of the self: "[T]he individual splits up and his [sic] unity is shattered from the first instance of the sexual crisis."<sup>35</sup> "The urge," Bataille goes on to say, "is first of all a natural one but it cannot be given free rein without barriers being torn down, so much so that the natural urge and the demolished obstacles are confused in the mind. . . . Demolished barriers are not the same as death, but just as the violence of death overturns—irrevocably—the structure of life so temporarily does sexual violence."<sup>36</sup> He writes of transgression—therefore, that "[c]ontinuity is reached when boundaries are crossed. But the most constant characteristic of the impulse I have called transgression is to make order out of what is essentially chaos. By introducing transcendence into an organised world, transgression becomes a principle of an organised disorder."<sup>37</sup> The work of the liminal being is to make sense of chaos, to control (or at least to interpret) what is otherwise inaccessible to the community.

Bataille's discussion, in many ways a critique of Catholicism, sheds light on *The Ancient Child's* ritualized violence. Momaday, like Silko, foreshadows the ultimate syncretism that is Set's and Grey's solution by incorporating traditional elements alongside images of American culture, including representations of the church. In this novel, Set's recollections of his father and the stories he told are juxtaposed with memories of Sister Stella, the nun at the orphanage where he lived until his adoption. As Momaday writes, "And then Cate [his father] was gone. Set could not clearly remember the sequence of things. There was Sister Stella Francesca, who appeared to him in his dreams. . . . It had been difficult for him to leave the Peter and Paul home. Curious. . . . But he loved [Sister Stella], for he was a child, and there was no one else to love. And Set remembered. It is an important story, I think; Cate said, all those years ago" (p. 118). Momaday is able to illustrate that, despite the problems besieging Indian communities, there remains a constant tie to the past that serves to support the people as they create new ways that blend traditional culture and adaptations of Western culture. The centrality of ritualized violence—a significant aspect of Catholicism—as a

means of transformation is crucial to an interpretation of *The Ancient Child*.

Momaday prefaces his novel with a quote from Luis Borges: "For myth is at the beginning of literature, and also at its end" (p. i). Then comes the story of the origin of the Big Dipper (Ursa Major), the transformation of the boy into a bear and the escape of his seven sisters into the sky to form the constellation. Accordingly, Set is equated with the bear and is literally transformed. "Most people cannot recover nature," says Momaday during an interview, "But this boy is an exception. He turns into a bear; that means that he reconstructs that link with nature."<sup>38</sup> Significantly, we must interpret these characters with both tribal and Western mythology and folklore, the second viewed through the framework of the first. This ensnares Set and Grey and their story in the complicated experience of the author: "*Set*, my work in progress, is about the boy who turns into a bear, and in a sense I am writing about myself. I'm not writing an autobiography, but I am imagining a story that proceeds out of my own experience of the bear power."<sup>39</sup> Even on his first trip to Oklahoma, for example, Set begins to feel the power of his Kiowa heritage:

He had a strange feeling there, as if some ancestral intelligence had been awakened in him for the first time. There in the wild growth and the soft glowing of the earth, in the muddy water at his feet, was something profoundly original. It was itself genesis . . . not the genesis in the public domain, not an Old Testament tale, but *his* genesis." (p. 64)

Momaday describes Set's experience in terms of myriad traditions. Section 12, entitled "They sit so, like mother and child," evocative perhaps of the Pietà, ends with the calling forth, resurrection almost, of the bear: "The grandmother Kope'mah had begun to speak names: Set-page, Set-tainte, Set-angya, Set-mante. Setman. Set" (p. 35). As a complement to this image, Set's introduction in the following section begins with his disassociation from the persona he has constructed. Reflecting on his endeavors as a painter leads him to ponder the nature of God: "What sustains Him is the satisfaction, far deeper than we can know, of having created a few incomparables. . . . He used both hands when he made the bear. Imagine a bear proceeding from the hands of God!" (p. 39)

