L'AVENIR EST AU METISSAGE: CHRISTIANITY AND NATIVE AMERICAN TRADITIONAL SPIRITUALITY IN MOMADAY'S HOUSE MADE OF DAWN, SILKO'S CEREMONY AND GARDENS IN THE DUNES, AND ERDRICH'S TRACKS

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

James Ruppert's Mediation in Contemporary Native American Fiction, like other recent critical studies of Native American literature, has focused on the ways in which Native American literature is more than a description of the "social tragedy" of the "victimization of Native peoples" (4). Instead, critics investigate the stated goals of Native American novelists themselves, who "often see themselves as changing the way people think and understand" (ix). Ruppert speaks of a reinvigoration occurring for both Native and non-Native readers of texts that enact mediation between cultures, mediation being the negotiation between cultures that occurs, for example, when Native Americans use Western forms to express Native American concepts. In such novels, "readers are expected to move between Native and non-Native discourse to varying degrees" (ix-x). Establishing a "dialogic relationship between Native and non-Native discourse fields," Native American writers may "disrupt the easy engagement of the dominant literary discourse" (x). In fact, Ruppert, like many other critics such as Louis Owens or Gerald Vizenor, sees such disruption in Native American literature to be "oriented toward a restructuring of the readers' preconceptions and expectations," with the "possibilit[y] of realigning and reinforcing the reader's epistemology" (ix, 6).

In this study I explore how contemporary Native American novelists attempt to effect such "restructuring of the reader's preconceptions" through their use of the concept of interrelation, with which they demonstrate and critique the difference between (the admittedly clumsy categories of) European-American and Native American beliefs.[1]

First I will demonstrate how the concept of interrelation is used in three of the most often read and taught contemporary Native American novels, N. Scott Momaday's House Made of Dawn, Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony, and Louise Erdrich's Tracks. These authors indicate the existence of two different world views whose determining difference is the belief in or the rejection of the concept of interrelation. Primarily, however, I am interested in how Leslie Marmon Silko's latest novel, Gardens in the Dunes, builds upon the concept of interrelation as she and these other writers describe it, to critique the differences between European-American and Native American beliefs, arguing perhaps more pointedly for a conversion, willing or not, of European Americans to what she describes as an indigenous belief system emphasizing interrelation.

This conversion is not an attempt to turn European Americans into Native Americans.[2] Vine Deloria, Jr., Standing Rock Sioux, prominent lawyer, activist, and cultural critic, openly mocks the futility of that sort of conversion with his scathing comments regarding European Americans who attempt to "go Native," without ever coming to an understanding of the complexity of the culture(s) they try to adopt. Thus he describes "Episcopal bishops, [who] already look[ed] silly in ecclesiastical costumes standing on the South Dakota prairies look[ing] absurd when this dress was topped off with awkward fitting war bonnets" (40).[3] The conversion sought differs, moving beyond blood quotients (a subject which leaves many Native American writers angered, with good reason) and cultural costumes to a different way of thinking, of perceiving the natural world, not as something opposed to humankind, but as something into which humans are integrated. With this different conceptual framework, plants, animals, and inanimate "objects" such as soil and minerals are no longer seen in what some Native

American writers allege to be a predatory European American fashion where human's only contact with the non-human results from calculations meant to maximize the exploitation of natural resources, which stand in ignorant, unconscious, brute opposition to those humans. Instead, humans are seen as part of a web-like existence, wherein the actions of one creature or "thing" affect others located in various locations along the same gossamer construction. Such conceptual frameworks, as we shall see, often spring from religious understandings of the world; thus, such a conceptual conversion may, though it does not have to necessarily, involve a spiritual conversion as well. More importantly, conceptual conversion results in changed behavior. In other words, Native American novels often have as one of their goals an ecological aim to replace exploitative, binary European American behavior with more responsible actions towards planet, plant, and animal by asking readers to reconsider the concept of interrelation.

This interrelation, while having been the subject of much discussion by readers of Native American literature, has sometimes been misunderstood as a simplistic notion that "the earth is round, and all things [live] in circles" (Deloria, God 41). A more accurate and detailed description is necessary, and so, before moving into the fictionalized accounts of interrelation offered by Momaday, Silko, and Erdrich, we should pause to consider the non-fictional explanations offered by contemporary Native American writers. Paula Gunn Allen describes the Indian worldview as one in which "the complementary nature of all life forms is stressed" (Sacred 3). Deloria concurs, offering a vision of the world in which all things are dependent upon each other for survival. He explains that "what Western man misses is the rather logical implication of the unity of life. If all living things share a creator and a creation, is it not logical to suppose that all

have the ability to relate to every part of creation?" (God104). Here Deloria describes an understanding similar to that of many ecologists, stressing that one creature has the potential, for better or worse, to affect all others. Such a belief makes feasible the attribution of characteristics to non-humans that European-Americans generally reserve for people. Demonstrating this "personification" he quotes Walking Buffalo, a Stony Indian from Canada:

> Did you know trees talk? Well they do. They talk to each other, and they'll talk to you if you listen. The trouble is, white people don't listen. They never learned to listen to the Indians, so I don't suppose they'll listen to other voices in nature. But I learned a lot from trees, sometimes about the weather, sometimes about animals, and sometimes about the Great Spirit. (104)

In "Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit," Silko writes of such everyday items as women's clothing to illustrate her belief that, inside tribal traditions, "[e]very impulse is to reaffirm the urgent relationship that human beings have with the plant and animal world" (69). She describes the many ways relationships with non-humans are important, from emphasizing clan relationships to teaching survival. Silko claims that according to her tribe's traditions, "a person's value lies in how that person interacts with other people, how that person behaves toward the animals and the earth" (61). The syntax of the sentence makes one wonder if Silko, rather than distinguishing people from animals and the earth, finds earth and animals to be deserving the same importance and respect accorded to people. And indeed, in these novels animals and earth are treated with this respect.

Such interrelation is not confined only to animate creatures. Deloria explains that "many tribal religions go even farther. The manifestation of power is simply not limited to the mobile life forms. For some tribes, the idea extends to plants, rocks, and natural features which Western man considers inanimate" (God 104). Silko agrees that the land and its features are also considered living beings imbuedwith spirit. She describes how animals' remains are to be left close to the earth, so that they may return to the "earth *who* first created them" (27, italics mine), and she reminds us that dead people, also, return to dust.[4] Writes Silko, "A rock has being or spirit, although we may not understand it. In the end, we all originate from the depths of the earth. Perhaps this is how beings share in the spirit of the creator" (27). So we see that, despite the problematics of generalizing about such a broad and varied thing as a religious system, these authors, even with their differing backgrounds, seem to agree that humans have an intimate relationship with other living creatures and even with what most European Americans would consider non-living entities. For many of them, as the above passages indicate, the concept extends to the inanimate: earth and stones, for example.

Storytelling and sexuality, themes often apparent in contemporary Native American Literature, prove to be significant to the discussion of interrelation in these novels. Storytelling demonstrates this concept of interrelation. The novels themselves are stories that teach the concept of interrelation to readers, and inside each novel, magnificent storytellers relate stories to teach this same concept to characters such as Abel in House Made of Dawn, Tayo in Ceremony, Lulu in Tracks, and Hattie and Indigo in Gardens in the Dunes. Sexuality acts as a metaphor for proper relationships between the people within the tribe, as Tracks demonstrates, and, improperly used, becomes a

demonstration of how non-Native belief systems may sully proper relations between people in Gardens in the Dunes. Finally, the restricted sexuality often attributed to Christianity exemplifies the negative outcome of European American attitudes toward the material world as well, because Christian sexual prohibition (for example, the prohibitions against sexual activity outside of marriage) is implied to be the result of the false binary separation of the material and the spiritual arising from the Christian insistence that everything on this planet, including sexuality, is nothing more than temptation away from the spiritual bliss of the next world.

As has already been demonstrated, the classic treatise on Native and European American religious traditions, God Is Red, by Vine Deloria, Jr., also treats the issue of interrelation as it illuminates the differences between these two different traditions, and so I will often be referring this nonfiction text in order to more clearly explain the suggested conversion to a concept of interrelation. Deloria deliberately speculates upon the necessity of such a conversion, which he believes arises from the bankruptcy of orthodox Christianity on this foreign soil. As the title of his work proclaims, on this continent at least, God is red. European Americans, now confronted with the inadequacy of either a European Christianity or a belief in nothing beyond intellectualism, will eventually realize that in the difference between tribal traditions and mainstream European American Christianity lies the key to appropriate living on this continent. Since, according to Deloria, "The basic divergence of points of view between American Indians and the rest of American society must be seen...in the conception of land...as either a subject or an object," any movement away from traditional Western thought involves a conception of interrelation, a more accurate view of the importance of land,

where "land" signifies not only the soil, but every thing living below, in, on, or above it (72). Tribal cultures, in contrast to mainstream European America, "hold their lands--places--as having the highest possible meaning, and all their statements are made with this reference point in mind" (75). Deloria alleges that the last "two centuries in which the exploitation of human and natural resources became increasingly sophisticated" are the result of the European American tendency to see the land as object (72). For Deloria, just as Native American conceptions of land arise from tribal religious beliefs, European American conceptions of the importance of time, instead of place or land, always spring from Christian theology, so that while he recognizes that European American society is becoming increasingly secularized, he calls the United States "a nation where few people ha[ve] ever questioned the superiority of Anglo-Saxon and Christian values" (God 1973, 5). Thus we see that current actions are based, according to Deloria and the novelists I will discuss, upon deep-seated, even (at this point) unconscious religious beliefs.

Foremost among those few who have questioned "the superiority of...Christian values" are the Native Americans who are returning to tribal traditions in record numbers. Deloria describes the period from 1972 (when the first edition of God Is Red was being produced) to 1990 (the approximate date of the preparation of his second edition of the popular work) as one in which

> Indians in their respective tribes began a serious revival of their religious traditions. Ceremonies that had long been discarded or suppressed were once again performed. Traditional people were sought out for their knowledge of ceremonies and customs. Young Indians all over the country felt it imperative to experience a vision quest, and some groups

> even reinstituted a version of the ghost dance. The movement even intruded upon the congregations of Christian Indians and Indian priests and ministers who sought to combine the teachings and practices of both religions. Some traditional ceremonies were even carried out in Protestant churches so that it became difficult to tell whether one was going to attend a hymn-singing or a healing ceremony when the people gathered. (39)

At the same time that Native Americans were returning to traditional practices, "the intense interest in tribal religions by non-Indians and the seemingly wholesale adoption of some of their beliefs and practices by significant segments of white society" began, resulting in a "wave of appropriation" as "workshops, conferences, and gatherings" were conducted where fake medicine men extolled the virtues of medicine wheels, "the seven directions to which the Plains Indians pray with the pipe," and "drums and feather fans" (40).

For Deloria, such phenomena, as mentioned above, merely indicate the bankruptcy of a religion destined to fail due to the influence exerted by the American continent. Christianity in its unhybridized form is a tree that will not live transplanted on this soil. Indeed, he claims, "on almost every front...we find the old mythologies of Christianity being intellectually and often emotionally rejected by contemporary society." The resultant "struggling for meaning in a world in which institutions and beliefs are rapidly eroding" may be resolved by an acceptance of tribal, land-centered religion (God 235).[5] According to Deloria, though, such an acceptance will be difficult for most European Americans, as "[a]ttempting to shift the American/ Western/ Christian outlook from a preoccupation with a particular history and the great concern with time to an

examination of spaces, places, and lands requires...a total reorientation as to the impact of viewing life in different categories" (73-4). He expects that the suggested change will be met with derision, and yet he is grudgingly optimistic of the possibility: "The effort to shift religious thinking so as to examine this theory appears ludicrous to Western men when first proposed...[Still, t]hat religions change is a foregone conclusion." Deloria concludes sarcastically, "To go from Jesus on the hillside advocating the message of the Beatitudes to a Cotton Bowl filled with Jesus freaks chanting 'two bits, four bits, six bits a dollar, all those for Jesus stand up and holler' indicates that anything can occur in a religious tradition" (295). Just as Deloria compares Christian and tribal traditions in an effort to illuminate the efficacy of tribal traditions, so do N. Scott Momaday, Louise Erdrich, and Leslie Marmon Silko. Silko and Deloria agree even more than these other writers in their insistence that mainstream Christianity is not a viable option for this continent, and in their conviction that those who continue to live on this continent will be absorbed into tribal ways of acknowledging interrelation.[6]

This discussion demonstrates that Deloria, Momaday, Erdrich, and Silko *do* posit a European American and a Native American identity. Such identities, however, should be seen not as unchanging racial identities, but rather, as simplifications used to move their argument along. As evidence of the relative importance of belief, rather than blood, numerous characters cross over from European American to Native American points of view and vice versa. As my conversion thesis suggests, these characters are more accurately seen as examples to European American readers of the importance of belief over bloodline, and of the possibility of changing beliefs and actions, than as an argument for inherent racial beliefs.

One might ask, then, how the conversion experienced by Native Americans at the hands of missionary forces differs from the conversion suggested by Momaday, Erdrich, and Silko. The difference, they (and many other Native American writers) allege, lies in the Western conception of binaries, a concept they argue does not really translate into Native American thinking. Native Americans experienced this sense of binaries at the hands of those missionaries who, often with altruistic intentions, attempted their conversion to Christianity. As Irene S. Vernon (and many others) observe, for many missionaries, conversion to Christianity was an all or nothing affair, whereas their Native convertees, on the other hand, expressed confusion "at the actions of missionaries who hated Native spirits, particularly since [their] people did not denounce their Christian God who was very strange to them" (80). Through their European American characters who, mimicking these all-or-nothing missionaries, balk at the notion of a blend of Christian and tribal religious traditions, Silko, Erdrich, and Momaday duplicate in their fiction this view of mutually exclusive binaries.

Although these novels do not consistently see European American points of view to require exclusivity, the authors do provide compelling examples of such exclusivity. In House Made of Dawn, Momaday offers an example of soldiers who ride in to disperse the Kiowa tribe as they prepare to celebrate their sundance. Tosamah describes his grandmother's people as "forbidden without cause the essential act of their faith" and reports that his grandmother bore "a vision of deicide" (133). In Ceremony, when Night Swan's early lover realizes her power, understanding that "his desire for her had uncovered something which had been hidden inside him, something with wings that could fly, escape the gravity of the Church, the town, his mother, his wife, he wanted to

crush the skull into feathers and snap the bones of the wings" (85). Because he has internalized the European American values represented by the Church, the town, his mother, and his wife, he refuses to accept Night Swan's power which, in the eyes of the white institutions, represents evil. Rocky, an assimilated Indian, mocks Tayo's use of traditional ceremonies after they kill a deer. In Tracks, Pauline, a somewhat Christianized Indian, characterizes Nanapush as a pagan who has "not one flare of belief" (196). In other words, if he does not believe according to Christianity, the perception of European Americans and those who have accepted their beliefs is that he does not believe at all. In Gardens in the Dunes, this resistance to intermixture is represented by the soldiers who ride in to disperse the Ghost Dance. Clearly, these novelists often portray European Americans as people unwilling to blend Native American and European American ideas.

In contrast to the European Americans who require exclusivity, time and time again in contemporary Native American literature, readers encounter Native American characters who readily accept a mixture of European American and Native images. I would like to offer two brief examples. In Mean Spirit, Linda Hogan describes Belle, a strong leader and wise older Osage woman, as sitting "before the burning sacred heart candle, a cross, and an eagle prayer feather" (67). In Gordon Henry, Jr.'s The Light People, a

> priest enters from a doorway to the left beyond the altar, beside the big golden cross, at the back center of the chapel. His vestments flow over his body, swishing as he walks into the sound of a Christian song, sung in Ojibway. Beaded woodland patterns run the length of the stole draped

> over his robes into full blooming Anishinabe flowers up around his
> shoulders. (116)[7]

In both instances, Native characters comfortably absorb what European American characters often find to clash disturbingly.

In House Made of Dawn the interaction between the priest and Francisco illustrates that Christians often find conversion to be an excluding process wherein one gives up any "contrary" impulses such as those labeled pagan by church authorities. Francisco, on the other hand, simply absorbs Christianity into his own existing belief system, apparently finding no conflict between them. Like most Christian figures in these novels, at least before they have lived with Natives for a while, the priest sees Christianity as something which must entirely replace Native spiritual traditions, leaving behind not even a trace of "pagan superstitions." Native characters such as Francisco disagree. The priest's journals Father Olguin reads contain a letter outlining the basis of the priest's dislike of Francisco: "He is evil & desires to do me some wrong & this after I befriended him all his life." What has driven the old priest to view Francisco, a seemingly harmless and peaceful man only slightly younger than the priest, in such a fashion? The priest explains, "He is one of them & goes often in the kiva & puts on their horns & hides & does worship that Serpent which…is the One our most ancient enemy. Yet he is unashamed to make one of my sacristans..." (51). Clearly, for the priest, Christianity, represented by the title "sacristan," and tribal tradition, represented by the "horns and hides…&…that serpent," are antithetical.[8] Father Olguin would most likely agree with the old priest's analysis of Francisco's character, pleased as he is to have

"seen to the saint's heart...a small, innocuous ecstasy" gained by reading his journal, which he finds to be "the gift, as it were, of another man's sanctity" (53).

Here is Francisco's alternate view of this syncretic situation: Describing the altar for Porcingula during the feast of Santiago, an altogether mixed event, Francisco thinks, "Tomorrow it would be made beautiful with candles and cloth and holy with incense. He would see to it, for he was the sacristan, after all. Two young boys would stand with rifles at the open side, and he would remind them of their trust." It is obvious that Francisco sees no conflict between the "Lady of the Angels" and the events which share the attention of the townspeople described immediately thereafter:

> And after Mass the lovely Lady would be born in procession from the church, and the little horse would come to greet her in the aisle, would precede her out into the Campo Santo and dance beside her in the streets; and the bull would lope all around and wheel and hook the air with its wooden horns, and the black-faced children, who were the invaders, and the clowns would follow, laughing and taunting with curses, upon its heels. The Lady would stand all day in her shrine, and the governor and his officials would sit in attendance at her feet, and one by one the dancers of the squash and turquoise clans would appear in their rich ceremonial dress, descend the high ladder to the earth, and kneel before her. (77)

Here we see an apparently untroubled blend of Christian (sacristan, mass) and Native traditions (squash and turquoise clans), along with symbols combining both (Porcingula) as well as political elements (such as the governor and his officials) to remind us that no spiritual event occurs in a vacuum.

Even Father Olguin's account of the saint day is only a thin veneer over an older meaning behind the celebration. Santiago, the saint whose day it is, participates in what appears to be an older Pueblo creation myth:

> At the end of the journey Santiago had no longer any need of his horse, and the horse spoke to him and said: "now you must sacrifice me for the good of the people." Accordingly, Santiago stabbed the horse to death, and from its blood there issued a great herd of horses, enough for all the Pueblo people. After that, the rooster spoke to Santiago and said: "Now you must sacrifice me for the good of the people." And accordingly Santiago tore the bird apart with his bare hands and scattered the remains all about on the ground. The blood and feathers of the bird became cultivated plants and domestic animals, enough for all of the Pueblo people. (39)

We see that, while the priest is displeased by the situation, he does not realize the extent to which the mixture has permeated his own life and religion. On the other hand, Francisco may be just as unconscious of this mixture, but it obviously does not bother him as much. The authors of these books, in opposition to Christian exclusivity, repeatedly privilege an amalgam of Christian and tribal traditions, rather than one over the other. For example, Tosamah's grandmother, who is also a storyteller, and therefore a guardian of the spirituality of her tribe, is also a Christian (132). Tosamah explains, "there was a wariness in her, and an ancient awe. She was a Christian in her later years, but she had come a long way about, and she never forgot her birthright" (32). In this passage, Momaday insists on the mixture of the two, refusing to separate them, just as the

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Native American Church is not separated from Native American traditions.

Momaday uses the Native American Church as an example of a positive mixture of European American and Native American culture in other instances as well. The use of peyote would likely be the most controversial aspect of the Native American Church in the eyes of practitioners of the more traditional branches of Christianity. Momaday works to counteract this prejudice by couching his description of the ceremony in biblical language, for example, saying that the "celebrants ate of the peyote buttons" (111), instead of the more current use of that verb which drops the preposition. Momaday leaves no doubt that this particular combination of Christian and Native traditions is positive for the participants: "Everyone felt himself young and whole and powerful. No one was sick and weary" (112). The participants appropriately end their ceremony by both calling on "the Great Spirit" and closing "in Jesus' name, Amen" (113).

Similarly, in Tracks, Margaret begins as a prudish Christian, but ends by practicing a synthesis of Christian and Native traditions. Even for Ceremony's Auntie, escape from the old ways is not completely possible; she is unable to ignore tribal expectations that she bring her younger sister back to more traditional ways. Auntie also inadvertently subverts her own adherence to strictly Christian ways when she offers tea to Tayo. Tayo associates the tea with the "air after a rainstorm, when all the grass and plants smell green and earth is damp" (39). The tea and the cornmeal, product of that symbol of Laguna spirituality, corn, and associated strongly with sexuality, are the only things Tayo can eat and keep down.

