

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

The Heart of Knowledge: Nuclear Themes in Native American Thought and Literature

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5wx6h7xp>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 16(4)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Caputi, Jane

Publication Date

1992-09-01

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

The Heart of Knowledge: Nuclear Themes in Native American Thought and Literature

JANE CAPUTI

Virginia Sanchez, Western Shoshone National Council agrees that, yes, indigenous people do have a leadership role in global disarmament, because “[w]e know how to communicate other ways than with the . . . brain.”¹

In popular culture, images of peaceful, traditional American Indians characteristically evoke ecological sentiment; in one of the latest manifestations of that propensity, *Dances with Wolves* has been hailed as a film that raises environmental consciousness.² Ironically, though, and despite the existence of organizations such as WARN (Women of All Red Nations), C.A.R.E. (Citizens Against Ruining our Environment), the Native Resource Coalition, and Native Americans for a Clean Environment, many non-Indians see only this symbolic association and do not heed the importance of contemporary American Indians as agents and theorists of environmental concerns, particularly around nuclear issues. Yet, throughout current American Indian writings, in the works of Paula Gunn Allen, Marilou Awiakta, Linda Hogan, Simon Ortiz, Wendy Rose, Martin Cruz Smith, Barney Bush, and Leslie Marmon Silko³—to name only those who most immediately come to mind—we find a richly developed, diverse, and insightful attention to nuclear themes.

Jane Caputi is an associate professor in the Department of American Studies, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.

Worldwide, tribal traditions instruct that in order to find an antidote to a poison, one must look in its immediate vicinity, for nature places a cure in close proximity to a harm. Steps toward a "cure" for the nuclear dilemma may indeed originate in the philosophical systems of the people most impacted by nuclear development—American Indians. The atom bomb was developed on the lands of Pueblo Indians in New Mexico (ironically, peoples with a tradition of considering violent war to be unnatural). Uranium mining and milling on Laguna and Navajo lands has led to dire health consequences for these peoples.⁴ The worst spill of radioactive materials ever in the United States occurred in 1979 on the Navajo Reservation when a dam mismanaged by the United Nuclear Corporation spilled 100 million gallons of radioactive water and 1,100 tons of mill tailings into the Rio Puerco. It is still dangerous for animals and people to drink the contaminated water, but many must do so, since it is the only available water source. Because Indian reservations often are located in undeveloped and economically depressed areas, they have become prime targets for test sites and waste dumps, as has happened, for example, to Shoshone lands in Nevada. And, as is just now being revealed, those at greatest risk in the area of the United States government's Hanford (Washington State) nuclear weapons plant are the members of the eight tribes (including the Yakima and Klickitat) that have long depended for food and water on the Columbia River, now "the most radioactive river in the world."⁵ American Indians (as well as other indigenous peoples worldwide) have been, often unknowingly, on the front lines of atomic development,⁶ and this legacy is everywhere reflected in philosophical and literary writings.

Still, it is vital to recognize that Indian writers address nuclear themes not just as an expression of resistance to exploitation. Rather, American Indian writers consistently draw upon tribal thought and tradition to discern the metaphysical meanings of the nuclear age and to arrive at unique and critical understandings. Most Native American writers show no great fascination with the details of weaponry, nuclear war, disaster, or bizarre postholocaust scenarios. Moreover, their works defy categorization as pro- or antinuclear. Rather, a recurrent theme is the call for a holistic, sacred, poetic, balanced, and frequently gynocentric perspective of nuclear technology.

George Lipsitz reminds us that, quite possibly, "the most sophisticated cultural theorists in America are neither critics nor scholars, but rather artists."⁷ Central to this essay is the proposition

that Native American nuclear theory—informing poetry, fiction, and art as well as prose—comprises a most sophisticated heart of knowledge, with particular and essential insight into the nuclear dilemma. Joseph Bruchac (Abnaki) writes, “One group of ‘Americans’ has roots as deep as the rocks. They go back, at the very least, thirty thousand years. As descendants of those oldest ‘Americans,’ American Indian writers may be better equipped to speak of the American past and to draw from it lessons relating to survival.”⁸ A Native American advocacy group recently affirmed, “[T]he survival of Indian traditions is key to the survival of the world. The ecological threats that we all face can be offset by a new environmental ethic, one that is based upon the very ancient understanding of the natural Law.”⁹

It is these ways of thought and being—rooted deeply in the past of this continent, cognizant of the equal sacredness of human and nonhuman being, insistent upon the need for a human attitude of appropriateness¹⁰ or reverence in all interactions, steeped in communal values, based in the certainty of the spiritual world, and intimately acquainted with survival—that texture contemporary Indian thought and literature on nuclear themes. In this essay I will provide something of an overview, though by no means a comprehensive one, of the range of this thought, identifying some of the principal concerns and themes. My path will be a meandering one, stopping first among works of grief and anger, then examining two novels dealing with the origins of nuclear power in New Mexico, and coming to rest among the works of those thinkers who are wrenching nuclear power outside of the doomed polarities of Western morality and rationalism by signifying it through wholly other, transmutational metaphors.

POEMS OF ANGER

This is a poem of anger
All of us are “Indian” now
The treaty not made is the only one
which might never be broken.
It promises waste, it promises death
for as long as the rivers run
for as long as the grass shall grow

—Joseph Bruchac, “Wahsah Zeh (War Dance)—As Long
as the Grass”¹¹

Simon Ortiz is an Acoma Pueblo writer who incorporates his experiences working in the New Mexico uranium mines and mills in the early 1950s into his art. Ortiz explicitly advocates resistance to economic and ecological exploitation. He prefaces one extensive work, "The following story and poem narratives speak for the sake of the People and for the sake of the land. Hanoh eh haaze kuutseniah—the People's fightback is critical."¹² In the opening poem, "It Was That Indian," Ortiz caustically observes a number of paradoxes and hypocrisies: the basing of nuclear development projects on Indian lands; the ironies of a development that sometimes brings boom, sometimes unprecedented ruination, and the various ways that the neocolonial culture manipulates the image of the Indian to its own ends. Here, he tells us of Martinez, the Navajo man who "discovered uranium / west of Grants." Soon after,

Tourist magazines did a couple spreads
on him, photographed him in kodak color,
and the Chamber of Commerce celebrated
that Navajo man

...

The city fathers named
a city park after him
and some even wanted to put up a statue
of Martinez but others said
that was going too far for just an Indian
even if he was the one who started that area
into a boom.

