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Violence, Resistance, and Myth in the Texts of Silko, Kingston, Mukherjee, and Erdrich

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, the City University of New York

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Abstract

Violence as Resistance to Adaptation in the Texts of Silko, Kingston, Mukherjee, and Erdrich

by

Maureen Markel

Adviser: Professor Neal Tolchin

My thesis examines literary violence in the works of four American women writers from distinct ethnic groups: *Ceremony* (Leslie Marmon Silko); *Woman Warrior* (Maxine Hong Kingston); *Jasmine* (Bharati Mukherjee); and *Tracks* and *Love Medicine* (Louise Erdrich). I propose that the violence in each work is rooted in feminism and functions as an expression of revolt against patriarchal suppression. Each author's shaping of violence relates directly to her ethnic background. Both Kingston, who is Chinese-American, and Mukherjee, an East-Indian immigrant, have grown up in a misogynist society where the very act of writing defies their culture's admonishment to be silent and passive. Their characters fight centuries-old traditions of repression, as well as the prejudice of the dominant white society, to develop selfhood and independence. Erdrich, of Chippewa and German-American descent, explores generations of Chippewas living on land reservations where violence issues from the context of a dysfunctional community and its ensuing

problems–alcoholism, abandoned children, lives displaced and extracted from their roots. Her description of the rape and abuse of women echoes the rape of Indian land and heritage. Silko, who also writes from a mixed-blood heritage (Laguna/Mexican/white), differs from the others in that her culture is matriarchal. Thus, her assessment of the role of violence contrasts theirs: she represents violence not as a tool of justice and empowerment but as a form of witchery corrupting those who employ it.

Despite the ethnic differences of the authors, their novels share similar themes: violence and resistance in cultural adaptations; the clash of values and traditions; the quest for self-definition in the context of repressive and conflicting social values; generational and gender conflict; nature as a reflection of internal violence and as a metaphor for reconciliation and transcendence; the potential of violence to intimidate, diminish, corrupt as well as to liberate and empower. Moreover, in creating her work of mixed genre, each author subverts and revises a traditional literary form: the memoir (*Woman Warrior*), the Western (*Ceremony*), the female *bildüngsroman* (*Jasmine*) and the Christian life of the saints (*Tracks, Love Medicine*). My study will demonstrate how the use of violence in each work effectively critiques and redefines the particular genre and how it shapes the reader's consciousness of gender and social justice both within the specific ethnic context and within the larger framework of the dominant American culture.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to the memory of my mother, Catherine Cox Gallagher,

who is my model and inspiration, and whose love has provided

the foundation and guiding light of my life.

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Introduction

The prevalence of violence in the writing of Leslie Marmon Silko, Maxine Hong Kingston, Bharati Mukherjee, and Louise Erdrich raises multiple questions about literary violence. What are its sources? What function does it serve? How much of it stems from racial bigotry or from personal fear? How much is political? How does each writer's interpretation of violence describe the process of acculturation or resistance to that process? I propose to demonstrate that the violence in *Ceremony* (Silko), *Woman Warrior* (Kingston), *Jasmine* (Mukherjee) and Erdrich's novels *Tracks*, and *Love Medicine* has its roots in feminism, and functions as an expression of revolt against patriarchal suppression as experienced within the writer's own ethnic culture and within the broader American context. Moreover, in creating her work of mixed genre, each author subverts and revises a traditional form—the Christian life of the saints (*Tracks, Love Medicine*), the Western (*Ceremony*), the woman's *bildüngsroman* (*Jasmine*), and the memoir (*Woman Warrior*). My study will explore both how the use of violence in each work reflects the writer's reading of the immigration/assimilation experience and how each work effectively critiques and redefines the respective genre.

These particular writers represent four distinct ethnic groups at various stages of "Americanization," specifically an immigrant East Indian (Mukherjee); a first generation Chinese American (Kingston); and two Native Americans (Silko and Erdrich) whose different tribal cultures have long been part of American history but who have remained outside western literary traditions. The way each author shapes her treatment of violence relates directly to her ethnic

background as demonstrated by Kingston and Mukherjee who are writing from within distinctly misogynist traditions. Kingston's protagonist has grown up in a culture that assaults women with words and sayings ("Girls are maggots in the rice." "It is more profitable to raise geese than daughters.") and she tries to adapt to a culture that labels her as "gook" and "chink." For Kingston the very act of writing is a rebellion against her mother's enjoinder "not to tell" and against her culture's admonishment to be silent and passive. Because her not-telling would make her a participant in the continued repression of women, Kingston assumes the persona of a warrior and engages in violence to disclose and reform the injustices she experiences in both her Chinese and American cultures.

Beginning at birth Mukherjee's heroine is taught her worthlessness when her mother attempts to strangle her to save her from the affliction of an undowried future. Jasmine has to fight a centuries-old tradition of repression, one that encourages wife-beating and *sati*, to develop some degree of selfhood and independence. Mukherjee portrays an India in which life appears cheap, violence random, and coercion and repression commonplace. At the same time, the sudden eruptions of violence in Jasmine's adopted land attest to the injustices latent in its institutions. Mukherjee's use of violence attempts to connect Asia and the West in their political and social instability.

Erdrich, who is half Chippewa and half German American, explores generations of Chippewas, many of mixed blood, living on land reservations. It is an expressly patriarchal society and Erdrich's description of the rape and abuse of women is echoed in the rape of Indian land and heritage. While she shares with Kingston and Mukherjee the centrality of strong female characters who empower themselves through violence, several of Erdrich's characters are ultimately self-

destructive. Displaced from their tribal lands, living in a largely welfare manner, Christianized, and educated off-reservation in government schools, her characters' ancestral memories are dimmed, their native language and traditions forgotten. The violence Erdrich describes issues from the context of a dysfunctional community and its ensuing problems—alcoholism, abandoned children, lives extracted from their roots. Silko, who also writes from a mixed-blood heritage (Laguna/Mexican/white), differs from the other authors in that her culture is matriarchal, and it is perhaps because of this that her assessment of the role of violence contrasts theirs. Unlike Mukherjee and Erdrich, she does not depict violence as an instrument of justice and empowerment but represents it as a form of witchery which destroys those who engage in it.

Despite the ethnic differences of the authors, their novels possess similar thematic and structural elements that provide enriched cross-textual readings. One of the most striking elements of similarity is in their use of mythic figures as models of empowerment for their characters. In each case, these authors exploit a myth or mythic representation to displace a central patriarchal text such as the bible or an accepted social construct which exerts power over women. Richard Slotkin in *Gunfighter Nation* explains how myth-making exists for the culture that it serves: created and transmitted by particular classes of people, myth-making processes "are therefore responsive to the politics of class differences" (8). He might well have added "responsive to the politics of gender differences." The writers in this study resurrect (Silko, Mukherjee) or recreate (Erdrich, Kingston) myths which inspire their protagonists to heroic action. With the exception of Silko, they deploy these myths to propel their female protagonists to violent action.

A second thread that links these authors—and distinguishes them from more mainstream American writers—is the intermingling, often violent, of natural and supernatural events. Silko's

Tayo is guided by the mysterious Ts'eh, human enough to have sex with him, but transcendent in her ability to appear and disappear at will, and powerful enough to control earth's forces. Erdrich's characters are transported by their spiritual visions. Jasmine's entire life is shaped by a holy man's prophecy, and Kingston's physically powerful Brave Orchid battles an equally powerful ghost and barely escapes intact. Carpenter and Kolmar note that the sense of continuity between natural and supernatural is often nurtured in non-Eurocentric cultural traditions (12). Thus these American women writers with their roots in minority cultures do not privilege formal realism over the unexplained but rather integrate the supernatural into their characters' lives.

Additionally, all of these writers explore violence and resistance in cultural adaptations, the conflict that stems from the clash of values and traditions; the quest for self-definition in the context of repressive and conflicting social values; generational and gender conflict; nature as a reflection of internal violence and as a metaphor for reconciliation and transcendence. All of them concentrate on the *idea* of violence itself and explore its complexity, its ability to intimidate, diminish, corrupt as well as its potential for liberation and empowerment. Moreover, they also share a sense of humor, a sense of the ridiculous, and although critical of their native cultures, their criticisms are informed by love and sympathy.

Reed Dasenbrook warns against the tendency, when studying such bicultural writers, to deny their biculturality by privileging one of their formative cultures in the name of authenticity or the other in the name of universality. This temptation, he notes, is greater when the cultures have not melded but are still separate and in a state of tension. Dasenbrook attributes these writers' experimentation with genre specifically to the fact that they straddle two worlds. "If genres are cultural constructs, these bicultural writers create works of mixed genres to represent that

biculturality" (*Genre* 317). Indeed, there are two ways in which the biculturality of these writers is evident in their disruption of genre. First, they all use a non-traditional, non-linear structure; and secondly, they tend to fuse genre types. Erdrich shifts time and perspective with each chapter and Mukherjee darts back and forth across continents undercutting the rigidity of time and space. Kingston mixes myth, memoir, and fiction while Silko interweaves prose with extended poetic narratives of native myths that provide perspective for her protagonist's journey. In all the works this inventiveness results not in a kaleidoscopic image of reality but in a sense of life that expands beyond the constraints of a particular time and social setting. Moreover, while emphasizing their ethnic background, these writers also explicitly state in essays and interviews that they are claiming America as their literary sphere and that they aspire to transform and expand the American literary heritage. Because of this, it is important to situate their use of violence within the framework of American literature.

It is not surprising that a nation whose very foundation is based on revolution has been obsessed with the subject of violence. Early colonial historical narratives contain detailed descriptions of battles, scalpings, tortures, deaths by disease and natural elements. Mary Rowlandson's personal account, posthumously published in 1682, *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restauration of Mrs Mary Rowlandson*, became what Marshall Walker describes as "the first American best-seller by a woman" (21) and established a new genre of captivity narratives popular until the late nineteenth century. Rowlandson's narrative is a catalog of brutality and butchery, a tale of terror and sorrow that she eventually reads as an instance of divine intervention: "For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth" (Heb 12:6). This linking of religion to violence is pervasive is 17th Century American religious writers. The poet Edward Taylor described his world as "filld up to

the brim / With Sins, Deaths, Divills, Crowding men to Hell" (Meditation 19) and imaged salvation as a brutal assault by God:

> Blesst Lord, my King, where is thy golden Sword?
>
> Oh! Sheath it in the bowells of my Sin.
>
> Slay my Rebellion . . . .
>
> Breake off my black brire Claws: mee scrape, and pare . . .
>
> Kill my Hypocrisie, Pride Poison, Gall (Meditation 16).

A century later, Jonathan Edwards delivered his most famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," in which he insinuated a parallel between the wrath of God and the familiar fear of Indian attack. In the most notable passage of the sermon, by his analogy of God to man and man to "hateful venomous serpent," Edwards establishes the relationship of man to God as one of violent enmity:

> The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the first, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. (336)

In addition to its use as a metaphor of the individual's spiritual journey—her descent into "Hell" and eventual redemption—violence becomes the sacrament of God's favor. Rowlandson, for example, interprets her affliction as an indication of God's particular love for her. In turn, this

manifest love of God sanctions violence toward those not so chosen. Aligned with the white colonizers, God delivers his Christian faithful from the clutches of the Indians, imaged as "devils," "hell-hounds," "wolves," "barbarous creatures." Her resistance to the Indians and her rescue is a vindication of her virtue and of the values they symbolize. However, by viewing her sufferings primarily as a supernatural intervention to chasten and purify her from her vanities and bad habits (such as the occasional enjoyment of a tobacco pipe). Rowlandson extracts her entire experience from its social implications, and by so doing skews its significance. In *Ceremony* Silko reverses the captivity experience and clearly relates violence to its social context within the Native American experience. And in *Tracks*, Erdrich portrays a character disfigured spiritually and socially by her devotion to the vengeful God whom Taylor and Edwards praised.

The continued emphasis on violence is apparent in much of the great fiction of the nineteenth and twentieth century, in the works of Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, Crane, Hemingway, Faulkner, and Steinbeck but it discards the vocabulary of religious fervor submission to a vocabulary of individual autonomy and political domination. Advancing the argument of *Regeneration Through Violence*, Richard Slotkin in his recent book *Gunfighter Nation* emphasizes the uniqueness of what he calls the "Myth of Violence" in the American literary tradition. He locates this myth within the "Myth of the Frontier," the "oldest and most characteristic American myth expressed in a body of literature, folklore, ritual, historiography, and polemics produced over a period of three centuries" (10). Slotkin explains the centrality of violence in its relationship to the historical development of the frontier: colonizers had to struggle against an unfamiliar environment and against natives accustomed to the wilderness. The colonies grew by displacing native societies and enslaving Africans to advance the fortunes of white society and by liberating themselves from

European restrictions. "The compleat 'American' of the Myth was one who had defeated both the 'savage' of the western wilderness and the metropolitan regime of authoritarian politics and class privilege" (11).

One of the questions Slotkin raises that is significant for the works in this study is whether the recurring themes of violence in American literature have any significance in reflecting the realities of our society? Slotkin, among others, argues that we must distinguish literary from political violence. Although much of our political and social history is distinguished by a particular kind of violence, he writes, it is not actual violence that is responsible for literary violence. Neither the slave trade nor the exploitation/ extermination of natives by the colonizers was an exclusively American undertaking. He supports his argument by claiming that the most horrific violence of the twentieth century—including the mass genocides—are rooted not in America's history but in that of Europe, Asia, and Africa.

> What is distinctively "American" is not necessarily the amount or kind of violence that characterizes our history but the mythic significance we have assigned to the kinds of violence we have actually experienced, the forms of symbolic violence we imagine or invent, and the political uses to which we put that symbolism (12).

Other analysts claim that literary violence cannot be separated from its political roots. In their introduction to *The Violence of Representation,* Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse assert the continuity between historical, material, and representational violence.

> We have offered a distinction between two modalities of violence: that which is "out there" in the world, as opposed to that which is exercised though words upon

> things in the world, often by attributing violence. But our ultimate goal is to demonstrate that the two cannot in fact be distinguished (9).

Still other critics remind us that while literary violence bears testimony to the continuing violence of American life, we cannot ignore the fictional conventions used in representing life or the pleasures derived by both authors and audiences from hyperbolic exaggeration. Kenneth Lynn, for example, argues that social scientists, in extracting violent incidents from their literary contexts, "have not taken into account either the mitigating dreams of peace which are threaded through the very bloodiest of our novels and stories, or the comic juxtapositions which take the curse off many of the most unpleasant episodes that the American imagination has ever recorded" (190). David Brion Harris suggests that the seriousness of the violence motif can be easily exaggerated and offers as a more obvious explanation of its popularity "the sheer marketability of imagined violence" (71). He quotes Alexis de Tocqueville's theory that a democratic audience feeds on exaggeration, strong emotionalism, and violent sensationalism. "To hold the attention of the ordinary reader or even of the educated but fatigued mind in search of diversion, a story must be full of suspense, surprise, and startling contrasts. Violence is the cheapest means to a change of pace" (72).

The violence in the works in this study, however, has little in common with the bang-bang-pow popular fiction of writers like Robert Ludlum, John Grisham, Tom Clancy. It functions not as a cheap means to a change of pace, an attempt at diversion and entertainment, but as a disturbing reflection of cultural dis-ease. Although they risk obliterating the distinction between real-life violence and its semiotic expression, Armstrong and Tennenhouse correctly locate the representations of violence within the larger context of social violence. Silko, Kingston, and to a

lesser extent, Mukherjee clearly demonstrate the very concrete ways in which "mythic significance" is symptomatic of social, political, racial, and gender oppression and serve to perpetuate that oppression.

The treatment of violence by these bi-cultural authors also differs from that of African American writers whose description of it is embedded in the history of slavery and repression, whose source is the white's cultural attempt to confine and control, whose central metaphor is that of castration, and whose primary expression of violence is in whippings and lynchings. In her book *Exorcizing Blackness* Trudier Harris argues that black male writers perpetuate the "tradition of ritualized violence" and use their characters in the thematic illustrations of society's problems. Black women writers, she claims, are less graphic in their description of violence, and more interested in moving inwards towards their characters than outward towards the environment which shapes them. If so, then the works of black women writers differ greatly in this respect from those of this study, each of which contains detailed descriptions of ritualized violence that is both graphic and consciously related to the shaping environment.[1] Moreover, the violence these writers describe is not limited to a few common expressions but extends to spouse-beating, verbal and psychological abuse, incest, rape, self-mutilation, ritualized torture, suicide, and murder.

Nineteenth and twentieth century women novelists write violence into their works. Brutal descriptions are abundant in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; Edith Wharton and Kate Chopin probe violence turned inward against oneself in the most desperate form of self-

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[1] One might argue that the description of the environment which shapes the violence in *Beloved* and *The Color Purple* shares the same "tradition of ritualized violence" apparent in the works of black male writers.

deprecation: suicide. But the violence they describe is occasional and purposeful. It does not have the jarring effect of randomness and unpredictability that marks its occurrence in *Jasmine, Love Medicine, Tracks*, and *Ceremony*. Moreover, it is the female characters in three of the four works who are openly aggressive. In fact, three of the female characters are killers, one a multiple-murderer. And their instrument of choice is not the subtle poisons suitable to the "daughters of Eve," but knives, swords, and in one case, bare hands. This provides a wholly different perspective from the traditional woman-as-victim theme. There is a striking contrast between the classic rape scene in Richardson's *Clarissa* where the drugged heroine once violated suffers a tedious and seemingly endless descent into virtuous death, and Jasmine's restructuring of herself as the goddess Kali to take murderous revenge upon her violator or Pauline's transformation of her rapist/lover into the Devil she must vanquish and destroy.

However, it is not because they are women who kill that these characters are unique: after all, there are literary models of murdering females in American fiction, figures such as the homicidal aunts in Joseph Kesselring's *Arsenic and Old Lace*. But as Margaret Hallissey points out, such murderous acts as theirs do not disrupt or subvert standards of feminine behavior because these maiden aunts dispense their poison within the limits of prescribed female conduct. In fact, their actions issue from nurturing motives. "For the Brewster sisters, permanent virgins, poison is innocent because it is not an instrument of power, especially sexual power, but of subservience. They can kill eleven men without being much of a threat at all because they are operating within the patriarchal order" (3).[2]

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[2] Otto Pollak proffers the rather silly premise that women's violent crimes are more deceitful than men's simply because of the way human bodies are sexually constructed. A man's erect penis is visually apparent while a woman can feign orgasm and thus practice deceit in sexual relations. "This interplay

In recent decades, however, a new female heroine has developed in women's detective fiction, characters like Sara Paretsky's V. I. Warshawski and Sue Grafton's Kinsey Millhone who do defy and subvert prescribed female behavior. As Maureen Reddy points out, none of these women ever needs rescuing: they fight back against those who try to victimize them, thus preserving themselves and refusing the conventionally feminine role of victim. Like their male counterparts, they use their fists as well as their wits to overcome dangerous situations; yet unlike male detectives they neither initiate nor take pleasure in violence. More significantly, by bloodying their opponents and emerging victorious these women do not prove their femininity (as the male detective does his masculinity), but instead call it into question (112-3).

While the female characters of the novels in this study resemble these detectives in their gumption and self-sufficiency, they differ in two significant ways. First, on occasion they both initiate and take pleasure in violence; and second, they are more conventionally feminine. It is impossible to imagine Warshawski or Millhone practicing a walk that is "American feminine" as Kingston's and Mukherjee's characters do or becoming obsessed with fashionable clothes as Jasmine does in New York. The protagonists of my study are neither tough nor hard-boiled as are the female detectives, and unlike the latter, they usually assume the traditional roles of wife and mother. The fact that they do so makes the violence in their works all the more disturbing. Andre Brink remarks that the world in which literature situates itself "has traditionally been, and is now more than ever, one of violent confrontations, of power relations, of the oppressions and exploitations and appropriations that mark racist, sexist or religious intolerance" (2). That the

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between physical and cultural factors seems, therefore, actually to result in a greater lack of sincerity in women than in men" (11).

violence in the fiction of Silko, Mukherjee, Kingston, and Erdrich takes place not in the masculine world of crime scenes and detectives but within the family, within the religious group, within our educational institutions, and indeed within a law-governed society reveals the hidden oppressions and exploitations characteristic of the world in which these authors, and their characters, reside.

Linda Bell in formulating a feminist ethics in a society pervaded by violence—much of which is directed against women—recognizes that there is a legitimate place for an active anger, one that inspires reformist action and revolutionary consciousness. Yet she also recognizes that violence is problematic: in order to overcome systems of oppression, one must sometimes engage in violence when doing so is the only way to resist the violence of others and to move beyond an oppressive situation. Avoiding all violence is likely to strengthen the oppressive situation, and thus condone the violence that permeates it. On the other hand, we "cannot undermine the goal of a society in which individuals would not be violated and used merely as a way to achieve the ends of others" (160). In other words, while the goal for justice and personal freedom may require violence so as not to compromise the goal itself, violence must not thereby be endorsed as an acceptable means. Bell draws the rather equivocal conclusion that feminists must condemn violence while simultaneously acknowledging that it is sometimes necessary. Although she is analyzing a rather limited view of violence, Bell's reflections help to illuminate a key paradox in the writings of three of the authors in this study–Silko, Erdrich, and Kingston: an apparently contradictory stance in which they alternately endorse violence as empowering and repudiate it as dehumanizing.

> Acting against the oppression may of necessity involve violence; but not acting against the oppression affirms, collaborates with, and even reinforces the oppression and its violence (189).

It is understood of course that the violence within a work of fiction is deliberately crafted to dramatize conflict (personal, racial, gender, or class). Although shaped by a fictional voice, vividly evoked scenes of violence have the power, as Michael Kowalewski observes, to "shatter social complacency or literary convention" (25). Precisely because they are shaped and controlled by the imagination they can point to conditions in social reality in an interpretative, a critical, or even an accusatory manner. This study will show how each of the authors attempts to shape the violence within her work in order to fuel the revolutionary consciousness of which Bell speaks.

Chapter 1

Violence and Religious Vision

The kingdom of heaven
has suffered violence
and the violent
take it by force.

Matthew 11: 12

In the classic American novel, the protagonist leaves home, moving away from birthplace and family in order to establish identity and a mature self. William Bevis calls this a "leaving plot" and contrasts it to the "homing plot" typical of the Native American novel where the protagonist, having left the Indian culture to embrace white society, experiences emptiness and a loss of self (584-5). Characters like Tayo in *Ceremony* and Abel in Momaday's *The House Made of Dawn* achieve wholeness only by returning to tribal lands and native ways. In the latter novel, Abel summarizes the comfort and security that the return to the reservation imparts:

> You felt good out there, like everything was all right and still and cool inside of you . . . You were coming home like a man, on a black and beautiful horse . . . . And at first light you went out and knew where you were. And it was the same, the way you remembered it, the way you knew it had to be; and nothing had changed. The first light, you thought, that little while before sunup; it would always be the same out there. That was the way it was, that's all. (169)

Louise Erdrich, however, in her novels *Love Medicine* and *Tracks*, shows that neither conformity to contemporary Anglo values nor a retreat to native culture provides access to

wholeness.[3] In part this is because the traditional culture has been mongrelized. Scott Sanders notes that the inroading of white culture has uprooted the ancient skills in the Chippewa tribes. As the old men die off they take with them the wisdom of the woods, of tracking and hunting. And as the old women die, they take with them the wisdom of the spirit world and the gift of healing (*Studies* 6-7). Characters like Lipsha who inherit the healing touch seem to possess it in some incomplete or inept manner. In both novels Erdrich's strongest characters are survivors who recognize that the way they remember their past tribal life is no longer the way it is or will be; they can risk letting go of the remembered past and try to fashion, in their mixed culture, a lifestyle that juggles traditional values with contemporary customs. One way that Erdrich distinguishes between the adaptation or alienation of her characters is in relation to the Catholic Church and the adoption of Catholic models of behavior. Erdrich shows that conformity to these models can result in paranoia and insanity as evident in the character of Pauline. But total disregard for the adopted tribal Catholicism implies the inability to evolve and leads to another form of alienation, exemplified by Fleur. The most successful characters, Marie and Lulu, are able both to resist and negotiate. They sift values and customs, rejecting some, ignoring some, embracing some. This ability to "pick and choose and keep and discard" is itself, according to Erdrich, one of the strengths of Indian culture (Interview, "Whatever" 79). This chapter will concentrate on the spiritual conflict involved in the tribe's transformation as it is reflected in the complex relationships between Pauline and Fleur, and

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[3] Many critics point out that Lipsha's "return" at the end of the novel is a repetition of the familiar returning theme common to many Native American plots, a movement toward wholeness, back to family, tribe, land. But Lipsha's family remains one marked by dysfunction and confusion, his tribe mixed-blood and semi-assimilated, the reservation pocked with cheap government housing, old-age institutions, and factories that produce chintzy plastic tomahawks. Even the ancient burial grounds have been renamed, deforested and de-ghosted in the course of civilization's "progress."

Pauline and Marie; it will then explore the sources that form the foundation for Pauline's/ Leopolda's religious practices and show how Erdrich subverts these and critiques the virgin-martyr model of female spirituality.

Erdrich introduces the reader to Pauline in *Love Medicine*, published in 1984, where she emerges as a fully professed nun.[4] In this novel she plays a cameo role, engaging in a bizarre spiritual battle with Marie over the salvation of the young girl's soul. It is only in her later published *Tracks* (1988) that the reader comes to understand the source of the love-hate relationship between Pauline and Marie, and the ways in which Pauline has been disfigured by her fanatical adherence to Catholic norms of behavior. In the latter work Erdrich develops Pauline's character more fully, tracing her development from a 15-year-old adolescent to a mature woman.

Most critics interpret Pauline's affiliation with Christianity as the confirmation of her self-hatred, the reflection of her "invisibility" and alienation. Such an interpretation, however, overlooks the fact that long before Pauline affiliates herself with the Church, she is presented as confused and alienated, a girl who wants to be other than she is, suffering, as Laura Tanner expresses it, from both racial and gender disempowerment (118). As a half-breed, Pauline is caught in the trap of cultural definition and attempts to reclaim her subjectivity by identifying herself completely as white. Her words "I saw through the eyes of the world outside us. I would not speak our language" (14) reveal the split in her consciousness as she both affirms and disclaims her racial heritage. "*I* would not speak *our* language". This internalization of the vision of the

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[4] Erdrich resequenced and added two previously unpublished chapters in her 1993 edition of the book. It is this new and more definitive text that will serve as the primary reference for this chapter.

dominant culture that redefines *us* as Other binds her "to a destructive vision of herself as not-white" (Tanner 119).

Just as Pauline views her own racial features through the dominant culture, she sees her sexual nature through the eyes of men, eyes which strip her of her feminine traits. "I was fifteen, alone, and so poor-looking I was invisible to . . . the men in the shop" (15). In a patriarchal society, Mary Ann Doane observes, "to desexualize the female body is ultimately to deny its very existence" (79). Stripped of the identifying characteristics of race and gender, Pauline consistently describes herself in terms that accent her insubstantiality. Thus her self-description issues from a perceived outsider-status that explicitly denies her Indian heritage. Pauline demonstrates this rejection of her Indianness in various ways. She refuses to speak her native language, and identifies herself solely with the white half of her mother and with her grandfather who is "pure Canadian" (14). She refuses to bead or work with quills and begs to be sent to the white town of Argus to learn lace-making from the nuns. When her father warns her, "You'll fade out there . . . You won't be an Indian once you return" (14), she welcomes his words as a blessing. Fading out, shadow, invisibility are virtues in Pauline's perspective. So engrossed is she in the notion of shadow that she projects that image onto external objects, even those that are singularly concrete, as for example, when she equates the white steeple of the Catholic Church with a thin shadow (14). Further, she depicts herself as Fleur's shadow, invisible to men because of her plainness, "a skinny big-nosed girl with staring eyes" (16). However, Pauline uses her invisibility as a weapon, cunningly fading into corners to observe unseen what those around her say and do, storing their secrets to augment her own power.

In the opening paragraphs of her narrative, Pauline discloses her complex feelings toward Fleur, who is both nemesis and surrogate mother. In fact, Pauline's own story of her self and her journey is so inextricably interwoven with—and as Pauline sees it, overshadowed by—that of Fleur that she feels compelled to destroy the older woman spiritually to achieve a sense of selfhood. She describes Fleur as a witch who sucks the life from those who would save her, who is aligned with Misshepeshu, a water god who destroys men; as a woman who toys with evil, dresses like a man, and exercises some "half forgotten medicine, [studying] ways we shouldn't talk about" (13). Although Pauline blames the devastation that took place in the small town of Argus on Fleur's witchery, she holds the Catholic Church (specifically excluding other Christian churches) indirectly responsible for attracting Fleur with its tall steeple that beckoned to her across the fields of flat wheat. Pauline compares the attraction of Fleur to the spire to that of lightening's attraction to a lone tree (12-13), and in that analogy Pauline establishes the antagonism between Fleur and Catholicism in terms of aggressor (Fleur) and victim (the Church), a victim which Pauline herself will later champion. Moreover, the transformation in her imagination of a concrete white object into an insubstantial dark one ("that shadow thin as a needle") associated with the Church suggests that she too, tall, thin and "wholly white" is the target, along with the Church, of Fleur's "raw power."

Since Fleur has no narrative of her own, Erdrich represents her through the eyes of Pauline and old Nanapush. The reader is alerted early-on to the prejudice and inconsistency of Pauline's perspective so that there is an incongruence between what Pauline says and what the reader concludes. Pauline tells us, for example, that Fleur attracted Pauline's young cousin Russell the way she attracted all men—with deliberation and cunning, swaying them, sotting them, drawing

them close and casting them off with equal indifference. Transparent beneath her narrative, however, is the image of a woman who befriends the little boy, mothering him with small kindnesses and protecting him from Pauline's teasing and kicking. Fleur emerges, despite Pauline's bias, as an uncomplaining, hard-working young woman who is discounted by the men she works with until she engages with them in a card game and challenges their sense of superiority.

Jealousy and fear are the two emotions that inspire Pauline's relationship with Fleur. Part of Pauline's fear stems from Fleur's association with Misshepeshu, the powerful and destructive water god who lurks beneath the surface of Lake Matchimanito. Even when describing Fleur's physical attributes, Pauline insinuates fish-like qualities; she emphasizes her broad curved shoulders, her "hips fishlike, slippery, narrow," and uses other predatory and animal images—sly brown eyes, strong and sharp white teeth, braids like animals' tails. Pauline notes that her own spiritual acuity gives her insight into Fleur's real nature, whereas the men "were blinded, they were stupid, they saw her only in the flesh" (18). Jealous of Fleur's ability to attract men and fearful of her spiritual power, Pauline devotes her energies toward extinguishing Fleur's influence. Five incidents, in particular, demonstrate this jealousy-fear relationship: Fleur's gang-rape; Pauline's vicarious seduction of Fleur's lover, Eli Kashpaw; her roles in the death of Fleur's baby and Fleur's curing ceremony; and her death-battle with Fleur's Manitou, Misshepeshu.

In the first incident, the scene of Fleur's rape by the three butchermen in Argus is muted, played off-stage as it were, its horror prefigured in Lily's wild fight with the angered sow just before his attack on Fleur. All the violence of the rape is displaced onto the battle with the pig which thus becomes a metaphor of the rape. The intimate sexual images—embracing, squeezing,

dancing, lunging—combine with brutal ones—scraping, striking, biting—to create a surreal and foreboding preamble to Fleur's sexual assault.

> She [the pig] plunged at Lily's thick waist and snatched a mouthful of shirt. She lunged again, caught him lower so that he grunted in pained surprise . . . . She rolled, striking out with her knife-sharp hooves and Lily gathered himself upon her, took her foot-long face by the ears, and scraped her snout and cheeks against the trestles of the pen . . . She reared, shrieked, and then he squeezed her so hard that they leaned into each other and posed in a standing embrace . . . . She sank her black fangs into his shoulder, clasping him, dancing him forward backward through the pen . . . . Their steps picked up pace, went wild. The two dipped as one, box-stepped . . . She ran her split foot through his hair. He grabbed her kinked tail. (25)

In this scene the pig is portrayed as the more powerful of the two. Lily only moves away when the pig, growing bored with the match, releases him. Although the pig is a stand-in for Fleur, and although her power is emphasized in the novel, almost in quasi-mythical terms, she is vulnerable in this setting. Capable of casting spells on her enemies, of outmaneuvering these same men in card games, of causing the death of those who oppose her, of assuming the powerful animal shapes of the wolf and bear, Fleur is unable to move outside of her female body in this most intimate of assaults. This is a defining moment for Pauline who witnesses Fleur's sexual violation in the context of gender disempowerment.

Twice Pauline admits she could have saved Fleur from being raped, but chose instead the role of silent onlooker. "I closed my eyes and put my hands on my ears, so there is nothing more to

describe but what I couldn't block out: those yells from Russell, Fleur's hoarse breath, so loud it filled me, her cry in the old language and our names repeated over and over among the words" (26). Paradoxically, it is Pauline who is the more traumatized by the incident. Her own invisibility enables her to identify herself with others so intimately that she can project herself into their body and, in some mystical sense, become them. Later in the novel, she describes the assault on Fleur as her own rape. At the actual event, she shut her eyes; as she relives it, she becomes the staring witness forced to see "when the men slapped Fleur's mouth, beat her, entered and rode her." She appropriates Fleur's body and experiences the violence of the rape as her own. "I felt all. My shrieks poured from her mouth and my blood from her wounds" (66). Assaulted in Fleur's body, Pauline strikes back. Although she relates that Fleur retaliates by causing a tornado to strike the town on the following day, it is Pauline herself who avenges the rape by locking the perpetrators in the ice-house where two of them freeze to death and the third one rots away limb by limb. Her guilt for her avenging act combines with her guilt for not helping Fleur and turns inward to haunt her dreams where she replays both the rape and her subsequent action. She envisions herself at the last Judgment condemned, her "poor body turned on the devil's wheel" (66).

After the incidents at Argus, both Fleur and Pauline return to the reservation where Pauline intensifies her invisibility by linking herself with that most elusive group, the dead. From this point until her own demise, both Pauline and other characters associate her with images of death, with dust, with Kokoto the owl, and with the scavengers who feed on death. Pauline sits with the dying, prepares their bodies after death, and cooks for the dead one's funeral. But her involvement with them springs less from charitable than predatory motives. "She was the crow of

the reservation," Nanapush related to Lulu. "She lived off our scraps, and she knew us best because the scraps told our story" (54).

Pauline's relationship with death grows more consuming over the years. During her first death-watch, Pauline realizes that she has the power to hasten death. As the child she was guarding lay dying, Pauline reached out her hand into the air between them and "cut where the rope [holding her to life] was frayed down to string." Pauline actually gloats over the death and has to hide her elation from the grieving family. "A cool blackness lifted me, out the room and through the door. I leapt, spun, landed along the edge of the clearing. My body rippled. I tore leaves off a branch and stuffed them into my mouth to smother laughter." Pauline is thus metamorphosed into the crow, fulfilling Nanapush's prediction. "And that is when, twirling dizzily, my wings raked the air, and I rose in three powerful beats and saw what lay below" (68). Just as she despised the men who only saw the attractiveness of Fleur, so now Pauline despises the mourners as stupid and small. "I alone, watching, filled with breath, knew death as a form of grace" (68). Her identification with the crow is intensified when the mourners find Pauline several hours later nested precariously high in an unclimbable tree.

In a contradictory conjunction of characteristics, Pauline states that the experience of death transformed her into one both "devious and holy, dangerously meek and mild" (69). This association of deviousness with sanctity informs (or deforms) her entire spiritual energy. Her meekness masks a growing power as she moves beyond the mere midwife of death to become its inseminator. "I handled the dead until the cold feel of their skin was a comfort, until I no longer bothered to bathe once I left the cabin but touched others with the same hands, passed death on" (69). Pauline adopts the black, cast-off clothing of the nuns, garb that reinforces both the crow

imagery and her invisibility. Becoming a figure both familiar and dreaded, she passes among the inhabitants of the reservation aware that their bodies will eventually come under her power. Sidney Larson and other critics have commented on Pauline's "missionary zeal" for souls. But her enthusiasm for death does not issue from religious conviction or a concern to assist suffering souls to eternal happiness. She admits, in fact, that she doesn't care what happens after life—it is the event itself of death that she finds so pleasurable.

One of the reasons that Pauline affiliates herself with death is that she feels herself rejected by men, a sexual outcast as described earlier. She uses words like "stark" and "bony," "a starved cow," a body "stretched long as a hayrake with no softening grace" to describe her appearance. "My forehead wrinkled because I shut my eyes hard against certain sights. My jaw grew and my mouth sank into it. My nose was long . . . . I was angles and sharp edges, a girl of bent tin." (64, 71). Her association of herself with death rather than life, then, is closely connected to her hatred of her own body and her simultaneous desire for, and repulsion by, sexual intimacy. When the older man Napoleon first attempts to have sex with her, he is unable to complete the act. Instead of attributing his impotence to his age or drunkenness, she understands it as a failure in herself, something about herself that stops him "like a dog sensing the presence of a tasteless poison in its food" (73). She is incapable even of imagining herself in a loving sexual relationship. Her sexual fantasies are both bestial and destructive, reminiscent in their violence, of Lily's engagement with the sow.