As Michael W. Raymond writes in his article on House Made of Dawn, novels such as these offer the suggestion that "meaning in contemporary life comes when one

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finds his sense of place by recognizing and living within that large and diverse context" which is the pluralism of contemporary life (61). The characters who succeed in these novels, Abel and Tayo, for example, do so because they are able to live by a balance of opposites. Ruppert refers to this ability to balance rather than reject when he claims that mediational texts draw from both traditions, resulting in a stronger hybrid. Characters such as Auntie have difficulties because they embrace these opposites, attempting, at least, to live by one way and to deny the other.

In The Woman Warrior, Maxine Hong Kingston, Chinese-American, writes of her own negotiation between two cultures: "I had to make my mind large, large enough for paradoxes." The characters in these novels, too, must somehow reconcile their different worlds, as many critics have remarked, and they do so by absorbing aspects of one culture into the other. Momaday, Silko, and Erdrich suggest that their non-Native readers do the same, allowing a conversion, which unlike many instances of Native American conversion to Christianity, is unforced and avoids exclusivity. Paula Gunn Allen describes the Western world view (a dubious endeavor, to be sure) as one which is permeated by polarities such as "Christian/pagan," "sacred/secular," and "male/female," with one of the pair being viewed as superior to the other, thus excluding the "weaker" as a viable option (167). Rebecca Tsosie comments that it is this polarity "which fragments the modern consciousness into near insanity" (33) and suggests that the "Native" view of binaries is very different. Instead of allowing them to be opposite and mutually exclusive, according to these two authors, Native views see them as meshed, combined into a "balance" (32), a "unified continuum, rather than a fragmented assembly of parts" (25). As she explains, "it is this resolution of an artificially imposed polarity [that]

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restores one to the 'primordial center'" described in novels such as Ceremony. Raymond explains that the difficulties modern Native Americans have with a binary such as Allen and others attribute to Euro-American thinking extends into the relationship between people of the two (?) different cultures: "One cannot reduce the struggles of contemporary life into an 'us vs. them'" (66). Raymond accurately describes House Made of Dawn as a novel which blends different cultures together (not just White and Indian, but Hispanic as well). This description can be extended to novels such as Ceremony and Tracks as well. In Gardens in the Dunes, Silko further complicates any simplistic "us vs. them" approach to the differences between Native American and European American world views by suggesting that even inside the supposedly monolithic Christian world, a long history exists of orthodox Christianity eradicating contrary interpretations of Christian behavior and belief, suggesting that European Americans are subject to the same sorts of manipulations imposed on Native Americans.

If the European American forces in these novels require a replacement of Native traditions by Christianity, then the first subversion of Christianity and the European American culture it permeates lies in the ability of Natives in these works to accept Christianity side by side with Native traditions, despite the efforts of clergy to erect Christianity in place of those Native traditions. This subversion calls into question European American culture, and therefore mainstream Christianity as the driving force behind it, which is described repeatedly as obsessed with the material as opposed to the spiritual (a false dichotomy not upheld in the Native environments described in these novels) and therefore with the individual as opposed to the communal, as the individual remains the key unit for pursuing and enjoying material gain in the European American

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environments described in these novels. The first clue that such values are not acceptable (for Natives or non-Natives, characters or readers) is the negative reactions on the part of Abel in House Made of Dawn, Tayo in Ceremony, and Pauline in Tracks to the environment where this worldview flourishes. Our "heroes" and "heroines," on the other hand, for example, Josiah, Ts'eh, Betonie in Ceremony, Nanapush in Tracks, Angela and perhaps Big Bluff Tosamah in House Made of Dawn, as well as Tayo and Abel in their healthier states of understanding, advocate a rejection of the values of materialism and individualism with which they are confronted. A close analysis of the texts discussed here will demonstrate that the authors eschew such extremes in favor of what they suggest are more productive and harmonious attitudes, absorbing sometimes surprising aspects of European American culture while rejecting the values associated with it. In all of these choices, European American readers are invited to participate, as they are led to question their own culture and to consider the concept of interrelation which underlies a tribal position.

CHAPTER TWO

N. SCOTT MOMADAY'S HOUSE MADE OF DAWN: "WORDS WERE MEDICINE"

Clearly, the publication of N. Scott Momaday's Pulitzer Prize winning novel, House Made of Dawn, was a momentous event in the history of Native American literature. While critics may argue about the validity of the term Native American Renaissance, they all seem to agree that House Made of Dawn is an incredible achievement on the part of its author, and most mark a noticeable change in Native American literature with this work.[9] In this distinguished and breathtaking novel, Momaday describes the return to spiritual harmony of an Indian war veteran who learns to venerate, rather than be embarrassed by, his traditional heritage. As readers follow Abel's realization of the importance of his tribal religious traditions, they encounter a powerful argument which contrasts Native and European traditions in order to prove that the Native traditions offer a more practical option. At the root of this comparison is the understanding of what Momaday terms the "spiritual investment in the landscape," the result of Native Americans' "very long experience of the North American continent, say, going back thousands of years." Momaday explains that an Indian is "able to think of himself in relation to the land, and he is able to define for himself a sense of place, belonging" (Coltelli 91). This relationship to the land is the interrelation writers like Deloria, Silko, and Allen describe, and its realization is born out through storytelling and sexuality, in a subtle comparison of Native American and Christian spiritual traditions.

As Robert Nelson points out, "Repeatedly and emphatically, Momaday has held

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that what distinguishes American Indian from Euroamerican moral and spiritual vision is a deep-rooted identity with, and sense of responsibility to, the natural environment." He continues by describing Momaday's belief that "a human being's life is, or ought to be, an event 'indivisible' from the landscape in which it 'takes place'" (Place and Vision 41). In House Made of Dawn, we see the beginnings of a fictional explanation of the concept of interrelation. Abel learns that "the relationship between the life of the individual and the life of the land is one of 'indivisible' reciprocity: the land holds and is held by the People living there, and the People hold and are held by the land" (42). Abel apprehends his connection to the land, and its hold over him, by learning from the other "people" who inhabit it, for example, from the rooster and the snakes which appear repeatedly throughout the novel. Thus, people and the earth are connected through rituals like the rooster ceremony, and especially, through the story of Santiago, whose horse and rooster both speak to him, urging him to sacrifice them "for the good of the people" in order to provide "cultivated plants and domesticated animals enough for all the Pueblo people" (39).[10] The connection between people and land is also exemplified in Tosamah's grandmother's story which connects Devil's Tower, a specific characteristic of the land, to her tribe.

As has been noted by critics such as Nelson, Abel also learns about the connection between land and people from seemingly unlikely sources, the non-Native women Angela and Millie, who become involved with Abel. Thus we find that sexuality is important to Abel because it serves as an example of the interrelation of all things, a relationship that must be acknowledged for healthy survival. The denial of the power of sexuality threatens death, literally, to Night Swan's early lover in Ceremony, but the

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appreciation of it represents healing for Abel as well as Tayo. The blurb on the cover of House Made of Dawn refers to Abel's "sexual exploits," but this reference is an unfortunate glossing over of the importance of Abel's encounters with Angela and Millie. Even critics such as Bernard Hirsch and Michael Raymond do not allow Angela and Millie the credit they deserve in Abel's healing. According to Raymond, Angela "senses the spiritual vision but finds it all strange and incomprehensible" (69). Hirsch does not recognize the symbolic role Angela plays for Abel, saying only that Abel, "like Angela St. John...turns off his own light and denies his own intuitive wisdom" (318). But the novel actually points in several ways to the importance of their encounters to Abel's emotional and spiritual health.

Abel describes how his body has experienced a rift (very similar to the one that Tayo experiences in Ceremony, published in the following decade) between himself and the earth, remarking that "his body, like his mind, had turned on him; it was his enemy." This is a distinct change from his earlier attitude when he "had loved his body, hard and quick and beautiful; it had been useful, quickly and surely responsive to his mind and will" (100). Connecting with Angela, though, heals them both. Directly after Abel describes his newfound dislike for his body, he remembers Angela: "Angela put her white hands to his body. Abel put his hands to her white body" (101). That his thoughts move from his lack of comfort to his encounter with Angela is not chance; on the contrary, it shows that Angela helps him overcome the problem. Abel remembers despising the priest who helps him at his trial, describing how "he hated the priest for suffering so" (102). But what Angela and Millie teach Abel is that he, too, must learn to submit, and submit to suffering too. Abel "was brutal with her" (Millie), yet it is he

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whose "whole body was breaking open to the roar of the sea" (109).

Following the example offered by Millie and Angela, Abel will also resemble the snake who allows himself, "limp and curving in the trail of her flight," to be tossed between the two mating eagles (18). Just as Angela and Millie submit to Abel, so Abel must submit to the earth, acknowledging its claims over him. As Nelson clearly puts it, Abel's interaction with Angela and Millie leads to a clarification of the lessons provided by the animal clans represented in the novel, resulting in Abel's "understanding of the life of the land" and therefore his "understanding of [his] own separation from that land and his consequent spiritual sickness. To be whole in his life at this place Abel must become willing to be held by the land, which is to say 'possessed' by it." Nelson explains, "In the structure of the novel, Angela...function[s]" to "prepare him to surrender his hold of the land" (42). The lessons that Angela and Millie provide for him (and the lessons that Angela learns from Abel, as well) through their sexual liaisons mirror, then, the lesson that Abel must learn from the land and the creatures which surround him.[11] The view presented in this novel coincides with that of the other novels in that the lessons taught in part by women enable Abel to survive. Remarkably, Angela and Millie are both white women, indicating, then, that, as Ruppert suggests, both cultures may offer lessons to each other, despite that this particular lesson on interrelation seems to be more often understood by Native Americans.

Angela, in addition to being Abel's sexual partner, is a storyteller as well, and a quite accomplished one, who causes even an experienced story listener to cry out "Ei yai" at the thought of her story, and to compare it to the works of an elder storyteller (187). This story which so impresses him hints that Angela absorbed the lessons Abel and his

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environment offered her, as he needs to absorb her lessons for him. In her story she integrates Abel's bear symbol with her white son's life, showing that she teaches her son, too, that animals can teach people how best to be and behave, just as her earlier recognition of Abel's resemblance to the bear demonstrated Abel's ability to take on and be healed by the bear-like characteristics he had the potential to embody. This storytelling, like sexuality, teaches people how to treat themselves, each other, and the earth. Momaday devotes another story, Tosamah's sermon "The Way to Rainy Mountain," to the importance of words and their relation to place. If we look outside the text we see that names in particular, for people, places, animals, are especially powerful words and stories, at the same time, not just to the tribe at large, but to the author Momaday as well, whose name derives from a story about a place. Momaday's novel, and also the other novels discussed here, emphasize the importance of storytelling, because traditionally, tribal language shows how all things are connected.

Given the importance of storytelling, it is no wonder that Momaday engages in a textual guerrilla warfare, stealing the story of the Garden of Eden for his own purposes, that is, to compare (unfavorably) to his own creation story. Momaday appropriates not only St. John, but also the story of the Garden of Eden in order to illustrate the differences between Native American traditions and traditional European American interpretations of the Bible, and the effects of those differences on the inheritors of both cultures. The previously mentioned account of the origin of cultivated plants and domesticated animals "enough for all the Pueblo people" offers an intriguing contrast to the Garden of Eden, and the reader is left to wonder if the rooster's self sacrifice is committed after the model of Christ, or as a counterexample of a more practical sacrifice.

According to Deloria, for Christians, and even for non-Christians who, despite their disbelief in Christianity's tenets still live in a world permeated by Christian beliefs, values and mythology, creation is seen as a specific event, whereas in Native traditions, creation is an "ecosystem present in a definable place." Outlining their differences, he claims, "Both religions can be said to agree on the role and activity of a creator. Outside of that particular thing, there would appear to be little that the two views share." These differences have grave repercussions for the actions of both European Americans and Native Americans: "Tribal religions appear to be thereafter concerned with the interrelationship of all things. Christians see creation as the beginning event of a linear time structure in which a divine plan is worked out, the conclusion of the sequence being an act of destruction bringing the world to an end." In contrast, "[t]he beginning and the end of time are of no apparent concern for many tribal religions" (God 91-92). Deloria has this to say of Jesus' crucifixion: "With the fall of Adam the rest of nature also falls out of grace with God, Adam being a surrogate for the whole of creation...the major thesis of the Christian religion is thus contained in its creation story, since it is for the redemption of man that the atonement of Jesus of Nazareth is considered to make sense" (92). Deloria, like Momaday, suggests that the story of Jesus' crucifixion is part and parcel of the larger difference between European American and Native American religions, that difference being the belief in or rejection of the concept of interrelation.

Momaday makes a distinction between the traditional ways their tribes regard the word and the European American way, which is aligned with Christianity and often with writing as opposed to spoken word. Momaday traces the development of the difference between the two points of view in Tosamah's first sermon. In the beginning, the

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Christian and the tribal views are the same. In Genesis, God speaks to create, and in the Kiowa story, Tai-me speaks in order to lead the Kiowa from starvation, suggesting that the two stories may be one and the same. Tosamah emphasizes the similarities between the creation myth in Genesis with the story of the coming of Tai-me. Of course, this comparison also shows that Momaday is not merely accepting the Christian point of view, but instead is arguing with it, changing it, making it move to meet what he knows is the truth. Tosamah quotes the beginning of the Christian creation story: "'In the beginning was the Word' And that is all there was, and it was enough." The divergence occurs when Saint John carries things too far, "impos[ing] his idea of God upon the everlasting Truth" (93). With this observation, Momaday suggests that St. John is only the first in a long line of Europeans, and later, European Americans, who reinterpreted the word to best suit either their spiritual ambitions or preconceptions, in John's case, or their economic and political interests in later instances. Due to this change, the word is corrupted. Instead of linking the world to the word and sensing the word's power, Saint John ignores that power and plays with words: "Old John was a white man, and the white man has his ways. He talks about the Word. He talks through it and around it." Tosamah describes the disrespect inherent in the blithe alteration of words: "He builds upon it with syllables, with prefixes and suffixes and hyphens and accents." With these changes, he diminishes the power of the word; he "adds and divides and multiplies the Word. And in all of this he subtracts the Truth" (93-4).[12] Here we see the kernel of an idea more fully developed in Silko's Gardens in the Dunes, and a solution to the problem of contradiction: Christianity at its heart does not disagree in great degree from some Native traditions, Momaday suggests. It is mainstream Christianity's misinterpretations,

with their origins in John, and then moving through years of Western culture and conquest, which are the source of conflict and difference from Native traditions.[13]

Tosamah subverts what he describes as the current European American way of privileging the written word over the spoken by describing the value, strength, and beauty of the spoken word.[14] As words are taken for granted, a process encouraged by the written nature of words in European American culture, they multiply in number and are then disrespected due to the ease with which they can be manipulated:

> In the white man's world, language, too, has undergone a process of change. The white man takes such things as words and literatures for granted. On every side of him there are words by the millions, an unending succession of pamphlets and paper, letters and books, bills and bulletins, commentaries and conversation. He has diluted and multiplied the Word, and words have begun to close in upon him. (95)

The oral tradition, on the other hand, privileges the word, appreciating it all the more as it is always "but one generation from extinction." Tosamah explains that "for that reason it was cherished and revered" (97). By calling the oral tradition "literature" and by privileging it through its nearness to extinction Tosamah turns around the European American point of view that written words are superior to the spoken word. Writing the word is not inherently bad though; the disregard for the word which tends to accompany its written proliferation is the problem. When St. John embellishes the Word as he writes it, "in terms of the moment afterward, which was irrelevant and remote; not in terms of his imagination, but only in terms of his prejudice" (97), he disrespects the word. Tosamah offers his grandmother, another storyteller, as an example of the way words

should be regarded (remarkable that this information comes, at least within the confines of the novel, not from a university scholar, but from an ancestor):

> Her regard for words was always keen in proportion as she depended on them. You see, for her, words were medicine; they were magic and invisible. They came from nothing into sound and meaning. They were beyond prices; they could be neither bought nor sold. And she never threw words away. (96)

What Tosamah knows is that with the change in the way words are used, the white man's "regard for language-for the Word itself-as an instrument of creation, has diminished nearly to the point of no return."

Momaday implies (though I believe he does so, as I mentioned earlier, for the sake of argument, rather than through any trust in rigid categories) that the European American view of words, which is likened in Tosamah's sermon to the Christian words of Saint John, requires that all be explained, that mystery be removed. So just as the oil wells and uranium mines plumb the depths of the earth, the white words reveal the "scheme" about them. Saint John "could find no satisfaction in the simple fact that the Word was; he had to account for it, [but] not in terms of that sudden and profound insight which must have devastated him at once," as Tosamah and his grandmother are still devastated by the power of the word. This need to explain appears in contexts outside of the strictly spiritual, so that the difference in the two points of view can be seen when the priest (an unlikely ally) tries to explain why Abel killed the Albino: "[A]nyway, there is no way to be objective about such a thing" (101). Despite the lawyers' desire to distinguish between the terms homicide, murder and death, and their appropriate

contexts, the priest knows that mere definitions will not be enough to tie everything down and remove the mystery from the situation.

In the point of view presented by Momaday, and as we shall see, by Erdrich and Silko as well, words, at their best, connect instead of ripping apart. Words should connect, by teaching, but the disrespect associated with the Christian approach to words tears apart. Momaday remarks that by removing power from the word, European Americans may even "perish by the Word" (95). Here Momaday is most likely referring to the way words pull apart, instead of uniting, as shown in Abel's court case: "Word by word these men were disposing of him in language, and they were doing a bad job of it." Such a bad job, indeed, that Abel, coming from a tradition which understands the importance of language as a tool to connect, "wanted to help them" (102). This does not occur just at Abel's trial, but also in the documents which are interspersed between Abel's recollections of the trial. Inquiring about Abel's age, physical characteristics, and marital status, one form requires the least important information, obviously mistaking it for the most important. The form only asks for his parents' ages and occupations if they are living, a clear contrast to the tribal belief that the dead continue to have importance beyond their sojourns in the physical world. Religious information, presumably the most important information, is, according to the form, "optional" (106). Clearly, the writers of these forms have much to learn.

The lesson Abel learns through Angela and Millie, a lesson confirmed by his relationship with the land as demonstrated in the dawn running, is both reinforced and enriched by what Abel's experiences are able to teach readers. While Abel is reconnected to a traditional past (one that lives on into the present, as Abel's story shows), non-Native

readers are introduced to a conception of land (as well as of story and sexuality) that varies greatly from their own traditional approach. Momaday's writing suggests that Abel's lesson applies not only to his life, but to ours as well.

CHAPTER THREE

CEREMONY: "NO WORD STANDS ALONE"

In an interview with Laura Coltelli, Leslie Marmon Silko discusses the forces behind her work. She explains that "certainly for me the most effective political statement I would make is in my art work." She continues, "I'm really aware of ways of saying things so you don't offend somebody, so you can keep their interest, so you can keep talking to them" (147). In this chapter, I discuss Silko's comparison of Christian and Native American approaches as a form of subtle argument for a better way of living, one with individual and worldwide consequences. This better way of living has at its focal point the concept of interrelation.

Again in Ceremony, the spirit world, the animal world and the realm of humans are shown to be one and the same, each vitally interdependent on the others for survival. Ts'eh, herself a representative perhaps of the spirit world and certainly a teacher of how humans should relate with the earth and its creatures, is linked with the painting of an elk "swollen with new life." Silko describes the actions of Ts'eh and the appearance of the painting in adjacent sentences with no attempt to differentiate between Ts'eh and the elk: "She laid the willow sticks she had tied inside the small square enclosure, and he laid a flat sandstone over the opening at the top. The rain and the wind were overtaking her, rubbing away the details of her legs; the sun was bleaching her hooves into faint outlines, merging into the cliff" (231). The hazel eyes of the mixed blood, and the spider-webs which appear throughout the novel are other symbols of this interrelation. The most

obvious example of this interrelation occurs in the simultaneity of Tayo's illness and the drought which affects the reservation.[15] Similarly, readers are persuaded that the uranium mine which devastates the earth also somehow devastates the people.[16] Paula Gunn Allen analyzes Tayo's illness and recovery as being related to his misunderstanding of this connection to the land in the following way: "Tayo is healed when he understands...that his being is within and outside him" (Studies 128). As Silko explains in Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit, that one is separate from the surrounding land is an erroneous assumption. She writes, "So long as the human consciousness remains *within* the hills, canyons, cliffs, and the plants, clouds and sky, the term *landscape*, as it has entered the English language, is misleading." She continues, "'A portion of territory the eye can comprehend in a single view' does not correctly describe the relationship between the human being and his or her surroundings. This assumes the viewer is somehow outside or separate from the territory she or he surveys." On the contrary, "Viewers are as much a part of the landscape as the boulders they stand on" (27). Thus we see that humans are inextricably bound to the land they inhabit, and from this relationship proceeds all others, including those between human and animal, plant, earth or stone.

