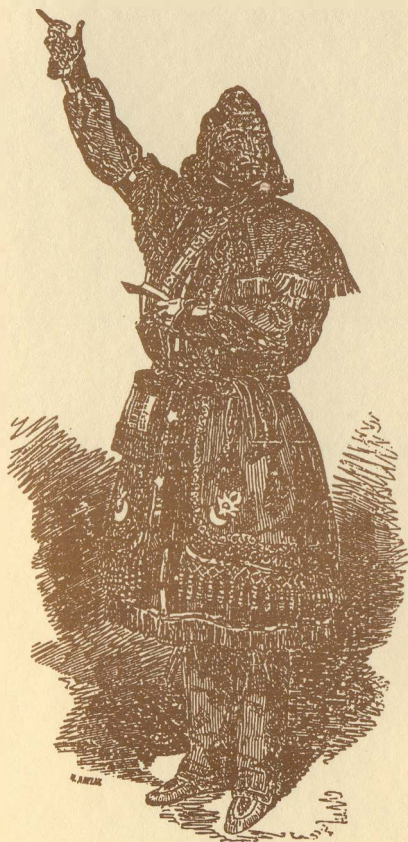




NAIT-OH-SA-GAN-DOW, THE CHICKENWAT CHIEF, KILLED DURING THE TEMPERANCE
MEETING AT SHORT-LAKE INDIAN VILLAGE.

Studies in American Indian Literatures

University of Arkansas at Little Rock
Stabler Hall 502
American Native Press Archives
2801 South University
Little Rock, AR 72204

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS
Permit Number 2542

SAIL

Studies in American Indian Literatures

Series 2

Volume 1, Number 2, Fall 1989

1825-0730-8235

General Editors: Helen Jaskoski, Daniel F. Littlefield Jr., James W. Parins

Poetry/Fiction: Joseph Bruchac III

Bibliographer: Jack W. Marken

Editor Emeritus: Karl Kroeber

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Manuscripts should follow MLA format; please submit three copies with SASE.

Creative work should be addressed to
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The Greenfield Review Press
2 Middle Grove Road
Greenfield Center, New York 12833

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ISSN: 0730-3238

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ADDENDUM

The third paragraph of Robert Nelson's article should read as follows:

Properly, the relationship between the life of the individual and the life of the land is one of intimate and "indivisible" reciprocity: the land holds and is held by the people living there, and the people hold and are held by the land. As Momaday casts it and as Abel sees it, at Walatowa the hold of the land (and the reciprocal human willingness to be thus held) manifests as the "snake spirit" of the land, while the human ability to hold the land (and the reciprocal willingness of the living land to be thus held) manifests as the "eagle spirit" informing Abel's vision for much of the novel. In part, then, both snake and eagle are, in this novel, avatars of place, manifestations of the life of the land itself. The design of *House Made of Dawn* arises out of the conflict between Abel's willingness to hold the land on the one hand and his resistance to being held by the land on the other. Throughout the novel but particularly in Part 1 and Part 4 (both set at Walatowa), the eagle and snake motifs point the way not only to an understanding of the life of the land but also to an understanding of Abel's own separation from that life 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 as much as he would possess it.

SNAKE AND EAGLE: ABEL'S DISEASE AND THE LANDSCAPE OF *HOUSE MADE OF DAWN*

By Robert M. Nelson

The events of one's life take place, take place. How often have I used this expression, and how often have I stopped to think what it means? Events do indeed take place; they have meaning in relation to the things around them. And a part of my life happened to take place at Jemez. I existed in that landscape, and then my existence was indivisible with it.¹

Place matters: literature grounded solidly in Native American thought and experience proceeds from the proposition that the land itself lives, which is to say it functions not only as "setting" but also as "character"; landscape can therefore exert an influence that not only contextualizes but also provides criteria for evaluating human events occurring--"taking place"--there. This proposition is a first principle of much of the fiction we categorize as "Native American," and taking this principle into critical account can, as I hope to show, go a long way towards clarifying why things happen the way they do in *House Made of Dawn*.

One corollary of the proposition that individual human existence is, or ought to be, an event "indivisible" with the landscape in which it "takes place" is that separation from the land leads to disease--spiritual illness, alienation, and uncertainty. Such separation can be imposed by outside forces (as, for instance, the infamous Relocation Act); however, it may also come about through an individual's failure of vision, his inability or unwillingness to remain one with the land and the spirit or life of the land. Abel, the protagonist of Momaday's novel, is made to suffer both of these kinds of separation, but it is the second sort (the one most often overlooked by critics of the novel) that I wish to address in this essay.

Properly, the relationship between the life of the individual and the life of the land is one of intimate and "indivisible" reciprocity: the land holds and is held by the people living there, and the people hold and are held by the land. As Momaday casts it and as Abel sees it, at Walatowa the hold of the land (and the reciprocal human willingness to be thus held) manifests as the "eagle spirit" informing Abel's vision for much of the novel. In part, then, both snake and eagle are, in this novel, avatars of place, manifestations of the life of

the land itself. The design of *House Made of Dawn* arises out of the conflict between Abel's willingness to hold the land on the one hand and his resistance to being held by the land on the other. Throughout the novel but particularly in Part 1 and Part 4 (both set at Walatowa), the eagle and snake motifs point the way not only to an understanding of the life of the land but also to an understanding of Abel's own separation from that life 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 as much as he would possess it.

The eagle holds the land whole and entire in its vision: eagle medicine is about possessing the land, and this Abel is willing to do from the outset. Snake medicine, however, is about being possessed by the land, and Abel needs a good dose of this medicine to make his spirit whole. A return to wholeness and healing, for Abel, depends on his ability to accept both of these aspects of place by making room in his vision of his own identity for both avatars of holding--both eagle and snake. In the structure of the novel, Angela, the albino, and Martinez all function as agents of the snake spirit of the land, and Abel's several encounters with these figures prepare him to surrender to the hold of the land in Part 4.

* * * * *

Most early reviewers of the novel, as well as some later critics, propose that Abel's felt dislocation and disease derive from his exposure to White culture during World War II. But Momaday rather clearly establishes, in the form of the six distinct memories presented early in Part 1 (14-25),² that Abel's disease predates any of his recorded encounters with either corrupting Anglos or the horrors of World War II. The first sunrise of his return to Jemez after the war, we are told, Abel goes out into the hills just east of the village to reestablish in his experience the reality of the place called Walatowa³ and (if we take literally Momaday's own words regarding the identity of self with place) his own life prior to leaving Jemez. The first four of these memories chronicle the development of Abel's awareness of the snake spirit, as well as his reluctance to "hold" such memories or their informing spirit (I shall return to this topic later). The fifth, and by far the most fully developed episode in this series records Abel's vision of eagles and his subsequent participation in the work of the Eagle Watchers Society. The vision of eagles he acquires in this episode--"an awful, holy sight, full of magic and meaning" (21)--is in fact

recounted as though it were to be understood as a Power Vision,⁴ a definitive vision of Abel's own felt spiritual identity prior to World War II.

In this remembered episode, Abel recalls seeing

golden eagles, a male and a female, in their mating flight. They were cavorting, spinning and spiraling on the cold, clear columns of air, and they were beautiful. They swooped and hovered, leaning on the air, and swung close together, feinting and screaming with delight. The female was full-grown, and the span of her broad wings was greater than any man's height. . . . She carried a rattlesnake; it hung shining from her feet, limp and curving out in the trail of her light. (20)

The dance of the eagles, staged in the sky above the Valle Grande (the "right eye of the earth" [19]), takes on the ritualized motions of some exotic katsina performance in Abel's eyes, the comings and goings of the two eagles linked to the image of the helpless snake. He sees the female eagle rise until she is "small in the sky," and he sees her "let go of the snake," which falls "slowly, writhing and rolling, floating out like a bit of silver thread against the wide backdrop of the land"; he then sees the male take up the ritual by "sliding down in a blur of motion to the strike," hitting the snake and "cracking its long body like a whip," then repeating the motion of the female by rising and "let[ting] go of the snake in turn." As the eagles end their dance and the snake falls back to the earth, we are told, "Abel watched them go, straining to see, saw them veer once, dip and disappear" (20-21).

What makes this vision "an awful, holy sight, full of magic and meaning" in Abel's eyes is not that he sees eagles (in fact a fairly common sight over the Valle Grande even today) but rather that he sees them moving in a very special relationship to *culebra*, the snake: Abel's vision represents the two creatures, eagle and snake, as antithetical forces, and it is the conjunction of these disparate-looking forces in a single event that accounts for the "awful, holy" quality of the vision. As Abel comes to see it, the aerial dance of these eagles is about demonstrating to one another their mutual *superiority* over the snake; when the male eagle lets go of the snake in the air, Abel's attention locks exclusively on to the eagles until they disappear from sight, as though the rattlesnake were of no concern or consequence anymore. Still, the sight of eagles so intimately involved with a snake clearly leaves Abel uneasy, "brood[ing] for a time, full of a strange longing" (21); but when he finally decides to tell what he has seen, he seeks out old Patiestewa,

head of the Eagle Watchers Society, rather than the head of the Snake Society.