Correspondingly, Grey is reminiscent of the Lady Godiva, a figure steeped in the traditions of the West, when she rides past

Dwight's barn, asking after his health following his "circumcision," the revenge she has taken on the man. She, naked and wearing a mask in the form of an "unearthly turtle," rides past on a horse named Dog (p. 199–200). According to Barbara Walker, the original purpose of Lady Godiva's ride was to "renew her virginity,"<sup>40</sup> comparable to Grey's successful attempt to restore her sense of self following Dwight's assault. Thus Grey's ride on the horse called Dog is significant in several ways. Momaday comments,

Dogs and horses are closely related in my mind. The horse . . . was called "Big Dog" by certain Indians in early times. And dogs were horses for the Kiowas before the horse came along. . . . So the dog is an ancient animal and a fascinating creature."<sup>41</sup>

Walker also writes that dogs were most often considered companions to goddesses and to powerful mortal women or witches and that they are associated with funerary customs: "In myth, dogs accompanied only the Goddess, guarding the gates of her afterworld, helping her to receive the dead."<sup>42</sup>

In their association with death, horses allow for the possibility of rebirth and restoration. Walker states that they represent ritual sacrifice and the phallus or castration.<sup>43</sup> For example, "Death was the significance of Father Odin's eight-legged gray horse Sleipnir, symbol of the gallows tree, where human sacrifices were hung in Odin's sacred groves. Skalds called the gallows 'high-chested rope-Sleipnir', the horse on which men rode to the land of death. . . ."<sup>44</sup> Western narrative thus reconfirms the ritual nature of the violence Grey suffers and in turn inflicts. Additionally, the horse is related to Set, who is alternately known as the "Ass-headed Egyptian deity, once ruler of the pantheon" and the "Good Shepherd Osiris."<sup>45</sup> These stories complete the underlying paradigm for their story. As Walker writes, "Set and Horus were remnants of a primitive sacred-king cult. . . . The story of the rival gods appeared in the Bible as Seth's supplanting of the sacrificed shepherd Abel."<sup>46</sup> Grey, remarkable in part for her eyes, is linked to Horus, who became known as a female judge: "I am the all-seeing Eye of Horus."<sup>47</sup> Set, when he comes to Oklahoma, usurps the place of Grey's boyfriend Murphy who, being Dwight's son, assumes guilt by association, and both father and son are expelled from her life. Balance is regained through adherence to tradition, the acceptance of "folk-mythological time."<sup>48</sup>

In discussing the temporal-spatial dimension of the traditional Greek romance, of which *The Ancient Child* is reminiscent, Bakhtin writes,

The novel as a whole is conceived precisely as a test of the heroes. Greek adventure-time . . . leaves no traces—neither in the world nor in human beings. No changes of any consequence occur, internal or external, as a result of the events recounted in the novel. At the end of the novel that initial equilibrium that had been destroyed by chance is restored once again. Everything returns to its own source. The result of this whole lengthy novel is that—the hero marries his sweetheart. And yet people and things have gone through something, something that did not, indeed, change them but that did . . . affirm what they, and precisely they, were as individuals, something that did verify and establish their identity, their durability and continuity. The hammer of events shatters nothing and forges nothing—it merely tries the durability of an already finished product.<sup>49</sup>

The separation of real time from mythic time, the mundane from the sacred, becomes less definite and requires mediation. These threshold figures or liminal personae reside on the boundaries between; they belong to both and, as such, are inviolate within the larger story.

Ultimately, though, each character is inseparable from his or her tribal history and from the others: Set is the ancient child, and he needs Grey to help him come into the power of this position. Despite the other influences undoubtedly interspersed throughout Momaday's narrative, it is the story of the bear that provides the frame for the novel. Grey's power and vision allow Set to give up the ambiguity of the periphery, with its concomitant lack of responsibility, and enter into a tribal social structure. Grey has always been aware of her own agency and liminal status; as she admonishes Set while driving to their new home in Navajoland,

"Don't imagine that you have a choice in the matter, in what is going on, and don't imagine that *I* have one either. You are *Set*; you are the bear; you will be the bear, no matter what. You will act accordingly, in the proper way, because there is no other way to act." (p. 270)

She, like Tayo, becomes part of a whole that is in itself marginal, deriving strength and power.