> We coupled in a blinding darkness . . . We howled like cats in a manger, dove and bucked like horses in their heat. I snapped him in my beak like a wicket-boned mouse. He crushed me to a powder and spread me against the floor. (73)

Despite her imaginative constructs, Pauline shrank from sexual intimacy. She disliked the weight of Napoleon's hands and the feel of his hardened palms. She disliked seeing herself naked because it made her feel plucked and skinned, transparent, and therefore vulnerable. And she generalizes from her own dissatisfactory sexual experience to the emptiness of all sexual relations: "Now I knew that men and women ground their bodies together, sweat and cried out, wept, shoved their hips in motion and fell quiet. They lay there and looked at the wall, listening as the mice scratched insistently behind the boards" (74).

Pauline's sexual frustration lays the groundwork for her second encounter with Fleur as she challenges the woman's emotional hold over Eli. Jealous of the erotic vitality of Fleur and Eli, Pauline projects herself into their lovemaking. She senses their touching, visualizes their wild and heady love life. "They made my head hurt. A heaviness spread between my legs and ached. The tips of my breasts chafed and wore themselves to points and a yawning eagerness gripped me" (78). Pauline's imaginative voyeurism impels her to destroy their love. Failing to seduce Eli herself, she manipulates her fourteen year old "niece" into seducing him.[5] Although she slips an ancient love potion into Eli's drink, her success lies less in its power than in her own ability to exploit the naive Sophie, plant in her the seeds of sexual desire, dress her seductively, and turn her head with notions of how Eli loves her. Just as she had with Fleur, Pauline projects herself into the young girl, moving out of her own invisibility to feel "what it was like to be inside Sophie's form, not hunched in mine, not blending into the walls . . . " (78). Indeed, so great is her identification with Sophie that Pauline actually feels her physical arousal.

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[5] Pauline dubs herself the "pretend aunt." Actually Sophie is the older daughter of Bernadette (Napoleon's sister) and the woman who adopted Pauline into her home. Thus Pauline betrays both the woman who protected her and the child she was entrusted to protect.

> [Eli] moved his hands up [Sophie's] thighs, beneath the tucked billow of her skirt. She shivered and I dug my fingers through the tough claws of sumac, through the wood-sod, clutched bark, shrank backward into her pleasure. (83)

Beyond taking vicarious pleasure in their experience, Pauline sees both Eli and Sophie as puppets whom she is manipulating, forcing to couple again and again, mechanical as dolls wound past their limit. "I drove Eli to the peak and then took his relief away and made him start again . . . Their breasts and thighs would wrinkle like a toad's, their faces puff, their eyes bloat, yet they would move and move . . . I let them stop eventually" (84).

Unsuccessful in her attempt to sunder Fleur and Eli, Pauline's opposition to Fleur advances beyond the physical and emotional spheres to become a contest between two spiritual powers. Pauline uses the image of a hinge to externalize the opposition between herself and Fleur. The medicine woman has the power to close and open the door that separates and connects the people with their spiritual heritage, a heritage which Pauline deems pagan and corrupt: "between the people and the gold-eyed creature in the Lake" (139). Pauline sees the dwindling power of the Manitous, the spirits who live in trees and bushes and animals, in relation to the growing power of the white spirit, as represented by Christianity. Because the latter institution favors the whites and endows them with strength, while the Indians recede through death and drink, Pauline casts her lot with the winning forces. She imagines herself as the new Moses, "There would have to come a turning, a gathering, another door. And it would be Pauline who opened it, same as she closed the Argus lockers. Not Fleur Pillager" (139). But unlike Moses who led a living, contentious people to the Promised Land, Pauline envisions herself guiding a procession of broken and spiritless corpses.

> I saw the people I had wrapped, the influenza and consumption dead whose hands I had folded. They traveled, lame and bent, with chests darkened from the blood they coughed out of their lungs, filing forward and gathering, taking a different road. A new road . . . hoping to get the best place when the great shining doors, beaten of air and gold, swung open on soundless oiled fretwork to admit them all. (140)[6]

In the third encounter between Pauline and Fleur, the conflict is externalized as a contest between life and death. Pauline, the minister of death, is ministered to by Fleur, whose life-force is represented by her pregnant state. Ironically, it is by mothering Pauline, bathing her stinking body and washing her filthy clothes, that Fleur loses her baby. The exertions of lifting heavy pails of water combines with her weakened state in a winter of starvation to bring on early labor. Previously, Pauline's "victims" were those already dying, but in this scene her very presence seems to provoke an abortion of life. She who is so efficient at the death-bed, becomes confused and disoriented when dealing with the simplest of Fleur's directives: to make an alder broth to stem the bleeding. Nanapush remarked that Pauline was "good at easing souls into death but bad at breathing them to life, afraid of life in fact, afraid of birth, and afraid of Fleur Pillager" (57). It is not apparent to the reader whether she is genuinely confounded or assumes a passive pose in a conscious thwarting of Fleur and of birth. Not only does she fail to prevent Fleur from delivering prematurely, she fails to help her afterwards, allowing the fire to go out and the cold to overtake

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[6] Although discussed in an ironic tone, Pauline's work with the dead actually had a real validity in the life of the tribe. Carl Waldman reports that disease wiped out 25 to 50 percent of Native Americans, in contrast to Indian-white warfare, which killed an estimated 10 percent. A single smallpox epidemic decreased the Dakota tribe of the Mandans from 1,600 to 131 (166).

the weakened woman. Pauline maintains herself in a trance-like state, "stunned in prayer" as she narrates it, a bizarre and sinister prayer:

> Oh God who has seen fit to prove Thyself through the vessel of a woman, through me, Oh God who bound my wrists, who tripped me, Lord and Author of all Lies, hear Pauline. (158)

In Catholic liturgies God is often acknowledged as "proving" his power through the frailty of human vessels.[7] In her prayer, Pauline attributes the death of the infant and the near-death of Fleur to the conscious will of God working through her ineptitude. Thus she reveals her affiliation to a God who authors not life but death. The inclusion of the phrase "Lord and Author of all Lies" is puzzling. Is Pauline's discipleship tendered to the Christian God or to the devil, "a liar and the Father of all lies" (John 8:49) as intimated in this prayer? Her next remark is so ironic it calls into question her sanity itself: "I saw that she was dying, despite the medicines, despite all that I could do, all the prayers I had lifted" (158).

That Fleur considers Pauline responsible for the death of her child is evident when she hurls a dagger at the black-robed figure. She later confounds Pauline's attempt to baptize the baby and add it to her hoard of dead. That Eli's mother Margaret also holds Pauline responsible is evident when she spits in contempt, first on the novice's feet and next on her head. At the end of the scene Pauline is reduced to a figure of ridicule for as she turns the cheeks of her palms to Margaret for them to be spat on as well (a variation on "turning the other cheek"), Margaret lashes out with a knife. "It flared out the second time that night, would have pierced me with Christ's stigmata, had

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[7] The frailty is generally accented when the "vessel" is a woman. See, for example, the prayer commemorating the martyrdom of St. Maria Goretti later in this chapter.

I not clapped my palms together in a sudden prayer and jumped out the door, lighting backward in the snow" (164). Awkward to the point of immobility when it comes to helping Fleur, Pauline is nimble enough when it comes to saving her own skin. And although she denies Margaret the pleasure of inflicting the stigmata on her, she herself punishes her hands afterwards, continually smashing her fists into icy buckets until the water turns bloody and the Superior restrains her and leads her to bed with the sardonic comment, "Even a saint must rest" (164). Pauline's love-hate relationship is so profound that she is compelled to avenge Fleur's enemies, even when that enemy is herself.

The death of the infant marks the transfer of power from the tribe's cultural representative, Fleur, to the Catholic affiliate, Pauline. From this time Fleur's spirit is broken, her vision becomes obscured, and her dreams illusory. She vainly sends Eli out to track a venison on a path she saw in her dreams, she vainly fishes the frozen lake where her protecting Manitou dwells. In the end her household is saved from starvation not by her native skills nor by those of Nanapush, Margaret, or Eli but by the arrival of wagon-loads of commodities sent by the U. S. Government.

In the fourth and fifth encounters, Pauline is no longer content to challenge Fleur indirectly with covert methods but takes active measures to thwart her. When Nanapush undertakes, with the assistance of Moses Pillager, to cure Fleur from her lethargy and depression with an ancient ceremony, Pauline intervenes to prevent its accomplishment. In this scene the clash between the two opposing spiritual forces is most dramatic. The incident is especially interesting in that it demonstrates to Pauline the relative strength and superiority of the Native American ritual over Christian faith, while at the same time providing her the opportunity to render the rite ineffectual. Pauline's untimely arrival and her insistence on being present at the ceremony is a distraction to

Fleur and a worry to Nanapush. He refers again to Pauline as "a scavenger, a bird that lands only for its purpose" (189). Although depicted as slightly mad, Pauline's is nevertheless a sinister presence as, crouched in the corner, she stares hungrily at Fleur, muttering prayers and forming crosses in the air to protect herself from the "pagan" ritual. Nanapush, having protected his hand with a paste of special plants, lowers it into a pot of boiling stew, brings up a piece of choice meat from the bottom and feeds it to Fleur. Pauline sees this as a direct and personal challenge and the opportunity to prove the supremacy of her faith. Praying loudly in Latin, she plunges both her hands and arms into the boiling stew and holds them there. Nanapush narrates her reaction:

> Her eyes rolled back into her skull and the skin around her cheeks stretched so tight and thin it nearly split. If she opened her mouth, I thought, pure steam might blast into the air. Moments passed. Then she shrieked, jumped. She clawed straight through the flimsy tent walls, scattering the willow poles, collapsing the blankets and skins around us all. Then she ran, by the light of her scalded arms, and followed the dark path back to town. (190)

In commenting on this scene, Jennifer Shaddock compares Fleur to Tayo and claims that Fleur is so "intensely focused on enacting her own story" that she is oblivious to Pauline's disruption of the healing ceremony, supporting her statement with Nanapush's observation that Fleur's eyes were closed, her breath shallow and "her attention was directed within, so she did not witness Pauline's dreadful proof" (190). However, Pauline did disrupt the ritual at a crucial point by crashing the tent down on all of them and even Nanapush acknowledges that he was unable to complete the rite "only because of Pauline" (188).

Perhaps Shaddock's argument stems from too strained an attempt to parallel Fleur's story with Tayo's, to interpret both *Ceremony* and *Tracks* as variations on a single theme.

> When Fleur and Tayo refuse to engage with their oppressors, "the destroyers" are powerless to affect them and exist virtually without meaning for these redemptive characters . . . . Fleur survives Pauline's betrayals and Tayo resists the witchery through a self-conscious engagement in and reconstruction of the old ways, the myths and stories of their past. (118)

Shaddock continues, describing storytelling as the foundation of these "myths of cultural empowerment . . . potent rituals that reveal and re-create history and, concomitantly, provide imaginative signposts for the future" (119). Unlike Tayo, however, Fleur does not achieve greater integrity through fidelity to her story. Part of the problem, as Nanapush points out, is that she was too young when all her family died and "had no stories or depth of life to rely on" (7). Beyond that, neither plot nor theme of *Ceremony* resembles that of *Tracks*. Unlike Silko, Erdrich is not writing a returning plot: Fleur leaves her tribe, abandons her child and her land. Her physical and spiritual self is diminished and she wanders off into the woods a bereft figure *not* "more powerfully ephemeral than her shaman cousin Moses" as Shaddock claims (118) but *merely* ephemeral, a tragic figure who, as Nanapush observed, leaves no tracks.

There is no doubt that Fleur possesses raw power. Both Nanapush and Pauline relate her ability to transform land agents into ghosts, outmaneuver the lake monster, Misshepeshu, change her shape to that of a wolf and a bear. The Pillagers "knew the secret ways to cure or kill, until the art deserted them" (2). Her mistake, according to Nanapush, is in assuming that her power is both

timeless and boundless, possessed in isolation. Overconfidence misleads her into dismissing Pauline as a mere annoyance, half-crazy but impotent.

> Power dies, power goes under and gutters out, ungraspable. It is momentary, quick of flight and liable to deceive. As soon as you rely on the possession it is gone . . . I never made the mistake of thinking that I owned my own strength, that was my secret. And so I was never alone in my failures. (177)

Nanapush recognizes—as Fleur does not—that her power is contingent on her heritage, and as that heritage is weakened by the intrusions of government and church, Fleur's power wanes accordingly. The old man observes that Fleur had failed too often, both to save her family and her baby. As a result she becomes hesitant, anxious and fearful, false in her gestures. In her pride, she rejects offers of help both from Nanapush and Eli and isolates herself increasingly even from her family. She is as alone in her failures as Pauline is in her excesses.

The final spiritual contest between Pauline and Fleur takes place where Fleur's Manitou resides, Lake Matchimanito. What Pauline has learned in the incident with the boiling stew is that Christ is weak, "a tame newcomer in this country that has its own devils in the waters of boiling-over kettles" (192). Pauline's scalded hands prove to her conclusively that her God is incompetent in comparison to the awesome devil that Nanapush invokes. "Christ had huddled out of frailty, overcome by the glitter of copper scales, appalled at the creature's unwinding length and luxury" (195). The implications of his defeat means that all of Pauline's faith and self-tortures were in vain. His failure reduces Pauline to insignificance and it is that, above all, which she cannot bear. "I knew there never was a martyr like me" (192). Faced with the fragility of Christ, Pauline determines to reverse his situation—and hers—by challenging Misshepeshu in a one-to-one

combat. Having been fortified and strengthened by her penances and privations, she now feels armed and strong enough to be the champion and savior of Jesus Christ. Pauline moves to a new level in her relationship with God, presenting herself to him—not as the meek and mild servant—but as a formidable warrior, ready to defend the lamb-like Christ against Fleur's protector, the dragon-like Misshepeshu.

Pauline's battle against the water god is explicitly undertaken to justify herself and her privations. She is as indifferent to the spiritual welfare of her people as she is to their physical survival; in fact, for all she cares, "they could starve and fornicate, expose their young for dogs and crows, worship the bones of animals or the brown liquor in a jar. I would have none of it. I would be chosen" (196). Indeed, she relishes the thought of victory because it would cut her off from them permanently on both a physical and spiritual level. God, being indebted to her, would free her from the debt of Fleur's kindness, from her sin in murdering the men in Argus, from the sin of her sexual liaison with Napoleon Morrissey, from her responsibility for the death of Fleur's baby, would free her, above all, from her own Indianness. Her victory would confirm God's revelation that she is an orphan, and despite her dark coloring, is "not one speck of Indian but "wholly white"(137).[8]

In this final contest, Erdrich uses humor and laughter to delineate the gap between Pauline and her tribe. In an interview with Joseph Bruchac, the author stated that the enduring ceremony of

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[8] Pauline's desire to be "wholly white" partially stems from the discrimination that the Catholic Church practiced in the Midwest. Valerie Mathes points out that Native American women were not allowed to join religious orders until the late nineteenth century when separate sisterhoods for them were founded (22). In Pauline's case, when her superior receives instructions not to accept reservation girls, she informs the superior of the divine revelation concerning her true background as a white orphan whose parents had died in grace.

the Chippewa people is their sense of humor (81). While Erdrich does not elaborate on how humor is ceremonial, her use of it suggests that it can be used as an inversion of violence, its effectiveness as a tribal virtue exemplified in Nanapush. His sense of humor enables him to deflate the pomposity of Pauline, keep in perspective the changing fortunes of the tribe, cope with the hardships of poverty and his own aging body. Pauline, by contrast, is devoid of humor, and its lack alienates her still further from the community. One of the reasons, in fact, that Pauline despises Nanapush is his sense of humor, his propensity to laugh at everything—namely, Pauline herself. Only twice in the novel is Pauline depicted as laughing: first, when she is up in the tree watching the mourners in their bereavement; and second, when standing in Nanapush's leaky boat. Her mirth here is triggered by the sight of the people on shore who were gesticulating and beckoning her to safety. "They were such small foolish sticks strung together with cloth that in the heat of my sudden hilarity I nearly tumbled over the side" (197). In both instances Pauline's laughter is provoked when she observes her neighbors from a distance. It as if she is observing mechanical creatures that have no relationship whatever to herself. Each time a figure on shore ran or waved its arms in circles, she broke into new spasms of laughter. Her laughter is disturbing because she projects it onto God in his gaze at humankind. "This was how God felt: beyond hindrance or reach" (198). Pauline's God is one who stands detached from human concern, laughing at all human gesticulation and distress. By putting herself beyond her people—up a tree or in a boat, she identifies herself with God's remoteness, while inflating her sense of power and consequence: "I was important, beyond their reach" (198). In contrast to Nanapush's healthy sense of humor, Pauline's laughter is full of disdain for herself, for others, and even for God.

The boat scene is in many ways quite comic. As a stand-in for Christ, Pauline plays out an inversion of the temptation scene of Jesus as described in the Gospel of Matthew (4:1-11) and she is fully prepared to invest equal time to her ordeal, "which was to suffer in the desert forty days, forty nights, or as long as the patches lasted on this boat" (200). Instead of the devil water monster, however, old Nanapush comes out to play against her in the temptation scenes. The disparity between Pauline's imagined plot and Nanapush's dialog is especially funny: "I prayed . . . that God lured him forward in order to overturn the vessel just out of land's reach. But . . . at last we were close enough to speak." And the envoy of Satan declares:

"That boat's no damn good, Pauline!"

Pauline's pious posturing, her sudden kneeling, hands clasped, causes the boat to sink still farther and Napoleon calls out:

"Come back with me, you stupid girl."

"I shall not live by bread alone."

"There's meat," he cried, "good stew!" [Since her hands are still disfigured from Nanapush's last stew, that's probably the last dish that would interest Pauline.]

"I want words from God's mouth."

"You'll drown!" (199)

In the final Biblical temptation, Satan carries Jesus to a mountain pinnacle showing him all the kingdoms of the earth and their glory. Nanapush calls Pauline's attention to the villagers on shore who are pointing and beckoning them to safety. But Pauline interprets the scene mystically—Nanapush displaying the "kingdom of the damned" and she responds to his temptation in the words of Jesus, "Get thee behind me" (199).

The dialog continues, Pauline inflating and Nanapush deflating, up and down, like the waves of the lake. The juxtaposition of Pauline's pious quotes and Nanapush's common sense replies can perhaps lull the reader into dismissing Pauline as merely ridiculous. Despite her eccentricity, she is a visionary every bit as powerful as Nanapush or Fleur herself—and as it turns out, more accurate in her perceptions than the latter. Spying Fleur on shore, Pauline screams at her and swirls into a vision in which she sees Fleur distended by that scream, transformed again into door and hinge. "Her heavy black clothes, her shawl, the way she held herself so rigid, suggested a door into blackness."

> I stood before it and then she turned, so slowly I heard the hinges creak. A moment and I was inside where I could not breathe and water filled me, cold and black water of the drowned, a currentless blanket. I thought I would be shut there, but she turned again and off she walked, a black slot into the air, a passage into herself. (200)

The implication of this vision is that Fleur, who has drowned men in the past, retains that power yet, and if she willed, could absorb Pauline into herself and into the black waters of Lake Matchimanito. But Fleur doesn't have the will, and whether through pity or indifference, she turns away and lets Pauline be. As Fleur becomes more distrustful of her visionary power, Pauline grows increasingly confident in her own, forcing reality, if necessary, to fit the contours of her divinations. When she discovers that she murdered her old lover, Napoleon Morrissey, choking him with her rosary beads, she exonerates herself from all blame by reshaping Napoleon into Misshepeshu. "I had committed no sin. There was no guilt in this matter, no fault. How could I have know what body the devil would assume? He had taunted me, lured me, shed blankets in a

heap. He had appeared to me as the water thing" (203). The words "water thing" reflect back to Nanapush's bawdy tale in which the water thing turned out to be an enormous penis. Thus Pauline interprets her third temptation as a sexual one with the devil seducing her and preparing a mating place. By murdering her former lover, she purifies herself from the sins of her own carnal past.

In her own mind, Pauline is convinced that her actions at the lake precipitate the defeat of Fleur, who, abandoning her child, packs up her goods into a small cart and disappears. In the battle between Christianity and paganism carried on through their representatives, Pauline and Fleur, Christianity proves the ultimate victor. Pauline's vision discloses that the defeat of Fleur entails the selling of the land the takeover of Fleur's land, the destruction of the forest, the takeover of the lake by the lumber company (even to renaming it Lake Turcut), and the blinding and deafening of native children in government schools. That it is a terrible victory—even in Pauline's warped viewpoint—is evident in her admission of being overwhelmed by the "crushing sadness" of her vision (200).

In *Love Medicine*, Pauline takes up arms once more, this time against her illegitimate daughter Marie. Their conflict begins in a chapter of the text ("Saint Marie") that is almost totally ignored by critics—perhaps because of the bizarre nature of its violence. In this section of her narrative, Marie describes her classroom days with Sister Leopolda and her brief stint as a postulant. It is obvious that at this stage of her development Marie shares many of her mother's characteristics. She emphasizes her whiteness, despises her parentage (although her parents are not the low-living Lazarres she thinks they are), aspires to recognition for sainthood and is fascinated by her imagined workings of the devil. She differs from Pauline (now Sister Leopolda) in that she is neither devious nor mild. Rather than pretend a greater belief than she has, she frankly admits

being a "mail order Catholic" who endures Sunday Mass as an excuse for getting into town. "Our souls went cheap." [9] Whereas the young Pauline was described herself in terms of invisibility, Marie is bolder and more forthright. In contrast to Pauline, who felt no man would ever want her because she was thin and unattractive, Marie declares, "I could have had any damn man on the reservation . . . And I could have made him treat me like his own life. I looked good. And I looked white" (48). She believes with Leopolda that the "Dark One" wanted her above the other children because she "stood out." Although Erdrich doesn't specify how Marie has formulated her conception of the devil, she appears to have adopted Leopolda's description of him as synonymous with her native heritage because he speaks to her in the "old language of the bush," telling her things he told only Indians (46).

There are three violent and strange encounters between Marie and Sister Leopolda that illuminate their relationship, two contained in the "Saint Marie" chapter and the third occurring over twenty years later. The first, which occurs in Leopolda's classroom, precipitates Marie into an awareness of the dark side of spiritual consciousness. It is an experience, mediated through Leopolda's long hooked window-pole, not of the living presence of God but of Satan. Erdrich compresses the terror and control Sister Leopolda imposes in the simple sentence "She had a stringer of children who could only breathe if she said the word" (46). That Marie sees Sister Leopolda in the same images that Pauline envisioned Fleur:, "a blackness leading into deeper blackness" (46), prepares the reader to understand this new conflict as a continuation of the earlier one, carrying overtones of gender, race, and culture. By her cockiness and bravado, Marie has

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[9] *Love Medicine* 44. Future text references to *Love Medicine* will be indicated by number only. Further references to *Tracks* will be indicated by the single letter *T* followed by the page number.

signaled herself as aligned with the devil. But just as Pauline learned the frailty of Christ when confronted with the powers of Indian religion and the monster Misshepeshu, so Marie learns the weakness and fear of the devil in his contest with Leopolda. The "Dark One" abandons Marie as she is shut up in the classroom closet waiting for Leopolda's window pole to pierce her heart. Her statement, "I felt a cold hook in my heart" (47) is reminiscent of Pauline's earlier comparison of God's love to "a hook sunk deep into our chests" (*T* 205). In a later passage Marie compares Leopolda's love to "the black hook. The spear singing through the mind" (48). It is notable that at this stage of her development, Marie describes love, as Pauline did, in metaphors of pain.

The classroom episode, while it might appear outlandish in contemporary society, even in Catholic circles, is probably recognizable to generations of women educated in parochial schools where the nuns depicted the devil as a tangible being who whispered seductions into vacant young ears and where they regularly intimidated those of their wards who strayed from the "straight and narrow path." A girl who resisted the strict and repressive classroom rules might easily be accused of harboring the devil's suggestions. A personality like Marie's—self-assured, brazen, and rebellious—was bound to clash head-on with a fierce and unbalanced nun like Sister Leopolda. Also understandable are Marie's ambivalent feelings towards Sister Leopolda, her simultaneous desire to both please and resist, her awe for the nun's ability to read the child's mind, her respect for Leopolda's power and the strength and accuracy of her aim. "I wanted Sister Leopolda's heart. And here was the thing: sometimes I wanted her heart in love and admiration. Sometimes. And sometimes I wanted her heart to roast on a black stick" (49).

While the first encounter between Leopolda and Marie has comic elements— the large, thin nun kneeling, casting her pole like a javelin at the empty closet and spearing the toe of her own

black boot, a boot in which Marie imagines the devil himself hiding terrified—the second battle is unremittingly sadistic and abusive. When Marie learns in the dark closet that overt resistance to Leopolda is futile, she determines to employ subversive means to gain victory by engaging in the game rules of the nun. She resolves to become a saint powerful enough to operate heaven's gate, and influential enough to slam that gate in Leopolda's face. To this end, she climbs the hill to join the convent, adding to her impure motive for revenge on Leopolda, a second desire, equally impure—to transform a reservation girl who could pray as well as the nuns into a saint they'd have to kneel to. Even in this, however, Marie cushions her desire not in the traditional Catholic representation of saints in plaster and wood, but in qualities reminiscent of Misshepeshu. "The dark fish must rise," she declares in an ambiguous metaphor that includes her Indianness and the water monster, "And I'd be carved in pure gold. And my toenails would be little pink ocean shells, which they would have to stoop down off their high horse to kiss" (43). In terms of traditional religious standards, her motivation is not exactly saintly.

The reader understands, as Marie does not, that Leopolda must regard this child as having received a double dose of the devil. Not only conceived in sin as is every child since Adam and Eve according to Catholic teaching, Marie has been conceived outside of the sacramental framework, born of degenerate lust. And although Pauline is convinced that she herself is forgiven her past sins and absolved from all responsibility for her child, she has no parallel assurance of grace for Marie. She can, however, just as she did with Sophie and Fleur, project herself into the body of Marie, identifying with her thoughts and intentions.

> "You're like I was. He wants you very much . . . There is a wicked ice forming in your blood. You don't have a shred of devotion for God. Only wild cold dark lust.

> I know it. I know how you feel. I see the beast . . . the beast watches me out of your eyes sometimes. Cold" (52).

In *Love Medicine* Leopolda exhibits her conflict with the "Dark One" in physical abuse. She attempts to melt Marie's "cold heart" by dripping scalding water onto her back, warning that the pain is "only one fraction of the heat you will feel in his hellish embrace," and threatening the girl to silence, "I will boil him from your mind if you make a peep by filling up your ear" (51, 53).

After the torture, both Marie's and Leopolda's reactions are typical of those in an abusive relationship. Both are shaken and subdued by the violence. Leopolda tells Marie with trembling hands and actual tears in her eyes, "It was so hard, Marie." But it is unclear what was hard: was it causing pain to her daughter or the rigors of the ceremonial exorcism? "But I have used all the water up now. I think he is gone" (53). Leopolda's subsequent and tender soothing of Marie's burnt back and her use of uncharacteristic endearments are also typical actions of the abuser, who having gained relief through violence, now seeks to make amends.

Marie's reaction is more complex. By telling Leopolda, "I prayed. I prayed so hard," she appears to assume a complicit role in her torture. She seems more intimate with Leopolda—sitting quietly beside her—so calm, in fact, that the other nuns remark on it. "*Elle est docile*" (55). Confusion and self-doubt follow, along with the fear that Leopolda has finally conquered her, has rendered her empty and voiceless, and worst of all, has despoiled her of the will to vengeance. "She had gotten past me with her poker and I would never be a saint. I despaired. I felt I had no inside voice, nothing to direct me, no darkness, no Marie." Then the recurrence of her vision of herself (resonant with overtones of Misshepeshu) standing victorious over Leopolda inspires her.

> I was rippling gold. My breasts were bare and my nipples flashed and winked. Diamonds tipped them. I could walk through panes of glass . . . She was at my feet, swallowing the glass after each step I took . . . . the glass she swallowed ground and cut until her starved insides were only a subtle dust. And then she was only a black rag that flapped off, snagged in bobwire, hung there for an age, and finally rotted into the breeze. (54)

(Ironically, Leopolda will gain her reputation for sanctity by walking on pebbles as sharp as glass, and people will collect the bloodied stones as relics.) Once again, Leopolda is associated with death (rot) and with Nanapush's favorite comparison, that of the crow (flapping black rag) but, in this passage, both images are sapped of their vitality, and the nun is envisioned as more pathetic than ominous.

In the second part of this violent interchange, Marie, assuming the abusive role, calls the nun "the Bitch of Jesus Christ" and attempts not simply to shut heaven's door in Leopolda's face but to kick her into the oven that gapes "like the gate of a personal hell" (57). Leopolda's equally violent response—stabbing Marie with the bread fork and knocking her unconscious—ironically brings to fruition the girl's desire to be worshiped as a saint, her holiness confirmed by the mysterious stigmata, her victory over Leopolda sealed in her public blessing of the humiliated nun.

How believable is the conflict between Leopolda and Marie where episodes of increasing violence alternate with abortive attempts at reconciliation? While the classroom conflict is very plausible, the scalding and hand-piercing in the convent kitchen are less so. Even less believable is the concluding scene of the chapter with all the sisters kneeling in homage to Marie as she raises her hand in blessing, "Receive the dispensation of my sacred blood." Although the scene's ending

is clever and funny and highly satisfactory, it is hard to believe the astute Mother Superior would mistake a fork stab for a nail wound. Moreover, there is too great a discrepancy between the language of the fourteen-year-old as she speaks at the beginning of the chapter

> There was no use in trying to ignore me any longer. I was going up there on the hill with the black robe women. They were not any lighter than me. I was going up there to pray as good as they could. Because I don't have that much Indian blood. And they never thought they'd have a girl from this reservation as a saint they'd have to kneel to. But they'd have me. (43)

and her comment upon awaking from her "vision," "My name was buzzing up and down the room, like a fat autumn fly lighting on the tips of their tongues between Latin, humming up the heavy blood-dark curtains, circling their little cosseted heads" (58).[10]

Although one might accuse Erdrich of writing Native-Anglo gothic in these scalding/stabbing scenes, her resolution of the conflict is satisfying. Moreover, she prepares the reader for the subsequent battle between these two strong personalities especially in the way she develops the connection between Pauline and dust. Like Nanapush, Marie associates Leopolda with death, although the images they use are significantly different. Nanapush referred to her as "the whore of death," the one who attended death and is contagious with it. Dust is Marie's standard metaphor for Leopolda, an image that recalls the Ash Wednesday antiphon, "Dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return" and reinforces the nun's association with death. "But she was beaten.

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[10] In the first passage, the 77 words are comprised of only 87 syllables. With an average of eleven words per sentence, a sentence complexity of 12% and a vocabulary of 2% (where 100% is highly complex), her language would be estimated to be at the third grade level according to the Flesch-Kincaid scale. By contrast, the second passage has a reading level of grade 15.

It was in her eyes. She stared at me now with all the deep hate of the wheel of devilish dust that rolled wild within her emptiness" (59). Applied to Leopolda the word conveys a deadness that blankets joy and feeling and which she communicates like a disease, the way she "passed death on" in *Tracks*. Even at the height of her victory, Marie feels contaminated, "Blank dust was whirling through the light shafts. My skin was dust. Dust my lips. Dust the dirty spoons on the ends of my feet . . . There is no limit to this dust!" (60).

Marie saves herself only by escaping from Leopolda and the convent. Despite her apparent victory—the external sign of saintliness, the homage she desired, and especially the humiliation of Leopolda, Marie feels vacant and joyless. Though Leopolda is forced to kneel as Marie is forced to bless, there is no heart in the actions of either. Marie's self-congratulation turns sour even as she begins to gloat, her bubble of victory pricked by pity—depicted in the same image as that of love, the hook-pole. "I pitied her. Pity twisted in my stomach like that hook-pole was driven through me. I was caught. It was a feeling more terrible than any amount of boiling water and worse than being forked" (60). Nevertheless, it is precisely pity that distinguishes Marie from her mother, for whom pity is an alien emotion; and it is Marie's pity that will eventually reconcile the two women.

Over twenty years pass before the third confrontation of Marie and Sister Leopolda but it is clear that the passing years have not dimmed the strong, conflicting emotions that bind them. When Marie scalds her hand while simply thinking about Leopolda, she blames the accident on the nun.

> "Damn buzzard" I screamed, as if she'd done it. And she might have. Who knew how far the influence spread? (148).

Again there is the association of Leopolda with scavengers, death and power to harm. By this time the nun has gained a reputation for sanctity because of her life of prayer, fasting and penance. But Marie cuts through her supposed sanctity as Nanapush had done earlier. Despite living for weeks, like Saint Theresa, on the sacred hosts alone, Leopolda's holiness has no social expression. "But I hadn't seen her visiting the sick nor raising the sad ones up. No everyday miracles for her. Her talent was the relishment of pain, foaming at the mouth . . . " (147).

There are many levels of irony in this chapter. Marie walks proudly up to the front door of the convent (having been instructed as a postulant to seek entrance at the back door), wearing her best plum dress, the dress that marks her disjunction from the Lazarres and Morrisseys; the dress that she wore as she stood beside Nector when he was sworn in as the tribal chairman; the dress, therefore, that is an emblem of her respectability and her movement up in the world. But at the very sight of the dress, Leopolda deflates Marie's complacence by her condescension, "I feel sorry for you . . . . so poor that you had to cut an old Easter shroud up and sew it" (152-3). Marie has brought her daughter Zelda along to flaunt in Leopolda's face, to prove that although Leopolda may be living on plain white hosts, Marie has fattened on the fruit of a man. "Long ago she had tried for my devotion. Now I'd let her see where my devotion had gone and where it had got me. For by now I was solid class. Nector was tribal chairman. My children were well behaved, and they were educated too" (148). Ironically, at the very hour when Marie is trying to impress Sister Leopolda with her respectability and her social status as Nector's wife, he is writing her a note to say he is leaving her because he has long felt "true love" for Lulu Lamartine. Again the force of Leopolda's presence seems to settle on Marie like dust and veil her life in meaninglessness. Initially driven to confront the nun, partially out of pity, partially out of the need to bring her low, Marie

now engages with Leopolda in a symbolic battle for the possession of her soul imaged in the form of her iron spoon, the instrument of the earlier torture, that "hell-claw welded smooth."

> It was the iron poker that she'd marked me with, flattened. It had power. It was like her soul boiled down and poured in a mold and hardened. That was the shape of it. If I had that spoon I'd have her to stir in my pot. I'd have her to whack the bannock, fry the fish, lift out the smoking meat. Every time I held the spoon handle I'd know that she was nothing but a ghost, a black wind. I'd have her helpless in the scar of my palm. (156)

Significantly, all the things Marie wants to do with the spoon are violent: whack, fry, burn. And in conniving to get hold of it, Marie reverses the physical and spiritual positions they assumed at their parting years before. Marie kneels, pretending to seek a blessing, and Leopolda feints a blessing while actually maneuvering to clout Marie with the iron instrument. It is notable that the strong, stocky Marie is unable to wrench the weapon from the frail and dying woman. They lean into each other balanced by hate, replaying their earlier roles with Leopolda still commanding ("Down!") and Marie still resisting ("No!").

> She [Leopolda] clung to the iron handle with both hands and kept grinning into my face. I grinned back at her, just to even things, and that was when I felt she got the better of me, for suddenly my face stretched and the air around me flattened. On her breath, in which I kneeled, was the smell of turned earth. Her gaze, in what I struggled, was a deep square hole. Her strength was the strict progress of darkness.

> "Hold on!" I yelled, frightened, for it seemed just as if I was falling fast into her eyes and would be covered up by flowers and clods of earth unless she pulled me back.
>
> And she did pull. 157-8

In this marvelous passage, Erdrich pulls together all the threads of darkness from both *Tracks* and *Love Medicine*. Pauline who was sucked into Fleur's darkness—a darkness of water and death—and then released, now sucks Marie into a darkness of earth (dust) and death and then releases her. Neither woman is defeated by the other; neither gains ascendancy over the other. In fact, they achieve a genuine reconciliation in the scene. Leopolda initiates the redemptive action by pulling Marie back; and Marie, in gratitude, relinquishes the spoon together with the long years of hatred, and the two women sit together in silence. Marie reflects that the earth in which Leopolda will soon be placed is mild, a fitting resting place for Leopolda, "devious and holy, dangerously meek and mild" (*T* 69).

In order to understand the dynamics between Pauline and Marie, it is important to explore the sources of their beliefs and practices. It is reasonable enough to dismiss Pauline's ascetic practices as aberrations stemming from her self-hatred and her desire to assimilate, and most critics interpret her actions in this way. It is possible, however, to view her alignment with the Catholic Church and even her masochistic practices as self-affirming. Doubly estranged, through gender and race, Pauline carves out for herself, within the framework of Catholic tradition, an identity that not only renders her visible but endows her with a power and prestige that she could not otherwise access. She imitates in her practices the early Christian martyrs Agatha and Agnes; the medieval saint, Catherine of Sienna; and two sixteenth century women, Rose of Lima and Jane Frances de

Chantal. Compared to the mortifications and penances of these women, Pauline's seem less bizarre and extreme, a practical means of establishing her legitimacy and associating herself with the anguish of the crucifixion. "Whenever I was tempted to put the shoes on the proper way, I recalled Christ's last journey to my mind, His bare feet on the cobbled stones, and the nail holes through them " (*T* 146).