It is not too surprising that, in a novel devoted to recovering Native American identity, Momaday should have his protagonist identify provisionally with eagle rather than snake. Within the broad, "pan-Indian" context of the novel, the eagle is a conventional metaphor for Native American vision in general, and certainly Momaday's eagle functions that way:

The eagle ranges far and wide over the land, farther than any other creature, and all things there are related simply by having existence in the perfect vision of a bird.
(55)

Such a vision of place--coupled with a vision of his own place in the pattern of the land--is precisely what Abel lacks, and this lack is precisely what accounts for the "longing" and alienation he so frequently feels.⁵ While most critics (consistent with Momaday's own frequent pronouncements regarding the generative power of language) point to Abel's need for a voice, it should be noted that, even more than a voice, Abel needs such a vision of identity with this place to give voice to--specifically, a vision of the land *and himself in it* like the ones which open and close the novel, both of which imitate the perspective of vision attributed to eagle in the passage quoted above.

Abel's vision of the eagle's significance not only provides him with an individual spiritual identity but also aligns him with the special character of the culture of Jemez. According to Joe Sando, "Jemez still uses the eagle as its symbol, or logo" and as a sign of ownership (98); and while the Jemez People currently abide at the place they call Walatowa, other important places where they have lived include the ones they named (and still refer to as) Seyshokwa, "eagle living place," and Seytokwa, "eagle cage place" (Sando 13). Seytokwa is mentioned by name early in the novel (11), and Francisco associates this place with "the race for good hunting and harvest"--the long Winter Race which frames the rest of the novel. The starting point for the Winter Race is, in fact, located at the place called Seytokwa.⁶ This is not to say, though, that Abel's identity with eagle is somehow dictated by his cultural environment; the implication is rather that the characters of both Jemez culture and Abel derive from common ground. Here as elsewhere in the novel, Abel derives both his vision and his felt identity directly from the living place itself, not from the culture's stories *about* that place. The implication is that Abel's identity and the cultural identity of the Hemish people collectively both derive from the shaping spirit of the land, rather than from one

another; here as throughout the novel, the cultural traditions specific to Jemez function to confirm, rather than to mediate or create, Abel's vision and identity.

Perhaps the most obvious flaw in Abel's vision for most of the novel, a flaw manifest in his initial response to the Valle Grande experience, is that Abel is willing to identify with *only part* of the ceremony he sees being enacted in the air above "the right eye of the earth." Beginning with his earliest memories and continuing throughout the novel, Abel perceives snake or *culebra* as a spirit enemy rather than a potential ally; rather than endeavor to make a place for this figure or the spirit it represents in his concept of himself or of the place he wishes to identify with, Abel attempts to avoid or destroy snake medicine and its avatars whenever he encounters them. Insofar as Abel's disease arises out of his separation from the land, it would seem then that his disease derives even more specifically from his rejection of the snake spirit of the land. The other five patches of memory which constitute Abel's dawn meditation, all of which record encounters with fear and/or some sense of alienation, bear out this contention: encoded in this ensemble of dis-easing memories of Abel's life at Jemez, an ensemble which includes memories of some of his most intimate encounters with the living land of Jemez, is the figure of snake.

The first fragment records Abel's experience, at the age of five, of detouring on the way to the cacique's fields to explore "a narrow box canyon he had never seen before" situated in "the face of the red mesa"; moving up into this canyon, young Abel perceives the walls of the canyon "clos[ing] over him" as the surrounding red earth becomes "dark and cool as a cave." The "crooked line of the sky" as seen from this place, combined with the sense that the "great leaning walls themselves" are alive and moving, terrifies Abel. Momaday quickly establishes a connection between Abel's experience here and the irrigation ceremony being conducted simultaneously by the men of the pueblo (in the next sentences Abel returns to the fields to watch "the foaming brown water creep among the furrows and go into the broken earth" [15]), but Abel seems to recognize, in the shape of the sky and the closeness of the earth experienced at this place, only the impending death of his mother (whose voice, Abel recalls after her death, "had been as soft as water"). Perhaps we are to understand from this that, long before Abel ever obtains his eagle vision, he has seen as snake sees; if so, we are also to understand that Abel, focused as he is at the time of this experience on his "foreign and strange"

status and on his imminent aloneness, does not recognize the blessing of this early vision.

The second fragment records an experience in which Abel's capacity for fear becomes grounded in the image of a "hole in the rock where the wind dipped," a *sipapu*-like opening into the underworld which, when the wind blows across it, makes a sound, "a stranger sound than any he had known" and which "for the rest of his life . . . would be for him the particular sound of anguish" (16). The particular fear Abel brings to this place is his fear of the old Bahkyush woman, Nicolas *teah-whau*, and the "unintelligible curse" she has cast his way. No doubt we are to understand that the sound and spirit of her curse is the "Something [which] frightened him," the "something" he comes to identify as emanating from this hole in the earth (described as being "larger than a rabbit hole") and powerful enough to cause even the "snake-killer dog" to quiver and lay back its ears in this spirit's presence; while his snake-killer dog may guard him (and his sheep) against ordinary rattlers, it is no match for the supernatural *spirit* of snake which Abel comes here to identify as the informing spirit of both the Bahkyush witch and this particular sound.

In the third fragment of memory, this sound reappears as "the low sound itself, rising and falling far away in his mind, unmistakeable and unbroken" which he comes to associate here with the death of his brother Vidal. This time the words accompanying the sound are the words of a prayer (16). Presumably Abel has heard this sound of the old men praying this prayer before (at the time his mother died); hence, hearing this sound again, "he knew what it was he was waiting for"; he is waiting to be left alone with the corpse of one of his limited family, to know again the feeling of being left increasingly alone in a world he does not quite feel a part of. In this episode, then, the sound (and perhaps, by association, the old words of the old men as well) becomes grounded in Abel's sense of his own growing aloneness and fear.

These important passage are, I think, crucial to an understanding of the disease Abel suffers from--and, it should be noted, suffers long before leaving Jemez for World War II. His disease lies in his fear of the *hold* the land has on him (and on his dying family), his fear of his own (and others'--his mother's, his brother's, his aging grandfather's, even his snake-killer dog's) powerlessness to resist those underworld spirits which influence and perhaps ultimately control human life at this place. I think this fear of powerlessness

accounts for Abel's attitude towards eagle as well; initially, he admires the eagles precisely because they seem above and in control of the earthbound (and earth-binding) force represented by the rattlesnake; but later, seeing his eagle "bound and helpless" in the moonlight--"grounded," as it were--Abel feels only "shame and disgust" (24-25).

Because these incidents are so clearly imprinted in his memory, Abel accepts them as important parts of his own life, and in so doing accepts the reality that the snake spirit is part of the life of the land as well as part of the life of the people of Jemez as he has come to know it, and them. However, his *vision* of this elemental power makes it out to be both the source of disease (in the cases of his mother and brother, fatal disease) and antithetical to human freedom and control, and consequently a thing to be feared. His vision of the land thus biased, Abel understandably fails to see what good this elemental power of the land, identified in Abel's thinking with snake, is.

Precisely what function snake does have in the overall welfare of the place called Walatowa is hard to see, not only for Abel but also for most critics of the novel. Many critics are quick to spot the association of snake with the albino in the "Longhair" chapter of the novel, and several of them point to the further relationship between the albino and the figure of Martinez (both of whom Abel identifies as "culebras"). Most of these critics, however, go on to classify these two *culebras* as genuine enemies of both Abel as an individual Indian and Jemez as a representative Indian group, arguing that both the albino and Martinez represent the intrusions of a white--to be understood as specifically "Anglo"--spirit which has invaded, and diseased, Abel's consciousness as well as Jemez culture.⁷ Other critics, citing Momaday's own documented appreciation of Melville's *Moby Dick*, treat both the albino and Martinez, on the basis of their "whiteness," as embodiments of some perhaps less specifically Anglo but nonetheless genuinely malign spirit of evil, and treat Abel's conflict with the albino (and, later, Martinez) accordingly.⁸ In either case, the conclusion is that *culebra*, whether in the form of the albino or in the form of Martinez, is an evil force (perhaps specifically aligned with witchery) loose in the world, and Abel is tragically correct to act out of his conviction that "a man kills such an enemy if he can" (95).

