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Roth, Morrison and Silko: Studies in survival

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ROTH, MORRISON AND SILKO

STUDIES IN SURVIVAL

by

Naomi Rand

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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Silko, Morrison and Roth: My Reasons Why

The dictionary defines survival as "the act or instance of surviving, while the word 'survive' is defined as to outlive, to live past or through . . . to remain alive or in existence" (Scribners 917). I think a survival narrative is any narrative that relates the story of someone's miraculous escape. However, this can be an escape from the jaws of death as well as an escape from emotional obliteration. Writers of these narratives offer many reasons for their success; some believe they were blessed by God, others credit luck, still others attest to the ferocious nature of some hidden reserve of inner strength. Like eloquent lawyers they develop evidence to explain their right to assume the mantle of survivor.

Primo Levi, the author of Se Questo E Un Uomo, (Survival In Auschwitz), a description of concentration camp life, offers this rationalization for the desire to tell. Because "we must not become beasts; that even in this place one can survive, and therefore one must want to survive, to tell the story, to bear witness" (Se Questo E Un Uomo 36). Levi proposes his tale as a way of saving "at least the skeleton, the scaffolding, the form of civilization" (Se Questo E Un Uomo 36). He uses the narrative as a way of making order out of disorder. In Number Our Days, her study of old-world survivors in a California Jewish center, Barbara Myerhoff also discusses survival in terms of the concentration camp experience. She notes that "inmates during internment and afterward pursued and seized upon any evidence of sense and justice in the world" (25). And she recognizes

this desire in the people she studied who were able to escape the worst effects of the Holocaust. She believes that this reordering is one way for a survivor to effect a return from the "edge of the world of the living" (25).

I believe that all survival narratives make some attempt to restructure the world. This is because survivors find they need to reconstruct connections that have been torn apart. Even narratives that deal with the most personal concerns, such as an analysis of dysfunctional family structures or personal attempts to overcome drug addiction, fit into this pattern. A survival narrative ends with a return; the alcoholic gains sobriety, the victim of depression takes up an active life. These narratives have described the journey from the edge of life back, but we are the ones left to judge. We are the ones who must decide whether the terrors experienced are real or imagined.

I would propose that in a close examination of survival in the work of Leslie Marmon Silko, Philip Roth and Toni Morrison there are many commonalities. Leslie Marmon Silko comes from a mixed Anglo-Native American heritage, Philip Roth is an American Jew, Toni Morrison an African-American; all three of these writers explore the stresses that exist when a culturally marginalized protagonist attempts assimilation and is unable to accomplish this American dream, either because of their racial and ethnic heritage, or because of the writer's own, tortured connection with their antecedents. This tortured connection helps to explain the most intriguing similarity between the three bodies of work. I believe that

each one of these writers is constantly revising their own version(s) of a survival narrative.

Philip Roth has constantly written about the pull of old-world Jewish roots. In Portnoy's Complaint Alexander talks of his desire for the past, for the things he has ostensibly rejected. His tone is faintly satirical but there is a tangible longing in his description of "those men! I want to grow up to *be* one of those men! To be going home to Sunday dinner at one o'clock, sweat socks pungent from twenty-one innings of softball, underwear athletically gamy" (245). Portnoy's vision of this paradise is tongue-in-cheek. We know he is "Assistant Commissioner on Human Opportunity" and doesn't really want to be "a robust Jewish man now gloriously pooped--yes, home I head for resuscitation . . . and to whom? To *my* wife and *my* children, to a family of my own, and right there in the Weequahic section" (245). Portnoy has no intention of returning to New Jersey, (his rant to the psychiatrist details his escape from there). He has moved across the Hudson and through a host of women's bodies as he runs far and fast. But all the same, Portnoy feels a sense of loss. The description of those "jewish men" is only one example of his faintly suppressed desire for acceptance. Portnoy needs to find some way of melding the old world to the new. Indeed, the text of the book shows us this through the skillful interweaving of youthful memory with vividly described adult sexual escapades. He is attempting to balance the two versions of self. However, ultimately, he fails.

Silko is also obsessed with the old world, or in her case a tribal ethnic identity. She seems to believe in the power of a mythic Native American community. According to Silko, the Laguna Pueblo and

other Native American tribal communities exist on two planes. There is the temporal plane where they coexist uneasily with white society. And there is a timeline that stretches back into the past thousands of years further than any European history. Indeed, according to Silko, the Europeans are part of an ancient mythology owned by the Indians. In Almanac of the Dead she elaborates on this. "Now the old story came back to Sterling as he walked along. The appearance of the Europeans had been no accident; the Gunadeeyahs had called for their white brethren to join them" (760). Gunadeeyahs are Indian sorcerers and the whites are their malevolent invention.

In her novel Ceremony, Silko presents another version of this conflict. The main character, Tayo, is torn between two worlds. He is ostracized by the Native Americans in his pueblo because he is half-white. But he is also rejected by white society because of his Indian background. Caught between the pulls of the white and pueblo cultures, he loses hold of his sanity. In order to survive intact, Silko has him take part in a ritualistic healing process that is totally Indian-identified. By doing this, Tayo makes it clear survival depends on choosing the Indian half and successfully obliterating any whiteness in his psyche. In Silko's writing whiteness is always linked to "witchery." Silko uses witchery as a codeword. It is defined as the evil that drives the "destroyers," those Gunadeeyahs.

Silko is making an attempt to contain the white world inside the Indian. She is seeking to establish a reverse reservation system. In Black Elk Speaks, Black Elk tells Neihardt that "a long time ago my father told me what his father told him, that there was once a Lakota holy man, called Drinks Water, who dreamed what was to be: and

this was long before the coming of the Wasichus. He dreamed that the four-leggeds were going back into the earth and that a strange race had woven a spider's web all around the Lakotas. And he said; 'When this happens, you shall live in square gray houses, in a barren land, and beside those square gray houses you shall starve.'" (9-10). Silko simply reverses this prediction, using her power as a writer to reinvent the world yet again and offering a way to supersede white power forever.

Morrison focuses on African-American cultural identity. However her take on the long established racial conflict that haunts the black community leads her to formulate a different sort of literary conclusion. Instead of focusing on the divisions between the white and African-American worlds, Morrison attempts to obliterate whiteness by ignoring it. All her novels spend a great deal of time delineating the boundaries of an African-American community where whites are largely unknown. Morrison's communities are self destructive because they attempt to imitate this invisible outside force. In Sula the community destroys itself through a central misunderstanding of what has been deeded to them by the whites who live in "the valley town of Medallion" (1). At the end of the novel they "come out and play in the sunshine--as though the sunshine would last, as though there really was hope. The same hope that kept them picking beans for other farmers; kept them from finally leaving as they talked of doing; kept them knee-deep in other people's dirt; kept them excited about other people's wars; kept them solicitous of white people's children; kept them convinced that some magic 'government' was going to lift them up, out and away from

that dirt, those beans, those wars" (160). The townspeople go down to investigate and destroy a mineshaft. They are lost in the vision that possesses them, a vision that Morrison returns to often in her work. They are too obsessed with the wrong kind of values, those deeded to them by the dominant white culture to be able to recognize the most vital pieces of an African-American self. They mimic whites and obliterate blackness in the process. That is why "a lot of them died there" (162) in that mineshaft, buried alive because of their misconceived "hope."

Silko, Morrison and Roth are both attracted to and repelled by their own ethnic communities. Although they offer different ways of addressing this conflict, the conflict itself stems from the most basic need, the need to survive as an individual. Each of these writers comes from a community that has had to deal with genocide or the most potent kind of racism. Each community has not emerged from this battle unscarred. And there are two stances the survivor of any conflict can take. There is a survivor who writes as a true member of an embattled community, who sees him or herself as a part of the "we." There is a survivor who, like Levi and others who write Holocaust survival narratives, accepts his/her place as one of the victims. Levi uses "we-ness" as a narrative strategy. In Se Questo E Un Uomo he writes that "around us, everything is hostile. Above us the malevolent clouds chase each other to separate us from the sun" (37). Levi is willing to admit to his own membership in this particular society of the damned. He has escaped death, but it is not because of some superiority in his nature, it is simply because of a stroke of good fortune. He has an Italian dayworker to thank for

making it through the last winter in Auschwitz. According to Levi there is no way to "specify why I, rather than thousands of others, managed to survive the test, I believe that it was really due to Lorenzo that I am alive" (Se Questo E Un Uomo 111). Lorenzo, this dayworker, brought him extra rations of food. That was all it took for him to cross the finest of lines, the line separating the "drowned" from the "saved."