Susan Friedman has argued that female saints engaged in severe asceticism to prove their authenticity in the eyes of the church. They had to overcome the doubts and opposition of male figures—both in the family and in the hierarchy—by validating their visions and spirituality. One method of self-validation was "extreme deprivation, an excessive mortification of the flesh that functioned as penitence for sin, replicated the sufferings of Christ, and served as the precondition of visionary experience" (121). There are distinct parallels, even duplications—as well as subversions—between the lives of these canonized saints and that of Pauline. Agatha and Agnes, the early Christian martyrs whom Pauline specifically names as models, were tortured by their spurned suitors and killed in defense of their virginity. Agatha's flesh was ripped with iron hooks in the course of her martyrdom, recalling Pauline's comparison of God's love to "a hook sunk deep into our chests" (*T* 205). Marie associates Leopolda with the iron hook of her window pole, and later, in her attempt to "hook" Marie, the nun rips the girl's flesh with the hook of her iron fork. Pauline inverts the outcome of these martyrs, however, by torturing and killing Napoleon, the lover whom *she* spurns.

Pauline's actual penitential practices replicate those of St. Catherine (c. 1348-1375) and Rose of Lima (c. 1578-1632). Just as Pauline was the sole survivor of the tuberculosis that killed her entire family (as well as those of Fleur and Nanapush and so many other Chippewas) so

Catherine survived the plague that decimated medieval Europe. Catherine's extreme penances—she lived three years in complete silence, beat herself regularly with iron chains, underwent periods of intense fasting, and wore rough wool and hair shirts—inspire Pauline's. The saint's scalding at the hot baths where she went on the advice of her doctors prefigures Pauline's scalding in the curing ceremony.

Pauline is even more imitative of Rose of Lima whose practices, like those of Pauline, move beyond the realm of devotion to psychosis. Fittingly enough, Rose is proclaimed by the classic text of Catholic hagiography, *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, as the first "native" saint who appeared in the vast reaches of the "barren land" of America "like a rose amidst thorns, the first-fruits of its canonized saints" (444). When Rose's mother attempted to show her daughter off by crowning her with a garland of flowers, Rose embedded a pin so deeply into her head that she later had difficulty removing the garland. To prevent her beauty from being a temptation to others, Rose rubbed her face with raw pepper and disfigured her skin with blotches. When a woman happened to admire her shapely fingers and fine skin, she responded by rubbing them with lime and was consequently unable to dress herself for a month. The disfiguration of Pauline's hands thus unites the scalding of Catherine and the maiming of Rose. In addition to severe fasting and prolonged prayer, Rose took a vow of virginity and lived like a recluse, wearing on her head a thin circlet of silver, studded with sharp points on the inside so that it resembles Jesus's crown of thorns. It is evident that Pauline found in models such as Catherine and Rose, convenient exemplars on which to pattern her own ascetic practices. Like Rose, she puts pins in her head, then hangs a rope around her neck to remind her to avoid Judas' betrayal. She chafes her hands until they are raw and bleeding by using them as a weapon to break ice, wears rough potato sacking that irritates her skin,

and switches her shoes so that her walking becomes painful and creates festering sores on her feet. As time passes, she adopts more outlandish rituals, bragging that her penances are not imitations but original concoctions. And original they are. She allows herself to sleep only on her back, arms crossed in the traditional pose of the Virgin Mary at the Annunciation. She puts burrs in her armpits, screwgrass in her stockings that grow painfully into her skin, nettles in her collar, and lets her toenails grow so long, they cause her pain when she walks. Moreover, the ridicule these women endured from their family and friends encourages Pauline to deflect all the scorn she receives into affirmations of genuine sanctity.

In addition to her penances, Pauline used the saints' lives to model darker aspects of her personal choices. She could find in the life of St. Jane Frances de Chantal (1572-1641), a contemporary of Rose of Lima, approbation for abandoning her child. Madame de Chantal, after months of depression following the death of her husband, desired to enter a cloister, and joyfully welcomed the proposal offered by St. Francis de Sales, to establish a new congregation for women. When others objected that her obligation to her children prevented such an action, St. Francis replied that "in a cloister she would be able to watch over them with no less vigilance, and perhaps even with greater advantage to them, than by continuing always with them" (Thurston 371). Madame de Chantal's sanctity was "tested and proven by the fortitude she demonstrated" in forsaking her desolate children. As she was leaving her home, her son, who had tried repeatedly to alter his mother's resolution, "threw himself to the ground across the doorway in a paroxysm of grief. Here was a last inducement to choose the easier way, and stay; she chose the harder—and stepped over his body" (Thurston 371).

With de Chantal's example before her, it is understandable that Pauline could feel that God instructs her to forget her daughter because he has an "important plan" for her (*T* 137). Likewise when she sees Marie at the water's edge, skinny and unkempt, she realizes "they had left her that way just to tempt me, I knew, and I was not moved or swayed" (*T* 198). Pauline also resembles St. Frances de Chantal in her rigidity and severity, in the "disturbance of mind" that afflicted her, and in her use of violent references to God's love.[11] de Chantal's statement that "divine love must consume all the rust of self-love" is reiterated in Pauline's admonition to Marie: "Marie. Marie. Star of the Sea! She will shine when we have burned off the dark corrosion" (54); and again (twenty years later), "Marie. Marie. Star of the Sea! You will shine when we burn off the salt" (152). Pauline's association of divine love with physical pain clearly has its sources outside her own disturbed psyche.

Although Friedman concludes that the "parallels between Pauline's story and the metanarrative of many medieval women mystics covertly elevate her status in the narrative contest with Nanapush" (122), Erdrich uses the saintly analogue to ridicule Pauline as well as to affirm her. The wise old man, Nanapush, deflates Pauline's sanctimonious penances with his humorous and occasionally crude comments and questions. When he first sees her in her religious garb walking around with her shoes reversed, he shouts out, "God is turning this woman into a duck" (146). When she refuses to bathe, convinced that God "would rather have a good soul that stank like a cheese than a bad soul fragranced with rose oil and myrrh. My rank aroma was the perfume my soul exuded, devotion's air," it is Nanapush who ridicules her, holding his nose, and moving

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[11] Upon hearing of her son's death in battle, de Chantal responded in prayer, "Destroy, cut, burn, whatever opposes thy holy will."

out of her way (153). It is also he who notices that she spends hours in Fleur's cabin without ever using the outhouse and discovers the ludicrous bargain she invents, whereby she, on her part, will use the privy only at dawn and dusk—never paying it an extra visit—provided God, on his part, will guarantee her eternal life. When Nanapush deliberately tricks her into breaking her privy-pact by plying her with cup after cup of sweet sassafras tea and then telling a long, salacious tale filled with water sounds, the juxtaposition of the bawdy tale with Pauline's spiritual intensity, reduces her privations to the level of the ridiculous.

> I stared at my fists. I did not dare move and now knew the tea, the story, were his plan. He was informed by Satan, sent to me on purpose to test my resolve. He meant to bar me from gaining joy in the presence of my Savior, in heaven where I would be finished with such earthly humiliations . . . I strained to make myself into a block of ice. To think of droughted fields and dust on the road. To think of Him and of His special love for martyrs (150).

Because of the conflict between these two characters, many critics posit Pauline and Nanapush—or Pauline and Fleur—as polar opposites, exploding them into prototypes representing, on one side, pure native traditions and spirituality, and on the other, Western spirituality in the guise of a frenzied Catholicism. Friedman writes that the contest between Nanapush and Pauline—enacted as it is in "narrative, cultural, and religious terms—is in one sense a battle for the heart and soul of the Ojibwa and by extension for the sympathy of all readers. It is a battle that Nanapush wins hands down" (116) Nanapush, she claims, is supremely likeable, humorous, and ribald, whereas Pauline is excessively detestable. (109). In her article, "Louise Erdrich as Nanapush," Sharon Manybeads Bowers insinuates by her very title that Nanapush's

voice alone represents that of the author. She argues that the structure of the plot reflects the oppositional strands of twentieth century Chippewa life. Within this binary structure, Nanapush embodies the Chippewa trickster hero and powerful spirit, Nanabozho while Pauline reflects the "baroque and austere mission-house Catholicism (135-6). Jennifer Shaddock writes that by identifying herself with Anglo culture, Pauline "personifies the historical destruction of Native American culture by a rapacious Anglo ideology," similar to that identified by Silko as "the witchery;" she concludes that insofar as she identifies herself with the Anglo culture Pauline sabotages her narrative credibility (109).

However, Erdrich herself never establishes such radical dualities nor asks the reader to choose one narrative over the other, sympathize with one character and spurn the other. Although Pauline is sometimes a liar and frequently deluded, hers is a very credible narrative. Shaddock valorizes Nanapush's narrative unfairly when she claims that his narrative is a "sustained dramatic monologue, punctuated only by Pauline's version of events. Pauline's narrative is equally a "sustained dramatic monologue," one that reads as a counterpoint to Nanapush's. Unlike Silko, Erdrich does not erect an opposition of two forces—the life-giving one of tradition and story against the destructive forces of "witchery." Whereas Silko emphasizes getting the story right, Pauline remarks that the story "comes up different every time, and has no ending, no beginning. They get the middle wrong too. They only know they don't know anything" (31). Although Pauline is not the most reliable of narrators, Nanapush confirms this, "There were so many tales, so many possibilities, so many lies. The waters were so muddy I thought I'd give them another stir" (61). What Erdrich said of the narratives in *Love Medicine* can be applied to those in *Tracks* as well—that "nobody in the book is right;" that there is no single voice, no single protagonist, but a

"splicing together of different dramatic voices," a series of intersecting story lines that allow the entire community to emerge from the book as it deals with physical tragedies and spiritual triumphs (Interview 1987, 22).

By asserting the credibility of Pauline's narrative I do not suggest that Erdrich elevates this character for our adulation. On the contrary, she exposes the superficiality of Pauline's supposed holiness, showing how her penances are undertaken for self-glorification and have no fruition in charitable works. She is visibly smug and self-willed (*T* 54). When her religious superior prohibits her unusual penances, Pauline devises less visible ones and continues to practice the forbidden ones when out of the watchful eyes of her sisters. She is vengeful towards those who oppose her, her anger and spite never far below the surface. She prays for the death of Nanapush as he paddles out into the partially frozen lake to lead her back to safety. Her prayer unanswered, she takes matters into her own hands by reaching out to grab his paddle and set him adrift on the rough waves. When Sister Saint Anne fed her hot soup, Pauline spat it out on the floor, shouting angrily, "You stink. You smell worse than this hell-soup does. Take the slop away." She curses profanely when she attacks Napoleon-Misshepeshu and does so again when Nanapush discovers her privy secret. It is he, above all, who pricks the thin skin of Pauline's sanctity and provokes her unbridled rancor, "You filthy mouth, I hope the devil tears you apart piece by piece and fries each morsel!" (148). Even her privations have a pugnacious quality and she sounds like a boxer in the ring where the blows are the penances she slugs at God.

> "Accept this," I asked Him when night after night the cold gripped me in tight claws and I shook so hard I could not sleep. "And this," every time I sat to eat and halved my bread. When my stomach pinched, "This also, my Lord." When

> the blood rushed back into my frozen hands after taking the sheets off the line, "This too. This. And this" (136-7).

In using Nanapush to expose the fanaticism of Pauline, Erdrich makes a larger critique of the standards of Catholic sainthood, a critique supported by contemporary feminist theologians. Though Erdrich is careful not to present Pauline as typical of Roman Catholic nuns, nevertheless in her zeal for pain, she reflects a tradition long part of the Christian church, the purification of pleasure through pain. This tradition, based on platonic dualism, was developed by the early Church fathers to mitigate the tension between the opposing realities of spirit and flesh, male and female, good and evil, life and death. Harmony, in such a system, is achieved only when the higher realities control the lower. In patristic theological discourse, therefore, the fathers of the family—both civil and ecclesiastical—believed that they should rule not only the women, children, and slaves but their own lower selves as well, that is, their passions, bodily needs, and eroticism.

In her study of the connection of pain and pleasure in the Christian tradition, Beverly Harrison concluded that because good Christian men—and through men's authority, women as well—must deny the enjoyment of flesh, "early Christian anthropology required that *pain*—the *deprivation of sensual pleasure*—be accepted as an important element in attaining the joy of salvation" (152). Over the centuries the exercise of faith included attempts to transcend the sensual pleasures of food, warmth, and sex—so that pain became not only acceptable as a dimension of Christian spirituality, but normative for it. To be Christian meant to accept or—better yet–to seek pain. The suffering associated with bodily self-denial eventually became essential to Christian spiritual and moral life, and a source of spiritual satisfaction. "Without pain, pleasure was

immoral; whereas by pain, with pain, and through pain, pleasure became a happy consequence of the Christian pilgrimage" (Harrison 153).[12]

In addition to this dualism, the Augustinian doctrine of original sin emphasizes the intrinsically sinful nature of human beings and accuses woman of being the sex primarily responsible for introducing sin into the world through her disobedience to God. Since the disobedience of woman caused the original sin, the highest virtue of redeemed woman is obedience to authority, whether that authority be God, the ecclesial hierarchy, or her father or husband; and since pride prompted her to commit that original disobedience, the Christian woman was exhorted to practice those virtues which are a corollary to obedience: meekness and humility. In line with this tradition, St. Francis de Sales exhorted Jane de Chantal to make obedience and humility the source of all other virtues. "Let it be without bounds; make it the reigning principle of all your actions. Let an unalterable meekness and sweetness on all occasions become by habit natural to

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[12] It is important to note that pain is a necessary component of Native American as well as Christian religions. Lame Deer writes of sacrificial practices in his chapter on the sundance that are every bit as extreme as those Pauline imitated.

> Staring open-eyed at the blazing sun, the blinding rays burning deep into your skull, filling it with unbearable brightness . . .
>
> Dancing . . . from morning to night without food or water until you are close to dropping in a dead faint.
>
> Pulling away at a rawhide thong which is fastened to a skewer embedded deeply in your flesh, until you skin stretches and rips apart as you finally break free with blood streaming down your chest . . . This is what some of us must endure during the sun dance.
>
> Many people do not understand why we do this. They call the sun dance barbarous, savage . . . The way I look at it our body is the only thing which truly belongs to us. What we Indians give of our flesh, our bodies, we are giving of the only thing which is ours alone. (187)

The embedded skewer is reminiscent of Pauline's description of the "hook sunk deep into our chests" (*T* 205) Moreover, Lame Deer's explanation of the purpose of physical suffering is not all that different from Pauline's statement that "Suffering is a gift to God! I have given away everything I owned. All that I have left is my body's comfort and pleasure, and I give that last pearl to Him now" (*T* 144).

you" (Thurston 371). Pauline, in her statement that she is "devious and holy, dangerously meek and mild" (*T* 69) reveals that she has both assimilated and subverted this exhortation.

Charles Ess and Phyllis Trible argue that the patristic reading of *Genesis* reinforces the doctrine of original sin. The creation story thus serves as a "foundational myth which sacralizes both a patriarchal relationship between the sexes (justified by the woman's responsibility for sin and suffering, and her apparent inferiority and subordination to the man in the order of creation) and the hierarchical politics of monarchy and empire" (Ess 102).[13] Such a myth which portrays the woman as a threatening chaos agent, also endorses her control—by violence if necessary—in order to safeguard patriarchal authority and domination. Ess observes that the patristic reading of *Genesis* establishes a definition of woman which dominates contemporary culture (102).[14] In the New Testament, the teachings of St. Paul reinforce this myth::

> Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands. (Ephesians 5:22-24)

Pauline parallels St. Paul whose conversion to Christianity involved the repudiation of his prior name and Jewish identity. Like her namesake, Pauline's Christianity is built upon fundamentalist dualism of good and evil represented by God and his adversary Satan, (the devil,

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[13] St. Paul spells out the implication of this order of creation in the First Letter to the Corinthians: "A man has no need to cover his head because he reflects the image and glory of God. But woman reflects the glory of man; for man was not created from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for woman's sake, but woman was created for man's sake" (7-9).

[14] See also Trible's outline of the six main elements of the Genesis myth as she correlates the justification of the subordination of women to each element of the myth.

the "Dark One," the "Author of Lies"), a Manichaean form of Christianity that is meant to invoke the extremes of missionary Catholicism.

A logical extension, in fact, of the association of woman to sexuality and sin is the glorification of chastity and virginity. The virgin state is the Christian ideal for women as exemplified by the virgin martyrs.[15] It is not surprising that Pauline evokes Agatha and Agnes who chose death—not over sexual violation—but over the alternative of a legitimate married life. Virginity becomes an indication of a spiritual commitment more urgent than the young woman's life. For this reason, Kathleen Young argues, the spiritual importance attached to virginity makes the Catholic woman more vulnerable following an incidence of rape. The anxiety evident in Pauline's neurotic rehashing of Fleur's rape as well as her repeated assurances of God's forgiveness of her fornication with Napoleon supports this argument. Young further claims that the Catholic church has confirmed male dominance and condoned violence against women by "handing on stories of virgin martyrs as one facet of the social control of women, their bodies and sexuality" (279).

Beginning in the early twentieth century the lives of the early virgin martyrs were overshadowed in Catholic teaching by the story of Maria Goretti, a twelve-year-old girl, whose life assumed almost mythic proportions with levels of meaning extending into the spiritual, social, and political spheres. In the summer of 1902 Maria Goretti was stabbed to death by an acquaintance of her family, Alessandro Serenelli, when she refused to have sex with him. Maria died twenty-four hours later and was immediately venerated in the Church for her virtue. Serenelli was later convicted and sentenced to thirty years in prison. While imprisoned, Serenelli experienced a vision

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[15] There is no popular male saint who underwent martyrdom to maintain his virginity.

of Maria who assured him of her forgiveness. When Maria was canonized in 1950, the converted and repentant Serenelli attended the ceremony at the side of Maria's mother.

There are several aspects of Maria's story and her glorification by the Church which have ramifications in both *Tracks* and *Love Medicine*. As a model of chastity, Maria Goretti was preached to generations of Roman Catholics in parochial schools before Vatican II. According to Debra Campbell, "It was impossible for a girl to attend a parochial or convent school at any time during the six decades prior to Vatican II and not learn about Maria Goretti, who constituted the core curriculum in moral theology for Catholic girls during this period" (668). At Goretti's canonization, Pope Pius XII declared, "From Maria's story carefree children and young people with their zest for life can learn not to be led astray by attractive pleasures which are not only ephemeral and empty but also sinful." The description of a life-threatening rape as "attractive pleasures" by a male celibate pope empowered to define appropriate sexual behavior—combined with the implication that had Maria succumbed sexually to force, her actions would be sinful—conveys an emphatic message to the Catholic girl that her hymen is worth more than her life and sets her up for victimization. The prayer contained in Maria Goretti's feast-day liturgy confirms her actions as exemplary:

> O God, who among the other miracles of your power, have given even to the weaker sex the victory of martyrdom, grant, we beseech You, that we, who are celebrating the heavenly birthday of Blessed Maria, Your Virgin and Martyr, may by her example draw nearer to You.

Young calls attention to the extraordinarily short lapse of time between Goretti's death and her canonization and suggests that her celebration was accelerated for political reasons. In the

years following World War II, the role of women was changing in a way that threatened traditional values. While Pietro DiDonato emphasizes the necessity of Maria Goretti's example of "virtuous hope and inspiration toward purity for girls" (157), Young asserts that it became "a useful reactionary symbol of patriarchal, religious, and family values" (285). Maria Goretti's example is additionally useful in a patriarchal society as her forgiveness of Serenelli can be extended on a global scale. Thus the rape victim, the victim of incest, the battered wife are given an unambiguous message by the Catholic Church to assume responsibility for their abusers, to forgive them and by forgiving, redeem them.

The identification of woman with sexuality and sin has its corollary in the association of female sexuality with pain, as Karen Armstrong observes:

> It is possible that the woman in the pornographic movie . . . is a tired secular relic of this Western tradition of Christendom which links female sexuality with pain and humiliation. The alliance of pain and punishment with women and sex is clearly in line with the sexual disgust that informed Christian emotion. Men have been taught in our culture to take pleasure in the sight of a woman suffering; suffering is seen as a female virtue and is also, obscurely, seen as sexy (210).[16]

Erdrich undercuts the virgin-martyr paradigm in two ways. First, she has Pauline change the end of the story. When Pauline perceives that Napoleon is inviting her to have sex ("He had . . . lured me, shed blankets in a heap. He had appeared to me as the water thing"), she neither submits

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[16] One of the paintings in Hallam's book of saints depicts St. Agatha completely naked, her face impassive, surrounded by an audience of luridly staring men. One of her torturers is raking her body with an iron hook while another has placed an instrument resembling a circular scissors around her full breast, ready to squeeze the handles and snip off the flesh.

to his advances nor does she forgive her seducer. Instead she attacks him, "tortures" him with her rosary beads and kills him. Secondly, she has Marie jettison the entire paradigm of virginity and sainthood. Marie's sexual act with Nector immediately after she leaves and immediately outside the grounds of the convent is a deliberate rejection of the Goretti moral.[17] Nector is shocked and mortified when he realizes that the act took place on open ground in full view of the convent—*in flagrante*: "On the hill, the windows dark in the white-washed brick seem to harbor a thousand holy eyes widening and narrowing" (65). Marie, in contrast, is contemptuous and defiant, "I hope they saw it." Her rebelliousness is actually an assertion of sexuality, an affirmation of life, a rejection of her own false standards of sanctity. She chooses to lie down in the dust with Nector as the alternative of the dust of deadness in the convent.

Pauline's personal repulsion for sex is layered with religious overtones of sex as sinful, involving pain and degradation. That she has absorbed the Church's representation of sex as sinful is manifest in her repeated referral to her need for forgiveness for her sexual liaison with Napoleon and for her depiction of sex as violent and loathsome. Even when she has contrived the sexual event and is titillated by it, as in the scene between Eli and Sophie, she uses rape-like terms to describe it. He "lifted her and brought her to the water. She stood rooted, dazed . . . obedient. He . . . bit her shoulder . . . held her head back by the pale brown strands . . . pulled her hips against him

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[17] The original version of *Love Medicine* depicts the scene as a semi-rape where Nector pins down Marie in an attempt to dominate her when suddenly he is caught in the grip of her hips.

> Marie is all tight plush acceptance, graceful movements, little jabs that lead me underneath her skirt where she is slick, warm, silk. I touch her with one hand and in that one touch I lose myself. (65)

Her response to the incident in the first edition, "I've had better." is discredited in the second by Nector's comment, "I know that isn't true because we haven't done anything yet. She just doesn't know what comes next" (65).

. . . Sophie screamed God's name and blood showed at her lip" (83-84). More disturbing, Pauline visualizes the central tenet of Christianity, the Incarnation, in terms of rape and violence. When Pauline sees the statue of the Virgin shedding tears for Sophie, she thinks at first the Virgin is sad because she herself is sexually innocent, "because She herself had never known the curse of men. She had never been touched, never known the shackling heat of the flesh" (*T* 95). Years later, however, after her own sexual experience with Napoleon, Pauline revises her understanding of the Virgin's tears. They flow not from innocent pity but from sympathy arising from her own experience.

> In God's spiritual embrace She experienced a loss more ruthless than we can imagine. She wept, pinned full-weight to the earth, known in the brain and known in the flesh and planted like dirt. She did not want Him [and was] frightened at the touch of His great hand upon Her mind. (*T* 95)

The repeated use of the word "known," clearly implies the biblical connotation of sexual intercourse. Pauline transposes the traditional iconography of the Virgin as cooperative and compliant, submissively accepting her role in human salvation, into a brutal assault, her mind as well as her body raped by overwhelming force. It establishes Pauline's understanding of God as one who ravishes, who overpowers, who imposes his will despite human resistance.[18] It is no wonder that Pauline expresses God's love in terms of instruments of torture and assumes the pose of the suffering servant. Her words, "I was empty except for pain" (*T* 192) take on new meaning: she is God-filled only when she is pain-filled. And it is no wonder that Pauline, having broken her

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[18] One wonders, therefore, about the kinkiness of Pauline's practice of imitating the Virgin's posture—the traditional female "missionary position" as Pauline describes it— as she sleeps. Is she not, indeed, covertly desiring a similar assault?

hymen in her tryst with Napoleon, obsessively tries to shed all her old skins and grow new ones. This revelation clarifies her final actions in *Tracks* where she rolls naked in the slough mud, "a poor and noble creature now, dressed in earth like Christ." She acquires yet another new skin, one that shrouds her femininity, her race, even her humanity. Unaware of the irony of her comment, "God would love me better as a lily of the field, though no such flower as I had yet appeared on reservation ground" (*T* 203), the "lily" plasters herself with dead leaves, feathers, and animal feces so that by the time she returned to the convent, she "was nothing human, nothing victorious, nothing like myself. I was no more than a piece of the woods." The taking of the veil simply finalizes her progression throughout the novel. Displaced through gender and race, Pauline takes on a new name, a new identity, and religious habit that masks both feminine form and Indian skin and severs her from her past.

> I asked for the grace . . . to leave Pauline behind, to remember that my name, any name, was no more than a crumbling skin. (205)

The reader recognizes that Pauline's religious choice and her mysticism may be an impulse to escape invisibility in a system that places her beyond representation. She negates the negative as Flavin points out, her mystical loss of subjectivity appearing as "the negation of a discourse which would rigidly define her position as woman and Indian in negative terms" (236).

In her critique of Christianity's influence on Native American culture, Paula Gunn Allen argues that the Church with its patriarchal construction disrupted the entire structure of indigenous tribes, replacing a gender-balanced social system with a hierarchical one in which "a woman's proper place was under the authority of her husband and a man's proper place was under the authority of the priests."

> . . . the shift from gynocentric-egalitarian and ritual-based systems to phallocentric, hierarchical systems is not accomplished in only one dimension . . .the assault on the system of woman power requires the replacing of a peaceful, nonpunitive, nonauthoritarian social system wherein women wield power by making social life easy and gentle with one based on child terrorization, male dominance, and submission of women to male authority (*Hoop 38*, 40-41).

The resulting religious, social, and political changes, erased, according to Allen, the entire spiritual basis for native governance.

Erdrich presents a more ambivalent picture of Christianity. Perhaps this is because her focus is less on social or political issues than the human dimensions of her characters, or perhaps it is due to her own Catholic upbringing. In any case, as Hans Bak observes, Erdrich moves beyond the stereotype of the "doomed Indian" helplessly caught between the conflicting codes of Native American spiritual traditions and Roman Catholicism. Such intercultural conflict is not necessarily destructive, but rather provides an "ambiguous source of both strength and powerlessness. Whatever prevails seems often less a matter of cultural conditioning or displacement than of inner resources of strength, determination and endurance" (146). Pauline's conjunction with Christian saints and martyrs, however ironic, highlights certain similarities between medieval mysticism in general and Ojibwa religious tradition. For both, mystical vision is the primary gateway to the realm of the spirit. In both traditions, prayer and fasting serve as a kind of testing and precondition for the visionary experience.[19]

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[19] Lame Deer also discusses at length the rigorous preparation a seeker of visions must undergo in the Western Lakota tribes to become receptive to the spirit world.

Friedman notes that Erdrich uses religion as a site of "cultural syncretism" rather than domination (123). Although the Ojibwa were greatly influenced by Catholic missionaries from the earliest times, conversion to Catholicism did not necessarily mean abandoning Anishinabe beliefs and practices. In an interview with Joseph Bruchac, Erdrich talked of her grandfather who "had a real mixture of old time and church religion—which is another way of incorporating. He would do pipe ceremonies for ordinations and things like that. He just had a grasp in both realities, in both religions. (Interview 1987, 80-81). She added that while Catholicism is a central fact of life on the Turtle Mountain Reservation, just as it is for many of the characters in *Tracks*, Ojibwa traditional religion is also currently flourishing alongside Catholicism (80-81). Even though she is no longer a practicing Catholic, Erdrich recognizes its continuing influence, "Catholicism has always been important to me . . . The ritual is full of symbols, mysteries, and the unsaid. That affects a person always, once you know it as a child." (George 245). She also recognizes its negative influences and the repressions it entails:

> I guess I have my beefs about Catholicism. Although you never change once you're raised a Catholic—you've got that. You've got that symbolism, that guilt, you've got the whole works and you can't really change that. That's easy to talk about because you have to exorcize it somehow. That's why there's a lot of Catholicism in both books. (Interview 1987 81)

Erdrich's fullest characters have, like her grandfather, a grasp of both realities. At the end of *Love Medicine* Erdrich reconciles the long opposition between Pauline and Fleur and their respective Catholic and Anishinabe positions through the friendship of their daughters, Marie and Lulu. Both are strong like their mothers; unlike them, both are able to adapt to their mixed-cultured

lives. Despite economic, spiritual and social upheaval, both women construct a firm identity. Although she casts off convent life, Marie proves herself a true "sister of mercy" in caring for orphaned children and attending Lulu. (Tharpe 174). Both pick and choose those elements of native spirituality and Christianity that foster their own sense of self and family life. For it is in the establishment of multiple and intimate relationships and a family life which, though chaotic, is energizing and loving, that most distinguishes the daughters from their mothers.

Erdrich's skill is such that she critiques Christianity without condemning it. In no way is Pauline presented to us as a typical Christian or Leopolda as a typical nun. Even in the eyes of her religious community, her penitential practices are depicted as odd, and her sanctity suspicious. The reader recognizes that Pauline's religious choice and her mysticism may be motivated by an impulse to escape invisibility in a system that places her beyond representation. She negates the negative as Louise Flavin points out, her mystical loss of subjectivity appearing as "the negation of a discourse which would rigidly define her position as woman and Indian in negative terms (62).

Erdrich includes a number of sympathetic Catholic figures to counterbalance Pauline: the gentle and sympathetic Father Damian; the staunch Sister Saint Anne, and Sister Mary Martin who comes to Gordie's assistance when he thinks he has murdered June. It is a tribute to her skill that even Pauline, for all her awfulness, gains the reader's heart. So much so that in the dramatic scene in *Love Medicine* when she and Marie combat and play tug of war with the spoon, the reader is gratified that Erdrich allows Leopolda to keep her dignity—and her spoon—intact. Sidney Larson's assessment of Pauline as a victim of forced acculturation, "confused and broken" is far from accurate. She is not admirable bur neither is she pathetic, vulnerable or victimized. With her force and single-mindedness, she might best be described as formidable. It is significant that

Erdrich doesn't bestow on her a sappy religious name like "Sister Mary of the Infant Jesus" but "Leopolda" with its intonations of fierceness and strength. Leopolda the Lion. The name "crackles" as Pauline herself acknowledges. And it fits.

Chapter Two

Ceremony: Violence and the Inversion of the Western

Even before he began to write the novel that would introduce and popularize the Western genre, Owen Wister recognized that the West that enthralled him was but an imaginative construct. True, the mountains and plains of the Western landscape still existed, but Wister lamented the passing of the huge herds of buffalo, the wild antelope, and especially the pasturing horseman: "He will never come again. He rides in historic yesterday. You will no more see him gallop out of the unchanging silence than you will see Columbus on the unchanging sea come sailing from Palos with his caravels" (x). *The Virginian*, Wister himself confesses, is a nostalgic commemoration of a brief epoch when men lived "wild and free" according to an unwritten code of justice and honor, unfettered by the culture of the past or the sissifying manners of civilization. It is a remembrance that is even more remote today, for the "infinite earth" that Wister pronounced to be the sole remaining heritage of the Western, has become in Leslie Silko's words, a land of "neon and plastic." Criss-crossed with major highways, dotted with fast-food chains, lined with strip malls, the wild West has become urbanized and predictable. Yet the values that the Western represented—adventure, independence, ruggedness, quick and natural justice, a willingness to

suffer and endure hardship, a love of fun and fellowship, a resolution of conflict through violence—have taken root in our mythology and continue to shape the definition of what it means to be an American.

In her award-winning book, *Ceremony*, Leslie Marmon Silko has revised the Western genre and infused it with new meaning. For she writes not of a west that has been and is no more, but of one that has potential existence, provided we are wise enough and courageous enough to accommodate in our technological world the values of the past. In constructing her version of the genre, Silko critiques not only the traditional components of the Western, but the oppressive and destructive elements of contemporary American culture.[20] While she uses violence to dramatize personal and racial conflict, she ultimately rejects it as a force of empowerment or justice. Her critique, then, includes an assessment of violence not only as it was played out in the mythic Western hero, but as a vindication for past wrongs or as a tool for social justice. The three major comparative elements between the Western and *Ceremony*—language and story, land and animals, and the use of ritual, including its construction of gender—can be examined from Silko's philosophical and moral approach to the topic of violence.

The attention to language is as deliberate in the Western as it is in *Ceremony*. In his book *Phallic Critiques* Peter Schwenger defines a category of writing style that he terms the "School of Virility," consisting of authors like Jack London, Ernest Hemingway, Norman Mailer—all of whom speak this "language of men," a language peppered with colloquialisms, slang, "bitten-off

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[20] The Western, as it developed in text, film and TV serials is too amorphous a genre to fit neatly into a single classification. For the purposes of this study, the term "Western" refers to the theme, plot, and structure common to the classic text of Owen Wister and to the popular fiction of writers like Zane Gray, Max Brand and Louis L'Amour.

fragments," and "tough" diction. Its function is to maintain, in Schwenger's words, "masculine reserve." According to this code, to express an emotion feminizes the speaker whereas to restrain it safeguards masculine integrity. Masculine reserve, therefore, means distrusting speech, for by talking one opens oneself up, making oneself vulnerable and inferior (as a woman is because she opens herself up sexually) whereas not talking demonstrates masculine control over emotion. The key issue is control. By remaining closed and silent, the male maintains the boundary which separates him from the world (43-45).

Schwenger's description of language and its function in the masculine role is applicable to virtually all the Western novels. Jane Tompkins remarks that the Western is at heart "anti-language," its mode of communication marked by understatement, sentence fragments, and the clipping off of the indefinite article, "a desperate shorthand, comic, really, in its attempt to communicate without using words" (*West* 51). In Cynthia Hamilton's analysis, this shorthand, together with the use of slang, cant and argot upholds democratic informality by asserting a linguistic democracy where all are equal. Examples of this minimalist and equalizing speech can be found in any of the Zane Grey, Louis L'Amour, or Max Brand series. A typical incident in Louis L'Amour's *Borden Chantry* illustrates the "conversation" that takes place between Marshal Chantry and Boone Silva, the gunman Chantry knows has been hired to kill him:

> "Howdy," he [Silva] said.
> "Light an' set," Chantry suggested.
> "Passin' by. How far's town?"
> "Hour. . . maybe more."
> "Your place?"
> "Stopping by."
> "Who's the law over yonder?"
> "Name of Chantry . . ."
> "Good with a gun?"
> "He gets along."

"You Chantry?"
"I am. Are you Boone Silva?"
"Uh-huh" (121-2).

The lack of emotion in the scene, although far-fetched, is designed to demonstrate the courage of each man in the face of his enemy, neither showing fear or surprise at this unexpected meeting. In the sparse exchange, they assess each other, their few words a measure both of their control and of their power. Their real conversation will come several chapters later in an exchange of bullets. The democratic principle is at work on another level: lawman and outlaw start out equal; it is the accuracy of the aim that will determine superiority.

But the Western's use of "shorthand language" goes beyond the assertion of linguistic democracy. The polished language skills of the Easterner reflect a social status of privilege, wealth, and political power. The Western uses the non-language of the hero to expose and deflate this social status while conferring power on the taciturnity of the hero. This simultaneous deflation/inflation is clearly exemplified in a campfire exchange between the Virginian and the Eastern narrator:

> It [the American climate] was a potent drug, I [the Easterner] said, for millions to be swallowing every day.
> "Yes," said he, wiping the damp from his Winchester rifle.
> Our American climate, I said, had worked remarkable changes, at least.
> "Yes," he said; and did not ask what they were.
> So I had to tell him."It has made successful politicians of the Irish. That's one. And it has given our whole race the habit of poker."
> Bang went his Winchester. The bullet struck close to my left. I sat up angrily.
> "That's the first foolish thing I ever saw you do!" I said.
> "Yes," he drawled slowly,"I'd ought to have done it sooner. He was pretty near lively again." And then he picked up a rattlesnake six feet behind me. It had . . . part revived by the sun, and he had shot its head off (178).[21]

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[21] It is interesting to note that as the Virginian grows wealthier and more socialized, his speech becomes more "Eastern." Compare his initial exchange with the narrator,"Find many oddities out here like Uncle Hughey?" "Yes, seh, there is a right smart of oddities around. They come in on every train." (9) with

The silent and therefore masculine Westerner contrasts the talkative Easterner and proves himself superior. Certainly the narrator's idle, even silly, prattle emphasizes that masculine language is that of action and its most effective locution is the pistol or rifle.