The flaw, I think, in both these lines of argument is their tendency to identify snake energy as a force that originates *outside* rather than from within the landscape which, in turn, gives rise to Abel's life and

the life of the culture of Jemez. The problem here is that snake is, and perhaps always has been, an integral part of the life of the place now called Jemez, as integral as eagle. Momaday makes this clear enough to us rather early in the novel, in the much-admired passage describing the life of the land in the middle of Part 1 ("The canyon is a ladder to the plain . . ."). In this passage, "rattlesnakes" are the fourth-mentioned "kind of life that is peculiar to the land in summer" (54); like the "great golden eagles" (the twelfth-named species of animal life in this passage), "these . . . have tenure in the land" and suffer no "poverty of vision and instinct" (55-56). And, as we might expect of a culture whose existence is designed to be indivisible with the landscape in which it "takes place," snake medicine, like eagle medicine, is institutionalized within the overall structure of Jemez religious and ceremonial life. The Snake Society at Jemez plays a crucial role (as it does at, for instance, Hopi) in rainmaking and curing ceremonies;⁹ not only a Snake Society but also a Snake Clan exist at Jemez.¹⁰ Further, associations of albinism with snake in the novel, far from making either snake medicine or albinism into "outside forces," merely identify them both as intracultural ones: Parsons and others have all pointed out that the frequency of albinism is relatively high at Jemez.¹¹ Consequently, we should probably conclude that one of the indices of Abel's own *faulty* vision is that he opts to resist snake medicine (even to the point of destroying or attempting to destroy its agents), rather than move with it, for much of the novel.

I mean "moving with" snake, here, literally as well as figuratively. As mentioned previously, the Winter Race which frames the narrative commences at the place called Seytokwa, "eagle caged place," and hence Abel's persona becomes reassociated with eagle when he runs the Winter Race; but the Winter Race is also intimately associated with snake medicine. Describing the race in *The Names*, Momaday asserts that the participants in this "kick race" run "not in a straight line along the [old San Ysidro wagon] road, but in zigzag lines across the road, back and forth; it is the way water rushes and dips, swirling along in the channels" (143). (The zigzag figure is used interchangeably to represent both water and snake in Hemish mythology as in the mythology of Southwestern tribes generally.) Describing the same race in "The Morality of Indian Hating," Momaday claims that "the runners imitate the Cloud People who fill the arroyos with life-giving rain" and that "to watch those runners is to know that they draw with every step some elemental power which resides at the core of the earth" (40). I am suggesting that the

"elemental power" Momaday refers to in this passage is identical with the power Abel comes to know in his youth as the snake spirit of the land itself.¹² I would further suggest that both Angela and the albino function as agents of this elemental power in the subsequent plot line of Part 1, and that Abel's attempts to control them while at the same time avoid being controlled by them derive, finally, from his egotistically misguided desire to hold the land yet avoid being held by it.

In Abel's remembered experience as well as in his encounters with Angela and the albino later in Part 1, snakes fail to cooperate for him the way the snake in his vision was made to cooperate with the animal embodiment of perfect vision and spiritual mobility, the eagle. Unlike either of the two eagles he sees sporting with their culebra in the sky over the Valle Grande, Abel throughout the novel lacks the ability to exercise graceful control over *culebra* (perhaps because he is not an eagle but a human being; perhaps because he seeks, but does not possess, the quality of perfect vision which makes eagles so special in his model of how things work). Rather, the pattern of Abel's confrontations with *culebras*—and more importantly, with the spirit or power that is embodied in the figures of snakes and their allies in the novel—is, until the final movements of the novel, the pattern of Abel's failures to live gracefully and in harmony with the land, its spirit, and the manifestations of that spirit he encounters in the plot of the novel.

In the structure of the novel and of Momaday's creative vision, the land abides, present at the end as at the beginning of the novel, as though patiently awaiting Abel's return. And when Abel does finally return to Walatowa seven years later (after his chastening confrontations with the *culebras* Martinez and Angela in Los Angeles) willing finally not only to hold but also to be held by the land, the land makes a place for him.

Part 4, "The Dawn Runner," returns us (and Abel) to where the novel began, at "Walatowa." Although nearly seven years have passed and the season is late winter rather than summer, the landscape of Walatowa as depicted in the opening paragraph of Part 4 (173-174) unfolds exactly as it does in the first paragraph of Part 1: first there is the river, then the valley around it, then the mountains framing the valley, and finally the fields in the valley and the town there. As Momaday describes it here in Part 4, however, the land appears nearly lifeless: the river is "dark," the valley "gray and cold," the mountains "dark and dim," the sky a "great, gray motionless cloud of snow and mist," the fields "bare and colorless," the

streets of the town "empty." The time of year suggests a moment of fragile equilibrium or equipoise, a moment in the life of the land when its animating spirit could as easily leave the land forever as reappear. The time of day is just past sundown (Father Olguin is settling down for his evening reading of Fray Nicolás's journal, while for Abel "evening was coming on" [175]). As Momaday describes it, the quality of light absolutely precludes the making of any clear distinctions among natural features of the landscape: "There was no telling of the sun, save for the one cold, dim, and even light that lay on every corner of the land and made no shadow" (173-174). Like the time of the year, this quality of light suggests a special moment when one's vision of the land could go either way: any more light and the land might take on distinct shape and contour, as it did for Abel during his sunrise meditation in Part 1; any less and the land might appear as formless and amorphous as the sea does to Abel in Part 2. For human beings living in this place, it is a moment for choosing.

As though to emphasize this point in the structure of the first section of Part 4 ("February 27"), Momaday positions the figure of Abel between two human models of choice, Father Olguin and Francisco, either of whom Abel is free to emulate at this point in his reemergence journey. Though both men are "longhairs" in the sense of being traditionalists, they represent in the novel radically different traditions, the only fundamental difference between them (and the traditions they come to personify) being how they choose to relate to the landscape in which they live.

It is an act of vision which has enabled Father Olguin, after seven years, to give up the struggle to make his existence indivisible with the place in which that existence takes shape. His "central point of view" and "the sense of all his [religious] vows" have become framed within a vision of "safe and sacred solitude" (174)--a vision much like Abel's old eagle vision of self-preserving detachment from the world. As Olguin is aware, the price of sustaining this vision of his own spiritual inviolability is separation from the life of Walatowa, including its collective human aspect: "To be sure, there was the matter of some old and final cleavage, of certain exclusion, the whole and subtle politics of estrangement" (174); what makes it possible for him to accept this spiritual estrangement is his conviction that "it had been brought about by his own design, his act of renunciation, not the town's." Clearly, as Olguin here illustrates, one can choose to impose one's vision, and thereby whatever *a priori* values the vision encodes, upon the "event" of existence; just as clearly, the inevitable consequence of such imposition is spiritual separation and conse-

quent disease (a disease Olguin experiences as "a cold and sudden gust among his ordinary thoughts"). Having thus chosen, Father Olguin reduces himself to a solipsistic irrelevancy within the living world of the novel, a figure whose final words ("I understand! *Oh God I understand—I understand!*" [190]) elicit no response from either the living or the dead.

In contrast to Father Olguin's willed separation from the land and consequent poverty of vision, Francisco continues in Part 4 to represent the Jemez "longhair" tradition of deriving vision from the landscape rather than imposing vision on it. Although he is (like Olguin) all but blind physiologically, Francisco's eyes continue to the end to remain "open and roving and straining to see" (176), and when the quality of light without and impending death within combine to preclude any further perception, Francisco resorts to seeing in the form of his memories the shape and seasons of the land and by extension the life he has derived, and continues to derive, from his participation in that landscape. As Francisco recalls it, his humanity is at every point "indivisible" with the land. In order to be able to "reckon where they were, where all things were, in time" he and his grandsons "must learn the whole contour of the black mesa" lying just south and east of the town, must "know it as they knew the shape of their hands, always and by heart" (177). To become one with the spirit of the bear, Francisco must come to know, intimately, the landscape of the mesas and mountains to the north and west of the village (178-183). To recall accurately the sound of the "race of the dead,"¹³ Francisco must first reimagine how the land lies "a little way north from the town":

They crossed the broad Arroyo Bajo which ran south and east from Vallecitos and came to the cinch of the valley.

There in the plain, between the blue hills and the low line of the red cliffs, was the round red rock. (185)

To play the ceremonial drum perfectly on behalf of the squash clan, he has only to give his life's motions over entirely to the life rhythm of the land itself as the dancers do, so that "their feet fell upon the earth and his hand struck thunder to the drum, and it was the same thing, one motion made of sound" (187). And finally, to win the dawn race, the Winter Race, he must learn to stop trying to run it "at the wrong pace, another and better man's pace," must learn rather to draw his strength from the earth he runs on, come to be "running still" (187-188).

