Chapter 3

Orality and Storytelling Mode : Leslie Silko and Ruby Slipperjack

> Why do cultures tell stories? Storytelling personally brings people together; it engages them collectively in giving and receiving the events of their lives. In such storytelling times, people occupy space with focused attention; they enter their common world more fully. In the tribe, people share and pass on information, values, and beliefs through stories. They are entertained while learning their culture's crafts, skills and means of survival. They historically mark and recount events worth remembering, so that culture extends history as a collective experience, across the spaces between peoples, over time that separates living and dead.
>
> (Silko 223).

Post colonial cultures have all in various ways been influenced by the interrelationship between orality and literacy. This is obvious in societies where oral culture predominated in the pre-colonial period, as in the case of some African societies and in the indigenous cultures of all settler colonies. The present continuity and vigour of orality in post-colonial societies is demonstrated in the example of the West Indies, where the emergence of a vigorous post-colonial culture is as much the result of figures like reggae performer Bob Marley, 'dub' street poet Michael Smith, and the women storytellers and performers of the Sistren Collective, as of writers like Walcott, Harris, Brathwaite or Brodber. In

such cases not only is the work of the written culture increasingly modified by the existence of popular oral forms, but the oral cultures are themselves transformed by their ongoing interaction with the written cultures of the modern period.

The orality of the Indian, the Maori, and the Aborigine seems an intrinsic part of their image, as it is of most representation of indigenous people. According to Terry Goldie, "Orality is a manifestation, demonstration of the other. Thus orality becomes the land, presence and mystically becomes the silent invocation of the consciousness of the "other". (Fear and Temptation 30). By incorporating storytelling mode, trickster figures from myths and legends and a circular narrative, the transformation from oral to written gets realized in most Native literary productions.

The storytelling tradition is at the heart of most contemporary Native fiction, which means that writer/storyteller operates out of a shared knowledge base of myths and legends that are communal in nature. Because stories arise out of communal experience, the concept of a single author is an anomaly for Native critics and authors. Therefore contemporary Native American authors convert the collective traditional tales and myths of their people into European literary forms that demand an author; their names appears as the sole creator of a work, but it is instead their rendering of a tribal story rather than their own original story. Welch's reconfiguration of Gross Venture warrior's journey into manhood in *Winter in the Blood*, Silko's *Ceremony* as retold Yellow

Woman and Spider-Woman stories, Momaday's *Way to Rainy Mountain* as his personal journey woven into the mythic journey of the kiowa people and Erdrich's novels that tell the story of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa in the twentieth century are but a few examples of contemporary Native authors retelling tribal stories.

The chapter would locate the novels of Leslie Silko and Ruby Slipperjack as novels that approximate storytelling mode in written format. In *Ceremony* sacrificial-regenerative narrative pattern akin to "grail romance" is interwoven within the laguna-pueblo myth and depicts the culture healing of Tayo. Similarly in the novels *Almanac of the Dead* the author reworks on the storytelling narrative. On the other hand Slipperjack proposes to make her own people revalue their inheritance through the storytelling tradition. In both *Silent Words* and *Weesquachak and the Lost Ones* a mythical journey is undertaken to describe the fictional Ojibway community in Northern Ontario.

A number of anthropologists have worked on the oral tradition with respect to its survival and endurance in the present time. Both Momaday and Paula Gunn Allen probably agree with some specific storytelling functions delineated by the anthropologists. But in their writing they go beyond the specifics of the recorded anthropological work. In his essay *Man Made of Words* Momaday stresses the storyteller's ability to express humanity's "capacity for wonder, meaning and delight". He also calls attention to the influence of a fundamental paradox. A story is "tenuous"

because any tale handed down by "world of mouth" is "always but one generation removed from extinction". Yet it is "held dear, too on that same account". In her essay, *The Sacred Hoop*, Allen presents narratives as a means of bringing the "isolated private self into harmony and balance with reality. In other words, this harmony and balance is achieved because of the encyclopaedic scope of traditional narrations. To quote the nineteenth century Anishinabe Chief George Copway "nearly every beast and bird is the subject" of the storyteller .....every moving leaf would seem to be a voice of a spirit". But the stories can help the "isolated private self" to establish harmony and balance with realities for beyond day-to-day experiences. The constellation tales give listeners relatives in the sky. Thus, Momaday's observations about what can be lost when technological societies abandon oral traditions and the sense of harmony they often testifies to the importance of Indian narratives: "We may be perfectly sure of where we are in relation to the supermarket and the next coffee break, but I doubt that any of us knows where he is in relation to the story and to the summer solstices". (Man Made of Words 5).

In his Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *House Made of Dawn*, Momaday emphasises the potential healing effects of parts of Navajo and Jemez Pueblo ceremonial and narrative traditions on a World War II veteran shattered by his childhood experiences as an outsider in a Pueblo land by a series of horrible experiences during the war, and afterwards in Los Angeles. He is not cured, but by the end of the novel he is beginning to

find his "voice" – a metaphor that suggests the continuing significance of oral traditions. Silko's *Ceremony* also dramatises the struggles of a World War II veteran, a mixed blood Laguna named Tayo. But in this novel the significance of storytelling is even more important than in Momaday's. One way to read *Ceremony* is as a struggle between the powers of evil and good stories. The evil stories are represented by tribal gossip about Tayo's mother and other reservation figures, by tales of poverty, prostitution and alcoholism in Gallup, New Mexico and other cities, and by World War II narratives about seducing blonds and redheads in Oakland, San Diego and Los Angeles, or gory tales about killing Japanese soldiers and stealing their teeth. The good stories are often represented by traditional tales about the animals and land of the Southwest told by Tayo's uncle, Josiah; traditional Keres stories, presented separately as narrative poetry, that parallel Tayo's story of emergence from chaos and imbalance to new life and harmony; and the stories told by a Navajo medicine man, Betonie – stories that mix traditional Navajo narratives, other tribal stories, and experience that range from the Sherman Indian Institute in California to railroad stories to the St. Louis World's Fair to a powerful story dramatising the origin of witchery. Betonie believes that the only stories powerful enough to combat the evils of the modern world encompass traditional Indian narratives and the engulfing, everchanging torrents of the mainstream culture. Fortunately for Tayo, Betonie's stories and his own ability to act them out are powerful enough to ward off the influence of the evil stories – at least for a while.

Momaday's prose poem, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, rivals Silko's *Ceremony* as an extended, imaginative exploration of the relationships between traditional and modern streams of narrative. Initially the book was a "remarkable body of history and learning, fact and fiction – all of it in the oral tradition" collected by Momaday from Kiowa elders. To this material he added his own personal and family memories and his creative imagination. The results, as Momaday describes them, are "three distinct narrative voices... the mythological, the historical, and the immediate". The three voices are presented as a series of twenty-four short trios framed by poems, a prologue, an introduction, an epilogue. The first voice is printed on the left-hand page and is answered by the other two voices on the right-hand page. The relationships between the voices are complex and change throughout the book, but one trio should at least hint at what Momaday has done.

Today Native American storytellers, poets and novelists may not recite the old stories exactly the way their ancestors did and they may have new tales to tell, but they know that the ancient art of oral narration is a precious gift that must be rediscovered, recollected, and refashioned so that each generation can breathe new life into the gift. A few lines from Leslie Marmon Silko's poem *Skeleton Fixer's Story* express this commitment with warmth and respect. The poem appeared in *Sun Tracks* and is based on a story told at Laguna and Acoma Pueblos. The narrative tells how the Skeleton Fixer discovers and collects Old Coyote Woman's

bones. With love and exquisite care he reassembles the bones using both words and actions to give Coyote new life. In these lines Skeleton Fixer, the Old Badger Man speaks to the bones as he works with them:

'Oh poor dear one who left your bones here
I wonder who you are?'
Old Skeleton Fixer spoke to the bones
Because things don't die
They fall to pieces maybe,
Get scattered or separate,
But Old Badger Man can tell
How they once fit together.