Language also operates to define gender power. Refined speech is associated with women and religion as well as Eastern culture and acts as a critique of physical force. Sitting in the library of a Long Island mansion, Anthony Woodbury, a character in Max Brand's *Trailin'* states "I'd rather be out in the country where men still wear guns, where the sky isn't stained with filthy coal smoke, where there's an horizon wide enough to breathe in, where there's man-talk instead of this damned chatter over teacups" (26-7). "Man-talk" is gun-talk spoken far from the restrictions of city life. It is presented as real living as opposed to the artificial and superficial "chatter over teacups" in a social existence that emasculates men. Almost every Western novel concludes with the glorification of force that affirms masculine violence and denigrates the feminine plea for peace. It is the noise, not of speech, but of thundering hooves and gunfire, that distinguishes personal and social power.

Tompkins analyzes the Western hero's silence from a feminist perspective. She interprets it as a behavioral script, expressing and authorizing a power relation that affects every aspect of domestic and social life. "The impassivity of male silence suggests the inadequacy of female verbalization, establishes male superiority, and silences the one who would engage in conversation"

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his language at the end of the novel when he describes the future of the cattle business: "We'll have big pastures fenced, and hay and shelter ready for winter. What we'll spend in improvements, we'll more than save in wages. I am well fixed for the new conditions" (433).

(59). Ultimately it figures as a "massive suppression of the inner life" (66) because the hero, by virtue of his characteristic terseness, is denied the most basic means of self-expression.

At the beginning of *Ceremony,* Tayo, too, is as closed and silent as the most macho of Western heros. However, Silko depicts his silence not as an indication of control but of disintegration, denoting not integrity and sexual vigor but spiritual and physical impotence. While confined in the army veteran's hospital, Tayo responds to the psychiatrist's questions in the third person, "'He can't talk to you. He is invisible. His words are formed with an invisible tongue, they have no sound.' He reached into his mouth and felt his own tongue; it was dry and dead, the carcass of a tiny rodent" (15). If the tongue can be seen as a phallic image, as Norman Mailer makes explicit in *Prisoner of Sex:* "that equivalent of a phallus, that ghost phallus of the mentality, firm strong-tongued ego" (9), then Tayo is, at this point in the story, clearly emasculated.

Many critics have traced the source of Tayo's confusion and muteness to the violence of World War II and the manner in which this violence disconnected him from native values, but Silko's depiction of his illness is actually more complex. True, Tayo's madness is directly attributable to his experience of violence and death in the army, but even before the war, he is presented as the speechless and shadowy partner of his cousin Rocky. The violence that muted Tayo can be traced back to his childhood, to his mother's abandonment and his aunt's censure. Tayo is further rejected by Emo and other schoolmates because of his illegitimate and half-breed status. Silko explicitly connects Tayo's silence and emotional confusion to his incomplete grasp of language. "But now the feelings were twisted, tangled roots, and all the names of the source of this growth were buried under English words, out of reach" (69). Thus his lack of access to language is symbolic of his inability to establish his identity within himself, his tribe, and the larger social

world. His journey, then, becomes a search for language and story that provides him with such an identity.

Native American writers and critics emphasize the centrality of language within the tribal culture. For many native cultures, language is more than the mechanism by which information is communicated—language creates reality. Simon Ortiz calls language a "way of life." "Our language is the way we create the world . . . . Consciousness comes about through language. Life—language. Language is life, then" (Coltelli 107-8).

In his essay "The Man Made of Words," N. Scott Momaday uses the word "morality" to define our verbal dimension, the connection between language and our essential being. It is our "consummate being in language; it is the world of [our] origin and of [our] posterity, and there is no other. But it is a world of definite reality and of infinite possibility" (172). Critics outside the native tradition have been struck by the power assigned there to the spoken and written word. Linda Krumholz describes language in the native tradition as efficacious, able to create and transform both individual consciousness and external reality (90-91). "The Word, in fact," writes Brian Swann, "is a sacrament, a vital force . . . . [where] object and word are so fused that their creation, the 'event,' is itself creative, bringing into this time and place the enduring powers which truly effect that which the event claims, and such action cannot be undone" (xi-xii). And Kenneth Lincoln confirms this: "Ideally generative in the world, words make things happen in Native America; language is the source of a world in itself" ("Native" 20). Toni Flores explains that *Ceremony* and the culture in which it is rooted is deeply committed to the conviction that story-telling is creation. "For Tayo, for the Navajo and Pueblo peoples, and for Silko also, to tell a story is to make a reality; to act out a story is to make a world" (54). Our rationalistic bias may

persuade us that such an attribution of power to language is superstitious, but Momaday reminds us that at one time all races believed in the magic of words. The Anglo Saxons who chanted spells over fields to germinate seeds on sheer strength of the human voice "knew a great deal about language and the efficacy of language" ("Magic" 183). Indeed, this belief in generative verbal power is intrinsic to the western Judeo-Christian tradition. In Genesis the word of God is depicted as supremely powerful and fecund: "Let there be . . . and there was." [22] Moreover, in multiple Old and New Testament narratives, biblical leaders, the prophets, Jesus, and the Apostles wrought miracles by the sheer power of their word. Perhaps as our world has become more scientific and technological, we have relegated the sacramental power of the word to the realm of superstition. Nevertheless, recent feminist and linguistic theory clearly demonstrates the relationship of language to power and control.

Lincoln refers to Silko's novel as a "word ceremony," telling Tayo's story as a creative act. "She writes out of an old medicinal regard for word-spirits powerful enough to make things happen" (*NAR* 238). That Tayo believes in the efficacy of words is manifested by his conviction that his curse of the rain on a jungle island is powerful enough and far-reaching enough to cause a six-year drought in his homeland. Later, his healing, his consciousness, and his masculinity are inextricably connected with his power of language. And the primary expression of this power is storytelling.

Although the Western hero eschews words when in pain, conflict, and emotional crisis, he nevertheless supports a tradition of storytelling. The story in this genre appears to have a triple

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[22] A Uitoto creation myth that begins thus: "In the beginning, the word gave origin to the Father," (Astrov 20) echoes the initial words of St. John's gospel: "In the beginning was the Word."

function: entertainment, aggrandizement of the hero, and power-play. The stories in Brand's *Destry Rides Again,* for example, all contribute to the myth of Destry's prowess. His exploits are told and retold by the townsfolk with increasing exaggeration of their violence and his power until they assume mythic proportions. The stories in *The Virginian* have a more complex role. When the cowboys sit around swapping tales, the good-natured humor of their tales is deceptive; they are in reality, never innocent. One of their functions is to undermine Easterners by emphasizing their clumsiness, naivete, ignorance, and incompetence while simultaneously illustrating the superiority of the Westerner. The Eastern narrator endures several embarrassing situations when he overhears or is directly told thinly disguised tales mocking his speech, manners, and clothing.

In his analysis of the tall tale in the American literary tradition, James Caron classifies it as a sub-species of myth consisting of two opposing impulses: to hide yet reveal its true purpose by contriving ways of containing lies within a plausible framework. Unlike the folk tale, legend, or myth, the tall tale generates a specious feeling and aims at revealing this speciousness sufficiently to raise doubts without confirming them. Caron calls attention to the underlying violence of this tradition and compares it to the violence done to straight discourse "by the turning or crookedness of tropes or the violence that figurative language does to ideas as they exist in themselves."[23] He argues that it has a specific purpose in the frontier community because it acts as a verbal displacement of physical hostility—that is, it afforded the expression of aggression in a civilized form at a time when violent behavior was allowable (27-34).

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[23] This description coincides with that of the OED's third definition of violence as the "improper treatment or use of a word; wresting or perversion of meaning or application; unauthorized alteration of wording"; as well as "intensity or excess of contrast."

Although Caron recognizes the content and purpose of the frontier tale, he does not explore the violence of its effects beyond admitting the loss of face suffered by the hearer who is conned by a tale. In actuality, the Western story, rather than displacing hostility, actually invites it, functioning as a sort of verbal foreplay that assaults the foe with words prior to doing so with fists or bullets. For example, the central conflict between the Virginian and his nemesis, Trampas, is demonstrated and developed in storytelling before it is resolved in gunfire. When the latter invents a yarn, his aim is to make a fool of the protagonist, diminishing his esteem and his authority over the cowboys under his charge. The story has power, and Trampas uses it to subvert authority. The Virginian retaliates by telling a more fabulous story that deceives not only Trampas but the entire group of mutineering cowboys. By telling a better story, the Virginian reestablishes the proper hierarchy: he confirms his power as leader, wins back the rebelling cowboys and denudes Trampas of social authority. "Rise up, liars, and salute your king!" the Virginian's friend Scipio cried at the conclusion of the hero's tale. Despite its apparent levity, however, the story creates an atmosphere of unrest and latent anarchy. In the case of *The Virginian* storytelling confirms the antagonism between the hero and Trampas and prefigures their final violent confrontation.

The role of language and story is even more central to the plot of *Ceremony* for it operates on three levels: to prefigure, illuminate, and confirm the pattern of events that the hero must decode in order to construct the proper ending. In accord with the tradition of Native American literature, Silko uses the story to tell us who we are and our place and purpose in the universe. In an interview with Kim Barnes, Silko defined her concept of storytelling.

> When I say "storytelling," I don't just mean sitting down and telling a once-upon-a-time kind of story. I mean a whole way of seeing yourself, the people around

> you, your life, the place of your life in the bigger context, not just in terms of nature and location, but in terms of what has gone on before, what's happened to other people. So it's a whole way of being (86).

In Silko's tradition stories function as a locator and identifier. "You don't have anything if you don't have the stories," Silko tells the reader at the beginning of the novel (2). And in a conversation with Larry Evers and Denny Carr, she explains this idea further, "That's how you know, that's how you belong, that's how you know you belong, if the stories incorporate you into them . . . . In a sense, you are told who you are or you know who you are by the stories that are told about you" (29-30). The Western story tells you who you are not; it deflates and dislocates you if you happen not to be the hero. In contrast, Tayo's journey is one of locating himself within and by means of the stories.[24] Shut out from the stories by his mother's and his aunt's rejection, he is unable to establish an appropriate identity. Paula Gunn Allen explains that the question "Who is your mother?" is pivotal in the Laguna Pueblo, because the mother's identity is the key of the child's. "Naming your own mother enables people to place you precisely within the universal web of your life, in each of its dimensions: cultural, spiritual, personal, and historical" *(Hoop* 209). This crucial mothering is absent in Tayo's childhood. Who is Tayo's mother?" The one who gave birth to him bequeathed him the 'texts' and memories of her shame. She was "shamed by what they taught her in school about the deplorable ways of the Indian people," shamed by her white lovers,

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[24] Tayo's very name may well have its origin in the story of Ti'yo, a Pueblo god (Snake Youth), who in his youth searches for the sources of water. The search entails an intricate and dangerous passage to discover the truth. During his journey Ti'yo sleeps with a goddess who is possibly Spider Grandmother. Like Tayo he returns as a hero, bringing confirmation of the god's care and authentication for the sacred ceremonies (Hamilton 240).

by "the truth in their fists and their greedy feeble love-making" and shamed by "the pain of what she was doing with her life" (68-69).

Tayo's shame is reinforced by his aunt's censure. Although she provides Tayo with food and shelter, she denies him both love and a spiritual connection with the past. Hence Tayo's inability to "name" his mother is tied to his failure to identify his own significance, to establish a sense of reality, and a sustaining relationship with the earth. Separated from Indian women and the feminine principle, Tayo is cut off from the source of integration and connection (Ronnow 217). Although aware of the power of the story, Tayo seems at the beginning of the novel to see it as having meaning not for himself but for those who like his cousin Rocky "belong," and he is able to create a story only for Rocky's sake.

> Tayo talked to the corporal almost incessantly, walking behind him with his end of the blanket stretcher, telling him that it wasn't much farther now, and all down hill from there. He made a story for all of them, a story to give them strength. The words of the story poured out of his mouth as if they had substance, pebbles and stone extending to hold the corporal up, to keep his knees from buckling, to keep his hands from letting go of the blanket (12).

As Rocky grows weaker Tayo's story turns violent and becomes a curse of land and rain, with far-reaching ramifications. When his story fails and Rocky dies, Tayo relinquishes whatever sense he has of himself and he has to be confined to a mental ward. His gradual recovery occurs as he discovers the pattern of the stories told him by Josiah, Night Swan, Betonie, and Ts'eh and learns to distinguish in them the structure and meaning they provide for the course of events. At the

end of the novel, Tayo's integration is affirmed when he sits among the tribal elders and tells the story of his journey as he has shaped it.

It is Betonie's scalp ceremony that enables Tayo to begin his participation in the story and to script out the triple pattern the wise man discerns in his vision of the cattle, the woman, and the mountain. By recovering Josiah's spotted cattle, mixed-breeds like himself, he not only makes good on his promise to his uncle, but as Jennifer Haddock comments, he symbolically asserts pride in his own mixed-breed heritage; through his relationship with Ts'eh, he embraces the feminine principle of life, nurturance and continuity (115); and his experience on the mountain teaches him the falsity of boundaries of time and space. Alfonso Ortiz explains the sacredness of the dry paintings that Betonie uses in his ritual and he emphasizes the importance of following the traditional ritual exactly. "Effective control comes only from a letter-perfect attention to detail and correct performance" (143). But Silko suggests that the old ceremonies, if unadapted, no longer work. The medicine man Ku'osh using the ancient tribal healing ritual was unable to effect Tayo's cure. Tayo himself, the mixed breed, is living testimony to change and transition, and Betonie tells him that effective religious rituals must evolve and change as life does.

> Long ago when the people were given these ceremonies, the changing began, if only in the aging of the yellow gourd rattle or the shrinking of the skin around the eagle's claw, if only in the different voices from generation to generation, singing the chants. You see, in many ways, the ceremonies have always been changing. . . . I have made changes in the rituals. The people mistrust this greatly, but only this growth keeps the ceremonies strong. She [his Mexican mother, a curandera] taught me this above all else: things which don't shift and grow are dead things" (126).

Although Silko proposes that stories are the only way to fight off illness and death, not all those told in the novel are life-giving. The novel contains stories of twentieth century Indian characters like Auntie and Rocky who have shaped their lives according to Anglo narratives that promise wealth and power but which sabotage their native cultural strength. And some stories are more violent and sinister than those found in the Western because of their wider social implications. Silko opposes to the story scripted in Betonie's ceremony the tales of what she terms "witchery." Like the Western tale, the purpose of the witchery narratives is to delude and destroy; and their latent hostility is not a displacement of, but a prelude to, greater physical violence. Nuclear devastation is witchery's inversion of the "sunrise" that begins and ends the story. Emo's conquest tales of "white pussy" and Japanese soldiers foreshadows the atrocities he commits at Jackpile Mine. The climactic action (or "nonaction" as Reed Dasenbrook terms it) is Tayo's resistance to the witchery story as Emo shapes it when Tayo refrains from killing Emo to save his friend Harley. "Tayo survives where the other Indian war vets do not because he has faith in the old stories and ceremonies. He follows their plot; the others fall prey to white plots and die according to the end of the story they have chosen" (Dasenbrook 312-313).

In a narrative such as *Ceremony,* the reader too must learn to locate the self within the story—and by doing so engages in a process that is disturbing if not actually violent. While it may seem sheer hyperbole to describe a reader as assaulted by a text, the notion is neither original nor far-fetched. Indeed it is fitting that violence be situated in language since language is the foundational structure for oppression and, consequently, is one of the most powerful sites for transformation as western feminists in the last twenty years have recognized (Shaddock 108). In a sense all literature can be seen as intrinsically violent because it forces us to move beyond our

comfortable boundaries, to question our values and our assumptions. Andrew Brink argues that violence is a function of literature, reflecting a "constructive violence" which occurs in fundamental life events: fertilization, birth, growth (6-7). If the text is invaded ("ravished" in Barthes's terminology) by the reader, so also the text has the power to invade, dislocate, provoke, and assault the reader and the world as the reader knows it. Certainly Silko invades the reader's space by addressing the disparity between white and native perceptions, thereby creating a sort of double-consciousness. In James Ruppert's analysis, this interaction between two separate spheres of discourse—Native and contemporary American—is mediational, resulting in an increased appreciation of the Native world view by non-native readers and in the evolution of the Native world view (*Desert* 129-30). However, Silko herself identifies the collision of values, realities, and ways of knowing as subversive. She uses the story to deconstruct the familiar Anglo world, recognizing the transformative power of text as Wolfgang Iser described it:

> The text must therefore *bring about* a standpoint from which the reader will be able to view things that would never have come into focus as long as his own habitual dispositions were determining his orientation (35).

In an interview with Laura Coltelli, Silko identified her writing as radical, stating that it is "more effective to write a story . . . than to rant and rave [against oppression] . . . For me the most effective political statement I could make is through my art work. I believe in subversion rather than straight-out confrontation" (147-48). Krumholz notes that Silko provides the reader with a second sight that illuminates their misunderstandings and misrepresentations. She positions us, as readers, into a self-critical situation in which we experience the discomfort both of our historical role and present responsibilities, prompting a more self-conscious and less authoritative approach

to our own reading practice (107). Narratives like *Ceremony* and Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* and *Tracks* construct the Anglo as subject and the Indian as object, and probe the self-destructive factionalism that this inevitably causes within the Native American community. These works are significant for feminist theories of oppression because they present strategies of resistance through language, specifically through story, and, in the process, re-theorize oppression itself (Shaddock 109). The irony of this "second sight" is that it inverts the double consciousness which W. E. B. Dubois made famous in describing how minorities see themselves reflected in white eyes.[25] In *Ceremony* the Anglo readers see themselves, their culture and their history, through a Native American lens and it brings into focus a gaze of "mixed contempt and pity."

An analogy can be made between the feminist/ethnic writer and the violence of the text in terms of reader response. In Margaret Whitford's appraisal of the male reaction to feminist narratives, she concludes that "women are positioned *outside* the social contract, as its basis and foundation, and therefore it is inevitable that women contesting their position will come to be seen as violent and threatening, while from women's point of view, it is *patriarchy* that is deadly" (381). Just as a male reader may find feminist discourse violent and threatening, so the Anglo reader of a text like Silko's that critiques both patriarchy and white society may find it accusatory and hostile, and react with resistance and allegations of reverse bigotry. Indeed, in a symposium devoted to the analysis of *Ceremony*, Charles Link of East Texas University commented, "All American Indian

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[25] "The Negro," W. E. B. DuBois wrote, "is . . . gifted with a second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no real 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, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (3).

novels seem to condemn the white race in their curing ceremonies, incorporating us into Indian sickness." Carol Mitchell, one of the panelists denied this, pointing to places in the novel where Silko resists white condemnation. When Link further asked, "You mean we [whites] weren't invented by the witches?", Mitchell acknowledged the anti-white tenor in the novel but added, "It is also clearly stated by Betonie that you can't trust all Indians just as you can't trust all white people."[26] Two of the other panelists came to Silko's defense, Peter Beidler reasoning that "the witches invented the whites in *Ceremony* as a response to some of the problems that the Indians had," and Larry Evers justifying it as a humorous invention on Silko's part (Sands/Ruoff 69-70). Although Silko has explicitly denied blaming whites,

> I try to begin to see witchery as a sort of metaphor for the destroyers or the counter force, that force which counters vitality and birth. The counter force is destruction and death . . . I try to take it beyond any particular culture or continent, because that's such a bullshit thing. It's all Whitey's fault, that's too simplistic, mind-less ("Conversation" 32)

nevertheless, she does locate the very source of whiteness within evil (132). Moreover, throughout the novel, whites are described without exception in negative terms.

In caves of dark hills

white skin people

like the belly of a fish

covered with hair.

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[26] Silko's actual words are contained in Betonie's warning to Tayo prior to the curing ritual, "You don't write off all the white people, just like you don't trust all the Indians." (128).

. . . .

They see no life

When they look

they see only objects.

The world is a dead thing for them

the trees and rivers are not alive

the mountains and stones are not alive.

The deer and bear are objects

They see no life (135).

Individual whites—store managers, ranchers, bartenders—are stereotyped as bigoted red-necks with repulsive physical characteristics. When she describes the gas station manager, for example, she focuses on his milky white face stubbled with a red beard, his skin wrinkled from frowning, black and oily fingers on hands covered with curly reddish hair. When Tayo encounters him, he has to keep himself from laughing at the station man "who did not even know that his existence and the existence of all white people had been conceived by witchery" (154).

Over twenty-five years ago Hannah Arendt analyzed the problem of sweeping racial accusations in the context of black and white relationships. She argued that general accusations along with confessions of collective guilt were not only the "best possible safeguard against the discovery of culprits" but provided the best excuse for doing nothing. In addition to being "dangerous and obfuscating," such accusations/confessions escalate racism into higher, less tangible regions.

> The real rift between black and white is not healed by being translated into an even less reconcilable conflict between collective innocence and collective guilt. "All white men are guilty" is not only dangerous nonsense but also racism in reverse, and it serves quite effectively to give the very real grievances and rational emotions of the Negro population an outlet into irrationality, an escape from reality (65).

Nevertheless the Anglo reader must consider Silko's accusations, discomforting though they be.

> They will kill the things they fear
>
> all the animals
>
> the people will starve.
>
> They will poison the water. . . .
>
> They will slaughter whole tribes. . . .
>
> they will bring terrible diseases. . . .
>
> They will take this world from ocean to ocean
>
> they will turn on each other
>
> they will destroy each other. . . (136-7)

Silko's censure is echoed in Slotkin's sobering conclusion to *Gunfighter Nation* when he encourages the reader to reflect on the myth of the American hero and to unmask the illusion of the independence of that myth to time and consequence. Their frontier world is chained to ours, the consequences of their hunting—to the verge of extinction—the whale, buffalo, and bear emerging in the wasted landscape;

> the Indian debased, impoverished, and killed in return for his gifts; the land and its people, its "dark" people especially, economically exploited . . . the warfare between man and nature, between race and race, exalted as a kind of heroic ideal; the piles of wrecked and rusted cars, heaped like Tartar pyramids of death-cracked, weather-browned, rain-rotted skulls, to signify our passage through the land (564-5).

The response Silko provokes to past injustices is not a chest-beating *mea culpa* nor an intellectual concurrence. She invites the reader to take part in the story. Ruppert writes that Silko structures the readers' experiences so as to force them "to understand and participate in the cultural and epistemological framework of people of Laguna" ("Reader" 85). But Silko's purpose goes beyond understanding native culture. Her novel is itself a curing ceremony with the novelist acting as shaman and the reader participating and being healed by a ritual made relevant to contemporary life. The reader is asked to resist witchery in all its manifestations, "the prying impulse, the need to try the next bomb, the curiosity that stirs up ant hills, that tortures in order to learn how pain manifests itself . . . the impulsive, the act untainted with reflection, unentangled with any sense of implication, of ends, of responsibility" (McAllister 157). Like Tayo, the reader must first try to discern the pattern in the stories and then map out appropriate action. Betonie's words to Tayo are equally directed to the reader in his/her resistance to the destructive forces of witchery: "It's up to you. Don't let them stop you. Don't let them finish off this world" (152). Such an openness to the text involves looking inward to examine and reassess one's assumptions and values and implies a willingness to change. It is exactly this provocation to change that causes Ruppert to relate Silko's text to Bahktin's Dialogism.

> Both audiences [Indian and white] must acknowledge the growth of new myths . . . must examine their attitudes to different people, positions, and discourse. Their acts of mediation constitute Bahktin's "ideological translation of the language of the other" into a perspective on the text that merges the different spheres of discourse while continuing each. *Explicator* 134

Certainly, if there is violence for the reader in this aspect of the text, it is the provocative and creative violence that Brink described where text and reader converge not in a "one-directional and one-dimensional encounter but a cosmopolitan and multivocal conversation" (12).

In addition to the violence of language and story, a second point of comparison of violence between Silko's *Ceremony* and the traditional Western lies in the various constructions of the land and its non-human inhabitants. Both demonstrate an appreciation for the land's immensity, its wildness and beauty. But the Western, despite its enthusiastic, even lyrical descriptions of plains, prairie, mountains and canyons, often represents the land in adversarial terms, the standard against which the hero can measure his manhood. It functions, in effect, as a crucible that proves the hero's mettle as he endures searing heat, bitter cold, blizzards, rain, flash floods, violent summer storms, drought, and long stretches of comfortless days and nights on the trail. Although Tayo also experiences these harsher aspects of nature, Silko emphasizes the land's nurturing features over its violent ones. An interesting and surprisingly similar desire to merge so completely with the earth as to become indistinguishable from it is experienced by both the Virginian and Tayo and clearly illustrates the perspective from which each views the land. The Virginian, honeymooning with his bride in an idyllic island setting, confides to her, "Often when I have camped here, it has made me want to become the ground, become the water, become the trees, mix with the whole thing. Not

know myself from it. Never unmix again" (425-26). Only after his marriage does he recognize that urge as a displacement of his desire for union with a woman. "What I did not know at all," he confesses to Molly, "was the way a man can be pining for—for this—and never guess what is the matter with him" (426). For Tayo the desire to "become the ground" emerges in cold and pain and represents a desire for union not with a woman but with death.

> He was aware of the center beneath him . . . The magnetism of the center spread over him smoothly like rainwater down his neck and shoulders . . . It was pulling him back, close to the earth, where the core was cool and silent as mountain stone. And even with the noise and pain in his head he knew how it would be: a returning rather than a separation (201).

Although both men reject this craving for obliteration out of a sense of responsibility, that duty manifests itself in opposing ways. The Virginian, although recognizing his obligations to his employer, his fellow cowboys and the cattle, nevertheless works purposefully to acquire land for his personal enrichment. Ultimately, he expresses his relationship to the earth in terms of economic rather than emotional or spiritual values. Land is equated to property, which represents in Cynthia Hamilton's words "the emblem of power and the badge of success" (10). The Virginian purchases land which contains coal needed by railroads and which guarantees his wealth. In the final analysis, therefore, it is not love of the land but love of the land's value that inspires him. Despite his acclaimed love of the wilderness, the Western hero will purchase it, deforest it, mine it, develop it—that is, make it non-wilderness—in order to achieve his dream of riches.

In contrast, Tayo is taught by Betonie to look beyond the legal ownership of land. When Tayo expresses his bitterness over what the white man has taken from the Indian, the magnitude of

that original theft and its continuing destruction, Betonie tells him to look east at Mount Taylor which is towering dark blue in the fading twilight. "They only fool themselves when they think it is theirs. The deeds and papers don't mean anything. It is the people who belong to the mountain" (128). Like the Virginian, Tayo assumes responsibility for the cattle and the community but he moves beyond that to a commitment to the land for the land's sake in a consciousness that recognizes his obligation to the past and expresses a pledge to the future.

Many historians attribute the particular landscape of the Western to the desire to escape the complexities and tensions of civilization, a "reenactment of the American dialectic between civilization and nature" (Tompkins 44). But recent critics such as Heyne, Tompkins, Hamilton, and Slotkin have revised this theory. According to Heyne the wilderness existed primarily as a text written and read by Americans and is increasingly becoming understood as a trope. "Metaphors such as "virgin land" reveal that just as women—and often nonwhite men as well—have been the body and voice of the Other for the white male author, so the frontier has been the place of the Other" (5). Zane Grey, Wister, L'Amour, Brand all depict the West as a symbol of exploitable wealth: rich with mineral deposits, wildlife, and potential for pasture and farmland. It is indeed the "Other" to be mastered and subdued, awarded to the hero as a trophy of wealth and social recognition. Tompkins argues that the genre is situated in the wilderness because there it could safely exclude the power and presence of woman. "The Western doesn't have anything to do with the West as such. It isn't about the encounter between civilization and the frontier. It is about men's fear of losing their mastery, and hence their identity, both of which the Western tirelessly reinvents" (44-45). Perhaps the land—which is traditionally gendered as feminine—replaces the human female with a female landscape that evokes the dark side of desire: domination, exploitation,

and control. Lame Deer articulates this belief when he uses the metaphor of rape to describe the relationship between the Anglo and virgin land. "White men always pick the few unspoiled, beautiful, awesome spots for the sites of these abominations [missile silos and radar stations]. You have raped and violated these lands, always saying, 'Gimme, gimme, gimme,' and never giving anything back" (108).

Indeed, Silko expresses the opposition between native and white culture in terms of land, and it is precisely the trope of a feminized, exploitable setting that she subverts in *Ceremony*. Although she clearly genders the land as female she does not construct a simplistic equation of earth-bearing-grain to woman-bearing-child. Rather she associates the nature of woman with the creative power of thought, thought which results in physical manifestations such as mountains, lakes, creatures, as well as philosophical and sociological systems. By the end of the novel, Tayo bridges the distance between his individual consciousness and the universe through learning to love "the Woman who brings all things into being, and because he is at last conscious that She has always loved them, his people, and him" (Allen "Landscapes" 10).

Tayo's responsibility towards the land is not expressed in terms of the exercise of patriarchal authority—to name, own, conquer, tame, subject—but in recognition of an elastic interdependence, a relationship of mutual nurturing. "We are the land," writes Paula Gunn Allen. "To the best of my understanding, that is the fundamental idea of Native American life: the land and the People are the same" ("Landscapes" 7). The relationship she pictures is not one of mere affinity for the earth nor living "close to nature"; it is more one of mathematical identity, such as Lame Deer experienced in a vision which enabled him to perceive that "all of nature is in me, and a bit of myself is in all of nature" (126). Emo's bitter assessment, "Here's the Indians' mother earth!

Old dried-up thing!" is evidence of his radical alienation. If Tayo has lost all sense of identity at the novel's opening, it is because he is estranged from the land; his healing, therefore, is bound up with re-establishing this essential connection. "There are some things worth more than money," Josiah has told him. This is where we come from, see. This sand, this stone, these trees, the vines, all the wildflowers. This earth keeps us going" (45).

The difference between the two perspectives can be seen most clearly in terms of wild and smaller animals. In the Western, "good" animals—the horse, cattle, and sheep, and occasionally as in the *Virginian*, domestic fowl—support the economic prosperity of the frontier while "bad" ones, the coyote, rattlesnake, and mountain lion, threaten that prosperity and are depicted as vicious and evil. There is little attention to smaller life forms. Their lack of presence—like that of women—attests to their lack of significance. Throughout *Ceremony* Silko criticizes the whites' attitude to insects and wild animals. She opposes western attitudes towards flies, for example, as dirty and disease-bearing with a story: the greenbottle fly who gained forgiveness for the people from the mother of the people (101). A comparison between a scene in *Ceremony* and in *The Virginian* dramatizes the difference between the two perspectives. When a snake crosses Tayo's path, he stops to admire its yellow color and the bright copper spots which remind him of wildflowers; kneeling over its delicate arching tracks, he sprinkles pollen in the imprints. "As far as he could see, in all directions, the world was alive. He could feel the motion pushing out of the damp earth into the sunshine—the yellow spotted snake the first to emerge, carrying this message on his back to the people" (221). He appreciates the snake as a sign of spring and as messenger of the spirit world carrying the promise of new life. The Virginian also comes across a snake while

riding along a trail in the company of Molly. He immediately shoots it, commenting with satisfaction on the condition of his gun and the accuracy of his aim.

In another passage, Silko contrasts Rocky's anglicized attitude towards deer-killing with that of Josiah who teaches Tayo to sprinkle cornmeal on the nose of the slain deer to feed its spirit. "They had to show their love and respect, their appreciation" (51). In a later scene, she contrasts the successive encounters of Tayo and a Texan with a mountain lion. Tayo greets the lion with wonder and a prayer, "'Mountain lion, he whispered, 'becoming what you are with each breath, your substance changing with the earth and the sky.'"

> He knelt and touched the footprints, tracing his finger around the delicate edges of dust the paw prints had made, deep round imprints, each toe a distinctive swirl. He kept his back to the wind and poured yellow pollen from Josiah's tobacco sack into the cup of his hand. He leaned close to the earth and sprinkled pinches of yellow pollen into the four foot-prints. Mountain lion, the hunter. Mountain lion, the hunter's helper (196).

When the Texan discovers the lion's tracks, he shouts in excitement, "A big son of a bitch! Tracks the size of my palm!" and puts off jailing Tayo to hunt it, "'Shit,' he said, 'greasers and Indians—we can run them down anytime. But it's been a couple of years since anybody up here got a mountain lion'"(202). This reflection on casual killing and the tendency to dominate through destruction echoes Black Elk's incredulity at the slaughter of thousands of herds of buffalo by white hunters for sheer sport. Again the reader is forced to recognize the unpleasant truth in Silko's image of whites as destroyers.

In his book *Regeneration Through Violence*, Richard Slotkin observes that the image of the frontier hero as hunter holds a charm for many of us who are enthralled with the chase, the conflict, the kill. The hunter's actions "demonstrate his peculiar combination of love for the wild country and the urge to destroy, digest, and remake it in his own image . . . . He is not simply a man who, by unfortunate circumstances, must hunt game and kill Indians to survive. He is a professional killer, a solitary acolyte perpetually sacrificing and consuming his god" (426). The hunter myth construes the relationship between man and nature as that of hunter to prey, a relationship whose final expression is the destructive assimilation of the wilderness. "It is the *hunter* quality that sets the hero apart and makes him the hero. Not the cultivator, but the *conquistadore* is the American Aeneas" (555).

What Silko does in the comparison between Tayo's and the ranch hand's reaction to the mountain lion is to strip the hunter myth of its heroic aspect, the bold man-against-nature posture that signals an admirable courage and freedom of spirit. Tayo's reverence for the animal, his spiritual connection with it underscores not only the ranch hand's ignorant and destructive reaction but the invidiousness of the myth itself. In subverting this myth, she supplants the hunter-hero with one who is not *conquistador* but cultivator, one who reveres and nurtures the land and its inhabitants.

The third major comparison between the Western and *Ceremony* concerns the use of ritual. One does not usually associate the Western with ritual because the genre deliberately disclaimed any overtones of tradition and religiosity. Nevertheless there are a recurring series of rituals in the Western formula which contain pivotal violent elements. The most common of these rituals are those of deception, the chase, the romantic conquest and the gunfight. The ritual of deception is

embedded in the Western formula and, although the least violent of Western rituals, frequently results in the theft of horses, money, or self-esteem. "It is the small tricks that lead to the big bullets," the narrator reflects in *The Virginian* (185). The hero tells the narrator that moral transgressions are assessed not by their degree of illegality but by their level of skill: "You've got to deal cyards *well*; you've got to steal *well*; and if you claim to be quick with your gun, you must be quick . . . . You must break all the Commandments *well* in this Western country" (399). When the Virginian and his vigilantes breakfast with the captured horse thieves before lynching them, their discussion centers on the failure of the rustlers to outwit their pursuers rather than on their misdeeds. The entire plot of Brand's *Destry Rides Again* is based on the deception of friendship on the part of the antagonist Chet Brant for the hero. Because Destry fails to read the indications of treachery (which are clearly obvious to the reader), several deaths ensue. Speedy, the con-man hero in the novel of the same name, warns his intended victim, "We're all men, we all have a share of brains, we all want money, we all want an easy time. Well, your dollars are your treasure; your wits are the soldiers that guard it. If I can put your soldiers to sleep, I take your money. That's my game, and it's a good game. It beats chess all hollow" (17).

The first ritual that Silko describes, Betonie's scalp ceremony, contrasts the Western rituals of deception. The rite is designed to dispel Tayo's illusions and promote his healing by connecting him with truths that precede, include, and extend beyond himself. Tayo's first reaction to Betonie is one of distrust because he assesses the shaman from a purely materialistic viewpoint. How can a man living in an old hogan "so pitiful and small compared to the world he knew the white people had," (127) possess healing power? Power in the white world is reflected in wealth, and Betonie's accumulation of "junk and trash"—phone books, newspapers, calendars,

overflowing cartons of herbs and roots—seem an indication of psychosis rather than of wisdom. In *The Language of the Self,* Jacques Lacan explains how crucial such symbols are in confirming both identity and purpose:

> Symbols in fact envelop the life of man in a network so total that they join together, before he comes into the world, those who are going to engender him "by flesh and by blood", so total that they bring to his birth, along with the gifts of the stars . . . the design of his destiny, so total that they give words which will make him faithful or renegade, the laws of the acts which will follow him right to the very place where he *is* not yet and beyond his death itself (42).

Betonie instructs Tayo (and the reader) that the value of his curious collection lies in the stories they contain and the manner in which they record the traces of human passage. Lincoln suggests that Betonie's healing is bound up with naming things and in triggering the right memories. "This right naming connects inner with outer forms, the *ianyhi* (breath) or spirit with matter, by way of living words" (*NAR* 242).

Tayo, however, resists this connection. Like his war buddies, he uses alcohol as an anesthetic and as a commemoration of the death and displacement they experienced during the war. He is terrified of his memories, not only because of their physical horror but because they disclose the heart of his madness, his conviction that his uncle Josiah was among the Japanese soldiers Tayo was ordered to kill in the Philippine jungle. Instead of trying to convince Tayo that his conviction is irrational and illogical (as his cousin Rocky and the white doctors tried to do), Betonie points out the ancient racial link between Oriental and Native Americans and suggests to him the connectedness of all living things across time and distance. By doing so he acknowledges

the reality of Tayo's sense of guilt. Betonie doesn't exonerate Tayo from culpability even though Tayo has killed no Japanese soldiers—his very presence in the army implicated him in its evil. Nor does Betonie urge him to erase his memories as the veteran doctors recommended. Instead the shaman uses the ceremony to connect Tayo to his memories, admit their reality and then to make atonement to his uncle and the land. St. Andrews observes that the problem of healing is multidimensional, moving out from individual to tribe to universe. While the white doctors' medicine drained memories from him, the ceremony performed by the shaman requires memory on a global rather than a personal scale. Tayo's final battle against witchery occurs in a highly symbolic place—where the ancient creation myth of the Keres tribe intersects with the nuclear age (91).