The final section of the novel, "February 28," opens with Abel coming "suddenly awake, wide awake and listening" (189). The

quality of Abel's awareness here should remind us of his attitude just before he "sees" the old men in white leggings in Part 2: spirits are moving in the shadow state between the Fourth and Fifth worlds;¹⁴ presumably Francisco's is now among them, having finally become one with the "dark shape [. . .] like a motionless shadow" (188) he was running to become in the final motions of his dying vision; and now Abel, once again stranded (his last kinsman now dead) in the night, "knew what had to be done." After attending to the corpse of his grandfather, he does "what had to be done" in order to complete the reintegrative ceremony set in motion by his vision in Part 2: he re-enters the human race at Walatowa which, in the Fifth World, shapes itself, willingly, to the motions of the spirits of the Fourth World--spirits whose motion draws darkness into dawn and winter into spring at this time of the year in this place called Walatowa.

To participate in this race, Abel must leave Francisco's house and walk in the dark to the place where an indeterminate number of others, as though replacing the image of the grunions in Abel's new vision of the human condition, have gathered and stand "huddled in the cold together, waiting." As mentioned previously, this place is at the site of that earlier Jemez settlement called "Seytokwa," a place associated in both Abel's (15) and Francisco's memories with the idea of knowing, with certainty, "*where they were, where all things were, in time*" (177). From the spot where the runners stand, the sun at this time of year appears to rise out of (that is, emerges from) the saddle of the "black mesa" to the east, and in so doing appears to confirm just how life emerges from the land itself; the "black mesa" of Walatowa thus functions as an analog to the "Rainy Mountain" of John Big Bluff Tosamah's vision of Kiowa identity and the "Tse'gihi" of Ben Benally's vision of Navajo identity. In all three cases, the "place among the rocks" functions as the locus where the possibilities of renewed vision ("dawn"), renewed physical motion, and spiritual healing may become constellated in an act which confirms one's own identity with the landscape.

Abel's participation in the dawn race thus not only confirms the healing power of identity with the land (the common tenor of Tosamah's, Ben's, and Francisco's healing visions), but more importantly grounds the *possibility* of healing in a *specific* place, thus turning the *vision* of healing into an *act* of healing and the idea of regenerative motion into an act of regenerative motion, in this case the running of the "Winter Race."

The surest indication that Abel has re-entered the life of this particular landscape (and that this reintegration is curative) is that in his act of running he confirms the wholeness of the life of this place--a wholeness he earlier violated by dividing it into its "eagle" and "snake" aspects, choosing to celebrate only the former and to resist or destroy the latter. In one sense, Abel's run takes on aspects of a surrender to the land and thus a concession to the snake spirit: we see him opening himself to the elements, shirtless in the icy winter darkness, his body covered with ashes and once again (as in Part 2) "numb" and "ach[ing]," and when he starts running we are told that "his body crack[s] open with pain" (190). The very act of surrender, however, results in a transformation of his condition: the rain gradually washes the ashes from his body, returning them to the earth, as his motion gradually moves him closer to the Middle that lies at the end of the road he runs on. Further, his willing surrender to the natural forces at work here results in a gradual clearing of vision, the ability to see clearly (as eagle sees) where he is, where all things are, in space. Thus, both the quality of perception earlier attributed to snake spirit possession and the quality earlier attributed to eagle vision become (re-)integrated in Abel's experience, so that the act of running can be seen as a ceremonial motion which weaves both eagle and snake motions into a single, and more human, one.

Of crucial importance in this event, as Momaday depicts it, is that Abel's vision, as he runs, derives solely and immediately from the landscape itself:

He could see at last without having to think. He could see the canyon and the mountains and the sky. He could see the rain and the river and the fields beyond. He could see the dark hills at dawn. (191)

At this moment Abel's vision is, like the vision attributed by Tosamah to John prior to his verbalization of it, a vision of "the Truth" of the innate wholeness of the land, a wholeness that, seen, has the power to heal. Such moments are the seeds of powerful songs and stories, and Abel's final gesture in the novel is to prepare, in his mind, "the words of a song," the same words Ben's Night Chant is composed of--not a song about eagles, or a song about snakes or grunions, or even a song about men running at dawn, but rather a song designed to celebrate the source of all forms of life, about the land made visible, the "house made of dawn."

Almost uniformly, critics of the novel have Abel "singing" as he runs at the end of the novel. But Momaday explicitly states that

"there was no sound, and he had no voice" (191); Abel at the end of the novel is as "inarticulate" as he was at its beginning.¹⁵ The difference (and it is a crucial difference to be sure) is that Abel at the novel's end has recovered an identity with the land worth singing about, and he sees (both literally and figuratively) life--his and the land's--as, at this moment at least, indivisible. Perhaps Abel will continue on into the village (it lies, in fact as in Momaday's fiction, around the bend of the road on which Abel is running when last we see him), and perhaps he will share what he has seen with representatives of the community; if so, he will succeed in converting healing vision into a verbal version of it, and thereby enter into the collective ceremonial life of the people, as well as the ceremonial life of the landscape, of this place. The structure of Momaday's novel, however, beginning and ending as it does with the moment of Abel's recovery of identity with the landscape of "Walatowa, Canon de San Diego," seems to emphasize less the healing power of storytelling than it does the healing power of the land itself.

NOTES

1. N. Scott Momaday, *The Names*, p. 142. A slightly differently worded version of this statement appears in Momaday's "What Will Happen to the Land?" (Viva, 30 July 1972, p. 2). Cp. his statement in his interview with Joseph Bruchac: "The Indians of the Southwest, and the Pueblo people, for example, and the Navajos with whom I grew up, they don't live on the land; they live in it, in a real sense. And that is very important to me, and I like to evoke as best I can that sense of belonging to the earth." (N. Scott Momaday: An Interview with Joseph Bruchac, p. 14.)
2. N. Scott Momaday, *House Made of Dawn* (New York: New American Library, 1963). Subsequent citations (all from this paperback edition) appear in the text in parentheses.
3. "Walatowa," the setting of the first and last chapters of the novel, is the Towan word for the place named "Jemez Pueblo" on most maps today. "Walatowa" has been translated variously as "village of the bear" (Evers, n. 18, citing Frederick Webb Hodge, ed., *Handbook of American Indians* [1907]), "the people in the canyon" (Schubnell, p. 180, citing Tom Bahti, *Southwestern Indian Tribes* [1972]), and "at the pueblo in the canyon" (Dutton, p. 7). As Watkins and others have noted, Momaday's descriptions of the terrain and geography of Walatowa in the novel, as well as the descriptions in Part 2 of the landscape around Rainy Mountain and in Part 3 of the landscape of

Ben Benally's beloved *dtné' bikeyah*, are strictly representational (almost photographically so).

4. In an interview with Joseph Bruchac, Momaday acknowledges his longstanding interest in the "vision quest" motif common among Plains cultures (Bruchac, p. 17).
5. Images of Abel's faulty vision (both physiological and spiritual) abound in the novel, and the relationship between sickness and faulty vision is established in the novel's opening portrait of Abel returning from the war. Getting off the bus stuporously drunk, "he fell against his grandfather and did not know him. His wet lips hung loose and his eyes were half closed and rolling." (13)
6. See Elsie Clews Parsons, *The Pueblo Indians of Jemez*, p. 119.
7. See, for instance, Carole Oleson, "The Remembered Earth: Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*"; Bernard A. Hirsch, "Self-Hatred and Spiritual Corruption in *House Made of Dawn*"; Joseph Trimmer, "Native Americans and the American Mix"; and Andrew Wiget, *Native American Literature*, p. 85.
8. Nora Barry ("The Bear's Folk Tale in *When the Legends Die* and *House Made of Dawn*," p. 285) and Alan Velie ("Nobody's Protest Novel," among others, maintain this position. Harold S. McAllister ("Incarnate Grace and the Paths of Salvation in *House Made of Dawn*") sees them both as representatives of spiritual sterility. Like Marion Hylton, who sees the albino as a "figure of evil" (p. 62), R.G. Billingsley ("Momaday's Treatise on the Word") concludes from this identification of the albino that "the killing of the albino is a proper and healthy act. It restores harmony to the community and fecundity to the earth; the essential balance between good and evil has been preserved" (p. 86). The error of thus accounting the albino as a purely evil force is that, in the novel both Abel and Francisco are excluded from the "harmony of the village" subsequent to the albino's death at Abel's hands. According to Momaday, from Abel's point of view the albino "is neither white [that is, Anglo] nor a man in the usual sense of those words. He is an embodiment of evil like Moby Dick, an intelligent malignity" (quoted by Schubnell, p. 97); as I have tried to emphasize, though, we need to distinguish between Abel's point of view (reflecting as it does his flawed vision) and the snake spirit as it should be understood in the broader context of the life of the land itself.
9. At the risk of confusing fiction with the culture it refers to: Florence Hawley Ellis lists 21 religious societies at Jemez, seven of which are "concerned with war, protection, and hunting" and the other fourteen of which are "directed primarily at curing, rainmak-