Though he didn't recognise the bones
He could not stop;
He loved them anyway.

In a talk entitled "Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective", Silko explained the role of a storyteller that "a great deal of the story is believed to be inside the listener, and the storyteller's role is to draw a story out of listeners. This kind of shared experience grows out of a strong community base" (57). In the book *Storyteller*, Silko begins with stories that represent Natives as remnants of dying culture. As the reader moves through the book, she or he gains familiarity with Native American stories and perspectives until the final stories of the book use

the humour and subversion of Coyote stories and at the same time critiquing the dominant representatives of power, history and Native people. Her progressive movement from representing the dominant culture to her own Laguna world is made to shift the reader's perspective from one interpretive position to another.

The distinction between oral and written cultures has been used in anthropology to define the preliterate, pre-historical and primitive cultures in opposition to the literate, historical and by implication contemporary (European) people. These definition have been critiqued by contemporary anthropologists like Joel Sherzen and Anthery Woodburg:

> "Some statements describing an oral / written distinction do not come to terms with the nature of oral discourse as a model and then view oral discourse as less complicated, less advanced and seemingly deficient in relation to the written texts of literate, technological societies.....there is no simple dichotomy between oral and written discourse, between non-literate and literate societies. Rather there is a considerable and quite interesting continuity between the oral and the written, sharing diverging within each: there are oral genres in Native America that have such "written" properties as fixed text, "planning" and abstraction from context and written genres in European based societies how such "oral" properties as spontaneity and "repair" scansion into pause phrases and context dependent interpretability.... (9-10)

In *Storyteller*, Silko challenges the distinctions between the oral and the written world by constructing the written "as a secondary and diminished version not simply as of verbal presence but of the entire dynamic situation of place, people and stories in the oral community" (Linda Krumholz 93). She carries Native American concepts of language into her written text. In Native American oral tradition language has the power to create and transform reality. This "power" of the "word" has been dealt by different critics. Kennett Lincoln offers a description of "tribal poetics". "Ideally generative, words make things happen in Native America; language is the source of the word in itself" (20). For Brian Swann "The word, in fact, is a sacrament, a vital force, so that, for instance, a hunting song is not just a pleasant aesthetic experience but possesses an active relationship with the hunting act" (xi). He further elaborates: "A truly sacramental sense of language means that object and word are so fused that creation of the "event" is itself creative, bringing into this time and place the enduring powers which truly affect that which the event claims and such action cannot be undone" (xii). The spoken word therefore is a powerful creative or destructive force.

Storytelling is a central element in Native American rituals and Silko refers to the culture and destructive powers of language throughout *Storyteller*. Silko gives the text ritual properties : with the sense of community of voices, a spiritual vision, a visual, physical relationship to the text and a structure that moves both progressively towards a vision

and in a circle, suggesting cyclical and balanced relations rather than a sense of closure. Linda J. Kramholz in her study of this text has made six thematic divisions on the same. The first two sections are drawn from Bernard A. Hirsch's discussion of *Storyteller* and remaining four are related to the work of Linda Danielson. According to Hirsch the first section is the survival section (1-53) that describes *Storyteller* as a whole as "a self-renewing act of imagination / memory designed to keep storytellers as well as stories from so tragic a fate" as to be lost to memory (4). Here the author establishes the familiar and collective transmission of stories as vital cultural forces. This section also contains stories marked by sense of loss and displacement caused by European intrusion. In the two short stories *Storyteller* and *Lullaby* the characters re-affirm the power and continuity of stories. Some stories also tell of matrilineage of storytelling, its power and tensions.

Both stories – the story of the young girl who killed herself because her mother would not make her yashtoah (her favourite food) and the story of the two little girls who lost their mother in a flood and turned to stone – portray severed relationships between mothers and daughters, and may well have served as solace for Silko in her relationship with her mother. Silko also shows her writing to be a continuation of a female lineage of storytellers, such as Aunt Susie, in her family photographs and reminiscence. When Silko recollects her Aunt Susie's stories she writes:

> I remember only a small part.

But this is what I remember. (7)

In the balance of these two lines, Silko embodies both the loss of so much of the oral tradition, as well as the perpetuation of the oral tradition in her own memory and her own retellings. In the Survival section the reader is made to feel the depth of loss both of the stories and of the people who attempted to tell the stories and live by them. But Silko does not simply present the tragedy of the loss; she creates in her readers the need, the desire, and the ability to hear and understand those stories from a Native American interpretive perspective.

The second section (54-99), dubbed "Yellow Woman" by Hirsch, contains a number of stories about Yellow Woman, or "Kochininako" in Keres, a generic female character in Laguna Pueblo stories. Yellow Woman encompasses a great diversity of traits: in some stories she is loyal, beautiful, or powerful; in other stories she is selfish, thoughtless, or worst of all, a witch. Here Silko focuses especially on the so-called abduction stories, in which Yellow Woman is taken from her husband and children by a powerful male figure – Whirlwind Man, Buffalo Man or the Sun.

It is especially pertinent to consider the relation of old and new in the treatment of women's roles. Silko's description of her hunting experiences in this section connected by a story she was told as a child about a great young girl hunter, point out some of the ways in which

"traditional" roles for woman means something quite different from Native American and Euro-American Woman. Rayna Green makes these differences explicit:

> The ironies multiply when, contrary to standard feminist calls for revolution and change, Indian Women insists on taking their traditional places as healers, legal specialist, and tribal governors. Their call is for a return to Native American forms which, they insist, involve men and women in complementary, mutual roles. I underscore these differences because they may teach us more than analysis of Indian female "oppression" I am not suggesting that a return to tradition in all these forms "correct" but that attention to the debate about the implications of such retraditionalisation would mean healthier, culturally more appropriate scholarship on Indian Women. (264).

Silko's focus on women's roles in this section of *Storyteller* compels the White reader to re-evaluate ideas of tradition, often considered by Euro Americans as something static, repressive, and unyielding. The way woman concept and imagine their roles and their relation to tradition in Silko's stories parallels the give and take between old and new stories that gives the oral tradition its continuing vitality and relevance.

The next two sections, coming in the centre of the book, comprise a cycle from drought to rain. The Pueblo Indians, as well as the other Indians

living in the arid Southwest, focus many of their stories and rituals on the need for rain. Drought results from disruption of harmony, from Witchcraft, from bad thoughts or deeds, or from forgetting the old stories and the old ways. Rain results from an establishment of the right order and balance and sometimes from a ritual of healing to counter witchcraft. In Pueblo and Navajo religions, witchcraft is a reversal of the right order and balance of things. It is a destructive rather than a creative use of power.

In *Storyteller*, Silko uses the process of initiation to transform the reader and to shift the interpretive vantage point and the definition of terms from the Euro American to Native American. At this point in the book, Silko moves toward affirmation and representation of Native American philosophical and spiritual beliefs from a more Native American centred world view. For example, both "Tony's story" in the Drought section and "The Man to Send Rain Clouds" in the Rain section end with the promise of the rain, but in the former story, Tony believes seem disturbing and out of touch with his surroundings, while in the latter story, it is the Anglo Priest whose beliefs seem disturbing and out of touch within the Laguna Committee. Although the perspective throughout the book is clearly Native American, the weight of Euro American representations lifts in this section, and the storyteller exhibits a greater confidence in the reader's ability to engage with Native American concepts and representation. The other stories in this section describe productive relationship and growth as part of the cyclical process of the world.