Silko, Morrison and Roth are modern day Americans. They have no Holocaust to contend with. More to the point, none of these writers has an interest in that close an identification with victimization. They choose to separate their characters from the racial obliteration and genocide they reference. Their narratives depend on the "I" rather than the "we." Indeed, their narrative strategies work at creating a moat between their protagonists and the community they emerge from. These writers understand the lessons of history. They know that too close an identification with a purely ethnic self can be dangerous, not to mention, suicidal. Therefore, while Silko spends a great deal of time presenting a scathing attack on whiteness, she still resists too close an identification with the purely Indian. Tayo, the principle survivor in Ceremony, is half-white. His cousin Rocky, a Native American, ends up slaughtered by the Japanese. And it is not just chance that leads Silko to deed Tayo her own ethnic mix. She is constantly reciting the dangers of any solely Native American heritage. In fact, Tayo's piece of whiteness is what saves him. He can choose to be "Indian." In some important emotional way he is able to take advantage of what Mary Waters in Ethnic Options defines as "voluntary ethnicity."

Silko continues her development of this theme in her next book, Storyteller. In this collection of stories, tales and poetry almost all of the fictional characters who identify themselves with the old, mythic vision of the Native American world end up doomed. Ayah, an elderly Indian woman, freezes to death on the mesa. The girl in "Storyteller" drowns the storekeeper and is sent to jail. Silva is a modern day man who replaces the ka' tsina spirit in the tribal version of the "Yellow Woman" story. He shoots a rancher who catches him poaching and has to flee white justice. And Tony decides that a racist cop is a witch and kills him, then burns his body inside his car on the highway. Although we don't know what will become of Tony, we know what type of sentence policeman's murderers usually receive. But Silko makes sure to keep herself at a far remove from all this disastrous behavior. She clings to her narrator's pose, her storyteller's positioning. Although she feels the need to examine the history of Native American oppression, she also understands the dangers inherent in this examination. With her literary success, she has managed to travel far from the square houses that Black Elk described. And she does not want to return to them permanently, even if she sympathizes and feels a connection with their present tenants.

The fear of victimization and the desire to escape the stigma attached to this particular view of difference are fuel for all three of these writers' survival narratives. Silko, Roth and Morrison offer their fictional narrators a multitude of vantage points simply because they are at work trying to invent a citadel strong enough, a place of comfort perched safely enough, to resist conquest and obliteration.

And the conquest that they resist comes from two sides. This is why the ground beneath the feet of their fictional narrators is constantly shifting. Their protagonists are trying to inhabit a gray area. This place of safety rests somewhere between the ethnic and mainstream American worlds. It hangs between the place where guilt and communal dramas mean everything and the place where freedom from historical guilt mixes with the cultivation of a belief in individual power and achievement.

These writers are never able to settle in that place for very long. This is why, at times, they seem to seek an identification with traditional views of storytelling and at other times they shy away from that pose. Roth, Morrison and Silko offer characterizations of individuals who attempt to choose when they are "ethnic" and when they are "American" and then they show how tortured a choice this is. Ultimately they tell us that as much as they would like to be freed of obligation, to shed identification with and guilt about the past, it is impossible.

These survival narratives often read like instructional tales. Morrison takes slavery as the theme in Beloved. In interviews she discussed her lengthy research. She made herself familiar with the original slave narratives where the survivors identified so strongly with those who were left behind in misery. In one of the most famous of those narratives, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Harriet Jacobs made it clear that she wrote because she had a mission. She does not "care to excite sympathy for my own sufferings" (335) yet she wants "to add my testimony to that of abler pens to convince the people of the Free States what Slavery really is.

Only by experience can anyone realize how deep, and dark, and foul is that pit of abominations" (335-336). But Jacobs was writing at a certain historical moment. She wanted to effect immediate political change. Morrison's purpose is different. Today, racism is insidious and an overwhelming problem, but there is no Fugitive Slave Law to repeal. Instead, Morrison's subject is the historical effect of racism on the black community. It is this community she delineates in Beloved. Instead of focusing on plantation life and delineating abuse, Morrison shows what happens after the escape from that abuse. Morrison focuses on Sethe's desperate act and her attendant ostracism from the free black community. At the end of the novel she attempts to offer a truce between these two warring forces; she attempts to adapt Sethe's independent vision of what self preservation must entail to the community's more modest and white influenced notions of propriety.

Roth, Morrison and Silko all cling to the concept of orality established by the culturally empowered figures from their own ethnicity: the shaman, the rebbe and the griot. Yet they also shy away from too close an identification with these figures simply because they want to stand outside of the fray. Silko advises us that

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

However, the storyteller also advises us that her own escape is "her best story" (247). This is a clear conflict between the need for individual protection and a desire for a place in the old order.

In her study of elderly Jews, Myerhoff noted that "storytelling was a passion among these people, absolutely central to their culture" (37). Indeed, one of her subjects told her that "he first acquired his taste and regard for stories from the 'wonder rebbes,' Hasidic rabbies who visited his shtetl from time to time" (37). Even in the Lager, Levi described how "the story-teller comes in. He is seated on Wachsmann's bunk and at once gathers around him a small, attentive, silent crowd" (Se Questo E Un Uomo 52). And when Roth creates Lonoff, the dean of Jewish writers, he is offering Zuckerman a storytelling idol as well as a clear connection to this culturally-sanctioned pose. Lonoff has made Zuckerman realize that "out of everything humbling from which my own striving, troubled father had laboured to elevate us all, a literature of such dour wit and poignancy could be shamelessly conceived" (20). But Roth deflates this idol by the end of The Ghost Writer. He is tempted by this paradigm, but he is also tempted by the possibility of a new paradigm, one that melds this old-world vision to his own, nastier, funnier and ultimately more honest sensibility. "'You're not so nice and polite in your fiction,'" (221) Lonoff tells Zuckerman.

Silko, Morrison and Roth all spend time dealing with racist and anti-semitic ideologies. In doing so they note the demeaning nature of racist and anti-semitic language. This is one way they develop a stance that offers them an entree into a dialogue about the present-day effects of the Holocaust, Native American genocide or the

lingering effects of the slave trade and slavery. But one interesting problem with a response to this dialogue is how easy it becomes to respond in kind. All three of these writers fall prey to an usurpation of the exclusionary and racist language they ostensibly deride. Silko, Morrison and Roth are all guilty of a simplification of what it means to be either white or gentile. In Roth, the dislike of the gentile is clear. In Goodbye Columbus Neil castigates Brenda for her desire to change her Jewish nose. And in his book-long complaint, Portnoy eviscerates the same Wasps he lusts after. "Why didn't I marry the girl? Well, there was her cutesy-wootsy boarding school argot, for one. Couldn't bear it. 'Bark' for vomit, 'ticked off' for angry, 'a howl' for funny . . . . then my argot caused her some pain too. The first time I said fuck in her presence . . . such a look of agony passed over The Pilgrim's face, you would have thought I had just branded four letters on her flesh. Why, she asked so plaintively once we were alone, why *had* I to be so 'unattractive'" (233). But Portnoy has to be unattractive simply because he finds her so completely artificial and revolting. Because Portnoy and Roth depend on satire, because Roth is such an effective writer of satire, the audience ends up siding with Portnoy and dismissing this Junior League Pilgrim even though we wince at the nastiness in Portnoy's tone.