This interrelation is denied by Auntie, who does her best to leave traditional tribal ways of thinking, having embraced a different point of view, a point of view she believes requires her to divide herself from her people:

> Christianity separated the people from themselves; it tried to crush the single clan name, encouraging each person to stand alone, because Jesus Christ would save only the individual soul. Jesus Christ was not like the

Mother who loved and cared for them as her children, as her family. (68)[17]

Contrast this view with the Native belief described by Silko in Yellow Woman: "the impulse was to leave nothing out" ("Interior and Exterior Landscapes" 31). Auntie stands as an example of the repercussions of the clash in cultures which Native Americans throughout this continent have experienced. In just this quote, Silko illustrates what Native Americans who refuse to accept Christianity are reacting against: a world view which requires individuality to take precedence over community, and that was encouraged to the point of coercion.[18] Auntie stresses the individual self: her worries, her sacrifices, her knowledge, her salvation. It is for this reason that she must always remind everyone that she told them so: "remember how I warned you, Tayo?" she demands when the Pinkie's death is revealed. She takes great pleasure in "remind[ing] them she had said it would happen all along" (259). The narrator explains that "[w]hen it came to saving her own soul, she wanted to be careful there were no mistakes" (77). Auntie excludes herself from the tribe again and again by emphasizing how much "she had endured all because of what they had done" (30). Auntie aligns this attitude with Christianity not simply in her idea that Jesus judges each soul individually, regardless of clan ties, but because she thinks it is what the other church goers, "[t]hose who measure life by counting the crosses," expect from her (30). Here, as in House Made of Dawn, we see a subtle rebuke of the story of Jesus' crucifixion, as that story encourages Christians to count their burdens rather than their blessings and to value martyrdom as a means of impressing upon others one's individual importance.

Ku'oosh, on the other hand, denies his self in order to combine himself with the community, not just of the living, but of his ancestors as well. He refuses to take credit

for the healing he is performing. Instead, he speaks "as if nothing [he] said were his own, but all had been said before and he was there only to repeat it" (34). Many of the members of the tribe, despite Auntie's convictions to the contrary, agree with Ku'oosh. Thus Robert says to Tayo, "I'm afraid of what will happen to all of us if you and the others don't get well" (38). Like the tribespeople who accept responsibility (as does Auntie, whether she likes it or not) for the wandering of Little Sister, he understands that what happens to one of them happens to all of them. The tribemembers do see themselves as related: "When they failed, the humiliation fell on all of them; what happened to the girl did not happen to her alone. It happened to all of them" (69). In the following passage Silko shows us how the people interact together, spiritually, as one entity, further illustrating the disparity between this point of view and the Christian one, which even Auntie feels compelled to participate in: "The old instinct had always been to gather the feelings and the opinions that were scattered throughout the village, to gather them like willow twigs and tie them into a single prayer bundle that would bring peace to all of them" (69). What happens to one, happens to all. This is the reason behind Tayo's feelings that, despite the brevity of their encounter, "Night Swan cared a great deal about him" (100). Like the earth, personified by Night Swan and "the Mother," she does care, about him, Robert, and the tribe as a whole. Stepping outside the text, Silko, too, aligns herself with her tribal community when she says, as the author, "I'm telling you the story," the same story of Thought Woman, "sitting in her room/ thinking of a story now" (1). Instead of stressing her role as the creator of the tale, she credits Thought Woman (while of course glorifying herself as a kind of incarnation of Thought Woman).

In a beautiful passage, Silko shows how words demonstrate the interrelation of

people, animal and earth:

> The word he used to express "fragile" was filled with the intricacies of a continuing process, and with a strength inherent in spider webs woven across paths through sand hills where early in the morning the sun becomes entangled in each filament of web. It took a long time to explain the fragility and intricacy because no word exists alone, and the reason for choosing each word had to be explained with a story about why it must be said this certain way. That was the responsibility that went with being human, old Ku'oosh said, the story behind each word must be told so there could be no mistake in the meaning of what had been said, and this demanded great patience and love. (356)

Words not only connect; they create, much as in Momaday's description of the vital power of words in House Made of Dawn. Paula Gunn Allen explains, "The thought for which Spider Woman is known is the kind which results in physical manifestation of phenomena: mountains, lakes, creatures, or philosophical-sociological systems" (Studies 130). Based on this explanation, the danger of words changing in the face of European American influence becomes clear. Auntie remembers a time when "the people had known, with the simple certainty of the world they saw, how everything should be. But the fifth world had become entangled with European names: the names of rivers, the hills, the names of the animals and plants-all of creation suddenly had two names, an Indian name and a white name" (68).

In Ceremony, Silko shows how the wrong attitude can twist around storytelling as the witchery, created by story, results in racism and the threat of nuclear annihilation. If

speaking may result in positive creation, it may also result in negative creation. Silko balances this danger inherent in the word with the admonition that the word must also be flexible, like the ceremonies, which must be altered in the face of new circumstances. Therefore, the flexible nature of stories is emphasized, in a description of Old Grandma's relations with the other Lagunas : "The story was all that counted. If she had a better one about them, then it didn't matter what they said" (89).

In Ceremony, Night Swan tells stories to Josiah to illuminate the power and importance of sexuality, and Ts'eh, Tayo's partner, teaches him to care for the earth and encourage the growing cycles by moving the flowers from one place to another. Sexuality and words are quite naturally linked, in that they both reinforce the interrelation of all things. Sexuality demonstrates the link, while storytelling teaches it. Like storytelling, sexuality in Ceremony helps to illustrate and to teach the awareness of the interrelation between the earth and the creatures on it, and to demonstrate a fundamental difference between orthodox Christianity and Native spirituality. Silko writes that "[s]exual inhibition did not begin until the missionaries arrived…In the days before the Puritans came, marriage did not mean an end to sex with people other than your spouse. Women were just as likely as men to have a *si'ash*, or lover…New life was so precious that pregnancy was always appropriate, and pregnancy before marriage was celebrated as a good sign" (Yellow Woman 68). Silko explains that the character Yellow Woman's "power lies in her courage and in her uninhibited sexuality" (70) which "benefits her people" (71).

If Silko is correct about Pueblo attitudes towards sexuality, then once again, Silko's Auntie shows herself to be a characterization not of traditionally Pueblo beliefs,

but of Christianity. Tayo is seen through Auntie's presumably Christian eyes as "the shame of her younger sister" because he is the product of her illicit sexual activity (29). It is not only Little Sister's sexuality which Auntie seeks to censor. Not confining her beliefs to her own life and her sister's, she tries to control Josiah's sexual behavior as well. She scolds Josiah for the "scandal of his Mexican girlfriend" (32). In fact, when she considers Josiah's relationship with Night Swan, she feels that "it wasn't any different from Little Sister and that white man" (30). It is not simply the interracial nature of the alliances which disturbs Auntie; it is the sexuality itself, although her abhorrence of interracial sexuality further emphasizes Silko's conviction that belief, rather than blood, determines a human being's value. There is a reason we never get an account of Auntie's sex life, even though she is married and her husband shows up over and over again in the story. For daring to engage in sexual relations, Josiah should suffer some awful punishment, perhaps like that of Auntie's old dog, Pepper. Directly after Auntie explains that she had always been happy Josiah hadn't married, and expresses her dismay that "now, worse things are happening," Auntie reminds us of Pepper's fateful end, "run over on the highway, chasing some she-dog in heat" (93). Auntie's ideas on sexuality seem to come directly from the priest, who "shook his finger at drunkenness and lust" (68).

It is Auntie, although she would like us to think the whole tribe agrees with her, who senses scandal in Little Sister's sexuality, and who builds that scandal as she describes Little Sister returning home one night, "completely naked except for her high-heel shoes." Exclaims an outraged Auntie, "She had no clothes on. Nothing."[19] Perhaps Auntie feels the need to build up the story with her numerous false starts to compensate

for the lack of scandal that anyone else might find in it. She wishes they really gossiped the way she accuses them of gossiping, but if, in fact, the other tribespeople were told of this story, their reaction would most likely be to notice not the high-heel shoes, which Auntie interprets as signs of female wickedness and debauchery, but rather the way Little Sister's sexuality, exemplified by her nudity, is portrayed against a positive background, that of the earth. Little Sister is found at the river, from the vantage point of "that sandrock, above the big curve under that big cottonwood tree" (70). The reader remembers that Night Swan is also settled near a cottonwood tree. In this way Silko suggests that even misguided and abused women like Little Sister share with Night Swan the potential for an earthy sexuality which seems, when properly channeled, wholly positive.

Josiah must escape Auntie's Christian notions of sexual propriety. Auntie's baleful presence is so overwhelming that, when discussing his upcoming journey to visit Night Swan with Tayo, Josiah "talked to Tayo in a low, confidential tone, as if Auntie were only a few feet away from them" (81). When Josiah succeeds in making this break, we see the expression of a joyful and unashamed sexuality. Unlike Auntie, Night Swan laughs a lot, instead of constantly meditating and commenting on her suffering. This laughter is associated with sexuality, sexuality uninhibited by Western notions of age-appropriateness (like Erdrich's Nanapush and Margaret): "He liked to look at the way her light brown skin had wrinkled at the corners of her eyes and mouth, from too much laughing, she liked to say" (81). She is straightforward and bold, like Fleur in Tracks, initiating their sexual encounter (83), and lustily productive, a grandmother with "wide hips" who dances so powerfully that she "made the room shake" (84).

Night Swan is tied to the earth and the seasons. She invites Josiah to "sit down" and "enjoy the seasons with me" (82). Like Tayo, she knows that the dancers covered themselves with dust because "it connected them with the earth," since she, too, is connected to the earth. Her home is covered with dust which "drift[s] up in little clouds around her feet" when Tayo returns to it (101). When Tayo enters he is reminded of a "sandstone cave in the cliffs" (104). When he searches for the lingering traces of her perfume, he smells, appropriately, "the white clay plaster, as timeless as the cliffs where it came from" (195). Tayo is healed just by entering her former home, sleeping a rare night of dreamlessness, in a healthy contrast to his usual nightmares, and a contrast that nicely underscores the differences in the two sexual perspectives. As Garcia Reyes puts it, "The dancer Night Swan introduced Tayo to his own body's connection to earth...Tayo learns through this woman's flesh to feel his own connectedness" (40-1).

As sexuality serves the same purpose as storytelling, demonstrating the interrelation, when sexuality's force is disparaged, the people lose a means of affirming their connection to the earth. <u>Ceremony</u> provides an example of the consequences as Night Swan recounts the story of the beginning of her dancing and her lover at the time. When he leaves her, not because he is tired of her, but "because his desire for her had uncovered something which had been hiding inside of him, something with wings which could fly," he becomes "a dead man, a living dead man who sucked life from the living, desiring and hating even as he took it." Her dancing, after he has renounced her, "illuminated the dead tissues and outlined the hollow of his spirit" (85).

Just as Momaday warns of the dangers of misusing the word, Silko warns that sexuality may be twisted to unfortunate ends. The loss of sexuality as a positive force is

not only felt by the tribe as a whole, or even male members of the tribe in particular. Perhaps the most devastating effects occur among the women. Little Sister and Auntie are prime examples. Auntie, taking her cue from the Christian missionaries, denies Little Sister any personality beyond her supposedly sinful sexual identity. When Tayo dangerously hazards, "after he swallowed and took a breath" to ask what his mother was like, Auntie ends the conversation by returning abruptly to her work in the pantry, so that Tayo has no doubt that "she was finished talking to him" (70). Just in case Tayo might associate beauty with his sinful mother, Auntie removes the photo which is Tayo's only concrete reminder of his mother. Since Little Sister has chosen what Auntie perceives to be the wrong path for her life, Auntie will not allow her anything else, even in the memory of her son.

> The missionaries, disliking the natives because of their supposedly savage and uncivilized nature, destroy Little Sister's pride in herself and this is what leads to her downfall. The tribespeople know that her reunion with them "might have been possible if the girl hadn't been ashamed of herself, [s]hamed by what they taught her in school about the deplorable ways of the Indian people; holy missionary white people, who urged her to break away from her home" (68). She internalizes their standards of womanly goodness, so instead of enjoying her healthy sexuality, she arranges "her dress, her lipstick, her hair, exactly like the white girls" (69).

Rebecca Tsosie asserts that contemporary Native American women restore themselves to a balance in place of the dichotomies offered by Western ways of thinking when they identify with tribal traditions, emphasizing "their own special bond to the

female life-forces in the universe" (32). This is precisely what Auntie and Little Sister cut themselves off from when they refuse their native spirituality and power. Tsosie explains that "for the American Indian woman, the conflict between a traditional identity and the 'feminine' ideal promoted by Euro-American society has assumed complex dimensions in relation to the contemporary search for identity" (28). A woman who adopts this Euro-American ideal maintains a "thin veneer of physical attractiveness to cover her inner disintegration" (28). While Tsosie suggests that characters like Little Sister feel marginalized by their tribe's shame of their promiscuity, perhaps it is people like Auntie, having internalized the Christian point of view towards sexual behavior, who are really ashamed of Little Sister.

Silko's novel suggests that Tayo's sense of alienization is healed by gaining awareness of the Native concept of interrelation, which he, like Abel, learns through his tribe's stories told by the tribal women he encounters. The suggestion is that Little Sister and others like her should choose this healthier sense of interconnection rather than the wounding choice of Christianity. This choice is also available to non-Indian readers. Silko, speaking of <u>Almanac of the Dead</u>, emphasizes shared humanity over ethnicity when she describes the "way the old folks felt, which was, first of all you're a human being. Secondly you originate from somewhere, from a family and a culture. But first of all, human beings" (153). Advocating belief over blood allows Silko to "redefin[e] authorial power according to a nonwestern agenda." As Catherine Rainwater comments, "contemporary Indian writing effects social reform through relocation of non-Indian people from positions of authority to positions as listeners and receivers of knowledge"

(xiv). Silko creates Native American characters who turn non-Native readers into "listeners and receivers of knowledge," the knowledge of interrelation.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRAPS AND TRACKS: "A TRIBE OF PRESSED TREES"

The title of Erdrich's book extends to a motif that occurs throughout the novel, revealing webs and entanglements which demonstrate various kinds of interrelation, some vengeful, some playful, all educational to readers of all backgrounds. In this way, Erdrich's novel carries on the argument we see in Ceremony and House Made of Dawn, an argument which presents Christianity and Native American spiritual traditions in such a manner that non-Native readers may assess for themselves the viability of their religious heritage.

Traps, like tracks, help the hunter capture his (or her) prey. Both traps and tracks are interspersed throughout this book, connecting animals to the people in it and demonstrating perhaps a darker side of interrelation. Still, many of the examples of interrelation in Tracks are positive, and suggest means of maintaining responsibility and therefore health. Lulu's birth story describes this connection of animal to person with the appearance of what might be a "spirit bear" sent to force Fleur into giving birth, thus saving both Fleur's and Lulu's lives. Nanapush is connected to the lake monster as the "servant of the lake, the arranger of secrets" according to Pauline. Aside, though, from the tracks of the animals and the snares of the hunters, and Christ's love like "a hook sunk deep into our flesh" (a more ominous connection found on p. 205), there are instances, naturally enough, of the connections between people. For example, Nanapush describes his relationship to Fleur: "I was entangled with her." He describes the

"pattern" that connects them, the "vine of a wild grape that twined the timbers and drew them close." Relation is not just between those who share blood; these people are connected "not so much by blood as by name and chance survival" (33). Nanapush is also connected to Eli in a mystical way when he guides him on his hunt, which allows all three of them to survive another winter. Eli and Fleur, Margaret and Nanapush are bound together by sexual relations, and Nanapush wraps everyone and everything up in his words, "the web of his meddling" (168). Nanapush then relates the people he has bound together back to the plants of the earth which allow for survival when he describes relations between parents and children as a "net of vines" (169), and in the passage above where he likens his relationship with Fleur to a tangle of grape vines, and them both to trees (33). Pauline, too, is drawn into the tribal relationships despite herself, as she casts the "net of my knowledge" (140). As the word traps suggests, this interrelation is not always as positive as it appears in the previously discussed novels. Unfortunately for the villagers in Tracks, the traps, both physical and metaphorical, are most often used against their own, creating a cruel web of interrelation instead of the caring bonds often shown in Ceremony.[20]

It is individuality, the denial of interrelation, which leads to Fleur's loss of her home, or rather, the individual's refusal to admit to the relations between him or herself and everything else. This negative individuality occurs from within and without, of course, as European Americans' individuality, in the form of greed, leads them to steal Fleur's land for its lumber, and as Fleur herself refuses to admit that she is connected to others, and that she depends upon them. Fleur's attitude is in stark contrast to that of Nanapush who knows that "power dies, power goes under and gutters out ungraspable"

and who, because of this knowledge, "never made the mistake of thinking that I owned my own strength." Then, when trouble hits, he knows that he "was never entirely to blame when all was lost, when my desperate cures had no effect on the suffering of those I loved" (177). When he watches Fleur, though, "in her bearing" Nanapush sees the "barrier of her obstinate pride" because she takes all as her responsibility and within her power to rectify, thinking that "she was huge, she was endless" (178). Nanapush, when faced with a task beyond his strength or ability, asks for help, for example, as he does of Moses to heal Fleur. Fleur takes on the task for herself, which leaves her too tired to continue in any other way than leaving, abandoning her husband, her child, and her tribe. As Sidner Larson suggests, the success of individual Indians in Tracks occurs "at the expense of other Indian people" (7), and it is this working as individuals and not as a community which leads to the downfall of members of the tribe (though readers are led to wonder if any other choices exist, given white expansionist pressure at the end of the 19th century). Although Larson describes Nanapush's triumphs in reuniting his kin, we must recognize that Nanapush does not succeed in keeping the whole tribe from fighting along kinship lines, and in fact, Nanapush contributes to the feuding at times (217). In a similar fashion, Fleur's power, which might have been directed towards bringing them back together again, is perverted by her strong sense of individuality into curses against Many Women (11) and Nector (213), dooming the tribe to separation.

In Ceremony, such instances of individuality clearly implicate Christianity in the division between tribespeople as the promise of Jesus' salvation is held out only on an individual basis, encouraging relatives to abandon each other in their fear of the punishment of their own souls. In Tracks, however, the relation between Christianity and

the tribe is more complex. Erdrich shows that both Christian nuns in their convents and wily old storytelling healers in their lean-tos are equally susceptible to the desire to gossip, compete, and pull each other apart in any way imaginable (194, 217). If anything, Christians come out smelling sweeter in this respect as Erdrich generously allows Father Damien to chastise Nanapush for his made-up gossip regarding Pukwan's act of self-love (216).

Still, the Christianity presented here alters the attitude toward sexuality in these novels, and as we know, since sexuality is clearly attached to storytelling and thus to education about interrelation, such alteration is dangerous. Allen asserts that Native American life before Christianity was introduced was characterized by a "free and easy sexuality" (2). Deloria corroborates this comment: "we are just now ridding ourselves of a fear of sex imposed upon us" (God 286). In Tracks, the differing way mainstream Christianity approaches sexuality becomes even more apparent. Margaret, at least at the beginning of the novel, represents white inculturation, as Auntie does in Ceremony by virtue of her alliance with the Church. On the grounds of Christian propriety, she complains to Nanapush of Fleur's outrageous behavior with Eli. "Who learned him to have a woman against a tree in clear daylight?" demands Margaret indignantly. Although it is clear at this point that Margaret thinks Fleur must have so "learned him," her suspicions of Nanapush must spread when he eventually lures her to his bed as the novel progresses. When Nanapush does win Margaret over, his comments indicate the reception Christianity offers sexuality: Lulu has not been taught about sexuality because in order for Margaret to teach her, she would have to "admit...weakness" on her own part

(183). When Pauline speaks of sexuality, it is something of which one must be "purged" (196).

Just as Millie and Angela (though outsiders) teach Abel his relationship to the earth, and therefore, to his tribe, through their sexual encounters, and as Night Swan and Ts'eh perform a similar sort of education in Ceremony, in this novel, again, sexuality unaltered by Christianity proves the means of reasserting a sense of interrelation. Fleur and Eli teach their tribespeople through their sexual reunion what they have to hope for and how they should live. As members of the tribe stand on the frozen water of the lake to icefish, "they would cast their eyes to [the] shore [of the island upon which Fleur's cabin was built] and learn a thing or two." As they listen to the cries of Fleur and Eli's lovemaking, the "people stood fast, let the chill reach deep into their bones, until they heard the satisfaction of silence. Then they turned away and crept back with hope. Faintly warmed, they leaned down to gather in their icy lines" (130). As they work together to ensure their survival, they learn from Eli and Fleur, despite any doubts they might entertain about the couple. It is as though the couple were telling a story to their tribespeople.