ing, weather control, and fertility"; included in the latter group are the "Jemez Eagle Watchers," "Pecos Eagle Catchers," and "Snake" societies (14). Ellis speculates that the Snake Society at Jemez may have been acquired from Hopi around the turn of the eighteenth century. In 1694, during the drought- and invasion-plagued period of reconquest after the Pueblo Rebellion of 1680, "the Tsuntash Society, carefully carrying their eagle plume fetish, left New Mexico to live with the First Mesa Hopi"; a decade later "some of the Jemez refugees in Hopi . . . returned to reestablish their own village in Jemez Canyon," while "sixteen families remained longer with the Hopis, the other 113 Jemez at Hopi returning, slowly, in 1716" (13-14), bringing with them a body of Snake Society ceremonials adapted from Hopi. If Ellis is correct, then the Snake Society's tenure at Jemez predates by about a century the advent of the Bahkyush (Pecos) Eagle Watchers Society at Jemez. Again according to Ellis, "The Snake cult is widespread among the Keres. The respect in which the society is held is reflected in two Snake men of Jemez necessarily being members of the Cacique Society (to the ire of some conservatives) and in the Snake leader taking charge of the major ceremony of installing officers for all the Jemez societies when the War Priest, who customarily officiates, has died and himself must be replaced" (27-28). (Elsewhere, Ellis explains that the Cacique Society is one of three which "concentrate primarily on matters of fertility" [41].)

As possibly further evidence of the indigenoussness of the snake spirit to the life of Jemez culture, several critics have pointed to a passage in Fray Nicolás's diary which would seem to implicate Francisco, the Jemez "longhair" figure in the novel, as a member of the Snake Society. (The entry so cited is the one dated "17th. October. 1888": "He [Francisco] is one of them & goes often in the kiva & puts on their horns & hides & does worship that Serpent which even is the One our most ancient enemy" [50]. My own sense of this passage is that a character like Fray Nicolás might well use a term like "Serpent" metonymically to conjure the idea of "evil," and thus I think it is a little farfetched to take this passage as strong evidence that Francisco is being cast by Momaday as a literal Snake priest.) At any rate, it would appear from all this that Abel's bias towards eagle over snake is to be understood as an individual, rather than a cultural, one.

10. These are the facts of which Momaday was aware. In a paragraph in *The Names* designed to specify the geographical *situs* of Jemez, Momaday mentions the San Diego Canyon; San Ysidro and the S.R. 44 turnoff there; the "long blue mesa" (the Jemez analog of the Navajo

"House Made of Dawn") and, to the west (along with a red mesa containing "the ancient ruins of Zia" and "the lone blue mountain in the northwest" where Francisco's bearhunt is set), "the white sandstone cliffs in which is carved the old sacred cave of the Jemez Snake Clan" (121-122). Eagles are mentioned nowhere in this passage; they are, however, mentioned in the very next paragraph of that book, in association with both clear vision and the Valle Grande:

You see things in the high air that you do not see farther down in the lowlands. . . . in the high country all objects bear upon you, and you touch hard upon the earth. The air of the mountains is itself an element in which vision is made acute; eagles bear me out. From my home of Jemez I could see the huge, billowing clouds above the Valle Grande, how, even motionless, they drew close upon me and merged with my life. (122)

11. In 1921 Parsons recorded three living albinos and one recently deceased albino infant at Jemez (pp. 49-50). According to Alan Watkins, "for some reason the incidence of albinism [at Jemez] is extraordinarily high" ("Culture vs. Anonymity in *House Made of Dawn*," p. 141). See also Roger Dickinson-Brown, "The Art and Importance of N. Scott Momaday," p. 32.

12. For some further explanation of the relationship between the "Cloud People" and the underground life of the land, see note 14. In Parsons (p. 18, Plate 5) there is a drawing of the altar of the Eagle Society (not to be confused with either the Pecos or the Jemez Eagle Watchers Societies); it features, in addition to figures of the sun and moon below and the eagle feathers above, two large horned (water) serpents, and I think it offers strong graphic evidence of the conceptual interdependence of eagle and snake in traditional Jemez ceremonialism.

13. This race should not be confused with the "Winter Race" Francisco later recalls running (the race in which he beats Mariano). The "race of the dead" begins north of the village, bringing back to the Middle the spirits of ancestors from that direction. The Winter Race begins at Seytokwa, south of the Middle and within sight of the "black mesa" (Chamisa Mesa on maps).

14. At Jemez as at most other pueblos, life (including human life) in the "Fifth World," or surface world (the world of ordinary event), is traditionally conceived of as emerging from (and at death returning to) the "Fourth World," located within the earth itself. However, spirits may move back and forth, as it were, between these worlds, as for instance when people in the Fifth World descend into the kivas

to commune with spirits of the Fourth World or when spirits of the Fourth World return to the Fifth World in the form of katsinas or of rain. Apropos of the latter: in Jemez belief, according to Parsons, the "cloud people" or *dyasa* live among the *k'ats'ana* (cp. Keresan *k'ats'ina* and Hopi *kachina*); the *k'ats'ana*, in turn, live at *alawana-tota* (*ala*, towards the north), on the mountaintops, and under springs. And the *k'ats'ana* are identifiable with the dead. The dead live also at *wanatota* (translated as "forever"), which is in the north, underground, the place from whence the people came, and whence the newborn still come. "It is the place where we come from and go back to when we die." It is identified with the Keresan term *shipapu* (125)

15. The passage I am referring to here is something of a *locus classicus* of Momaday critical study, and so I quote it more fully below:

He had tried in the days that followed to speak to his grandfather, but he could not say the things he wanted; he had tried to pray, to sing, to enter into the old rhythm of the tongue, but he was no longer at-tuned to it. And yet it was still there, like memory, in the reach of his hearing, as if Francisco or his mother or Vidal had spoken out of the past and the words had taken hold of the moment and made it eternal. Had he been able to say it, anything of his own language--even the commonplace formula of greeting "Where are you going?" --which had no being beyond sound, no visible substance, would once again have shown him whole to himself; but he was dumb. Not dumb--silence was the older and better part of custom still--but *inarticulate*. (57; Momaday's emphasis.)

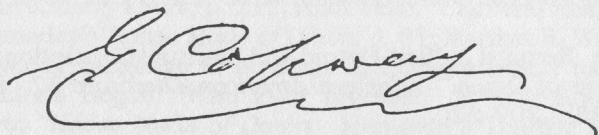
Most critics take this passage to mean that Abel is sick because he is "inarticulate," as though words in themselves might heal him (see, for instance, Larry Evers, p. 217; Alan Velie, "Cain and Abel in N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*", p. 61; Marilyn R. Wanick, "The Power of Language in N. Scott Momaday's *House made of Dawn*"; Linda Hogan, "Who Puts Together," p. 169; and R.G. Billingsley, "*House Made of Dawn*: Momaday's Treatise on the Word"). My contention, however, is that Abel's inarticulateness is *symptomatic* of his disease; as I have tried to demonstrate earlier in this essay, his sickness lies in his fear of being possessed by the land (such possession equated in his thinking with disease and death, as in the cases of his mother and brother Vidal, or with crippling, as in the case of Francisco) and in his consequent desire to escape or resist

the "hold" the land has on his own existence. For Abel to enter fully into the life of this place (including the Tanoan [56] verbal community of this place) would be to accede to such possession. Before Abel can "show him [or anyone else] whole to himself" in language, he must *become* "whole," must have a whole self to show (articulate). But he can never be whole at this place until he "surrenders" to being held by the land, "possessed" by it as fully as he would possess it.

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THE STORYTELLERS IN STORYTELLER

By Linda Danielson

In American Indian traditional cultures, good songs and stories are useful, fostering the survival of the people and their culture. The verbal arts sustain cosmic relationships, testify to sources of creative energy, teach young people, heal the sick, bring lovers together, or reprimand the socially irresponsible. Leslie Silko's *Storyteller* is an heir of such tradition and a testimony to verbal art as a survival strategy. Moreover, the work takes its spiderweb-like structure from the Keresan mythologic traditions of female creative deities who think--or tell--the world into existence (Thought Woman) and who offer disciplined protection to the living beings (Grandmother Spider).¹ When we read *Storyteller* bearing in mind the significance of both the spiderweb structure and the values underlying traditional verbal art, we realize that *Storyteller*, often dismissed as an oddly assorted album, is a coherent work about how tribal people survive. By making stories, people continue the tradition of Thought Woman and Grandmother Spider: they continuously create and protect themselves and their world.