Silko also chooses to eviscerate "whiteness." For Silko, there is no middle ground. Whites are repugnant. They are bestial at best, sexually perverse and often acting on one impulse, alone. Their central motive is a hatred of the Indian. Black Elk talks of seeing the Wasichus (whites) and deciding that "they all looked sick" (63). Silko would certainly agree with this fairly benign adjective but her

descriptions far outdo his modest, entirely understandable, delineation of the "other." Silko writes about a white rancher who smelled "rancid" (Storyteller 61). In Almanac of the Dead a white homosexual named Paulie has "a grimy white face and the close-set eyes of a rodent" (456). Meanwhile another white character, Serlo, "had been ahead of his time with his fetishes of purity and cleanliness; there were insinuations his sex organ touched only sterile, prewarmed stainless steel cylinders used for the artificial insemination of cattle" (547).

Morrison too disdains whites, but her criticism is much more subtle than the ones developed by Roth and Silko. In order to undermine the powerful presence of the white she simply marginalizes them. Whites are usually presented as historical figures; the brutal schoolteacher who becomes a master, the avaricious Butlers who murder Macon Dead Senior. If not they are peripheral characters who have little force in the body of the narrative. Instead of focusing on any real description of the white world, Morrison delineates how "whiteness" has crept into "blackness." It is her disdain for the most potent examples of this that illustrate to the reader the moral bankruptcy of all that is white. As Soaphead Church tells us, "we in this colony took as our own the most dramatic, and the most obvious, of our white masters' characteristics, which were, of course, their worst" (The Bluest Eye 140). Church defines these bad characteristics as a contempt for women and a lingering contempt for everyone of African heritage. And this begins and ends with a disdain for weakness. This disdain is what dooms the people of the Bottom in Sula. They need Sula to deride. Once she dies they

have nothing to hate and then the truth takes over. They are all they have imagined her to be. "Now that Sula was dead and done with, they returned to a steeping resentment of the burdens of old people. Wives uncoddled their husbands; there seemed no further need to reinforce their vanity. And even those Negroes who had moved down from Canada to Medallion, who remarked every chance they got that they had never been slaves, felt a loosening of the reactionary compassion for Southern-born blacks Sula had inspired in them. They returned to their original claims of superiority" (154). Morrison has the utmost contempt for this notion of superiority, the desire to take hold of a higher moral stance. This superiority is a standard set by the whites in this topsy-turvy world where the "Bottom" exists on a raised hill above town and ultimately becomes an exclusive white suburb.

Although they seem to have similar intentions and use similar literary tools, there are many striking differences in Roth, Silko and Morrison's fiction; for example, narrative construction. Silko's writing could not succeed without her unusual integration of poetry and prose. She also depends on a melding of languages, sprinkling her work with Indian words the way a Jewish grandmother might sprinkle advice with Yiddish phrases. In many ways, Silko attempts to take up the work of a cultural anthropologist. She clearly feels a mission to preserve the old stories. In Storyteller orality has been captured by her use of phrasing and her attempt to widen the boundaries of the literary text. Silko blends old family stories and inserts photographs in an effort to further extend the boundaries of how a literary text is defined. She uses this strategy as a way of

physically linking herself to the past. In Storyteller many of the portraits are of immediate family. In one her sisters sit next to dead deer and she describes it as "my sisters with the buck my father brought back one hunting season" (272).

An individualistic voice is at odds with Silko's cultural and tribal heritage, a heritage that depends on communal ownership of these stories. In an effort to achieve a compromise between the demands of a contemporary literary tradition and the need for cultural and communal continuity, Silko creates a meld, a different language including Indian phraseology, poetry and traditional English narratives. In her most successful text, Ceremony, she is able to develop a plot that mirrors this formula, merging form with content. Tayo struggles with the same question of cross-cultural difference and power and finally develops a sense of self that integrates both. As Paula Gunn Allen notes "through the stories, the ceremony, the gap between isolate human being and lonely landscape is closed" ("Feminine Landscape" 128).

Toni Morrison constructs a narrative that also depends on poetry, but hers is the poetry of voice. She is as concerned with using a variety of voices as Silko is, but she doesn't effect this by a mix of genres. Instead she uses more traditional approaches, the most experimental the text gets is when she italicizes Beloved's interior monologues. What makes Morrison particularly compelling as a writer is the prose itself. The lyrical quality of the prose has its antecedents in Faulkner and Garcia Marquez.

Philip Roth, the third, and perhaps most unlikely partner in this triad, comes out of a completely different literary tradition.

Although ethnicity plays a critical part in his texts, he is, primarily a confessional writer as well as a trickster. His novels are the most traditional of the three, and in all the works I am choosing to analyze he depends on one voice, the narrator's own, to pull the reader along on his main character's picaresque journeys.

Other differences abound, yet, despite their own estrangement from a complete identification with their own ethnic backgrounds, each of these writers makes it clear that the novels they have produced do codify their own ethnicity's ability to survive. While their protagonists seem less inclined to embrace a return to a tribal or shtetl world that maintains its own exclusive cultural base, these writers are still concerned with acknowledging that, as members of a certain ethnic identity, they fall within a "double boundary." As Anya Peterson Royce proposes, these double boundaries are made up of "the boundary maintained from within, and the boundary imposed from outside, which results from the process of interaction with others" (29). Royce adds that "individuals enclosed by the inner boundary share a common cultural knowledge" (29). Silko, Morrison and Roth are all convinced that this cultural knowledge exists and that they are privy to it in some way. They depend upon a knowledge of the inner workings of their own communities. This is the only way they can envision characters who have moved inside and outside of these double boundaries and have confronted both worlds in an effort to define a new vision of self. For the main protagonists of Ceremony, Beloved and The Ghost Writer, Tayo, Sethe, and Zuckerman, this stance offers many of the same alternatives.

This is because each one of them is alienated from the ethnic community and viewed as an outsider or, even a traitor.

When I began to write this study, I was immediately asked why I wanted to include Roth. One argument that was raised claimed that Jewish-Americans have not experienced the same kind of racial oppression that has been practiced against African and Native Americans. In other words, Jews have not had to contend with more than the typical "voluntaristic, emblematic, and identity aspects of contemporary ethnicity" (Nash 90). Yet even sociologists like Manning Nash are of two minds. In the study that he wrote, The Cauldron of Ethnicity in the Modern World, he goes on to state that " . . . anti-Semitism is not wholly gone from the American scene. Annual surveys conducted by the Anti-Defamation League show a persisting 20% of anti-Semitic attitudes among Americans" (121) and, he asserts that "among Jews . . . there seems to be a sense of urgency to preserve a cultural heritage, a religious viewpoint, and ethnic viability probably stemming from thousands of years as a pariah people, the recent memories of the Holocaust, and the precariousness of a social position depending upon secular democracy" (121).

According to Nash's definition, an assumption of Jewish identity by an assimilated American Jew could not be wholly defined as voluntary. Waters argues that "The legacy and present reality of discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity must be overcome before the ideal of a pluralist society where all heritages are treated equally and are equally available for individuals to choose or discard at will is realized" (168). She defines voluntary ethnicity as "that ethnicity (which) is something that is enjoyed and will not cause

problems for the individual" (158). And she differentiates it from ethnicity which "is influenced by societal and political components" (164). For someone like Roth, as for many other Jewish-Americans, ethnicity is not something that can be this easily enjoyed or discarded. Myerhoff attempts to explain this view of Jewish identity by discussing the tremendous guilt she felt as she worked with the elderly residents who were the focus of her study. "It took many forms and floated about, settling on different issues at different times . . . did I know enough Judaica? Did I know enough Yiddish? Was I too young?" (26). Myerhoff is able to get some insight into her guilt when she reads Isaac Bashevis Singer. His statement about Holocaust survivors clarifies her own feelings. Singer writes, "'Although I did not have the privilege of going through the Hitler holocaust . . . .'" (27). This is when she realizes that she too has perceived these survivors as "privileged," as closer to the seat of real suffering. "Paradoxically they were the privileged ones for having lived on our behalf through what was in one sense our common fate" (28). Her final decision mirrors the decision Roth comes to in his delineation of old-world communities. "I settled on striving for balance,"she writes. "If these people emerged as real . . . I would be satisfied . . . . When I judge these people, I judge myself" (28).