Erdrich links storytelling even more concretely to sexuality at another point in the story. When Margaret and Nanapush are reunited, and Nanapush is complaining that perhaps he is too old to perform, Margaret reassures him that, "[a]s long as your voice works, the other will" (129). It is no accident that Nanapush, the storyteller (and "pagan"), is repeatedly portrayed as a sexual character. The word which identifies Nanapush, his name, is connected to his sexual exploits when his father says that "[t]he first Nanapush stole fire. You will steal hearts" (33). Eli goes to Nanapush to learn how

to win Fleur sexually, asking Nanapush how he satisfied three wives. We may surmise that Eli's education includes stories about sex, but Nanapush doesn't abstain from including sexualty even in stories that seem to be entirely unrelated to the subject. For example, Nanapush loads his water story (carefully calculated to cost Pauline her vow not to relieve herself from sun up to sundown, yet another demonstration of the conflict between the two belief systems) with such sexual language that Margaret feels the need "to distract the child," Lulu, who is also part of the audience, hoping that Lulu will somehow miss Nanapush's description: "they coupled until their parts smoked" (150). Words teach, as Nanapush explains (though certainly with humor, and bawdy humor at that), "I'm only telling this for your own benefit!" (150). And, just as in Ceremony where Tayo recalls Josiah's story explaining the importance of a seemingly useless creature, the fly, stories teach people not to debase their relationship with the land. So in Tracks, we should be on guard immediately when we hear Pauline describe how she "listened half-heartedly to Margaret tell some story about the way things used to happen with the people of their clan" (148). Erdrich demonstrates the power of words through Nanapush's stories, but Pauline seals herself from the tribe when she refuses to listen to those stories, meant to help her. And when Nanapush humiliates her, her pride leads to her exclusion, making it impossible for her to forgive him: "He laughed too much, at everything, at me. For that I had no stomach, no forgiveness" (196-7).

Erdrich again demonstrates the power of the spoken word as she describes the discovery of Fleur in the Pillager cabin during a plague which has killed most of the tribe. Nanapush explains that they shouldn't speak the names of the dead, because it would distract their spirits from their after-death destination, and also pose a threat to the living

who remain. Describing his grief, Nanapush says, "I was not prepared to think of the people I had lost. Or to speak of them, although we did carefully, without letting their names loose in the wind that would reach their ears" (5). Nanapush and Fleur survive, but just barely, unlike others who "could not swallow another bite of food because the names of the dead anchored their tongues" (6).

Words are important, as Nanapush's explanation of his own name shows, but the power of a name can be lost: "Nanapush is a name that loses power every time that it is written and stored in a government file" (32). Here we see that power and its loss are related to the government and its misappropriation of words, as is also the case in Ceremony and House Made of Dawn, and to the corruption brought about by the act of writing. Repeatedly Nanapush refuses to give out his name to the census takers and the priests: "I have the use of a white man's name...but I won't sign your paper with that name either," Nanapush tells the captain, demonstrating at one time both the flexibility he maintains, and the power in a word, even a white one (32-3).

But Nanapush knows that he can't refuse to learn white ways and still survive, for whatever survival under those terms is worth. He "told the Captain and the Agent what I thought of their papers in good English" (33). In the end though, it is the need to keep Lulu, and the entire next generation of Indians which stand to be lost to the white world, which leads Nanapush to really master the English language in both its oral and written forms: "I produced papers from the church records to prove I was your father, the one who had the right to say where you went to school and that you should be brought home" (225). The cost is high, though, and once again, tied to the unacceptable aspects of white culture. Nanapush explains:

> once the bureaucrats sink their barbed pens into the lives of Indians, the paper starts flying a blizzard of legal forms, a waste of ink by the gallon, a correspondence to which there is no end or reason. That's when I began to see what we were becoming, and the years have born me out: a tribe of file cabinets and triplicates. A tribe of single space documents, directives, policy. A tribe of pressed trees. A tribe that can be scattered by a wind, diminished into ashes by one struck match. (225)

Here we see not only the devastation caused by the government, but how that government indoctrinates and sullies the tribe itself (hinted at early on in the novel by the incompetent and loathsome tribal policeman, Pukwan, "convinced he should carry out the Agency's instructions to the letter" (3)). Later Edward Pukwan, Jr. "decided to conduct what he delighted in calling an investigation. It sounded so important, this long white word the war had taught him" (216). In this work, again, the discussion of language focuses on oral and written communication, but this time there is a much darker sense of how much choice is offered to Native Americans trying to cope with European American coercion. Here Momaday's explanation of St. John's overzealous treatment of the word and his description of white language's suffixes and prefixes with which it "adds and divides and multiplies the word...subtract[ing] the Truth" add richness to Erdrich's description of the dangers associated with the word mistreated (94).

We also see through this language allusions to the landscape which is desecrated by the actions of the whites. The ink is not all that is wasted in the flurry of government documents (wastefulness being a key characteristic of European American culture that demonstrates the negative actions resulting from the rejection of interrelation): the trees

provide the paper for the unnatural "blizzard," and the trees' health corresponds to the well-being of the people, as we see during Fleur and Nanapush's final interaction. Fleur knocks down every tree around her cabin to demonstrate to the loggers just what they will be doing to the island, and then must leave, self-exiled and with no means of sustenance once her home has been stolen. Nanapush, early on in the novel, remarks that "I weakened into an old man as one oak went down, another and another was lost, as a gap formed here, a clearing there, and plain daylight entered" (9).[21] Clearly, Fleur threatens her own well-being when she sacrifices the trees (though it is true that if she doesn't get to them first, the loggers will seal their fate), and Nanapush's health declines in simultaneity with the trees which surround him.

Passages such as these resonate beyond their demonstration of a tribe's downfall for readers who live in a world where ecologically conscious activists tie themselves to trees in an attempt to demonstrate the same truth. Erdrich, in her indictment of the loggers, meets ecologists' expectations. The lake dispatches with surveyor after surveyor (the forerunners of the loggers), and despite the obvious hint of foul play, readers are still led to side against the surveyors. By the end of the novel, loggers are disappearing or being killed right and left. The Turcot company is described as a reckless "leveler of a whole forest" (219), which leaves in place of the forest "ugliness, the scraped and raw places, the scattered bits of wood and dust" (220). Erdrich reminds us with these descriptions that such activities persist only to feed our reckless, individualistic sense of consumerism and display. Of course, this attitude coincides nicely with the allegedly Christian notion that the land is here for our use, subject to our subduing it.[22] Here, too, Erdrich calls on her readers to consider which approach is most appropriate ecologically

as well as spiritually, as do Momaday and Silko, as his descriptions of a whole and harmonious land and her descriptions of a broken, desecrated uranium mine lead us to the same conclusion.

Certainly the most intriguing intersection and therefore comparison of Christian and Native American tradition occurs in the person of Pauline. Like Auntie in Silko's Ceremony, Pauline must be a martyr, the best martyr ever: "I knew there was never a martyr like me. I was hollow unless pain filled me" (192). And like Auntie, Pauline struggles with her desire to know it all. The apex of her separation occurs when she becomes the self-appointed savior, separating herself from not only her tribe but from the other nuns as well, in order to glorify herself. Pauline feels the need to do Christ's job for him:

> Because my God was lamblike and meek and I had strengthened, daily, on His tests and privations, it was I who was armored and armed even though my hands were loosely bound. It was I with the cunning of serpents, I with the skill to win forgiveness. I would be His champion, His savior, too. (195)

It would be easy to see Pauline as a representation of the evils of European American institutions in general and Christianity in particular. She certainly doesn't seem to be an example of a well-balanced, healthy being, considering her jealousy of Fleur, her cruelty towards Eli and Sophie, and her harsh treatment of her own body. The evidence tempts us to conclude that she is crazy, as do some of the characters in the novel, but why? Because of her visions of God? Her mixture of the Christian God with the lake monster? That physical cruelty toward her own body? Visions are experienced

by other characters in these books without it calling into question their sanity, and the mixture of Christianity and tribal spirituality appears repeatedly and with apparently positive connotations in all three of these novels. Fasting and even torture (as in the fasting and physical torture which occur in conjunction with ceremonial dancing in Welch's novel Fools Crow) occur repeatedly in Native American works without characters' sanity being questioned. Surely Abel's running comes at a cost, especially given the shape he is in when he returns to the reservation.

Pauline's sanity is questionable, but the root of her real problem is in her self-imposed exclusion from the tribe and from the earth. Her lack of sexual activity (minus a few ugly and bizarre exceptions) indicates her separation from them. Erdrich complicates this matter by suggesting that Pauline has no choice in her sexual inactivity, given that she in unwanted by the man she desires, Eli, and poorly treated by the man who desires her, Napoleon. Her denial of any tie to the tribe can be extended to her denial of any connection to the land her tribe lives on and her interrelation with the other creatures there, as she forsakes all material manifestations of spirituality (allegedly an oxymoron in Christian culture) in her pursuit of the purely spiritual. Thus while Nanapush is tied to the very materially real lake monster, Pauline communes with a vision of the devil we fear is either a delusion called up to reinforce her sense of her own importance or a vision that will disappear in a puff of smoke at any moment.

Perhaps Pauline's seeming insanity is simply the inevitable and logical conclusion of full immersion in a rigid form of Christianity. Deloria speaks of the impossibility of living up to the ludicrous expectations of such a God as Christianity's. One feels Deloria's frustration at such a whimsical God in Pauline's confusion as to whether she's

been visited by Jesus or the devil. When the ambiguous creature appears, we are given no more certain reference than "him." First he (He?) tortures Pauline with instruments taken from his "peddler'...pack...full of forks, scissors, and paper packets of sharp needles." Is this Jesus selling torture, or is it the devil?

Erdrich seems to suggest that it doesn't really matter, or that there is no answer at all. Deloria would say that no such religion, based on the afterlife as is Christianity, and on dogma rather than experience, can ever really comfort us in this world. At the heart of such a complaint is the very Native conception that the duality between materiality and spirituality, and therefore between what Christianity would call this world and the next, is false. Deloria calls it a distinction between temporal worlds and physical ones, and clearly, he privileges the physical one and, therefore, the materiality of it, while never separating this materiality from the spiritual. One wonders if Erdrich doesn't agree. In her piece "The Preacher," Erdrich dismisses the rest of the Bible in order to focus on Ecclesiastes, the book which "speaks to people in tough binds, people with vendettas, a bone to pick, no dog to kick, the sour-grapers, the hurt, those who've never shucked off their adolescent angst. In general tones the preacher speaks to the bummed-out." She suggests that the Bible itself really offers no consolation except as it encourages self-indulgence. She quotes "'To everything there is a season, a time to be born and a time to die'...a passage that not only states the obvious but that offers no consolation" (235). Finally, she states both her frustration with the Bible specifically and with Christianity in general, as well as explaining the attraction behind the book of Ecclesiastes: "I think [the preacher] felt as desperate as we all do about the absolute paucity of real answers to a five year old's mind-blowing question, namely, Why are we here? Why are we forced to

think about eternity when our lives are so damned brief?" (236). It is all these questions with which Pauline must grapple when she tries to determine whether it is Jesus or the devil with whom she speaks. She gets no answer, only bewilderingly ambiguous details such as his parting shot that "We'll meet in the desert." The scripture suggests she could meet both Jesus and the devil out there, and so Erdrich seems to be saying that they are both the same thing. The beating she has been given leaves her so weak she could neither "summon [the] will to drive him out the window [n]or even crane her neck to see if he had a tail." Pauline's own words sum up the debate: "I had to wonder. Which master had given me these words to decipher?" While Erdrich's creature's parting shot suggests that perhaps Jesus and the devil are one and the same, a reading supported by Native American critics' avowal of the lack of binaries in Native religions, Pauline thinks that "I must hate one, the other adore" (193).

Pauline defies understanding. While House Made of Dawn and Ceremony both suggest a clearer answer to the question inherently posed by the comparison of Christianity and Native American tradition, in Tracks the comparison is much murkier. Finally, it is in this rejection of binaries as futile to our understanding of the relationship between material and spiritual, this world and the next, that we see any sort of answer. Thus Nanapush's magic works as a combination not only of the profane with the spiritual, as Nanapush's sexuality and storytelling are linked, but of the material and the spiritual (and perhaps these are the same thing): While Pauline plunges her hands into boiling water with only the delusory protection of her faith, Nanapush's dream visitor provides a material protection against the boiling water, a "paste...rubbed on the hands a certain way, then up to the elbows, with exact words said."[23] Too, Nanapush's mission is

practical, Fleur's healing, while Pauline's mission is just for show (188).

This rejection of binaries is underscored by the fact that Pauline herself, despi her fervent desires to the contrary, cannot seem to leave behind the associations she h with Native traditions. We have seen this already in her interpretation of Christ's weakness, but in her confrontation with Nanapush and the water monster on behalf of Christ, the blend of Christian education with her Native knowledge becomes even cle. When Sister Saint Anne holds Pauline's nose until she thinks she will die, it is not a Christian afterlife she sees. Rather, she "began to travel. But I would not take the thr day road...I walked, unwilling, the old way to Matchimanito Lake, passed the round slough...away beyond Fleur's cabin" where she sees the water monster, as the "light fe from the scales and gleamed off the tips of the horns when he rose from the water like shield, like a breastplate, rings of iron in his skin and from his lips, clear fragments of jutting stone" (194). Even when Pauline takes up what she sees as Christ's fight with t water monster, her early immersion in tribal tradition requires that she change the stor so that she is Christianity, taking Christ's place in the battle. As Pauline says, "New devils require new gods." When Pauline becomes this new god, she takes on the characteristics associated with the water monster. Thus it is Pauline "with the cunning serpents" (195). Even before this confrontation, when Pauline describes her healing hands, she calls them "hatchling's claws," suggesting that she is as much connected to lake monster, with his "sprout[ed]...claws," as is Fleur (196, 11). During the confrontation, she "addressed God not as a penitent, with humility, but rather as a dangerous lion" (196). When she is issued the name Leopolda, she knows that it fits (205). Though the syllables are "unfamiliar" the meaning of the name, as well as her

lion-like behavior before God, go back to the lake monster, who "takes the body of a lion" (205, 11). When Pauline grapples with what she believes is the water monster, but which is more likely Napoleon, she changes shape and grapples in the same manner as she has described the water monster grappling with his victims. As she says, "He holds you under," which is exactly what Pauline does as she strangles Napoleon while saying her rosary (11, 202), and for that matter, what Nanapush, already associated with the monster, does to his listeners with his words, though with more positive connotations (7).

Pauline demonstrates that the hold of Native traditions is too strong to be escaped, even by the best Christian missionary efforts. The final piece of evidence comes from the similarity Pauline shares with Nanapush. For Pauline, though it is easy to forget thanks to her identity as nun, is also a storyteller. Furthermore, she tells on herself, despite the embarrassing situations these stories find her in. If Nanapush is telling his story to Lulu (and to the generation of which she is a member, the children Pauline does not like very well), there is also then the suggestion that Pauline speaks to Lulu too. Since Nanapush's mission behind the stories he tells Lulu is to keep her with him and to encourage her to follow the old ways, it would be easy to see Pauline as offering the counter-argument in her desire to do to Lulu what she wishes to do to the children to whom she teaches arithmetic, to return them "blinded and deafened," to "purify their minds, to mold them in my own image" (205). Still, Pauline is a consummate storyteller, and it is hard to imagine her including the stories of her own abasement and treachery without realizing the counter effect they would have on such a listener. It is as though Pauline, despite herself, is warning Lulu of the dangers of trying to be white, dangers Pauline would know better than anyone.

Perhaps Pauline stands as a metaphor for the internalization of the values of European America and therefore, Christianity.[24] Native Americans were repeatedly and steadily coerced into giving up their own traditions in favor of Christian ones. One finds repeatedly descriptions of how individuals in such circumstances may internalize the desires of their oppressors, often becoming more critical of themselves than are those oppressors. Such an explanation certainly illuminates Pauline's martyr-like behavior in the convent. Even the white nuns are appalled by her dedication to self-punishment, by her "mis-worn shoes" and scalded, fat-salved "gauze clubs" (196,192). Pauline's desire to be white then pushes her to a desire to be even whiter than white, to overcompensate in her desire to prove herself worthy despite her Indian blood. Pauline's perception, at least, is that Jesus, "in His extremity," has endorsed such sacrifices (195). Pauline's belief that "God would love me better as a lily of the field, though no such flower as I had yet appeared on reservation ground" then becomes especially significant (203). Pauline, like countless Christian converts before her, internalizes the belief that in order to be on spiritually sturdy ground, to build her house upon the rock, she must give up her traditional ways entirely and replace them with Christianity.

If this is the case, then, at the same time, Pauline serves ironically to show how impossible it is for anyone originally tied to the land to convert, perhaps because of all that Christianity can't do for Pauline (and by extension, for other Natives and non-Natives). Deloria claims that Christianity lost its viability when it became removed from the land in which it was rooted through its migration to the "New World" (God 286). In Pauline's description of the weakness of Christ, we see this belief illustrated. As the earlier quotation emphasizes, and as currently popular characterizations of Jesus show,

"my God was lamblike and meek." Pauline both evokes and mocks the European American myth of the dangers of the wilderness when she concludes, "Christ was weak, I saw now, a tame newcomer in this country that has its own devils in the waters of boiling over kettles." She concludes that "Christ had hidden out of frailty, overcome by the glitter of copper scales, appalled at the creature's unwinding length and luxury." Like Milton's Satan, Pauline's water monster is by far the more alluring character. Pauline's realization is ours as well: "I knew God had no foothold or sway in this land, or no mercy for the just" (192). Finally, Pauline, and the novel as a whole, stand as testimony that, despite the years separating the publication of her works and those of Silko and Momaday, she, too, illustrates a similar notion of Native spirituality, a spirituality which should be chosen in opposition to that of Christianity specifically and of European American culture at large.

CHAPTER FIVE

GARDENS IN THE DUNES: QUESTIONING THE CHRISTIAN WORD

Leslie Marmon Silko's Gardens in the Dunes, published in the spring of 1999, is unlikely to displace most readers' love of her earlier masterpiece, Ceremony. Still, this long-awaited fictional follow up to Almanac of the Dead, while having been criticized on the grounds that character development (especially Edward's) is sometimes weak, or that its language is too child-like, has also been praised for its "dense, rich narration" and its discussion of such themes as politics, education, race and gender.[25] I find this latest novel to be most interesting for its contribution to the ongoing critique of contemporary (and past) mainstream Christianity (though the novel does not reject Christianity wholesale) and its support of values many contemporary Native American critics commonly associate with tribal traditions. Silko explains that this novel (like Almanac, certainly) is a "retaking of the Americas," not in a literal sense, "but in a spiritual way of doing things, getting along with each other, with the earth and the animals" (Arnold 10). Such a reappropriation, staged in this manner, aligns the novel with House Made of Dawn, Tracks, and Silko's earlier novel, Ceremony. The comparison of Native American and European American postures demonstrates Silko's conviction that European Americans (as well as Native Americans) must adopt an approach to life that recognizes interrelation.

Previous chapters examined the interrelation between humans, animals, and the land seen in House Made of Dawn, exhibited, for example, in the way Momaday presents

the eagles as teachers of the fine balance of capitulation and aggression, and also in Tosamah's stories of the relationships between bears and human sisters. The most striking example is the story related by the priest concerning Santiago's animals which offer themselves for the good of the people. Of course, there is also an impressive body of scholarship on the land's integral role in helping Abel overcome his sense of alienation.[26] In Silko's earlier book, Ceremony, we see this interrelation in Tayo's experience with the mountain lion, and in the myth/poem which demonstrates the people's need for the help of hummingbirds, flies, spiders and other creatures in order to survive in this world (a concept mirrored in the interrelation of genres). Paradoxically, the importance of non-human creatures demonstrates that, while humans can destroy the planet they depend upon (witness the mining and the atomic weaponry described in Ceremony), Tayo senses incorrectly that his cursing the rain in Asia resulted in the drought in New Mexico. As Silko shows, he has overestimated, if that is possible, the vital interconnection of man to planet, insofar as he has underestimated the role that other creatures, such as the bottle-nosed fly, play in maintaining the health of the planet.[27] In Erdrich's Tracks, the interrelation between animals and humans is evidenced in the hunting expedition that Nanapush and Eli share, but also in Fleur's much-speculated-upon relationship with the water monster (a materialization of the connection between animal, human, and spirit), in Nanapush and Fleur's sense of responsibility for the trees of their area, and in their sense of impending doom at the prospect of the trees' destruction.