The story "The Man to Send Rain Clouds" provides a link between the Rain section and the Spirit section (187-211). Since the earth's cycles are connected with process of life and death and the presence of the spirits of the dead. The concept of temporal coexistence in Rain section has direct bearing on concepts and ancestral presences, as Johannes Fabian observes:

> .....all temporal relations and therefore also contemporaneity are embedded in culturally organised praxis. ....To cite but two examples, relationships between the living and the dead, or relationship between the agent and object of magic operations, presuppose cultural conceptions of contemporaneity. To a large extent, Western rational disbelief in the presence of ancestors and the efficacy of magic rest on the rejection of ideas of temporal coexistence implied in these ideas and practices. (34).

The dissolution of temporal boundaries in the Rain section prepares the reader for an understanding of spiritual presences and our relations to them.

In the Spirits section, Silko tells a number of stories about family members who have died, especially about her Grandpa Hank; the section is firmed by photographs her Grandpa Hank and her Grandma A'mooh.

The Deer Dance becomes a model for the reciprocal relations between the living and the dead.

In the last section of the book, Silko tells stories of Coyote the Native American trickster figure and ultimate survivor, to complete the shift to a Native American perspective and tradition. The two stories of the section have two versions, wherein Silko describes spiritual transformations that affect the living. In one version a young boy taken by the bear people is brought back gradually to his humanity by medicine man, but he will always be different after his connection to the bears. In the other version "Story from Bear Country" the reader, referred to ask "you", is in the position of the young boy and we are being lured back from the beauty of the bears world by the narrator – the poem is the song by which the storyteller, in the role of the medicine man, calls the readers back. In these stories Silko conveys the power of stories to create spiritual transformation, thus offering stories that help to understand the reader's initiation and transformation in the ritual process of the book.

In this last section of *Storyteller*, Silko introduces a character who represents human foibles and human creativity, as well as the power of Native American and human survival.

Throughout *Storyteller* Silko reflects on the storytellers; the final section, she connects the storytellers art and her own and role as storyteller to

the strategies of Coyote. The storyteller is like Coyote, a culture creator and transformer. But the analogy also connects to the subversive role of Coyote, in which Coyote's reversal of power relations and subversion of rules serve to expose the deceptions of White people or to represent Indian undermining White power. In the interview, Silko says:

> Certainly for me most effective Coyote political statement I could make is in my art work. I believe in subversion rather than straight – out con-frontation. I believe in the sands of time, so to speak. Especially in America, when you confront the so-called mainstream, it is very inefficient, and in every way destroys you and disarms you. I am still a believer in subversion. I don't think we are numerous enough, who-ever "we" are, to take them by storm. ("Interview" 147-48).

Like all of Silko's works, *Almanac of the Dead* attempts to subvert the ideology of the European colonisers. In *Almanac*, Silko examines the colonisation of the Americas and the resistance that the colonisers still encounter. Through the discourse of its multiple narrators, *Almanac* argues that the Americas have been both a physical and a rhetorical battle rages on in the form of a moral treatise on the nature of good and evil. The narrative contains many complex and contradictory characters who function as representatives of the social classes to which they claim membership. Each one represents a point on the moral continuum of the

text. *Almanac* subverts the dominant ideology by showing readers America through the eyes of the indigenous peoples.

Like Silko's earlier works, *Almanac of the Dead* contains a set of ideological propositions; however, *Almanac* is bigger in both size and scope than Silko's earlier works, and its lessons are more complex. To understand *Almanac*'s many lessons, readers must accept that there is a treatise on good and evil implicit in the narrative. Like the lessons of many stories in the oral tradition of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, *Almanac*'s lessons are not easy to grasp. Following in this tradition, the narrative perplexes readers in pursuit of its meaning by leading them along false trails and confounding them with dead ends. *Almanac* is, indeed, an exercise for the wits. *Almanac*'s narrator, in her construction of character, exploits narrative strategies to convey and conceal simultaneously the moral treatise on good and evil contained within the narrative.

Almanac is narrated by a multitude of often unrelated character-focalisers with no one central protagonist, and its implied author – the entity that selects the data comprising the narrative (see Booth) – and its narrators fuse together so that we find it difficult to determine how we are influenced and by whom. Furthermore, although *Almanac*'s narrator may encourage us to align ourselves wit any character, we soon discover that she is misleading us and that she views all the characters with a kind of scorn that only varies in degree. As a result, readers find

themselves alienated from the characters and denied any real point of entry into the narrative.

The narrator's treatment of the indigenous characters differs radically from that of the other characters in the text. The narrator allows those indigenous characters who resist the colonial aristocracy to grow when they begin to understand the roles they must play in the continuing indigenous resistance to colonialism. It is not until the text nears its end that the narrator reveals that *Almanac*'s true heroes and heroines are the indigenous peoples who grow and change be developing an understanding of the history of the Americas and of their place in it. At the beginning of the text, Zeta and her associate, Calabazas, claim to be exercising their resistance by smuggling drugs and artefacts from Mexico into the United States. Both recognise that American and Mexican governments have stolen Indian land and murdered Indian people, and both claim that they struggle in retaliation. They call themselves subversives because they refuse to recognise the border between the United States and Mexico. Like the villains, these characters learn their attitudes and behaviours from their ancestors. Remembering what her grandmother Yoeme would say, Zeta asks, "How could one steal if the government itself was the worst thief?" (133).

Yet Zeta is not the champion of the people that she claims to be. The narrator situates her on an isolated ranch with only her adopted son and her employees around her. Zeta has little contact with anyone; she is

especially isolated from the people for whom she professes to be fighting. Furthermore, at the beginning of the narrative Zeta can only "recite Yoeme's arguments" without truly understanding them, and calls her grandmother's legal theories "crazed" (133). She smuggles, although she knows that her grandmother does not consider the smuggling of artefacts a true act of resistance because "Old Yoeme had made a big point of shaming those who would sell the last few objects of the people who had been destroyed and worlds that had been destroyed by Europeans" (128). Initially, the narrator suggests that Zeta and Calabazas are not true revolutionaries because their actions benefit only a few and their main goal is material gain. Rather than using the profit from her struggling to help her people, Zeta invests it in golds and guns, which she hoards in an abandoned mine shaft on her property. Similarly, Calabazas does little with the earning from his schemes that really benefits his people. Granted, he employs his in-laws, but not out of concern for their welfare. Calabazas is a cynic who "had always had the philosophy it was better to put in-laws to work for you... It made the prospect of betrayal less likely" (238). For the most part, Calabaza's money either goes back into his business or is used to provide his employees with drugs and alcohol. Although both Zeta and Calabazas have been educated by the elders, they either ignore or reject the history of the people and think only of themselves. At *Almanac*'s beginning, the narrator gives no indication that these characters are capable of change and provide little information to distinguish them from the villains.