Roth's characters feel the same type of guilt Myerhoff describes. This is why they cannot see themselves as "voluntary" Jews. In all his novels there are references to the Holocaust. Portnoy describes himself as a Diaspora Jew. He is one of the "Jews . . . who had gone by the millions to the gas chambers without ever raising a hand against their persecutors" (265). And in The Ghost Writer Roth

offers up the best way of satisfying his own version of survivor's guilt when he invents a living, breathing Anne Frank. She speaks the words he does not feel he has a right to offer.

> I wanted my revenge. It wasn't for the dead--
> it had nothing to do with bringing back the dead
> or scourging the living. It wasn't corpses I was
> avenging--it was the motherless, fatherless,
> sisterless, venge-filled, hate-filled, shame-filled,
> half-flayed, seething thing. It was myself. I
> wanted tears, I wanted their Christian tears to
> run like Jewish blood, for me (190).

Frank/Gillette can say what Roth's male characters can't, she can express her anger at being victimized because she is a righteous victim. But Roth's male characters are empowered in a different way. They act out the revenge that she so desires. This desire for revenge has its roots in a history based on oppression and exclusion. The weight of this history makes it impossible for Roth to invent characters who can mask their Jewishness. Instead, what Roth ultimately attempts to devise is a new and idiosyncratic Jewish identity. It is an identity that refuses Christianization, yet idealizes, in fact cultifies, the individual. His is a newly constructed version of the Jewish-American. He is attempting to find a way he can remind others of the painful history of the Holocaust, even as he works for a definition of a new version of Jewish-American self, dissolving the most potent bonds of that old world community. This is why one must disagree with Sanford Pinsker's assessment of Roth's work,

most notably his take on Portnoy's Complaint, which according to this critic "provides . . . an encylopedia of moments drawn from a Jewish-American ethos in its cultural death throes" (93). In fact, Roth would have us believe that Jewish-American culture, both old-world and new, is alive and kicking and that being Jewish is not something that can be proscribed by either the old-world or the new world culture. Roth's version of a Jewish-American is never narrowly defined. He shows us that "what Jewish history comes down to is that at long last we have in our ranks one of everything" (Reading Myself and Others 155).

As Roth addresses the conflicts between the pull of history, the duty of the good Jew to remain virtuous and pure, versus the temptation of the American Jew to assimilate and undercut the power of this history, he makes one thing clear. This new identity he is attempting to forge requires, more than anything, a wry sense of humor.

> "Mr. Portnoy,"she said, raising her knap-
> sack from the floor,"you are nothing but
> a self-hating Jew."
> "Ah, but Naomi, maybe that's the best kind" (265).

Roth's humor never masks his desire for revenge. This desire for revenge is also a desire to resist. It comes from what Anya Peterson Royce describes as the response of ethnic groups to colonial incursions. Royce notes that "a sense of peoplehood arising from a shared history . . . can be the basis for a spirit of resistance" (58). Silko, Morrison and Roth are all resisting, yet they are incorporated into American society in the guise of successful novelists. Thus, even

though they seem to be textually rebelling against the cultural desire to mask history, to eradicate it, they also announce their intention to share in the American dream and assume their rightful place as an American success rather than an ethnic victim. This dichotomy creates a further tension in their own work, the desire for success as an American belies the message they feel it is their duty to impart about terms which have been imposed upon them because of their ethnic identities.

Werner Sollors argues that "The conflicts between descent and consent in American literature . . . tell us much about the creation of an American culture out of diverse pre-American pasts" (6). Close examination of the literary work of these three writers shows that they all go much further than Sollors would credit, they feel trapped by their "descent" and are unable to forge a contract or basis for "consent." Instead, they find themselves not conflicted, but rather, engaged in an active and constant battle. It is only through this particular form of aggressive argument that they are able to define their ethnic and American selves and forge a truce between the two warring sides.

Before Silko became known as a poet and novelist, the tacitly accepted version of the settling of America was already being questioned. Dee Brown writes that "after the Englishmen landed at Plymouth in 1620, most of them probably would have starved to death but for aid received from friendly natives of the New World. A Pemaquid named Samoset and three Wampanoags named Massasoit, Squanto, and Hoboma became self-appointed missionaries to the Pilgrims" (3). These Indians "regarded the Plymouth colonists as

helpless children; they shared corn with them from the tribal stores, showed them where and how to catch fish, and got them through the first winter" (3). Silko's tribe is Laguna Pueblo, not Pemoquid or Wampanoag; however, she continually generalizes her own connection to Native Americans. This is because, as Ronald L. Trosper argues, "American Indians have transformed themselves from a diverse people with little common identity into an ethnic group" (247). This redefinition has helped to revitalize and engage someone like Silko in a pan-tribal dialogue.

Silko talks about "the destroyers" (Ceremony 246) and describes the Europeans as "the orphan people" who "failed to recognize the earth was their mother. She argues that Europeans were like their first parents, Adam and Eve, wandering aimlessly because the insane God who had sired them had abandoned them" (Almanac of the Dead 258). Despite her mixed heritage, this us/them stratification seems to place Silko firmly on the side of the non-Europeans. According to Silko "the white man had sprinkled holy water and had prayed for almost five hundred years in the Americas, and still the Christian God was absent" (Almanac of the Dead 417). By aligning herself so solidly with those non-christians, these supposedly "heathen" others, she is telling a story of survival that is purposely in direct opposition to the old vision of Pilgrim New England. But she goes much further than this. Silko writes that "the Native Americans had died off deliberately to spite the Europeans. In Death their spirits had been set free to roam at will and to help other powerful ancestor spirits already set loose on the slave masters" (Almanac of the Dead 424). In fact, in Almanac of the Dead Silko

imagines a revolutionary future where the African-Americans and Native Americans struggle together to overthrow the European influenced white power structure.

Paula Gunn Allen writes that "no Indian can grow to any age without being informed that her people were 'savages' who interfered with the march of progress pursued by respectable, loving, civilized white people" (Hoop 49). Thus it is natural to assume that Native American writers must write partly in order to express their disagreement with all the stereotypical terms set forth by the dominant white culture. Silko's revenge unfortunately consists of a real assumption of this vocabulary of race. In fact, Silko attempts to climb a Judeo-Christian ladder that Gunn Allen proposes as completely opposed to the major currents in Native American thought (see The Sacred Hoop).

Vine De Loria argues that "white has been abstracted into a magical nebulous mythology that dominates all inhabitants of our country in their attitudes towards one another" (Custer Died for Our Sins 189). Morrison would agree but she has a much subtler way of dealing with whiteness. In Beloved she offers up a revivification of the dead as a way of coming to terms with the weight of America's slaveholding past. Arguing against Deborah Horvitz, who says "the paradox of how to live in the present without cancelling out an excruciatingly painful past remains unresolved at the end of the novel" (66), I would propose that it is Sethe's survival that has made it possible to attempt a separation from the past even as her own brutal attempt to save her children has tied her inextricably to it.

"A fully dressed woman walked out of the water. She barely gained the dry bank of the stream before she sat down and leaned against the mulberry tree" (Beloved 50). In this novel, the invisible becomes visible, the unsaid, said. Sethe carries the dead with her, incarnate. And Morrison revitalizes the past in order to finally resolve it. The village women must shoo the ghost daughter away to save both Sethe and Denver. By acknowledging Beloved's existence, they integrate Sethe's act into their community, showing it to be one that was not just horrible, but actually, spiritually regenerative. Beloved's appearance forces the opposite approach from a desire for invisibility. Morrison resists the use of the "mask" as Henry L. Gates proposes. Gates says this mask is something "that is, covering the human face with an-other, second surface-to re-cover, in an almost mystical sense, a self contained, virtually autonomous world" (Afro-American 90). It is a covering which he links to Yoruba ritual and which Gates posits as a culturally accepted way of keeping the self hidden, However Beloved's development into a fully fleshed out person forces Sethe forward, impelling her towards the community she has tried to isolate herself from. Furthermore, Beloved's presence has forced the real Sethe to appear, naked of protective coverings, and it is this Sethe who is accepted, forgiven and understood by the "society of women" who have shunned her for so long.