Well, later on,
when some folks began to complain
about chemical poisons flowing into the streams
from the processing mills, carwrecks on Highway 53,
lack of housing in Grants,
cave-ins at Section 33,
non-union support,
high cost of living,
and uranium radiation causing cancer,
they—the Chamber of Commerce—pointed out
that it was Martinez
that Navajo Indian from over by Bluewater
who discovered uranium,
it says so in this here brochure,
he found that green stone over by Haystack
out behind his hogan
it was that Indian who started that boom.¹³

Of course, as Ortiz later notes, the popular story that Martinez had “discovered” uranium ably served racism by reiterating “the idea of the Indian bringing his own fate upon his head.”¹⁴ The stories he tells point out that the government located the laboratory in Los Alamos, tested in Alamogordo, and allowed uranium to be found on Navajo and Laguna lands because these areas were most vulnerable to capitalist/military exploitation. As Ortiz concludes, “No, it was not that Navajo man who discovered uranium. It was the U. S. government and the economic and military interests which would make enormous profits and hold the world at frightened bay which made that discovery in a colonized area.”¹⁵

Some of the New Mexico Pueblos, notably Santo Domingo, have refused to allow uranium mining on or near their land. In 1979, the Pueblo Council of Santo Domingo issued a statement outlining its concerns: “The Indian way of thinking about land is different than the non-Indian’s. We believe that all things on this earth are sacred, and all things have as much right to exist as man himself. The non-Indian world is out of balance with nature—it is always trying to destroy it. We oppose this way of life.”¹⁶

Currently, an issue of great alarm and contention is the use of tribal lands for nuclear waste dumping. While, for economic reasons, more and more tribes are considering applying for the nuclear waste study grants offered by the Department of Energy, many others are taking a vehement stand against such ventures, relating them to a violation of tribal ethics and a continuation of genocidal practices. Gregg Bourland, chairman of the Cheyenne River Sioux tribe, relates that, after receiving such a grant proposal package from David Leroy, the United States nuclear waste negotiator,

I quickly proceeded to put the proposal in its proper place, the trash can.

To be very frank with you, I really did not consider that any tribe would take him up on his offer. I know of our Native American People’s love of our Mother Earth and how sacred it is to us. Our ancestors would be appalled at such ideas and the future generations would have to live with our shame, not to mention possible nuclear radioactive contamination

Too much Lakota blood was spilled by the U. S. Government on the land of the Great Sioux Nation, through the government’s extermination policies of the 1800’s.

Let us not allow the Government to cover that blood with its used and worthless nuclear waste.¹⁷

In a number of her essays, most notably "Everything Is a Human Being," novelist, poet, and essayist Alice Walker (of African, Native American, and European descent) continually references Native American philosophies as providing the most sensible, passionate, and historically compelling basis for contemporary ecological consciousness. She uses the Oglala Sioux word for the white man, *Wasichu*, "he who takes the fat," to designate those who perpetuate a tradition of defiling and disrespecting the land and other life forms; she contrasts the *Wasichu* worldview with the Native American:

The new way to exist on the Earth may well be the ancient way of the steadfast lovers of this particular land. No one has better appreciated Earth than the Native American. Whereas to the *Wasichus* only the white male attains full human status, everything to the Indian was a relative. Everything was a human being.

"Everything to the Indian was a relative": So might read a primal theory of relativity. Walker asks her readers to realize that "even tiny insects in the South American jungle know how to make plastic, for instance; they have simply chosen not to cover the Earth with it."¹⁸ Perhaps, too, it is because these beings choose more beautiful and efficient means to accomplish their tasks. Roberta Hill Whiteman (Oneida) reminds us that "spiders near your door / joined all the reddening blades of grass / without oil, hasp or uranium."¹⁹

This principle governing the equal sacredness of all life continues to inform contemporary native writings on nuclear subjects, including the poems of Diane Glancy (Cherokee), Ralph Salisbury (Cherokee), Awiakta (Cherokee), and Terri Meyette (Yaqui).²⁰ In "Celebration 1982," Meyette surveys the wreckage from a "harmless" underground nuclear weapons test:

They say no one died.
 Tiny desert flower
 micro beetle bug
 are they not life

 They say no one died
 Nevada desert
 1000 miles into her bowels
 earth melted.

radiation, radiation, radiation,
radiation.
oozed into blood
of Shoshone and Paiute.
The bomb lasted minutes
the intent lasts generations
in the womb of Creation, herself.
They say no one died.
Closing their eye,
they dismissed death
dismissed life
became blinded
by white flash
their God.

Meyette, along with many other poets and thinkers, recognizes the divine yearnings that poured into the development of atomic weaponry. J. Robert Oppenheimer, widely known as the “Father of the Bomb,” gave the first test site the code name “Trinity.” Different derivations for the name have been suggested, including the threesome of nuclear sites (Los Alamos, Hanford, and Oak Ridge) operating during World War II and the Hindu trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. However, the most commonly accepted one is that Oppenheimer was recalling a John Donne poem invoking the three-personed god of the Christian tradition. Robert Jungk notes that the reaction of the assembled scientists to the first atomic bomb test in 1945 was primarily a religious one: “They all . . . recounted their experiences in words derived from the linguistic fields of myth and theology.” An official report to President Truman declared that the blast had released forces “heretofore reserved to the Almighty.” Commentators from Pulitzer prize-winning journalists to leaders of state spoke of the event as analogous to both the biblical creation of the world, “when the Lord said, ‘Let there be light,’” and the prophesied “Second Coming” of Christ. These associations between nuclear power and religious imagery and tradition continue to pervade contemporary culture, appearing (along a wide and diverse range of signification) in the popular arts and oral tradition as well as in elite literature and philosophy.²¹

Ironically, any damage to what Meyette understands as the “womb of Creation” is denied by another set of companion metaphors central to the language of nuclear invention—that of male birth. In this oft-told tale, the all-male group of atomic

scientists “gives birth” to sons/bombs. At Los Alamos, the scientists took bets among themselves as to whether they would ultimately have a “boy” or a “girl,” that is, a success or a dud. A success it was, and the bomb dropped on Hiroshima was nicknamed “Little Boy.” Subsequently, the American Baby Association named Oppenheimer “Father of the Year” for 1945. Playing off nuclear strategist Herman Kahn’s notorious exhortation that Americans accept the notion of winnable nuclear war by “thinking about the unthinkable,” nuclear physicist and historian Brian Easlea criticizes the male supremacist assumptions in the original atomic project by characterizing that movement as “fathering the unthinkable.”²²

Easlea and others direct attention to the ways that these metaphors reveal an underlying phallocentrism in the nuclear project; concomitantly, religious historian Ira Chernus analyzes nuclear metaphors for the ways that they reveal our culture’s divinization of a death machine, “the Bomb.”²³ Taking this lead, we also might be cognizant of the greater meanings contained in still another metaphorical image employed in 1942 to describe the success of the Italian physicist Enrico Fermi’s Chicago lab in producing the first self-sustaining fission chain reaction. One scientist from the team, Arthur Compton, immediately called in the news to a colleague, James Conant: “Jim, you’ll be interested to know that the Italian navigator has just landed in the new world.” Conant replied, “Is that so? Were the natives friendly?”²⁴ This metaphor explicitly links the controlled splitting of the atom to the “discovery”—that is, exploitation, domination, and possession—of the “new world” and its inhabitants. The latest steps of this exploratory, exploitationist movement include digging deeply into the Earth to extract uranium and venturing ever further into outer space.²⁵ These latest steps, however, may also prove to be the last ones. The invention of atomic weaponry commonly is believed to be the crowning achievement of Western intellectual exploration and conquest. Yet, as nuclear waste continues to pile up, with no safe way to contain it, as the ozone layer’s patience continues to wear thin, as the air warms unnaturally, and as animal and plant species die out, even those most mired in denial must begin to question the “friendliness” of the “natives” and the wisdom of such “progress.”

