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## Coming home: storytelling, place, and identity in N. Scott Momaday's House made of down and Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony

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Coming Home: Storytelling, Place, and Identity in N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of  
Dawn* and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*

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A Thesis

Presented To

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Cheney, Washington

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts: English

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By

Azalyn Croft

Spring 2013

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MASTER'S THESIS

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## Abstract

This analysis will examine identity and authenticity through the conflated elements of identity, home, ceremony, and storytelling in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* and N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*. Coming home for characters Tayo and Abel involves redirecting of isolated individual energy to the whole community, enabling them to return to their estranged homes. Traumatic experiences in the war have alienated these men to the point where they can no longer claim place, identity or self. The author analyzes the ways in which these men have become "un-homed" as well as the various forces that "home" them. This thesis, on a larger scale, discusses how the two works collide and magnify meanings that can extend beyond the text.

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to all those seeking to find a home and a place in this world, whatever and wherever that may be. One day, I hope, your search will be fruitful.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

*“The stories are always bringing us together, keeping this whole together, keeping this family together, keeping this clan together. Don't go away, don't isolate yourself, but come here, because we have all had these experiences together”* (Silko “Language and Literature” 59).

Owen Flanagan of Duke University, a leading consciousness researcher, writes that “evidence strongly suggests that humans in all cultures come to cast their own identity in some sort of narrative form. We are inveterate storytellers” (198). Our identities are formed in constant negotiation; an inordinate number of pieces comprise the sometimes tangible, often intangible, self. As Flanagan has illustrated, many of these pieces have something to do with storytelling and language. In the heart of their novels, N. Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* (1968) and Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* (1977) discuss how the competing forces that constitute the self can become entangled, broken, but also mended.

Navarre Scott Momaday has proven with his masterpiece, *House Made of Dawn*, that identity is inextricably linked with storytelling. Indeed, as a Kiowa Native, he draws upon the dramatic wild landscapes of Arizona, Wyoming, New Mexico, and Oklahoma, his origins, places that also inspired the oral tales of his ancestors, to eloquently pass on the stories his Kiowa fathers told him as a child. Momaday’s great-grandfather, Pohd-lohk, (meaning “Old Wolf” in Kiowa), gave him his first Indian name: Tsoai-talee, or “Rock-Tree Boy.” Momaday, in his memoir *The Names* (1976), describes how Pohd-lohk



passed on the heritage of a Kiowa storyteller to him by telling him the story behind his Indian name. From an early age, Momaday was thoroughly steeped in the Kiowa culture of his father's family. The lyrical nature of Momaday's writing owes much to his training as a poet and storyteller. The novel was an immediate success, having won the 1969 Pulitzer Prize a year after its publication, which led to the breakthrough of several Native authors, almost all of whom have credited Momaday for their work: James Welch, Leslie Marmon Silko, Gerald Vizenor, Louise Erdrich and Sherman Alexie. This was helped immensely by *House Made of Dawn's* success at reaching a mainstream audience; it served as a Native voice, a voice that refused to remain silent or stoic with little connection to contemporary reality. Instead, Momaday presents characters like Abel, characters who are figures of humanity rather than stereotypes. They are people living in the present and struggling through a system of white colonization.

*House Made of Dawn* is the narrative of a young Kiowa, Abel, who is caught between two worlds—his native heritage on the reservation and the industrialized world of contemporary America in Los Angeles. In writing the novel, Momaday drew on his own painful childhood experiences of growing up on Jemez Pueblo through the turbulent era of World War II:

Abel is a composite of the boys I knew at Jemez. I wanted to say something about them. An appalling number of them are dead; they died young, and they died violent deaths. One of them was drunk and run over. Another was drunk and froze to death. (He was the best runner I ever knew). One man was murdered, butchered by a kinsman under a telegraph pole just east of San Ysidro. And yet another committed suicide. A good many who have survived this long are living under the

Relocation Program in Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, etc. They're a sad lot of people (*Rainy Mountain* 14).

Momaday's portrayal of Abel describes the difficult experience of many young Native Americans during the twentieth century: Indian relocation efforts, the struggle to enter the work force, the isolation of reservations, and the harmful effects of alcoholism. In the last half of the 20th century, the Urban Relocation Program created the largest movement of Native people from reservations to urban American cities in American history.

Stripped of power and place, many of these individuals turned to suicide and alcohol to forget the world that has brought them so little. In addition, Abel's unfortunate background parallels the life of Ira Hayes, the famous Pima Native and American Marine who was one of the six men immortalized in the iconic photograph of the flag raising on Iwo Jima during World War II. Hayes was never comfortable returning home, and after his honorable discharge from the Marine Corps, he descended into alcoholism and ultimately died from as a result (Viola 93-94). These violent and tragic realities are reflected in the works of Momaday and Silko who both openly critique and examine the forces that destroy the self and help to create the unfortunate realities that so many Native peoples face in this contemporary world.

Silko's *Ceremony*, nine years following the Pulitzer Prize winning *House Made of Dawn*, continues the conversation and responds to the issues raised in Momaday's work. Tayo parallels Abel in similar ways—he is a mixed-blooded outcast Laguna; he returns home shell-shocked and traumatized by the war and is unable to mentally or physically “come home.” *Ceremony* raises issues of authenticity and legitimacy on top of this, as Tayo is made to feel unwelcome because he is not “full-blooded.” Like Tayo, Leslie

Marmon Silko was denied access to her own culture's sacred stories, due to her blood status. She was "prohibited from speaking the Keresan language of her grandmother and aunts" ("Leslie Marmon Silko"). As a result, Silko relied on written texts for many of the Keresan sacred stories that are embedded in *Ceremony*, chiefly from Franz Boas's 1928 *Keresan Texts*; in addition, she relied on Leland Wyman's translations and transcriptions for the oral Navajo ceremonial texts (Nelson 13). Tayo struggles with re-connecting to Silko's conception of the "spider-web," essentially, the past, the present and Tayo's responsibility to others. His struggles (lack of agency and legitimacy) manifest through his binge drinking and inarticulacy. Ultimately Silko proves how the lack of language equates with lack of physical being, and therefore, chaos and fragmentation.

Louis Owens, a mixed-blooded Choctaw, Cherokee and Irish critic of Native literature lends an invaluable voice to conflation of storytelling and being:

Silko at once associates primal creation with storytelling, underscoring, like Momaday in *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, the essential creative power of story and discourse to 'bring into being.' Implicit within Silko's prefatory 'poems' is the Indian certainty that through the utterance of stories we place ourselves within and make inhabitable an ordered 'universe that without stories would be dangerously chaotic' ("Leslie Silko's Webs of Identity" 93).

Owens raises a critical link between Silko and Momaday's works: the necessity of existing through stories. How do Tayo and Abel as alienated mixed-blooded men come home? And on a larger scale, how does a liminal being, an entity trapped between worlds, "return" to a place that may not exist? Much ink has been spilled on *Ceremony's* and

*House Made of Dawn*'s themes of place, healing and coming home. However, few critics have linked the two novels together in analyzing *how* Tayo and Abel (as hybrid/liminal beings) find identity and home through stories (though the two works, I will argue, are inseparable). This study will attempt to answer these questions, ultimately concluding that both Tayo and Abel are ultimately able to come "home" when they rejoin the community through stories. Through stories, they are able to reclaim an identity in a fractured world. Through stories, they are able to claim authenticity. The storytelling, in essence, creates a place with which these men can return and have a hold over people and their own selves. Silko illustrates this point in an interview on her own writing:

Yes, it is a culture in which each person has a contribution to make ... The oral tradition stays in the human brain and then it is a collective effort in the recollection. So when he is telling a story and she is telling a story and you are telling a story and one of us is listening and there is a slightly different version or a detail, then it is participatory when somebody politely says I remember it this way. It is a collective memory and depends upon the whole community (Arnold).