Momaday writes of Grey,

She had not decided to become a medicine woman. Such things are not decided after all. She was becoming a medicine woman because it was in her to do so; it was her purpose, her reason for being; she *dreamed* it. . . . In her dreams she know of things that had long since been lost to others. She knew of things that lay in remote distances of time and space. . . . And she knew of the ancient child, the boy who turned into a bear. (p. 173-74)

Set embraces his liminal role, his indianness, and leaves San Francisco and his career there to marry Grey and live at Lukachukai. Regardless of Grey's power and guidance, however, it is not until Set feels he has lost control of himself that he is willing to commit to being indian, to being the bear. Upon the death of his adopted father, he returns to San Francisco from Oklahoma and becomes more and more disoriented:

In his desperation he became steadily more self-destructive. There was no longer a design to his existence. His life was coming apart, dis-integrating. He drank heavily, and he did not eat or sleep for long periods. . . . He began to shake, and a terrible cold came upon his extremities. His whole being suffered a numbness, a kind of paralysis. . . . Even on the verge of madness there were times of profound lucidity. The dissolution of his life seemed an illusion. . . . Yes he believed, there is only one story, after all, and it is about the pursuit of man by God, and it is about man who ventures out to the edge of the world, and it is about his holy quest . . . and it is about the hunting of a great beast. . . . He must be true to the story. (p. 215-16)

By accepting Grey's articulation of his marginality, if not his obligations, and by purposefully entering the story of the bear, he accomplishes what Tayo does in entering the story told by Thought Woman. The stories that underlie both *Ceremony* and *The Ancient Child* are therefore essential to the theme of identity in each.

The characters that Silko and Momaday introduce must, as liminal personae, come to terms with conflicting aspects of their personalities and somehow make their "otherness" a source of power. Consequently, the stories of which they become a part are pushed to the foreground, making these archetypal roles central

and structuring the transgression within the narrative. Set and Grey use the whole of their experience, rather than discrete fragments, to determine what it is to be Indian, but the ritual demands a crisis by which this may occur. The story of the bear and the story of Billy the Kid, for example, are both crucial elements of Grey's experience, and both serve to define who she is. In this way, the ritualizing of transgression, not necessarily the specificity of Momaday's story, confirms who these characters are as liminal people and the space they occupy.

Hence Tayo and Betonie, Set and Grey are able to establish a new normative space. Betonie and Grey are holy people, revered and feared by their communities because they transgress boundaries. By entering into relationships with them, Tayo and Set are made aware of and participate in their power. Thus the structure of the traditional society is maintained while, along its edges, things change. The narrative focus shifts to the threshold figures who negotiate this reinvigoration. "Prophets and artists," offers Victor Turner, "tend to be liminal and marginal people, 'edgemen', who strive with a passionate sincerity to rid themselves of the clichés associated with status incumbency and role-playing and to enter into vital relations with other men in fact or imagination."<sup>50</sup> Liminal people may acceptably defy the rules that define the rest of community. As Silko and Momaday illustrate, it is along the edges of tribal cultures that Indians reconsider survival. It is from these spaces that one may generate and control the kind of power to effect change through rituals adapted to uncertain circumstances.