In her poem, “The Fifties,” Wendy Rose (Hopi) suggests that atomic invention, rather than being the greatest accomplishment of Western culture, actually sounds the note of its demise. She

begins by recalling her childhood in the 1950s and the “concrete caves / dug by frightened men / who cast searchlights/ to restricted city skies/ for Russian bombers / sure to come sooner or later.” She, looking “the part/ of a war-humbled refugee” practiced “how to die/ in a foetal position.” But, thirty years later, “my bones have burrowed / deeply into this world, / my tongue has traveled its many highways” and

Once again
we scan our western expanse of sky
not for bombers and Russians
but for a thing more final
than antique atom bomb.
Like earthquakes
crawling up the Richter scale
the ghosts of our future
are unpredictable
and out of control.

This is a weather report:
who knows what will end
in the fury of the storm?²⁶

IN THE BEGINNING

There are scores of Euro-American narratives (fictional and factual) of the development of atomic power in New Mexico, many cast in the forms of hero (scientist) tales and/or creation myth (the birth of the bomb). The vast majority of these narratives, save two by writers of American Indian descent, simply ignore the Indian presence and perspective.²⁷ As one of those Indian authors, Martin Cruz Smith (Seneca Pueblo), observed, this is “like telling a story about England or France and not mentioning the English or the French.”²⁸ But American Indians themselves have been observing nuclear heroes and telling their own nuclear stories for some time.

Wendy Rose’s poem, “Robert,” observes the destruction of the inventor by his device, “leaving you leaving you / your own fingerprints . . . in the ashes / you vomit your tears.”²⁹ An unheroic, obtuse, and racist Oppenheimer figures in Smith’s *Stallion Gate*, his rendition of the events at Los Alamos from the perspective of “Sergeant Joe Peña,” a Tewa musician and boxing champion who

serves as Oppenheimer's driver. Joe is something of a lout when we first meet him. He has affairs with the officers' wives and is alienated from his people at the fictional Santiago Pueblo. While he superficially supports the activities and ideologies of "the Hill," it is clear that his only real loyalty is to himself. However, several things change his perspective. Joe's superior officer, Captain Augustino, despises him (partially because Joe slept with his wife). Augustino commands Joe to go hunting with him and, during the hunt, kills a pregnant elk, much to Joe's horror. Some time later, as Joe is performing one of his jobs—finding and killing cattle who have wandered into restricted areas and become radioactive—he discovers that one of the cows he has killed was pregnant: "Now he remembered why he was so upset with Augustino when they'd gone hunting Not shooting an animal that was carrying was an Indian stricture, a primitive taboo. Not against killing life, but against killing the *seed* of life."³⁰

Joe's new perspective also is shaped by his continuing contact with several other people: his uncle Ben Reyes; a blind man named Roberto (the nemesis of Robert Oppenheimer) from Taos Pueblo; and a German Jewish mathematician, Anna, with whom he is developing a romantic involvement. Ben and Roberto are connected with a sacred society that is trying to prevent the building of the bomb. One of their activities involves planting lightning wands in key areas, causing fires. When Joe meets with them to try to dissuade them from such sabotage, he asks what they have "against the Hill, anyway?"

"What they're doing there," Ben said.

"You don't know what they're doing there. It's a secret. It's the biggest damn secret of the war."

"I had a dream they were making a gourd filled with ashes," Roberto said.

"A gourd of ashes?"

"I had the dream in Taos. Two Hopi men had the same dream—two elders. A woman in Acoma had the dream.

"Four dreams." Joe nodded, as if the conversation were sane. Listening, Ben went on stirring the can.

Roberto tilted his head up. "Each time they take the gourd to the top of a long ladder and break it open. The ashes fall and cover the earth In my dream there was a giant As soon as I met you, I knew the giant was you [T]he ashes will poison the clouds and the water and the ground and everything that lives on it. All the dreams are the same about that."³¹

In Smith's narrative, Indians are neither invisible nor powerless spectators to what is generally viewed as the most momentous event of Western civilization. Rather, they foresee the destructive power of the bomb, penetrate the legendary secrecy of the Manhattan Project, and organize an active resistance to it, of which Joe, "the giant," ultimately becomes a part.

Oppenheimer's "gourd of ashes,"³² which will poison "the seed of life," is metaphorically contrasted with a seed pot made by Joe's mother, Dolores, one of the region's most renowned potters. But *Stallion Gate* is not a work of simple opposition between good and evil, life and death. Joe is not only a deeply liminal character, but is himself a gate through which humanity passes into an undefined new world. Increasingly, as the novel progresses, events signify that Joe will take on a sacred role. For example, in order to allow Roberto to escape from government agents, Joe takes Roberto's place in a clown dance that burlesques Oppenheimer and the building of the bomb. By novel's end, it is the day of the Trinity test, 16 July 1945, but, due to heavy rain and lightning, it appears that the test will be canceled. Captain Augustino, who has been trying all along to find some way to implicate Joe, plants some confiscated lightning wands in Joe's jeep. Joe finds the wands, brings them into the bomb tower, and hides them in some ropes. Later, Oppenheimer, pacing the floor, stumbles against the ropes. When the wands tumble to the floor, he registers his disgust: "Chief Joe Peña. What an incredibly stupid time for you to turn into an Indian . . . Do you really think I'm going to let the effort of all these good men be endangered by a . . . tribe?" (second ellipsis in original).³³ Joe strikes Oppenheimer when he tries to make off with the wands, and Oppenheimer leaves. Now alone, Joe

used spare rope off the floors to tie the yellow wands, serpent heads up, to the detonator boxes . . . Joe felt unexpected pleasure seeing the wands stand on their makeshift altar. As lightning closed in on the tower, the shed seemed to rise and plunge into each crash. The fierce, brief glow at the door made the sphere levitate and the wands, bright as gold, jump to life. The shadow on the wall was a head of coiled hair wearing a crown of wands. A dancer's shadow, kicking up thunder.

Everyone insisted he was Indian, so, why not? Put some finery on the atom, a brace of electric snakes, and let it dance on hundred-foot legs. Dance in the desert and shake the earth. He wished he knew the right prayer or song; there had to be

some music for this, or something he could improvise. Good music and good religion, he guessed, were both born in times of stress. Roberto would be proud.³⁴

At this point, Augustino unexpectedly returns. The rain is stopping as he snaps the wands in half: "Thunder became a receding tide. The last bolts were perfunctory and muffled. On the floor, the broken wands looked dead."³⁵ Augustino tries to kill Joe. Their struggle results in Augustino's training a gun on Joe's head, while Joe holds him over the edge of the tower, a hundred-foot drop. Meanwhile, since the rain has stopped, Oppenheimer decides the test can proceed, and a jeep drives up with men who will arm the bomb. The men wonder whether anyone remains at the tower, since Joe's jeep is still there. Oppenheimer speaks to them on the radio, denying Joe's presence and commanding the men to leave. After they do, Augustino tries to shoot Joe, but his gun is empty and he twists out of Joe's grip, falling to his death. By now, the countdown for the blast has begun. Joe climbs down the ladder and tries to escape in the jeep, but there is no key. He begins to run, putting about a mile between him and ground zero. The rains have caused toads to surface and they sing deliriously as they slide into a trench filled with water. The bomb goes off and it seems that Joe must surely die. Still, we cannot be sure of his fate. Earlier, a scientist had told him that if one were able to get a mile away and seek shelter in water, one might survive the blast. The bomb is death itself, but the toads and the water are evocations of the life force. The last sentence of the book reads simply, "From the eye of the new sun, a shadow flying."³⁶