Towards the end of the text, however, the narrator reveals that both Zeta and Calabazas are not static characters, that they are capable of change. Zeta is first prompted to change when she sees her adopted son devastated by his lover's murder at the hands of the police. Until the moment that she sees Ferro in the throes of grief, Zeta has never been a real mother to him. Although she has taken care of his physical needs, she has ignored his emotional ones, treating him as a burden rather than a person. When Ferro's anger over Jamey's death turns to plans for vengeance, Zeta fears for his life and realises that she does indeed love him. Her priorities change, and she turns into the mother that she has never been in spirit. Her eyes open, and although she has never brought life into this world, she becomes a life-force character whose change in outlook generates a change in action. She kills Greenlee, the racist gun dealer whom she has tolerated for years. She attends the International Holistic Healers Convention along with Calabazas, something that neither of them would have considered doing in the past. Her sister, Lecha, is amazed at this change in behaviour and concludes that "earth must truly be in crisis for both Zeta and Calabazas to be attending this convention" (79).

Through their contact with the like-minded people they meet at the convention, Zeta and Calabazas begin to see that they are a small part of a larger movement rather than isolated individuals carrying out futile acts of subversion. As a young man, Calabazas rejected the knowledge of the old ones, but now "he had been listening to his loco lieutenant,

Mosca, who had wild stories about a barefooted Hopi with radial schemes, and new reports about the spirit macaws carried by the twin brothers on a sacred journey north accompanied by thousands of the faithful" (79). The discussions that occur at the conference both put into perspective the knowledge that Zeta and Calabazas received as children from their grandparents and update it. Zeta and Calabazas learn that the story of the people is not a relic of the past, for as long as it endures in the memories of the people it lives. The narrator demonstrates that Zeta and Calabazas can change only by understanding that they are part of the people, part of the land, and part of the story.

Considering the fact that oral narration is a precious gift, Native writers in contemporary times refashion and recollect it to provide it a new life. Within the oral framework, myth and history are spurn together in the narrative offering a more viable means to reclaim the lost Indian pride. Beginning with Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* and *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, the use of myth and oral narratology is seen in most of the post 1960's literary production. In *House Made of Dawn* Momaday emphasises the healing power of Navajo and James Welch ceremonial tradition through the protagonist. James Welch too reworks on his Black feet myths in *Fools Crow* and *Winter in the Blood.*

In Native Indian discourse, Leslie Mermen Silko holds a significant position with her contribution to Native fiction in particular. As traditional Native storyteller she tells us a series of stories, making a

complex narrative. In *Ceremony*, the story is not only about the pristine world of the Indian but also about the White European World that dispossessed the Natives of their culture and literature. Leslie Silko begins Ceremony with several poems; and in one of these aptly titled "ceremony" – she reminds us about the significance of stories:

> I will tell you he said something about stories,
> They aren't just entertainment.
> Don't be fooled.
> They are all we have you see,
> All we have to fight off illness and death. (2).

This is the reason for the strong influence of oral tradition in Silko's fiction. For she does not regard the oral literature of the past but "....views her own work as part of a still on going literary tradition, once purely oral and how at least partially written" (Clements 74).

The novel *Ceremony* incorporates Laguna – Pueblo myth and contemporary time akin to the writer's mixed ancestry – Laguna, Pueblo, Mexican and White. Broadly speaking it deals with the cultural survival of the Natives in post colonial North American with the fluid narrative of Tayo (the veteran of World War II). Like her other counter parts, Silko too wants to change the paradigm of new world order of Euro American image of individual autonomy and have a new approach opposite to this subjective stand. This is the primary reason for contemporary Native

American writers to go back to oral tradition in order to correct the White misconstruction of the Native in general. In *Ceremony* Laguna myths are woven allegorically through personal and cultural healing of Tayo. The action of the novel is set in the southwest desert near Laguna - the actual spot were uranium was mined for Manhattan projects. Here Tayo's quest is to find an alternative to 'witchery' which sets off White against Indian. Silko constructs the myth of Witchery to dramatise the colonial antimonies for North America history and culture. The texture of her work by mixing prose narrative wit verse myths reinforces the dynamics of contemporary Native identity within traditional myth.

By integrating ceremony, myth, folklore, oral narrative, trickster figure, this complex Native Indian literature possesses unity as well as complexity of Indian world. The structure of the narrative is articulated through various symbols that create harmony based on the perceived harmony of the universe. Thus many critics feel a need to read this literature from the vantage of its people. In *Ceremony* we encounter a contest of stories which forms a complex narrative that encompasses, a cultural transformation that Native Indian witnesses instead of the more familiar narrative of psychological and social disintegration of Native American culture in the face of western colonisation.

The various comments of Indian history live to surface through Betonie (the medicine man) where race, culture and generation interact. In the

narrative Betonie talk of colonial adaptation wit the changing of ceremonies:

> You see in many ways, the ceremonies, have always been changing....at one time the ceremonies as they had been performed where enough for the way the world then. But after the White people came; elements in this would began to shift and it became necessary to create ceremonies. I have made changes in the rituals. The people mistrust this greatly, but only this growth keeps the ceremonies strong. (132-133).

It is Betonie who stresses the idea of survival of a community through interaction. Betonie living on the edges of Navajo community is the embodiment of cultural transformation and innovation. This is clearly exemplified with his hut packed with medicine bottles, calendars and telephone directories. It is with Betonie's help that Tayo comes to terms with his condition. By joining the mythical ceremony of sandpainting, Tayo gets healed from the wounds of colonialism. Thus, "Betonie's radical theory of the ceremony along with his performance of it with Tayo, helps Tayo learn how to create an end to his story" (Hobbs 306).

While approaching *Ceremony* the reader must bear in mind the colonial history and its implications on the Native culture that resulted in such cultural transformation. By juxtaposing antithetical Native American narrative and the dialectical articulation of western and oral tradition in

Ceremony, the narrative gives a description of Pueblo world under the capitalist political economy of the coloniser / White. The region of American southwest forms the area of the novel proper. Since the 1940's this region has remained an atomic power block in the shape of uranium mining, atomic power development and atomic weapon's testing programme. This area was almost devastating for human habitat. Therefore Nixon administration declared it as a 'National Sacrifice Area'.

This American southwest represents one of the crude and violent forms of colonisation ever witnessed. Comprising of Laguna Pueblo and Navajo culture it is seen seriously threatened by the European imperialism and therefore Silko in this novel attempts at building up a new tradition with the transformation that is important for its survival. The change in ceremonies as explained by Betonie makes a case also for a literal transformation undertaken by Silko in her writing endeavour where myth, history, and contemporary situation fuse together, like the process of 'Osmosis', the myth in the narrative almost seeps into the contemporary framework.

In the beginning Silko suggest that she herself is retelling grandmother Spider's story and that this story infact contributes the novel as a whole. In this connection for critics like Shamoon Zamir the contest of stories in *Ceremony* is an attempt by Silko to manage and to contain the malign power of witchery story within the larger narrative of the grandmother Spider's story. Towards the end Tayo realises that the success of the

contest lies in its end. Therefore stories are to be put out of reach of the destroyer if the ceremony is to be completed successfully.

There are different strands of smaller narratives that join the larger narrative of draught and witchery in *Ceremony*. Throughout *Ceremony* narrative of gift exchange are juxtaposed with sacrificial narrative. For instance in one of the witchery stories, Corn woman angered by her sister reed women, leaves this world to the fourth world below. To bring her back, Flybird and Humming bird take gifts of pollen and prayer sticks. They also give similar gifts to Buzzard so that he will purify the town before corn woman returns. In Native tradition, such reciprocity illustrates moral values between human world and nature. In the earlier sections of the novel we come across Tayo who remembers that as a young boy his uncle's Josiah and Robert sprinkled pinches of corn meal on the dead deer's nose in order to feed 'deer spirit'. In the very last stage of his ceremonial healing, while searching his uncle's lost cattle, Tayo remembers this reciprocal offering and sprinkles pollen on the tacks of mountain lion. This mountain lion (hunter's helper in Pueblo mythology) saves Tayo's life by driving away White armed patrol men.