Silko creates Gardens in the Dunes to showcase her version of the Native American concept of interrelation as a positive option for people of all ethnicities. This interrelation of animals, people, plants and land can be seen in Vine Deloria, Jr.'s,

explanation that "the task of tribal tradition…is to determine the proper relationship that the people of the tribe must have with other living things, and to develop the self-discipline within the tribal community so that man acts harmoniously with other creatures" (88). Such harmonious action is taught and demonstrated in these novels, which, at the same time, indict mainstream Christianity because it fails to maintain a similar respect for non-human entities.

Silko's treatment of snakes in Gardens in the Dunes (as in her earlier works) as spirit-ful creatures both educates readers about the relationship between humans and nonhumans and highlights orthodox Christianity's failure to do so. As Deloria, the authors of these novels, and so many other Native writers and commentators on Native writing agree, in many Native traditions, animals are respected in almost the same fashion as family members. Silko describes her preoccupation with snakes in "Notes on Almanac of the Dead," saying that she

> had been thinking a lot about the old-time Pueblo beliefs concerning snakes, especially rattlesnakes. I'd moved to Tuscon from Laguna in 1978 and at my place in the Tuscon Mountains I had seen a large number of extremely large rattlesnakes that had seemed extremely gentle and tame--probably because no one had been killing them and they had forgotten how bad people were. Or maybe I was thinking about snakes because I was homesick for the way people at Laguna see everything as being related; they like to say someone is related to the coyotes or that a snake looks like someone's uncle. Anyway, I had been able to approach and talk to the rattlesnakes that I had encountered in the Tucson Mountains, and

> they had not coiled or rattled, and a couple of the snakes had even seemed curious about me. I started to think about what the old time people had to say about the snakes. (Yellow Woman 138)

In this passage, we see a connection between old and new, of new stories sustaining the old stories, and a connection (a relationship, in the familial sense) between humans, snakes and other creatures.

Silko shows that she finds this connection to be still relevant, not just belonging to a fictional realm or to a generation preceding hers. She sees the snake as a manifestation of the spiritual and the physical, the fictional and the real at the same time. While she was writing Almanac, a novel which took many years to complete, she began to despair of it ever being finished. But as she was writing, she began also to paint a mural on the wall outside of her office. The mural is drawn around a snake, which she interpreted to be, among other things, a sign of her work: "The longer I worked on the mural, the better I felt about the novel. I worked some days on the novel, other days painting my mural...As the mural began to work out beautifully, I realized it was somehow a sign to me that the novel would work out also, and I would somehow be able to complete it successfully" (143).[28]

In Gardens, Indigo, having seen the statuary with snake arms in the professoressa's garden, is reminded of how "Grandma Fleet used to talk to the big snake that lived at the spring above the old gardens; she always asked after the snake's grandchildren and relatives and sent her best regards" (299). When Laura talks of snakes in the garden, Indigo has a corresponding memory of how "Grandma Fleet always thanked the snakes for their protection -- not just from rodents but from those who would

do you harm" (301). Of course, Edward and even Hattie, at this point at least, are concerned with Indigo's idea of snakes as family. They agree that "[t]he child was from a culture of snake worshipers and there was no sense in confusing her with the impression the old Europeans were no better than red Indians or black Africans who prayed to snakes" (304). Here Hattie and Edward express the views Silko claims are typically European-American with regards to nonhuman creatures, just Indigo expresses a Native point of view.

A brief detour into the work of Vine Deloria, Jr. provides an explicit, and therefore, perhaps clearer, explanation of the implicit argument in Gardens in the Dunes, the same argument which is found, of course, in House Made of Dawn, Tracks, and Ceremony, that differences between European American and Native American actions, such as the treatment of and attitude towards snakes and other nonhuman creatures, are based on different spiritual beliefs. Deloria reaches back to the Genesis creation story as the root of what he declares European Americans' ecologically unsound lifestyle, which he sees as the repercussion of a faulty attitude towards nonhuman creatures. He asserts that "the Genesis account places nature and nonhuman life systems in polarity with us, tinged with evil and without hope of redemption except at the last judgment" (101). He explains, "With the fall of Adam the rest of nature also falls out of grace with God, Adam being a surrogate for the whole of creation in a very real sense...the natural world is thereafter considered as corrupted, and it becomes theoretically beyond redemption" (93). He contrasts this perception with one he claims is indicative of tribal tradition: "In the Indian tribal religions, man and the rest of creation are cooperative and respectful of the task set for them by the Great Spirit. In the Christian religion both are doomed from

shortly after the creation event until the end of the world." Quoting Harvey Cox (a Protestant theologian), he says: "'Just after his creation man is given the crucial responsibility of naming the animals. He is their master and commander. It is his task to subdue the earth.'" According to Deloria, "this attitude...has been adopted wholeheartedly by Western peoples in their economic exploitation of the earth. The creation becomes a mere object" --rather than a subject with whom one has a sense of interrelation-- "when this view is carried to its logical conclusion--a directly opposite result from that of the Indian religions" (96). Contemporary Native American novels emphasizing the interrelation of human and non-human life contradict this view of man as "master and commander."

Deloria's speculation on the difference in attitude towards snakes shows that they are a particularly apt example due to the popular conception among many Christians of the snake in the Garden of Eden as an incarnation of the devil, or at the very least, of fatal temptation:

> Tribal religions find a great affinity among species of living creatures, and it is at this point that the brotherhood of life is strong in the Indian way. The Hopi, for example, revere not only the lands on which they live but the animals with which they have a particular relationship. The dance for rain, which involves the use of reptiles in its ceremonies, holds a great fascination for whites, primarily because they have traditionally considered reptiles--particularly snakes--as their mortal enemy. In this attitude and its ensuing fascination, we may illustrate, perhaps, the alienation between the various life forms which Christian peoples read

> into the story in Genesis. This alienation is not present in tribal religions.
> (103).

Deloria concludes, "Recognition that the human being holds an important place in such a creation is tempered by the thought that he is dependent on everything in creation for his existence. There is not, therefore, that determined cause...to subdue the earth and its living things. Instead the awareness of the meaning of life comes from observing how the various living things appear to mesh to provide a whole tapestry" (102). This alternate approach described by Deloria, with its emphasis on interrelation of human and non-human and its critique of Christian culture, is demonstrated in Gardens in the Dunes.

In fact, given Deloria's explanation, it is not surprising that snakes figure prominently in the other novels as well. The lesson Abel learns from the eagles and the snake has already been discussed, as has the snake imagery associated with the lake monster in Tracks. By including such images in their novels, Silko, Momaday, and Erdrich force readers who have been steeped in a Judeo-Christian tradition and whose first and perhaps strongest image of evil comes in the form of a snake, to reconsider them (and therefore other creatures) inside a system such as they and Deloria describe. As Silko's snakes remind us of the interrelation between humans and animals, they also constitute a challenge to the Church's version of history and spirituality. Not only are snakes not the creatures cursed to slither on their bellies (the better to bruise human heels) as the Bible teaches; but animals in general are not to be dominated by humans.

This interrelation exists not only between animals and humans, but also between humans and "inanimate" entities. For example, Hattie feels an affinity for the stones, while Edward only considers their money-making capacity. Stones are mentioned

repeatedly in this book, and they serve as yet another clue to readers of what Hattie will realize in the end, that not only people have spirits. For example, Silko writes her "Essay on Rocks" about the search for one rock which changes, suggesting a spirit, something Silko says elsewhere all rocks have (Yellow Woman 187-91). Silko, in this novel as well, describes rocks that move about; Aunt Bronwyn suggests that the rocks which move around the countryside surrounding her farm are alive in some way. As Aunt Bronwyn's stories indicate, such different beliefs about the nature of stones create great conflict between some Christians and the people around her home who protect the rocks, although Aunt Bronwyn (and, the reader suspects, Silko as well) does not feel that such animosity is necessary.

While snakes and rocks, particularly people's reactions to them and depictions of them, serve to demonstrate a belief system based on interrelation for Native Americans, Silko uses gardens as a study in contrast, demonstrating the opposite posture on the part of European Americans. For example, Susan's Masque of the Blue Garden is the height of the greed- and waste-ridden structure of upper class European-America as one sees it in Gardens. The Masque of the Blue Garden exemplifies wastefulness as display of prestige, as Silko points out in a recent interview. Describing a discovery learned in her preparatory research, she says, "right behind the conquistadors came the plant collectors. Elaborate gardens and greenhouses were a way of showing off...conspicuous consumption" (Cohen K6). This truth, and its repercussions for European Americans' relations with the land, is further reinforced by Indigo's horrified description of the ancient trees uprooted for Susan's display: "wrapped in canvas and big chains on the flat wagon was a great tree lying helpless, its leaves shocked limp, followed by its

companion; the stain of damp earth like dead blood seeped through the canvas." Silko indicates through the trees' pain (implied in their "shock" and seeping blood) and their relationship to each other ("companion") that these trees deserve human consideration, and from the "strain of damp earth like dark blood" that the earth, too should be considered a spirit-ful creature. Susan's act of waste is further indicted by the "low creaks and groans" Indigo hears, "not sounds of the wagons but from the trees" (185).[29] In House of Mirth fashion, the entire scenario is merely setting for the jewel--Susan: "The moon gave off a lovely silver blue glow, which was all Susan could ask for her dramatic entrance" in a white ball gown and sapphire slippers (197).

Finally, the gardens in this novel serve to illustrate how the same subject is seen differently by Native and non-Native viewers. Thus, Edward becomes the quintessential European-American, as his greed colors the way he sees the plants he collects, contrasted with Indigo's love and respect, which color the way she sees the plants she nurtures and is nurtured by. While gardens remind Indigo of her home and enflame her desire to return, the gardens remind Edward of the money he can make from them. Repeatedly he and other European Americans consider the financial potential of every garden he encounters, culminating in the burning of the orchid-filled jungle, which of course destroys all remaining "specimens" so that no one else may profit from them. Silko has called this book "a riff on what capitalism makes people do to the land," and it is clear that Edward is one of the chief representatives of capitalism in Gardens (Cohen K6). As Suzanne Ruta puts is, Edward is an "eco-predator--suggest[ing] the tainted genesis of our great natural history museums, only now de-accessioning their vast collections of Indian bones" (1B). Indigo, on the other hand, carefully handles each seed with which she

comes into contact. Silko explains the economic and political ramifications of her novel: "There's nothing more political than what's in your garden" (Cohen K6). Clearly, Silko demonstrates that gardens are just one way that European-American values, underlain by Christianity, lead to devastation of the planet and the people on it.

We have already examined Deloria's useful explanation of how Christianity tends to focus believers' thoughts and actions on a redemptive afterlife, to the detriment of responsible actions during one's material existence. Because sexuality has often been seen as a temptation towards one's material existence, diverting attention away from a spiritual afterlife, it is not unreasonable that Silko addresses the issue of sexuality in her quest to topple Christian hegemony. To valorize sexuality is to valorize earthly existence and responsible living in the material world. Silko's new novel continues the commentary on how sexuality is valued differently in Native and European American approaches. In Momaday's novel, we saw this difference illustrated in Abel's sexual encounters with Angela and Millie, and in his grandfather's tryst with Porcingula (and in the priest's reaction to this tryst, as discussed earlier). In Ceremony, European American attitudes towards sexuality are indicted as petty, at the very least, as Night Swan's account of her affairs with married men shows, and often dangerous in the extreme, as for example, Little Sister's death as a result of Christian attitudes towards sex demonstrates. Erdrich covers this subject as well, not only in her description of Pauline's failed attempts to lead a sex-free existence, and in Margaret's comical reaction to her son's (in her mind) publicly humiliating sexual relationship with Fleur, but finally, in Margaret's conversion (or re-conversion, or backsliding?) to the traditional tribal way of thinking on sexual mores.

Just as sexuality illustrates the difference in approach between Native and European America in these earlier works, the subject also appears in Gardens in the Dunes. Two of the most vivid examples are Sister Salt's conversations with the other encampment women regarding sexuality, and Silko's almost-mocking description of Edward's reaction to the statuary in the Italian garden of the professoressa. As Sister Salt is getting to know the twins, her closest friends at the encampment and afterwards, we learn that Sand Lizard tribal tradition holds that "sex with strangers is valued for alliances and friendships that might be made" (204). In the following passage Silko demonstrates a Native American view she claims was traditional and widespread, while also contrasting this way and European America's Victorian response to it. Sister Salt "was like the old-time people their mother talked about...In those days, the Chemehuevis really knew how to enjoy one another; only Sand Lizards knew how to enjoy sex more…It was true: Sand Lizards practiced sex the way they all used to, before the missionaries came" (208).[30] Here, again, we see sexuality as a means of emphasizing and encouraging interrelation.

In the professoressa's garden, when Laura "spoke of the link the old Europeans made between raindrops and drops of milk," "Edward felt his cheeks color at the mention of drops of breast milk." After seeing yet another explicit statue, "Edward began to feel uneasy about the other figures here…Laura thought her statues posed no moral harm; perhaps not to an Italian child, but for American children, precautions must be taken." He concludes that "for modesty's sake the child should be sent to wait in the black garden" (a humorously inappropriate solution, since this black garden is in fact dedicated to "fertility and birth, [black being] the color of the Great mother" [303-4]). Readers recall that while Susan excuses the removal of the undamaged statuary in her garden as

necessary due to their having weathered poorly, Edward "realized she was concerned about the propriety of the nude figures now that Josephine and Anna were young ladies. The noses and facial features of the marbles naturally softened with time, but there were other prominent features on the marbles not eroded enough" (188). Here, as in other places, Silko brings humor to her argument that the gardens and the people who live in them often act in a silly manner, while predisposing readers to agree with the narrator as they share the joke.

Hattie's early memories of veiled warnings regarding sex further, and more seriously, illustrate the European American attitude (an example of Victorian prudery) Silko describes. Whispers of "the hidden dangers of the world polite people seldom discussed…about young women who were ruined" clearly indicate that sexuality poses the greatest of all possible threats to a European American woman of this time period. And not just sex with men, which leads to the dangers of childbearing, but sex with oneself, we learn, thanks to Sister Conrad's "hints…about 'bad girls,' who must confess sins of the flesh if they lingered in their warm baths too long" (96). It is hard to imagine a writer like Silko or Deloria confessing even the existence of "sins of the flesh," but Hattie obviously feels as though she is at least guilty in part for the Mr. Hyslop's onslaught of physical attention. No doubt her mother and her mother's friends would agree with Hattie, on this matter at least. Hattie's fear of childbearing as compared to Sister Salt's readiness is also a manifestation of this difference in attitude (though certainly European American women of Hattie's era were expected to rear children).

Once again, Deloria explicitly explains a situation implicitly suggested by Silko's work. Deloria comments on the unhealthy nature of prude notions of sexuality as he

remarks their abandonment: "We are now ridding ourselves of a fear of sex imposed upon us by Christian theologians of the past, beginning with the theology of St. Paul. Whether this society can complete the transition from thinking of sexuality as inherently sinful to considering it as a normal part of the existence of a life species is a question yet to be answered" (God 286). Silko has spoken against the results of this prudish attitude on several occasions. For example, in an interview with Kim Barnes, she comments in exasperation, "In this particular stupid, middle-America society, men and women really don't know very much about one another" due to the "segregation of the sexes that we have" (93). In Silko's novel we see that such an attitude is not only silly and unhealthy, but it is also dangerous, as Hattie's encounter with Mr. Hyslop demonstrates. While sexuality may be a tool to bring people together, as is the case for the Sand Lizards, it may also, when treated improperly, become an instrument of destructive power, alienating people from each other and from the material existence in which they must be immersed.

Storytelling, already seen to be a vital tool for demonstrating the concept of interrelation, continues to be important in Gardens as it was in the novels discussed previously, because it illuminates not only the possibilities of Native spirituality but also the possibilities inherent in an alternate form of Christianity proposed by Silko (and discussed in the next chapter). The importance of storytelling in each of the earlier novels has been discussed: in House Made of Dawn through the stories created and recounted by the different characters, in Ceremony in the incorporation of the "mythical" poem-story of the disappearance of the rain clouds (among other things) and their subsequent reappearance in Tayo's own post-war quest, the story being what keeps him

alive, and in Tracks through the choice of Nanapush, a king among storytellers, as one of the two narrators of the story, or in the way Nanapush saves his own life and Fleur's by telling stories, as well as in the way that Erdrich emphasizes the use and power of words and the paper they are written on throughout the narrative.

The powerful older women in this novel, Laura, Aunt Bronwyn, and Grandma Fleet, all tell stories to Indigo and Hattie, and the knowledge conveyed in these stories, which emphasize the interconnection of land, people, animals and plants, is privileged over scientific or canonical knowledge. Thus the novel opens with Indigo's memories of her Grandmother Fleet's stories of their garden's old age, stories that explain how the people tend to the plants so that the plants return each year to feed them (16-7). Her stories of the "invaders...dirty people who carried disease and fever" encourage survival by explaining European encroachment and suggesting avoidance as a safe course of action towards the Europeans. Additionally, these stories provide a sense of control over European encroachment through the prophetic character of these stories which predate the European arrival. Grandma Fleet also teaches survival by telling "them stories she'd heard when she was a girl" (47) and "hunting stories from long ago" (48). These stories emphasize survival through generations by explaining the proper relationship between humans, animals, and plants, for example, how to approach the hyenas so they will share food without being offended.

While Aunt Bronwyn and Laura's stories differ from each other and from Grandma Fleet's due to the influences of the places they inhabit, their stories are similar in that they are not just fairy tales, but explanations of how to live. Aunt Bronwyn tells about King Arthur's knights, reminding Indigo of the "Navajo woman [who]...used to

tell...stories about long ago when there were giants, and when humans and animals still spoke the same language" (254). Indigo responds by telling Aunt Bronwyn "about the wounded giant's drops of blood that became the black lava peaks" letting readers know that the Arthur stories are analogous to Native American stories relating people, place, and animals. Of course, Aunt Bronwyn also knows the stories that testify to the living, moving nature of stones and how to treat them (254), as well as stories similar to Laura's, explaining Hattie's encounters with the strange glow. Laura, the professoressa, knows of the glow because she has heard of it appearing around her premises, and not only provides old European mythology, but also more recent stories such as the tale of the snake princess to explain it (301). In this tale, blackbirds help the snake princess's lover to follow her though "a soft glow" to a lake where she dances with snakes (301-2). The professoressa, like Aunt Bronwyn, explains the meanings of the glyphs on stone (255, 293), glyphs that symbolize rain and snakes, for example, both of which reinforce the storytelling link between Aunt Bronwyn, the professoressa, and Grandma Fleet (301). Just as in earlier novels, stories are told to demonstrate the interrelation of plants, animals, earth, and humans.

To explicate Silko 's view that storytelling and interrelation are vitally connected, I turn to a passage from her non-fictional Yellow Woman:

> As offspring of the Mother Earth, the ancient Pueblo people could not conceive of themselves within a specific landscape, but location, or place, nearly always plays a central role in the Pueblo oral narratives. Indeed, stories are most frequently recalled as people are passing by a specific geographical feature or the exact location where a story took place...Thus,

> in the case of many Pueblo narratives, it is impossible to determine which came first, the incident or the geographical feature that begs to be brought alive in a story that features some unusual aspect of this location. (33)

Here, again, story, land, and human are connected in the people's conception of themselves. With this tradition of storytelling's relation to the land to guide her, it is no wonder Silko has written what is, in great degree, a novel about the canonization of old stories, or that the new stories she offers to be considered for canonization resituate the land in all its importance, whether for Christians or non-Christians.

It is this commentary on mainstream Christianity's accepted truths, its canon of literature and belief, which Silko uses to negotiate between what she suggests are Native American and European American systems of belief and action. This negotiation provides a fictional representation of a notion also described in Deloria's God is Red, the concept of land-centered religion, which Silko and Deloria both show is at the root of the difference in approach between Native and non-Native traditions. The next chapter discusses the way Silko decenters the authority of the Biblical text as we know it today, in order to argue for this land-centered approach.

CHAPTER SIX

GARDENS AS EXPLORATION OF A LAND-CENTERED RELIGION

It is no surprise to readers of contemporary Native American literature that colonial and American policy sought to domesticate Native Americans by attempting to eradicate their religious, and therefore, cultural, heritage, including encouraging them to conceptualize their relationship with the land in the manner that most European Americans did, as something to own. Amongst the works considered here, perhaps Louis Erdrich's Tracks offers the clearest representation of such an attempted, and in that novel often successful, take-over.[31]

Clearly, though, such attempted eradication has often failed, both in fiction and in reality, as Jace Weaver reminds us. He claims that "today the survival not of traditional spirituality but of Christianity in Indian country is an open question. Even among Natives who consider themselves Christian, traditional ways are often still important and honored" (viii). Vine Deloria, Jr., too, suggests that many Native Americans no longer consider Christianity to be a viable option as he describes the return to traditional religious experience from the 1970's to the present day, and the interest on the part of some European Americans in that tribal traditional religious experience. Thus, Deloria goes beyond Weaver's claims to assert that, even for most European Americans, Christianity no longer appeals or applies.