In an interview with me in July 1990, Smith acknowledged the ambiguity of the ending, saying that he deliberately left it open "because this is a book about chance. . . . The bomb is about chance. . . . The question with the bomb is 'do we live or do we die?' And, so, why answer? Joe is us. For me to give an answer to that would be false." He also agreed that Joe is a sacred character and that the resolution of the novel resonates with ancient beliefs regarding sacrifice and the constitution of a new world based on the character of the sacrificial being: "There is a connection between the Pueblo and Aztec belief. To renew the sun, there has to be a sacrifice and a still-beating heart must be taken by runners to different parts of the kingdom. Yet, you don't know what kind of god is being born here."³⁷

As I suggested earlier, many and diverse associations between

the bomb and Western conceptions of divinity recur in Euro-American thought. In *Stallion Gate*, Smith suggests that the bomb has a great deal to do, as well, with Native American theology. Anna, the Jewish mathematician whom Joe loves, is said by his aunt, Sophie Reyes, to be something of an avatar of the creator, Thinking Woman. The novel concludes with a Pueblo man providing the core energy of a new world into which human culture has moved.

Laguna writer Leslie Marmon Silko also, though quite differently, introduces sacred concepts into her nuclear fiction. She begins her novel *Ceremony* by narrating the creation myth of the Keres³⁸ people whereby Thought Woman creates the world by thinking it into being, by telling its story. We soon realize that Silko's novel itself is a prayer, a ceremony meant to counteract the prevailing nuclear disaster myth as embodied in so much of mainstream story about the bomb. *Ceremony* traces the healing journey of Tayo, a mixed-blood from Laguna Pueblo (New Mexico) who has just returned from combat in World War II and is suffering from shock, grief, and psychic fragmentation. In the course of the novel, Tayo—through an extensive ceremony and aided by both human and supernatural helpers—is healed. Moreover, we are to understand that the ceremony to heal Tayo is simultaneously a healing rite for all: "His sickness was only part of something larger, and his cure would be found only in something great and inclusive of everything."³⁹

One of Tayo's helpers is the medicine man Betonie, who performs the initial ceremony for Tayo. It is from Betonie that we learn the origins of the sickness-causing evil: in the language of the novel, Indian "witchery." Long ago, witches from all over the world gathered in the hills near Laguna (near the site of the original uranium mines and just a hundred miles south of Los Alamos). Boasting, each tried to outdo the others' tricks. An unknown witch stepped out and, in "demonic, destructive antithesis of the Laguna creation myth,"⁴⁰ spoke into being the genesis of white men, describing/ordaining their disconnection from the Earth and proclivity for objectification:

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.*⁴¹

The story tells also of the coming of these white men to North America, their conquest of the land and genocide of the people. It concludes,

Up here
in these hills
they will find the 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.*⁴²

Tayo's illness, then, is traced to the same evil that now threatens the planet with nuclear destruction; concomitantly, the ceremony to heal Tayo becomes part of a much larger ritual, one to counteract the "final pattern" of nuclear annihilation now reaching for fulfillment. In *Ceremony*, the forces of elemental life do prevail. Aided by the spirit woman Ts'eh and protected by "the sky . . . the position of the sun . . . the pattern of the stars,"⁴³ Tayo is able to complete the ceremony and, "for now," turn the witchery of the destroyers in upon themselves.

As Paula Gunn Allen comments, although the story appears to be about a man, Tayo, it is Ts'eh, Tayo's supernatural helper and ultimate healer, the mountain spirit woman whom he meets, learns from, and loves, who "is the central character of the drama."⁴⁴ Ts'eh signifies the elemental female Earth spirit, the "matrix, the creative and life-restoring power"⁴⁵; it is she who spreads a storm blanket to bring snow, who transplants roots and plant cuttings to bring rain, whose face is twin to the "yellow sandstone cliffs dark orange."⁴⁶ Her name, she tells Tayo, is a "nickname"⁴⁷ which, as Patricia Clark Smith and Allen reveal, "is short for Tse-pi'na—in Keres, 'Woman Veiled in Clouds'—the Laguna name for Mount Taylor,"⁴⁸ the sacred mountain. As the traditional myths and stories that counterpoint the narrative of Tayo make clear, she, finally, is the Earth or Life force (also invoked by a cliff drawing of a pregnant elk) who, after having been neglected for some time, is now returning to the people: "A'moo'oooh! A'moo'oooh! / you have seen her / We will be blessed / again."⁴⁹ Allen comments,

We are the land, and the land is mother to us all. There is not a symbol in the tale that is not in some way connected with womanness, that does not in some way relate back to Ts'eh and through her to the universal feminine principle of cre-

ation: Ts'its'tsi'nako, Thought Woman, Grandmother Spider, Old Spider Woman. All tales are born in the mind of Spider Woman, and all creation exists as a result of her naming.⁵⁰

Silko thus counters a nuclearist⁵¹ worldview and its ensuing necrophilic reality by recalling primordial female spirit and presence, by ritually evoking an alternative reality, and, finally, by telling an older and more potent story. There have been some questions raised, however, about the dangers involved in telling traditional stories to the outside world, and, in a subsequent article, Allen criticizes Silko for telling clan stories in *Ceremony*.⁵²

WOMEN, THOUGHT, AND THE BOMB

I am ready for a new God. Thinking Woman sounds like a great improvement to me.

—Anna in *Stallion Gate*⁵³

In much of Euro-American feminist thinking (including my own), the initial impulse has been to expose the investment of patriarchal sexuality and divinity into nuclear technology / weaponry and to oppose that abusive force.⁵⁴ Yet, in the writings of Paula Gunn Allen, Marilou Awiakta, and Carol Lee Sanchez the predominant movement is to reclaim the atom from its immurement in male supremacist language, sexuality, and religion and to restore balance by recalling its repressed sacred / gynocentric face.⁵⁵

Sanchez, a poet and artist with Laguna and Sioux ancestry, deplores the modern Western schism between the sacred and the profane and contrasts it to the tribal tradition that recognizes “all things in the known universe to be equally sacred.”⁵⁶ She believes that modern peoples must not only acknowledge the sacredness of everyday life, but must also

create new songs of acknowledgement as well as ceremonies that include metals, petrochemicals, and fossil fuels, electricity, modern solar power systems, and water power systems . . . [I]t is very important to make sacred . . . the new ways and elements in our lives—from nuclear power . . . to plastics to computers . . . in order to restore harmony and balance to our out-of-control systems and in particular, to our modern technologies.⁵⁷

Of course, Western culture already holds sacred, in the sense of worshiping, its technologies; and “songs” to nuclear power, reiterating the hypervirility of the warhead, the promise of religious/sexual ecstasy in annihilation, and the captivity of female power, underlie many of the the most common metaphors for nuclear technology (as I discuss in great detail elsewhere).⁵⁸ Yet, this obeisance to technology is worship, not reverence, and stems from a worldview that reveres opposition and hierarchy, not balance and equality, as the basic principles of the universe. Sanchez insists that those who resist technological depredations must neither worship nor demonize technology but instead must acknowledge its sacredness, while thinking/acting in ways that restore harmony and balance.