Here, Silko reminds us that home and belonging can come from stories, where the liminal being is inserted into a place. The liminal being is defined and is given a role in which to participate. The concept of "coming home," then, is more than estranged members returning to the community; homing involves the reconnection to a homeland and the "spider-web" of people, place, identity, story and history. Coming home for Tayo and Abel involves a redirection of the individual to the whole, requiring them to re-learn ways to participate in the community and come to terms with the past and his present. On

a larger scale, Silko and Momaday provide answers to the questions of their own authenticity and legitimacy by proving that liminal beings can seek hybridization as a positive way for the dissonant western and Native cultures to come together in peace.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The forces that separate Tayo from his Laguna heritage in Silko's *Ceremony* and Abel from his Kiowa heritage in Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* are more than being separated from a physical place of birth. These characters' internal battles for the reconstruction of the self involves other forces, such as the loss of connection to language and oral tradition, haunting memories from the past, and a disconnect from friends and family. This literature review will complicate the existing conversation on "unhoming" (as defined by Homi Bhabha) by placing Abel and Tayo as liminal beings and hybrids through Owens's work on the "Mixed-blood" and Said's "Other" and by analyzing the thematic import of the embedded sacred tales found in both *Ceremony* and *House Made of Dawn*. The structure of this literature review will establish the authors' key terms, definitions and concepts that will re-appear in the following chapter's analysis of the same topics located within the texts of Momaday and Silko.

### "Un-Homing" and Homing

Homi Bhabha has written extensively on the concept of the "unhome" in "The World and the Home" and offers this description:

The 'unhomely' captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed place. To be 'unhomed' is not to be homeless . . . . The unhomely moment creeps up on you stealthily as your own shadow and suddenly you find yourself with Henry James's Isabel Archer 'taking the measure of your dwelling' in a state of 'incredulous terror' . . . . In that displacement the border between

home and world becomes confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other. (141)

Bhabha describes a nuanced antithesis to be home, a feeling of estrangement and dislocation. The home may even still be present, but the outsider feeling persists. In this study, the “public” that infringes on the “private” can be extended to mean the meeting of the Native and non-Native worlds. As Edward Said questions in “Orientalism” what happens when the East meets West, these authors discuss the collision of the West and its expectations and prescriptions of the Native world. This collision constitutes the elements that create Tayo’s tangled “web” and Abel’s “void” of being, as will be discussed later. The alienation they experience upon their return from the war helps them realize how much foreignness and otherness has crept into their perceptions of home. What was once natural, familiar and comforting has become unnatural, unfamiliar and discomfoting. To further illustrate the concept, Roberson discusses the concept of *place identity*: “Place identity is an integral part of the self and that self-identity involves a society, a past, and a place. ‘Who I am’ is complicated with ‘where I am’ and that narratives, the stories we tell about ourselves, are often plots locating the self in time and space” (31). While place, especially the home place, participates in the formation of self-concept and can give one a sense of belongingness, of security, privacy, and control, relocation destabilizes the familiar and repositions the individual.

The Kiowa and the Laguna Pueblo Indians have a history of forced migrations and repeated relocations, as is the unfortunate history of nearly all Native tribes in the United States. Furthermore, with the Indian Relocation Act, many others like Tayo and

Abel left their homes and become lost in the contemporary haze of mainland American cities, unable to assimilate. Abel and Tayo, it seems, must fight the force of nature in order to claim a home place. One of the most un-homing repercussions of these movements is the loss of sacred place, such as the Arroyo Bajo (the “river below”) that Momaday references in *House Made of Dawn*. This river corresponds to the Chelly Creek in Arizona, which is the mythic location of the healing ceremony in the sacred Navajo creation story, the *Dine’ Bahane’* (Scarberry-Garcia 14). In addition, part of Abel’s metamorphosis at the end of the novel occurs at the foot of Tse’intyel (“Broad Rock”) in the Chelly Canyon (Scarberry-Garcia 14). In *The Names*, Momaday writes that “Tsegihí,” a canyon north of the San Juan River, translates to the House Made of Dawn and is also the name of the Navajo Nightsong, from which the novel takes its title. However, the current Kiowa peoples are located in Oklahoma, far away from the actual places of these tales and their homeland. In addition, in *The Names*, Momaday highlights the importance of identity and existence in a specific place:

The events of one’s life 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. (142)

Identity, thus, is cast in location. Without Jemez, perhaps Momaday would feel non-existent and unhomed, as do Tayo and Abel when they are made to feel unwelcome. Momaday and Silko both suggest that Abel’s and Tayo’s unhoming reflects a longer and wider institutionalized unhoming of Native Tribes.



As for the Navajo people (and specifically the Laguna in Silko's *Ceremony*), Mount Taylor in New Mexico, called Tsoodzil in the Navajo language, is the turquoise mountain, one of the four sacred mountains marking the cardinal directions and the boundaries of the Dinétah, the traditional Navajo homeland (McPherson 1). This area, rich in uranium pockets (as well as most of the Laguna reservation), has been mined extensively since 1945 by the United States' government, though the Native tribes in the surrounding area have continued to ask for the mountain's protection. In essence, the land itself has been displaced, renamed Mount "Taylor" for President Zachary Taylor and thus appropriated.

Returning to Bhabha's "unhoming," what, then, is the counterpart? When homeland is displaced and unfamiliar, how does one "come home?" One of the answers to this question is the notion of inserting the 'home-less' into stories by becoming a part, again, of a history, a past, and a people. Wilson describes this concept as a "unitary language" in storytelling cultures, where a stable center of value is created through the efforts of speakers and listeners over time, sometimes millennia. Within this dynamic, the oral tradition maintains dialogical spaces where people can talk, learn, and live together in the continual creation of individual and group identity. In an interview, Silko discusses how being and place conflate: "Through our stories we hear who we are" (Barnes 47). She describes oral tradition as "a way of interacting... a whole way of seeing yourself, the people around you, your life, the place of your life in bigger context . . . . It's a whole way of being" (65). This quote further emphasizes Bhabha's notion of wholeness: that coming home and being a part of one's origins and birthplace is akin to spiritual fulfillment.

As an important note to this study, linking Native Americans to the land in pseudo-mystical terms has previously been written in harmful ways. Paula Gunn Allen, a Laguna herself, has written extensively on the subject, and she asks: “How do we explain the Indigenous relationship with the land without appealing to spiritual concepts, which are often mystified yet fundamental to that relationship?” (Allen qtd. in Teuton 48). As American Indian peoples have been forcibly evicted from their homelands throughout the history of the United States’ colonization, many American Indian authors refer to oral traditions which preserve these special, often sacred, tales which frequently allude to specific locations. In addition, the myths of the Laguna and Kiowa that Silko and Momaday frequently call upon suggest notions of spiritual connection to place. Landscape holds the power to connect the people with the ritual-mythic world. However, these notions are not universal. Instead, Sean Kicummah Teuton’s alternate method of locating place in Native American literature is preferred: “Knowledge of places is therefore closely linked to knowledge of the self, to grasping one’s position in the larger scheme of things, including one’s own community, and to securing a confident sense of who one is as a person” (49). The realities experienced by Native peoples and by western peoples are diverse, and the western reader may not always be familiar with the structure or allusions present in Native works. Indeed, western works tend to keep spiritual and supernatural elements separate from the main story while Native authors use the spiritual and supernatural as expressions of the same reality. As critics in an increasingly evolving and changing world, we must resist essentialisms and generalizations for the message in works like *Ceremony* and *House Made of Dawn* to bear weight outside of the novel.