In Native literature storyteller has an important place. In *Ceremony*, we find a culmination of accumulated years of traditional storytelling. Unlike her short fiction, '*Storyteller*' and '*Yellow Woman*', *Ceremony* relies on oral heritage. This enables the writer to make connection between the past and the present. In the novel this connection swings from poetic

space to prosaic world. These stories help to communicate between land and the people. In the beginning we get to know Tayo's illness. Through the vehicle of story, T'itststhought, Silko explains how witchery could be responsible for man's sickness:

> Thought-Woman, the spider
> Named things and
> As she named them
> They appeared.
> She is sitting in her room
> Thinking of a story now.
> It's telling you the story
> She is thinking. (1).

It is through Betonie's ceremony that Tayo is able to confront witchery and abandon any thought to retaliation. The idea of wholeness comes alive to him in caring cattles and nurturing plants. For, "He would go back now, where she has shown him the plant, he would gather the seeds for her and plant them with great care in places near sandy hills.... The plants would grow there like the story, strong and translucent as stars. Towards the end, the story that enables him to heal his mind is the story of the land that signified:

> The transition was completed. In the west and in the south too, the clouds with round heavy bellies had gathered for the dawn. It was

not necessary, but it was right, even if the sky had been cloudless the end was the same. The ear for the story and the eye for the pattern were theirs; the feeling was theirs; we came out of this land and we are hers...They had always been loved. He thought of her then; she had always loved him, she had never left him; she had always been there. He crossed the river at sunrise. (225).

Having grown up in her father's trapline in Northern Ontario Ruby Slipperjack childhood was nurtured on a strong storytelling tradition by her parents and her elders. This made an undeliable mark on her that led to her writing stories as a child. *Silent Words* published in the year 1992 to capture the writer's storytelling method in both theme and structure. Like an archaeologist Slipperjack digs up the fossilised past buried under the weight of colonialism to make connection between the pristine Native cultures and to renew the lost Indian pride. We therefore find total exclusion of the White world in her novels. In order to reclaim their identities, some of the Native writers have excluded the White presence in order to have a better picture of true Native Indian culture, thereby enabling their people to understand their history and culture in a better way. As a traditional Native Indian storyteller Ruby Slipperjack in this novel is didactic in her approach to reaffirm and strengthen Native beliefs and values.

The straight forward telling of the story can be traced back to the writer's first novel *Honour the Sun* (1987). *Honour the Sun* portrays a

psychological account of a young girl named Owl's transition from the age of ten to sixteen. The gradual disintegration of the family is the microcosm of the larger macrocosmic disintegration of the Natives in general. Their predicament too entails the story of lost innocence by the attack of satanic colonisers in their edenic world. The end posits anew beginning when the girl Owl remembers what her mother said "Honour the sun, child, just as it comes over the horizon, Honour the sun that it may bless you come another day..." (221). Here the beginning is implied in the end giving it a cyclic shape akin to Native culture. Each chapter is dated by season and year revolving around the daily routine of the Owl's family. It also painfully records the violence and alcohol ridden Native community, giving a sensitive and realistic portrayal about the ups and downs of the life of the Native Indians.

Ruby Slipperjack unlike her counterparts does not make any overt remark regarding Native situation. In an interview, she categorically says that "Who am I to come and tell you something". It is there for you to see" (Lutz 209). In *Silent Words*, her second novel, Slipperjack explores the discovery of the self in spiritual terms. The narratives revolve around Danny and his journey of self discovery. Continuing the oral framework, the narrative lacks proper linear development rendering it episodic and loosely structured. Like her previous novels *Honour the Sun*, here too, Slipperjack has a child named Danny as the first person narrative protagonist to show a continuation of the quest for the self in terms of their association to past, present and future. In this manner the quest

motif runs parallel to the structure of the narrative, thereby providing an extended debate on Native cultural inheritance.

Ruby Slipperjack's *Honour the Sun* is a novel, but it reads more like autobiography. The story is told through the perceptions of a young girl, the Owl, from 1962 to 1968. She records events that are exciting, frightening, joyful, horrifying, and simply mundane with painstaking detail and great authenticity. Readers familiar with boreal forests experience waves of nostalgia as they see, feel, smell, and hear along with Owl. The maturation of Owl and her changing perceptions provide the threads from which the book is woven. Slipperjack creates an intimate portrait of a single-parent family in an isolated Ojibway community in northern Ontario.

Slipperjack is a superb storyteller. With a great economy of words, she manages to convey a picture of a small cabin, full to bursting with permanent occupants as well as relatives who come and go. Keeping track of characters could be a bewildering task were it not for the fact that readers soon realise that actual numbers are unimportant the relationships are what make life joyful.

But not all is joy and love. Violence lurks under the surface of the community. Native Men become like enemies when they drink – they smash doors, rape women, terrorise children, and kill animals wantonly. The women and children can only protect themselves with well-rehearsed

escape procedures. But the violence is transmitted to the children and the older and stronger bully and terrorise the younger and weaker, deliberately inflicting pain. The younger ones can only cope with the abuse stoically. Damaged, psychopathic children grow up in this community, and alcoholism is rampant. It is only the strong who survive unscathed.

This is a moving book. Slipperjack writes "from the heart," as the Ojibway say, and captures the joys and sorrows of what it is to be an Indian in this century. She does not sentimentalise, nor does she excuse or blame. She records Owl's perceptions and interpretations. Slipperjack has said of her book: "The only thing I can do is to remind you of the person you once were, to wake you up and make you remember what it felt like to be that small...The child has memory of creation, because the child has not yet lost that connection. That is one thing that we all have in common, and I think that is one way we can all communicate" (Lutz 209).

Owl is a cherished child – cherished by her mother, her extended family, and her community. So Owl grows up to be a strong young woman capable of determining the direction her future will take. On the surface, the book appears to be simple; however, the simple style is deceptive/ Slipperjack probes and explores, gently uncovering universal truths and leaving readers with haunting and unforgettable images.

Keeper'n Me by Richard Wagamese is also set on an isolated Ojibway reserve in northern Ontario. It tells the story of Garnet Raven, who is victimised by the baby-snatching practices of social-service agencies in the 1960s. Garnet grows up in various foster homes with no sense of personal identity. The book is about his quest for identity. *Keeper'n Me* is basically a "happy ever after" book, but it is also much more than that. It demonstrates how family and elders wait to teach and heal those who have been robbed of their roots. A significant character is Keeper, a one-time protégé of Garnet's grandfather. Keeper, too, is seeking healing, since he did not avail himself of the opportunities to learn that were offered to him in his younger years. He is given a second chance when he helps his mentor's grandson.

The book is a significant contribution to Canadian literature and Canadian society in general. Wagamese fictionalises an experience that has been only too common in Native society, and an era mainstream society today prefers to forget. He presents Ojibway culture from the point of view of one who is attempting to regain his rightful place within it.

A common theme throughout all Native writing is the need for Natives to reclaim and tell their own stories. Maria Campbell regrets that "dah teef" did not leave a legacy of good stories for his children:

> An dah stories you know

dah dah bes treasure of all to leave your family.
Everything else on dis eart
he gets los or wore out.
But dah stories
day las forever.
Too bad about dah man hees kids.
Jus too bad. (142).