There is an element of physical violence in the scalp ceremony Betonie enacts. He slices Tayo's scalp with a flint stone deeply enough to cause blood to trickle down through Tayo's hair onto his neck. The bloodletting complete, the ceremony turns gentle. Betonie guides the blindfolded Tayo gently by the hand through four sets of hoops, a metaphor for his step-by-step returning to his family, tribe, and cultural values:

. . . walking home

. . . walking back to belonging

. . . walking home to happiness

. . . walking back to long life (144).

Simon Ortiz points out that Tayo's return home to tribe and belonging is not achieved by magic or mysticism or some abstract revelation but through a "ceremony of story, the tracing of story, rebuilding of story, and the creation of story" (11). Paula Gunn Allen elaborates on this. At

base, every story, song, and ceremony tells the Indian that each creature is part of a living whole and that all parts of that whole are related to one another by virtue of their participation in the whole of being. The religious ceremony, then, is the ritual enactment of a specialized perception of cosmic relationships. "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" (*Hoop* 61).

Both Betonie and Tayo are aware that the scalp ritual is only the beginning of Tayo's cure. "One night or nine nights won't do it any more," the medicine man remarks. His rite is neither a quick fix nor a miraculous transformation. Tayo is responsible for his own cure and he must be both diligent and circumspect in working it out. Betonie also warns him to be on guard against those who would deflect him from his purpose. "It's up to you. Don't let them stop you." Finally, he gives him a map for working out his cure. "Remember these stars," Betonie tells Tayo, demarking the related parts of the Ceremony. "I've seen them and I've seen the spotted cattle: I've seen a mountain and I've seen a woman" (152).

The second common ritual, the chase, appears in some form in every Western narrative and has only two variations: the hero is out in front with the bad guys giving chase; or the bad guys are on the run with the hero on their trail. The function of the chase is to prove the superiority of the hero through his greater wit, cool, courage, and physical prowess. Destry, for example, unable to outrun his pursuers on his tired horse, outwits them by playing dead. When they holster their guns, he unsheathes his, ties them up and rides off on their fresh mounts. Although the West lends people epic stature, as Cawelti has commented (39), the chase scenes tend to strain the limits of the reader's ability to suspend disbelief as melodrama gallops toward cartoon. Weldon, pursued by a

group of angry and armed Mexicans gallops pell-mell down a blind alley blocked by a nine-foot wall. Only momentarily daunted, he uses his bare fists to break down four feet of the wall. Then horse and he leap lightly over the remaining five feet to escape. Lassiter rescues a child from a band of rustlers, and then, bleeding profusely from five bullet wounds, he carries the child and guides an exhausted woman up a steep canyon wall. After reaching the ledge, he launches an enormous rock down the cliff to obstruct their pursuers. Earlier in the novel his friend Venters had climbed that same sheer wall using a rope one-handedly while carrying in his other arm a wounded, unconscious young woman. In novel after novel, variations of the chase are used to bolster the myth of manhood—the tireless, fearless, larger-than-life Western hero.

The second aspect of Betonie's ritual involves seeking out the stolen cattle, and it involves a chase that functions not unlike those of the Western narrative in that it highlights Tayo's wit, courage, determination, and endurance. Tayo undertakes his search on a frigid winter night in the middle of a blizzard. Silko revises the traditional chase scene, however, in two significant ways. First, within the same scene Tayo functions both as hunter and hunted. To drive the stolen cattle back to Indian land, he has to adopt the mind of the wily animals, out-think them, out-maneuver them while relying on their instincts. Tayo emerges as the successful hunter when the cattle follow his plan and escape through the gap in the fence he created. However, he is also the successfully hunted, captured by two ranch-hands who are patrolling the perimeter of the ranch. It is here that Silko humorously subverts the classic chase scene. There is no suspenseful hand-to-hand combat, no extraordinary take-over of control by the subdued Indian, no miraculous escape up or down a canyon wall. Instead, the chase abruptly ends. The ranch-hands, discovering the prints of the mountain lion, abandon Tayo as the less interesting quarry, and move off excitedly in their new

hunt. Tayo simply picks himself up, dusts off the mud and snow, and limps away after his cattle. The blizzard provides an ironic touch, for the reader realizes that the prints of the lion will be obliterated by the snow and that the hunters are off on a cold and fruitless pursuit.

The third common ritual, that of romantic conquest, is an important subplot in most Westerns and involves a construction of gender that clearly establishes the physical, intellectual, moral, and emotional superiority of the male hero over the heroine. Generally the female is initially resistant or unattainable because she is better educated, wealthier, or of a higher social class. However, because the Western is based on strong democratic principles—merit is earned through personal force and achievements rather than through inheritance—class and wealth distinctions prove a feeble impediment to the hero's romantic quest. Wister, in fact, imputes Molly Stark's refusal of the Virginian to sheer snobbery and suggests to the reader that her inability to appreciate and respond to the hero's charms implies a deficiency of character.

In this genre, the hero's sexual energy can become a weapon to subdue the recalcitrant female. Indomitable Jane Withersteen, who can keep the whole Mormon community at bay, cannot maintain her gaze before Lassiter's. The feisty Molly, despite her intellectual and social scruples, melts in passion in the presence of the cowboy-hero. The educated and refined colonel's widow in L'Amour's *The Cherokee Trail* chooses the cowboy-protector—so taciturn as to suggest mental deficiency—more educated, professional and well-spoken suitors because he is the bravest and the best with a gun. The phallus, writes Molly Haskell, is used to reinforce male superiority. It acts "as a totem to strike fear and awe in woman (and appease man's fear and awe of the womb), and to distract women from their spiritual quest" (341). According to Slotkin, the primary sign of social and moral superiority in the Western is not nobility but *virility*. The Virginian signals his

dominance through the language of gender and sexual relations. In these relations he is the virile male courting or seducing a female who must eventually submit to him (*Gunfighter* 177). In some cases the female possesses wild, even villainous qualities and must be tamed or reformed by the hero. Max Brand's protagonist Weldon (*Border Guns*) is simultaneously attracted to a dark vivacious female outlaw (Francesca Laguarda) and a pale sickly "saint" (Helen O'Mallock) confined to her upstairs bedroom.[27] Both women are therefore out-of-reach; luckily for Weldon they turn out to be one and the same person and through a double form of rescue he is able to achieve both a cure and a reform to win his two-in-one prize.

The Western hero needs a female as foil. In constructing gender, the Western genre creates both a hierarchy and dichotomy between the sexes. Even in stories lacking a female presence, there is frequently a male side-kick whose feminized behavior silhouettes the hero's masculinity. Cawelti noted that however much he may be alienated from the town, the Western hero almost never appears without some kind of membership in a group of males. *(62).* In fact, there is a distinct homoerotic quality even in Westerns with a romantic subplot. In three separate incidents in *The Virginian,* the narrator calls attention to the sexual allure of the Virginian and to his own physical attraction to him. The hero appears godlike to the "dude," reflecting in his stature the enormity of the West. He seems "to tower," possessing" in his eye, in his face, in his step, in the whole man . . . a something potent to be felt by man or woman" (8). "His tiger limberness and his beauty were rich with unabated youth; and that force which lurked beneath his surface . . . "(58). "I have never seen a creature more irresistibly handsome" (212). In the most telling of these descriptions, the narrator

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[27] The rather bizarre plot mimics the dualities of Hawthorne's females in *The Marble Fawn*—dark/light, sinner/saint, vivacious/anemic.

describes a look that the Virginian bestows on Molly. "The Virginian looked at her with such a smile, that, had I been a woman, it would have made me his to do what he pleased with on the spot" (215-6). That the lady is less impressed than the narrator underlines the homoerotic quality of their relationship.

Slotkin proposes that Wister applies the male-"female" relationships of the Virginian to both the narrator and Judge Henry "to articulate a gendered allegory of politics in which the Virginian's virile 'realism' is opposed by Molly's inconsistent mixture of genteel class snobbery and philanthropic-sentimental egalitarianism" (*Gunfighter* 177). Molly's ideology, therefore, becomes representative of the emasculated and intellectually exhausted American upper class. Haskell, in reflecting on the importance of these male-male relationships suggests that it is neither sexual desire nor homoeroticism that accounts for its emphasis in Western novels and films but a kind of love that requires little effort in terms of understanding and responsibility. Men speak the same language, share the same dangers, understand each other's motives and risk their lives to gain each other's respect. However, the delusion in such relationships is that the risks of adventure disguise the fact that this kind of love is pre-sexual, immature; it is, at bottom, the love of one's semblable, a mirror image infatuation.

> And so the real risks (and thus, the test of masculinity is the same as the test of "femininity" it is the test of character) lie in rising to meet other challenges, the challenge of another human being, of someone different but equal, in a love that relishes separateness, grows stronger with resistance, and in the maturity of admitting dependence, acknowledges its own mortality (Haskell 25).

In almost all novels of this genre, the hero proves his physical superiority by rescuing the heroine: the Virginian saves Molly from imminent death when her carriage overturns in a flooded ravine. Lassiter rescues Jane from the corrupt Mormon leaders who are bankrupting her. Destry rescues his beloved from a treacherous suitor. Louis L'Amour's taciturn hero rescues the widow he befriends from the ambush of a paid gunman. The woman, therefore, is frequently the provocateur of, and rationale for, violence since it is in her defense that the hero unsheathes his gun.

Some Westerns play out the Jane/Rochester theme. The hero, incapacitated by gunshot wounds, exposure or illness enables the heroine to dominate him temporarily as nurse and mother figure. Norris Yates comments that women writers of the Western use such situations to humanize the male. The hero discovers what it's like to be helpless and dominated—that is, to be in a female situation. As Elaine Showalter points out, "If he [the hero] is . . . to rediscover his humanity, the 'woman's man' must find out how it feels to be a woman" (152).

However, when the Virginian is half-killed by Indians and rescued by Molly (who is later praised for acting "just like a man"), he uses his long recuperation period not to experience what it is like to be helpless but to exercise his intellectual superiority and his growing dominance of Molly. Initially he acknowledges that he is unschooled and allows Molly to mentor him. But having read the few books she lent him, he is soon in a position to educate her on their true meaning and comparative worth, debunking her value system in a patronizing manner. She quickly adapts to the role of tutee. As the cow-puncher "unfolded his notions of masculine courage" in the consideration of Browning, "Molly forgot everything to listen to him. 'I would never have supposed that!' she would exclaim as she heard him; or again, 'I never had such an idea!' And her mind opened with delight to these new things which came from the man's mind so simple and direct" (299).

More significant than his intellectual acuity is his moral superiority. Dickinson, a character in *Border Guns* accounts for this by asserting that the female body is a subterfuge for a duplicitous mind. "A man, honest or crooked, is a thing without a face or a feature. It's the heart and soul that makes a man. A woman's two thirds flesh and one third mind, and when that mind is bad, it still can dodge behind the body" (17-18). In *The Virginian* the moral superiority of the hero is once again manifested in the context of language and violence. On the eve of his marriage to Molly, the Virginian accepts the drunken challenge of his foe Trampas to fight at sunset. Molly is, not surprisingly, horrified when she learns of the proposed fight—not just because of the physical dangers but because she is repelled by the idea of marriage to a killer. She is unable to persuade him to change his mind since he has pledged his *word*, a word that binds him physically and morally; rather than compromise the word given to a drunken foe, he will jeopardize not only his life but his beloved's future happiness. Molly finally gives him an ultimatum: back down or back out of their relationship. Wister emphasizes the gravity of her word, given solemnly and with reflection. Predictably, the Virginian fights, kills Trampas and returns to Molly victorious. Just as predictably, she reneges on her word and welcomes him as husband. His word, pledged to an inebriate, is reliable and morally binding; hers, pledged to her lover, is mercurial, impotent, and untrustworthy.

Both Grey and Brand reinforce the traditional concepts of sex roles, roles in which women depend on men for their property, individual rights, safety, even their "honor." According to Tompkins the purpose of this depiction of male-female relationships is to destroy female authority and suppress what women stand for in the culture. The "viewpoint of women - love and forgiveness in place of vengeance - is introduced in order to be swept aside, crushed or

dramatically invalidated" (*West* 40-41). The embattled heroines are ultimately at the mercy of the men who fight over them and their property; in the end they are dished out to the hero as part of his reward. In *The Border Legion,* Joan expresses this: "Men were the embodiment of passion—ferocity. They breathed only possession, and the thing in the balance was death. Women were creatures to hunger and fight for, but womanhood was nothing" (Grey 254).

What Tompkins has referred to as the destruction of female authority can be extended to the destruction of the female personality. Once Molly accepts the slaying of Trampas as necessary and moral, she surrenders to what Slotkin has called the "virility principle" and accepts it as a guide to moral action. The change in her personality is almost immediately apparent. The initially confident and spirited character who did not hesitate to challenge the hero's assumptions of justice and courage suddenly becomes diffident. Her surrender to the Virginian results not in intimacy with him but in the acceptance of a subservient role. And once he is sure of her devotion, he resists a genuine level of intimacy and makes Molly aware that she must not trespass "the borders of his reticence." The Virginian's "reticence" in this situation bolsters Schwenger's theory that by remaining closed and silent the male maintains the boundary that separates him—in this case, even from his beloved. Molly complies because she has come to realize she is not his equal.

> By love and her surrender to him their positions had been exchanged. He was not now, as through his long courting he had been her half-obeying, half-refractory worshiper. She was no longer his half-indulgent, half-scornful superior. Her better birth and schooling that had once been weapons to keep him at his distance, or bring her off victorious in their encounters, had given way before the onset of the natural man himself. She knew her cow-boy lover, with all that he lacked, to be

> more than ever she could be, with all that she had. He was her worshiper still, but her master, too. Therefore now, against the baffling smile he gave her, she felt powerless (385).

The use of the word "powerless" is highly significant. Having learned in the West to acknowledge her desire for a dominant man, Molly concedes to him her moral and spiritual principles. Her conversion and subjection are complete.

In every Western novel the suitor proves his worth through violence and killing, and although his lover may be repelled by that violence, she nevertheless condones it by accepting the violent hero as lover. The male is superior in mind, spirit, and body; although a killer, he represents power, control, courage, independence, persistence, competence. The female functions as his negative image, demonstrating impotence, fearfulness, dependence, inconsistency, and incompetence. Only by gratefully acknowledging her dependence and subjugating herself to her master-husband can a happy ending be construed.

Logically enough, the story must end with the conquest, for an epilogue of married life would completely contradict the essence of the Western. In hanging his gun over the hearth, the hero symbolically surrenders his freedom and masculinity to domesticity. As Madelon Heatherington remarked, "a married man figuratively becomes a gelding . . . . Marriage virtually unmans a Western hero" (86). It is the illusion of the romantic chase with the promise of conquest without its stifling responsibilities that writers like Wister, Brand, and Grey sought to establish even when that illusion was already contradicted by reality. "Time steps in between the now that is and the then that was with a vengeance; it blocks the way for us all; we cannot go back . . . . The nomadic, bachelor West is over, the house, married West is established" (Wister, *Members* 7, 10).

In *Ceremony* Silko constructs the masculine hero and gendered relationships in a very different manner. Certainly her own upbringing in a matrilineal society influences her depiction of sexual roles and relationships. In such a "gynocentric" society, Allen writes, "male relationships are ordered in accordance with the maternal principle; a man's spiritual and economic placement and attendant responsibilities are determined by his membership in the community of the sisterhood" (*Hoop* 251). In discussing the social implications of growing up in a culture where women own the land, pass on their names to their children and are respected as leaders within the tribe, what Allen describes is not an Amazonian society where men are excluded or denigrated, but one of shared responsibility and authority in both the domestic and political arenas.

There are three particular features of Pueblo social order that illuminate the study of *Ceremony*: first, descent is reckoned along female lines so that children belong to the clan of their mother; second, a man moves to the home of his wife upon marriage so the couple continues to live with or near the bride's mother, forming a residential system convening women related by blood; and third, the women own most of the property (Dozier 133). In Silko's novel, Grandmother and Auntie are the head of the family; they own the sheep but manage the herd in cooperation with Auntie's husband Robert and her brother Josiah. Josiah, not Robert, Rocky's father, is the primary teacher, guardian and disciplinarian of Rocky and Tayo.

However, the traditional Laguna male models represented by Josiah, Robert, Betonie and Ku'uosh are countered by Anglo types like Rocky, Emo, and Harley. The latter share several features with the Western hero: they are arrogant, despise traditional culture, engage in macho relationships with women and kill without compunction. Rocky, Tayo's cousin, scorns the rituals surrounding the deer hunt as superstitious and unsanitary. He works to excel in Anglo subjects and

sports and persuades Tayo to join him in enlisting in the army. He adopts as a model of manhood the athlete and soldier, hoping these roles will secure his escape from the reservation and confer success according to white standards. Emo's masculinity is still more brittle. He describes his manhood in hunter metaphors, bragging about trophies of white pussy and teeth yanked from dead Japanese soldiers. Both Rocky and Emo explicitly reject their native heritage in defining their masculinity and reap the results of that choice. For Rocky it is death in the steaming Pacific jungles and for Emo it is a legacy worse than death—a life of perversion and hate.

Silko thus subverts the virility principal that Slotkin described as the sign of social and moral superiority in Westerns. She shows that when used to displace feminine authority, virility destroys balance and harmony on a global scale. "Without the balance of female power," Toni Flores writes in her commentary on *Ceremony*, "the male hunters and killers, so necessary for food and protection, have gone on an insane rampage, killing for conquest, for ego-satisfaction, and worst of all, for pleasure" (54). In rejecting the patriarchal definitions of manhood, Silko doesn't uproot and not replant. Instead she claims a different version of what it means to be male and female, based on the mother-centered experience of the native American peoples of the Southwest.

Over the last few decades the number of powerful female characters who resist the stereotype of submissive, self-sacrificing women has increased—especially in the fiction of feminist writers, but there has been less attention to male characters who are sensitive, nurturing, more community-conscious than individualistic. Silko is an exception as she develops strong, sympathetic male characters who are also nurturing and sensitive as well as sympathetic female

characters who are sexual and feminine but also strong and independent.[28] Josiah, for example, exhibits a feminine aspect to his personality that is nurturing, tender, and mothering without compromising his masculinity. He educates his nephews in the outdoor aspects of life, in hunting and animal care. He instructs them in tribal rituals, using storytelling to teach them their place in the universe and their relationship with all living things. When Tayo is ready, he introduces him to Night Swan who initiates him sexually. Josiah's manner of teaching the masculine role is never macho. Moreover, he gently counters Rocky's over-anglicized influence. Without disdaining modern technology, he resists those influences which cut him off from the life of the land. Even when hunting, Josiah follows a protocol of restraint, teaching Tayo not to kill any living creature for sport but to respect its life and recognize his connection with it. After killing a deer, for example, Josiah and Tayo

> knelt down and took pinches of cornmeal from Josiah's leather pouch. They sprinkled the cornmeal on the nose and fed the deer's spirit. They had to show their love and respect, their appreciation . . . . They said the deer gave itself to them because it loved them and he [Tayo] could feel the love as the fading heat of the deer's body warmed his hands (51-2).

Another powerful male figure, Betonie, has distinctly feminine characteristics. He is pregnant with stories, a nurturer of the human race. In his collection of phone books and old newspapers, he maintains a kind of cosmic awareness of all peoples and enables Tayo to recognize his connectedness with those of other races. Betonie also helps Tayo to define his manhood not

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[28] Kristin Herzog points out that even feminist literary criticism has paid little attention to male figures who are gentle rather than ruthlessly heroic (25).

through killing and revenge but through conscious resistance to violence. In Tayo himself Silko shows that manhood is most fragile when he engages in the "manly" acts of drinking and boasting and fighting. She exposes the ugliness of barroom drunkenness, the emptiness of swapping wartime tales of physical and sexual conquest. Emo's macho stance is pictured not in terms of masculinity nor even in animal imagery but in metaphors of witchery and mutilation.

Besides presenting strong but nurturing male characters, Silko develops female characters that contrast strongly with those of the Western narrative. One of the difficulties in comparing these female types, however, is that Silko's heroines have supernatural qualities that withstand simple definition. Both Night Swan and Ts'eh are independent, fully sexual, earthy beings yet they seem to represent Laguna mythical prototypes. Castillo notes that Night Swan embodies many attributes of the Kat'sinas, the half-human, half-divine beings of Pueblo myth (228). With her blue curtains, blue sheets, blue satin kimono (the color associated with Kat'sinas), her very being suggests rain and fertility. She appears and disappears like a magical creature, one powerful enough to dance a betraying lover into death. Despite these mystical overtones, Night Swan is definitely human, exuberantly sexual, and aware of her power to heal and restore men. Ts'eh is equally enigmatic. According to Allen "Ts'eh" is short for Tse-pi'na in Keres, meaning "Woman Veiled in Clouds," the Laguna name for Mt. Taylor (*Hoop* 190). Ts'eh's surname, "Montano," supports this interpretation. She is nurturer, healer, planter of delicate flowers and herbs, her sexuality extending beyond physical intercourse.

Although her depiction is sometimes uncomfortably close to the Eternal Feminine and mother goddess prototype, her attention to earth-matters—for example, her absorption with small stones—and her full sexuality, rescues her from the ethereal and concretizes her. Ts'eh is portrayed

as a woman of power, capable even of commanding the snow and rain. Unlike the heroines in the Westerns, she is not mastered by her lover, nor do she and Tayo engage in any form of the rescue game. And in contrast to the Western description of gendered relationships, neither Ts'eh nor Tayo exhibit a need to dominate or submit, their encounters devoid of the hunter imagery of pursuing and pursued. They do, however, assist each other. Ts'eh helps Tayo recover his cattle and reestablishes his relationship with the earth. In loving her, Tayo learns to love and accept himself in a way that defuses witchery, heals his cultural dissociation and enables him to choose the right ending for his story. Tayo, for his part, continues Ts'eh's work of transplanting seeds and herbs and in nurturing the land.

In addition to developing strong characters of both sexes who cooperate with each other for their mutual growth, Silko shows that male wholeness is attained through the adoption of positive feminine characteristics. Several critics, including Herzog, Allen, Swann, and Flores, have remarked that Tayo finds his identity by recovering in himself and in all of creation what has traditionally been termed the "feminine." Such an interpretation may suggest that Tayo's progression is a linear one from macho to sensitive. However, even in the early chapters, Tayo reflects male-female characteristics, alternating from passive-suffering-victim to physical-angry-aggressor. His personality, however, is not integrated, and the female qualities he reflects are the stereotypical helplessness, confusion, and low self-esteem. By the end of the novel, Tayo emerges as a somewhat androgynous character. He is hunter and warrior but also caretaker, a planter of seeds. His love for Ts'eh enables him to move beyond his early pre-adolescent stage where—like the Western hero—he is more comfortable drinking with his male buddies than he is in the presence of Indian women.

Silko's description of gender as encompassing both male and female characteristics including nurturance, spirituality and strength, can help us overcome Western stereotypes of the male as the excessively rational, power-seeker. Through the characters of Ts'eh, Night Swan and Tayo, Silko shows that each gender attains completeness and integrity only when it includes qualities usually ascribed to its opposite. Her view of gender is reminiscent of that of Virginia Woolf who ascribed genuine creativity to the androgynous: "It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create any more than a mind that is purely feminine." (*Room* 94). By the novel's end Tayo has successfully integrated male and female as well as Anglo and Indian characteristics, his own half-breed heritage a hallmark for richness and diversity.

The most violent of Western rituals is, of course, that of the culminating battle when the hero faces death. The rubrics of this ritual vary little from one narrative to the next as the hero defends his manhood in a one-to-one or one-to-many gunfight. The outcome is just as predictable: the hero shoots faster and straighter, his honor vindicated in the spilled blood of his opponent. The gun, an obvious symbol for the penis, is a clear manifestation of manhood but one that the Western character uses to express not sexual desire but violence (Tompkins *West* 33). In *Riders of the Purple Sage*, faith-afflicted Jane convinces her friend Benn Venters to surrender his gun to her. When the notorious gunman Lassiter appears on the scene, Venters recognizes that in giving up his gun, he has been emasculated by Jane and her religious pacifism. To regain his manhood he must not only reclaim his weapons; he must reject religious faith: "Talk to me no more of mercy or religion . . . . Give me my guns" (17). By deflating the power of religion, the Western transfers

power from women and culture to the very material embodiment of the physical and the physically violent—the gun.

Part of the ritualistic foreplay of the gunfight is the multiple provocation of the hero by the villain. The hero, having been provoked by the antagonist, and having demonstrated peaceable resistance, even mercy rather than instant retaliation, finally erupts into "justified" brutality usually with a viciousness so complete that had the antagonist acted that way it would have provoked horror on the reader's part. At this point, we are made to feel, as Tompkins notes, that "*not* to transgress the interdict against violence would be the transgression. . . . Vengeance, by the time it arrives, feels biologically necessary" (*West* 228). Ironically, the hero can now commit with impunity the same actions that marked his foe as degenerate. Because he is *hero* he becomes entitled to unrestrained violence. This use of violence is not only necessary to the plot, it provides a kind of cathartic satisfaction to the reader who in a vicarious manner participates in the same murderousness as the hero.

The frontier myth thus upholds violence as paradigm for achieving manhood, the confirmation of which is the killing of another man. In describing the hunt-transformation myth, Schwenger writes of the *mana*, a spiritual power which animals possess, similar to their spiritual essence and frequently the object of religious dread. In killing, the hunter makes the animal's *mana* his own (106). In the Western, hunters are not satisfied to take into themselves the *mana* of even the most dangerous animals. Their ultimate prey is their fellow man. To kill another human becomes a form of initiation into manhood and a way of acquiring another's *mana*, another's manliness.

In the final analysis neither desire for justice nor the protection of the weak motivates the hero; these only provide socially acceptable occasions for him to assert himself through violence. When the Virginian draws his gun on Trampas in the fading sunlight, what he defends is not Molly nor the local population. What he defends is what the heros of all Westerns defend—the myth of his own manhood.

The hero's entitlement to employ violence in a privileged manner raises multiple moral and political problems as Slotkin points out (*Gunfighter* 180), and it is a privilege that Silko does not bestow on Tayo. At the end of *Ceremony,* when Tayo witnesses the torturing of his friend Harley, the reader fully expects that Tayo will erupt into retaliatory violence and is ready to cheer him on. The impulse to kill Emo is as natural for the reader as for Tayo; resistance to Tayo's resistance provokes a deeper understanding of Silko's handling of violence: evil is not corrected by evil but by resistance to it. When Tayo does not counter with violence, the reader is initially puzzled and disappointed. What kind of hero could witness the torturing of his friend and not engage in violence to assist him? The reader's hand itches like Tayo's when he fingers the screwdriver and visualizes his attack on Emo. By engaging in Tayo's first violent response ("He closed his fingers around the screwdriver and squeezed it until it became part of his hand") and then moving in to his resistance, the reader comes to see that Harley is not his friend; not only has he played Judas in betraying Tayo to Emo, his screams are designed to lure Tayo from his hiding place into open confrontation according to Emo's ritual plan.

In the final scenes Silko juxtaposes two types of convergence—that of the evil of witchery and that of the story. Emo enacts his grotesque ritual at the Jackpile mine where the land was mutilated to mine uranium for atomic destruction. His cutting of Harley invokes the earlier cutting

of Tayo by Betonie. But whereas Betonie 's action was done to restore Tayo's sense of himself, Emo's mutilation destroys identity. He slices off the whorls of Harley's fingers and toes, the tip of his penis and his testicles—all of which are signifiers of identity. He then places them in a bloody brown paper bag, displaying them like his earlier war trophies. His actions clearly show that he is trying to assume the *mana* of his victims. The destructiveness of war, of drunkenness, of self-hatred, of betrayed friendships all come together in this sinister scene.

And Tayo is almost seduced into participating in the violence before realizing that to do so would be to end the story according to the plan of witchery. Whether Emo kills him or whether he kills Emo, "savoring the yielding bone and membrane as the steel ruptured [Emo's] brain," he would become another victim, another "drunk Indian war veteran settling an old feud" (253). As the firelight glints off Emo's glasses, Tayo realizes he is witnessing an autumnal rite of witchery that feeds on its sycophants and that only his willful non-participation can deflect its power and turn it back on itself.

> "You fucking little queer!" Leroy kicked sand in his face and Pinkie lunged at him. Emo stood close to them; the fat under his chin was wrinkled with his grinning. The fire's reflection made two flashing yellow eyes on Emo's glasses. The wind was moving clouds rapidly against the sky, and as they crossed over the moon, darkness and light rolled back and forth like the men wrestling on the ground . . . . Leroy had a knee on Pinkie's throat, and he could hear raspy choking sounds. Emo was laughing loudly, pointing at the body hanging stiffly, swaying a little in the gust of wind, then pointing at Leroy kneeling on Pinkie's throat (253).

Once Tayo has successfully resisted the lure of witchery, he experiences the convergence of all the separate threads of the story. On the long night journey back to the kiva, he dreams that Josiah and Rocky and Grandma are carrying him home. As he crosses the river at sunrise—just as his mother did earlier in the story, naked except for her high-heeled shoes—Tayo thinks of her and realizes that "she had always loved him, she had never left him; she had always been there." Past and present, Anglo and native, male and female connect in Tayo's consciousness. He returns to his tribal community as a storied warrior secure in the knowledge that he is loved and that he belongs.

> The cloudy yellow sandstone of Enchanted Mesa was still smoky blue before dawn, and only a faint hint of yellow light touched the highest point of the mesa. All things seemed to converge there: roads and wagon trails, canyons with springs, cliff paintings and shrines, the memory of Josiah with his cattle . . . . Yet at that moment in the sunrise, it was all so beautiful, everything, from all directions, evenly, perfectly, balancing day with night, summer months with winter. The valley was enclosing this totality, like the mind holding all thoughts together in a single moment" (237).

Tayo's story and the ending he shapes have tremendous significance for the contemporary American reader. Brink reminds us that writing does not cease at the end of a poem or a story but, inscribed in the mind of the reader, continues to pursue its meanings in the world.

> Its meaning is never 'here,' never 'present,' never final;' and pursuing it involves the never-ending crossing of boundaries (of meaning, of spaces, of fields of action), which demands that one place at risk, at every step, the security and the

> certainty of self and of language. There is no more significant violence than this continuous act of transgression and transcendence (11).

The act of transgression and transcendence that Silko commits in *Ceremony* is to expose the destructiveness of the Western rituals of deception, female conquest, the chase, and the gunfight. Although viewed from a distance and under the veil of myth and ritual the actions of the frontier hero may appear heroic, the admirable embodiment of the American spirit, they mask the essential economic motivation behind the conquest of the West just as the romantic subplot masks the oppression of women. And although these rituals may appear to us now as archaic and fanciful, they are nevertheless culturally pervasive as Tompkins points out, carrying within them "codes of conduct, standards of judgment, and habits of perception that shape our sense of the world and govern our behavior without our having the slightest awareness of it" (6).

In *Ceremony* Silko demonstrates just how pervasive and destructive some of our national myths are. In his essay on frontier violence, Reginald Dyck proposes that "the modern marginal character does not use violence to protect society against threatening individuals but to protect the individual, himself, against a society that threatens because it refuses to give recognition" (65). But the violence of the Virginian as that of Emo has at its core the same desire for self-definition by self-assertive violence. What Silko does is unmask the socially generated motivation of this violence and demonstrate how violence simply further marginalizes the characters who engage in it.

Throughout her novel the refrain of "It was easy . . ." counterpoints that of "It's not easy." What is easy is for Tayo to get lost in the warmth of beer in his belly, insulated in the steel cab of Harley's truck. There his memories of Josiah and Rocky become blurred, the call of Betonie's Ceremony appears foolish and even his experience with Ts'eh seems remote. What is not

easy is to persist in his quest, to believe in himself and his essential connection with all things living. In the end Tayo's story becomes our ceremony of reading, and in restoring some of our shared humanity despite our cultural differences, offers us a healing equal to Tayo's. But it is up to us, as Silko tells us through Betonie, to resist the witchery that would deny the home place and community values, reject meaning and participate in violence and in the destruction of the land. And she cautions us in Auntie's words at the novel's end, "It's not easy. It never has been easy."

Chapter 3

Jasmine: Violence and the Flawed Bildüngsroman

What the hell are you writing about Bharati Mukherjee for, you jackass? Write about Kazi Nazrul Islam or Selina Hossain or any other Bangladeshi Muslim novelist, for God's sake.

Anonymous

I found this inscription on the title page of Fakrul Alam's text *Bharati Mukherjee* in the Syracuse University Library and it gave me pause. It voiced the anger that some of her critics–especially those of South Asian heritage–express more covertly in their appraisal of her work. She has been accused of erasing the history and ethnic identity of the immigrant woman and ignoring the realities of race and class distinctions in American society (Grewal 188, 192); of being complicit in the colonization of the Third World woman (Aneja 75); and of obsessively excavating the consciousness of her transplanted protagonists (Meenakshi Mukherjee 87). On the other hand, her supporters claim that she has given voice to the fears and struggles of many who are unable to express their immigrant experience (Rustomji-Kerns 659); that her writings communicate a social and political vision (Alam 14); that the movement of her characters from one country to another is symbolic of a larger transformation– representing a celebration of life, and expressing the "creative possibilities contained within people, the ability to give up fixed worlds, to break out of cages and relate to a complex, multicultural world" (St. Andrews 58).

Mukherjee herself might well respond to the anonymous comment above by dissociating herself from Islam and Hossain and the entire tradition of Bangladeshi fiction. In her essays and

interviews she clearly defines herself neither as a Bangladeshi nor Muslim novelist but as an American writer in the American immigrant tradition. Although she does not share the heritage of either Silko or Erdrich, Mukherjee resembles them in that she writes from the margins of society and brings an outside perspective to contemporary culture. The rampant violence in *Jasmine* is reminiscent of their works. Like them, Mukherjee tells stories of rape and murder, suicide and social disturbances. This chapter will first explore the effectiveness of Mukherjee's use of violence to signal and foment change. Mukherjee also recalls these authors in her reshaping of a traditional form–in this case the female *bildungsroman*, and specifically *Jane Eyre*. This chapter will therefore examine the ways in which the parallels between the two Janes function in the novel. In her stance of exuberant immigrant, however, Mukherjee sets herself in opposition to the more socially critical viewpoints of Silko and Erdrich. This difference will form the final focus of the chapter: the credibility of Jasmine's narrative voice within the immigrant experience.

The violence in *Jasmine* is pervasive and arbitrary. It erupts in the land, animals, and spiritual leaders, as well as out of politics and economics, and its explosions are unpredictable. Jasmine is struck to the ground and scarred by a fakir at age seven, attacked by a mad dog, witness to the bombing of her husband, raped by Half-Face before she stabs him to death, and terrorized by a Sikh partisan in New York City. Additionally, violence surrounds her as well. Jasmine's friend cremates herself on a gasoline stove, her father is gored to death by a bull, her teacher Masterjee is humiliated and killed by Sikh fanatics; her lover Ripplemeyer is shot and crippled by an angry farmer; her young neighbor Darrel hangs himself in his new barn, his body partially eaten by hogs as he dangles.

Mukherjee uses violence as a catalyst in the development of the protagonist. Every significant change in Jasmine's life and personality is precipitated by a violent act, an act which

causes her to redefine herself. The immigrant experience is necessarily accompanied by violence, according to the author. When asked if she saw violence as necessary to the transformation of character, she replied with an emphatic, "Yes," and added that in her personal experience the violence was psychic; whereas Jasmine's was physical because of her background in a poor farming family. "Because she is an undocumented, poor alien, she necessarily goes through a kind of physical harassment that someone like me was exempt from"(1990 Interview, 8).[29] While Jasmine's poverty and low-caste condition make her a target for physical violence, Mukherjee suggests that these same conditions exempt her from the psychological violence that would seem integral to the immigrant experience. It is for this reason, perhaps, that the novel abounds in violent incidents.

The text opens with a fakir prophesying a life of widowhood and exile for the child Jyoti and then striking her on the head so hard that she falls to the ground, her forehead scarred with a mark that Jyoti will wear as a badge of spiritual power, her "third eye." The incident, however, appears to have no natural provocation. It is unclear to the reader why a meditating man would exit his trance, as Jyoti describes it, offer a prophecy of doom to a seven-year-old collecting twigs, knock her to the ground, and then re-enter his trance. It is the first in a series of seemingly gratuitous and sometimes implausible acts of violence. Angered by the astrologer's prediction, Jasmine swims in the river and rubs up against the carcass of an eyeless and rotting dog that explodes at her touch, enveloping her in the stench of death. Its odor infects her so strongly, in fact, that as an adult, she can smell it in her Iowa drinking water, a continual reminder of what she did

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[29] Mukherjee's "exemption" from physical violence is at odds with the experience of other South Asian immigrant of similar background and education. Meena Alexander, for example, recounts in *Fault Lines* how she was cursed and abused because of her dark skin. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak writes at length of the prejudice that immigrants of the same socio-economic class as Mukherjee experience.

not want to become (*Jasmine* 3).[30] These two episodes–the prophesy and the encounter with the dog–are significant because they establish much of the impetus of the novel. The first event sets up the polarities of fate and will between which Jasmine will struggle. Throughout her life the narrator will labor to reposition the stars and mitigate her *femme fatale* propensities. Although her first husband is violently killed, her second common-law husband, whom she refuses to marry officially, is "only" partially paralyzed and Jasmine attributes his survival to the power of her own will. "Bud was wounded in the war between my fate and my will. I think sometimes I saved his life by not marrying him. I feel so potent, a goddess" (9).