### The Mixed-Blood and the Absolute Fake

The concept of the “mixed-blood” Indian has appeared in a vast amount of literature and serves as a medium with which authors work against harmful essentialisms and concepts of legitimacy. De-legitimization is another way that Tayo and Abel become unhomed in their respective novels. In *Mixedblood Messages*, a collection of critical essays focusing on Native authors, Louis Owens discusses characters such as Tayo and Abel who have to “prove” their identities, so to speak. In what Owens calls the “Absolute Fake,” he draws heavily from Edward Said’s concept of *Orientalism*, where the colonizers describe and prescribe the Other. In this sense, Native culture exists in the way western society wishes it would. To further illustrate this concept, Owens writes:

In literature by contemporary Indian authors, we find characters that constantly face this dilemma of an identity constructed within the authoritative discourse of the non-Indian world. In order to be recognized, to claim authenticity in the world— in order *to be seen at all*— the Indian must conform to an identity imposed from the outside. (12-13).

Owens’s quote has immense implications. First is the idea that discourse can shape identity. The words and images that are frequently shown on television, in movies, in cartoons and in literature often portray Native American society in an outdated or outlandish way where the ubiquitous “Noble Savage” prevails. Marginalized people have to participate in this image in order to be recognized. For instance, in the Gallup Ceremonial, the local tribe hosts a pow-wow where western-imposed stereotypes of Native cultures are marketed in order to get money from the tourists, and “the tourists got to see what they wanted” (*Mixedblood Messages* 116). The regalia of the headdress, the

beads and buckskin, feathers and dancing are all old customs that western society still projects onto current Native peoples. As established, those in power have the ability to construct the identities of the minority, of those without power. Thus, in a way, the constructions become more real than the real, as power is given to what masquerades as authentic, or true.

The second implication is that the “absolute fake” becomes the hyper-real, and thus becomes internalized with Native society. Here, a new hegemonic center is forced within the community to accommodate western constructions of Native identity. Jean Baudrillard’s conception of the “simulacrum” is useful in determining how race functions here: “The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth— it is the truth which conceals that there is none . . . . It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself” (Baudrillard 1). Examples of this are the increasing blood quantum laws that determine whether or not a person has enough Native blood to become an enrolled member of the tribe. Louis Owens, Scott Momaday, Leslie Silko, and many other Native authors who also come from white ancestry implicate these kinds of laws as further ways in which they are driven from society and made to be illegitimate.

Other Native authors like Sherman Alexie, James Welch, and even Owens use rapier-sharp humor to ridicule these notions. For example, in *Dark River*, Owens creates Avrum Goldberg, a white Jewish man, who lives traditionally and archaically in his own essentialized version of American Indian ways, adding to the plethora of images that critics and readers have constructed for Native people to be. Owens does this in the best kind of humor, such as when character Two-Bears keeps repeating: “I’m not a chief. How many times do I have to tell people that? I’m just the elected chairman” (251). Owens

brings up essentialist stereotypes by lamp-shading them and decreasing their destructive power. Authors in liminal positions, such as those who possess both American Indian and white ancestry, are able to articulate clearly the ways in which the strict box of identity and authenticity are re-inserted into the margins as a result.

In the first chapter of W.E.B. Du Bois's seminal work, *Of Our Spiritual Strivings*, he provides a useful way of examining race, called the "double consciousness" that aligns well with the idea of the "Absolute Fake." Du Bois writes:

The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others . . . . One ever feels his two-ness. (Du Bois 1).

Du Bois mentions that there is no true self-consciousness. To be conscious of oneself is to be aware of one's existence, to be aware that one is an individual. In this case, one can only exist if given consciousness, if given awareness by an outside force. Thus, one is always looking at oneself through the eyes of others. Thus, "Indian-ness" displaces characters rather than signifies them. When "Indian-ness" becomes the sole representation of a character, notions of identity and consciousness must be redefined and questioned.

#### Agency through Hybridity and Liminality

In other words, Tayo and Abel are quintessential *hybrids*, and they operate in a liminal space within their respective worlds. Hybridity, acknowledged as one of the key

terms in postcolonial theory, usually refers to “the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zones produced by colonization” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 20). In this case, hybridity refers to Tayo’s and Abel’s statuses as mixed-bloods, as representations of the cultural meeting of the Native and non-Native worlds. They are not truly one or the other; these men are a perfect blend of stranger to either world. Tayo and Abel often struggle throughout their respective novels with the meeting of the two worlds. Tayo’s “web,” as will be discussed, becomes tangled in the collision; Abel feels powerless and lost, as the narration frequently depicts him helpless on the beach, battered by nameless white men who can be taken on a grander scale to represent the large-scale cruel indifference of contemporary American society. The collision of cultures and worlds and worldviews is not always, or even often, straightforward or without abuse from one side to the other. However, while hybridity may limit authenticity and promote temporary power-less positions, as already put forth, this thesis attempts to argue for hybridity and liminality as ways for those caught between worlds and homes to gain power and agency.

The second key word, liminal, can refer to liminal beings, or the space of liminality. Liminality (from the Latin word *limen*, meaning “a threshold”) is a “psychological or metaphysical subjective state, conscious or unconscious, of being on the threshold of or between two different existential planes (“Liminality” def. 1). Liminality allows for the suspension of power systems. In the case of this study, in postcolonial settings, liminality can suspend the hegemonic power structure of the “center,” allowing for these systems to be “re-set” in a way, providing a *tabula rasa* and new beginnings. The first contact of cultural collision, immediately creates a new

direction. Languages connect and combine. As Thomassen writes, liminality can extend to entire societies that are experiencing flux or a “collapse of order” (19). What was once concrete and established tradition opens up for dialogue between these spaces.

Hybrids are liminal beings, then, as they are on the threshold between identities. What is one if not fully part of the “hegemony” (of white western American society) or of the “other” (Native)? All too often, hybrid characters let their own identities be cast in the black and white concrete definitions of “hegemony” or “other.” However, what happens when the hybrid is able to choose his or her own place? Must “hegemony” and “other” be mutually exclusive? On the contrary, Hybridity enables those operating in the spaces of liminality an altered authority of power. Liminality is a world of contingency where events and ideas, and “reality” itself, can be carried in different directions (Thomassen 5). The established constructions of identity (what one *is* and *how* one becomes either an insider or outsider) are broken down and deconstructed.

Louis Owens discusses the concept of the frontier (the liminal space where non-Native meets Native) as a “zone of the trickster,” writing:

Frontier, I would suggest, is the zone of the trickster, a shimmering, always changing zone of multifaceted contact within which every utterance is challenged and interrogated, all referents put into question. In taking such a position, I am arguing for an appropriation and transvaluation of this deadly cliché of colonialism—for appropriation, inversion, and abrogation of authority are always tricksters’ strategies . . . . Native Americans . . . . continue to resist this ideology of containment and

to insist upon the freedom to reimagine themselves within a fluid, always shifting frontier space. (26-27)

As Owen illustrates, trickster figures throughout world literature possess power over those limited to only one world, displaying the power of liminality and hybridity. They are not limited by the conventions or rules of society. For example, the trickster may display gender fluidity, unconventional gender roles and on occasion, the trickster may engage in same-sex practices. (In Native American mythologies they are called “two-spirits.”) Most importantly, the trickster illustrates “an openness to life’s multiplicity and paradoxes” (Ballinger 21). Tricksters never operate in strict binaries and thus have immense power over their counterparts.