Slipperjack, Wagamese, and other novelists are revealing a richness that has long been dormant in Canada. Great stories are, indeed, being told. They make valuable contributions to a greater understanding of the Canadian mosaic.

The novel *Silent Words* is divided into twenty chapters with an epilogue in the end. As mentioned earlier due to the influence of the oral tradition, the narrative lacks proper linear development. It moves back and forth, requiring a very careful and attentive reading. The novel opens with Danny in a pathetic state in a state of shock with the poverty, alcohol and violence ridden home. To top it all the inhuman attitude of Sarah, Danny's step mother results in his leaving home.

After boarding the train, Danny begins his search for his mother. He envisions a happy home with himself his mother and father at the trapper's shack, and also questions the need to move to town that led to his broken family. He further says "Everything would have been alright if

we had just stayed at the cabin. Mama! Please let me find you please...I love you Mama....I am scared. Mama where are you?" (SW 35).

This search for the mother is metaphorically the search for mother Native culture that was gradually destroyed by the White order. At the same time, one cannot ignore the fact that the longing for mother remains a live issue among Native children, for they are doomed to foster homes and other agencies with the failure of a balanced family life. The journey therefore undertaken by Danny is a type of 'Pilgrim's progress' to restore back Native cultural identity.

Native culture epitomises the idea of communal living. The concept one for all and all for one is part of Native Indian ideological formulation that cherishes the idea of sharing and togetherness. This was the reason for well knot Native community during precontact days. On his way Danny meets people who feed and provide shelter to him. This kind of care and affection instills in him the idea of Native brotherhood. He for a while feels secured and happy. Danny meets Ol'Jim for his spiritual self discovery. As a surrogate grandfather, he instills in him the traditional Indian ways and values of life. But before that it becomes imperative to just recognise himself as an Indian by being of Indian community. Danny thus proves this by taking care of Mr. and Mrs. Indian.

Within the Native context grandparents are considered the bridge between present and past. As guardians of Native Cultural heritage, they

are kept in a high pedestal in the Native Community. In this novel it is Ol'Jim the surrogate grandfather who instills in Danny traditional Native wisdom. This enables Danny to share his problems with Ol'Jim to cleanse himself from the wound of colonial rule. He acknowledges Ol'Jim role and says that "Boy it felt so good to tell a grandfather my problems" (95).

To impart a true sense of Native identity Slipperjack makes her protagonist undergo a long-canoe trip with Ol'Jim to relive the pre-contact days. it is here that Danny truly understands the concept of nature as held in Native community. His approach to nature was different from White perception. To quote Arnold Krupat, Native views on life, "derive from an ecosystem, non anthropocentric perspective which is "centrally rather than marginally important to human survival" (55). The Native Indian attitude to nature is best reflected in Ol'Jim's remark :

> You are right, son. There is someone there are a lot beings here. The Memegwesiwag live there. They see us go by. Long ago they were able to communicate with us when there were people who could see and understand them. Now we have lost our communication, so all we can do is to know that they are there. It is our fault that we have lost the level of thought and knowledge to be able to see and take with them. Now all we have left is to acknowledge their existence by leaving 'ahsamah'. (97).

From the spiritual order of Ol'Jim, Danny goes back to the temporal world of the other Jim. This is a kind of cosmic cycle akin to Native beliefs and cultural value. The meeting with the Ol'Jim is a kind of ritual performance that makes the cultural inheritance of Danny possible. The two Jims therefore enable Danny to assimilate in the Native ways and values of life and thereby recover this identity in true respect with full acceptance.

To impart Danny a true sense of Native identity, Slipperjack makes him experience and cope with one of the most intricate aspect of life-death. There are three deaths he witnesses one after another right from his friend Heney, Ol'Jim and his mother. His ability to accept death reflects his acceptance of Native identity. Although his mother is dead it is part of the ritualistic design of Slipperjack that he happens to marry the girl with the same name – Charlotte Lynx. His wedding therefore to Charlotte towards the end metaphorically represents his wedding to his mother culture. The didactic intent of the novelist becomes clears in the parting lines of the novel. Danny says, "You can't escape the silent words of your memory. They grow on you, layer after layer, year after year, documenting you from the beginning to the end from the core to surface, I built my cabin with silent words" (SW 256). These silent words are non-verbal words of Native inheritance that Danny has learnt to decipher. Through her novel, Honour the Sun and Silent Words, Slipperjack emphasises, the need to re-discover Native heritage in order to learn their distinctive Native Identity.

Continuing with the oral tradition and storytelling mode in *Silent Words*, Ruby Slipperjack uncovers the silence of the Ojibway Community through the character Danny. Although the narrative is in first person, it does not convey Danny's point of view. Instead the focus is on the group i.e. Danny's Ojibway Community. According to Dee Horne in this novel, "Like many First Nations oral stories, the narrative does not offer readers any clear cut resolution, but leaves the story open ended. It concludes with Danny's accidental shooting of his father and his realisation that the silent words of memories will always be with him". (122).

Danny's dilemma with his father and his dilemma as an Ojibway contending with settler society further point to a central problem that the narrative introduces: how do you speak to those who do not want to listen? The narrative addresses this question by subverting the silence / violence of colonialism through Danny and his telling of his story. In the course of his journey, Danny works through the destructive silencing that he experienced earlier.

Slipperjack subverts this loss of language by making the silence – the absence of Ojibway language – speak. Other aspects of Ojibway culture must fill this gap. One of these is pedagogy. Danny undergoes a learning process in which he acquires experimental knowledge and realises the value of sharing and community. He begins to understand the First

Nations expression "all my relations", and his father later reminds him that his Ojibway community is "like one big family" (244).

Through non-verbal communication, Ol'Jim encourages Danny to cultivate his awareness. Unlike verbal language, the language of silence is non-intrusive, non-directive, and non-authorisation. He often does not tell Danny how to interpret these lessons, but allows him to discover their meaning for himself. Impatience impeded awareness, and both awareness and memory are essential to survival:

> You (Danny) rush too much, you know that?...You should take time to look around and remember how things are, son. Would you remember how we got here if you had to do the trip all over again without me? (129).

First Nations languages, oral traditions, and histories are passed from one generation to the next through social and individual memories. As Ol'Jim explains, Elders play a pedagogical role because they educate the young through their stories, lives, and actions; thus, this process of rememoration contributes to the survival of First Nations. (143-44).

Throughout the text, Slipperjack illustrates the complex web between memory, history, and land. As she points out to Lutz, land is central to First Nations subject formation because it is their history (Lutz 207);

land is an integral part of their stories, lifestyle, traditions, and culture(s) generally.

Memory also plays an integral role in subject formation. The past influences and shapes the present and the present modifies how the individual interprets the past. In the concluding passage of the novel, Slipperjack employs silence as a metaphor for a language of feelings and memories that document Danny's history: "You can't escape the silent words of your memory. They grow on you, layer after layer, year after year, documenting you from beginning to end, from the core to the surface. I built my cabin with silent words" (250). The author who chooses to write silence often falls into the trap of writing about silence; the writer tells, instead of showing it.

He discovers in the course of his journey how to speak through silence; he voices the colonial violence / silencing he endured and communicates in silent words. Silence becomes a form of communication that aids.