The second incident reinforces Jasmine's association with violence and death and establishes a pattern of negative definition that the protagonist uses throughout the novel: this is what or who she is *not* like. This definition by negation is especially apparent in Jasmine's use of other women as foils. Her sisters, she tells us, are "slow, happy girls with butter smooth arms"(2). Jasmine's arms we know are scabrous; she depicts herself as rebellious and "raging;" therefore, by implication, she must be quick and smart. The village women of Hasnapur are indistinguishable and function primarily as a background against which the defiance and courage of Jasmine is silhouetted. Their life histories are alike in the litany of disasters which plague them; unlike Jasmine, fate and tradition overwhelm their will. "All over our district, bad luck dogged dowryless wives, rebellious wives, barren wives. They fell into wells, they got run over by trains, they burned to death heating milk on kerosene stoves" (41).

In America Jasmine distinguishes herself from the Kanjobal women, illegal immigrants like herself. "You're different from the others," Lillian Gordon tells her, "You're a very special case, my dear" (120). In this context, "different" implies "superior;" it intimates that Jasmine is more

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[30] Future references to this text will be indicated by page number alone.

intelligent, more sophisticated, possessing some unspecified mystique that makes it unsuitable for her to work as a domestic or a picker, employment that the other women are being trained for. The Kanjobal women collectively endorse this assessment of her superiority: "They looked at her intently, nodding their heads as if they understood" (120). Jasmine is also defined against educated South Asians. She is unlike Nirmala Vadhera, the wife of the countryman who befriends Jasmine, whose object in life is to immure herself within the Flushing Indian ghetto and live a life as close to that of her traditional upbringing as possible. Jasmine criticizes and rejects the "ancient prescription" for marital accord that the Vadheras adhere to, a prescription that assigns the husband a role of silence, order, authority and the wife one of "submission, beauty, innocence" (134). Thus native villagers, other illegal immigrants and Indian expatriates are flattened and homogenized in the celebration of Jasmine's uniqueness.

In addition to immigrant women, Jasmine defines herself negatively in comparison to the Americans she meets. She is unlike Karen Ripplemeyer who is plodding and predictable, unlike Wylie Hayes who is uncertain and guilt-ridden, unlike the woman in the medical clinic who is infertile, and unlike the ridiculous Mary Webb, Ph. D. with her orange socks, lime-green barrette, plastic red-rimmed glasses who spouts pseudo Abo learned in her previous life as an Australian aboriginal. Although the American women are more individualized than the South Asians, they still function as contrasts to Jasmine. Posed against them, Jasmine always appears smarter, more sophisticated, more alive, more beautiful, more sensible, and more daring. It is notable that Mukherjee uses class signifiers to reinforce class distinctions between Jasmine and Third World women and to neutralize distinctions between Jasmine and white middle-class American women.

The physical violence associated with Jasmine issues initially from within her own family and extends back to the moment of her birth when her mother, discovering her newborn to be

another girl, attempts to choke her to death. It is the issue of education that arouses the next violent action. When Jasmine's mother encourages her father to continue the girl's education instead of marrying her off at twelve years of age, he beats the mother for encouraging aspirations contrary to the girl's caste and gender. Nevertheless, the morning following the beating, her mother, smiling through bleeding lips, announces to Jasmine that her father and grandmother have changed their minds. The reader is left wondering about the causal relationship between the mother's beating and the father's change of mind. Nor is it clear why the same woman–who attempted to kill her daughter because she feared the child would have no dowry and therefore, no suitable marriage–now rejects a marriage that promises security and relative affluence. This appears to be an example of what Gayatri Spivak calls "translation as violation" ("Imperialism" 234), a distortion of cultural phenomenon to render it in terms that are understandable and acceptable to a feminist western audience. Moreover, it is only in this scene that Jyoti's mother speaks in American slang, "They've come around. Just make sure you ace your exams" (52). Susan Koshy notes that the mother's speech is conspicuous in this instance because her other utterances–as those of most of the other Punjabi characters–are in Indian English and do not carry distinctively American linguistic markers. The use of slang by this village woman is, according to Koshy, "an attempt to translate her character by representing proto-feminist sentiments as an Americanism of attitude or value (77). Without any noticeable transition, the traditional Indian wife and mother appears as a "liberated woman." Perhaps the violence of the scene is meant to shock and distract the reader from its essential illogic.

The third violent childhood event, the attack of a mad dog, is more obviously contradictory. "Ladies Hour" or "latrine hour" took place, Jasmine tells the reader, "in the predawn dark before the men awoke so they couldn't spy on [the women]" (46). On a particular morning,

Jasmine noticed a staff stuck in the midst of thorny brush and crawled in among the thorns to get it, bloodying her arms. Afterwards as the women squatted on the banks of a stream to relieve themselves, "perverts" sat on the opposite bank and ogled them. "We knew they were there because the lit tips of their bidis floated like fireflies" (48). While the women are caught with their pants down, a mad dog appears. They all flee, some crawling with their clothing caught around their feet, others locked in a crouch, leaving the twelve-year-old child to face the dog alone. Again Jasmine is positioned opposite a group of women, their fear and cowardice defining the measure of her bravery. The child who admits that she hated all dogs allows this mad dog, "bigger than a jackal, almost the size of a wolf" with "bloodied and monstrous" head and foaming mouth to approach close enough to spray her with its diseased spume. Taking aim, she waited until the dog leapt at her before striking him dead.

All kinds of incongruencies, visual, social, and literary emerge in this scene. Mukherjee's arming of the narrator is somewhat forced. How likely is the child to spy a staff in a pile of brush in the "predawn dark"? If the women went to the bank before the men awoke to spy on them, how is it that the men are already positioned on the opposite bank spying–something, the narrator tells us, they routinely did? And since the women know that the men are present only by the lighted tips of their cigarettes, how then can the men see the women's buttocks which is their attributed purpose for going there? Moreover, it seems questionable whether this group of sturdy peasant women would all run off and abandon a child to face the dog alone. Jasmine's remark that "fear stippled the naked haunches" of the women seems more like a conscious attempt on the author's part to write a striking metaphor than to convey the frightened child's impressions. Finally, the reader is forced to question how Jasmine, given that her hands and arms were bloodied by thorns, remained uncontaminated by the dog when he sprayed his diseased saliva on her. Although the

violence of this scene is used purposefully to magnify the resistance of the child to heroic proportions, it does so with such contradictory details that it makes the entire episode incredible.

The violence continues when Pataji conveniently dies, gored by a bull, and the strong Mataji, who stood up to her husband in life, unsuccessfully tries to commit *sati* and then disintegrates, having to be bathed and force fed. These events free Jasmine to make a love marriage with a liberated and intelligent friend of her brothers, Prakash Vijh. As Prakash's wife, Jyoti begins the first in her series of transformations. The narrator uses the twentieth century British version of the Greek myth *Pygmalion* to illuminate the relationship between husband and wife. "He wanted to break down the Jyoti I'd been in Hasnapur and make me a new kind of city woman. To break off the past, he gave me a new name: Jasmine" (70). Jasmine portrays her husband as unconventional, a modern man who expresses his love by letting go, and by fostering independence and self-reliance in his young bride, a stark contrast to his uncle who defined love in terms of control. Since she compares him to Shaw's character, the reader expects her to perceive the control Prakash does exert, and the ways in which he manipulates her, reshaping her values, her likes and dislikes, her desires, beliefs, the very person that she is. In fact, by renaming her in her private life, he exceeds the arrogance of Professor Higgins; despite his liberal views, the relationship he develops with his young bride is one of continuous control. And of Jyoti, who complained that at this point in her life she "shuttled between identities" (70), the reader sees little. There is no continuity between the feisty young girl who battled the mad dog, the rebellious daughter who defied her father's wishes, and the parrotty little wife. "I was fifteen, a village fifteen, ready to be led" (71). The woman, Jane, who will declare that she is "greedy with wants and reckless from hope" is, within this marriage, so passive that when Prakash informs her that he wants to go to America where they can have a "real life," Jasmine responds, "All right, if you want me to have a real life, I want it too" (74).

Some of the violence in *Jasmine* is of a peculiar psycho-social nature, an odd sense of dislocation that predates actual causes. For example, Mukherjee includes a cameo scene in which Prakash and Jasmine giggle at pictures of their countrymen contained in a brochure of a technical college in Florida. Their response reveals not only Jasmine's alienation from herself as Jyoti but also the divided consciousness that both she and Prakash feel about their own Indianness.

> We made up names for all the stiff-backed, pompous-looking Indians. "*Must* be a Bengali," he'd say, "No? I am a very good Bengali boy. My name is Baby Banerjee and I eat rabri and hilso fish three times a day." And "Oh look at that crafty, ratlike pair of eyes. Sindhi, I'll bet. Mr. Moneyani." For the first time in my life, I was looking at familiar Indian faces and seeing them as strange, a kind of tribe of intense men with oily hair, heavy-rimmed glasses, and mustaches. (83)

The reader is left puzzled about what would provoke Jasmine and Prakash to view the "familiar Indian faces" not only as Other but as laughable Other. They appear to have adopted the vision that W. E. B. DuBois ascribed to American blacks, a "second sight" which produces not genuine self-awareness but merely reflects an image of self constructed by an unsympathetic society. "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others. of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (3). But what precipitates the adoption of this vision, this reshaping of themselves as foreigners within the heart of their own culture? The contemptuous eye through which the Vijhs view their countrymen's faces seems both misplaced and mis-timed and reinforces the theory that Mukherjee mistranslates the past.

The next violent act catapults Jasmine across the world. Following the assassination of her husband Jasmine determines to build a funeral pyre out of her husband's made-for-America clothes

on the Tampa campus he applied to and then to immolate herself on it. Brinda Bose dismisses Jasmine's plan as "crazy" (59) and Gurleen Grewal accuses Mukherjee of fostering a "gross misconception" by suggesting some obscure piety for Jasmine's bizarre motivation. Jasmine is neither forced by relatives greedy for Prakash's money nor so limited by options that death is the only possible action. "Extricated from relations of power and property, the practice of *sati*, as an arena both of oppression and of women's resistance to oppression, is rendered meaningless in *Jasmine*" (Grewal 188). All three Indian widows in the novel–Vimla, Mataji, and Jasmine–committed *sati* or planned to commit it, so that western readers, Grewal fears, might think the ritual was being practiced routinely in contemporary Hindu society.

> To an Indian reader it is clear that Jasmine's desire for *sati*–let alone her desire for *sati* in America–is incomprehensible. The will to live that she exhibits at all other times is conveniently repressed; her husband's considerable savings that could have supported her are squandered on a passport to death. (188)

It is not only an Indian reader who finds Jasmine's actions incomprehensible. The American reader is inclined to agree with Half-Face's response: "Christ, getting your ass kicked halfway around the world just to burn a suit. I never heard of such a fool notion" (102).

Susan Koshy traces Jasmine's plan to commit *sati* back to Mukherjee's representation of Indian village women suffocating in a "monolithically oppressive society" where resistance is impossible and where Jyoti's survival is an anomaly:

> Mukherjee becomes, in a sense, trapped within the formulations of her own discourse–there is no escape for Hasnapuri women, but Jyoti is a woman who escapes. Rescue can, therefore, only be brought about through extraordinary

> means, hence the incredible scheme of the "mission" as a bizarre ritual that subsumes Jyoti's agency within ritual imperative. (78)

The most intimate kind of violence assaults Jasmine her first night in America when she is raped by Half-Face, a deformed boat skipper who transports illegal immigrants. So much significance is attached to this event that it needs careful examination. The action-packed scene speeds like an episode from a television action serial. Jasmine willingly accompanies Half-face to his motel room; he subdues her by grabbing her hair and banging her forehead against the TV screen until it cracks, pulls off her clothes and rapes her. Immediately following the rape–which seems more violent and repulsive because of Half-Face's deformity–Jasmine goes to the bathroom, calls attention to the fact that she had never seen a Western shower before, and cleans herself under the hot pulsing water. Shamed by her defilement, she prepares to take her own life, but at the last minute, changes her mind and slits her tongue instead of her neck; she then stands over her rapist, tongue hanging out, dripping blood on him in symbolic retribution before she slashes his throat.

> I wanted that moment when he saw me above him as he had last seen me, naked, but now with my mouth open, pouring blood, my red tongue out. I wanted him to open his mouth and start to reach, I wanted that extra hundredth of a second when the blade bit deeper than any insect, when I jumped back as he jerked forward, slapping at his neck while blood, ribbons of bright blood, rushed between his fingers . . . . I pulled the bedspread off the bed and threw it over him and then began stabbing wildly through the cloth, as the human form beneath it grew smaller and stiller. (118-19)

Later Jasmine will attach mythic importance to the scene, and identify herself as Kali, the avenging goddess, committing brutal murder in retribution for her brutal rape. Instead of upsetting

her further, the murder calms her, and village girl from Hasnapur though she is, she knows enough to clean her fingerprints from the bathroom faucets. She sums up her response to the entire episode in a comment both melodramatic and trivial: "What a monstrous thing, what an infinitesimal thing, is the taking of a human life . . . . I was walking death. Death incarnate" (106).

A careful examination of the sequence of events surrounding the rape and subsequent murder undermines the scene's believability. Once on shore all the other illegal passengers find vehicles awaiting them–all but Jasmine. How is it that these others have arranged convenient methods of departure smuggled as they were into a remote Florida cove? It is not reasonable for Half-Face to abandon his passengers on the shoreline where they could easily be discovered and traced back to him and his ship. Moreover, one of the passengers in the boat had slipped Jasmine a knife with the warning not to trust Half-Face. Up to this point Jasmine has been portrayed as smart and perceptive. Mukherjee emphasizes her ability to look out for herself; describing her in an interview as a "village girl who's used to quite literally fighting the enemy whether it's a mad dog, or bad guys trying to accost her on the village lane as she's gathering firewood" (1990 Interview, 24). What then would induce such an alert young woman to accompany Half-Face, clearly portrayed as a sleeze, into his hotel room?

On one level it appears as if Mukherjee is attempting to construct a protocol of rape that intersects with feminist political theory by attributing to Half-Face the characteristics that Marilyn Frye posits as the hallmark of the rapist. Frye links the coercion involved in rape with the coercive influence of the "arrogant male eye" which assumes women will conform to its expectations; which either disregards any incongruities or regards the woman who does not meet those expectations as being somehow defective. "This arrogant eye places women, particularly younger women, in binds where neither sexual activity nor sexuality inactivity is acceptable: in the one case she is loose and

in the other she is frigid: in the one case, if she is raped, she wanted it and in the other she needed it, and in neither case therefore could she have been *raped"(3).* Half-Face certainly fits Fry's description of the rapist: he is arrogant and insensitive; he calls her food names like "prime piece," and "honey," and when she doesn't respond, "cold fish" and "dead meat." He structures their intercourse in terms of economics: "Just you keep it coming and I'm you're meal ticket outta here" (102). He not only assumes she will conform to his expectations but that she will find pleasure in so doing, and when she resists him, he accuses her of being both promiscuous and frigid.

Despite its feminist framework, however, the rape has a false ring. When Jasmine describes Half-Face as "monstrously erect" and compares him to the gentle Prakash, she leads the reader to believe that she has had limited sexual experience with her husband and no sex at all since his death. But at the end of the chapter, Jasmine informs the reader of her "numbed surrender to various men for the reward of an orange, a blanket, a slice of cheese" (108). If Jasmine in her desperation has engaged in sex with other men for a morsel of food–and has not felt defiled by it–it is not easy to understand her murderous reaction now when Half Face offers her food, warmth, shelter, even transportation to Tampa on the following morning. At the beginning of Chapter 18, Jasmine will again undercut the significance of this particular rape by reducing it to one among many, "raped and raped and raped in boats and cars and motel rooms" (114). What seems to make this rape significant is Half-Face's ghoulish appearance. He's lost an eye and an ear and most of his cheek, kisses Jasmine with a "dead half-mouth," and spits when he laughs. His ugliness is intensified by his red-neck stance; he alternates racist slurs with strings of clichés: "jigaboo Jamaican," "Asia . . . the armpit of the universe," "meal ticket outta here," "lie back and enjoy it," "second time's the sweetest" (99-104). The reader suspects that Mukherjee's purpose in constructing Half-Face as a grotesque is to elicit a response of revulsion from the reader and

complicity in the murder. His physical and spiritual deformity, therefore, appear essential to her configuration of rape.

Both the rape and ensuing murder are used to propel Jasmine through yet another transformation. When she slits her tongue with the knife that she will use to kill Half-Face, she slits her personality as well, assuming the persona of Kali, the goddess with the bloody tongue, the destroyer, "walking death. Death incarnate" (106). Both during the act of murder and afterwards, Jasmine experiences a loss of subjectivity–her "body was merely the shell, soon to be discarded" (108). Subsequent to this violent birth upon her arrival in America, Jasmine can only look forward to future rebirths, a perpetual "revolution" of the soul, as Kristen Carter-Sanborn terms it, "which begs the question of its own existence" (589).

In *Ceremony* the invocation of cultural heros empowered Tayo, enabling him to amass spiritual energy and determination to focus on his perceived goals. But Jasmine's invocation of Kali displaces her own subjectivity and overwhelms her personal history so that she does, in fact, become a shell. Mukherjee needs Jasmine to reject her intention to commit *sati*, to undergo a radical transformation, a reincarnation, in effect. Jasmine, murdered and reborn through her rape, now murders in order to be reborn again through vengeance. The rape and murder "work" to accomplish both of Mukherjee's plot necessities. According to Carter-Sanborn, this double violence constitutes a "defining moment in the complex articulation of . . . [Jasmine's] gendered subjectivity," an act that enables her to make the violence intelligible to herself and to her witness, the reader. Carter-Sanborn interprets Jasmine's act of violence as an "act" of de-selfing, much like *sati* itself (587). Perhaps this theory is meant to support Mukherjee's assertion that Jasmine's low-caste status makes her a target for physical rather than psychic violence. In this case, the literal violence– the murder– stands in for, even anaesthetizes, the pain of individual transformation.

However, it does not necessarily make the scene intelligible to the reader who can observe no transition from the previously self-effacing teenager and this powerful one. Certainly, compared to the rape of Fleur in Erdrich's *Tracks*, the assault of Jasmine appears contrived and without lasting impact on her consciousness; and compared to Pauline's attack on her "rapist" in the same novel, Jasmine's retaliation seems more metaphorical than realistic.

Not all of Mukherjee's critics regard her use of violence as contrived. Some maintain that it is revelatory of the immigrant experience. Samir Dayal, for example, relates Jasmine's struggle out of the feudal structure to the struggle of post-colonial subject-formation. He interprets Jasmine's experiences first as victim and then as the agent of violence as indicative of growing political maturity, a mastering of "the other face of power." By grasping the play and staging of violence, Dayal argues, Jasmine gains insight into the working of power structures, particularly in the context of the post-colonial diaspora (65, 67). From this point of view, Jasmine's accounts of assassination and political turbulence in India appear to exemplify Frantz Fanon's theory that in societies recently liberated from colonialism, "the atmosphere of violence is always and everywhere just beneath the skin" (76). On the other hand, according to Dayal, the violence that Jasmine experiences in the United States stimulates her personal growth by "demystifying stability . . . disabusing her of her craving for security. It steels her for a heroic self-destruction as a feudal wife and for her remaking abroad: in violent destruction may lie the seeds of creation" (71).

While it may be true that violence deconstructs Jasmine's longing for security, it is difficult to substantiate the argument that Mukherjee portrays violence as emblematic of political power. In the first place, Mukherjee is not explicitly concerned with the historical process of violence in this novel, although the political is always in the background. Secondly, every act of violence in the text clearly derives not from a position of power but from desperation: the murder

of Half-Face, the maiming of Bud, Darryl's suicide, the series of farmers who shoot their wives before blowing out their own brains. Nor does violence function as a symptom of post-colonialism as Dayal suggests. Mukherjee's use of violence, if anything, homogenizes the political context. The author herself explains that the violence in *Jasmine* simply mirrors its pervasiveness in contemporary American society. The same random and irrational acts of violence that ignite the politically unstable towns of India erupt below the supposedly smooth skin of U. S. capitalism. By describing the landscape of America in violent terms, by focusing on televised INS raids; farmers shooting bankers who foreclose on them; and the threat and reality of rape which first Jyoti, then Jasmine, then Jane and other immigrant women must negotiate, Mukherjee paints a picture of a state in economic, social, and political crisis. Violence is so pervasive, in fact, that it becomes predictable. The author herself admits that the reiteration of violent incidents "attenuates the exoticism" of violence and reduces it to the level of the banal (1990 Interview, 27).

Although Mukherjee's use of violence in *Jasmine* attempts to link east to west suggesting a disorder that is truly world-wide, her treatment of the underlying causes of violence in both First and Third World countries is fairly superficial. Anu Aneja remarks that Mukherjee's attempt to depict contemporary Third World reality, complete with Sikh terrorists, radio mechanics and forged green cards for sale, "seems like the set of a Hollywood movie about a Third World nation where a series of 'representational' images are forced into conveying a sense of the Third World" (76). Moreover, Mukherjee's most shocking scenes appear strained and contradictory in her attempt to make them grotesque. Her description of Darryl, for example, dangling from the pinnacle of the high-roofed barn like "an astronaut shamed by the failure of his lift-off . . . his bitter face turned away from the galaxies that he'd longed to explore" (209) is rendered nonsensical by her subsequent observation of Darryl's carnivorous hogs leaping and chewing on his legs. In the

previous chapter, Mukherjee stressed the height of the roof; even in this incident, she remarks that she had to raise her eyes to the roof's peak to see Darryl. In order to visualize the scene, therefore, the reader has to reconstruct Darryl as a giant stretchable Mr. Gumby whose boots offer bait to the hogs while his head remains secured to the rafters. Incongruities such as these dissolve the horror of the scene and ripple out to undermine the moral underpinnings they propose to support. The overall result is the erosion of the reader's confidence in Mukherjee's ability to provide serious political comment.

Within the framework of the violent re-making of self, Mukherjee draws conscious parallels between *Jasmine* and *Jane Eyre*–even to the extent of Jasmine assuming the name of Jane Ripplemeyer during her mid-west stage (the "eyer" ending of her surname suggesting that of the earlier novel). Both novels, using the format typical of a *bildungsroman*, track the spiritual, psychological, and emotional growth of their characters from childhood to maternity. In both novels, the protagonists are unwanted as children, earn their living as tutors and fall in love with their charge's father; both their lovers are older and become maimed. Both texts are remarkable for the forthright declaration of their protagonist's passions and appetites, and both heroines consciously resist repression and conformity to traditional definitions of femininity.[31] Despite its moral rigor, *Jane Eyre* is no portrait of a lady, as Joyce Carol Oates remarks in her introduction to the novel, but the story of a young woman in a "heroic mold, as susceptible as any man to restlessness and ennui when opposition fails to provide a cause against which to struggle" (x). Jasmine, too, is restless and energetic, perceptive and questioning, driven to risk and gamble by her

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[31] Ironically, Jasmine has elected to identify herself with Jane Eyre, the same character that Gayatri Spivak criticizes as emblematic of the "general epistemic violence of the glorification of the social mission of the colonizer" (270). According to Spivak, Bertha is forced to transform herself into a fictive Other that is animal-like, primitive, insane; she must set fire to the house and kill herself to enable Jane Eyre to become the feminist heroine of British fiction.

insistent wants and hopes. Both characters are stimulated into growth by violence and by place: Jane in the Reed household, Lowood, Thornfield, Whitcross, and finally, Ferndean; Jasmine in India, Florida, Queens, New York City, and Iowa. Alone in the world, both women must find their identity outside the family context, in material and psychological isolation. Although *Jasmine* undercuts the domestic paradigm which affirms marriage as the fulfillment of romantic love, the substructure of the novel's celebration of individualism, ambition and upward mobility is nevertheless, as in *Jane Eyre*, romantic love.

Despite these similarities, *Jasmine* is not a contemporary rendition of the earlier text. Whereas *Jane Eyre* is centered in the regulated English countryside, *Jasmine* shuttles from post-colonial India, to American industrial centers to the farmlands of Iowa. And while Brontë's novel follows a linear progression in both chronological and spatial dimensions, Jasmine moves back and forth in time and space, a technique Mukherjee uses to emphasize the enormity of change that immigration imposes.

Beyond these perhaps superficial differences in structure lie three essential distinctions in the personality and development of the respective characters. The first entails the evolution of the protagonist's consciousness. From her early orphaned years in the Reed family to the conclusion of her story, *Jane Eyre* 's narrative is that of a single developing consciousness. Jane Eyre's triumph as Lord Rochester's wife and mother of his child "represents a wish fulfillment of extraordinary dimensions," as Oates phrases it (xi), no less extraordinary, perhaps, than Jane Ripplemeyer's transformation from a low-caste peasant to a sophisticated and confident woman. The reason we believe Jane Eyre's good fortune is because we believe her voice, a voice that emerges, in its semi-suppressed rage, as strikingly contemporary. The voice and consciousness of the narrator at the conclusion of the novel is congruent with the voice and consciousness of Jane in all her stages of

development. In contrast to this single voice, *Jasmine* presents a succession of personae, each with its signifying name: Jyoti, the peasant girl; Jasmine, the wife of the forward-thinking Prakash; Kali, Jasmine's avenger; Jazzy, the spunky new immigrant in T-shirt and jeans; the widow Vijh, living as an expatriate in a Flushing ghetto; Jase, the stylish free-spender; and Jane, the exotic Other in the heart of America's wheatland. The voice of Jasmine varies radically from one situation to another, and appears, in fact, to be determined by her geographical and psychological location.

The second distinction lies in the portrayal of these characters as self-determined. Jasmine and Jane Eyre each fit the description of heroine that Francois Bach defines in *Relative Creatures* as a woman "who must constantly fight, to whom nothing has been given from birth, [who] asserts her superiority by her struggle" (163). Each resists the terms of her destiny, unprotected by family and social position and unsupported by material wealth. "I resisted all the way," Jane states in the beginning of the second chapter, and this stance of the rebellious female in opposition to authoritarian figures is consistent in the novel. She resists make-over by men and authoritarian figures. She resists her aunt's attempts to make her an acquiescent pleaser; she resists her cousin's bullying attempts to make her submissive; she resists the minister of Lowood when he tries to mold her into a docile and passive student; she resists Rochester's attempts to transform her into an elegantly dressed charmer; she resists St. John's persistent attempts to transform her into a self-sacrificing Christian.

In contrast, Jasmine's struggle is much more plastic. Although she rejects cultural stereotyping in terms of her Indian heritage, she works assiduously to conform to American standards of dress, walk, and body carriage. There is a pliant, fluid quality about her that impels her to adapt herself to the expectations of others. When Wylie and Taylor enumerate the qualities they hope their daughter's caretaker will possess, the new "Jase" determines to shape herself

accordingly. "I wanted to become the person they thought they saw: humorous, intelligent, refined, affectionate" (151). Once again, as in her relationship with Prakash, she becomes compliant in her make-over. This time she is transformed into an American, dissociating herself from her previous self-description as illegal, widowed, raped, destitute, and fearful. "The squatting fields of Hasnapur receded fast" (155).

Although both novels are marred by extraordinary coincidences–Jane Eyre, for example, just happens to stumble, homeless and starving, upon the doorstep of a family who will turn out to be her cousins; Jasmine encounters the man who assassinated her husband in Jullundhar selling hot dogs in New York's Riverside Park–Jasmine's plot is much more dependent on contrivances than is Brontë's work. Jane Eyre essentially fights her own battles and struggles on her own through adverse conditions, endowed by her author "with the strength enough to struggle with the psychological and social problems of being single" (Basch, 152). Jasmine, on the other hand, is constantly being rescued. Sarah Curtis, in her review of *Jasmine*, mentions how lucky the protagonist is to encounter two such two powerful dowagers as Lily Gordon and Mother Ripplemeyer who rescue her at desperate moments in her life (436). But the novel is full of gods and goddesses *ex machina* who rescue the heroine in her distress and advance her position like a piece in a game board. When Lillian Gordon rescues Jasmine from homelessness in Florida and from her telling Indianness, she simply continues the reshaping process begun by Prakash. She teaches Jasmine how to walk and dress in an American manner, how to cook hamburgers and clean toilets so that she can be hired as a domestic. Devinder Vadhera (Professorji) then rescues her from this future of domestic service by welcoming her into his family. Months later, Lillian Gordon's daughter rescues Jasmine from a life she describes as stifling in the Punjabi Ghetto in Queens ("fortress of Punjabiness," "apartment of artificially maintained Indianness" 146) and sets her up

as a governess/nanny. In his turn, Taylor Hayes saves her from a futureless care-giving career by falling in love with her. Mother Ripplemeyer rescues her from homelessness once again by introducing her to his son, who offers her a job, his love, and a place to live. Finally, Taylor rescues her yet once more, this time from the flatness of Elsa County Iowa and the drab life of caregiver to a cripple, and sweeps her off to the promised land of California. In the course of all these rescues, Jasmine exhibits a passivity that conflicts with the strong and ebullient personality that Mukherjee insists she is.

The third and most revealing comparison between the two Janes lies in the relationship of these characters with their handicapped husbands. The "perennial cliché" of Brontë criticism, as Oates phrases it, interprets Rochester's blinding as a form of castration. Such an interpretation implies that the heroine gains ascendency in the relationship through the psychological and physical diminishment of the hero. Harold Bloom, for example, claims that much of the literary power of *Jane Eyre* "results from its authentic sadism in representing the very masculine hero as a victim of Charlotte Brontë's will-to-power over the beautiful Lord Byron" (4). Ignoring the mis-connection of beauty with Rochester (Jane Eyre unfailingly describes him as fascinating but ugly–akin to her own plainness and a contrast to St. John's bland good looks), it can easily be argued that the blind and crippled Rochester is no less masculine than before. The narrator's description of her husband as "brown," "shaggy," "metamorphosed into a lion" clearly establishes his virility. In fact, despite his restrictions, she terms him "athletic," "vigorous," and "unblighted" (412, 419). At the same time his physical condition makes him helpless, and therefore, feminine, and forces Jane into a protective male role. As Terry Eagleton points out, Rochester's accident results in a "curious rhythm of sexual roles" where the need to venerate and revere alternates with the need to exercise

power (43). This intermingling of roles equalizes their relationship so that Jane confesses she loves him better now than when he "disdained every part but that of the giver and protector" (426).

In contrast to Rochester's sustained masculinity, Bud is clearly "not the man he once was," as Jasmine-Jane admits. There is a gradual loss of balance as the heroine's increase in power and control coincides with Bud's psychological and physical diminishment. Partially immobile, he is confined to a wheel chair, popping stomach pills, blood pressure pills, diuretics, and feminized by "all sorts of skin creams" (9). Even his statements end in a question, an indication of his uncertainty and lack of definition.

The passionate declarations of love between Jane Eyre and Rochester contrast sharply with Bud's pronouncements of love which the narrator attributes to his helplessness and abject position (31). The pendulum of control swings to the feminine extreme and jams there as Jasmine plays all the roles by herself from caregiver to temptress. Her description of their lovemaking clearly discloses Bud's shame in his helplessness.

> He can lift me, even from his prone position . . . and as my legs, my breasts, my face dip to touch his chest, I can feel the ripple of his heart; our flesh makes loud slapping noises. Then it is my turn to take charge. There are massages I must administer, pushing him on the prostate, tools I must push up him so that, at least on very special nights, he can ejaculate.
>
> Bud's eyes are closed, face contorted. "Sweet Jane," he mutters. "I've brought you to this." (32)

Although she declares, "I am Jane with my very own Mr. Rochester" (210), there is none of the fire between them than animates the Brontë romance. Their mutual attachment is based on something other than passion or even friendship. Bud is attracted to Jane because she is glamorous

and unattainable, an escape from his confining banking procedures. In turn, Jane is attracted to Bud because of his rootedness–he provides her with material security and emotional stability. In contrast to her earlier efforts to resist being culturally stereotyped, in her relationship with Bud, she slips into Orientalism and accepts the superficially foreign role he assigns her. "I am darkness, mystery, inscrutability. The East plugs me into instant vitality and wisdom. I rejuvenate him simply by being who I am" (178). However, Bud, together with his mother and the other citizens of Baden County, have no real interest in Jasmine's foreignness beyond the variations she provides to their plain mid-western fare: cumin, coriander, varieties of peppers, *matar paneer* and *gobi aloo*. Bud doesn't want to hear the stories of her past and even considers her memories a form of disloyalty. "My genuine foreignness frightens him," she admits and becomes complicit in his rejection of her Indianness when she adds, "It frightens me too" (22).

It does not surprise the reader, that Jane, bored with the caretaking routine of her crippled Mr. Rochester, runs off with Taylor when he turns up on her doorstep. Even before the car has left the driveway, she has cleanly discarded the "Old-world dutifulness" for the promise of America. She casts aside with a sense of relief the *Jane Eyre* fictive model in her leap toward adventure, risk and further transformation. But in her description of the text's final transformation, once she expresses a token sorrow, the old passivity recurs, together with an amoral assertion that she lacks control.

> I cry into Taylor's shoulder, cry through all the lives I've given birth to, cry for all my dead.
>
> Then there is nothing I can do . . . I am out the door and in the potholed and rutted driveway, scrambling ahead of Taylor, greedy with wants and reckless from hope. (214)

Mukherjee herself reflects her character's passive and amoral quality in her comment on the novel's ending. "I didn't know she was going to leave Bud at end of the novel. She just up and went! because she got bored with the situation. Not bored. She felt it was a regression, like going back to village life, a life of duty and devotion, to stay on caring for this crippled fellow" ("A-Four-Hundred-Year-Old-Woman" 25) The same lack of control that Jasmine expresses over the events in her personal life parallels Mukherjee's unconvincing disownment of responsibility towards her character in this instance. The energy, generosity, and love which Bud has demonstrated towards Jasmine in the course of their relationship is disregarded in this dismissive evaluation of him as this "crippled fellow."

Thus the same theme of romantic love that initially establishes the continuity between these two *bildungsroman* narratives discloses their essential differences. In both *Jane Eyre* and *Jasmine* romantic love is constructed using a vocabulary of idealism and liberation. It suggests the promise of transcendence, powerfully seductive possibilities for women whose material realities are so limited. However, because Brontë eventually endows her heroine with financial independence, Jane Eyre is able to establish a relationship of independence with her lover. In contrast, the "love" that Jasmine feels for her lovers is, as Koshy points out, "a sublimation of privilege and power" (80). Indeed, Jasmine explicitly confirms this when she describes her attractions to Taylor. "The love I felt . . . had nothing to do with sex. I fell in love with his world, its ease, its careless confidence and graceful self-absorption" (171). In *Jasmine* romantic love is displaced by opportunity and the promise of adventure.

Because so much of the violence in the text is associated with the redefinition of self triggered by immigration, it is useful to examine the author's assessment of the immigration experience. Despite Mukherjee's inscription of Jasmine's experience of violence within the physical

dimension alone, it seems unrealistic to describe the process as devoid of psychic pain. Several East Indian writers have commented on the deep disturbance that the change of culture, especially the change of language, entails. Sneja Gunew, in a discussion with Gayatri Spivak on multiculturalism, points out that one's native language is not simply a means of communicating but forms the core around which one's personality is structured:

> What is very much a question for me at this moment is that if you are constructed in one particular kind of language, what violence does it do to your subjectivity if one then has to move into another language and suppress whatever selves or subjectivities were constructed by the first. (Broe and Ingram 419)

In her article "Piecemeal Shelter: Writing, Ethnicity, Violence," Meena Alexander carefully details the extent of the suffering inherent in changing one's language of birth. She relates English to a skin that isolates and suffocates the immigrant initially, a skin that must be ruptured painfully and with force to release the voice within. In her book *Fault Lines*, Alexander further describes the tortuous routines of learning to speak English as a small child in India.

> Over and over she [her tutor] made me repeat the words she felt I should learn till the sharpness overwhelmed me, made my mouth hurt . . . . Over and over she made me say: "duck," "duck," "pluck," "pluck," "milk," "milk," "silk," "silk." It was hard for her. I pouted, I fidgeted under the table, knocking my knuckles against the wood, then tried over and over. It was a ruinous waste of time but she persisted. I was all wrong, I knew it. And I felt quite ashamed. (112)

On the other hand, Jasmine, from her grammar school introduction to English, envisages that language as the magic lamp which will whisk her from the poverty and parochialism of her village. It becomes an essential criterion in selecting a mate. "I couldn't marry a man who didn't speak

English, or at least who didn't want to speak English. To want English was to want more than you had been given at birth, it was to want the world" (61). Despite her minimal education and the illegal status that blocks her from formal education in America, she is never depicted as confused, unable to apprehend a particular linguistic context, or struggling for the appropriate word. On the contrary, Mukherjee offhandedly endows her protagonist with flawless English, an English, in fact, which on occasion sounds like the studied product of a creative writing class: "gold gulls straddled topaz waves. Lapis fish leaped toward coral clouds" (93). The rather incredible ease with which Jasmine absorbs the intricacies of both written and spoken English leads the reader, to question the entire depiction of her immigration process.