Two of the most famous trickster heroes in Native American mythology are Kokopelli and Nanabozho. Kokopelli (who originated in the Native American tribes of the Southwest) operates in liminal places and transitions. He can be seen in the waning of the moon, and his flute-playing chases winter into spring. Nanabozho (also known as Nanapush) figures prominently in the storytelling of Anishinaabe mythology, particularly among the Ojibwa. Nanabozho is a part of the creation mythos of the Ojibwa. Famous Ojibwa author Louise Erdrich features Nanabozho (called Nanapush) in her tetralogy beginning with *Love Medicine*. In the third novel, *Tracks*, Erdrich employs the use of multiple narratives and multiple consciousnesses to emphasize the power of the tribal patriarch Nanapush who is the only member who can successfully navigate through the tension of the changing white and Anishinaabe worlds. As Gross points out, Nanapush achieves this by appropriating and adapting to white culture while maintaining his own identity: “it is the tricksters who survive to build a new world on the ashes of the old”



(Gross 48). Indeed, the ability of the liminal being to bridge worlds enables them to survive and adapt to the changing and complex world.

Momaday writes candidly on the subject: “I am Indian and I believe I’m fortunate to have the heritage I have . . . . I grew up in two worlds and straddle both those worlds even now. It has made for confusion and a richness in my life. I’ve been able to deal with it reasonably well, I think and I value it” (*House* 193). Part of the complexity and nuance of *House Made of Dawn* is Tayo’s two-fold struggle. The first is of a young Kiowa struggling to fit into the world-view of Anglo society, who must reclaim the values of the Kiowa through embedded story and past, which breaks the mold of traditional Anglo literature. However, Abel struggles as a typical American outcast from society, separated from it by an inner conflict with himself, which is a literary archetype that describes hundreds of other twenty-first century fiction. Momaday’s own admitted status as a hybrid allows him the skills and ease with which to switch modes of writing and speak as an authentic and strong opinion from each world. Both Momaday and Silko have successfully bridged the gap between cultures by allowing their protagonists to work through the unsuccessful points of collision between hegemony and other in order to heal and establish cooperation and mutual respect. The hybrid/mixed-blood is the quintessential example of healing, unity and peace in this regard.

#### The ‘Circle Motif’: The Embedded Texts in Silko and Momaday

Paula Allen, a Laguna, and one of the forerunners of integrating high academic research in literature with cultural anthropology, argues that as familiarity with the Bible makes western culture accessible to the understanding, the basic texts of the Pueblo or the Navajo make their cultures, especially their literature, more accessible to scholarly

interpretation. She writes, “It is a nearly hopeless task to explicate *House Made of Dawn* without such a familiarity. To be unaware of the meanings of these symbols and their accompanying structures is to miss the greater part of the significance of the novel” (Allen, “Bringing Home the Fact” 570). Indeed, the embedded texts within *Ceremony* and *House Made of Dawn* are critical in understanding the central themes of the novels. The greatest unifying thread that runs between the chosen embedded texts in both novels is the motif of the ‘circle.’ Tayo and Abel are unhomed when they are “othered” and made unwelcome from the hegemonic circle of their communities. The response to this fracture is to mend the broken ties by extending the circle to include the margins and those that do not fit the black and white constructions of imposed identity.

Many of the sacred texts that are embedded in Momaday and Silko’s works come from the Navajo creation mythos, the *Dine’ Bahane*. They are aptly selected and woven seamlessly into Tayo’s and Abel’s consciousness. The selected texts help illustrate the authors’ main points of inclusiveness and healing, emphasizing the importance of unity over disunity. One of the most repeated patterns of the ‘circle’ motif in these texts is the underlying assumption that the past still affects the present. In “The Navajo, Lacan, and Derrida,” Selinger writes: “Navajo healing ceremonies contain two main parts: a retelling of the tribe’s origin or emergence story and a tracing of how the patient became ill” (65). The creation stories of the Kiowa and Laguna remind Abel and Tayo where they come from. The tales rekindle their notions of identity and belonging-ness in the community; both men become ill as a result of losing their connectedness to the people around them and the places they come from. Therefore, the embedded texts serve

as parables with which to remind these men the way to good health, healing, and wholesomeness.

*Ts'its'tsi'nako, and Corn-Woman: Texts from Ceremony*

The stories that Silko integrates into *Ceremony* involve how the spiritual powers interact with the land in circular notions of rebirth and a coming together. The primary recurring embedded text features the story of Corn Woman and Reed Woman. Reed Woman spends all day splashing in the river, and her sister, Corn Woman, becomes angry. Upset, Reed Woman goes away, to dire consequence:

And there was no more rain then.

Everything dried up

All the plans

The corn

The beans

They all dried up. (*Ceremony* 13)

Clearly, the Corn Mother and her sister co-depend on one another to provide sustenance and food. This reveals that the workings of the mythical universe are ones of coordination and teamwork. The conflict between the two sisters mirrors Tayo's own internal struggles and his dissonance from his own community. These passages call attention to Tayo's personal responsibility to find harmony within himself and especially the people with whom he feels the most spiritually disconnected from, such as Rocky and Josiah.

In addition, the "witchery" also prevents the coordination of the mythical universe from occurring, as manifested in the tale of the Ck'o'yo gambler and the magician Pa'caya'nyi. In an interview with Irmer, Silko reflects on her choice of using this tale:

He was a magician and in the old story he came and he tricked the people into neglecting their care of the corn fields, of their devotion to the corn mother . . . . So, in the story, the people leave their corn fields and neglect the corn mother's altar . . . . So in *Ceremony* we have in this old story the idea that we human beings are not dependable creatures, we are easily lured from one way or another, we get out of balance and out of harmony with our natural surroundings and also we can get out of harmony with one another. And then it is quite difficult and painful but necessary to make a kind of ceremony to find our way back. (Irmer)

Again, the circular motif is repeated. Silko planned for the embedded text to further illustrate Tayo's responsibilities to others which is the primary task of his own personal ceremony. Just as the natural world requires order and cooperation (sun, water, plants, soil), so too does the human world in order to co-exist and prosper.

Silko frames her own tale with the tale of Spider-Woman or Thought-Woman (Ts'its'tsi'nako), the creatrix of the world. Spider-Woman thinks the universe into being, and her spider-web controls every facet of life: "Thought-Woman, / is sitting in her room / and whatever she thinks about / appears." As the myth goes, Spider Woman began her many creations by spinning and chanting, first developing the universe in four sections—east, west, north, and south. In addition, there are five worlds, the fifth being the world we are currently inhabiting. This fragment serves to illustrate the interconnectedness of worlds. Just as a spider's web encircles and touches all traces of humanity, the tales from past to present reach through each of the worlds. The four other worlds precede and

follow our own, existing simultaneously all around us. Silko is emphasizing the connectedness of the worlds, rather than the separateness.

*Tai-me, the Sun Dance and Tsegihí: Texts from House Made of Dawn*

Scarberry-Garcia's *Landmarks of Healing: A Study of House Made of Dawn* is arguably the most famous and best researched critical work done on N. Scott Momaday. She spends hundreds of pages detailing the sacred myths and stories essential to truly understanding the parallels in Momaday's works, under the tutelage of many of the other critics, including Paula Gunn Allen and Momaday himself. Garcia's central argument is that for many peoples the origin myth is the birth story of their culture, and has the power to bestow a concrete notion of who they are as a people and as individuals. However, oral traditions are subject to "elasticity" and often must adapt with the people. As such, they are constantly changing and evolving. Scarberry-Garcia writes, "This hybridization across genres and between cultures makes it possible for oral traditions to change and thrive, while maintaining continuity with the old ways— often amidst outside threats of cultural genocide and assimilation" (110). Hybridization, as Scarberry-Garcia reminds us, also occurs in liminal spaces in literature, especially when two diverging genres meet. Hybridization allows for these sacred oral traditions to exist and thrive. These stories may be told differently from the stories of old, and other narrators may tell them differently, but more importantly, they survive and are passed on.