Silko, too, argues that Christianity, at least in what she describes as its traditional or unmediated form, is not applicable to the inhabitants of this continent, whether they

are of European-American or Native American descent. Both Deloria and Silko find this lack of applicability to be rooted in the nature of the continent itself . Thus Deloria explains that "[i]n seeking the religious reality behind the American Indian tribal experience, Americans are in fact attempting to come to grips with the land that *produced* the Indian tribal cultures and their community" (76 italics mine). Such a suggestion, that religion is a force that emanates from a particular place, may also be seen in Silko's discussion of religion on this continent, either in her fiction, her nonfiction, or in interviews. Recently Silko explained her view that for

> the strangers who come to this continent...[t]he longer they live here, the more they are being changed. Every minute the Europeans, and any other immigrants from any other place, come on to the Americans and start walking on this land. You get this dirt on you, and you drink this water, it starts to change you. And then your kids will be different, and then the spirits start to work on you. (Arnold 18)

Gardens in the Dunes, too, illustrates this conception shared by Deloria and Silko of a spirituality produced and altered by the land. Often turning to Deloria's similar views on this subject, this chapter explores Silko's depiction of the viability and changeable nature of Christianity in Gardens. Christianity is depicted as viable insofar as it is changeable, responding to the forces of the continent to which it has been transplanted.

In God is Red, Deloria begins his description of tribal religion with a discussion of Christianity. While such a beginning might seem off the subject, Deloria is actually suggesting that until those raised in an environment permeated by Christianity begin to question the assumptions arising in that environment, they will not be able to open-

mindedly approach any other religious tradition. Therefore, he sets about showing all the oddities of Christian behavior and thought, hoping to defamiliarize readers with their own tradition, before presenting them with his own. Silko attempts a similar move in Gardens in the Dunes. She questions Christianity's most basic tales, the creation and the stories surrounding Jesus' life and resurrection. Silko, then, does not create a novel that ignores Christianity or replaces it with something else. Instead, she includes Christianity, demonstrating how it has been mediated, and therefore corrupted, by authorities more interested in power and money than in an unadulterated religious message. She begins with questioning the canonization of the Bible, reminding readers of the complex and often political process of transmission of what many Christians prefer to consider, simply, the divinely inspired word of God. Hattie, the main European American character in this novel, unsuccessfully defends her Masters thesis at Harvard on the importance of women in the early Christian church. She uses as her basis of argument Coptic scrolls that were not included in the canonical Bible. Her questioning creates a fictional repetition of this process. If Freudian theory is correct that each person dreams to find resolutions to her problems, then Silko's novel may be best seen as a collective dream wherein the community of modern America attempts to redo the canonization of the Bible and the interpretations which preceded and followed it.[32]

Hattie's thesis work centers on the equal respect accorded women in the very early church. Hattie's remembrance of her training in so-called heresy frees women from the roles described for them as unintelligent creatures who caused the fall, dangerous due to their ability to sexually entice. She writes that Jesus treated Mary Magdalene as equal to the apostles, who suppressed news of her vision of Jesus' resurrected spirit, as opposed to

their vision of Jesus' resurrected body, out of jealousy and out of a lust for power (263). She concludes that "Jesus himself made Mary Magdalene and other women apostles in the early church" (103). Dr. Rhineheart's translations of the Coptic scrolls, which Hattie uses in her thesis, provide the clearest description of the importance of women in the early church. In his translations, Sophia sends her daughter Zoe, or Life, to Adam, "as an instructor to raise up Adam" and when Zoe commands Adam to live, "her word became deed." (One can not help but think of the opening lines of Ceremony here, "Ts'its'tsi'nako, Thought-Woman,/ is sitting in her room/ and whatever she thinks about/ appears" [1]). Zoe's power and roles are enumerated: "It is she who is the Physician, and the Woman, and She who has given birth...the Female Spiritual Principle came in the Snake, the Instructor, and it taught them." In Zoe's story, the snake represents not the devil, but the life force, which is then removed from Yahweh's sole authority. In a move reminiscent of Deloria, Silko's descriptions of Gnostic texts accuse the early Christian god, who "out of jealousy" said that men would die. Unfortunately, Zoe pays for her assertions: 'And the arrogant Ruler cursed the Woman and the Snake" (102); still, the "arrogant Ruler" is indicted.

Through Hattie's divinity classes she becomes acquainted with various heresies, including another heresy telling the beginning differently than the usual Genesis account. This heresy is associated with the followers of Valentinus, "who prayed to the Mother as the mythic eternal Silence and Grace, who is *before all things* and is incorruptible Wisdom, Sophia" (italics mine). In both alternate versions of the creation myth, the ultimate authority of Yahweh is questioned. As Deloria explains, to destabilize any portion of the creation myth is to destabilize the entire time-centered structure of Western

thought that arises from that beginning.[33] As Adam's fall is questioned, so is the fall of creation, of man and nature, that Deloria claims accompanied it. Silko's investigation of Christianity seeks to debunk, then, the false binary between human and non-human, rendering Jesus' redemption of both humans and non-humans unnecessary.[34]

Here, in the description of Hattie's heresy classes, we see Silko's interest in a theology that does not condemn the flesh: "Valentinus taught...there are no sins of the flesh, and no sacrament of marriage is necessary either." Another heretic Hattie notices is Carpocrates, who thought that "all believers were equal with Christ; man could be free of vice and sin only after enslavement to vice and sin" (101). Such heretical beliefs force readers to consider that the Christian notion of sin might be overly simplistic or simply misinterpreted. Silko also suggests that, just as the so-called heretical texts were covered up, so Jesus' message was perverted, for example, in the removal of any association with sexuality: Sister Salt "never minded the taunts of the churchgoers...who pursed their lips to spit insults at her. She blamed the loss of Charlie on the churchgoers who forgot Jesus loved the prostitute Mary Magdalene...Jesus knew there could be no peace without love--why couldn't the churchgoers remember that?" (222). Here Silko revises Jesus' story to include sexuality, redeeming it from the profane on the basis that it was never profane to begin with, except through early Christians' interpretations. Together these heresies suggest an unmediated Christianity which is, coincidentally, similar to descriptions Deloria gives of tribal religions in its acceptance of sexuality as healthy rather than profane and in its emphasis on an experienced religion rather than one obsessed with dogma and the punishment of sin.

Hattie's thesis establishes the possibility for her, and for Silko's readers as well, to question Christianity without eschewing all its fundamental beliefs. She does this by suggesting not that Christianity is wrong, but that it was misinterpreted at a very early stage. This notion is, while disconcerting, perhaps not so offensive as the alternative. If readers can accept that their most sacred institution is the result of such struggle, then they may also consider that their own attitudes regarding religion and all the categories of thought it influences, too, have been shaped by such struggle. In addition, Silko leads the reader to consider other religions with some objectivity, and to reconsider the secular repercussions arising from the Christian system, such as the aforementioned treatment of planet and indigenous peoples. Of course, Hattie does not at first seriously believe in any of the alternate forms of religious experience described in Gardens. But because we know that she has written this thesis, we can imagine her moving towards such realizations, and readers who had not yet considered this possibility can move towards them with her. If anything, her hesitation renders her eventual capitulation more credible.

Silko explains in a recent interview that her interest in Christianity moves beyond Hattie's thesis on the canonization of the Bible. As Silko says, Gardens also "ruminates over stories and the identity of Jesus, and the control of that" (Cohen K6). Clearly, in Gardens at least, Silko is the one controlling the stories, though Silko also suggests that the Indians have always had more control over these stories than missionaries and government authorities wanted to believe. As mentioned above, Indigo's Jesus seems to be involved sexually with Mary Magdalene. Silko also describes Jesus as a man who travels across the world with his family to comfort the poor and oppressed. In both cases, Silko mixes mainstream Christianity's notions of sexuality as corrupt into the Indian

version of the Jesus story, as she does in Indigo's dream of running naked with Jesus standing in the background (198). In sharp contrast with the view of the tainted body suggested by Hattie's school experiences and Edward's reactions to the professoressa's gardens, Indigo's nudity emerges pure and spiritually imbued. As Patrick Smith remarks in his recent review, Silko effects a "reunion of flesh and the spirit," rather than upholding the false binary of material and spiritual Deloria accuses Christianity of perpetuating.

Deloria's commentary here indicates the direct hit Silko aims for as she offers an alternative view of Jesus' life: "The right-wing, evangelical, and fundamentalist spectrum of Christianity dwells almost exclusively and fanatically on the figure of Jesus, and on the familiar theology of the old-time religion." Deloria's comments show how vulnerable many Christians are to such an attack; among the Christian community, he claims, "actual scholarly knowledge of Jesus and his times, the nature of the Roman world, and the movement of the early Church is practically nil. The less it knows about the human being Jesus, the more comfortable it is, since it is the idealized, law-abiding, goody-goody projection of themselves, which they call Jesus, that forms the object of their devotion" (241).[35] Silko doesn't allow such comfortable ignorance, forcing readers to consider that the Jesus they believe in comes transmitted through texts that were the site of political struggle, and that can not be accepted unquestioningly. Therefore, any exegesis effecting the way they live today must also be questioned.

Besides the very obvious take-over of the Jesus story by the Indians, Silko also works with the image of the Madonna to appropriate the Christian story as readers know it. During Indigo's visit to Aunt Bronwyn's stones, she remarks that "tiny quartz

crystals...glitter[ing] in the morning sun...looked like big eyes to her; and they *were* eyes, Aunt Bronwyn explained, the eyes of the original Mother, the Mother of God, the Mother of Jesus" (267). The professoressa's terminology for the Old European fertility figures in her gardens also appropriates a language often associated with Christianity: "little madonnas, as Laura called them" (300). Finally, these influences assist in Hattie's conversion: she "drifted off to sleep recalling the pictures and statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary standing on a snake. Catechism classes taught Mary was killing the snake, but after seeing the figures in the rain garden, she thought perhaps the Virgin with the snake was based on a figure from earlier times," a figure which would link Mary with life-giving knowledge as Zoe was so linked in the scrolls on which Hattie based her thesis (306).[36] In all of these examples, Silko demonstrates her concern that spiritual experience be unmediated by corrupting powers, and as she does so, she suggests that pagan rituals are often closer to that unmediated experience than are Christian experiences, though both suffer at the hands of those who would pervert them to their own purposes. In such an interpretation, European, European-American, and Native American are united through their manipulation at the hands of religious authority, rather than separated by their varying beliefs.

The Ghost Dance which Silko describes as a call to Jesus to return (though not from the dead, for sure) is the most vivid example of such shared manipulation.[37] Sadly ironic this alternative version of the Christ story, which dscribes Christ directing the Natives' continuance of the Ghost Dance so that they may see their relatives and the Messiah again. With this different version of Jesus' life, Silko imagines that the brutal interdiction of the Ghost Dances also meant the interdiction of the return of the Christ, a

happening that Christians everywhere should be hopefully and impatiently awaiting. That Indigo tells Hattie the story of the Ghost Dance, along with the participation of Mormons in the dance, suggests that, in Silko's version at least, people of all ethnicities could have joined the Ghost Dance and also experienced the return of Christ, if only they had not been so close-minded, fearful, and glued to their own version of the Christ story. Thus Silko's alternate version utilizes historical occurrences to suggest that European America missed an event they considered themselves in sole control to bring about (insofar as they were required to bring the Christ story to savage pagans everywhere before the second coming could occur), but in her version, the return is an event the Indians they were trying to educate already knew all about. As Michael Castro points out "the soldier's suppression of the Messiah cults parallels the suppression of Christian and pre-Christian ideas throughout history, and the suppression of Hattie as a pioneering woman scholar."

Hattie can question the nature of the Bible as unaltered text, but she has not discarded her notions of cultural positivism, as her comments regarding Indigo's "quaint" beliefs indicate (279). She has, most likely, abandoned her faith, for she avoids the priest who visits her mother (184). Silko seems to suggest that until Hattie replaces that disbelief with something other than a secular, cultural positivism that refuses to admit any transcendence, she will continue to be ill at ease. Hattie, having discarded dogma, must embrace experience. Here again, Deloria's comments explain Silko's novel. For Deloria, dogma is always a poor substitution for experienced religion. Describing the widespread non-Native interest in tribal tradition, he suggests that

> people are merely sorting out the correlation between beliefs and experiences. Thus the religions that depend on the articulation of doctrinal propositions to maintain themselves are doomed to disappear beneath their own silliness. Those religious traditions that depend primarily upon invoking some kind of experience that is qualitatively distinct from everyday feelings will become the vehicles for religious expression in the future. (235)

Deloria finds that in this respect at least, tribal tradition offers a more satisfying option to its followers than does Christianity; in tribal religions, he claims, "Doctrine is not needed and heresies are virtually unknown. Theology is part of communal experiences needing no elaboration, abstraction, or articulation of principles." In place of dogma, "[e]very factor of human experience is seen in a religious light as part of the meaning of life. Tribal customs structuring relationships found to be proper for people are continued." This results in what Deloria would claim is a very different situation than the one he sees to be dominant in Christian culture: "Preconceived standards of conduct are unimportant and the assumption of the innate sinfulness of humans is impossible, for the individual is judged instantaneously by his or her fellows as useful or useless according to his or her degree of participation in community affairs" (195). While Deloria suggests a situation where Native Americans and European Americans both must turn to religion based on experience rather than dogma, Silko describes Hattie's search, albeit unconscious, for that experienced truth.

At first, Hattie disbelieves the stories and experiences presented by Indigo and Aunt Bronwyn, calling them "vivid imagination" despite how they "lifted Hattie's spirits"

(127). At her aunt's, Hattie reacts to the "theories of Gustave Fechner" in whom her aunt is an avid believer, and who "believed plants have souls and human beings exist only to be consumed by plants and transformed into glorious plant life. Hattie had to smile; so human beings existed only to become fertilizer for plants!" Readers of Silko's Yellow Woman know that Hattie will eventually warm up to this idea, as Silko explains that traditionally, "Corn cobs and husks, the rinds and stalks and animal bones . . . were merely resting at a midpoint in their journey back to dust. Human remains are not so different. They should rest with the bones and rinds where they all may benefit living creatures—small rodents and insects—until their return is completed" (26). Still, Hattie's smiling reaction is followed by concern for what her male relatives might think: "Edward and her father would have a good laugh at that!" (242).

Over the course of the novel, the evidence mounts until eventually Hattie must accept the alternate possibilities. First, there is the striking accumulation of the color blue. Then Aunt Bronwyn agrees with Indigo, rather than Hattie, as Indigo explains about the Messiah (264). This is followed by a reenactment at Aunt Bronwyn's of the dream Hattie had while still at Oyster Bay, where she lies on a "strange flat stone" off of which she tries to slide, despite the way her skirt, a symbol of her own cultural training, impedes her progress (249). At Aunt Bronwyn's, Hattie also acquires the small stones she will carry with her as she returns Indigo to her family (259).

Finally, when confronted with the mystery of the Messiah and his Mother, Hattie moves from disbelief ("Was it an odd reflection off metal or glass nearby?") to recognition at a deeply physical level: "A faint glow suffused the whitewashed wall and Hattie felt her heart beat faster as the glow grew brighter with a subtle iridescence that

steadily intensified into a radiance of pure color that left her breathless, almost dizzy." Finally, she admits to a verbal affirmation of what she has experienced: "Yes, Hattie nodded her head, yes! So this is what was called a miracle--she felt wonder and excitement, though she saw the glow of colored light on the wall for only an instant." Edward, on the other hand, does not get it at all, attributing the tears on her cheeks to exhaustion or even "religious hysteria." So while Edward basks in "rare high spirits" inspired by his capitalistic assessment of the citron trees, Hattie, "briefly [thinking] he might understand if only she explained it in the right words...realized it was no use" (322). While Edward remains immersed in capitalistic culture, Hattie has moved beyond rejection of dogma to recognition of religious experience.

Silko connects this Christian experience with the pagan experience which occurred at Aunt Bronwyn's. This connection is drawn not only through the use of similar words and visual cues but also through the use as a framing device of the dream in Aunt Bronwyn's garden, which is replete with pagan imagery such as the stones Aunt Bronwyn explains are a source of conflict between the pagans and some of the Christians in her area. Hattie's first thought during the miraculous experience is that "[t]he strange light in Aunt Bronwyn's garden might have been a dream" (321), and her thought directly after the event is that she must write Aunt Bronwyn to explain to her what happened: "she recalled the light in Aunt Bronwyn's garden that night--now she was certain it wasn't a dream; it was true; she must write to her at once and tell her about that night and what they'd seen today" (322). Thanks to the professoressa's recounting of the princess' tale, we know that this glow is not just gas in the air, as Edward suggests, but rather, a spiritual phenomenon that has been occurring over a long period of time. The repeating

appearance of this dream and the glow associated with it (along with the glow surrounding Jesus' mother at the wall of the school) also serve to render the pagan elements more legitimate to a skeptical reader approaching the novel from a Christian viewpoint. So while Gardens broaches the issues of "alternative readings of Christ's teachings and life found in gnostic and other texts, or evolved among Indian followers of the Messiah," it also brings back to life "ancient beliefs in the power of sacred groves and stone circles" (Castro C5).

As Castro suggests, Silko is not merely describing a dead religion. Silko comments in an interview with Ellen Arnold that the pre-Christian religions are still alive and well in Europe: "I knew...something of what's alive there [in Europe], that there's a kind of continuity...I mean, Europe is not completely Christianized. The missionaries were not completely successful. There is a pagan heart there, and the old spirits are right there" (Arnold, "Listening" 5-6). By making her non-Native readers aware of such a living tradition, she creates a sense of solidarity between them, Indigo, Hattie, and the Sand Lizard characters.

While Hattie's vision at the school revitalizes Christianity, it does so at the expense of authorized Christian hierarchy. The school where Hattie sees Jesus' mother is not the Catholic abbey that houses a supposedly miraculous silver and gold picture of the Madonna, but a small poor school off the beaten track (at least before rumors of the recurring miracle spread). In their quest for power, money, and an understanding of a spiritual experience long since past, the monks "brandish large crucifixes," demonstrating Deloria's argument that as experience fades, it is replaced by political and economic struggle. When, "[o]ver time, the miraculous power of the picture slowly got used up,"

the abbot, motivated, no doubt, by the fear that the offering plates would be empty and perhaps by a sense of spiritual emptiness, "alleged the image on the wall was the work of the devil because the miraculous appearance overshadowed the monks' shrine to the portrait of Mary in silver on gold" (320). The abbot eventually requires that the mayor forbid the townspeople from visiting the wall.

This appearance of Mary on the school wall is just one among many instances that remind readers that church heritage began among the poor. As Vine Deloria, Jr. notes, the early church sanctioned the giving away of one's worldly possessions. In Gardens, Jesus appears to the poor and those who confront the law, as Indigo reminds Hattie after Edward's arrest. Indigo explains that Hattie should not be ashamed of his arrest, based upon Indigo's experience that believers often run afoul of the authorities, both religious and political alike. (Of course, Edward believes in nothing but money, so Indigo is referring more to the fact that political and economic systems are corrupt, rather than that Edward is any sort of believer.) It is clear that Christianity itself is not the cause of difficulty, according to Silko. Instead, the intricate relationships between religion, wealth, and law, are cause for objection. This sort of history lesson not only garners sympathy for Indigo's Ghost Dancers, but it also reminds readers that contemporary Christianity, centered as it often is on conspicuous wealth, is not necessarily Christianity in its purest form. Silko seems to ask, And if that is true, might not other things have gone astray over the centuries? Silko redeems the Church from its own reputation as supporter of gold-hungry colonizers as she makes her gnostic scriptures more legitimate inside the larger frame of her other arguments against Christianity as it is often practiced today.

The similarities Hattie and Indigo notice between religious symbolism in Celtic country, Italy, Sand Lizard land and even Susan's Oyster Bay area combine to form a description of what Deloria explains is the spirit of a land making itself known to the people who inhabit it. For example, in all these places we see statues combining human and animal features, lights and noises that signal a spiritual presence, and the previously mentioned proliferation of the color as in the name Indigo, the lengthy description of the blue flowers chosen for the Masque ball (163, 185), the professoressa's blue tile (285) and the omnipresent blue moon (197, for example). These cues are not always sensed consciously by the characters in this novel; the women who organize and attend the masque ball do not necessarily consciously apprehend their attraction to the color blue, but Indigo senses it immediately, thinking to herself, "blue was the color of the rain clouds. She wanted to wear blue from head to toe" (179).[38]

Deloria explains that "the major step to be taken to understand religion today is to understand the nature of religion as it occurs in specific places. There is a reason why shrines exist over and above the piety of the uneducated religious person who has visions while tending sheep". The example Deloria provides is a Western one (a gesture of good faith or of subversion?): "Mount Sinai, for example, has been a holy mountain for a considerable length of time, thus indicating that it has a religious existence over and above any temporary belief held by particular people." Deloria explains that each land projects a particular religious spirit, which largely determines what types of religious beliefs will arise on it (287-8).[39] In Gardens we see Silko's suggestions for how lands from Southwestern American desert to Italian mountains express the spirit contained in

them, and how people all over the world need to reconceptualize spirituality in order to survive.