In *Jasmine* (as in *Middleman and Other Stories*) Mukherjee shifts from an earlier representation of immigration which focused on expatriates attempting to preserve their identity in a hostile foreign environment to an embrace of the new world through a "process of uprooting and rerooting" (1988 Interview 648). Although the self-fashioning of the South Asian immigrant is necessarily self-dividing as Mitali Pati points out (197) the underlying impression of Jasmine's metamorphosis (or more accurately metamorphoses) is not one of loss but of aspiration and of hope. "My characters want to make it in the new world; they are filled with a hustlerish kind of energy," Mukherjee stated. "As they change citizenship, they are reborn" (1988 Interview, 654). The metaphor of rebirth or reincarnation necessarily implies some form of death and dislocation. To "make it in the new world" Mukherjee's characters must sever themselves from the past, sometimes at high cost. "There are no harmless, compassionate ways to remake oneself," Jasmine reflects in her Iowa sojourn. "We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams" (25). Mukherjee actually facilitated Jyoti's "murder," admitting in a 1990 interview that she constructed for her character a childhood and early adulthood in a North India society that was

so caste-bound, genderist, traditional, and repressive that she could jettison it with ease (19). In fact, Jasmine's detachment from India telescopes that of her author. After years in Canada and the United States, Mukherjee returned to India for a year-long visit. During her stay there, she felt displaced in her own homeland and concluded, "the old world was dead for me" (1990 Interview, 15). Afterwards she wrote that she viewed herself "more as an immigrant than an exile" (*Days* 284). However, Mukherjee collapses her decades-long evolution in American life into so rapid a transformation that one of her critics, Gurleen Grewal, caustically equates it to a fundamentalist conversion.

In her posture as immigrant rather than expatriate, Mukherjee defined for herself a clear literary agenda, distinguishing herself from writers such as Anita Desai and R. K. Narayan ("I do not write in Indian English about Indians living in India") and from Indian expatriate writers such as V. S. Naipul who write about living in perpetual exile and about the impossibility of ever having a home. "I have adopted this country as my home," Mukherjee stated. "I view myself as an American author in the tradition of other authors whose ancestors arrived at Ellis Island" (650). This is not a simple task. Himani Bannerji argues that a South Asian writer's text contains "holes for the Western reader" requiring exhaustive footnotes, glossaries and comments to explain the textual allusions, cultural signs and symbols. Bannerji places responsibility on the reader as well as the writer. Although the writer must presumably supply extensive commentary, such texts still necessitate "readers already familiar with these aspects or willing to learn about them" (33, 29). Mukherjee, on the other hand, proposes to fill those holes on her own. Her position appears akin to Silko's, who declares that it is the writer's responsibility, in the expression of the marginal experience, to make the text accessible to the general reader. "My task as a writer," Mukherjee stated in a 1988 interview, "is to make my intricate and unknown world comprehensible to

mainstream American readers" (653). She compares herself to Malamud, declaring her ambition to give voice to the experience of that segment of the minority community which escapes the ghetto and adapts itself to the pattern of the dominant American culture. In fact, she, as author, deliberately undertakes the "seduction"–as she phrases it–of the American reader through the character of Jasmine (1990 Interview 25). In "A Four Hundred Year Old Woman", Mukherjee presents her position even more forcefully:

> I am an American. I am an American writer, in the American mainstream, trying to extend it. . . I am not an Indian writer, not an exile, not an expatriate. I am an immigrant; my investment is in the American reality, not the Indian. 24

However several of Mukherjee's critics, including Koshy and Grewal, accuse her of mis-translating her "intricate and unknown world," of de-contextualizing its violence, and of mis-representing and over-simplifying the immigrant experience. In *Jasmine*, for example, Mukherjee presents only two possibilities of South Asian immigration: entombment in the past as exemplified by the Vadheras or total renunciation of the past. The Vadheras live in an apartment of "artificially maintained Indianness" (128). "They had kept a certain kind of Punjab alive, even if that Punjab no longer existed. They let nothing go, lest everything be lost" (143). Mukherjee implies that even the most trivial adaptation to American society creates a chink in the dyke of one's native culture, a chink through which all traditional customs, values, and beliefs will inevitably leak out. "Once we start letting go–let go just one thing, like not wearing our normal clothes, or a turban or not wearing a tika on the forehead–the rest goes on its own down a sinkhole" (24). Du is the only immigrant in the novel able to establish what Mukherjee calls a "hyphenated" existence as Vietnamese-American. He stands somewhere between the Vadheras strenuous rejection of American society and Jasmine's eager assimilation, an Americanization that Jasmine herself

describes as "genetic" (192). When she abandons her sari and "Third World heels" for T-shirts, tight jeans and running shoes, Jasmine consciously relinquishes her Hasnapuri modesty along with her Hasnapuri sidle (119). She assumes an entirely different personality from the Jyoti who would have lived modestly like the Vadheras, scrimping and saving. In contrast to them the reborn American Jase goes to movies and lives for the moment, squandering her salary on sexy lingerie and satin blouses with vampish necklines, spangled heels and silk chartreuse pants. She becomes, in her own assessment, a "prowling adventurer" (157).

There is a price, however, to this easy embrace of American pop culture. In the novel Mukherjee implies that successful immigrants negotiate a series of uprootings and rerootings in order to stake out their claims in the new world and engage in the process of "the making of new Americans" (1988 Interview, 684 ;"Woman" 26). A character simultaneously able to relinquish and reattach must necessarily be adaptable, a quality Mukherjee admires and which she richly bestows on Jasmine.

> The kinds of women who attract me, who intrigue me, are those who are adaptable. We've all been trained to please, been trained to be adaptable as wives and that adaptability works to women's advantage as immigrants . . . . For an Indian woman to learn to drive, put on pants, cash checks, is a big leap. They are . . . exhilarated by that change. They are no longer having to do what mothers-in-law tyrannically forced them to do. (1990 Interview 19)

Mukherjee suggests that the same quality which makes the Indian woman submissive and eager to please enables her in less oppressive circumstances to become liberated and independent. The term "adaptable," however, is a layered word and pushed to its extreme suggests a viscous quality, a lack of substance and individuality. Jasmine's adaptability stretches the reader's credulity because

she appears to lack any continuity of cultural identity. In what Jill Roberts terms an "alarming aspect of the novel," Jasmine adopts, adapts, adjusts, moves into new places and new families, but always moves out again (92). Her own unrootedness acts as a catalyst that disintegrates the lives of families and individuals with whom she comes in contact, as evident in the divorces of Taylor and Wylie, Bud and Karen, the crippling of Bud and the suicide of Darryl. Moreover, there is a curious amoral quality in her complacent acceptance of herself as a tornado that whirls through others' lives, leaving destruction in its wake.

The discontinuity between Jyoti-Jasmine-Jane is so abrupt, in fact, that Mukherjee employs the Hindu religious belief in reincarnation to justify the radical change:

> I believe that our souls can be reborn in another body, so the perspective I have about a single character's life is different from that of an American writer who believes that he only has one life . . . As a Hindu . . . I believe in the existence of alternate realities, and this belief makes itself evident in my fiction. (1988 Interview 651)

The problem with Mukherjee's defense of Jasmine's abrupt changes in identity as rooted in Hindu reincarnations is that she presents her character to the reader as a unique individual in a single and real-time life span. The metaphor of reincarnation is insufficient to convince the reader of the credibility of Jasmine's transformations, even on a fictional level. Jasmine's assimilation has a compressed, time-lapse quality that make her appear unreal and unbalanced. Arvinda Sant-Wade and Karen Radell explain this imbalance as resulting from the sudden release from the bonds of superstition and chauvinism. They argue that it is "impossible to adapt to life in the New World without sustaining some kind of wound to one's spirit (11). Such an observation appears both obvious and irrefutable. The difficulty with Jasmine's immigration is that, although characterized

by physical violence, she seems to escape any spiritual or psychic wounding. She does not even evince any of the ambivalence that the reader would expect in someone in the midst of such radical change. Indeed, one indication of Jasmine's unrootedness is her failure to express any sense of the fracturing of self that a dislocation as radical as hers would provoke. All has changed–food, clothing, language, customs, and climate. Yet Jasmine adjusts to these changes with remarkable ease. There is no looking back, no comparisons with the past. In fact, in her immigrant experience, Jasmine expresses only two moments of nostalgia, both of which take place the day after her arrival in America. Pictures that Lillian Gordon's daughter has taken of migrant workers reminds her of scenes in Hasnapur and she weeps. Shortly after looking at these pictures, Jasmine becomes hysterical when a pair of shoes evoke the memory of a shopping trip with Prakash. The reader can easily sympathize with Jasmine's sense of irrevocable loss, the longing for the past–even if willingly sacrificed–as familiar and predictable. The reader can as easily imagine the discomfiture of the immigrant, the feeling of dislocation that Salman Rusdie described when seeing an old photograph of his village: "It's my present that is foreign, and the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time" (9). Meena Alexander uses words like "splintered" "fragmented," "dislocated," "dispersed" to express the immigrant experience. "Sometimes I am torn apart by two sorts of memories, two opposing ways of being towards the past" (*Fault Lines* 29). What rings false in Jasmine's case is the omission of any expression of rupture: the exuberant immigrant cheerfully detaches from all vestiges of the past.

Even if one conceded that Jasmine's background was so deprived and unhappy that she could cast it aside with ease, as Mukherjee suggests, her transformation from peasant to middle-class American is too rapid to be believable. Mukherjee first emphasizes Jasmine's caste-bound, uneducated, peasant upbringing. "I was a coarse, common girl, a peasant" (94). "I was a child,

born in a mud hut without water or electricity . . . . the last to be born to that kind of submission, that expectation of ignorance" (204). "Ethnicity is a tenacious thing," remarks Arun Prabha Mukherjee in her introduction to *Her Mother's Ashes* where she reflects on the complexity of Indian culture and subculture and the sense of self that is rooted in language, religion, history, literature, cuisine, and dress (xiv). In *Jasmine*, however, the author asks the reader to accept that her character can slough off her background, her upbringing, her manner of relating, as simply as her sari.

Mukherjee's avoidance of a linear model in Jasmine's development disguises to some extent the leaps which her character makes in her assimilation into American society. Because the narrator's voice is consistently sophisticated and in control in American society, the reader is likely to overlook at first some of the discrepancies in her development. Why, for instance, is Jasmine so uncomfortable when she is living with the Vadheras? Why, after only a few weeks in America, does she feel suffocated in their presence and represent their adherence to their ethnic identity as indicative of inertia and cowardice. Jasmine's reflection that "I changed because I wanted to" (165) suggests that assimilation is accomplished by will-power alone. To dismiss the Vadhera's lifestyle as one-dimensional and cowardly ("To bunker oneself inside nostalgia, to sheathe the heart in a bulletproof vest, was to be a coward" (165)) is to blind oneself to the significance of the role that ethnic ghettos have played in the history of American immigration. Sucheta Muzemdar's observations about Asian-American ghettoes are equally valid for earlier models of immigrant neighborhoods. They serve as a natural response to the needs of new immigrants like Jasmine and the Vadheras who find within them comfort, support, and identity. Even highly trained professionals, Muzemdar points out, may discover that "their foreign credentials are unacceptable

her and be forced to turn to low-income housing and semi-skilled jobs in ethnic markets, restaurants . . . in order to survive" (14).

It is significant that the Asians with whom Jasmine does identify are not struggling illegals like herself but the elite, a community of highly-educated professionals. "Kwang, Liu, Patel, I've met them all. Poke around in a major medical facility and suddenly you're back in Asia, which I find very reassuring. I trust only Asian doctors, Asian professionals. What we've been through must count for something" (32).Certainly, as Koshy notes, the presence of Asian professionals in American society provides a political identity available to Jasmine as an Indian in that society. However, to ground that identity on "what we've been through" is misleading because it blurs crucial differences between the passages of unskilled and illegal immigrants like Jasmine and Du and the influx of post-1965 waves of middle-class professional Asian immigrants (79).

In her essays and interviews Mukherjee has insisted that her literary agenda is focused on demonstrating how the contemporary immigrant has transformed America.[32] But the character of Jasmine is so fluid and compliant that it is unclear what transformative effect she has on American society. Moreover, the very charges that Mukherjee has made against American fiction—of its being written in a political vacuum—have been leveled against her. Debani Banerjee, for example, accuses her of divorcing the violence in India from its political context, of obliterating Indian history from the text, and of "trivializing the complexities of the post-colonial condition." Banerjee implies that Mukherjee has not simply failed to "redefine the nature of what makes an American." By treating Indian history as a lack and by snatching her protagonist free of the past while

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[32] See, for example, "A Four Hundred Year Old Woman" where she states, "My duty is to give voice to continents, but also to redefine the nature of American and what makes an American" (26) or her interview with Bill Moyers in which she declares, "We have come not to passively accommodate ourselves to someone else's dream of what we should be, we have come, in a way, to take over, to help build a culture" (3 June, 1990).

simultaneously exoticizing her as an Indians princess, Mukherjee allies herself with First World cultural colonization (170-171).

Mukherjee identifies Jasmine with the Hindu trinity of female creativity, wrath, and sexual desire in an attempt at reshaping American social norms. However, as exotic caregiver, temptress, and homemaker, Jane is, as Grewal observes, "the model immigrant woman who says and does nothing to challenge the authority or ethnocentrism of the white American male . . . . Jasmine readily complies as the exotic Other (191). It is compliance to, rather than transformation of, the American dream that characterizes Jasmine's trajectory across America, her movement west a replication of the impetus of the frontier, her "narrative of assimilation," as Koshy phrases it (77), a compromised one that merely reflects European assumptions of Third World peoples.

One of the problems of Mukherjee's claim of giving voice to continents and redefining the nature of an American is that some readers have attempted to use her writing as a model of immigration. Roseanne Kanhai, for example, proposes to use *Jasmine* as a classroom text to explore the "relationship between global feminism and transnational cultural patterns" affecting women of color (119). Another critic, Sherry Morton-Mollo, proclaims *Jasmine* as the blueprint for the immigrant Everywoman, the representative of those who have experienced a dramatic shifting of cultural values.

> The reader sees [Jasmine] whole, unbounded, in process. This flux of Jasmine is not mere function of her personality nor of her singular personal experience: it is the form of her story, the source of her meaning, and more importantly, an *example for other immigrants as a way of being* (italics mine) that incorporates continual metamorphosis and reinvention of self that becomes not mere mode of accommodation but fusion of culture and a transcendence of separateness. (38)

To elevate Jasmine as a model for immigrants is comparable to establishing Cinderella as the paradigm for servant girls. It is less honest, in fact, for *Jasmine* overlays a pretense of reality on fantasy. To assume that unskilled, illegal immigrants like Jasmine, who are not fluent in English, have the same opportunities as the upper-class, educated compatriots is, as Grewal remarks, "to make a mockery of their lives" (192). Such assumptions erase the class restrictions that exist not only in India but in the United States as well.

Thus the central problem of the novel lies in its failure to account for the rapidity of Jasmine's assimilation into American society, its failure to deal with the realistic compromises and struggles that Jasmine would have to negotiate as an immigrant. The other problems of the novel–the inconsistency of Jasmine's voice and the strained use of external violence are rooted in this. Pushpa Parekh argues that the unevenness of Jasmine's voice reflects her precarious identity and existence (117). That might be so if her voice was tentative. But it is the surprising articulateness of her voice, its ease and confidence that leads the reader to suspect that it is her creator's voice that takes over and speaks for her, her creator's literary and socially success which Jasmine registers through the consciousness of Jane.

Jyoti-Jasmine-Jazzy-Jase-Jane's history is a sequence of erasures. "Too much of ourselves, Adrienne Rich writes, "must be deleted when we erase out personal histories and abruptly dissociate ourselves from who we have been. We become less dimensional than we really are. The dialectic between change and continuity is a painful but deeply instructive one, in personal life as in the life of a people" (143). It is this "painful but deeply instructive" negotiation between change and continuity that is so obviously lacking in the novel. No amount of external violence can distract from the essential violence inflicted on Jasmine–the sacrifice of her history, her memories, her appearance–in the quest to transform her into a middle-class mainstream American.

Chapter 4

Violence and the Repression of Voice

Selves which are coherent, seamless, bounded, and whole are indeed illusions. . . . You are not an "I" untouched by context, rather you are defined by context. One could argue that identity and context are inseparable.

–Dorinne Kondo

Haunted by the voices and images that violated us, bearing the pains of the past, we are slowly acquiring the tools to change the disabling images and memories, to replace them with self-affirming ones, to recreate our pasts and alter them–for the past can be as malleable as the present.

–Gloria Anzaldúa

Like Mukherjee, Maxine Hong Kingston centers her themes around the immigrant experience. The narrator in *The Woman Warrior*, in contrast to Jasmine, is not an immigrant herself, but the daughter of immigrants. Unlike Jasmine, who enthusiastically embraced American culture and traditions, Kingston's narrator is more tentative: she stands between worlds, neither fully accepted by, nor accepting either. The conflict in this text is multifaceted: generational, racial, social and gender-based. Although Kingston's use of violence is less extravagant than Mukherjee's,

less dramatic than Erdrich's and less pervasive than Silko's, it is every bit as real. While the physical violence is clustered in three sections of the text, the subtler psychological violence manifested in social and gender discrimination recurs throughout the memoir. This final chapter will first explore how Kingston stretches the genre of memoir to accommodate myth, fiction, remembered events, reflection, and story telling. It will then inspect the relationship between the violence of the text and its connection to the narrator's maturing consciousness, in particular the role of violence in the movement from silence to voice.

Memoir as a literary genre is generally understood as a biographical or autobiographical sketch, a record of facts and events connected with a subject, period, or individual, and generally including a commentary on one's life, times, and experiences. Typified by writings of world figures like Winston Churchill and Dwight D. Eisenhower, the memoir usually focuses on personalities and events known to or experienced by the writer. Myth, on the other hand, is the product of a racial group rather than an individual. Its large purpose is to guess at the meaning of existence and death, and in doing so, it frequently chronicles the adventures of a racial hero. T. S. Fraser, in his distinction between myth and history, interprets the latter as a singular and localized event in comparison to myth: "Mythology preserves the memory of ancient rituals; it is concerned with the regular repetitive activities of many people, under a very deep emotional compulsion, whereas history is what a few people happened to do once." (Scott, 65).

The inclusion of the word "memoirs" in her subtitle, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*, has mislead many of Kingston's critics, including those of her own racial background. Many white American critics have taken the word "memoirs" strictly in the traditional sense and have interpreted the text as a representational account of what it means to grow up Chinese American. Jane Kramer, for example, in her *New York Times* review of *The Woman*

Warrior, titled her essay "On Being Chinese in China and America." Even though she recognizes that the text is an investigation of soul rather than landscape, an expression of "dream and memory, myth and desire," Kramer nevertheless identifies the narrator with an historical "I" intent on translating the Chinese American experience for a wider American audience (18). Several Chinese reviewers–particularly Chinese male reviewers–have also approached the text as an historical and sociological commentary and have condemned it for distorting Chinese traditions and mythology, and for exaggerating the repression of females in Chinese society. Most critics–male and female, Asian and white, have assumed the "I" of the narrative is synonymous with the author and they refer to the narrator as "Maxine" even though Kingston never once made that connection explicit. In fact, in her response to what she felt was misreadings of the text, Kingston maintains that the narrator should be appraised critically. She further asserts that the text was never intended to typify the Chinese American experience—its purpose is to explore how a daughter would interpret her mother's Chinese culture given the American context in which they both live, a context of idealism and racism, sexism and cultural historical ignorance.[33] In fact, when Kingston asks her Chinese American readers,

> Chinese Americans, when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese? What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies?[34]

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[33] See her response to what she felt were erroneous interpretations to the text in her essay "Cultural Misreading by American Reviewers."

[34] *The Woman Warrior* 6. Further references to this text will be indicated by page number only.

she implies that no one can claim a typical experience; every person's identification with his or her culture is, in large measure, individual because it is contextual. Even though she acknowledges that many Chinese American readers have reported that the narrator's experiences have been similar to their own, Kingston resists iconizing *The Woman Warrior* as a representational text.[35] On the contrary, in asking the reader to critique the book's narrator and her constructs of American and Chinese culture, she is requesting an active discernment. By exploring the interplay of hiding and revealing that the narrator experienced, the reader can come to understand her confusions about her Chinese American identity.

The form of the text itself defies neat classification. Lucien Miller compares it to a fictional work because of the way the narration alternates between mythic and mimetic modes, explores character, experiments with the narrative point of view, and coins a Chinese American idiom (27). Other critics have discounted the title word "Memoirs" entirely with its intimations of historicity. When Stephen Sumida takes Kingston's disclaimer of her text as representational at face value, he interprets the work as pure fiction, a Chinese American *bildüngsroman,* "a narrative not aiming to present how China, Chinese and Chinese Americans essentially are but to plot the imaginative, psychological, ethical and bodily development of its main character, the narrator herself" (399). By dismissing the biographical content completely from the text, Sumida minimizes its complexity—and to a large extent discounts the socially critical aspects of the work. Kingston herself confirmed her intention to produce a type of memoir when she stated that she was "not writing history or sociology but a memoir like Proust" ("Cultural" 64). She wrote approvingly of

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[35] Kingston's resistence to being held up as a "representative" of the Chinese American community is humorously illustrated in a conversation with Arturo Islas and Marilyn Yalom. She said, "I have asked my sisters, 'On a range of 1 to 10, how odd do you think we were? How odd was our upbringing?' My sister said it was 8. That means pretty odd, which is saying that we are not very representative" (1980 11)

Diane Johnson's and Christine Cook's reviews, both of which acknowledge the scope of Kingston's form. Johnson wrote that Kingston was "slyly writing a memoir, a form which you can neither dismiss as fiction nor quarrel with as fact" and Cook said that the book was a grouping of stories whose purpose was to illuminate the times rather than offer an autobiography ("Cultural" 64). Perhaps Lee Quinby best defined Kingston's use of the word memoirs in stating that the text "constructs a new form of subjectivity . . . which refuses the particular forms of selfhood, knowledge, and artistry that the systems of power of the modern era (including the discourses of autobiography) have made dominant" (298). Quinby distinguishes Kingston's memoirs from autobiography by observing that the latter promotes an "I" which has an assumed interiority of confessional discourse whereas the "I" of a memoir is "explicitly constituted in the reports and proceedings of others" (299). In contrast to the linear organization typical of the autobiography, Kingston's memoirs are not unitary and continuous over time but multiple and discontinuous.

Non-linear, multiple, and discontinuous, the text—as the author has affirmed in multiple interviews—represents her remembrances of the difficulties of growing up bi-culturally, of the confusion and resentment of experiencing gender prejudice within the Chinese tradition and racial prejudice in American society. *The Woman Warrior* is a text that as Mary Dearborn observes, records the tension between the "echoes of a racial past and the present reality as often being linguistically and culturally divorced from that past" (162). It is also a text that like *Ceremony, Love Medicine, Tracks,* and *Jasmine*, has been prompted in part by rejection and exclusion. Ironically, Kingston has embraced that exclusion not only as furnishing a unique point of view but as providing her access to traditional American literary themes.

> Exclusion plays right into the hands of the American writer . . . . The alienated, individualistic writer or hero or heroine is a tradition in American literature. . . .

> Even though I have a peculiar voice I'm able to speak to everyone from my stance as an outsider and then I can make my way in.[36]

In a later interview, Kingston admitted that writers with multi-cultural backgrounds have a more difficult task than mainstream writers because they have to integrate more information "coming in from the universe," and shape it into an artistic whole (1989 Interview 5).

However, Kingston's text is more than a compilation of memories and reflections on her girlhood experiences of growing up bi-culturally. In the tradition of Yeats, Eliot, Faulkner and Joyce, she actively engages in mythopoesis; that is, she consciously constructs a mythic frame for her work as a representation of the primal conflict that is played out first in the superhuman accomplishments of Fa Mu Lan and then translated into the more mundane achievements of the narrator's mother and of the narrator herself. It is, in fact, the mythic component in *The Woman Warrior* that has triggered the most vitriolic response to the work. Frank Chin accuses Kingston of writing "fake" Asian American literature, of writing in a missionary tradition. He reprints in *Aiiieeeee!* a translation of the Fa Mu Lan story in its entirety to demonstrate how Kingston has bastardized the myth. Kingston, along with other the Asian American writers, claims Chin, is a victim of cultural imperialism, and as such

> is made to feel morally obligated to write in a language produced by an alien and hostile sensibility. His [the victim's] task, in terms of language alone, is to legitimize his, and by implication his people's orientation as white, to codify his experience in the form of prior symbols, clichés, linguistic mannerisms, and a

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[36] Interview by Jody Hoy, 1986 123. Further references to interviews will be indicated by the year of the interview and, in cases where multiple interviews occurred in one year, the year and the name of the interviewer.

> sense of humor that appeals to whites because it celebrates Asian American self-contempt (xxxvii).[37]

Jeffery Paul Chan, chairperson of the San Francisco State University Asian American studies, accused Kingston of mistranslating the Cantonese term "ghost" and falsifying the image of Chinese American culture based on her "unique" experiences, experiences that he termed "distortions" (S. Wong "Necessity" 4) and Benjamin R. Tong in an article entitled "Critic of Admirer Sees Dumb Racist" charged that Kingston deliberately mistranslated Chinese American expressions to appeal to white tastes for the purpose of increasing the sale of her book (B4). Kingston's work, the editors of *Aiiieeeee!* maintain, lacks integrity because as a victim of white supremacy, Kingston has "accepted white standards of objectivity, beauty, behavior, and achievement as being morally absolute" (xxvii).[38] Other Chinese American writers and critics have defended Kingston against such attacks. Sau-ling Wong, among others, has defended Kingston's right as an artist to claim her own literary territory. "Who is to legislate for the writer," she asks, " in choice of subject matter, adoption of tone, sifting of cultural traditions, portrayal of sex roles, degree of explicitness in expressing opposition, and a myriad other issues likely to surface in ethnic literature?"

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[37] It is telling that Chin who accuses Kingston of exaggerating the repression of women in her text uses only the male pronoun in his discussion of the writer, all the more so since the context of his remark is taken from a comparison of Asian American female writers (Kingston, Jade Snow Wong, Virginia Lee and Betty Lee Sung). Elsewhere he remarks that Louis Chu's novel, *Eat a Bow of Tea,* irritates white readers because the characters are "secure in a Chinatown *devoid of whites* (italics mine). It is a Chinatown that we are familiar with—filled with vulgarity and white whores"(xxxii). Evidently women are so low, in Chin's regard, that they don't even count as whites.

[38] While Wong credits Chan and Tong for their work in demolishing popular stereotypes, she argues that in their zeal, they have created stereotypes of their own in codifying Asian American literature. Stereotyping is damaging, she contends, precisely because it denies an individual's uniqueness. "To demand orthodoxy in the treatment of ethnic experiences is to subscribe to a narrowly utilitarian theory of literature, and the price one pays for this simplification is the same as the price one pays for the censorship of Extravagance: a reduction in the fullness of life, a shrinking of the self to meaner if more manageable proportions" ("Necessity" 24).

("Autobiography" 4). King-Kok Cheung argues that the editors of *Aiiieeeee!* in their zeal to combat Oriental stereotyping have themselves created a stereotype of Asian American literature. Their "hard-line" approach, Cheung writes, indicates that they have "underestimated the potential of a multiple consciousness—one that is neither schizophrenic or bisectable into East and West, neither merely preserving the ancestral culture nor dissolving into the mainstream" (*Articulate* 9).[39]

Moreover, what Chin and his associates fail to perceive is that Kingston's manipulation of the Fa Mu Lan myth is not an ignorant distortion but a deliberate re-invention, an embellishment of the original which, as Catherine Lappis points out, is intended for an American context where the narrator's struggle as a female within an immigrant Chinese American family is critically important (61). If, as Richard Slotkin argues, myths are stories embedded in a society's history that have, through repetition, become symbolic of that society's ideology, a dramatization, in effect, of its moral consciousness, then they are powerful purveyors of culture in themselves. "When history is translated into myth, the complexities of social and historical experiences are simplified and compressed into the action of representative individuals or 'heroes.' The narrative of the hero's action exemplifies and tests the political and/or moral validity of a particular approach to the use of human powers in the material world" (*Gunfighter* 13-14). Thus the hero's code of values expresses in personal behavior the complex, even contradictory, mixture of ideological imperatives that shape a society's response to a particular event, and become, in a sense, normative for that society.

Leslie Marmon Silko has written convincingly of the importance of myth in shaping identity within Native American culture. "That's how you know, that's how you belong, that's how

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[39] Chin and Chan group all Asian American writing within a single definition. In their insistence on "authentic" Asian American literature, they homogenize highly disparate peoples with diverse linguistic, religious, and social backgrounds, and in some cases, even a history of rivalry and conflict.

you know you belong, if the stories incorporate you into them . . . In a sense, you are told who you are or you know who you are by the stories that are told about you" (*Ceremony* 29-30). But what happens when a society's myths write out approximately half the population on the basis of gender? In Kingston's experience, the stories she is told as a child are reductive; the equivalent of the female "I" in Chinese, she tells the reader, is "slave." If myths diminish one's humanity because they are misogynous, then it takes more integrity to subvert and re-invent them than to repeat them in the interests of "cultural truth." Moreover, like Silko, who argued that revision of age-old ceremonies was not only inevitable but necessary to keep them strong, Kingston maintains that adherence to the literal story is sentimental and escapist. "We have to do more than record myth. . . . The way I keep old Chinese myths alive is by telling them in a new American way" (1980 Interview 24). In a discussion with Kay Bonetti, Kingston admitted that she attributed to Fa Mu Lan aspects of the story of the Chinese male hero Yüch Fei whose mother carved a vow on his back. She did so, she stated, as part of the "feminist war" taking place in *The Woman Warrior*, "to take the men's stories away from then and give the strength of that story to a woman" (40). As an aggressive story-teller, Kingston asserts her right to alter traditional myths out of the conviction that "myths have to be changed and played with all the time or they die" (40). In particular, Kingston insists that the revised myths are important for the insights they furnish for Chinese Americans today. Their purpose, she maintains, is not to illuminate the past but the present.

Apart from its literary historicism, critics have questioned the inclusion of an entire chapter centering on a myth in a work classified as biography, labeled as non-fiction on its cover, and affirmed as memoir by the author.[40] According to Jeanne Smith, *The Woman Warrior*

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[40] For several years after the publication of *The Woman Warrior*, the focus of criticism in England centered primarily on the question of its genre.

transgresses restrictive genre definitions "and offers a trickster-inspired model for narrative form and the construction of identity." Such a model permits Kingston to redefine biography as a process of "acknowledging and giving voice to the contradictions and paradoxes within the self" (*Writing* 33). Smith connects the form of *The Woman Warrior* to the political subversion of the status quo, a trickster role in relation to Asian American tradition. A. Robert Lee supports this view of the text as subversive when he describes Kingston's memoirs as an "intervention" in the traditional Asian American historiography. "It is precisely the discontinuities, dislocations, and erasures in the history of Chinese women in the United States that *The Woman Warrior* interrogates, thereby challenging both the silence imposed by Orientalism and the authoritarianism of a reasserted patriarchy that threatens to seal Chinese American women's experiences off in its masculinized revision of history" (155). Kingston's examination of identity challenges the predominantly male tradition in Asian American literature which stresses a monolithic, unified identity. Moreover, by incorporating into her memoir myth, fantasy, legend, "talk story," and biography, Kingston rejects a definition of self as an isolated individual. By encompassing the voices and perspectives of her mother, her mother's sister, and her No Name Aunt, as well as her cultural prototypes Fa Mu Lan and Ts'ai Yen, Kingston develops a notion of identity that includes both community and culture. "No matter how strong, bold or talented," Gail Sato writes in her review of Kingston's work, "no Chinese or Chinese American woman is defined outside of family" (207). Sato's comment clarifies Kingston's remark, "'I' am nothing but who 'I' am in relation to other people" ("Personal Statement" 25).

This relational view of the development of identity calls for "a fluid conception of autobiography as a form that creates and preserves community as well as individuality" (J. Smith *Writing* 33). It is also a way of giving voice to the women, real and mythical, who have created

community for her. Like the outlawed knot-maker to whom the narrator compares herself, Kingston's intricate web of fiction, fantasy, history and myth has broken through the traditional definitions of these genres. In an interview with Shelley Fishkin, Kingston maintained that her experimentation with form has broken through the pigeonholes of fiction and nonfiction (1991 791). After listening to two decades of debate concerning the genre of *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston herself remarked,

> I think that having two categories—fiction and nonfiction—is too small. I picture a border between fiction and nonfiction, and I am making that border very wide: fiction is a narrow place on one side and nonfiction is a narrow place on another side, and there's this great big border in the middle, in which real life is taking place and also fantasies and dreams and visions. (Schroeder 85).

In her manipulation of myth and her experimentation with form, Kingston has extended into Asian American literature the work of European and American feminists who for decades have actively sought to establish a literary tradition which does not diminish the female gender and which reinterprets canonical texts by disclosing hidden and subversive meanings. The use of the Fa Mu Lan myth within her memoir functions as an agent of reform. The inclusion of the grievance writing etched on Fa Mu Lan's back is central to the themes of *The Woman Warrior*, themes of repression and silence, voice and liberation. These in turn, are directly associated with the roots of violence in the text.

The Woman Warrior opens with a repressive "Don't tell" followed by the narration of a tale whose purpose is to intimidate the narrator into conformity with particular cultural standards of female chastity. The narrator resists the repression imposed on her in two ways: first, she defies her mother's injunction not-to-tell and opens her narrative with the story of her aunt's out-of-

wedlock pregnancy and subsequent suicide; secondly, she imaginatively reconstructs her aunt, giving her not only a series of contexts for her actions but associating herself with her ancestor, thereby bestowing on her a lineage and a connection to the present. Ruth Jenkens notes the paradox that the narrator, by recording her aunt's story and by translating the earlier silences into "narratives of female experience," engenders and legitimizes her own voice and her own desire (61, 63). In so doing, Kingston takes revenge on a culture which denies female voice through a narrator who also has no name.

Deborah Madsen writes that Kingston imagines her No Name Aunt as raped, wronged, the scapegoat of a double-standard society in a "narrative of betrayal by the opposite sex" (238). But Kingston's re-construction of her aunt's pregnancy is far richer. She presents the reader with several possibilities: the raped victim whose attacker is among the vengeful villagers; a seduced then willing sexual partner; a spoiled only daughter, vain and impulsive; a girl in love with life, a risk-taker who steps outside the boundaries of acceptable female behavior and who consequently draws down—not only upon herself but upon her entire family—the vengeance of the village. Kingston describes their attack in nightmarish, supernatural terms, the villagers surrounding the family home like a horde of avenging spirits.

> Familiar wild heads flared in our night windows; the villagers encircled us. Some of the faces stopped to peer at us, their eyes rushing like searchlights. The hands flattened against the panes, framed heads, and left red prints. (4)

The villagers slaughtered the family's stock, broke dishes, overturned earthenware jugs full of food, destroying duck eggs, pickled fruits, and vegetables, in a startling extravagance of waste. In a text that emphasizes the primacy of frugality, the scene is particularly disturbing because it reveals the depth of the neighbors' rage at the girl's transgression. Their worst fury is directed at No Name

Aunt personally. They ripped her clothes and shoes, ground her hair combs to bits, tore up her weaving all the while shouting, 'Pig.' 'Ghost." "Pig" (5).

Kingston's comment on the villagers' reaction implies that they are less concerned about a girl who has lapsed against chastity than they are about one who has dared to step outside the wall of prescribed behavior. "They expected her alone to keep the traditional ways, which her brothers, now among the barbarians, could fumble without detection . . . . The villagers punished her for acting as if she could have a private life, secret and apart from them" (9, 14). When the mother relates the story, she implies that the loss of goods cannot compare to the shame the family experienced. The taunt, 'Pig.' 'Ghost." "Pig" implicates the entire family in its accusation. The purpose of the story is purely monitory: don't become a pig and a ghost like the aunt who fulfilled their expectations, gave birth in a pigsty and drowned herself in the family well. "Now that you have started to menstruate, what happened to her could happen to you. Don't humiliate us" (5). Kingston, who later termed this "a story to grow up with" recounted that Joyce Chopra told her that the tale reminded her of some Jewish mothers who, when their daughter starts to menstruate, slap her face. Kingston correlates the mother's story to this physical assault: "And I thought, my God, I would feel the same way as if I had had my face slapped. . . a hard slap." (1986 Hoy 121). The mother's story, however, is counter-productive. The narrator expresses a spiritual affinity with her nameless aunt and likens her aunt's rebellion to her own discontent, resentment, confusion and anger. The writing of her aunt's story is both a rebellious action and a moral one. Rather than join in the conspiracy of silence which would confirm the villagers' condemnation, the narrator exposes her aunt's shame and the shame of her father's family in order to protest a greater shame: that of a double-standard society which commands conformity by force and violence.