Interestingly, similar to the creation mythos of the Pueblo Laguna, the Kiowa notion of this circular concept appears in *House Made of Dawn*, specifically in Tosamah's sermon. This sermon concerns itself primarily with the rise and fall of the Kiowa as a Sun Dance culture. In the middle of the sermon, he embeds the sacred tale of

Tai-me, the sun dance doll, culminating with how she brought prosperity to the Kiowa: “There was a voice, a sound, a word— and everything began. The story of the coming of Tai-me has existed for hundreds of years by word of mouth. It represents the oldest and best idea that man has of himself” (85-86). The Sun Dance unites the tribe and offers participation and union in which Tai-me is a sacred emblem. The Sun Dance is a religious ceremony practiced by a number of Native American and First Nations peoples; each tribe has its own distinct practices and ceremonial protocols. Many of the ceremonies have features in common, such as specific dances and songs passed down through many generations, the use of traditional drums, the sacred pipe, tobacco offerings, praying, fasting, and, in some cases, the piercing of skin on the chest or back for the men and arms for the women.

The object of the Sun Dance practice is to make a sacrifice to the Great Mystery and to pray while connected to the Tree of Life, a direct connection to the Creator. The Priest of the Sun, Tosamah, expresses the power of the ‘Word’ in his sermon, serving as the bulk of ‘The Priest of the Sun’ section of the novel. Tosamah discusses how the Word is an “instrument of creation” (85). The Word is sacred and spawns all of life itself; however, in the “white man’s world,” language “has undergone a process of change. The white man takes such things as words and literatures for granted... for nothing in his world is so commonplace” (84). Tosamah’s sermon and inclusion of Tai-me’s legend represents the vitality of the oral tradition, as he reiterates how these sacred stories must be preserved and re-told, or else they will eventually become forgotten and extinct:

Though Abel is never able to completely communicate by the end of the novel, he is “able” to participate in the sacred Race of the Dead. This is a Jemez ceremonial

activity, meant to assist the movement of the sun and spread energy to the land in order to raise healthy crops. His body “cracks open,” and he is able to commune with the land, almost literally. The ceremony comes to fruition for Abel as he is able to re-learn how “to follow the peyote road of personal dignity and respect for nature and other people” (Kiyanni 48). Abel spiritually convenes with the land by participating in this rite with others. How relevant then, that this inspiration occurs at “Tsegihi,” the spiritual canyon north of the San Juan River, which translates to the House Made of Dawn and corresponds to the Navajo Nightsong. This “Nightway” is the literal location of the “house” made of dawn. Abel thus returns to the natural and primal location of the sacred story.

## CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS

### Overview

In a traditional homing novel, the protagonist suffers from the fragmentation of identity and alienation by leaving the home community. Momaday and Silko depict Tayo's and Abel's unhoming in three main categories: through rejection of identity (being mixed-blood), through lack of language and access to tribal stories and through lack of physical presence. This first half of this chapter will thoroughly summarize and analyze the instances of unhoming in the novel, focusing on the components that create the unfamiliar in the familiar. The second half of this chapter moves on to the healing ceremonies, evaluating how they lead Tayo and Abel home.

### Un-Homing: Rejection, Silence and Invisibility in the Text

#### *Rejection*

Tayo struggles immensely after returning home from the horrors of the Bataan Death March in Japan during WWII. The memories of his past become entangled and he cannot process his experiences. However, he is an outsider before even leaving for the war. For example, Tayo is not allowed to be a brother to his cousin Rocky until they pretend to be brothers during the draft process: "It was the first time in all the years that Tayo had lived with him that Rocky ever called him 'brother'" (65). Auntie, who becomes Tayo's caretaker in his mother's absence, represents the overarching voice that points and discredits his authenticity. Growing up, she is sure to tell others: "They're not brothers, she'd say, that's Laura's boy. You know the one" (65). She is one of the primary antagonists throughout the novel that works against Tayo's healing ceremony.



She even tries to prevent Ku' oosh from helping Tayo, as Auntie tells Grandma, "You know what people will say if we ask for a medicine man to help him. Someone will say it's not right. They'll say, don't do it. He's not full blood anyway" (33). As a mixed-blood of white and Laguna ancestry, Tayo is not allowed to feel a part of either world, and this has intense ramifications upon his psyche. Even though Tayo and the others who served in the war felt that they had "belonged to America," they return to the same racist world they had left in the first place (43).

Emo, Tayo's foil, is another character who chooses to place one world above another and succumb to hate instead of healing. Ultimately, Emo's hatred decides his own fate and while he falls in defeat, Tayo learns to love and accept himself and rise above the "end" which would leave Emo dead and his own future in shambles. Emo, like Auntie, has always been a character that hurts and violently distances Tayo from the community. In addition, upon returning from the war, Emo has become self-hating and mocks and ridicules his own community: "Look. Here's the Indians' mother earth! Old dried-up thing!" (25). To this, Tayo believes Emo is wrong, "all wrong" (25). Emo has embraced the hatred of the world- he is the contrast to what happens when alienation and fragmentation go unresolved and lead to backlash and hate. Characters like Emo and Auntie who internalize hatred and project it upon others help to immerse Tayo in the entangled web where everything is confusing and unfamiliar.

This fear of authenticity and rigid demands of what "fits" into the community is discussed between Tayo and Night Swan. Night Swan voices the seeming purple elephant in the Laguna community. Night Swan says: "They are afraid, Tayo . . . Indians or Mexicans or whites—most people are afraid of change. They think that if their children

have the same color of skin, the same color of eyes, that nothing is changing” (99-100). What Night Swan puts into words is not only a fear that exists within Tayo’s community but extends as a metaphor for race relations in general. In an increasingly diversifying American society, where cultures meet and sometimes clash, the most troubling and un-homing aspect of it all is when cultures meet and adapt with each other to form entirely new mixed societies. These new half-of-this-world and half-of-that-world represent something foreign and unfamiliar, something that cannot be labeled or put into a box. This is the fear that Night Swan articulates, and this is the fear that Betonie must purge from not only Tayo, but his community if they are going to survive and adapt with the times.

Abel’s situation closely parallels this in *House Made of Dawn*. Abel is estranged from his community at Walatowa before leaving for the war as well: “His father was a Navajo, they said, or a Sia, or an Isleta, an outsider anyway, which made him and his mother and Vidal somehow foreign and strange” (11). Abel, through circumstances of birth, is not allowed the legacy of his fellow Kiowa; he is defined and limited by his blood status. In this sense, authenticity becomes a consequence of birth, stripping Abel and Tayo of their identities, instead marking them invisible, outcast, and powerless. Both passages illustrate that Abel and Tayo have felt these ruptures of identity and breaks in existence for a while, thus they must watch the world fall apart around them, isolated from it.

### *Silence*

As an extension of being made “unauthentic” by their communities, Abel and Tayo lose one of the most powerful possessions a disenfranchised being owns: their

language. Without language, there are no stories, no community, no shared past. Without language, the principal mode of communication is lost; there is no contact, only isolation. Tayo, for instance, has a nightmare where the Laguna words his mother speaks to him become the distorted and angry voices of the Japanese soldiers. Something that should be comforting and healing to him is, again, entangled with pain and lingering memories. The prose specifically mentions in this scene how “The voice suddenly broke into a language he could not understand” (6). The familiar language becomes another way to make him feel like a stranger in his own home with his own family.