In Roll, Jordan, Roll Eugene Genovese compared the power relationship between the slave and master to the power relationship between the Nazi and Jew. He wrote that "the German saying that whoever would command must first learn to obey, Hannah Arendt reminds us, rests on the psychological truth that the will to power

and the will to submission rise and fall together" (93). In attempting to come to terms with their own ethnic histories, Roth, Morrison and Silko have decided to attempt a revision of this version of the story. In doing so they avail themselves of a position described by Benjamin B. Ringer and Elinor R. Lawless in their book Race, Ethnicity and Society. Ringer and Lawless argue that African-Americans "angrily denied the contention that blacks were submissive and passive under slavery; instead they insisted that many blacks were hostile and rebellious and only the superior force of a repressive white society succeeded in crushing overt expressions of this antagonism. In a similar fashion many American Jews angrily denounced the contentions of Hannah Arendt and others that many European Jews passively accepted their fate under Hitler . . . . Ethnic groups feel the need to stress a heroic image of their past, as though such an image is essential for mobilizing their energies for the struggles of the present" (6). In their novels, Silko, Morrison and Roth do heroicize the historical victims. Yet their main protagonists are often cautious. They seem unable or unwilling to propose too close an identification with these same victims they have heroicized. These protagonists are most concerned with their own survival and they seem to believe that too intimate a connection with the old-world or tribal ethnic community is dangerous, if not suicidal.

Storyteller, The Bluest Eye and Goodbye Columbus: Promontories of Power

A promontory of power is a vantage point that will allow the author safety and yet lead him or her to a sense of empowerment as a full member of the dominant culture. They will be invisible and safe, above the audience and above the dramatic action. In Storyteller, The Bluest Eye and Goodbye Columbus, Morrison, Silko and Roth all attempt to establish a place of safety and power for the narrators they have invented. In each of these books, the narrator offers a godlike voice which has been purposely created to keep track of the narrative flow and to create order out of disorder. Meanwhile, the narrator of record makes it clear that they have managed to gain purchase to the only place of safety while the other characters they describe slide down into the abyss. They express sympathy for these characters, these victims, but make it clear that they have achieved an important distance from the troubles they describe.

Roth, Morrison and Silko makes us of the power of the taleteller, the survivor as a way of achieving this sense of distance. Indeed, for these three novelists, the stance of survival narrator is a way of addressing their own, problematic, success. This is because the success they desire also causes them guilt. This guilt comes because of the complicated historical baggage they carry with them as members of a particular ethnicity. In order to distance themselves

from that baggage, that burden of guilt, they create a space for the narrative "I" that has no link with failure. However they also attempt to placate the survivor's guilt they feel by describing and delineating the failure that comes to other characters who are more ethnically identified. This is why Pecola Breedlove is created in The Bluest Eye. She is the embodiment of an historical lesson, what happens if one does not take pride in an African-American version of self. And The Bluest Eye is an instructional text. It even mimics a grade school reader. And this is why, in Storyteller, Silko invents myriad characters who bear the weight of the white world's oppressive view of the Indian. Even the non-fiction text points to the oppressive views of the racist society; for example, the tale of her great-grandfather being refused entrance to a hotel because the innkeeper wanted her great-grandfather's Indian sons to use the rear entrance. Meanwhile Roth's bow to the past takes two forms in Goodbye Columbus. His aunt and uncle represent the old world tradition. They are trapped forever in the steamy Newark twilight. But Leo Patimkin also shows the dangers of any tie to this troubled and exhausting old-world Jewish lifestyle. Leo is the ultimate failure, mad and maddening yet tinged with glory. He suffers for Neil. He suffers in the way the Holocaust survivors suffered for Isaac Bashevis Singer, and in the way the older Jews in the Center suffered for Myerhoff. He exists, bearing the weight of his failure on his shoulders, bringing light to New England. He has been constructed to offer up a present day victim. His existence cements Neil's ability to escape. Leo can bear the burden of historical and social responsibility and Neil can sail to Tahiti in his explorer's craft.

In these three texts, Goodbye Columbus , The Bluest Eye and Storyteller, Roth, Morrison and Silko create narrators who are clearly separated from the more ethnically identified characters. Morrison creates Claudia, the narrator of The Bluest Eye; Roth gives us Neil who tells us about his love affair in Goodbye Columbus; and Silko offers Silko. She uses her nonfiction narrative voice as the glue cementing the narrative together in Storyteller. All three of these narrators stand above or outside of the fray. They all take hold, respectively, of the pose of the shaman, the rebbe, the griot. They relay information while showing us the dangers of a position too closely allied with ethnicity. And they are also able to teach us a lesson about history and its lasting effects. In doing this they offer us another choice, another survivor's pose. Perhaps it is an unheroic position, but it is certainly a practical one. This position is a place of safety, a place where the narrators can observe and relate the stories they think most important. This is why, even when they pretend to be involved in the action of the narrative as Neil does in his passionate romance with Brenda, there is a sense of detachment that we, the readers, note. In fact, this safe house Neil, Claudia and Silko inhabit is strongly identified with the cult of the individual. Because of this, these narratives end up glorifying the individual while deriding communal ties. The works end up sanctifying an American "I" at the expense of the Native American, African-American or Jewish-American "we."

This dependence on the individual mimics what Lasch describes as the culture of narcissism. In an analysis of the 1970's, Lasch wrote that "we are fast losing the sense of historical continuity,

the sense of belonging to a succession of generations originating in the past and stretching into the future" (5). These writers are aware of historical continuity but they attempt to escape its snapping jaws. They attempt to flee from the verdict of their own history of victimization and loss. They do this by creating a place where one is not part of the many who have gone before. They don't pretend that amnesia is good, but they still create a stance that limits all real connection with the past. In that way, they safeguard their future. By precluding too close an identification with the losers, they adapt and adopt the guise of a winner. However, this creates a unique quandary for them. Because they resist a connection to their communities, because they attempt to sever that bond, they must invent a new world where they will feel comfortable.

Most survival narratives end with a return to the world that has been abandoned during the rigorous journey. Even if that world is shattered, there is still some sense of a need for community, a desire for some sort of group embrace. And if that community has been battered into nonexistence there is a desire for the past like the one Black Elk offers. "I did not know then how much was ended. When I look back now from this high hill of my old age, I can still see the butchered women and children lying heaped and scattered all along the crooked gulch as plain as when I saw them with eyes still young. And I can see that something else died there in the bloody mud, and was buried in the blizzard. A people's dream died there. It was a beautiful dream" (270). Claudia, Neil and Silko choose another kind of position at the end of each of their narratives. They stand alone. They don't seek entrance to the old world that they have

forsaken or that lies destroyed. And they don't attempt to gain entrance to the new. They seem happy in that lonely place. But it is a place that is self created, and that glories in self. It is narcissistic and privileged.

These writers do more than testify. They use their ethnic history to goad us into believing in their vision of the future. The history becomes a vehicle that propels their independent self forward. And in order to deed themselves power and also donate power to their narrative "I"'s, each one of these writers takes advantage of the response Ringer and Lawless propose. In attempting to redress racist and anti-Semitic definitions of African-Americans, Jewish-Americans and Native Americans, Roth, Morrison and Silko have begun the long process of undeifying "whiteness" and upending the myth of the superior "gentile." This upending is not simply a way of taking revenge; it is also a way of empowering their ethnic selves. Yet even as they respond to this hate language, even as they raise the value of their own ethnicity while lowering the white or gentile, they also make it clear that those who are ethnically identified have already been scattered, the nation's hoop has been broken.