One way to achieve this is to understand atomic power through gynocentric metaphor. Like Sanchez, Cherokee/Appalachian poet and essayist Marilou Awiakta points to modern culture’s profound irreverence toward atomic power (manifested in the destructiveness of the bomb and the Three-Mile Island disaster) and links it to the disrespect that patriarchal culture accords to women and female power. Awiakta has long pondered the sacred significance of atomic power, which she understands not as “ultimate weapon,” but as “the life force in process—nurturing, enabling, enduring, fierce. I call it the atom’s mother heart.”⁵⁹ As such, the atomic age has special, even ontological, significance for women:

The linear Western, masculine mode of thought has been too intent on conquering nature to learn from her a basic truth: *to separate the gender that bears life from the power to sustain it is as destructive as to tempt nature itself*. . . . But the atom’s mother heart makes it impossible to ignore this truth any longer. She is the interpreter not only of new images and mental connections for humanity, but also, most particularly for women, who have profound responsibilities in solving the nuclear dilemma.⁶⁰

The “mother heart” is the first of several female metaphors through which Awiakta understands nuclear energy. As a child growing up on the nuclear reservation at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, she encountered a majestic female presence in the nuclear power plant. Awiakta recalls this scene from her childhood:

Scientists called the reactor “The lady” and, in moments of high emotion, referred to her as “our beloved reactor.”

"What does she look like, Daddy?"

"They tell me she has a seven foot shield of concrete around a graphite core, where the atom is split." I asked the color of graphite. "Black," he said. And I imagined a great, black queen, standing behind her shield, holding the splitting atom in the shelter of her arms.⁶¹

Awiakta's vision is of an autonomous and infinitely powerful cosmic being; her experience comprises a modern encounter with an archetype that religious historians term the "Black Madonna." Ean Begg notes that over four hundred of the world's images of the Christian Madonna are Black; she argues that these figures represent the "elemental and uncontrollable source of life, possessing a spirit and wisdom of its own not subject to organization or the laws of rationality."⁶²

Paula Gunn Allen similarly finds "elemental and uncontrollable" female power in nuclear power, not in the reactor but, boldly, in the bomb itself. In so doing, she turns upside down nearly every conceit of Euro-American organization and rationality. In a published excerpt from Allen's novel in progress, *Raven's Road*, two Indian lesbians, Eddie Raven and Allie, deliberately station themselves to watch the blast from an above-ground test. Allie, who has done this before and anticipates her response, asks Raven what she saw in the cloud. Scarcely believing herself, Raven remembers: "'An old woman . . . I remember now. I saw an old woman's face.'"⁶³

Allen roots her nuclear metaphors firmly in the Laguna sacred as she implies that the trinity that the atomic bomb invokes is not necessarily the Christian or even the Hindu trinity, but the Keres trinity of the primary creator Ts'its'tsi'nako (Thought Woman) and her two sisters, Naotsete (Sun Woman) and Iyatiku (Corn Woman). As previously noted, Thought Woman generates the universe by thinking it into being. Allen comments, "Men could not have found the idea [of nuclear power] if she didn't give it to them. When she dreams, and that's what Thought Woman does, what she says, what she dreams, becomes."⁶⁴ Long ago, Naotsete quarreled with her sister Iyatiku and left, but always with the idea that she eventually would return. Allen continues, "Around Laguna they say she's come back. And they say it with respect to the bomb. And 'she' is Naotsete, who is Sun Woman . . . I can't think of anything more vividly Sun Woman than the bomb."⁶⁵

At first, I was surprised, if not shocked by this ascription of female power to the bomb and asked Allen if this indicated that

women should encourage the development or use of nuclear bombs. She replied,

In my novel, as far as I've gotten with it, Allie and Raven are just observing, because that's what this old woman told Allie to do. She told her that there was this thing going on and she was supposed to observe to make sure they did it right. But the old woman didn't really know what she was seeing—this was in the 1930s—and she didn't know what the "it" was that they were doing or how they were going to do it right or how they were going to do it wrong. She just knew what she knew and she said what she said. And I think that there's something in that, in what she said. In a way, what we have to do is watch them. We can't stop them. We have to watch so that at the psychological moment, we can change the direction. Because I think that a new planet or a new being or a new world, something is being born. It has something to do with the bomb, though I don't know what it has to do with it. But it's like some vast magical rite that's going on and we don't know enough about magic to be able to interfere.⁶⁶

Allen's conceptualizations may seem utterly strange to those raised under the constraints, biases, and delusions of Western objectivity and rationalism. And, indeed, she radically upsets mindsets that the bomb is a thing invented by and under the control of elite Western men; that women are mere passive spectators to nuclear power; and that the Earth itself is inert, soulless matter, an object, or, concomitantly, a reflection of the patriarchal "feminine," that is, passive, endlessly forgiving and masochistic, willing to absorb every abuse and disrespect aimed at her.⁶⁷

Also astounding conventional expectation, Mother Nature, in a poem by Awiakta, dispassionately sends humanity a "pink slip":

To: Homo Sapiens
Re: Termination

My business is producing life.
The bottom line is
you are not cost-effective workers.
Over the millennia, I have repeatedly
clarified my management goals and objectives.
Your failure to comply is well-documented.
It stems from your inability to be
a team player:

- you interact badly with co-workers
- contaminate the workplace
- sabotage the machinery
- hold up production
- consume profits

In short, you are a disloyal species.

Within the last decade

I have given you three warnings:

- made the workplace too hot for you
- shaken up your home office
- utilized plague to cut back personnel

Your failure to take appropriate action

has locked these warnings into

the Phase-Out Mode, which will result

in termination.

No appeal.⁶⁸

Awiakta read this poem at the University of New Mexico on 3 December 1991. In the discussion following her reading, Leonard Tsosie, a lawyer in the audience, recalled this story:

One time, in listening to an elderly Navajo man talking about the atom, one of the things that I remember him saying is that Mother Earth is good, but Mother Earth also has to protect herself, and you can only go so far before you trigger Mother Earth's response. And one of the things that he was talking about—in Navajo we call it *'áńt'iih*, meaning something that is bad. And if you keep digging and digging and digging, that elderly man said, eventually you will find Mother Earth's *'áńt'iih*. And then that's when we all go. When we dig that up We are all bad and inefficient homo sapiens. We strive and strive and strive, but we don't understand because we keep on digging. We may have gotten to the *'áńt'iih*, and, if that is the case, that may be the end.