In addition, Abel’s return to Walatowa in *The Longhair* section of the novel “fails” because “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 attuned to it” (53). Again, the repetition of the failure of language appears. Abel’s inability to speak is immediately connected to the loss of the “old” tongue, which conflates with his dissociation with the past oral traditions and stories as well. The word “attuned” connotes the loss of a deeper, more spiritual harmony with language. Abel even realizes his lack of power and what agency he might have had with the language if he had known how to re-possess it:

And yet it was there still, like memory, in the reach of his hearing... Had he been able to say it, anything of his own language— even the commonplace formula of greeting “Where are you going” — 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*. (53)

This passage complicates the difference between silence, something that is acceptable, to inarticulacy. The distinction between these concepts is vital, as the first word suggests that Abel may still communicate, but refuses to, while *inarticulate* suggests a lack of ability to communicate or express himself. The expression aspect is revealed, as Abel feels that should he have the words he needed, he would be able to “see” himself again, properly. Being inarticulate makes Abel feel un-whole, dumb, and powerless. Internally and externally, forces continue to prevent him from speaking and being understood.

Abel’s and Tayo’s struggles to communicate and speak reflect a wider issue in postcolonial studies which affects the writers of postcolonial literature. As texts that operate on multiple layers of discourse and use embedded texts to highlight the meta-poetical nature of storytelling, it is only natural that the author’s struggle to use language to express these issues is examined. Language is one of the most overlooked sites of colonialism, control and unhoming: “Language is a fundamental site of struggle for postcolonial discourse because the colonial process itself begins in language” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 38). The hegemonic language and style becomes the “right” language, and anything in the margins becomes othered and immediately marked as “unusual.” In retaliation to the control and limitation of language by the colonizer, many minority or non-western authors “write back” to the center through abrogation, the refusal to use the hegemonic language in a “correct” or “acceptable” way. Some examples of abrogation in Native American literature are when authors do not write in the hegemonic language, leave non-English words untranslated or purposely leave tribal lore or rituals that would not be evident to the non-Native reader unexplained. This makes Native literature nearly inaccessible for the non-Native reader and would serve to benefit a solely Native

audience. In this way, abrogation helps to reject the colonial possession of language; however, abrogation limits the potential size of its audience. In addition, abrogation also has the undesired effect of turning away people like Leslie Marmon Silko, who was not allowed to learn the language of her tribe and would not be able to access a text entirely written in Keresan. In this way, abrogation would unfortunately recreate a hegemony within the margins, similar to characters like Auntie or Emo who police proper “Indian-ness” and reject members who do not fit a constructed mold or “reality.”

The ‘appropriation’ of language is an alternate method of the colonized to retaliate against the center. This kind of appropriation involves using the language of the colonizer (generally English) to “bear the burden” of one’s experiences, becoming a “tool” of expression (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 38). Thus, Scott Momaday and Leslie Marmon Silko appropriate language, as they write in English, but layer their texts with embedded narratives and cultural significance. However, as a result, Scott Momaday suffered criticism from other American Indian critics after the publication of *House Made of Dawn*. In his essay “Through an Amber Glass,” Louis Owens partly criticizes the novel for its Euramerican varnish—for looking “enough like the canon” of distinguished, white, male Euramerican works (61). Owens praises the works of Native predecessors (almost all who have not been praised or accepted by the American literary canon) who he argues have a “sophistication and maturity that underlies and actually subsumes the obvious modernist techniques of intertextuality, interreferentiality” in Momaday’s novel (62). These authors generally rely more on abrogation in their works. Owens is essentially arguing that Momaday’s novel is better able to reach a non-Native audience because of its resemblance to modernist American fiction. Both abrogation and

appropriation have successes and limitations for their audiences as language is never able to reach all people.

Language succeeds, however, when it becomes hybridized and subversive. Owens does admit the two-fold nature of *House Made of Dawn*. As already mentioned, Abel is similar to most modernist heroes struggling to find a place in American society.

However, the next layer of the novel operates against the grain of traditional Euramerican traditions:

To enter the novel is to cross a threshold into another cultural realm and to submit to being something other than the privileged center of the text.

Such has always been the experience for minority or marginalized readers in America reading the texts assigned in school or published in New York, but it is very likely a new experience for members of the dominant Euramerican culture. (63)

A first-time western reader of these works may feel uneasiness or discomfort in navigating through the complexities of the language, multiple consciousnesses, distorted and hazy timeline, and the embedded stories in *Ceremony* and *House Made of Dawn*, as these tropes are uncommon in traditional Euramerican literature. The non-Native reader is “unhomed” in this sense, put into the position of the non-dominant culture. Yet, the stories are still accessible, despite the initial challenges. Tayo and Abel’s struggles to find home and place transcend one experience. The unifying messages of both novels are those of inclusion and healing through stories. Indeed, in this manner, Momaday and Silko offer the sacred stories of the Kiowa and the Laguna to the non-Native audience (even despite some of their fellow Kiowa or Laguna’s anger at revealing these to non-

members). Writers like Momaday and Silko possess the literary finesse and fluidity that enable them to layer Tayo's and Abel's narratives in ways that succeed in reaching all audiences: both Native and non-Native.

### *Invisibility*

Returning to the effects of unhoming, Momaday and Silko similarly express Abel's and Tayo's struggles to *physically exist* as well. Often in literature where characters are unable to speak, they must communicate physically in a way that their tongues cannot. In gender and postcolonial studies, this phenomenon is termed "reading the body as text," as illustrated best in Gaytri Spivak's work on the subaltern ("Can the Subaltern Speak?") and Susan Bordo's studies on the commodification of female body (*Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*). In this case, generations of trauma, powerlessness and inarticulacy force Tayo and Abel to communicate their pain through alcoholism and violence to others. The staggeringly high rates of alcoholism and suicide on tribal reservations are symptoms of the large-scale unhoming of all American Indians. Tempus summarizes the psychology of suicide and alcohol abuse:

Higher rates of suicide have long been tied to alcoholism and drug use, depression and poverty that are prevalent in many American Indian communities . . . . But mental-health providers on Wisconsin reservations cite a deeper and more profound trigger for some suicides: the historical trauma that has disrupted and even destroyed intricate native cultures. (1)

Like the protagonist of Ralph Ellison's novel, *Invisible Man*, Abel and Tayo illustrate the devastating effects of invisibility due to racism and essentialism. Like Ellison's

protagonist, these men are “present” through absence.

For example, in *Ceremony*, Tayo continually vomits—a symptom of Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder and a clear indicator that he is not well. Tayo’s vomiting illustrates his hollowness, his emptiness. All of these elements add up to Tayo’s own acknowledgement of his absence of power and agency: “For a long time he had been white smoke. He did not realize that until he left the hospital, because white smoke had no consciousness of itself” (14). Tayo has been silenced and marginalized to the extreme extent that he feels like he does not even have a physical form. Later, the narration describes that Tayo has “come undone,” emphasizing the diction of unraveling and the fracture of his identity: “He cried at how the world had come undone, how thousands of miles, high ocean waves, and green jungles could not hold people in their place . . . . Maybe it had always been this way and he was only seeing it for the first time” (18). Tayo cannot communicate, and he cannot heal in this condition.