Each one of these books uses certain diaristic or journal-like touches. Storyteller embraces family stories that begin with named characters, among them Silko's great-grandfather and her great-aunt Susie. Time progresses and the book ends with a photograph of the middle-aged author beaming into the camera. This photograph is not an endnote but a piece of the text. The passage of time is also indicated through a description of climate. The girl in "Storyteller"

moves across the frozen ice, finding the place where the ice will crack and her victim will fall. Ayah, the elderly protagonist in "Lullaby," watches for the approaching storm and depends on its severity to hasten her suicide. Notations on a change in weather are a common diaristic device and Storyteller depends on an audience's familiarity with this diaristic mode. Meanwhile, snatches of poetry are mixed in with photos and stories. The cumulative effect reminds us of the way a writer's journal is constructed.

Morrison also uses the diaristic mode as inspiration. In The Bluest Eye the narrative is separated into seasons: Fall, Winter, Spring and Summer. However the details of the narrative seem to cover much more ground than a single year, swinging back into the Breedlove's troubled history and moving forward to a time when Pecola has lost her baby and lost her mind. Meanwhile, In Goodbye Columbus too, seasons and seasonal change are critical pieces of the narrative. The overheated swimming pool at the club where Neil first sees Brenda gives way to the wintry Cambridge setting where he finally loses her. Neil tells us, "I shall never forget the heat and mugginess of that afternoon we drove to New York" (98). Later on he notes that "autumn came quickly. It was cold and in Jersey the leaves turned and fell overnight" (118).

All three of these narratives depend on the passage of time, changes in weather, seasonal shifts. These show progress is being made. This dependence on weather, this desire to describe change in the exterior world mimics survival narratives that were the work of explorers. In the History of the Expedition under the command of Lewis and Clark we are told how "the morning was cold, and the

grass perfectly whitened by the frost" (519). Weather was of crucial importance to Lewis and Clark because it affected the spirits and health of their men, and also affected the practical work of the expedition. Good weather meant progress. "The day being fair we were occupied in making the necessary observations for determining our longitude" (636). One reason Silko, Morrison and Roth imitate this style is because they too are describing voyages of discovery. However, another benefit of this diaristic mode is tonal. The diary-keeper is also the keeper of fact. Roth, Morrison and Silko all avail themselves of the pose of the observer, the detailer of event, the scientist with his/her unprejudiced eye.

In Storyteller Silko takes full advantage of this scientific pose. She operates as a surgeon, splicing history together with myth and fiction. By assuming the position of cultural anthropologist resurrecting tribal tales, she deeds herself a place of power and also constructs a space for her narrator that frees her from intimacy with the disastrous narrative that she is about to relate.

Silko begins with her Aunt Susie who was part of the last generation who

> passed down an entire culture
> by word of mouth
> an entire history
> an entire vision of the world
> which depended on memory
> and retelling by subsequent generations. (6)

Jedediah Smith, one of the fathers of the Mormon sect in Utah, wrote that "on my arrival at the river which I named the Wimmulche

(named after a tribe of Indians which resides on it, of that name) I found a few beaver, and elk, deer and antelope in abundance" (191-192). Smith makes no bones about usurping the Indian name even as he validates his own discoverer's right of possession. Silko uses Aunt Susie to respond to Smith's sense of entitlement.

By using the dry voice of the discoverer Silko renames things and reclaims them. "I'm going to *Kawaik*, the beautiful lake place" Susie tells her niece as she relays the story (10). Silko's decision to mix English and Laguna words is a way of giving both languages equality. In the beginning of Storyteller she seems to be busy with her own version of a reclamation project. This project depends on a reestablishment of old, rather than new claims to the territory that surrounds the pueblo. "*There used to be a trail there, you know it is gone now, but it was accessible in those days*" Aunt Susie tells her (13).

By beginning with Aunt Susie, and with a story that is so vividly marking territory, Silko is focusing on the concept of rediscovery. She is presenting her own version of a voyage of exploration. It is exploration that first sends her back in time, but then propels her forward. What she attempts to establish is a resumption of Native American authority over land.

The movement to retake the land is a centerpiece in Silko's two books, Ceremony and Almanac of the Dead. In a letter to James Wright she comments on this "very important dimension of the land and the Pueblo people's relation to the land," agreeing with his comment that in Ceremony, "it is as if the land was telling the stories of the novel" (27). By focusing on an intimate and innate relationship

between land and people she is not only contradicting the notion of European ownership, she is also offering a relationship that is in direct opposition to the concept of territorial purchase. Silko is arguing that the Native American relationship to land is timeless, while the the white relationship is only temporal. In that way she offers Native Americans the upper hand and in doing so she reclaims both moral and mythic territory.

Silko moves from Aunt Susie to her great-grandfather. It is in this poem that she first mentions the bigotry that surrounds her. A hotelkeeper who had done business with him for many years tells him that

> when he had Indians with him
> he should use the back entrance to reach the cafe.
> My great-grandfather said,
> "These are my sons." (17)

Again her tone is matter of fact, the prose unembroidered; Silko stands at some remove from the action of the narrative, the great-granddaughter or niece, simply relaying stories she has been told as if telling them to her own child. We are left to discover the rest for ourselves, how shamed and angered her great-grandfather was, how ashamed we should be of these racist words. She is also reminding us of her own internal division, how her own heritage is part-white. Yet she assures us where her allegiance lies by focusing on her great grandfather's response. "He walked out of the hotel / and never would set foot in that hotel again / not even years later / when they began to allow Indians inside" (17). She is her great grandfather's part-white child and she has chosen her emblematic ethnicity, she is

Native American. He too chose to take up this voluntary ethnicity. His choice was made because he fell in love. Silko makes it clear she is choosing to side with the Indian herself but her reasons have to do with racist views which were the direct result of a history of oppression.

In the next section, Silko begins to subtly change her tactics. Without dropping her disguise, this bland and seemingly fact based tone of voice, she stops telling legends, stops relaying mythology or true life dramas, and introduces something that is clearly fictional. In interweaving fact, legend and fiction together like this without an evident change in voice, Silko has a dual purpose. She has begun by adopting the scientist's stance, purporting to tell us anthropological tales, and then offering memoir. These stories from her family's past were authentic truths, either culturally sanctioned stories that have been passed down for generations, or family stories based on "real-life" events. But by throwing pure fiction into this mix, she attempts to change the way we view the fiction, to disguise it and offer it up as simply another version of culturally sanctioned myth. She wants her fiction to bear the same kind of factual weight. This is the reason she uses the detached voice, to force along the idea of that independent narrator who only relays what they know to be true.

Silko is not just turning to a dispassionate voice out of a desire to imitate the higher arbiters of truth. She is also mimicking another type of scientific truth-telling. Many scientific writers have used anecdote to support scientific theory. When Darwin argued for the intelligence of the apes, he noted that a kitten was adopted by a baboon and this adopted kitten "scratched this affectionate baboon,

who certainly had a fine intellect, for she was much astonished at being scratched and immediately examined the kitten's feet, and without more ado bit off the claws" (Appleman 179). Silko attempts to use anecdotal evidence in much the same way. She piles it on so that we, the reader, understand the conclusion she wants us to draw. And this conclusion is one that upends the ladder to power. Whites are evil, Indians are sainted. Yet we are also aware of her own mixed ethnicity, also curious as to where she places herself on this refigured scale. And it becomes clear that Silko places herself at a distance. She chooses this dispassionate voice in order to elevate herself. She is Silko, the recognized inventor of this narrative. Instead of merging with the Indian characters she invents, she makes it clear she resides elsewhere. The Native Americans are victims but she is the scientist, scrutinizing both civilizations, yet ultimately severed from each of them. This is a lonely sanctuary, but it is also a place where survival is historically guaranteed. And we understand why she does this. In Silko's world, to be Indian-identified is to be doomed. We are aware of the history of genocide but Silko offers us modern versions which graphically illustrate the effects of that particular legacy.