Hearing this story and Awiakta's poem, we understand that Mother Earth, not homo sapiens, is the ultimate agent and determiner of fate. One of the reigning conceits of the nuclear age is that the Earth revolves around human beings (especially elite men) and that humans are the prime movers, responsible for nearly all that transpires, including the impending "destruction" or "salvation" of a passive planet. Yet the Earth, however deeply some may presume to dig into her, ultimately is beyond the grasp of humans. Leslie Silko also says it fiercely and well:

The prophecies foretelling the arrival of the Europeans to the Americas also say that over this long time, all things European will eventually disappear. The prophecies do not say that European people themselves will disappear, only their customs. The old people say that this has already begun to happen, and that it is a spiritual process that no armies will be able to stop. So the old people laugh when they hear talk about the "desecration" of the Earth. Because humankind, they know, is nothing in comparison to the Earth. Blast it open, dig it up, or cook it with nuclear explosions: the Earth remains. Humans desecrate only themselves. The Earth is inviolate.⁶⁹

NUCLEAR POETRY

I cure with Language.

—María Sabina⁷⁰

As we have seen, many writers link some aspect of atomic power with a feature of their tribe's spiritual tradition.⁷¹ One of the most arresting of these is the "emblem" that Awiakta tells us she has "created for my life and work—the sacred white deer of the Cherokee, leaping in the heart of an atom."⁷² In 1977, Awiakta visited the Oak Ridge Museum of Science and Energy:

I was looking at an immense translucent blue model of the atom. Inside it, tiny lights, representing electrons, whirl in orbit. As I watched this, my state of consciousness slowly altered, and suddenly I saw Little Deer leaping in the heart of the atom. . . . At this moment the words of Neils Bohr, the great Danish physicist (and poetry-lover), came to me (he was the first to apply the quantum theory successfully to the problem of atomic structure): "When it comes to atoms, language can only be used as in poetry. The poet, too, is not nearly so concerned with describing facts as with creating images and mental connections." This was my spontaneous understanding of how the world of traditional Native American thought and the world of scientific thought meet deep in the mystery.⁷³

As she explained in a conversation with me (7 April 1991), "Little Deer is a spirit of reverence for the sacred circle of life. He embodies the principle of never taking without giving back. He is a protean symbol, reminding us of the spirit that is always on the

move, always circling." This emblem asks us to remember that just as the hunter always had to "pray words of pardon" for the life that was taken, lest he be pursued by Little Deer, who "swiftly pains and cripples his bones so he never can hunt again,"⁷⁴ so, too, must contemporary culture ensure reverence for the atom, or else suffer retribution.

Awiakta abhors the dualisms that constrain "circling," arguing that a holistic approach must be adopted in order that productive harmony be restored with the atom: "Long before I learned the / universal turn of atoms, I heard / the spirit's song that binds us / all as one. And no more / could I follow any rule / that split my soul."⁷⁵ She further illustrates her point by telling a story of two gatherings at the site of the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant in California. The first was an antinuclear protest, as three thousand

women and men protested the activation of a nuclear power plant so near an earthquake fault. . . . That protest was effective, but it says much about the dominant, non-holistic mode of American thought that an article about the second group was buried in the middle of a San Francisco newspaper. After the 3000 had left Diablo Canyon to wind and silence, a band of about 80 Chumash Indians came to the site of the power plant. They raised a wood-sculpted totem and sat in a circle around it for a day-long prayer vigil. Jonathan Swift Turtle, a Mewok medicine man, said that the Indians did not oppose nuclear technology but objected to the plant's being built atop a sacred Chumash burial site, as well as near an earthquake fault. He said he hoped the vigil would bring about "a moment of harmony between the pro- and anti-nuclear factions."⁷⁶

The "deadliest fission," then, is the one that channels reality into false dichotomies (such as pro- and antinuclear) and, correspondingly, that splits "the atom from the sacred"⁷⁷ by negating and neglecting the poetic meaning of the atom. Awiakta writes that, in her childhood, she understood the atom as "a presence beautiful, mysterious, dangerous . . . like the mountain." Even as a young girl, though, she sensed that the atom had gone "awry" and turned away from it without knowing why. Later, as an adult, she realized that her disaffection was due to "the way they spoke of it. They'd split the nucleus in those days—neat, precise, controlled—and described it in heavy, concrete prose"; to her, the atom had lost its "poetry."⁷⁸ The language was soulless, because the venture

itself demanded soullessness, objectivity, and objectification, making the world into a “dead thing, trying to penetrate/split the very heart of matter/mother.”

Awiakta’s disdain for the ontological vacuum of standard nuclear language is shared by many European-American thinkers, the most perceptive of these including Carol Cohn, Glenn Hook, and Robert J. Lifton.⁷⁹ Such critics focus on the everyday “nukespeak” or “technostrategic speak”—language that, in Hook’s words, is “a form of power, exercised consciously or unconsciously, in the structuring of nuclear reality . . . making nuclear weapons easier to live with.”⁸⁰ Such terminology orders identification with wielders of weaponry (and even with the weapons themselves) and is awash with emotionless and sanitized euphemisms (e. g., “collateral damage” instead of “massacre”). By uttering the dominant culture’s nukespeak, these critics argue, we learn, participate in, and ultimately acquiesce or surrender to that worldview.

Cohn concludes her complex analysis of technostrategic speak by calling on concerned people to both deconstruct and reconstruct nuclear language and metaphor. All of the authors discussed here are such active poets of the atom. All are concerned with language and story as ceremonial forms of power, and all invent images, metaphors, poems, and stories that articulate and foment rage and resistance, up-end standard modes of perception, explain, convey, and practice reverence, and ritually act to shift the spiritual/psychic, and hence the material, (im)balance of power in the nuclear age.

Linda Hogan writes, “I hold to the traditional Indian views on language, that words have power, that words become entities. When I write I keep in mind that it is a form of power and salvation that is for the planet. If it is good and enters the world, perhaps it will counteract the destruction that seems to be getting so close to us. I think of language and poems, even fiction, as prayers and small ceremonies.”⁸¹

Atomic weaponry was invented on the very ground that Thought Woman calls home. This coincidence points us toward one route to transmute and avert nuclear disaster—a mode that I call “psychic activism.” Any of us, in the ways most appropriate to our talents, can become psychic activists, employing thinking, naming, singing, and dreaming to conjure realities other than the nuclearist one that now prevails. Awiakta claims that the “atom’s mother heart” is the “interpreter . . . of new images and mental

connections." Many Native American thinkers call for all of us to hear these new images and connections in our hearts and then realize them through our speech, our work, our songs, prayers, and daily experience. In all good hope, Native American philosophy promises that, with Thought Woman as our guide, we can unthink the unthinkable.⁸²

NOTES

1. Quoted in Amy Trussell, "Western Shoshones Oppose Nuclear Testing and a Nuclear Dump on Their Land," *Native Self-Sufficiency* 8:4 (Spring 1987): 6, 8.

2. Dianne Dumanoski, "'Deep Cultural Rumbblings' Emerge from Film," *Albuquerque Journal*, 5 April 1991. The film *Dances with Wolves* was directed by Kevin Costner and released in 1990.