Ultimately the depiction of a localized spirituality manifesting itself all over allows Silko to point to a still-living tradition in Europe which European Americans may access if they care to. Deloria's words suggest he would agree and also appreciate Silko's character Aunt Bronwyn, whose love of stones points to an older, pagan spirituality:

> The fact that Druidism is once again rising in parts of Europe may indicate that those lands, in largely determining the shape and beliefs of religious experiences, are Druid lands. We do not have any exact knowledge of what Druid religious beliefs and practices were. Whether present practitioners are precisely following ancient religious practices is less important than the fact that the religion has contemporary followers, who are attempting to make the proper connections with what has gone before. (288)

Thus, Silko and Deloria both propose a spirituality that emanates from each particular place in specific ways. Those people not indigenous to that place may, in Deloria's view, tap into this spirituality if they choose to pay attention to it, or in Silko's view, will be altered by it regardless of their own desires (or, as Almanac indicates, be spit out or destroyed.) While for both Silko and Deloria, it seems best recognized by Native Americans, this spirituality has global repercussions.

Deloria could almost be speaking specifically of Gardens in the Dunes, with its repeating motifs and layered religious experiences, when he explains why a specific geographical space may be venerated by numerous societies coming into contact with it:

> This tradition tells us that there are places of unquestionable, inherent sacredness on this earth, sites that are holy in and of themselves. Human societies will come and go on this earth and any prolonged occupation of a geographical region will produce shrines and sacred sites discerned by the occupying...One need only look at the shrines of present-day Europe. Long before Catholic or Protestant churches were built in certain places, other religions had established shrines and temples on that spot. (275)

Thus Silko's stones and churches appear on the same location, as at Bath. Aunt Bronwyn explains that "the location of the church, between the stone circles on the hilltop and the smaller stone ring and burial mound, was intended to discourage the people from their midsummer bonfires and all-night dances." The story told about the stones, that they were "once guests and members of a wedding party who danced all Saturday through the night to the sabbath, when suddenly the sinners dancing in their circles turned to stone," is clearly intended to frighten the pagans from their old ways, and testifies to the spiritual power of the place upon which both stones and church appear, while it also demonstrates the power relationships at work when mainstream Christianity attempts to remove religious beliefs it deems contrary to its own (267).

Deloria explains that "[e]very identifiable region has sacred places peculiar to its geography," locations "where we have perceived that something specifically other than ourselves is present, something mysteriously religious in the proper meaning of those words has happened or been made manifest." He concludes, "No matter how we might attempt to explain this event in later historical, political, or economic terms, the essence of the event is that the sacred has become a part of our experience" (273). Deloria's

explanation clarifies Silko's description of the layered religious experiences that take place on such locations, as well as her depiction of how such experiences and places can become embroiled in claims to control them. Clearly, though, Silko, perhaps working from a point of view similar to Deloria's, can reconcile the various experiences that may occur on one particular site. In an untroubled manner, Indigo compares the huge boulders to the crows that foretell and accompany Jesus and his family as they migrate with the weather from one place to another. Indigo also remarks that "the altar's stones" in the church "were cut from the same sandstone as the three giant horizontal stones that formed the entryway to the ancient burial mound," indicating that the similarities between the two religious traditions are more important than their differences (267).

One hopes that Christian readers will not be too offended by Silko's interpretation of Christian history, if not for any other reason than that she expects the same malleability of her own spiritual tradition, as the earlier discussion of Ceremony demonstrates. This malleability relates to a larger difference in storytelling, and in underlying philosophy: according to Silko (and Deloria) Native American stories are not rigid, but flexible, not the only answer, but one of many.[40] This attitude is contrasted with a supposedly typical European Christian attitude in Hattie's observation of the "quaintly inaccurate version of Jesus Indigo learned from other Indians" (279). Even Hattie eventually balks at this close-mindedness, though, wondering, "Why insist on a literal view of the resurrection and reject all others?" (263). This seemingly comfortable coexistence of competing stories, often said to be characteristic of Native American storytelling, is exemplified in Gardens by the alterations to the story of Jesus' crucifixion. And though Hattie and Indigo argue particular versions of this story are more correct

than others, Silko has already shown an indifference to whether one story contradicts another. While Christian characters often do not allow for the possibility that Christianity and Native traditions might coexist despite their contradictory notions, as has been mentioned before, this coexistence has existed for Native Americans for many years.

Basic theological assumptions provide an explanation for this difference between accepting multiple versions of a story as opposed to only allowing one. Deloria postulates this line of cause and effect for Western theology: "Religion has often been seen as an evolutionary process in which mankind evolves a monotheistic conception of divinity by a gradual reduction of a pantheon to a single deity. The reality of religion thus becomes its ability to explain the universe, not experience it" (79). Deloria claims, then, that according to Western theology, once one has the right version of the story, everything else is heresy. Again, dogma becomes privileged over the religious experience which originally inspired it.

Silko describes a far different tribal situation:

> The people were happy to listen to two or three different versions of the same event of the same *hummah-hah* story. Even conflicting versions of an incident were welcomed for the entertainment they provided. Defenders of each version might joke and tease one another, but seldom were there any direct confrontations. Implicit in the Pueblo oral tradition was the awareness that loyalties, grudges, and kinship must always influence the narrator's choices as she emphasizes that this is the way *she* has always heard the story told. The ancient Pueblo people sought a communal truth, not an absolute truth. For them this truth lived

> somewhere within the web of differing versions, disputes over minor points, and outright contradictions tangling with old feuds and village rivalries. (32)

Both Silko and Deloria describe Native American traditions, then, as having an innate ability to harmoniously absorb contradictions, in contrast, they claim, to Western traditions informed by a Christianity that privileges dogma or explanation over experience.

What Louis Owens asserts of N. Scott Momaday's character, Francisco, is true of Gardens' Indigo, and eventually, Hattie, too: he "has no difficulty in bringing two worlds together in a vital, heterogeneous unity--a crucial ability in a world where wholeness is essential and division or fragmentation causes illness...[H]e subverts the language of the Church by assimilating it into his indigenous cosmology." Owens continues, "By assuming the 'names and gestures' of the colonizers, Native Americans for several centuries have abrogated the authority of the colonizers' most powerful weapon--language--and have appropriated the dominant discourse" (103). While Owens' account is indubitably correct, he implies that this assimilation occurs only inside the tribal community, for its own use. In Gardens in the Dunes, Silko depicts such an assimilation of European tradition, in particular as it is demonstrated in Christian stories and morality, while pushing this assimilation back into European-American society, attempting a change in European language and living, as Arnold Krupat suggests all works of anti-imperialist translation do. By intermingling the supposedly necessarily distinct European-American and Native American religions she describes, she demonstrates the "incorporat[ion of] alternate strategies [and] indigenous perspectives...that...operate in

tension with or in a manner resistant to an English in the interest of colonialism" by European-American forces (Krupat 39).[41]

Silko's novel allows readers to visualize the changes Deloria sees as necessary in order to maintain viable religious traditions.[42] To change a world view, an entire philosophy or theology, seems likes a large agenda for a work of fiction, especially when, according to Silko, her novel began with a simple interest in what she thought would be a refreshingly innocent topic after Almanac of the Dead. In an interview, Silko shows, though, why even a "lighter" novel might carry such strong messages: "I believe in the sands of time, so to speak. Especially in America, when you confront the so-called mainstream, it's very inefficient, and in every way possible destroys you and disarms you. I'm still a believer in subversion. I don't think we're numerous enough, whoever 'we' are, to take them by storm" (Coltelli 148). As Silko says, comparing this work to her extremely political predecessor, "It's as subversive or even more subversive than Almanac of the Dead" (K6). In a recent interview with Philip Conners, she explains that

> [t]elling stories seems to me a far better way to attain justice. My people were expansive. They thought about justice for all people, and plants and animals, too. I think with Gardens in the Dunes I'm trying to look at the constants, how much we share as human beings, as living things on this planet. I wanted to explore our deeper common ties, and also the shared fates we have now under big capitalism. When human beings are caught up in bottom lines and profits, our humanity is eroded. Our ties are eroded. I think we reconnect through telling stories. (B11)

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION: ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS AND "THE NON-INDIAN APPROPRIATOR"

Many European-American readers are hesitant to approach the topic of Native American literary criticism, and with good reason. Deloria warns against "the non-Indian appropriator," who, he explains, "conveys the message that Indians are indeed a conquered people, and that there is nothing they possess, absolutely nothing--pipe, dances, land, water, feathers, drums and even prayers--that non-Indians cannot take whenever and wherever they wish" ("Is Religion Possible?" 37). In an age where cultural and religious traditions are being revived, Deloria argues that Indians must safeguard their cultural traditions "mak[ing] certain that they are shown due respect and do not become another workshop topic on the California New Age circuit" (39). Still, what Deloria has to say with regards to ceremonial knowledge may simply not be relevant to a discussion of literature, though clearly, literature and religion are inextricably interwoven in contemporary Native American novels. While that relationship between Native religion and contemporary literature becomes even stickier in the case of novels like Ceremony, which has been accused of disseminating too much private information on tribal religions, Deloria does state that he wishes more European Americans would read more contemporary Native American books. Since he also remarks that religion permeates all aspects of Native culture (including religion, as we have seen), it seems that he expects some dissemination of information on Native religion. In fact, disseminating such information seems to be one of the primary goals of his own God Is Red, which

illuminates the differences between worldviews and provides explanations clearly directed to non-Natives. As has been shown, Deloria expects readers to not only read, but to act according to what they learn through reading.

Finally, Native American novelists seem to suggest that it is necessary for European Americans to consider how the information in their novels affects them. If we are invited into these works by the authors themselves, perhaps that invitation overrides all other discussion on the subject of who may speak of and read them. And non-Natives are invited in.[43] It is clear that they are meant to be read by non-Indians as well as Indians, although there are certainly passages which are inaccessible without the help of a Native "interpreter," and even then, no doubt, the inexperienced reader's understanding of them falls short.[44]

Still, there are clues throughout the texts to help the uninitiated understand. Of course, the uninitiated are not necessarily European Americans only; given the Pan-Indian movement and the revived interest in traditional ways among younger Indians, Natives also may need clues to understand differences from one tribe to another (or even within the same tribe across geographical locations) or to understand older ways which are in danger of dying out and which may not yet have been introduced to any particular Native reader through more traditional means. In Tracks we have, for example, a narrator, Nanapush, explaining stories and tribal history to his granddaughter in an effort to entice her away from the boarding school and back to the reservation and older ways. Someone initiated into that culture in even the most superficial of ways will know that Nanapush is the word (or is similar to the word, depending on varying spellings) for the trickster figure in Anishinaabe traditional tales, but an inexperienced reader is likely to

"get it" too, thanks to the typical trickster actions performed by Nanapush, such as the jokes played on Pauline to try to teach her a better way of living than the warped Catholicism she has taken on in an effort to erase her Indian blood. But for those who still do not "get it," Erdrich explains through Nanapush, "My father said, 'Nanapush. That's what you'll be called. Because it's got to do with trickery and with living in the bush. Because it's got to do with something a girl can't resist. The first Nanapush stole fire. You will steal hearts" (33). Here Erdrich lets us know not only about the sexual nature of the trickster, his trickery, and his ability to help others (stealing fire), she also reminds readers familiar with Greek mythology of the similarity between Nanapush and one of their own myths so that they can better understand the Nanapush figure. In Ceremony, Silko shows us through Tayo's adventure the significance of the poetry which comes from traditional stories, and explicates that more traditionally rooted text with the prose which surrounds it. Through the interaction of the people, animals, and earth involved, she shows how people should treat each other and animals and earth. In House Made of Dawn, there are parts of the text the uninitiated do not understand, for example, the opening and closing words, Dypoloh and Qtsedaba. Nor do uninitiated readers understand the opening passage describing Abel's running. But by the time the novel ends, we have come full circle, and at least have some sympathy for what it means to have to reestablish cultural ties in a modern world that tries to ignore or debase traditions both white and Indian.[45]

The characters themselves suggest that these works are not just for Native audiences. These books are not peopled only by Native characters. Millie and Angela in House Made of Dawn suggest that not only should non-Natives allow these books to

teach them, but that non-Natives might even be the teachers sometimes. Various positively portrayed German-descended characters in Louise Erdrich's book and Mexican-descended characters in Ceremony testify to the non-exclusive nature of the novels. This does not mean that the situation of mixed-blood people is unproblematic, especially for those who were taught to be ashamed of the Indian portion of their heritage. Still, this openness to non-Native characters' positive traits is not really a wonder when one considers the backgrounds of the authors. They are all of mixed heritage themselves, and lived in environments where they were exposed to non-Indians' ideas. For example, Silko describes at some length the European Americans who married into the Pueblo side of her family and their positive effects on the tribe (though it is true that not all Pueblo inhabitants would agree with her) and Erdrich is of German and Chippewa heritage.

If we take these pieces rhetorically, as scholars of ethnicity like Werner Sollers and Frank Shuffelton and numerous critics of these three novels suggest we should, we realize that these works are arguments not only about how Native Americans should behave, but about how European Americans should behave. Sollers says that ethnicity, rather than being an essential quality, is created through "widely shared, though intensely debated, collective fictions that are continually reinvented" (xi). While such a statement seems to contradict the essentialist point of view suggested by the novels discussed here, Arnold Krupat argues that this essentialism is, as I have mentioned in previous chapters, a construction for the sake of argument. In these novels, Native American ethnicity is up for debate. If European Americans are also privy to the lessons to be learned from these novels, then "American" ethnicity is up for debate. Frank Shuffelton, in the introduction

of A Mixed Race, reminds us that America has always had an ethnic identity consisting of a mix of cultures, despite myths of pre-immigration "purity." Shuffelton states that "America was ethnic from the beginning, and to fail to understand this is to risk always the misconception that later immigration is a dilution or contamination of some supposed founding ethnic purity" (7). The authors discussed here are presenting just those "intensely debated, collective fictions" that work toward the construction of "American identity" not only for their own cultural group, but for European America as well.[46]). Of what would this American identity consist? No matter what else, it would contain a strong infusion of Native characteristics, as they are described in contemporary Native American literature. Perhaps the most important of these characteristics would be an appreciation for the concept of interrelation, especially in light of its repercussions for ecological (and political) awareness.[47] While some critics balk at the notion of a constructed identity, the transformative power of the word as it is described by Silko and Momaday, suggests that the authors embrace this notion of created identity. Momaday's discussion on several occasions of the power of the storyteller to create both himself and his audience also lends credence to these novelists' approval of an altered American identity.[48] Jace Weaver tells us that "literary output is both a reflection and a shaper of community values," indicating that such altered identity could be shaped by literature (viii).

Deloria, as we saw in the last chapter, argues the necessity of change in lifestyle: "It does seem likely that conditions have now developed that will lead to major catastrophic changes" which necessitate that "we gather around our traditional people" and "make fundamental changes in the manner in which we live" (39). Critics and

Native American thinkers agree. Catherine Rainwater describes these novels' "implied world healing" (37). Jace Weaver describes literature's contribution to the gathering around of traditional peoples as "communitism," "a combination of the words 'community' and 'activism'...hav[ing] a proactive commitment to Native community, including what I term the 'wider community' of Creation itself" (ix-xiii). This proactive commitment must be extended outside of the Native community so that Natives and non-Natives may fulfill "the reformative aim of resistant narrative" by moving from "passive consumers of dissenting discourse" to "responsible participants in storytelling in world-making" (Rainwater 37).

The specific changes necessary to complete the "reformative aim" are illustrated in the novels. Silko's novels, for example, argue against uranium mining. In Momaday's book, to cite just one example, white readers see that the Peyote ceremony is not the purely recreational event they might have misjudged it for, and in Tracks, all readers, but especially, perhaps, whites, see the direct effects of the Dawes Act and how it led to the division of tribal families. In Tracks, we also see how Indians teach whites and vice versa in Father Damien's attempts to persuade Nanapush to join the tribal government (185, 208). All four of these works, in addition to teaching about specific ecological and political disasters, also teach a respect for beautiful cultures that have hitherto only been rarely appreciated by European Americans. That respect translates perhaps into a different attitude on the part of readers towards individuals and politics. These novels also argue a change in individual spirituality that serves as the bedrock for the political and ecological changes described. Thus, Silko claims that Gardens is "offering people another way to see things and possible ways to connect up, in a spiritual way, to

withstand" (Arnold, "Listening" 22).

Deloria notes the ecological nature (but also religious and political, since Deloria sees little distinction between these categories) of the "catastrophic changes" which have occurred since European Americans began to influence this continent: "Ecologists project a world crisis of severe intensity within our lifetime, whereas the religious mythologies projecting the existence and eternal salvation of another world had better be correct in their beliefs." Deloria goes on to explain that this "imminent and expected destruction of the life cycle of world ecology can be prevented by a radical shift in outlook from our present naive conception of this world as a testing ground to a more mature view of the universe as a comprehensive matrix of life forms." This "radical shift in outlook" is exactly what these novelists argue for. Though it is clear that such changes do have economic and political effects, Deloria explains, "making this shift in viewpoint is essentially religious, not economic or political," in keeping with his other statements that all categories in Native American worldview collapse into the idea of religion, and with his call for a change in Christian religion (God Is Red 1993, 270.).[49]

European American literary and cultural critics agree with Deloria about the necessity of such a shift. In the introduction to their Ecocriticism Reader, the editors indict the academic community for the "absence of any sign of an environmental perspective in contemporary literary studies." They continue, "In view of the discrepancy between current events and the preoccupations of the literary profession, the claim that literary scholarship has responded to contemporary pressures becomes difficult to defend." Of course, their book is testimony that such concern does exist in the field of literary criticism. Pointing to the work of European Americans and Native Americans

(pieces by Silko and Paula Gunn Allen are included), they suggest that "as environmental problems compound, work as usual seems unconscionably frivilous" (xxi). Lynn White's contribution, "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," originally published in 1967, describes current ecological problems as due to the underlying Christian attitudes, which in turn shaped technology and science. Sounding remarkably like Deloria, he claims, "I personally doubt that disastrous ecological backlash can be avoided simply by applying to our problems more science and more technology...until we find a new religion, or rethink the old one" (12). Neil Evernden's article, "Beyond Ecology: Self, Place and the Pathetic Fallacy," while showing an awareness of the importance of the tenets of ecology, is skeptical of the ability of scientists on their own to do much good towards deflecting an ecological crisis. He claims that "It is ironic...that when a society finally detects a dissonance in the world around it, it looks to Science for a solution...pretending that the imminent discovery and marketing of a new adhesive will restore Harmony of the Biosphere." He continues, "It's no good passing the buck to ecologists--environmentalism involves the perception of values, and values are the coin of the arts. Environmentalism without aesthetics is merely regional planning" (103). He, too, argues for a change in religious perception (again, the similarities to Deloria, in content as well as tone, are clear): "What does make sense, however, is something that most in our society could not take seriously: animism" (101). Using the subject-object relationship already applied to the man/environment relationship by Deloria, he explains that the solution offered by animism lies "in the relationship between the individual and the environment, not simply in the object relationship...Rather than a subject-object relationship in which the observer parades before the supposedly beautiful view, we have

instead a process, an interaction"(97)[50]

Thus we see that the changes these novelists and Deloria argue for are important to a European American audience as well.[51] Some critics' comments on ecology offer an exciting area of similarity between their field and the concept of interrelation. So, for example, the editors of Ecofeminist Literary Criticism, Greta Gaard and Patrick Murphy, require the following understanding from those who would learn from the field of ecology: One must "reject the notion of absolute difference and the binary construct of inside and outside...some big outside that we go to. Ecology is a study of interrelationship, with its bedrock being the recognition of the distinction between things-in-themselves and things-for-us" (5-6). The surface similarities between this view of ecology and the religious perspective offered by Native American novelists and thinkers is clear, suggesting a more profound study would be intriguing. The editors suggest that emphasis should be placed on discovering the relationships between "humans and animals, between culture and nature, and across human differences of race class, gender, and sexual orientation" (7).