Silko describes one of her own critical essays in a way that could equally well apply to *Storyteller*:

For those of you accustomed to a structure that moves from point A to point B to point C, this presentation may be somewhat difficult to follow because the structure of Pueblo expression resembles something like a spider's web--with many little threads radiating from a center, criss-crossing each other. As with the web, the structure will emerge as it is made, and you must simply listen and trust, as the Pueblo people do, that meaning will be made. ("Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective," 54).

In *Storyteller*, thematic clusters constitute the radiating strands of the web. While the radial strands provide the organizational pattern of the book, the web's lateral threads connect one thematic strand to another, suggesting a whole and woven fabric. Throughout the book, Silko spins such a lateral thread of attention to storytellers and the art of storytelling. These pieces constantly guide the reader's attention back to the act of storytelling as creation, to the creative in all aspects of human interaction, to the female deities, and as well to the ordinary tribal women, Silko's

most frequently selected narrators who carry on Thought Woman's function of speaking into being.

Grandmother Spider of course lives at the center of the web, giving *Storyteller* its authority. But Grandmother Spider, and thus the whole pantheon of protective, creative female deities, live also in the author and in all the aunts, grandmothers, and other people from whom she heard these stories. Silko specifically credits many of these others: Great-aunt Susie Marmon, Great-grandmother Maria Anaya Marmon, Grandma Lillie and Grandpa Hank Marmon, her father Lee Marmon, and her friend and fellow writer Simon Ortiz. For Silko certainly credits the creative power in men as well as women. At other times Silko credits the "they say" of oral tradition. "Everyone," Silko says, "from the youngest child to the oldest person, was expected to listen and to be able to recall or tell a portion, if only a small detail, from a narrative account or story. Thus the remembering and retelling were a communal process" ("Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination," 87).

Taking such a stance, Silko identifies herself and her community with the creative power of Thought Woman. Thus the creation of the world is something humans are responsible for, day after day. This sacred connection between Thought Woman and author, as ordinary human and as member of the community, is directly expressed in the prefatory poem to Silko's novel *Ceremony*, when Thought Woman "is sitting in her room/thinking of a story now/I'm telling you the story/she is thinking" (1). If we read with a consciousness of structure and theme, we are reminded constantly of Grandmother Spider, and by extension of her other aspects as Thought Woman, the sisters Nau'ts'ity'i and I'tc'ts'ity'i, and Grandmother Spider. We are reminded of the nurture, creativity, and vitality of tribal people, especially the women; of how the people have survived by telling the stories of their lives and their collective past as well as by imagining their ongoing present; and of how the author's role contributes to this process. For it takes both memory and imagination to nurture and preserve life. "What we call memory and what we call imagination," Silko says, "are not so easily distinguished" *Storyteller* (227). We see the interplay of both functions in all of Silko's storytellers. The proportions may vary, but both functions are always present.

At the beginning of the first filament of the spiderweb are the literal and literary grandmothers, the living embodiments of Grandmother Spider, the first sources instead of the last consulted, as in so much work by (primarily male) anthropologists. By placing them

first, Silko suggests that these stories and these women's voices have mattered to her and to the survival of the culture. In "Aunt Susie had certain phrases," Silko emphasizes the personal, performance, and interactional elements, and so tells a story about telling stories. She begins the story of the little girl, Waithea, with, "This is the way Aunt Susie told the story" (7). As Silko recreates the narrative Aunt Susie told, we are aware of the audience of little girls, possibly Leslie and her sisters; this story contains lessons about attentiveness and the right way to live. Aunt Susie's text is from tribal memory, but her recreation of it involves acts of imagination, as when her asides indicate that she recognizes these modern grandchildren's need for information: "There used to be a trail there, you know, it is gone now but it was accessible in those days" (13). At the end of the narrative Silko, completing the contextual frame she has introduced, focuses on the qualities of Aunt Susie's voice, the way she sounded telling a story, and the way the sound of her voice affected the hearers. For Silko, the fact of storytelling is as important as the content of the story. Aunt Susie shapes the event in her hearers' minds, just as Thought Woman shapes the universe. The same creative energy may shape cosmic events or nurture the tribal and personal self-perception of a small girl.

The book's title story is set in Alaska, far from Laguna country; nonetheless here again the grandparent generation is a source of power, and storytelling is a way of being, of creating oneself and the world. From the old man, the central character learns the manner and need for telling the stories, which ensure the survival of a way of life and a world view. Just as her sexual relationship with the old man symbolizes her absorption of cultural traditions, similarly a putting on of old ways is suggested when she wears the wolfskin parka she has inherited from her grandmother. It is from her grandmother, too, that she learns the subject of her own story, beginning with the death of her parents.

Then she must live out and tell her story in the face of an invasive colonizing culture that would deny her the right to both her way of life and her own story. Her synthesizing imagination joins the old man's manner and valuation of storytelling with the content of the family story, to create both action and a new narrative. She comes to understand what the old man means when he says, "It will take a long time, but the stories must be told. There must not be any lies" (26). But she insists on the integrity of her own story: in revenge for her parents' death years before when an opportunistic storekeeper had apparently sold them canned heat as drinking alcohol, she has

lured the present storekeeper onto the weak river ice, where he has chased her and fallen through to his death. In her jail cell her liberal white attorney makes excuses for her: She couldn't possible have planned it; her mind was confused. But she insists, "I intended that he die. The story must be told as it is" (31). Her stance is both heroic and pathetic as she directs her story to those who have no ears to hear it.

The white characters--whether oil field workers, priests, educators, or functionaries of the Law--are all unable to accept who the protagonist is or what she says. Her curious, active sexuality causes them to try either to use her or reform her. The lawyer cannot accept that she may with justification have planned the death of the storekeeper. Kate Shanley Vangen suggests that if some legal functionary finally does believe her, the system will want to punish her for murder or hospitalize her ("Devil's Domain" 122-123). But the teller's spirit survives with her story in the face of colonialism.

Like the young Inuit woman in "Storyteller," the old Navajo woman, Ayah, in "Lullaby," tells the story of encounters with a hostile culture, though she recreates the story for herself, in her mind, rather than for an audience of foreigners. Though "Lullaby" lacks the apocalyptic tone of "Storyteller," nonetheless, Ayah's review of her pitifully ordinary life story and her identification with Grandmother Spider both lead her to reclaim her power to deal with her own situation. Ayah is no mere victim. The structural context of the spider web, combined with the story's imagery, associates Ayah with Grandmother Spider. And in her capacity to use her own story to govern her life and offer mercy where it is needed, she is also Thought Woman. Thus the story goes far beyond the pathetic cliché we might be tempted to see without the awareness of tribal traditions and the power of stories to shape reality.

The next radiating filament of *Storyteller's* web structure involves stories of Kochininako, or Yellow Woman, which explore the creative power and survival value of this Everywoman figure among the Keresan holy people.² Kochininako's power, Paula Gunn Allen observes, is that of an agent or catalyst. She enables the seasons to follow their appointed rounds, for example (238). Not only does she catalyze the seasonal progression, but, as A. Lavonne Ruoff points out, she renews tribal vitality through "liaison with outside forces" (10).

Her fictional character in "Yellow Woman," Silko tells us, joins "adolescent longings and the old stories, that plus the stories around Laguna at the time about people who did, in fact, just in recent times,

use the river as a meeting place" (*Sun Tracks* interview 29). Besides addressing an audience she assumes is sympathetic, this narrator is also telling herself the story she wants to hear, justifying herself, but with enough self-awareness and humor to recognize the doubtful elements in her story. She does bring renewal to her sense of mythic reality through her adventure with Silva, the "outside force," as she almost convinces herself that she really is Yellow Woman. The proposition is not utterly unlikely. Yellow Woman exhibits the desires and weaknesses of ordinary women; why should the protagonist not be Yellow Woman? Through her adventure, at any rate, she livens up an apparently dull existence. She identifies with the freedom of Yellow Woman in her grandfather's stories, reminding us that modern women embody the potential of Yellow Woman, bring the vitality of imagination to everyday life. After all, the power to make a convincing excuse or to fool oneself is yet one more version of the power to create the universe.

Silko's story of a young woman going off with an attractive stranger whom she meets on a riverbank closely follows the beginning of a Laguna story published by Franz Boas under the title "Cliff Dweller" (I, 104-111). The stranger, Silva, smilingly goes along with her suggestion that they may really be Yellow Woman and a Ka'tsina spirit. Eventually, the narrator makes her way back to the pueblo, reorienting herself to ordinary reality as she goes, speculating about what the family is doing in her absence.