As Paula Gunn Allen writes,

For all its complexity, Native American literature possesses a unity and harmony of symbol, structure, and articulation which is peculiar to itself. This harmony is based on the essential harmony of the universe and on thousands of years of refinement.<sup>51</sup>

*Ceremony* and *The Ancient Child* affirm Indianness by allowing their protagonists to extract from their experiences a perspective informed by both native and Western associations. Like these characters, Indians who find themselves participating in often conflicting circumstances must turn what are first perceived as obstacles into sources of regeneration. These characters and their dilemmas illustrate the potential of the liminal positions that

many indians occupy and the ways in which it is possible to integrate these roles into the larger context of their traditional cultures without a fragmentation of self. The narrative structures of *Ceremony* and *The Ancient Child* reflect and supplement the experiences of these marginalized indians, adapting the conventional Western narrative style of the *bildungsroman* to incorporate a style of presentation derived from traditional modes of storytelling.

By articulating the liminal experience, Silko and Momaday show the integration of their own experiences in the larger context of native cosmology. The oral tradition, which recalls the history of each group and provides guidance and boundaries for behavior, is now being enhanced by a different but certainly compatible form in the "indian novel." These texts are valuable in shedding some light on the problems and possible solutions that are affecting the lives of people in indian country, but they are also the voices of modern Native America. Theirs are attempts to recoup and reconstruct the indian as a viable means of identification. The margins in which indians live, be they Kiowa, Laguna, or Cherokee, are sites of power and, in revisualizing their potential, of resistance.

## NOTES

1. Simon Ortiz, ed., *Earth Power Coming* (Tsaile, AZ: Navajo Community College Press, 1983), vii.

2. For the purposes of this paper, I will use *indian* rather than *Indian* to defamiliarize the term and to refocus attention on the history on which its significance depends.

3. See Robert A. Williams, Jr., *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought: The Discourses of Conquest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

4. Louis Owens, *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel*, American Indian Literature and Critical Studies Series, vol. 3 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 7.

5. Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 78; Howard Bahr, for example, writes, "Anthropological research on the Indian was based on the premise that Indian culture would change and disappear, a premise that lent urgency to the study of traditional native American culture before it was too late. The anthropologists focused on what was 'really Indian' and tended to avoid the complications of the modern community 'polluted' by extensive contact with repre-

sentatives of white society." In Bahr, *Native Americans Today: Sociological Perspectives* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 405.

6. See Silko, *Ceremony* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988); Momaday, *House Made of Dawn* (New York: The New American Library, 1968) and *The Ancient Child* (New York: HarperCollins, 1989); James Welch, *Winter in the Blood* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986) and *The Death of Jim Loney* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979).

7. Judith A. Antell, "Momaday, Welch and Silko: Expressing the Feminine Principle Through Male Alienation," *American Indian Quarterly* 12:3 (Summer), 214.

8. bell hooks, "Marginality as Site of Resistance," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russell Ferguson et al. (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), 341.

9. Page references for *Ceremony* are to the Penguin edition (1986); for *The Ancient Child* to the Doubleday editions (1989).

10. Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile," in *Out There*, 357.

11. Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*, 78. Alvin Hamblen Morrison comments that "the encounter fantasy is at least a basic theme if not a fixation of western civilization, and its locus is the frontier. Monstrous satyrs, woodwoses (???), ogres, and bigfoot, along with Robin Hood, the Teddy Bears' Picnic, and especially the Noble Savage, all have inhabited the wilderness that white literature long has contrasted with civilization. The relativism here is that frontier encounters may provide whatever one seeks—shadow or substance of whatever sort, depending upon one's definition of the situation." See Morrison, "The Wabnaki in White Literature: Some Further Comments," in *Papers of the Twenty-Fourth Algonquian Conference*, ed. William Cowen (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1992), 307.

12. Vine Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died For Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), xii.

13. N. Scott Momaday, "The Man Made of Words," in *Indian Voices*, ed. first Convocation of American Indian Scholars, Princeton University (San Francisco: The Indian Historian Press, Inc., 1970), 55.

14. There is an extensive body of literature on the subject. See, for example, James A. Clifton, *Being and Becoming Indian: Biographical Studies of North American Frontiers* (Chicago: The Dorsey Press, 1989); Hazel W. Hertzberg, *The Search for an American Indian Identity: Pan-Indian Movements* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1971); Native American Research Group, *American Indian Socialization to Urban Life* (San Francisco: Institute for Scientific Analysis, 1975); Clifford E. Trafzer, *American Indian Identity: Today's Changing Perspective* (Sacramento, CA: Sierra Oaks Publishing Co., 1986).