In the second section of *The Woman Warrior*, "White Tigers," Kingston describes the journey of Fa Mu Lan from prepubescence to early motherhood. This section is artistically harmonious with the memoir because it develops the themes of silence, resistance and justice and their relation to artistic writing. Gail Sato sees this chapter as directly connected to the first, the story of Fa Mu Lan a positive counterpoint to that of No Name Woman, "a narrative of connectedness and return that follows and interprets one of severing and abandonment" (200). Before she goes off into battle, Fa Mu Lan's parents tatoo on her back all the injustice her father and brothers have suffered through oppressive rule. Like the western female warrior, Saint Joan of Arc, Fa Mu Lan rides off to lead her army disguised as a man. Unlike the virgin Maid of Orleans, however, Fa Mu Lan incorporates traditional female roles into her warrior one: she travels with her husband, has sex with him, becomes pregnant and gives birth without any interruption of her responsibilities. And unlike Joan of Arc, her femaleness is never discovered and so her life is spared.

One of the most significant events of this section is when Fa Mu Lan returns and confronts the corrupt local baron, demanding an account of his misdeeds, in particular his mistreatment of women. The warlord's automatic response is to attempt to create an alliance with the swordswoman on the common ground of misogyny:

> Then–heaven help him–he tried to be charming, to appeal to me man to man. "Oh, come now. Everyone takes the girls when he can. The families are glad to be rid of them. 'Girls are maggots in the rice.' 'It is more profitable to raise geese than daughters.'" (51)

The warrior holds the baron, the representative of political power, responsible for all the injustices carved on her body. She reveals them to him, simultaneously baring her back and her breasts

before she beheads him so that he will know that his slayer is female. Her words to him, "I am a female avenger," have a double layer of meaning: not only is she a female warrior, but she avenges crimes against women.

In re-writing the myth of Fa Mu Lan, Kingston occasionally simply reverses the paradigm of patriarchal authoritarianism so that her telling of the story turns into what Julia Kristeva calls "counterinvestment" (24). She adopts in her imaginative battle against patriarchy its traditional tools: force, bloodshed, violence, and destruction. It is possible to interpret her power not as personal inspiration but as imposed from without by her parents who have etched *their* words on her back. Although Fa Mu Lan menstruates, has sexual intercourse, and bears a son, she does so disguised as a male, wielding the military, sexual and verbal authority which are traditional male prerogatives. Moreover, upon the completion of her warrior tasks, she steps back willingly into patriarchal forms; she returns to the home of her in-laws, assuming a subservient *son*-bearing role: "'Now my public duties are finished,' I said. 'I will stay with you, doing farmwork, and housework, and giving you more sons'" (53-54). Fa Mu Lan's tale thus conveys a mixed message—it is a self-empowering fantasy, that as Cheung points out, is also self-defeating, endorsing the tenacity of patriarchal norms. "Trying to conform to both the feminine and masculine ideals of her imaginary Chinese society, Maxine-as-warrior grapples with a double bind" (*Articulate* 87).

Sidonie Smith remarks that the "truly subversive 'story' of female empowerment" is not that of Fa Mu Lan but of the women with bound feet released from concubinage who flee the village and form a band of man-hating outlaws.

> They did not wear men's clothes like me, but rode as women in black and red dresses. They bought up girl babies so that many poor families welcomed their

> visitations. When slave girls and daughters-in-law ran away, people would say they joined these witch amazons. They killed men and boys" (53).

Smith argues that these women, instead of avenging the wrongs done to their fathers and brothers, requite their own wrongs. Additionally, they wield their unauthorized power not by masking, but by aggressively revealing their sexual differences (159). A careful reading of the narrative of this amazon band, however, shows their actions not as subversive but merely another counterinvestment. Their story does not revise patriarchy but re-inscribes its *modus operandi*—authoritarianism, force, and violence—in a matriarchal setting.

Despite its limitations, the myth of Fa Mu Lan provides the narrator with a mythology of power and purpose which counters the "wife-slave" female roles to which she feels condemned. In mixing the traditional elements of Fa Mu Lan's myth with those of the male hero, Yüch Fei, the narrator crafts a prototype of a woman governed not by the cycles of her feminine body but by the impulses for leadership and justice. At the same time, the tale serves as a contrast between the swordswoman who transcends gender and tradition and the young narrator who is quicksanded by them. At the end of this section Kingston reverts from the narrator's fantasy life where she executes great deeds and earns great respect to the reality of growing up female within the Chinese immigrant culture. The speaker expresses her resentment about being of lesser importance than her brothers. She repeats the sayings familiar to her "Feeding girls is feeding cowbirds . . . There's no profit in raising girls. Better to raise geese than girls," and enumerates the ways her brothers have been preferred over herself and her sisters: their full-month birth celebrations; the sisters' exclusion from outings with the Great-Uncle who shouted "No girls!" and who bought only the boys candy and toys; the pity extended to her parents by neighbors who saw them cursed with daughters. Nor is the narrator's immediate family distinctive in its misogynism. She recounts how she and her two

sisters were invited to a house of their cousins, also three sisters. The grandfather stared at the six girls eating at table with him.

> "Maggots!" he shouted. "Maggots! Where are my grandsons? I want grandsons! Give me grandsons! Maggots!" he pointed at each one of us, "Maggot! Maggot! Maggot! Maggot! Maggot! Maggot! . . . Eat, maggots," he said. "Look at the maggots chew" (122)

Even though they dismiss him as an "asshole," the girls are offended and see their gendered selves as the object of hatred and contempt.

Linda Hunt claims that Kingston recasts herself as the swordswoman "who through magic and self-discipline trained to bring about social justice while fulfilling domestic obligations" (7). While the statement may be true of Fa Mu Lan, it can in no way be applied to Kingston or to the narrator who in her resentment and rebellion, spurned domestic obligations. She refused the work of females, refused to cook, broke dishes when forced to wash them and when called a "bad girl" gloated, "Isn't a bad girl almost a boy?" (56).[41] At the heart of the narrator's rebellion is confusion, confusion about gender and gender roles within the Chinese and the American community. Her subjectivity, as Deborah Madsen expresses it, is "precariously situated on the margin of both mainstream American society and emigrant Chinese culture" (241). She fluctuates between a desire for independence and the kind of love which would keep her dependent, experiencing contradictory impulses towards conformity and resistence which she expresses in her ambivalence towards work:

> Do the women's work; then do more work, which will become ours too. No husband of mine will say, "I could have been a drummer, but I had to think about

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[41] In so speaking she forgets the lesson of her No Name Aunt: the bad girl, instead of gaining the freedom and status of a male, is obliterated from memory.

> the wife and kids. You know how it is." Nobody supports me at the expense of his own adventure. Then I get bitter: no one supports me; I am not loved enough to be supported. That I am not a burden has to compensate for the sad envy when I look at women loved enough to be supported. Even now China wraps double binds around my feet. (57)

The narrator alternates expressions of worthlessness and accomplishment: "I am useless, one more girl who couldn't be sold" (62). She shields herself from self-doubt and self-deprecation with her "American successes" and protests in what appears to be an attempt at self-conviction, "I *am* worthy of eating the food" (62). Like the swordswoman, she separates herself from her family, but unlike the mythic hero she does so not to prepare for a mission but a means of survival and self-preservation. It is only at a distance that she is safe.

> From afar I can believe my family loves me fundamentally. They only say, "When fishing for treasures in the flood, be careful not to pull in girls," because that is what one says about daughters. But I watched such words come out of my own mother's and father's mouths; I looked at their ink drawing of poor people snagging their neighbors' flotage with long flood hooks and pushing the girl babies on down the river. And I had to get our of hating range. (62)

Although she will later discard the violent aspects of the mythological Fa Mu Lan, the narrator recognizes their inherent similarity—the need to report injustice. "What we have in common are the words at our backs. The ideographs for *revenge* are 'report a crime' and 'report to five families.' The reporting is the vengeance–not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words" (62-63). Just as the words etched on Fa Mu Lan's back empowered her to battle the enemy, so the misogynist sayings and racial slurs–words like "nigger" and "chink" and "gook" inspire the

narrator to battle. She does not take up the patriarchal killing tools as did Fa Mu Lan, remarking that the fighting and killing she's witnessed has not been glorious but "slum grubby"and that "fights are confusing as to who has won" (61). Even martial arts she disdains as appropriate only for "unsure little boys kicking away under fluorescent lights" (62). Her weapon of choice is the pen, the reporting of discrimination and injustice in both the Chinese and American communities. In speaking with Jody Hoy, Kingston explained her position on physical violence. Rejecting the dictum of "an eye for an eye," she said, "If you can find the words for an injustice and put it in some artistic shape, and let everyone know, then revenge has taken place" (1986 Hoy 128). Even though the effects of literary justice are not as immediate as physical weapons, Kingston nevertheless believes in their efficacy. "We create the world by our way of seeing and knowing," she said in the same interview. "Literature has some way of changing atmosphere and changing mind—and then mind creates the world" (125).

In the third section of the memoir, the narrator incarnates the figure of Fa Mu Lan in the persona of her mother. The very title of that section, "Shaman," signals the significance of the mother as cultural and spiritual icon. She, far more than the father, is the transmitter of Chinese culture, history, and stories. Like Fa Mu Lan, Brave Orchid separated herself from her family in order to train for a position of leadership and service to her village. She pushed herself to excel in her medical studies and earned the reputation of a courageous spiritual warrior, a vanquisher of powerful ghosts. And like the swordswoman Brave Orchid returned from public life to do farmwork, housework, birth children. Despite her loss of professional status upon emigration, she remains a woman of mythic strength and drive, the one with "the big muscles" in the family. Having given birth to six children after the age of forty-five, "this mother can carry a hundred pounds of Texas rice up and down stairs," sort and carry mountains of clothes. "She could work at

the laundry from 6:30 a.m. until midnight, shifting a baby from an ironing table to a shelf between packages, to the display window where the ghosts tapped on the glass" (122).

This mother-warrior becomes for the narrator—in this section of the text at least—not an inspiration upon which she can model herself, but a dragon capable of devouring her identity if she does not resist. She is unable to fulfill her mother's expectations, and is caught between cultures. Her mother tells her stories that confuse and frighten her, stories of female slaves cheaply bought or given away for nothing, stories of girl babies smothered in boxes of ashes kept beside the birth bed in the event of a female child. The warrior who vanquished the powerful ghost in her own student days infests her children's lives with threatening figures of white American "ghosts": taxi ghosts, garbage ghosts, druggist ghosts . . . She attempts to regulate their lives with other less tangible ghosts that represent codes and inhibitions from a time and land the children deem alien. The narrator cannot distinguish between what is real and what is fantasy, and when her mother "talks story" about ghosts that devour humans, they invade her dreams as well as her waking hours and she protects herself by keeping her lights on and trying to maker her life "American normal" (102).

The complexity of any mother/daughter conflict is intensified by the narrator's bi-cultural status. She uses the arena of the family meal to represent both the conflict and the awareness of the strangeness of her Chinese customs as seen through the eyes of white Americans. The narrator describes with repugnance the food her mother cooked for the family: raccoons, skunks, hawks, city pigeons, wild ducks, wild geese, black-skinned bantams, snakes, garden snails, turtles, yard weeds.

> "Eat! Eat!" my mother would shout at our heads bent over bowls, the blood pudding awabble in the middle of the table . . . . The squid eye would keep

> appearing at breakfast and dinner until eaten. Sometimes brown masses sat on every dish. I have seen revulsion on the faces of visitors who've caught us at meals. (108)

In refusing to eat, the narrator sets herself up against not only her mother as well as against the hero models that fed her imagination because, unlike her, they were bold in respect to food. At a deeper lever she interprets her mother's presentation of food as a puritanical means of repression and control ("If it tastes bad, it's good for you.") and concludes, "I would live on plastic" (108).

Part of the conflict arises from the discrepancy between what the narrator's mother teaches about women and their slave-roles and the ways in which her own life contradicts this. Both in her stories about her life in China and in her American accomplishments, the mother emerges as a strong and forceful woman. In contrast to her, the narrator judges herself as a disappointment to her mother—frail and skinny and inept. She is unsure of her valuation. When her mother says to her, "During the war. . . when you were born, many people gave older girls away for free. And here I was in the United States paying two hundred dollars for you" (98), the narrator interprets it as a complaint, as resentment felt for wasting money for a female child.

By the end of the chapter, the conflict remains without resolution. The daughter alternates expressions of tenderness and love with those of guilt and exasperation: "How can I bear to leaver her again" is followed on the next page by a confession of the impulse to run. "I shut my teeth together, vocal cords cut, they hurt so. . . . All her children gnash their teeth" (119). The mother herself becomes a figure of the haunting ghost, visiting her children's rooms in the dead of night and disturbing their dreams, using guilt to manipulate and control them.

> A spider headache spreads out in fine branches over my skull. She is etching spider legs into the icy bone. She pries open my head and my fists and crams into them responsibility for time, responsibility for intervening oceans. (126)

In fourth section of the text, "At the Western Palace," the narrative of Brave Orchid's reunion with her sister Moon Orchid, Kingston explores the theme of voice as indicator of sanity or insanity and the relationship between voice and domination. Moon Orchid's presence in the house highlights in a humorous manner the cultural conflict between Chinese traditions and American customs. Because her nieces thank her when she compliments them instead of deflecting the praise and insisting on their stupidity and ugliness, Moon Orchid accuses Brave Orchid of failing to teach her children to be either demure or modest. The aunt is shocked that the girls look directly into her eyes when speaking to her and compares them to wild savages, oversized and smelling of cow milk. Brave Orchid does not defend her children but attributes their absence of manners to the fact that they are "so stupid," just ignorant "American children." In order to make some sense of the barbarousness of the family, the aunt shadows the children, recording her observations aloud.

> She followed her nieces and nephews about. She bent over them. "Now she is taking a machine off the shelf. She attaches two metal spiders to it. She plugs in the cord. She cracks an egg against the rim and pours the yolk and white out of the shell into the bowl. She presses a button, and the spiders spin the eggs. What are you making?"
>
> "Aunt, please take your finger out of the batter."
>
> "She says, 'Aunt, please take your finger out of the batter,'" Moon Orchid repeated as she turned to follow another niece walking through the kitchen. (163-164).

In contrast to Brave Orchid whose talk stories are imaginative and varied, Moon Orchid's voice is mechanical and repetitive. But Brave Orchid can use her voice as an instrument of repression and intimidation and she wields it to dominate her sister as well as her children. From the evening of her sister's arrival in the United States, Brave Orchid insists that Moon Orchid confront her husband and demand her installation in his household as First Wife. She scripts the dialog for her, rehearses the various ways the encounter may play out, disregarding every objection Moon Orchid offers and overriding her reluctance. Categorizing her sister as the "lovely useless type," Brave Orchid is deaf to Moon Orchid's smaller voice as she campaigns for her sister's rights. When Moon Orchid tries to fend off her sister, the latter couches the situation in mythic terms to inspire her: Moon Orchid is the Empress of the East, the representative of China and Chinese tradition, on a mission to rescue her emperor-husband who has been imprisoned by his second wife, the conniving Empress of the West in the fortress of the Western Palace, America. As long as Moon Orchid can interpret Brave Orchid's various scenarios as "talk story," she is willing to enter into the game. But her naive, even playful, resistence is no match for Brave Orchid's indomitable will. As they approach the actual moment of encounter, Moon Orchid's resistence and fright increase and she begs her nephew to turn the car around. "This is a terrible thing to do. I'd be so scared. I am so scared" (168). Kingston shapes the utter terror of her aunt in terms of her loss of voice and her physical immobilization.

> "Oh, I'm so scared. I can't move. I can't do that [confront her husband in his medical office] in front of all those people–like a stage show. I won't be able to talk." And sure enough, her voice was fading into a whisper. She was shivering and small in the corner of the seat. (175)

Brave Orchid bulldozes her sister's fears and the objections of her son: "You Americans don't take life seriously . . . You'll ruin your aunt's life . . . You can't understand business begun in China. Just do what I say. Go" (175). It is clear to the reader that it is not the son but Brave Orchid who misunderstands both the "business begun in China" and its ramifications in American society. Her advice proves pernicious, as Linda Hunt points out, because it is based on a myth of reality structured on laws and traditions which regulated marital relations in China but which have no efficacy in America (9).

The meeting provides a moment of enlightenment for both sisters. When Brave Orchid sees the husband-doctor, she recognizes her error. She sees now that her sister had been married off to a man much younger herself and that she would never fit into the upper middle-class life he is living presently with his young Chinese American nurse-wife. While Brave Orchid is able to reassess the situation and accept that her sister cannot move in as First Wife in America, Moon Orchid is crushed by the encounter. She understands that the thirty odd years of financial support she received from her husband stemmed not from his affection and devotion but from a sense of lawful obligation. Out of context, as Marilyn Yalom expressed it, and bereft of the illusion of a loving and faithful husband, Moon Orchid shrivels into madness (1980 Islas 29). Although she eventually regains her voice, it one devoid of imagination or vitality, riddled with fear and insecurity. It is, in fact, the mechanical quality of her voice that convinces Brave Orchid of her sister's madness. "The difference between mad people and sane people," Brave Orchid explains, "is that sane people have variety when they talk-story. Mad people have only one story that they talk over and over" (184).[42]

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[42] The scene also provides an iron comment to the narrator's earlier words, "No one supports me; I am not loved enough to be supported " (52). As the narrator learns, an unloved woman can be meticulously supported.

In a later interview, Kingston said that language is directly connected to sanity. "You have to be able to tell your story, you have to be able to make up stories or you go mad. (1980 Islas 30).

In this fourth section of the text, Kingston depicts the darker side of the Fa Mu Lan myth. Incarnate in Brave Orchid, the one who fights for justice while wielding the tools of force and domination, brings about sorrow and madness. Unlike Fa Mu Lan who released the crippled concubines, Brave Orchid cripples her sister first by insisting that she uproot herself from China and resettle in California; and secondly, by robbing her of the illusion that has kept her content with her life. The children, too, are affected adversely by the will-to-power of this warrior woman. To avoid both the mad aunt and the bullying mother, they escape to the hiding places they have devised in the odd places of the house—the bathroom, basement, pantry, even burrowing under mounds of laundry. They escape still further from their mother's world of talk-story, ghosts, and incomprehensible rituals by resolving to major in mathematics and science, in subjects rooted in reason and fact, in logical examination and physical proof.

Just as the narrator critiques her mother-as-warrior in the fourth section, so in the following chapter, the narrator directs the critique inward as she herself plays out the warrior role. Each of the writers in this study depicted a scene of violence that was particularly disturbing: Silko's description of the mutilation and torture of the young man in the flickering desert night; Mukherjee's violent assassination where bits of Jasmine's husband are splattered over the young bride; Erdrich's surrealistic night scene when Leopolda confuses her former lover with Satan and strangles him to death. Compared to these, the one scene of violence which Kingston's narrator initiates may seem trivial–an ordinary girl-fight in a school bathroom that never progresses beyond hair-pulling and pinching. Nevertheless, in many ways it is the most haunting and disturbing scene of violence in any of the four works. The reasons for this are threefold: first, the scene is intensely

real. It is not ritualized or symbolic or hyperbolic. Secondly, the scene is prolonged. Its nine painful pages of detail attest to the importance which Kingston attaches to it. The third and perhaps most troubling aspect of the scene is the revelation of self-hatred which is at the root of the narrator's cruelties. Her victim is, in fact, her doppelgänger—the shy awkward girl silent like her and equally inept at sports, the girl who holds the bat on her shoulder until she is signaled to first base, an "automatic walk." "I hated her when she was the last chosen for her team and I, the last chosen for my team. I hated her for her China doll hair cut. I hated her at music time for the wheezes that came out of her plastic flute" (201-2).The narrator describes her victim's body the way she sees her own, baby-soft, boneless, like dough.

> I hated fragility. . . I hated her weak neck, the way it did not support her head but let it droop . . . . Her skin was fleshy, like squid out of which the glassy blades of bones had been pulled. I wanted tough skin, hard brown skin . . . I hated her clothes . . . . I hated her fingers. She shook her head, her mouth curved down, crying. I could see her tiny white teeth, baby teeth. I wanted to grow big strong yellow teeth. (204-207)

The narrator traps herself in increasing desperate measures of cruelty–of slapping, pinching, squeezing and hair-pulling, of taunting and insulting. Unable to admit defeat and frightened by her own loss of control, she looks for rescue from her violent role from the victim herself. "Don't make me [continue], " she begs her double. "'Why won't you talk?' I started to cry. What if I couldn't stop . . ." (211). The narrator's sobs resound in counterpoint to her victims sobs, bouncing off the tile walls in an alternating crescendo. In the midst of her taunts, calling her classmate "stupid," and "dumb," the narrator weaves in her anger and resentment about living in a culture that judges or condemns by standards very different from those of her family and

neighborhood. She recounts the tale of the boy who was unable to complete a form because he didn't know his father's name. When the exasperated teacher asked what his mother called him and the boy responded, "She calls him father of me," the Chinese children in the class join in laughing at the boy too dumb to know his father's name even though they know that a mother never calls a father by name. "We laughed and were relieved that our parents had the foresight to tell us some names we could give the teachers" (206). Her anger is directed at her racial look-alike, at her own family, at a system that flunked her in kindergarten, that assigned her an I.Q. of zero in first grade, that failed to see her black drawings as curtains behind which her imagination depicted scenes of raucous color and fantastic daring, the black curtains, as she explained to Kay Bonetti, not an image of sadness but of anticipation" (34). Behind the rage of her words, "Don't you ever want to be a cheerleader? Or a pompom girl?" (210). is the knowledge that she, like her victim, is always going to live in two worlds, half-understanding each, understanding the misunderstandings of each, never allowed full entry into either. She emphasizes over and over the connection between power and voice:

> "And you, you are a plant. Don't you know that? That's all you are if you don't talk. If you don't talk, you can't have a personality . . . You think somebody's going to marry you, is that it? Well, you're not the type that gets dates, let alone gets married. Nobody's going to notice you. And you have to talk for interviews, speak right up in front of the boss. Don't you know that ? You're so dumb" (210).

It is an ugly scene and the image of Fa Mu Lan , the warrior-fighter, embroidered first in Kingston's recounting of the myth, embodied in the myth-like accomplishments of her mother both in China and in the United States, tarnished in her mother's warrior-like domination of her weaker sister, now disintegrates completely in the narrator's physical battle. The fight give greater

significance to her words of an earlier chapter, "What fighting and killing I have seen have not been glorious but slum grubby. Fights are confusing as to who has won" (61).[43]

The violent scenes of the other authors studied in this work, graphic as they may be, issue in some kind of victory: Tayo's silent resistance overcomes the witchery; Jasmine's tragedy catapults her into independence and fortune, Pauline achieves a mad victory over her rapist/seducer. But the cruel one-sided battle between the narrator and her victim has no victor. The tormented girl, uninspired by the encounter, continues in the same silence, wearing into her adult years the same kind of clothing and hairstyle, symbols of her resistence to change and growth. Kingston later referred to her as a kind of Victorian recluse. but the same images of 19th Century enclosure that describe the silent schoolmate apply to the narrator as well. Indeed, the mad scene in the school basement bathroom and mysterious illness in which the narrator is bedridden and loses her English voice, evoke those scenes that Gilbert and Gubar describe in *Madwoman in the Attic*, scenes in which crazed doubles function as uninhibited surrogates for repressed selves. The eighteen-month enclosure of the narrator cin the confines of her bedroom extends the of enclosure. Moreover, if the voice is an indication of sanity, as Brave Orchid maintains, then the narrator can be said to descend into a state of temporary insanity signified by the loss of her English voice.

At the same time, the narrator's illness or breakdown becomes a space between selves, a hibernation or rooting time in which she gains strength and determination to struggle free from social and psychological confinement and begins to test her own voice. It is most appropriate that Kingston use the metaphor of voice to signify both her protagonist's integration as a Chinese

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[43] Ten years after publishing *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston admitted that she regretted the metaphor of a warrior who uses killing weapons and goes to war and clearly stated that violence must be renounced as a means of solving grievances or differences (1986 Bonetti 37).

American and the resolution of her conflict with her mother. For it is through this metaphor that she explores these conflicts. The narrator is haunted by the fact that her mother has cut her frenum when she was an infant. Remembering the saying she heard as a child, "A ready tongue is an evil," she imagines her mother, scissors in hand, waiting for her to cry in order to slice and silence her. She interprets the cutting as a form of mutilation, similar to foot-binding, that cripples her speech. Thus she blames her mother for causing her "dumbness," her awkwardness, and her broken voice: "the barest whisper," a "little squeak."

Besides tampering with her speech, the narrator accuser her mother of usurping her English voice. "The Chinese want to capture your voice for their own use. They want to fix up your tongue to speak for them"(196). Thus the girl was obliged to translate against her will, expressing her mother's demands for a lower price or a better bargain or for free "reparation candy." The narrator describes her own voice as weak, a duck-like quack, unpleasant in tone and lacking authority. When she attempts to express her convictions, her "small-person's voice" (57) makes no impact: her mother disregards her and her bosses are unimpressed.

Kingston's critics have offered various explanations for the narrator's constrained silence. Veronica Wang attributes it to compliance with cultural expectations whereby "the free flow of that instinctive voice for the Chinese women has virtually been forbidden even though she might be allowed heroic action" (24). Thus even Fa Mu Lan's female voice must be disguised as male. The narrator herself confirms this reading in her recognition of her similarity to other quiet Chinese students. In her observation, the Chinese are tongue-tied and voiceless while other minority children, including other Asian Americans, are boisterous and outspoken.[44] Chen Lok Chua, on the

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[44] In particular, the narrator describes the Japanese children as "noisy and tough" (204). Monica Stone, however, in her book *Nisei Daughter* attributes her own school-girl silence to her Japanese culture and her description of her painful dumbness parallels that of Kingston's narrator.

other hand, attributes the narrator's tentative voice as stemming from her problems in working out her identify within the parameters of four conflicting women: Brave Orchid, Moon Orchid, Fa Mu Lan, and No Name Woman who represent the heroic and humiliated, imagined and empirical (65). While Chua rightly points out the complexity of this task of integration, she overlooks the additional complication of the conflicting models of femininity presented by her American culture. In fact, Linda Hunt interprets the narrator's silence as stemming primarily from her bi-cultural confusions: since she is simultaneously an insider who identifies strongly with her cultural group and an outsider who is deviant and rebellious, she cannot determine from which perspective to speak (6). A fourth possibility is the narrator's conformity to "the implicit image of the subservient and non-vocal Oriental, together with the discrepancy between the idealism of equality and the lack of it in practice" (Wang 28). There are definite indications that the narrator evaluates herself from a white perspective; she describes her own voice and those of her neighbors as "ching-chong ugly . . . not beautiful like the Japanese sayonara words with the consonants and vowels as regular as Italian" (199). As with other minority characters in the texts under consideration in this work, she sees her own racial characteristics judged and found wanting by American standards. "We American Chinese girls had to whisper to make ourselves American - feminine" (222). These various explanations are not mutually exclusive and it is most likely that the narrator's silence results from a combination of them all.

"Tale-telling is like breathing," Meena Alexander writes in her article "No Nation Woman." "If you try to hold your breath, it explodes outwards" (153). Alexander's description of the eruption of voice exactly describes what occurs in *The Woman Warrior*.

The unvoiced grievances, having built up and been pressed down, burst forth in the narrator's "two hundred seven grievances," a pastiche of complaints and accusations that her mother brushes off as "insanity . . .senseless gabbings . . . madness . . craziness." (233)

Silenced once more by her mother, the narrator relates that she "felt something alive tearing at [her] throat, bite by bite from the inside" (233) until she hurls at her mother her most desperate accusations:

> "I don't want to listen to any more of your stories; they have no logic. They scramble me up. You lie with stories. You won't tell me a story and then say, 'This is a true story,' or 'This is just a story.' . . . I can't tell what's real and what you make up. Ha! You can't stop me from talking. You tried to cut off my tongue, but it didn't work." (202)

Suzanne Juhasz interprets this passage as an epiphanic moment for the narrator. "Establishing herself a as talker in opposition to her mother—as American instead of Chinese, a truth teller instead of a liar—makes it possible for her to define herself as separate from her mother. Leaving home at this stage means leaving China, and her mother's Chinese way of talking" (183). Juhasz's reading, however, establishes an unbridgeable chasm between the two cultures: American, truth-teller, vocal vs. Chinese, liar, silent. It implies that identity must be constructed by denying ethnicity and that there is no possibility of synthesis of culture. Moreover, this interpretation ignores the result of the narrator's uncontrolled outburst—her realization that the telling has heightened not diminished her isolation. "And suddenly I got very confused and lonely . . . No higher listener. No listener but myself" (237). The insight that the narrator gains at this moment is that the storyteller must have an audience, that she must shape her feelings and her grievances into an artistic form in order to be heard. It is true, as Juhasz points out, that leaving home means

leaving her mother's way of talking, but it also teaches her that life lived logically and without imagination, mystery, and contradiction, is shallow and cold. "Concrete pours out of my mouth to cover the forests with freeways and sidewalks. Give me plastics, periodical tables, TV dinners with vegetables no more complex than peas mixed with diced carrots. Shine floodlight into dark corners: no ghosts." (237-8).

The genuine epiphanic moment in *The Woman Warrior* is when the narrator acknowledges reality as ambiguous, as a tension between opposites, specifically when she recognizes and accepts the contradictions that her mother represents. The same woman who tampered with her speech by cutting her tongue also freed it to talk in any language. The mother who repeated stories of female slaves also chanted the warrior song of Fa Mu Lan. The one who related the repressive tale of No Name Aunt herself transgressed the injunction "not to tell," thus communicating to her daughter a subtle message of rebellion.

Elise Miller reminds us of the risks of double-inheritance—the aggression required to claim that existence together with the awareness of the dangers of "defining our identity and of the celebration of our separateness from others" (138). As the protagonist struggles to come to terms with her cultural heritage, she gradually accepts that her identity lies in synthesis, or as Sato terms it, a form of "bilingualness." (208), a doubleness rather than dual identity. She learns that truth itself is multifaceted and the different, occasionally discrepant versions of reality which Brave Orchid recites has empowered not crippled her. The narrator herself finally collapses cultural oppositions by portraying herself as "outlaw knotmaker," a risk-taker who can weave together the various strands of her Americanness and her Chineseness in a tale which is itself a weave of actual, fictional, and mythic events. Her journey does not end with her separation from her mother as Juhasz contends. Like Fa Mu Lan and like the western heros that Joseph Campbell describes, she

follows a three-fold pattern of transformation: initiation, separation, and return. Her journey is, as Mara Donaldson notes, a mythic one, primarily social, beginning in alienation from both American and Chinese communities and concluding in an affirmation of her identity as a Chinese American woman (108).

At the close of her book, Kingston displaces the model of the mythic warrior with all that it represents of violence and revenge with that of Ts'ai Yen, an actual figure in Chinese history. Captured by a barbarian tribe, Ts'ai Yen isolated herself within her tent until she heard the haunting music of the barbarian flutes and shaped her own expression of anger and sadness to their foreign music. This bridging of the two cultures freed Ts'ai Yen psychologically: "she left her tent to sit by the winter campfires, ringed by barbarians." This story becomes an inspirational force for the narrator, associating her with the artist, the writer, who transforms her pain into song. In her artistry, she claims her place as a Chinese American woman, and in so doing, she finds her voice.

Conclusion

Hannah Arendt reflected that violence often indicates a lack of power. When an individual or a class of individuals is denied access to power whether because of ignorance or prejudice or poverty, the temptation to seize power through violence increases. The writers in this study have clearly demonstrated that violence grows out of oppression and frustration and is a symptom of dysfunction. Silko and Erdrich, in particular, call into question the entire "Frontier Myth" that imbues so much of American literature, a myth of domination, subjugation, and rugged individualism. To a certain extent, Mukherjee's protagonist buys into this myth as she progressively moves west while shedding her cultural and emotional past. In *Tracks* and *Love Medicine*, *Ceremony* and *The Woman Warrior*, individuals are empowered not through force but through a centering process whereby they establish a sense of identity closely related to their connection to community. Writing from different positions on the cultural margins of American society, their writings, occasionally accusatory and occasionally monitory, challenge the reader's assumptions about genre, myth, race, and gender, about power relations, exploitation and appropriation that characterize intolerance of every form. However, they do not wallow in complaint or denunciation. On the contrary, their revisionist techniques minimize the rhetoric of victimization in favor of a more effective source of regeneration: women's stories, women's journeys, women's language. The rich connective tracks among their works promote resistance as an alternative to violence and emphasize the importance of oral and written traditions in creating and sustaining subjectivity.

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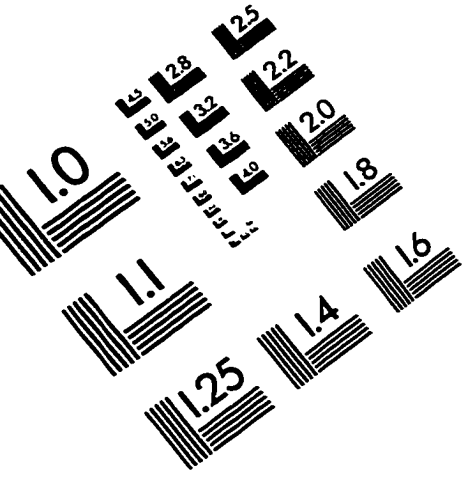

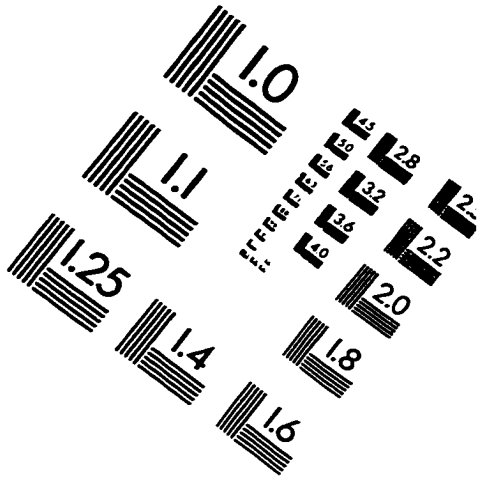

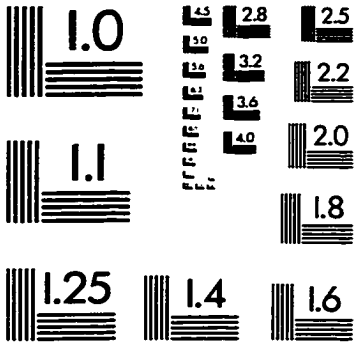

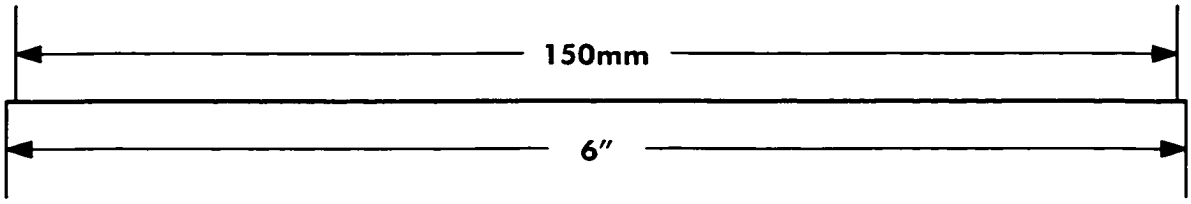

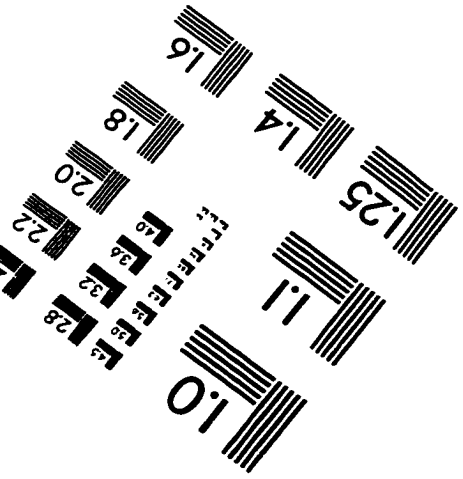

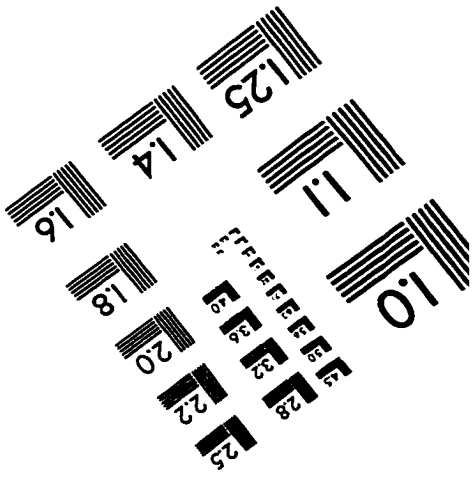

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