In the course of the adventure she has renewed the power of the myth by imagining what Yellow Woman's life and state of mind would have been like:

I was wondering if Yellow Woman had known who she was--if she knew that she would become part of the stories. Maybe she'd had another name that her husband and relatives called her so that only the ka'tsina from the north and the storytellers would know her as Yellow Woman (55).

Finally she sees her story as an artifact that only her grandfather could properly appreciate because the Yellow Woman stories were what he liked best. But it is not by chance that out of her grandfather's repertory the narrator recollects a Yellow Woman story involving a sexual encounter with Coyote. Silva, of course, is more opportunistic than evil, and thus more Coyote than Cliff Dweller. And the narrator shares the same appetite-driven opportunism. As there is a bit of Grandmother Spider and Yellow Woman in all women, so there is a bit of Coyote in all people. For storytellers are

tricksters like Coyote as well as agents like Yellow Woman, or creator-deities, and this character certainly contains all three possibilities.

This is the first point in the book where we see strongly and explicitly the suggestion that Coyote is part of storytelling and creative life, as much as the mother gods, whose creation he is, after all. We should have guessed, for memory and imagination are virtually inextricable, and while Coyote is short on memory, he is long on the experimental and playful part of the imagination. Coyote may not always be admirable. But a Navajo informant once remarked to J. Barre Toelken, "If [Coyote] did not do all those things, then those things would not be possible in the world" (221). Out of chaos, exaggeration, and impropriety comes the possibility of a new synthesis. This pool of possibility is the source of strength and growth, of creative response to the yet unimagined future.

This story looks toward the end of the book with its cluster of Coyote stories. It also prefigures the poem "Storytelling," which perfects the fine art of gossip, tale bearing, and excuse-making in daily life. "Storytelling" begins with a reprise of the Buffalo Man and Yellow Woman story from "Cottonwoods Part Two"; this leads to someone's modern-day Yellow Woman escapade, and concludes with several romance, kidnapping, and seduction vignettes from local gossip, including one in which four aggressive Laguna women and three evidently bemused Navajo men lead the FBI and the state police on a

trail
of wine bottles
and size 42 panties
hanging in bushes and trees
all the way along the road. (96)

In "Storytelling," Silko loops back in a recursive spiral, spinning together several themes found thus far in the book. Besides varying the Yellow Woman theme, the comic poem's title reminds us of the title story and counterpoints its serious view of storytelling as a kind of cultural holding action: the gossip in "Storytelling" reassures people of their place in the community, all the while laughing at and controlling their excesses. With its lusty appetites and proliferation of self-serving tales, this poem, like "Yellow Woman," anticipates the Coyote stories in the final section. Furthermore, its position just at the end of a sequence of hunting stories emphasizes that sexual encounters involve cooperation between the hunter and the hunted. Silko had presented the serious mythic version of this same cluster-

ing of sexual encounter, hunting, and cooperation in "Cottonwoods Part Two: Buffalo Man." Just as Silko had reminded us in the poem's title of the range of serious-to-comic narrative purposes and ritualistic-to-casual modes of telling, these thematic echoes simply suggest once more that the world is all one. Gossip and comedy, too, take on sacred and creative power.

In the next two filaments, Silko's focus shifts away from the interactions of people in communities and social settings, toward the use of power to create harmony or conflict in the universe. Among the several major narratives that portray destruction of natural harmony as a result of someone's ill-intentioned manipulation--witchery--one is specifically a story about a storyteller. "Long Time Ago" portrays a witch speaking into being the white people and their obsession with technology and power. Prophecy about the coming of white people is part of Keresan and many other tribal traditions.³ But the details of "Long Time Ago" seem to be Silko's invention. During a contest among witches to see whose magic is most spectacular or repellant, an unknown witch offers simply a story of white people discovering uranium and producing "nuclear cataclysm, promising, "as I tell the story/ it will begin to happen" (133). When the other witches ask the storyteller to call the prophecy back, of course it cannot be done. The frightened, individualistic white race, remote from nature and other people, has already been called into existence.

In "Long Time Ago," the power of a story is simple, literal, and monolithic, as when Thought Woman thinks something into existence. But the same kind of power that could create a harmonious universe instead creates a destructive force that would seem utterly fantastic did it not sound so familiar. Likewise, experimental try-anything-once Coyote power can create both comedy and stark disaster. Power itself is neutral. Any being, Silko suggests, might use the power for good or ill on different occasions, and in fact, "the balance could come undone and any character could change" in its relation to good or ill use of power (interview in *Persona* 34).

The spokes of *Storyteller's* spider web structure circle back through a cluster of pieces in which family members reappear as the sequence moves from the cosmic back into the community of animals and humans, co-existing through love and ceremonial interchange. But by now we realize that memory is not the only way to resist the ill-speaking of witchery, Silko's term for negativity, manipulation, and destructiveness. Whatever there is of foolishness or selfishness in Coyote, his saving grace is spontaneity and imagi-

nation. Like Grandmother Spider, Coyote is a maker figure, albeit a spirit of disorder, appetite, play, and potential. In the last part of *Storyteller*, this disorder, instead of the orderly creation of the mother gods, becomes the focal point. But then, the Coyote spirit of play and uncontrol always was part of the larger scheme. According to the emergence story told by W.G. Marmon's widow,

Iyetik said to her sisters, "I wish we had something to make us laugh. We sit around here so quiet without anything to make us laugh." *Iyetik* rubbed her skin. Rubbing both hands she got a ball like dough. She put it aside and covered it with cloth. Out of the rubbings came the *kashare* [sic] (Parsons, *Notes on Ceremonialism at Laguna* 114).

Coyote, like the *koshare*, both subverts and transcends the rules and the ceremonies. From Coyote's readiness to fulfill his appetites comes the power to adapt and experiment. Coyote power fuels the continuance of life as much as Grandmother Spider protects life.

The woman protagonist of the narrative poem "Storyteller's Escape" exhibits this adaptive power as she speaks into existence the story of her own escape from an enemy tribe. Not explicitly a Coyote story, it is positioned significantly in the midst of Coyote stories. The storyteller understands the value of stories for adaptation and survival:

she says, "With these stories of ours
we can escape almost anything
with these stories we will survive." (247)

She also understands the importance of memory to the survival of both individuals and the tribe:

"In this way
we hold them
and keep them with us forever
and in this way
we continue." (247; quotation marks in original)

This storyteller combines the creator gods' memory, love for the lost members of the tribe, and sense of responsibility with Coyote's sense of possibility, ability to seize the main chance and to enjoy a trick. Like Yellow Woman, even in a tight spot, she delights in her artifact:

This one's the best one yet—
Too bad nobody may ever hear it. (252)

For the first time, in Silko's sequence of women storytellers, this one seems to have a publicly acknowledged role. She is in some sense in charge of the stories. We might even suspect Silko of a subtle

reference to the phrasing of the Thought Woman poem at the beginning of *Ceremony*:

This is the story she told,
The child who looked back
The old teller's escape--
The story she was thinking of. (253)

The action of "Storyteller's Escape" once again echoes and this time inverts that of the book's title story. Like the earlier story, this one involves a pursuit, but with a happier ending than posited for the central character in "Storyteller." This time the storyteller is not forced to an inevitable ending. Rather, grasping luck and chance, she makes a Coyote-style escape. Having fallen behind her tribe as they flee from the enemy, she mourns, for how will the people now remember the lost ones, and who will remember her? Deciding that she will make up a story while she is waiting to die either of the heat or at the hands of the enemy, she suddenly sees things from a new angle, gets up, walks home, and is there waiting when the tribe returns.

One can hardly avoid the parallel with all those tales in which Coyote wins a race by hiding along the race course and resting while others run. The storyteller intends to cheat only the enemy tribe--which hardly seems like cheating. But she rescues herself through a fresh, direct, self-interested perception of the situation, like Coyote. Thus she protects and preserves history, of which she is the tribal guardian. But despite her regard for history and tradition, she is not stuck in old assumptions and ceremonies. She recognizes a need for a new approach.

Throughout the Coyote section we hear echoes and inversions of subjects and themes developed earlier. Police officers at a feast echo "Tony's Story," but this time the police resemble Coyote, not witches. Politicians, gas company officials, Marmon ancestors, Mrs. Sekakaku's opportunistic admirer, and Mrs. Sekakaku herself are all cast as Coyotes. In these parallels we are reminded of the need for open possibility, comedy, flexibility. This complex of threads connecting elsewhere in *Storyteller* reminds the reader that this is Grandmother Spider's web, and Thought Woman, Nau'ts'ity'l, I'tc'ts'ity'l, and Grandmother Spider are the ground of nurturance and continuance in the world. The children of Thought Woman continue to preserve and to speak the world into being. But the modern-day Coyotes renew and refresh its possibilities--the survi-

vors, the foolers and the fooled, those who, like Coyote in so many traditional stories, are just "going along."