From his interaction with Mr. Old Man and Mrs. Old Woman Indian, Danny begins to learn how to communicate without using words: "I shrugged hopelessly and she (Mrs. Old Woman Indian) smiled and looked away. I just did it! I mean talking not in words but by actions" (60). His experience with Ol'Jim also plays a central role in his subject formation and reintegration with his Ojibway culture. Ol'Jim teaches Danny the importance of sharing and community: "Boy, when you come home, you

don't just find yourself, you already got yourself! What you find are all the people who love you!" When he returns to visit Mr. Old Man and Mrs. Old Woman Indian, Danny realises that the non-verbal communication of "silent words" of warmth and love are "the little things I had almost forgotten". (193).

Danny begins to learn the significance of self-reliance, of not wasting words and of speaking with words only when necessary: "I knew by now not to ask stupid questions because he (Ol'Jim just pretended he didn't hear anyway" (97). Ol'Jim often communicates to Danny through silence, and Danny is now better able to decipher non-verbal communication.

Through silence, Ol'Jim often encourages Danny to modify his assimilated behaviour. For instance, when Danny speaks to him in English, Ol'Jim pretends not to hear and Danny switches to Ojibway (116). Ol'Jim embodies "silent words" both by his actions and by his frequent slips into his "memory world" (117). Even though he does not direct his speeches to Danny, the boy still listens and learns.

Learning from the examples of Mr. Old Man Indian, Ol'Jim, and others, Danny affirms experimental knowledge, realises the value of sharing and community, and begins to understand the First Nations expression "all my relations"; his Ojibway community is "like one big family" (244). As Danny later discovers, he has never really been lost. He has always been a part of his Ojibway community, and his community has supported him

throughout his journey. He has learned that listen is an anagram for silent. Having learned how to listen, he is capable of decoding the silent words in the environment and the silence spaces between spoken words. Ultimately, in crossing cultural gaps, *Silent Words* voices the gap between words and seeing and writes over colonial violence / silence to speak.

Oral cultures place primary importance on the ability to articulate experience. If an event – something we first perceive with our senses – can be put into words, it can be incorporated into our lives. Momaday is fond of narrating one aspect of Kiowa history ("Man", 104-5). On 13 November 1833 there occurred an explosion of meteors. This cosmic event was entered into Kiowa calendars as "the year the stars fell". By giving the historical event meaning in the imagination – by naming it and making it into a story – the Kiowa were able to endure everything that happened to them thereafter. Language makes meaning possible, and finding symbolic meaning in things seemingly beyond one's control ensures human survival. Through language the mythic mind finds a reason for being. The philosopher Ernst Cassirer explains the primacy of language for indigenous cultures as follows:

> Indeed, it is the Word, it is language, that really reveals to man that world which is closer to him than any world of natural objects and touches his weal and woe more directly than physical nature. For it is language that makes his existence in a community

possible; and only in society, in relation to a "Thee", can his subjectivity assert itself as a "Me". (Language and Myth 61).

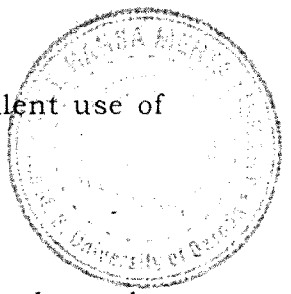
When Momaday says, in a convocation address published in 1975 as "The Man Made of Words" that "an Indian is an idea which a given man has of himself" (97) and "we are what we imagine" (103), he is making a connection between the imagination and language. Basically, language creates reality in our imagination. Without the verbal dimension we have no access to the world; in fact, the world does not exist, since we cannot imagine or visualise it. Momaday puts it this way: "Generally speaking, man has consummate being in language, and there only. The state of human being is an idea, an idea which man has of himself. Only when he is embodied in an idea, and the idea is realised in language, can man take possession of himself" (104). Because our very being is dependant on language, Indians believe that, when used properly, words have the power to heal.

Leslie Silko once stated in an interview, "Storytelling for Indians is like a natural resource.... I think it has to do with community, with growing up in certain kinds of communities as opposed to others" ("Stories" 18). The sharing of stories is, above all, a communal act: among other things it helps alleviate suffering by guarding against individual isolation. "I realise now how the telling at Laguna was meant to prevent the withdrawal and isolation at times at Laguna was meant to prevent the withdrawal and isolation at times like this", Silko says in a letter (qtd. In

A. Wright, *Delicacy and Strength* 69). From the rich diversity of her Laguna Pueblo culture she has learned to respect storytelling as an integral and necessary part of life. Her faith in the power of stories to heal and bind in a collective sense offers an alternative to Tacqueville's judgement of Americans as isolated individuals who "form the habit of thinking of themselves in isolation and imagine that their whole destiny is in their hands" (*Democracy* 508).

By attributing the novel to the thoughts of the mythic creator Thought-Woman ("I'm telling you the story she is thinking", says the narrator), Silko identifies her authorial role as augmenter and transmitter, rather than originator. In the style of oral performances the teller of *Ceremony* is conveying a story that is traditional as well as new and unique through the act of telling. As Thought- or Spider Woman is creating the story by thinking and naming, Silko the teller is conveying, interpreting, and augmenting. This collaboration suggests both continuity and change – continuity, because stories coming from a mythical deity are part of the people's heritage, and change, since stories are contextualised and recreated with each telling (while the feeling of the story is retained). It also suggests collective as well as individual input: Thought-Woman creates on behalf of the community, and the teller adds his or her input to the narrative. The arrangement forgoes individual ownership of the text in the Eurocentric sense. At the outset of the novel, then, the author places herself within a communal context of shared authorship. The story belongs to everyone. This strategy not only makes a statement

about communal values but also sets the stage for the prevalent use of myth in the narrative.



In *Ceremony* myths in the form of poems are scattered throughout the text, paralleling and augmenting the story line. These "time immemorial" stories from the Pueblo cultures serve as contextual backdrop for the contemporary prose narrative. This splicing technique simulates the atmosphere of storytelling – as if the reader were actually listening to and watching an oral performance. It effectively disabuses us of arbitrary separations such as past versus present, dream versus reality, and the animate versus the inanimate. In other words, with one un-novel-like stroke the author places us in a different reality, a view of the world that is cosmic and holistic rather than compartmentalised. What is more, the sense of cosmic order and need for balance is gradually elicited from the reader through the process of reading. As Silko once said of the participatory nature of oral performance: "The storytelling always includes the audience and the listeners, and, in fact, a great deal of the story is believed to be inside the listener, and the storyteller's role is to draw the story out of the listeners" ("Language" 57). This special teller-listener relationship, when translated into a literary framework, expands the parameters of fiction beyond the European American construct.

The title of the novel encapsulates the spirit of the book. According to Paula Gunn Allen, "The purpose of a ceremony is integration: the individual is integrated, fused, with his fellows, the community of people

is fused with that of the other kingdoms, and this larger communal group with the worlds beyond this one" (Sacred Hoop 119). In Indian cultures the term community extends beyond human society to include other life forms and other worlds. When one or more elements in the ecological system are out of balance a ceremony is necessary for reintegration. As a novel grounded in the Laguna Pueblo culture, *Ceremony* is itself a curing ceremony for anyone who works through it. Silko is not only telling the story, but shamanlike, she also facilitates healing through language and ritual. When the novel is viewed as a process rather than as a finite product it incorporates the reader into the text. The work becomes "accessible" – a quality that, according to the author, is the foremost criterion for good literature ("to make accessible perceptions that the people need", Silko says in an interview [Stories, 22]). While Silko's idea of accessibility might seem farfetched to the uninitiated reader, cultural barriers are less intimidating when we understand the circular pattern of the narrative. Repetition, which is central to oral presentations, plays a significant role in structuring the text.