15. Bahr, *Native Americans Today*, 198.

16. Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1969), 128–29.

17. *Ibid.*, 129.

18. Gunn Allen, "The Sacred Hoop: A Contemporary Indian Perspective on American Indian Literature," in *The Remembered Earth*, ed. Geary Hobson (Albuquerque: The Red Earth Press, 1979), 236.

19. For a detailed discussion, see two articles by Edith Swan: "Laguna Symbolic Geography and Silko's *Ceremony*," *American Indian Quarterly* 12:4 (Summer 1988): 229–49; "Healing via the Sunwise Cycle in Silko's *Ceremony*," *American Indian Quarterly* 12:4 (Fall 1988): 313–27.

20. Susan Perez Castillo, "Postmodernism, Native American Literature and the Real: The Silko-Erdrich Controversy," *Massachusetts Review* 32 (Summer): 292.

21. The Pueblo people and the Navajo had to accommodate uranium mining, which has been devastating for their communities: "At Laguna, drought coupled with the uranium mine was the major factor (the two happened together) as Silko frames the story of Tayo and the land." Paula Gunn Allen, personal communication, March 1994.

22. Gunn Allen, personal communication, November 1994.

23. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 95.

24. Kristin Herzog, "Thinking Woman and Feeling Man: Gender in Silko's *Ceremony*," *MELUS* 12:1 (Spring 1985): 33.

25. See, for example, Larry Burt, "Roots of the Native American Urban Experience: Relocation Policy in the 1950's," *American Indian Quarterly* 10:2 (Spring 1986): 85–99; Vine Deloria, Jr., and Clifford Lytle, *The Nations Within* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

26. See Orlan J. Svingen, "Jim Crow, Indian Style," *American Indian Quarterly* 11:4 (Fall 1987): 275–85; Eduardo and Bonnie Duran, *Native American Postcolonial Psychology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

27. Alan Velie writes, "Betonie tells Tayo that he must realize that the whites are not the real enemy; it is the witchery. Betonie alerts Tayo to the true nature of the enemy and helps him participate in the religious ritual of the bear cure. Tayo completes his cure by completing his sacred quest." *Four American Indian Literary Masters*, 116.

28. Georges Bataille writes, "Organised transgression together with the taboo make social life what it is. The frequency—and regularity—of transgressions do not affect the intangible stability of the prohibition since they are its expected complements." in Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986), 59.

29. M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988), 120–21.

30. Bataille, *Erotism*, 135–36.

31. Louis Owens, *Other Destinies*, 96.

32. Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, 84–258.

33. Owens, *Other Destinies*, 119.

34. Charles L. Woodard, *Ancestral Voices: Conversations with N. Scott Momaday* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 131.

35. Bataille, *Erotism*, 100.

36. *Ibid.*, 101–102.

37. *Ibid.*, 114.

38. Woodard, *Ancestral Voices*, 13.

39. Betty Givens, "A MELUS Interview: N. Scott Momaday—A Slant of Light," *MELUS* 12:1 (Spring 1985): 82.
40. Barbara Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (New York: HarperCollins, 1983), 347–48.
41. Woodard, *Ancestral Voices*, 20.
42. Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia*, 240.
43. This supports my reading of the text via Bataille, who theorizes that death is the ultimate transcendence, where the individual is (re)united with the rest of the cosmos. Sex, and particularly orgasm ("little death") are therefore moments of this continuity within life. *Erotism*, 95–96.
44. Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia*, 411.
45. *Ibid.*, 910.
46. *Ibid.*, 68.
47. *Ibid.*, 294.
48. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 104.
49. *Ibid.*, 106–107.
50. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 18.
51. Gunn Allen, "The Sacred Hoop," 237–38.