"Storyteller" is about the tensions that exist for an Eskimo girl who tries to straddle two worlds, the tribal world that depends on mythic time, and the more mundane world that has as its mainspring interactions with a white, incursive society. In this story, Silko develops a theme that will be an overriding concern for her in this and other texts, the disparity between the morality, the goodness of the Native Americans and the immorality, the transparent evildoing

of the whites. This is clearly a response to the historical givens Paula Gunn Allen has discussed, no Indian being able to come of age without seeing derogatory images of themselves plastered everywhere. But it is also an attempt to claim the elevated ground, the place of moral sanctity for the Indian. After all, we are all aware that the language that has approved white domination has depended on a tacit condemnation of the "savage."

While Americans have chosen to mythologize the Pilgrims and devote a major holiday to the moment when America was invented, Silko works on offering up a different version of the powerful nature of inheritance. The names in "Storyteller" are generic, the girl, the old man, so that it can remind the reader of the legend it is intended to mimic. "The old man" is the link between present and past, and in telling the "girl" a dreamlike tale of a "giant polar bear stalking a lone hunter across Bering Sea ice," he permits her entry into something larger than the petty details of her daily life and her ongoing struggle with the Gussucks (26). The iconography of the bear is also not particular. Though present in Eskimo mythology, bears have a place in many Native American myths, moving as far east as the Iroquois nation where tales of a Nia" gwahe, or monster bear abound. According to Arthur C. Parker in Seneca Myths and Folk Tales, "Nia"gwahe is the most feared of magic beasts . . . . He loves to race and in various forms which he assumes, seeks to get men, and particularly boys, to bet their lives on the race, which generally lasts from sunrise to sunset" (17). Although the mythology she depends on is slightly different, Silko is writing a story that travels further afield than the frozen north. This is a linkage to the type of identification

Trosper posits: Native Americans who now see themselves as a piece of a national ethnic group and not simply as members of individual tribes. This linkage is a way of adding a dimension of political unrest and political power to the narrative.

"Storyteller" is meant to work on the level of legend, a legend that shows what has and what should result from contact between Native and European-Americans. It is a warning tale. Silko relates the life of an unnamed girl in the sparest possible prose. Her parents have died from tainted liquor sold to them by the "gussucks" (read whites). This girl is a naive narrator, taking in her landscape slowly and feeding us only the most essential details of her existence. One might call her a primitive if the word did not have such culturally negative baggage attached to it. However, her naive viewpoint adds to the sense that we are dealing with a narrative that is supposed to have historical resonance; this is a tale rather than a fictional story meant for a literary quarterly. The old man, a man who slept with her grandmother and later on with her, is also her spiritual guide. He teaches her how to engage with her own history. He does this by relating the tale of the hunter and the bear, the hunter who "waited downwind on top of the ice knoll; he was holding the jade knife" (30).

The girl investigates her own sexuality, sleeping with a white man, discovering the white's moral and sexual perversity. The white man has a picture of a dog and woman involved in bestiality above his bed. The girl makes no judgement on this picture; she simply notes that it exists. We make the judgement. Whites are perverse. Indeed Silko seems obsessed with the bestial nature of white sexuality. In Almanac of the Dead she invents Judge Arne who raises

basset hounds. "The bassets were pure and noble. They waited their turns with him one by one; it was their ritual, their excited barking in anticipation; then, after martinis, he had sex with the four bitches" (657).

The girl's investigation points out the whites' moral weakness, and her own moral strength. Sex for her is curious and pleasurable. It is never dirty, never perverse. In the end when she becomes the hunter in her own legend by sending a lecherous storekeeper tumbling through thin ice to his death, the girl claims ownership of what the old man has deeded to her. She owns the tale of white bear, the tale of Native American power. The village people come to listen. "At the foot of her bed they left a king salmon that had been slit open wide and dried last summer. But she did not pause or hesitate; she went on with the story, and she never stopped, not even when the woman got up to close the door behind the village men" (32).

This girl has taken up her place on the track of history. In becoming a storyteller like the old man, like Silko's Aunt Susie, like her great-grandfather, and most obviously, like Silko herself, she can rise above the narrative and stand outside of the action she participates in. This knowledge of place and power is what makes it possible for her to tell her version of the truth. The old man has warned her that "there must not be any lies" (26). She makes it clear the death of the storekeeper is intentional. "I killed him...I don't lie" (31) she tells her attorney. This girl has entered a dimension as infinite as that of the polar hunter. And as powerful. She is the "legend narrator" that Elaine Jahner describes, who "generally views the subject matter as a validation of tenets of the belief system"

(215). The belief system she espouses is one where the storekeeper's fall is part of a reordered universe. It is a universe more fully realized in Silko's latest novel, Almanac of the Dead where she proposes a revolutionary state full of the dispossessed tribal peoples.

In order to deify her Native American characters, Silko spends an inordinate amount of time making it clear just how despicable the whites who surround them are. This is her attempt to climb back up that Judeo-Christian ladder of worthiness. A nineteenth century historian William T. Moore wrote in the common coin of the day. He described the Indians' actions in battle as illustrating "the deep depravity of fallen nature" (107). A hundred years later this description might be used with as much success in describing the actions of Silko's whites. This white male conqueror has several guises in "Storyteller": the storekeeper who murdered her parents for profit, the owner of the Gussack boats who destroyed her parents' livelihood and made them want to drink themselves to death, the white man who sleeps with the girl but can only find pleasure when he looks at a picture of a woman with a dog. None of these characters is any more fully developed than the hostile hotelkeeper who refused entrance to her great-grandfather's Indian offspring. Most whites are seen as venal and predictable . . . and male.

Silko describes the storekeeper in vivid detail. She writes that "his blue eyes moved like flies crawling over her body. He held his thin pale lips like he wanted to spit on her" (29). This man is the type of white man who Silko depends upon to cultivate our approval for her ultimate reordering of the American universe. Her vision of the white man is of someone physically revolting, sexually perverse,

and morally bankrupt. White men generically have "the desire . . . for valuable things" (26). The old man tells her that the whites "hated the people because they had something of value . . . something which the Gussucks could never have. They thought they could take it, suck it out of the earth or cut it from the mountains; but they were fools" (26). Whites "only come when there is something to steal" (22). The whites' inability to understand the true pattern of life leads them to have an air of desperation as they act. This gives credence to the idea that the white intruder is transitory, a simple blip in a larger, historical lifeline while the Native Americans possess the rights to a tenure of such length that it has existed in mythological time, a time outside of history. Silko uses the plot of the narrative to reiterate this, whites, even powerful whites float through. In "Storyteller" one storekeeper leaves town, the second one vanishes under the ice. His death brings up another idea that Silko examines in more depth in Almanac of the Dead. The conceit is that the natural world conspires with the Native American hero or heroinne to dethrone the white and usurp their power.

Yet, despite Silko's desire to castigate white society, she has also beautifully coopted the tools of this same oppressor. She writes in English, for one. More to the point, because she uses her autobiographical self as the glue that cements these stories, poems and memoirs together, we have to be aware of her reputation. We know that she is adept at moving between the two worlds; she is an award winning poet and the holder of a MacArthur award. In fact, she, unlike the girl in the story, is someone who has bridged the gap between these two societies. This knowledge works against the

vengeful aspects of the narrative. Knowing that she has gained this particular position tends to undercut the argument for physical retribution against the whites which her story seems to promote. Instead, it makes us curious to learn how she differs from the girl. We want to understand what has led to her success and her more socially acceptable form of survival. And when we compare Silko, when we accept her as the owner of this particular survival narrative, we realize that the girl in "Storyteller" is no survivor, she is a victim.