As Silko explains in the introduction to her recent collection of essays, *Yellow Woman* and *A Beauty of the Spirit* (1996), much of her work is concerned with "the written word as a picture of the spoken word" (14), with the visualisation of narrative in both written text and image. Walter Ong theorises this effect in *Orality and Literacy*, describing how in the transformation of the spoken word into written text, the aural event

becomes an object, a series of marks fixed on the two-dimensional space of the page and arrested in time. Thus, he argues, literacy contributes to an objectivist paradigm that conceives reality as something visualisable; it equates consciousness with visual activity, and anchors knowledge in two-dimensional space. Silko's writing may be understood in part as an attempt to extend the written word beyond the surface of the page, not in order to move away from the visual paradigm, but to alter the visual process of reading in order to reconnect the written word with the dynamic, multisensory, and multidimensional experience of orality. She writes to transform both the words and the acts of seeing / reading, to recontextualise, to re-embody and to "reworld" them.

Silko translates the oral tradition and experience into the literary form of the dominant culture to keep that tradition alive by recreating it (in fractal repetitions of self-similar but never identical patterns); at the same time she recreates the written words, translating it into a new form that makes the patterns of ongoing creation visible and thus provides a map for the future. In one of *Ceremony* most often quoted passages, which occurs early in the book at Tayo's first meeting with Laguna medicine man Ku'oosh, Silko describes Ku'oosh language:

> The word he chose to express "fragile" was filled with the intricacies of a continuing process, and with a strength inherent in spider webs woven across paths through sand, hills were early in the morning the sun becomes entangled in each filament of web. It

> took a long time to explain the fragility and intricacy because no word exists along, and the reason for choosing each word had to be explained with a story about why it must be said this certain way. (*Ceremony* 35)

Like thought and speech, stories participate in the flesh of the world, as patterns that are continually reproduced at multiple interdimensional scales by the fractal and unfolding of ongoing creation. As the days are written in cyclical patterns they are tied to the patterns of the stars and planets. (The same but never identical), so the stories return as "the story that was still being told" (*Ceremony* 258).

Familiarisation of even abstract concepts by substitution with common concrete images and with the embodiments of such qualities are regularly resorted to in oral renderings. As Walter J. Ong suggests in *Orality and Literacy: The Technologising of the Word*:

> In the absence of elaborate analytic categories that depend on writing to structure knowledge at a distance from lived experience, oral cultures must conceptualise and verbalise all their knowledge with more or less close reference to the human life – world, assimilating the alien, objective world to the more immediate, familiar interaction human beings. (42).

The texts under study also reflect the preoccupation with this device especially when the therapeutic powers of Native ways of healing are invoked. In *Slash* as well as *April Raintree* there are characters which amount to thinly disguised manifestations of the awesome potential of the traditional rites. In *Slash* the character of Uncle Joe is depicted in such a way as to highlight the virtues he represents rather than his physical attributes as in the case of the other characters in the novel. The author Jeannette Armstrong herself accedes in the interview published in *Contemporary Challenges*:

> [...] I'd drawn parts of the character that I present [...] That part about Joe that should be coming clear is his mind and his ability as a spiritual medicine man to work with. So you never really know if he's tall or short or clean-cut or whatever – and that's intentional (17).

In *April Raintree* the enigmatic figure of the Thunder Woman who brings about a volte-face in the central character of the title is an abstraction of the mysterious yet potent powers that she embodies. Rather than trying to covey this spiritual transformation through the written medium, the author resorts to the ambience generated.

> Her gaze held mine for I saw in her eyes that deep simple wisdom of which Cheryl had spoken. And I no longer found her touch distasteful. Without speaking a word to me, the woman imparted

her message with her eyes. She had seen something in me that was special, something that was deserving of her respect [...] I had this overwhelming feeling that a mystical spiritual occurrence had just taken place. (140).

The endings of Native narratives have certain peculiarities in keeping with the oral elements that they necessarily entail. As in oral presentations, the role of the connoisseur is not overlooked in its written form, rather it is emphasised to lend the text multiplicity of meanings. An expert on this unique feature, Lee Meracle, herself a major writer, explains:

> Like in a European story there is a plot – that is, something happens, events occur, the characters are caught in a dilemma – and there is a conclusion. The difference is that the reader is as much as a part of the story as the teller. Most of our stories don't have orthodox 'conclusions'; that is left to the listeners, who be trust will draw useful lessons from the story – not necessarily the lesson we wish them to draw, but all conclusions are considered valid. The listeners are drawn into a dilemma and are expected in some point of their lives to actively work themselves out of it (11).

This comment holds true especially in the two Native texts in focus. Both end optimistically with the emergence of the succeeding generation – even their names reflect the sense of expectation: 'The little chief' Marlon

in *Slash* and Henry Liberty Raintree in *April Raintree*. But the endings are rather inconclusive and open in the sense that no definite deduction is expected to the drawn from them.

In her article "Transmitting our Identity as Indian Writers" Beth Cuthand aptly sums up the key objective behind Native literary compositions in general:

> [...] We come from an oral tradition where our values, our world views, and our system of beliefs are transmitted orally. In this process, there is something more than information being transmitted: there's energy, there's strength [...] and that's what's important in teaching young people about their identity. What we're doing as Indian writers is taking that tradition and putting it physically into paper and getting a broader distribution those stories, because it's really important for us, in terms of our continuing existence, that we transmit our identity and strength from one generation to another. (54).

Most of the oral narratives are written from the narrator's perspective. The presence as well as participation of the storyteller within the narrative is quite forceful. The devise of introducing a narrator – protagonist fits in the pattern of biographical writing associated with the oral tradition as explained by Agnes Grant:

> The oral narrative style of intimate interaction with the readers, the lack of background detail, little descriptions of emotions, understatement and imperfect English, may all be found (in Native biographies). They often show a strong sense of community and the subjects attachment to a specific 'home' location. Community rituals ceremonies and customs are lovingly recalled and described. The uniqueness of the lifestyle is portrayed by the language the writers uses and the context that has been selected. (79).

Texts like *Slash* and *April Raintree* employ linguistic variation, Native rituals and ceremonies with the identity of the protagonist related to his community. With these linguistic variations, the oral renditions also offer a cyclical structure to the writing. This is important for the retention of memory as well as recollection of thoughts by the narrator.

Post-colonial theorists like Tiffin observe that the use of myth and oral narrative strategies are potent devices for contesting the western mode of representation. Since the colonisers had fabricated their history the myths served as a mechanism to counter the "master narratives" tainted by White beliefs and value systems. This is precisely what Silko and Slipperjack try to do in their writing and create alter/native narrative mode.

This reinvention of cultural history and mythology is essential to recover the true Native identity buried under layers of ignorance since colonial rule. In their fictional account, these writers use narrative modes which approximate oral traditions of their societies with myths and legends not for the purpose of, "containing western explanation as a moment in illusory time", but for "intensifying the resonances of tyrannical assumptions behind that explanation" (Dhar 151). In other words this strategy is part of the process of deculturation, in post colonial North America to resolve the continued identity problematic of the Native people.

Like storytelling, autobiography is an important mode of narration for the Native people. The next chapter attempts to look at the writings of Beatrice Culleton and Lee Meracle from the vantage point of autobiography with thrust on gender politics. These two writers problematise feminine search for their identity by contesting and critiquing the hegemonic patriarchal power structures, colonialism and institutional forms of racism.

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