Are these changes in attitude and behavior too much to expect of mere works of literature? Critics do not seem to think so. Jace Weaver claims that "writing becomes an essential means of struggle...prepar[ing] the ground for recovery, and even re-creation, of Indian identity and culture" (44). According to Weaver, Native writers "are looking back and looking forward for new myths, creating in the process new, praxis-oriented views of identity and community" (164). Of course we know from House Made of Dawn Momaday's belief in the transformative power of words. Weaver illustrates the connection between literature and religion (and therefore, practical, secular action) by

commenting on Momaday's words, "We have all been changed by words; we have all been hurt, delighted, puzzled, enlightened, filled with wonder...This power of language to transform has religious implications as well" (4). Weaver elaborates, "values are the basis of a people's identity and their sense of particularity as members of the human race...all this is carried in language. Story and literature are the primary means by which it does its work" (x). Rainwater supports this power of the word when she says, "the idea that our own words and deeds affect some larger pattern is a pan-tribal assumption" (124).

As I have argued, these "praxis-oriented views" may not be ignored by either Native Americans or European Americans, but must be considered by all "members of the human race." Contemporary Native American authors write from their own (individual and tribal) perspectives in order to argue for changes both among Natives and among European Americans. Catherine Rainwater describes the works of writers such as Silko, Momaday, Erdrich, and Linda Hogan as "counter colonial, world-transformative efforts" which work by "writ[ing] themselves into the discourse of the dominant society and encod[ing] it with alternative notions about what it means to inhabit the earth as human beings." She continues, "These writers dream of nothing less than revision of contemporary society, beginning with its representation in art" (ix). Rainwater calls this activity the "counter conquest of America" (4). Elizabeth N. Evasdaughter's comments on Ceremony are true of all of these works: "The celestial laughter Silko calls forth by her Ceremony shows that Indian civilization is living and has the potential to transform anglo culture...Ultimately she demonstrates that combining our cultures, as her narrative does, has the power to civilize both" (94).

[1] These terms are themselves gross oversimplifications. Just as it is clear that not all European Americans are aptly described by Deloria's criticism, or, of course, even by the designation "Christian," it is also obvious that there are many tribal traditions. The three novelists discussed here are from widely divergent backgrounds, both Native American (Kiowa, Laguna, Anishinaabe, for example) and European American (Erdrich is of German ancestry, for example). Numerous critics, Vine Deloria, Jr. among them, have warned against the dangers of lumping all Native Americans together into one group. In fact, while Deloria contradicts his statement with a book-length explanation of the commonalities between different tribes' religious conceptions, he does write that "it is possible to identify an 'Indianness'...intimately shared by all American Indian people" only in "the response made to white society" (God Is Red 55). On the other hand, European American culture, and Christianity as a subset of that culture, are both beautifully complex. In fact, while for the most part these authors aren't concerned with demonstrating that complexity, Silko, in Gardens in the Dunes, does explore the tensions between, for example, mainstream Christianity supported by the government and Christian "sects" such as Mormonism. Therefore, I will agree, as I think these writers do, to use such terms for the sake of convenience and argument, rather than accuracy.

[2] The thought of such a conversion brings to mind the characters of Marge Piercy's Woman on The Edge of Time, who are part of a futuristic utopia where citizens simplistically choose an ethnic group to which to belong, and have among their choices various Native American tribes, Arnold Krupat's ratio/natio critiques of Gerald Vizenor's Heirs of Columbus, or more darkly, Eye Killers' European murderer, also fascinated with Native American culture.

[3] Except where noted, I refer to the 1993 edition of God Is Red. Deloria is a provocative and for some critics problematic thinker and writer who often shocks readers. Both Robert Warrior and Jace Weaver defend Deloria against his detractors, explaining that what some see as lack of logic, they understand to be attempts to push readers outside of their usual thought patterns, and to illustrate the just-as-ludicrous nature of many opposing thoughts in the Christian camp (if such a thing can be said to exist). Certainly, his delineation of the contrasts between Christianity and Native American traditions is helpful. Some claim Deloria is the most often-cited thinker in Native American cultural studies today, and yet, his ideas are very rarely discussed in detail.

[4]With this in mind, it is interesting then to speculate upon the common practice of delaying "deterioration" of the body as long as possible in intricate embalming processes. One thinks of the dismay of the Osage Indians in Mean Spirit when their traditional meansof burial, which allows deterioration of the body so that it may be reintegrated with the earth, is outlawed by whites.

[5] Deloria attributes the rise of other, less savory beliefs such as Satanism to an attempt to fill in this gap.

[6] The idea of the North American continent absorbing stereotypical European American culture, or of exerting a converting influence on European Americans, is described in the fifth and sixth chapters, which discusses Gardens in the Dunes.

[7] I preserve here the varying spellings of Indian names for the Chippewa tribe; two examples are Henry's "Anishinabe" and Theresa Smith's plural "Anishinaabeg." Various spellings are also used by other writers.

[8] Of course, we are not supposed to take the priest too seriously. This passage hints at the priest's madness. The lengthened sentences are pieced together by strings of the conjunction "and," reduced to "&," making them run together faster and faster to illustrate a fevered and illogical state. In addition, the suggestion of pedophilia lingers in the ambiguous reference to "play [ing] cross to him & touch[ing] him after to make him laugh" (52) in the priest's description of Francisco falling into the river: "Did I tell you once he fell in the river & was no more than 6 or 7 & I made him take off his clothes & stand naked by the fire & he was shaking and ashamed" (51-2). Perhaps this suggested pedophilia offers the best explanation for his resentment towards Francisco. Further undermining any positive characteristics the priest might have is his plaintive whining after the fact that his brother has yet to send him a "razor & strop & a little money." Should his brother fail to send these items, the priest gives the distinct impression that he will not find time to pray for the soul of that good brother, as he is already so busy with the prayers of "friends and patrons before you be assured & they have some better claim & to be true I can scarce get you in" (52)!

[9] I refer in particular here to Arnold Krupat, who points out the problematics behind considering a Native American Literary Renaissance beginning with House Made of Dawn and incorporating the flood of books which followed, because this nomenclature suggests that what preceded House Made of Dawn was markedly different and even inferior. As Krupat notes, much of this earlier work has not seen adequate study to uphold or withstand such criticism. Weaver, though, sees Momaday's work as distinct despite Weaver's study of previous Native American literature. He feels that Abel

clearly has a more hopeful sort of transformation based through his reconnection with tribal traditions than do previous characters.

[10] For an intriguing explanation of the importance of the horse imagery in the novel, see Kathleen Donovan's chapter on House Made of Dawn in her work Feminist Readings of Native American Literature.

[11] My reading disagrees Kathleen M. Donovan's thought provoking chapter accusing Momaday's novel of misogyny. Angela, she claims, is "dangerous to [Abel's] healing because of her perversion of the sacredness of language and her sexuality" (76). I fear that Donovan may be superimposing European American sexual mores onto Momaday's characters, especially when she bases a portion of her argument of Angela's harmful nature on her judgment that Angela is morally problematic due to her sleeping with one man while she carries another man's child (77). I can not help but think here of Silko's injunction that sexuality and especially childbearing are always positive in Pueblo tradition, regardless of such issues as who controls whose body (Yellow Woman 68). I also wonder why she doesn't instead applaud Momaday for creating a character who may at least control her body in the circumstances where it is given to her to do so, and who finally makes peace with the circumstances where she does not have control of her body (such as her pregnancy). In addition, whereas Donovan reads Angela's detestation of the creature growing inside of her as a symbol of her alienation from the natural landscape so vital to Abel's healing, I see that Angela, like Abel and all other human beings, regardless of gender, is simply being forced to recognize the fact that she must submit to powers beyond her control. Finally, in her reading of Angela's hospital visit to Abel, she undervalues Angela's contribution by saying that she "offers no help to Abel other than

the vague storytelling." Perhaps Donovan confuses Benally's voice as he tells of Angela's visit with Angela's own demeanor (79).

[12] Scholars wince, perhaps, when they read such an indictment, recognizing it as a description of what some consider to be the tools of their trade. Here Momaday seems to align himself with Native American critics who sometimes scoff at the academic nature of the discussions of these books, despite his own Stanford education.

[13] Such a view brings to mind poststructuralist theory, in particular, Derrida's endless chain of signs and signifiers. An important difference, though, lies in Momaday's insistence that the chain is not endless, but has behind it a transcendent "Truth" (see in-text quote above). Thus he aligns himself more closely with Graeco-Christian notions than poststructuralist theory.

[14] This stance aligns Momaday with Derrida's derided logocentrism, and thus, with such important figures in Western culture as Socrates, Plato, and St. Augustine, who privilege the spoken word (with its presence, as Derrida would say, or its proximity to extinction, as Momaday puts it) over the written word's implied absence. As Krupat points out, it is tempting to think of Native American authors and their works either in terms of their traditional Native American forms and themes, or in terms of their use of Western forms and themes. But it is much more accurate, interesting, and useful to remember that all of the authors discussed here were educated in Western schools as well as through their ties with their tribal cultures. With this hybridity in mind, readers should not be too surprised that Momaday does, in fact, occasionally align himself with typically Western themes, just as he uses the novel, a Western form.

[15] Robert Nelson discusses the troubles of both land and people as a result of their having lost a sense of harmony with each other due to the neglect of ceremonies in Place and Vision. The most recent survey of such a tie between the author and the land which nurtured her occurs in Nelson's "A Laguna Woman." Silko discusses her personal connection to the land in numerous places, including Yellow Woman.

[16] And, as Robert Allen Warrior reminds us, the threat of being not the right sort of human being is dangerous to us all: "The threat of atomic annihilation unites all people again into one clan" (32).

[17] Interesting to compare this Jesus to the Jesus in Gardens who wanders the planet with his family, comforting the faithful, be they Christian or otherwise.

[18] Of course, we also glimpse what one's life becomes when one does accept the religion of the conquerors. Not only does one think of the disruptions in Auntie's life caused by the conflict between the religion she converts to and a traditional tribal approach, but also of the coercion which often accompanied conversion. One thinks of church schools set up to convert Indian children who had been virtually kidnapped from their parents and denied trips home during breaks, who were beaten when they attempted to speak their own language or wear their traditional clothing. In Smith's article on the Church of the Immaculate Conception, one Anishinaabe woman, Kitty Bell, explains, "Now the people are admitting 'yes, we gave up a lot.' And it was always taught from the pulpit. 'Don't go that way, that fire will surely lead you to hell.' They used these scare tactics" (516). Smith says, "Christian Anishinaabeg were told to hand over their medicine bundles to the priest and to reject the old ways as demonic" (523).

[19] Of course, the comedy inherent in Auntie's reaction is a tactic Silko uses again in Gardens, to bring non-Natives over to her position.

[20] Though they, too, show that interrelation carries dangerous ramifications if the responsibility which accompanies this interrelation is not lived up to, for example, Tayo's people's lack of responsibility to maintain the ties with the land that leads to the drought, and Abel's lack of connection to both snake and eagle magic that results in his near-death. For one reading of this darker side in Erdrich's novel, see "Storytelling and Preservation in Louise Erdrich's Tracks," by Jennifer Sergi.

[21] Perhaps the forest's deep darkness dispelled by the unnatural clearing is similar to the darkness of mystery Tosamah accuses Saint John of dispelling in House Made of Dawn.

[22] To be fair, there is, of course, a history of more positive Christian interaction with the environment. For example, Lynn White in his 1967 essay "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," claims St. Francis as an early example of more appropriate Christian relationships between humans and the environment. On a similar note, Edward Walkiewicz kindly offers a European literary example of interrelation, the tale of the Fisher King as T.S. Eliot uses it in "The Wasteland."

[23] There is an interesting similarity here between Nanapush's experience and Betonie's in Ceremony. Both meet with ridicule for changing of ceremonies. Nanapush remembers that "When I first dreamed the method of doing this, I got rude laughter. I got jokes about little boys playing with fire. But the person who visited my dream told me ...[how to] reach into the body itself and remove, as I did so long ago with Moses, the name that burned, the sickness" (188). In both novels, the things that last without changing also seem similar: "Yet we old-time Indians were like this, long thinking but in the last,

forgiving, as we must live close together, as one people, share what we have in common" (180).

[24] I owe this line of thought to Eric Anderson and Shelley Reid, who were kind enough to discuss Pauline's troubling character with me.

[25] These comments are from recent reviews by Patrick Smith and Irene Wanner, respectively.

[26] Robert Nelson, for example, in Place and Vision, and Scarberry-Garcia in Landmarks of Healing.

[27] As Tayo reenacts and becomes conscious of the "myth" of the return of Nau'ts'ity'i, he begins to see himself as not solely responsible for the drought, but as partially able to cure it, in conjunction with the assistance of spirits and animals and earth (here, earth in the sense of dirt, even).

[28] Readers of Almanac of the Dead will recall that the stone snake of that work, which is also described in this essay in Yellow Woman, was so important to the Pueblo people in Almanac that they exiled one of their own, albeit wrongly, Silko suggests, for not adequately protecting it from the white public (in the form of a movie crew).

[29] By contrast, Indigo is so thrifty that she saves string tied around a gift package (191).

[30] This quote also serves to demonstrate that stories are what keep old ways alive, a subject discussed elsewhere in more detail.

[31] One book-length study of the alliance of colonialism, religion, and economy is Gesa Mackenthum's Metaphors of Dispossion: American Beginnings and the Translation of Empire, 1492-1637. Vine Deloria in God Is Red and Arnold Krupat in The Turn to the Native both treat the policies the United States government has imposed upon Native

Americans, from the Dawes Act and House Concurrent Resolution 108 to the relocation program of the 1950s in the context of colonialism and religion's role in it.

[32] Silko calls Gardens in the Dunes "a tribute to [Freud, as] Almanac of the Dead is my tribute to Marx…[W]hen I was blocked during writing Almanac, I read Freud. Whoosh. right through" (Arnold 31).

[33] See the previous chapter for a more detailed explanation of Deloria's treatment of this subject.

[34] As is suggested by Deloria's inability to find much use for Jesus, Deloria's critique of Christianity is more stringent that Silko's. However, their views of what Christianity might become in order to remain viable are remarkably similar, and it is on this similarity that I will focus in the later portion of this chapter.

[35] Lest one thinks Deloria finds the left wing any better, he makes it plain they want to know Jesus no better: in his usual biting style, Deloria claims, "Most of them would take the Second Coming of Jesus as a personal affront indicating that God has lost confidence in their ability to solve problems" (242). But of course, according to Deloria, Christians probably never wanted Christ to return anyway. He claims that despite the promise or reunion with God after death, Christians have, more than anyone else, a great fear of death (God 170).

[36] In an interesting example of influences crossing back and forth between Native and non-Native cultures, Silko remarks in a recent interview with Ellen Arnold that she was reading Elaine Pagel's Gnostic Gospels while she was writing Gardens in the Dunes ("Listening" 3). Pagel mentions the following ideas raised in the gnostic texts, which readers of Gardens will recognize: first, "whether all suffering, labor, death derive from

human sin, which, in the orthodox version, marred an originally perfect creation;" second, "the feminine element in the divine, celebrati[on of] God as Father and Mother;" and finally, "that Christ's resurrection is to be understood symbolically, not literally" (xxxv).

[37] Jace Weaver comments on the Ghost Dance in Almanac that "Amer-Europeans assumed that because the Ghost Dance had not produced immediate, tangible events, it lacked efficacy. In reality, avers Silko, it began a process that still continues and will achieve its goal at the appointed time. Eventually, as the ancient prophecies foretell and as Wovoka predicted, all things European will disappear from the Americas" (135).

[38] In her interview with Ellen Arnold, Silko addresses the efficacy of spiritual acts committed with a lack of consciousness as she describes Spring rites celebrations in Zurich: "It's like a European Mardi Gras, but of course it's pagan...I could feel the German ancestor spirits out, because even though they consciously don't know why they're doing it, the Europeans when they dress up in their masks and go around like that, that's an old rite. And even though they consciously aren't aware of it, they're still doing what they are supposed to be" (5).

[39] For Deloria, this spirit in land is not confined to Native cultures. He speculates about a similar grounding for the major theistic religions: "Judaism, Islam, and Christianity do not radically differ about the nature of creation and the final days, when even nature is to be renewed. Arising as they did from the desert of the Middle East, it may be that concern for a renewal of that particular land has preformed their religious conceptions" (294-5).

[40] A complaint some readers have with regards to Deloria's writing is that he offers contradictory answers to the problems he describes. Jace Weaver and Robert Allen Warrior both admirably defend Deloria from such criticism, but I think that Deloria's words in God is Red should not only satisfy those unhappy with his scholarship, but should also serve as a commentary on this comfort with conflicting stories, as opposed to the desire for a concrete and definitive answer: "We cannot ...pretend to give an exhaustive answer to any particular question or to present a final definition of either Indian tribal or traditional Christian ideas. What is important is that alternative methods of asking questions or of viewing the world may arise" (89).

[41] Krupat, like Owens, focuses on the use of such translation by Native Americans (when he approaches issues of use at all), whereas I am interested, as the above indicates, in how that translation is used to alter European-American behavior, both in novels and in the world outside of them. Krupat's notion of cultural translation, or anti-imperialist translation, is very useful here, but more so in its general outline than in its specifics. For example, the distinction he follows regarding anti-colonial and nationalist versus postnativist, while intriguing, is beyond the scope of this study.

[42] It also allows European Americans to visualize their own heritage, without needing to "steal" from Native American cultures. Deloria complains of religious appropriation in one of his earlier articles cited above, "Is Religion Possible?". In God Is Red, as I noted above, he comments that the reason Christianity is no longer viable is because it is a religion based on explanation or creed, rather than experience. Silko shows a world where Christianity didn't try to obliterate only Native American traditions. Aunt Bronwyn explains that, "[f]or centuries the clergy made war on the ways of the old

ones...suppressed the druid religion" (263). Her descriptions make it clear that Christians are still doing their best to destroy the sacred stones around her farm as well (253). Silko shows a past which may still be recovered, despite the threats to that past.

[43] Erdrich, for example, discusses in her interview with Laura Coltelli her gratitude to non-Native critics and readers (47-8).

[44] Paula Gunn Allen gives us one example of the sorts of misunderstandings which arise from reading Native texts from a non-Native point of view. Numerous articles, both by Natives and non-Natives, attempt to understand these novels using tribal insight, for example, Robert L. Berner's "Trying to Be Round," which discusses House Made of Dawn and Ceremony, and Polly Duryea's "Rainwitch Ritual in Cather, Lawrence, and Momaday." Of course, readers know that works like these often require a cultural perspective of an entirely different and somewhat ironic sort: Catholicism's rituals and saints are explained in order to interpret their importance to House Made of Dawn, in H.S. McAllister's "Be a Man, Be a Woman: Androgyny in House Made of Dawn" and "Incarnate Grace and the Paths of Salvation in House Made of Dawn."

[45] Catherine Rainwater explains how "narrating voices assist the reader...to participate" in Silko's ceremony, "guid[ing] the reader through the potential confusion of the text to an understanding of the creative imagination-the place where 'the stories fit together'" (44). James Ruppert, too, offers an in-depth discussion of how both Native and non-Native readers are accommodated to the codes in these texts.

[46] Paula Gunn Allen suggests as much in her work Sacred Hoop. She devotes one chapter of this book to the contributions of Native American culture to the women's movement, and also argues that the famed inclusivity of our democratic government was

learned from Native American culture.

[47] Silko, for example, describes Almanac as a depiction of how "capitalism destroys a people, a continent" while Gardens focuses on "what capitalism makes people do to one another" (21), clearly demonstrating that for her, at least, the novels she writes have both large-scale and personal repercussions.

[48] See, for example, Momaday's interview with Bettye Givens, where he says, "When the storyteller tells his listener a story, he creates his listener, he creates a story. He creates himself in the process" (81). Momaday discusses this same idea in more detail in the Coltelli interview as well.

[49] Jace Weaver remarks, "Because of the failure of Native cultures to recognize any split between sacred and secular spheres, this worldview remains essentially religious, involving the Native's deepest sense of self and undergirding tribal life, existence and identity, just as the Creator undergirds all in the created order" (28).

[50] He concludes with a remark reminiscent of Deloria, "This concept of abstractions makes perfect sense if one realizes strict categories are an abstraction, not a reality" (97).

[51] This fact, along with the more mainstream pieces of literature that feature Native Americans and the long tradition of "American" nature writers, leads to a line of critical thought which would explore these two traditions to see where they intersect, and how, when and why they are different and similar to each other. Some works have already begun to explore this intersection; for example, Rachel Stein's Shifting the Ground and Karen Knowles's Celebrating the Land, both deal with the intersection of women's nature writing and Native American literature. Ideally, I'd like to see an approach to the study of this intersection which begins with Silko's suggestion that the land affects whoever

comes to it. Thus she says, "Even to this day, I point to the Transcendentalism as a sign of what the old prophecies say about the strangers who come to this continent. The longer they live here, the more they are being changed. Every minute the Europeans, and any other immigrants from any other place, come on to the Americas and start walking on this land. You get this dirt on you, and you drink this water, it starts to change you. Then your kids will be different, and then the spirits start to work on you. I point to American Transcendentalism and say, if you don't think the change isn't already under way, well, you're a fool...it's my evidence to the world of the change that's already happening" (Arnold, "Listening" 19).

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