NOTES

1. For a full analysis of the spider web structure in *Storyteller*, see Danielson, "Storyteller: Grandmother Spider's Web," where "Aunt Susie had certain phrases," "Storyteller," and "Lullaby" are discussed in greater depth.

2. Boas comments that "girl heroes" are generally called Yellow Woman (*Keresan Texts* I, 218). The plural *Yellow Women* is found in Boas's text entitled "Sunrise" (89).

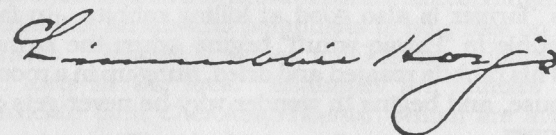
3. John M. Gunn, for example, gives a Laguna version of a widespread southwestern traditional prophecy that light-skinned, bearded warriors in metal shirts would come from the east. (*Schat-Chen* 101)

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COMMENTARY

About the Last Issue

We express our apologies for the printing problem in T.C.S. Langen's article in our last issue. The problem resulted from a mysterious dropping of two lines at the bottom of page 4 and the mysterious appearance of two extra lines at the bottom of page 6. The first few lines of the paragraph beginning at the bottom of page 4 should read as follows:

Estoy-ey-mùut, as his name tells us, is a hunter, and yet the beginning of the *Storyteller* version of this story tells us only about his farming. "Powaq-wùuti" tells us that its farmer is also good at killing rabbits. In fact, the trouble in "Powaq-wùuti" begins when the farmer sees all his rabbits roasted and dried, hung up in a room in his house, and begins to wonder why he never gets any for dinner.

Any typographical errors in the last issue are more easily explained and are, therefore, less excusable.

From the Editors

With our second issue we feel that SAIL, Series 2 is truly becoming established. Complementing the emphasis in our last issue on oral modes, with Toby Langen's discussion of a traditional tale and Joe Bruchac's transcribed interview with Mary Tallmountain, the present number offers two essays on contemporary written works. Bob Nelson continues his probing of landscape as a shaper of life and attitudes in his paper on *House Made of Dawn*, which draws together the two frequently noted themes of place and healing in Momaday's novel. Linda Danielson extends her study of *Storyteller* with a discussion of storytelling characters and narrators in Leslie Silko's challenging book.

We are happy to recognize the enthusiasm of colleagues who have proposed special topical issues on creative work, classical texts, *Storyteller*, and pedagogy. Details on the special issues are below; we hope you'll be inspired to contribute, and to encourage other potential contributors. And, we invite you to propose topics for special issues in the future.

The support offered by respondents to our first publication announcement has been indispensable in carrying us through these

first months of starting up again. We thank you all, and we hope to hear more from you as we move forward into volume 2 of SAIL's second series.

Helen Jaskoski

Daniel F. Littlefield, Jr.

James W. Parins

American Native Press Archives

The American Native Press Archives was begun in 1983, its purpose being to collect, preserve, and provide access to newspapers, periodicals, and other materials published by American Indians and Alaska Natives. The Archives contains over one thousand periodical titles and some one hundred thousand separate pieces, ranging from printed material like serials and pamphlets to note files on Native American writers. Related activities include the publication of bibliographic tools in the area. Examples are indexes of the *Cherokee Advocate* and *Cherokee Phoenix*, which are available from the Archives. The Archives collection, located in the Ottenheimer Library at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, is open for research by students and scholars. The directors invite inquiries from scholars and other interested persons.

Our latest project is the publication of the Native American Chapbook Series, which features the creative works of American Indian and Alaska Native writers. The first number in the series--Santee-Cree poet Doris Seale's *Blood Salt*--has recently been published. *Blood Salt* is available from the Archives or from the poet at \$5 plus \$1 for postage and handling. The second number in the series is a new collection by Mohawk poet Maurice Kenny. Kenny's work will be available in early spring.

Order *Blood Salt* from The American Native Press Archives or
Doris Seale
Public Library
361 Washington Street
Brookline, MA 02146

Call for Creative Work

SAIL is preparing a first-ever special issue on new creative work, to be edited by Joe Bruchac of Greenfield Review Press.

We are inviting submissions of poetry, fiction, and experimental writing by new and established Native American writers.

Submissions should be previously unpublished; each entry should be typed, double-spaced and submitted with SASE.

Please send contributions to

Joseph Bruchac

Greenfield Review Press

2 Middle Grove Road

Greenfield Center, New York 12833

Deadline: January 30, 1990

Call for Papers on Classical Literature

We are planning a special issue on the process of presenting classical (traditional, native-language) American Indian literature to a general, English-speaking audience.

Papers might address the process of working with Native American tradition-bearers, either in recording literary works or in seeking information about works already recorded, and might include a discussion of issues of confidentiality, friendship, title to intellectual property, or the political responsibilities involved in working with the arts of marginalized peoples. We would be interested in seeing discussions of problems arising from the transfer of works from the mode of performance to the modes of videotape, sound recordings, or the printed page. Also welcome would be papers on the process of translation e.g., specific problems in specific texts, including annotated text-and-translation presentations; transfer theory, including the more general question of the incorporation of ethnographic information into the presentation of works of art; the use of "Red English" as a medium for recreating a classical narrative voice; reception theory, particularly the ways in which concepts about the intended audience for a translation impinge upon the decision-making of the translator. We would be very happy to see papers co-produced by partners in the task of presenting a classical work to a modern audience, especially if their differences of opinion illuminate the process of working together and acquaint us with the ways in which their work has satisfied and failed to satisfy their aspirations for it.

This list of paper topics is meant to be suggestive, not exhaustive. Please send queries and contributions to

Toby Langen and Bonnie Barthold

Department of English

Western Washington University

Bellingham, Washington 98225

Deadline: March 15, 1990

Call for Papers on *Storyteller*

Linda Danielson will be guest editor for a special issue on Leslie Marmon Silko's *Storyteller*. She plans to include the special issue essays, plus other material, in a book that will be a critical companion to *Storyteller*.

Send contributions and queries to

Linda Danielson

English/Speech/Foreign Languages

Lane Community College

4000 East 30th Street

Eugene, Oregon 97405

Deadline: May 1, 1990

Call for Papers on Pedagogy

Larry Abbott is seeking materials for a special issue of *SAIL* on pedagogy. Of principal concern is the improvement of curriculum materials used in schools and the training of teachers. Larry invites research and critical articles, opinion pieces, prospectuses, suggestions and offers of assistance in areas such as the following: the relation of academic criticism to teacher education and the teaching of American Indian literatures in the schools, American Indian literature in the school curriculum, preparation and presentation of texts (including songs, oratory, autobiography, and contemporary writings), teacher education and preparation, educational policy-making, American Indian literature in relationship to the history/social sciences curriculum, and publishing (textbooks and trade books).

This is a list of suggested areas of concern; respondents are invited to contribute from other perspectives as well.

Please send queries and contributions to

Larry Abbot

P.O. Box 23

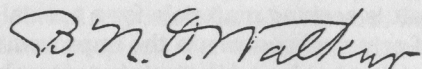
Orwell, Vermont 05760

Deadline is May 1, 1990

About our Illustrations

The cover design is taken from an artist's sketch of Kah-ge-gah-bowh, or George Copway, Ojibway lecturer, writer, and journalist. Copway was sketched during a temperance meeting at Drury Lane Theatre, 1850. The London sketch appeared in the *The Illustrated London News*, November 2, 1850. Reproduction of the sketch is a courtesy of the American Native Press Archives.

The design elements at the ends of articles are facsimile signatures of Indian writers: Copway; Chinnubie Harjo, pen name for Alexander Posey (1873-1908), Creek poet, journalist, and political humorist; John M. Oskison (1874-1947), Cherokee short story writer, journalist, and novelist; and Bertrand N. O. Walker (1870-1927), Wayandot poet and writer of traditional tales, who wrote under the pen name Hen-toh. Reproductions are courtesy of the American Native Press Archives.



CONTRIBUTORS

Linda Danielson teaches American Indian literature, folklore, and writing at Lane Community College in Eugene, Oregon. She also researches, does fieldwork, and writes on Anglo-American traditional music in the northwest and is herself a fiddler.

Robert M. Nelson has been teaching current literature, ethnic literatures, and interdisciplinary courses at the University of Richmond since 1975. He spent his 1988-89 sabbatical prowling around the terrains of northern Montana and New Mexico while working on a book-length study of the role of landscape in Native American fiction.