Similarly, Abel communicates his emptiness and unhoming through vomiting and the repeated diction of invisibility and the fracture of identity. Abel becomes frozen in time, suspended between worlds: “The intervention of days and years without meaning, of awful calm and collision, time always immediate and confused, that he could not put together in his mind” (21). Like Tayo, this is not an example of good hybridization or liminality. These men are so isolated and broken that time itself becomes meaningless and irrelevant in this state. There is no space for rebirth or change because these men do not even have a physical hold over either world. Momaday makes this distinction, writing that Abel “had lost his place . . . . he had known where he was . . . . now [he was] reeling on the edge of the void” (92). Abel’s very existence is questioned in this passage; without



a place and without knowing “where he was,” Abel cannot claim a hold over his own identity. This repeats itself when Abel’s nameless attackers reduce him to near-death, serving as an obvious reminder of his own powerlessness against the world:

The pain was very great, and his body throbbed with it; his mind rattled and shook, wobbling now out of a spin, and he could not place the center of the pain. And he could not see . . . . He was numb with cold, but the effort to move brought new pain . . . . The effect of the alcohol was wearing off. In another moment he began to retch, his whole body contracting, quaking involuntarily, and again the pain mounted and his mind was slipping away. (87-88)

In this passage, Abel has just been attacked by the nameless white men and left on the beach. Words such as “pain,” “throbbed,” “numb,” “retch,” and “quaking” are all physical quantifiers. His delicate hold over the world is reduced to the low brink of pain and bodily function. However, he still retains some control over his identity as long as he is able to *feel*. As the passage progresses, once Abel’s pain heightens, his mind begins to “slip” away into the void. As the novel rarely depicts Abel speaking or communicating with others, his interactions with the world almost entirely consists of his acts of violence upon others, being the victim of violence, and his few sexual encounters. Through these passages, we come to learn that Abel understands the world through his own physical and bodily connection to it. Momaday never allows Abel to ever fully transcend his limitations of traditional speech. Therefore, Abel’s ceremony must be of a more physical nature, as will be discussed; once Abel retains full control over his body and his body’s relation to place, he is able to heal.

### The Ceremonies

Both Tayo's and Abel's illegitimacy, inarticulacy and invisibility must be addressed in the healing ceremonies. The conflation of these struggles is epitomized by Tayo's concept of the "web" which is best represented in this passage:

He could feel it inside his skull—the tension of little threads being pulled and how it was with tangled things, things tied together, and as he tried to pull them apart and rewind the, into their places, they snagged and tangled even more. So Tayo had to sweat through those nights when thoughts became entangled; he had to sweat to think of something that wasn't unraveled or tied in knots to the past—something that existed by itself, standing alone like a deer. (7)

A spider-web represents the unity of society. Each thread connects to one another. If one thread is destroyed, usually other threads will go along with it. Like a ripple, actions have consequences that bleed into other consequences and affect other people. The web, thus, represents the universe and includes the collision and connection between Native and non-Native. However, Tayo does not yet have the ability to process the web and accept its responsibilities; Abel still struggles to regain his voice and renew his physical place at Walatowa and on a larger scale in the web itself. The threads which tie these men to the past are horrible and frightening. They do not have the power to stand up to their fears nor do they have the words with which to tell others why they cannot accept the web's responsibility.

This is where the ceremonies become of vital importance. In this way, "The purpose of a ceremony is to integrate: to fuse the individual with his or her fellows . . . .

The person sheds the isolated, individual personality and is restored to conscious harmony with the universe” (“Sacred Hoop” 62). By sorting through the tangled web, these men can restore the harmony of the universe. The power of the circle can continue, and they can finally claim place, identity, and story. Ultimately, they break down the myriad barriers of isolation in order to find a place within the map of the community.

### *Abel’s Ceremony*

Much like Tayo’s web, Abel’s ceremony prompts him to reconnect place, people, story and identity. Abel’s name itself suggests the biblical Abel, whose counterpart, Cain, represents white society. As the story goes, Cain murders Abel, and when God asks Cain where Abel has gone, Cain angrily responds, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” On the surface, this comparison illustrates the negative connection between the brothers and their reference to the collision of cultures. However, looking more deeply, we remember that Cain is Abel’s brother, and that Abel is a man of both white and Native worlds. The ceremony seeks to prove that, yes, Cain is his brother’s keeper, much as the Native and non-Native worlds must cooperate in order to coexist and survive, as Ben reminds him: “You know, you have to change. That’s the only way you can live in a place like this. You have to forget about the way it was, how you grew up and all. Sometimes it’s hard, but you have to do it” (131). Abel must come to terms with the changing world and his own past in order to overcome his pain and disconnect.

By the novel’s end, Abel is still unable to communicate traditionally, as the novel reminds us, even upon Francisco’s deathbed: “He wanted earlier, in the dawn, to speak to his grandfather, but he could think of nothing to say. He listened to the feeble voice that

rose out of the darkness, and he waited helplessly” (171). Yet, with Ben Benally’s Nightsong, Abel is regaining a voice, one that is strong enough to help him express himself: “There was no sound, and he had no voice; he had only the words of a song. And he went running on the rise of the song” (185). Clearly, Ben’s prayer and healing words have had an effect on Abel, as earlier Ben is confident that Abel would benefit from the Nightsong: “We were going to sing about the way it always was. And it was going to be right and beautiful. It was going to be the last time. And he was going home” (166). Ben is the unusual director of Abel’s ceremony, in this way. Ben, as Abel’s friend, understands the forces that have unhomed him. The stanzas of the Nightsong are exactly what Abel needs, a “home” in the earth, in the dawn and in the sacred stories:

Tse’ gihi.

House made of dawn,

House made of evening light,

House made of dark cloud,

House made of male rain,

House made of dark mist,

House made of female rain,

House made of pollen,

House made of grasshoppers,

Dark cloud is at the door.

.....

Restore my feet for me,

Restore my legs for me,

Restore my body for me,

.....

Restore my mind for me.

Being as it used to be long ago, may I walk.

May it be beautiful before me.

May it be beautiful behind me.

May it be beautiful below me.

May it be beautiful above me.

May it be beautiful all around me. (129-130)

The song of the House of Dawn is comprised of different times of the day and seasons, and transitional periods like evening, rain, mist, pollen, and grasshoppers. The song has the ultimate hope of recovery and walking again. Dawn represents a new beginning in the transitional space of the novel and Abel's life. Thus, Abel is not led to his demise but led to hope for a better place.

Abel's encounter with the Jemez runners helps him realize that even without voiced language the runners could communicate with the earth. The runners are participating in the sacred Race of the Dead which brings life to the earth by honoring all of creation. Through running the sacred trail, Abel can make his whole surroundings beautiful and full of life, as is prophesized in the Nightsong. Previously to this incident, Father Olguin and the psychologist failed to treat Abel because "no one expected or even wanted him to speak . . . . Word by word by word these men were disposing of him in language, *their* language" (90). Like Tayo's Ku'oosh, traditional language continues to fail him. Abel requires a language that resonates with his body and soul, allowing him to

understand the language of the runners:

The runners after evil ran as water runs, deep in the channel, in the way of least resistance, no resistance. His skin crawled with excitement; he was overcome with longing and loneliness, for suddenly he saw the crucial sense in their going, of old men in white leggings running after evil in the night. They were whole and indispensable in what they did; everything in creation referred to them. Because of them, perspective, proportion, design in the universe. Meaning because of them. (91).

Here, Abel finally connects his current place with the world, with the past, and with the very nature of existence. The runners rekindle meaning in his life. They communicate with the land and open up a wholesome place in the sacred stories which leads him to realize that the stories are current. The stories still carry meaning in the present.