3. Paula Gunn Allen, "Raven's Road" (excerpt), in *The New Native American Novel: Works in Progress*, ed. Mary Dougherty Bartlett (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), 51–64; Marilou Awiakta, *Abiding Appalachia: Where Mountain and Atom Meet* (Memphis, TN: St. Luke's Press, 1978); idem, "Baring the Atom's Mother Heart," in *Homewords: A Book of Tennessee Writers*, ed. Douglas Paschall and Alice Swanson (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 183–88; Barney Bush, *Inherit the Blood* (New York: Thunders Mouth Press, 1985); Linda Hogan, *Daughters I Love You* (Denver, CO: Research Center on Women, Loretto Heights College, 1981); Simon Ortiz, *Fight Back: For the Sake of the People For the Sake of the Land* (Albuquerque: Institute for Native American Development, 1980); Wendy Rose, "The Fifties," in *Women on War: Essential Voices for the Nuclear Age from a Brilliant International Assembly*, ed. Daniela Gioseffi (New York: Simon and Schuster, Touchstone Books, 1988), 60–61; idem, "The Indian Women Are Listening: To the Nuke Devils," *A Gathering of Spirit: A Collection by North American Indian Women*, ed. Beth Brant (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1984, 1988), 55; idem, "Robert," *Harper's Anthology of 20th Century Native American Poetry*, ed. Duane Niatum (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 243–44; Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (New York: New American Library, Signet, 1977); idem, "The Fourth World," *Artforum* (Summer 1989): 124–25; Martin Cruz Smith, *Stallion Gate* (New York: Ballantine, 1986).

4. Stuart Wasserman, "Navajos Testify on Uranium Reparations," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 14 March 1990; Steve Hinchman, "In New Mexico's Uranium Belt: Rebottling the Nuclear Genie," *Native Self-Sufficiency* 8:4 (Spring 1987): 1, 9–11; Ward Churchill and Winona LaDuke, "Radioactive Colonization and the Native American," *Socialist Review* 15:3 (May/June 1983): 95–119; LeAnn McRoberts, "Native Americans Fight Toxic Invasion," *Red Nations Movement* (January/February 1992), 11–12.

5. Trussell, "Western Shoshones"; Keith Schneider, "Nuclear Complex Threatens Indians," *New York Times*, national edition, 3 September 1990. Churchill and LaDuke, "Radioactive Colonization."

6. Acknowledging this, the World Uranium Hearing will be held in Salzburg, Austria, 13–19 September 1992. As its organizers write, "For one week, some of

the world's First Peoples who have hitherto been silenced and ignored, will have the opportunity to speak out before a jury of responsible world citizens Native people will tell about the destruction of their homes and cultures by a civilization whose energy and military policies depend increasingly on nuclear technology." This is from an informational flyer, "The World Uranium Hearing: Voices of the Unheard." See also an interview with the principle organizer, Claus Biegert, by Linda Larson, "Uranium Mining and Indigenous People," *Santa Fe Sun*, November 1991, 7-9.

7. George Lipsitz, "Listening to Learn and Learning to Listen: Popular Culture, Cultural Theory, and American Studies," *American Quarterly* 42:4 (1990): 615-36.

8. Joseph Bruchac, "Preface," *Survival This Way: Interviews with Native American Poets*, ed. Joseph Bruchac (Tucson, AZ: Sun Tracks and University of Arizona Press, 1987), ix-xiii.

9. This quote is from a flyer calling for support for the 1992 Alliance, a project of the Morningstar Foundation, Washington, D.C.

10. See N. Scott Momaday, "Native American Attitudes to the Environment," in *Seeing with a Native Eye: Essays on Native American Religion*, ed. W. H. Capps (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 79-85.

11. Joseph Bruchac, "Wahsah Zeh (War Dance)—As Long as the Grass," in *Nuke-Rebuke: Writers & Artists Against Nuclear Energy & Weapons*, ed. Morty Sklar (Iowa City, IO: The Spirit That Moves Us Press, 1984), 61-69.

12. Ortiz, *Fight Back*, 2.

13. *Ibid.*, 3-4.

14. *Ibid.*, 64.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Tom Barry, "New Mexico Pueblos Confront the Atomic Age." in *The Contemporary Southwest: An Anthology*, ed. E. G. Mahoney and C. D. Biebel (Albuquerque: The General College, University of New Mexico, 1986), 237-46.

17. Gregg Bourland, "Dump Nuclear Waste Proposals," *Lakota Times*, 6 May 1992.

18. Alice Walker, "Everything Is a Human Being," in *Living By the Word: Selected Writings 1973-1987* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 139-52.

19. Roberta Hill Whiteman, "In the Longhouse, Oneida Museum." in *New Voices from the Longhouse: An Anthology of Contemporary Iroquois Writing*, ed. Joseph Bruchac (Greenfield Center, NY: Greenfield Review Press, 1989), 279-80.

20. Diane Glancy, "Legend," in *Nuke-Rebuke*, 143; Ralph Salisbury, "Out of this World," in *Warnings: An Anthology on the Nuclear Peril* (Eugene, OR: Northwest Review Press, 1984), 142; Terri Meyette, "Celebration 1982," in *A Gathering of Spirit*, 60.

21. Robert Jungk, *Brighter Than 1000 Suns: A Personal History of the Atomic Scientists*, trans. James Cleugh (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958), 197. The statement about the "Almighty" is from General James Farrell, quoted in Stephen Hilgartner, Richard C. Bell, and Rory O'Connor, *Nukespeak: The Selling of Nuclear Technology in America* (New York: Penguin, 1983), 33. William Laurence, a reporter for the *New York Times*, received special government clearance to witness atomic tests and write about atomic weaponry; he compared the bomb to both the moment of creation when "God said, 'Let there be light'" and the Second Coming of Christ. Winston Churchill also compared the bomb to the Second Coming. See Spencer Weart, *Nuclear Fear: A History of Images* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 101. For more general discussions of the

associations between nuclear technology and divinity, see Ira Chernus, *Dr. Strangegod: On the Symbolic Meaning of Nuclear Weapons* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1986); Jane Caputi, "The Metaphors of Radiation: Or, Why a Beautiful Woman Is Like a Nuclear Power Plant," *Women's Studies International Forum* 15:5 (1991): 423–42.

22. Jungk, *Brighter than a Thousand Suns*, 197; Lansing Lamont, *Day of Trinity* (New York: Atheneum, 1965), 285. For further discussion, see Carol Cohn, "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 12 (1987): 687–718. See also Herman Kahn, *Thinking about the Unthinkable* (New York: Horizon Press, 1962) and Brian Easlea, *Fathering the Unthinkable: Masculinity, Scientists and the Nuclear Arms Race* (London: Pluto Press, 1983).

23. See Caputi, "The Metaphors of Radiation"; Cohn, "Sex and Death"; Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 102–104; Chernus, *Dr. Strangegod*.

24. Cited in Richard Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 442.

25. Shawnee/Cayuga poet Barney Bush angrily tracks the movement of the Wasichu into territories "beyond the stars":

Greedy Ones as you leave
take your sacred icons
statue of liberty nuclear
cores draglines cancer
the gold in Ft Knox take
your names with you to
your world beyond the stars
and with madlike laughter
know your manifest destiny is
not complete until each
planet bears your flag.

Bush, "Inherit the Blood," in *Inherit the Blood*, 9. See also M. Jane Young, "'Pity the Indians of Outer Space': Native American Views of the Space Program," *Western Folklore* 46 (October 1987): 269–79.

26. Rose, "The Fifties," 60–61.

27. For a discussion of mainstream fictional narratives, see C. L. Sonnichsen, "Fat Man and the Storytellers: Los Alamos in Fiction," *New Mexico Historical Review* 65:1 (1990): 49–71. See also the 1989 film *Fat Man and Little Boy*, directed by Roland Joffé. For an excellent critical discussion of the two Native American novels about nuclear power in New Mexico, *Ceremony* and *Stallion Gate*, see Helen Jaskoski, "Thinking Woman's Children and the Bomb," in *The Nightmare Considered: Critical Essays on Nuclear War Literature*, ed. Nancy Anisfield (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1991), 159–76.

28. Jane Caputi, interview with Martin Cruz Smith, July 1990, unpublished.

29. Rose, "Robert," 257–58.

30. Smith, *Stallion Gate*, 70.

31. *Ibid.*, 241.

32. Smith takes the phrase *gourd of ashes* from Hopi prophecy that someday a gourd of ashes would be invented that was so powerful that if human beings allowed it to be dropped on the Earth, everything would be burned up. Some

Hopi people see the invention of the atomic bomb as the fulfillment of this prophecy and, against the sentiments of other members of the tribe who believe prophecies must be kept private and not released to outsiders, since 1948 have carried this prophecy around the world in order to warn people. See the message from Thomas Banyacya in Stephen Most and Lynn Grasberg, eds., *The Broken Circle: A Search for Wisdom in the Nuclear Age* (Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press, 1988), 10–11. Another warning was issued from the Fire Clan of the Hopi in October 1990, when an “ancient three-foot pile of stones marking a boundary of the land for which the Hopis believe they are the divinely appointed caretakers was stripped away unknowingly by a gravel company.” Hopi elder Martin Gashweseoma of Hoteville brought the prophetic marked stones of his Fire Clan to Santa Fe on December 13 (picked because of the waxing moon), to tell New Mexico governor Bruce King that the last Hopi prophecies were being fulfilled, indicating impending apocalypse. See Larry Calloway, “Warnings from the Fire Clan,” *Albuquerque Journal*, 13 January 1991.

33. Smith, *Stallion Gate*, 359.
34. *Ibid.*, 361–62.
35. *Ibid.*, 365.
36. *Ibid.*, 374.
37. Caputi, interview with M. C. Smith.
38. Keres and Tewa are language groups of Southwestern Pueblo Indians.
39. Silko, *Ceremony*, 132.
40. Dennis R. Hoilman, “‘A World Made of Stories’: An Interpretation of Leslie Silko’s *Ceremony*,” *South Dakota Review* 17:4 (1979–80), 54–66.
41. Silko, *Ceremony*, 142.
42. *Ibid.*, 144.
43. *Ibid.*, 259.
44. Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 119.
45. *Ibid.*, 118.
46. Silko, *Ceremony*, 232.
47. *Ibid.*, 233.
48. Patricia Clark Smith with Paula Gunn Allen. “Earthy Relations, Carnal Knowledge: Southwestern American Indian Women Writers and Landscape,” *The Desert Is No Lady*, ed. Vera Norwood and Janice Monk (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 174–96.
49. Silko, *Ceremony*, 270.
50. Allen, *Sacred Hoop*, 119.
51. I use *nuclearist* to mean a disrespectful, irreverent, exploitative, and idolizing attitude toward nuclear power, frequently by investing it with attributes of patriarchal sexuality and divinity.
52. Paula Gunn Allen, “Special Problems in Teaching Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*,” *American Indian Quarterly: Journal of American Indian Studies* 14:4 (Fall 1990): 379–86.
53. Smith, *Stallion Gate*, 214.
54. Caputi, “Metaphors.” Diana E. H. Russell, ed., *Exposing Nuclear Phallacies* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1989).
55. Carol Lee Sanchez, “New World Tribal Communities: An Alternative Approach for Recreating Egalitarian Societies,” in *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*, ed. Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 344–56. The material in this section on Sanchez

and Awiakta and the beginning of the discussion on Allen's "Raven's Road" are, in part, taken from Caputi, "The Metaphors of Radiation."

56. Sanchez, "New World," 346.
57. *Ibid.*, 352–53.
58. Caputi, "Metaphors."
59. Awiakta, "Baring the Atom's Mother Heart," 186.
60. *Ibid.*
61. *Ibid.*, 184–85.
62. Ean Begg, *The Cult of the Black Virgin* (Boston: Arkana, 1985), 27.
63. Allen, "Raven's Road," 56.
64. Jane Caputi, "Interview with Paula Gunn Allen," *Trivia: A Journal of Ideas* 16/17 (1990): 50–67.
65. *Ibid.*, 62.
66. *Ibid.*, 63.
67. Shel Silverstein's perennially popular children's story, *The Giving Tree* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), propounds just such a view of a female-identified nature as passive and terribly masochistic.
68. Marilou Awiakta, "Mother Nature Sends a Pink Slip," *Appalachian Heritage* (Winter 1991), 5.
69. Silko, "The Fourth World," 124–25.
70. Cited in Jerome Rothenberg, "Pre-Face (1990)," in *Shaking the Pumpkin: Traditional Poetry of the Indian North Americas*, ed. Jerome Rothenberg (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986; rev. 1991), xvii.
71. For example, Barbara Means Adams (Oglala Sioux) writes of the "four parts of the soul," including the first being who is "*tonwan*, the eye, who sees everything . . . Later, when I was looking at drawings of atoms in a science text, I suddenly knew what that golden snake and those hundreds of prisms meant. *Tonwan* was the atom, or the atom was *tonwan*." See Barbara Means Adams, "The Four Parts of the Soul," *Woman of Power: A Magazine of Feminism, Spirituality, and Politics* 19 (Winter 1991), 34–39. Reprinted from Barbara Means Adams, *Prayers of Smoke* (Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts, 1990).
72. Awiakta, "Baring the Atom's Mother Heart," 188.
73. Thomas Rain Crowe, "Marilou Awiakta: Reweaving the Future," *Appalachian Journal* 18:1 (Fall 1990): 40–54.
74. Awiakta, *Abiding Appalachia*, 18.
75. *Ibid.*, 15.
76. Awiakta, "Baring the Atom's Mother Heart," 187.
77. *Ibid.*
78. Awiakta, *Abiding Appalachia*, 79.
79. Cohn, "Sex and Death"; Glenn D. Hook, "Making Nuclear Weapons Easier to Live With: The Political Role of Language in Nuclearization," *Bulletin of Peace Proposals* 16:1 (1985): 67–77; Robert J. Lifton and Richard Falk, *Indefensible Weapons: The Political and Psychological Case Against Nuclearism* (New York: Basic Books, 1982).
80. Hilgartner, Bell, and O'Connor, *Nukespeak*; Hook, "Making Nuclear Weapons," 67.
81. Linda Hogan, cited in *Reweaving the Web of Life: Feminism and Nonviolence*, ed. Pam McAllister (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1982), 352.
82. The phrase *unthinking the unthinkable* was used first by Jeff Smith in another context in his book *Unthinking the Unthinkable: Nuclear Weapons and Western Culture* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1989).