Like the wild landscape, like his running and integration into the dawn, he transcends human experience. As a result, Abel undergoes a metamorphosis: “The soft and sudden sound of their going, swift and breaking away all at once, startled him, and he began to run after them. He was running, and his body cracked open with pain, and he was running on” (Momaday 185). His body “cracks open” like a cocoon cracking open to become a butterfly. He must sink to his lowest level of pain and sadness before he can regain the tools and abilities to reconnect with what will bring him home.

### *Tayo's Ceremony*

Betonie's ceremony helps Tayo overcome his struggles and limitations. His ceremony (Stars, Cattle, Woman, Mountain) force Tayo to participate in his own healing

and overcome and accept his past. Ultimately, Tayo reinserts himself into a past and a story that he has been made to feel is off-limits to him. In an interview, Silko reveals that Tayo's journey echoes her own, and Tayo's healing process effectually heals herself as well: "As Tayo got better, I felt better" (Arnold 24). With Betonie, Tayo performs the rites of the ceremony, the facets of which lead him to the realization that being of two worlds is not a reason for illegitimacy, but for survival.

Ku'oosh is the Laguna's traditional medicine man and provides the first ceremony for Tayo upon request. However, much like Father Olguin and Abel's nameless therapist in *House Made of Dawn*, Ku'oosh is unable to help him. Instead, Ku'oosh's traditional ceremony brings Tayo shame and further distances him from a past that is already off-limits to him by birthright: "Tayo had to strain to catch the meaning, dense with place names he had never heard. His language was childish, interspersed with English words, and he could feel shame tightening in his throat" (34). Ku'oosh's ceremony would benefit an older member of the community who was perhaps more fluent in Keresan and fully belonged to the community. However, the elements that already distance Tayo from his heritage are being reinforced in what is supposed to heal him. Ku'oosh is not able to speak Tayo's language or truly understand the struggles which plague his psyche. He is not able to adapt the ceremony, as Betonie does.

Betonie's ceremony, however, is another story. Betonie himself is a fascinating enigma and foil to Tayo. Like Tayo, he is mixed-blood and shares Tayo's Mexican/green eyes, the proof of their hybridization. Though Betonie lives in a junk-yard near the freeway and appears to face much of the same scorn and fear from the community, Betonie does not suffer as Tayo does. Betonie has accepted his place in the world and

lives in the community in his own way. When Tayo first meets him, he marks that “This Betonie didn’t talk the way Tayo expected a medicine man to talk. He didn’t act like a medicine man at all” (118). This presents a strange conundrum. Betonie is a mixed-blood, strange to the community, while Ku’oosh is accepted by Auntie and others. However, Ku’oosh’s ceremony fails Tayo and does not help him. Unlike Ku’oosh, Betonie’s ceremony is inclusive and adapted to Tayo’s own personal predicament: “His sickness was only part of something larger, and his cure would be found only in something great and inclusive of everything” (125-126). A ceremony that is inclusive of everything seems natural for two men of mixed ancestry who understand that one world does not supersede another. The only way for them to exist happily is to fully accept who they are and the world around them. Silko emphasizes this, as she reveals, “Tayo’s healing is connected to the faith which this old medicine man had, a faith which went back to things far in the past, the belief that it’s human beings, not particular tribes, not particular races or cultures, which will determine whether the human race survives” (Arnold 35). Betonie, despite his eccentricities, is an agent for Tayo’s healing which further illustrates the need for union and peace between white and Native societies.

The Stars, Cattle, Woman and Mountain elements of the ceremony involve hybridization and the union of cultures. Tayo sees the ‘stars’ when he meets Ts’eh’s human incarnation, and they both look up at them together. In addition, the stars are further emphasized through a whole page illustration of a starlit night. The stars unite them; they are both looking at the same sky, and are thus on the same side.

Next, the speckled ‘cattle’ that Uncle Josiah has passed on to Tayo survive because of hybridization. They embrace change, flux, and liminality—and become



stronger for it: “He would take the cattle home again, and they would follow the plans Josiah had made and raise a new breed of cattle that could live in spite of drought and hard weather” (187). The speckled cattle are a larger metaphor for society, and for Tayo. The cattle represent another emphasis that change and flux make society stronger. On a more subtle level, the cattle connect Tayo and Uncle Josiah, placing them on the same side. Tayo struggles to find a way to relate to Josiah throughout the novel, but the success of Josiah’s mission for Tayo suggests that Tayo has found a way to connect to him.

As for ‘woman,’ there are two prominent women who help Tayo process his entangled web of life: Night Swan and Ts’eh. They are powerful, mysterious, and intangible. Night Swan helps Tayo understand the fears which affect them both, as already discussed. As for Ts’eh, her human avatar appears during Tayo’s journey to help him with the cattle and to teach him about love and union. The physical act of their making love represents the spiritual transcendence of body and soul, the union of physical body and the universe. This helps to restore Tayo’s humanity and participation with others.

Ultimately, the ‘mountain’ aspect of the ceremony ultimately restores Tayo’s conception of the web. The mountain outside of the Laguna reservation was severely mined for its uranium and used primarily in the development in the atomic bomb. Here, Tayo experiences a spiritual connection across time and place to the suffering that the Japanese civilians of Hiroshima and Nagasaki suffered by the devastating and savage acts of the bombs: “He cried at the relief he felt at finally seeing the pattern, the way all the stories fit together—the old stories, the war stories, their stories—to become the story that was still being told (246). Tayo is not isolated any longer. Through his journey, Tayo

can feel the pain of others; he can feel the love of others. He communicates with those around him and has learned to overcome his hate which he proves by not ending his own story by Emo's murder. Tayo's position between world and between selves, his liminality, enables him the power to accept the fact that the stories are constantly being rewritten and changed around him:

And in the belly of this story

The rituals and the ceremony

Are still growing. (2)

The stories, like life, are organic. The connection between storyteller and listener is a special, magical one, a connection that allows for the creation of entirely new stories generations later. Stories preserve the past and can enhance future variations of the same tales. This realization allows Tayo to step out of the static past into a more inviting future.

## CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

*Ceremony* and *House Made of Dawn* emphasize the connection between identity formation and narrative: our connection to places, people and stories all constitute who we are and where we are going. We desperately need our stories and our language to know who we are. Stories also pass along the wisdom of the ages and serve as guideposts to help humanity co-exist with each other and learn from the past. Through Tayo and Abel, Momaday and Silko have shown that having the flexibility to assume different roles and voices lends a greater sense of autonomy and power with which to overcome conflict.

On a larger scale, Tayo's ceremony has ramifications for Abel and for the entire universe. Abel's ceremony is spiritually rekindled *House Made of Dawn*. The novels are linked in subject matter, character and in the deepest structures of storytelling and myth. Momaday has proven with Abel's ceremony that the stories of the past can be a spiritual and wholesome replacement for the necessities of actual places, should they no longer be accessible. Stories can preserve places and people, enabling one to claim identity in a community that brings life and happiness. However, Silko drives the message even further, completing the ceremony many years later with Tayo's journey. *Ceremony* emphasizes the need for stories but also the continued creation and spread of them. Once people become locked into a certain way of doing things or seeing the world, progress and flux is halted.

As homing involves reintegration in the community and all that makes up community, naturally, both novels call for inclusiveness. Indeed, readers of all kinds grapple with these questions of identity and authenticity; we quest to find home and

belonging in a fractured world. Abel's and Tayo's journeys encourage all readers to come home and find meaning there. Ultimately, the importance of narration to the human psyche makes literature's import extend beyond the mere pages, as we often forget that "home" can be found through stories. Thus, Betonie's ceremony comes to fruition:

*I will bring you back.*

*Following my footprints*

*walk home*

*following my footprints*

*Come home, happily.*

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