It may be that Silko senses our doubts about her vision of tribal authority and power. It may be she is responding to the apparent doubts she herself possesses. Whatever the reason, she is eager to take up the cudgel of revenge. I would propose that it is necessary for Silko to voice this argument again and again because her allegiance to her Native American side is voluntary. Her ethnicity is something she has managed to manipulate successfully, at least as far as we are concerned. She is successful because of her Indian identity, because she writes about it in a way that gains her white approbation. Her own success adds to her feelings of guilt. This constant proselytizing, this evisceration of whiteness, comes because she is aware of her own, precarious pose. And what she never lets us view is the way she has escaped her own tragic view of what it means to grow up Indian in America today. Despite her apparent success in the white world, she never allows any of her fictional characters the same ease of entry.

In fact, Silko's vision of what is possible for the Native Americans she describes is severely limited. A poem entitled "Indian

Song: Survival" tells the tale of two young girls who have survived a flood. They travel high up in the mountains to a place where they turn to stone. This tale takes place in the past and the transformation of the sisters and the rest of their tribe into inanimate, but permanent pieces of the landscape is meant to represent the permanence that is an inherent part of the Laguna Pueblo cultural traditions. It is meant to evoke the mythological state that she depends on in "Storyteller" and is supposed to offer these Indian characters unlimited mythic power. However, it is also clear that if this is the type of survival one can depend on as an Indian, it is pretty dangerous to fully invest in that ethnic bond, after all the girl in "Storyteller" is going to be tried for murder and these sisters are stone figures on the side of a mountain. When Silko turns the legend into fiction, she further clarifies that danger. In "Lullaby" she undercuts the sense of continuance and focuses on an act of murder/suicide.

The point of the story "Lullaby" is to reiterate how any attempt to give in to the demands of white culture simply leads to extinction. Black Elk said it best. "The Wasichus have put us in these square boxes. Our power is gone and we are dying, for the power is not in us any more" (196). Ayah, the main character, understands that "it was like the old ones always told her about learning their language or any of their ways: it endangered you" (47). Ayah, the elderly woman who is the focal point of this story, has lived through the loss of a son to a foreign war, the loss of two other children to government medical quarantines and the loss of a husband because "the white rancher told Chato he was too old to work for him anymore" (47).

Instead of attempting to seek revenge like the girl in "Storyteller," Ayah chooses suicide. This is designed to echo the rendering in stone of the entire tribe in the poem/tale that has gone directly before.

Despite Silko's attempts to invest Ayah with power, she and her husband seem defeated. We know that Ayah is angry and that "she hated Chato" for teaching her to sign her name in English (47). When she comes to collect her husband she is "satisfied that the men in the bar feared her. Maybe it was her face and the way she held her mouth with teeth clenched tight, like there was nothing anyone could do to her now" (49). As she wraps her sleeping husband in a blanket, she sings a song passed down through generations, a child's lullaby. What the words of the lullaby propose are a powerful connection.

> The earth is your mother
> she holds you
> The sky is your father
> he protects you. (51)

This is meant to echo what Paula Gunn Allen says is "the basic assumption of the wholeness or unity of the universe, our natural and necessary relationship to all life" (9). However Ayah's victory is surprisingly hollow. White life has defeated her. The only way out is suicide. And as we watch her die, we are also aware of Silko's own stance which is completely outside of the experience that she narrates. Add to this the physical construction of the text, the fact that a photograph of Silko with her dog behind her is the last photo before the notes and I would argue that we are meant to admit to Silko being the only real survivor. And we cannot help comparing

her position out there, on a sunny day, with the position of Ayah, also seated among the rocks, in the place where "the giant boulders that had tumbled down from the red sandrock mesa throughout the centuries of rainstorms and earth tremors" are positioned to protect her against the harshness of the wind (50). Ayah freezes to death, Silko catches the sunlight. Silko's physical presence offers a less than discreet argument against Ayah's choice. The idea that suicide is a way of linking with the continuum of Laguna culture is devalued and Ayah's decision to embrace death, in the end, seems more a defeat, albeit heroic, than a victory. It is reminiscent of the captain, standing on the burning deck, and vanishing under the waves, while the survivor of the wreck looks on and captures the heroic, if foolhardy, act for posterity. Silko's victory, her escape has been duly captured; her teeth gleam out in a smile that is as much, pleasure, as power.

Paula Gunn Allen proposes that Native American culture as a whole shies away from the notion that "a great hierarchical ladder of being exists on which ground and trees occupy a very low rung, animals a slightly higher one, and man (never woman)--especially "civilized" man--a very high one" (7). When Silko invokes the old stories, they plead for this same kind of lesson, yet when she offers her own take on things, when she constructs fiction, instead of relaying tales or hard "facts" she cannot stop herself from reconstructing the same hierarchical ladder that Judeo-Christian culture has been imposing on Native Americans since the day of the first encounter. Silko claims

> you should understand
> the way it was

back then,
because it is the same
even now, (94).

Yet she shows over and over again how that is entirely untrue. When she attempts to merge past and present in "Yellow Woman" she again decides to ratify her Native American characters by simplifying and vilifying whites. She also returns to the revenge motif to invest her Native American hero, Silva, with the power of an old time warrior. And she adds to the mix a female character who more nearly represents the quandary a modern day woman would have with all of this reconstruction and reimposition of old cultural concerns and values.

The woman in "Yellow Woman" "comes from the pueblo on the other side of the mesa. She clings to the "Yellow Woman" story as an excuse for her infidelity. Yet she also resists it, questioning Silva, even after she's slept with him. "Who are you?"she asks him. "The old stories about the ka'tsina spirit and Yellow Woman can't mean us" (55). Thus she is torn between the archetypal rationalization of her act and the modern day version of simple lust and infidelity. She insists that "what they tell in stories was real only then, back in time immemorial, like they say," but he responds to these concerns by pointing to the time outside of the European time-line, that place where the Eskimo woman, the old man and Ayah have also taken up residence (56). Silva tells her that "someday they will talk about us, and they will say, "those two lived long ago when things like that happened" (57). The woman understands that if she sees herself as part of a bigger drama, her action becomes sacred rather than simply

hurtful. This makes that pose doubly appealing. Silva is certainly convinced as well as convincing. "What happened yesterday has nothing to do with what you will do today, Yellow Woman,"he tells her (57). If that is completely true, than a revivified link to the past would be a way to totally step outside of mundane concerns altogether. But this link with Silva cannot be maintained because of the entrance of the white world.

In a depiction of Silva and the white rancher who confronts him, Silko again delineates the repulsiveness of the intruder. While there has been no physical description of Silva (what we get instead is his assuring voice and the power of this woman's attraction to him) there is plenty of this "rancher". He has a "young fat face...small, pale eyes" (61). He was "fat, and sweat began to soak through his white cowboy shirt and the wet cloth stuck to the thick rolls of belly fat....he smelled rancid" (61). The difference between the elevated sensual pleasure that this woman has had with Silva and the physical reality of this grotesque white man is contrast enough. We know who is more dynamic, more appealing in an almost Hollywood sense.

The rancher in "Yellow Woman" is ultimately too much like the repulsive Gussucks in "Storyteller." And Silko is certainly not the first person to note physical difference between the white and Indian races. The Indian physique has played a part in the romanticization of Native Americans. Indians were often described in almost glowing terms by historians of the Indian Wars. "The Indians . . . . were large, straight, well proportioned men. Their bodies were firm and active, capable of enduring the greatest fatigues and hardships. Their passive courage was almost incredible" (White 307). Despite attesting

that "savages who live in a rude and dirty manner, are of a darker complexion than the members of more civilized society," Moore adds that "the men are tall, large boned and well made . . . . They have a sound understanding, quick apprehension, and retentive memory" (12-13). Obviously, if the Indians had been viewed as equals, these descriptions could have led the writers and their audience to feel unduly cowed or at least envious of such physical and mental virtues. However, since these were descriptions of "savages", the writers were apparently safe, and so was their presumed audience.

Silko's description of the rancher stands in marked contrast to her vision of Silva. There is something "ancient and dark" in Silva, she writes (61). Indeed these adjectives would propose a further link to that mythic Native American history. And by detailing the rancher's repulsiveness, Silko attempts to prove who the natural winners should have been if scientific reasoning had been rationally employed. By displaying the contrasting physiques of Silva and the rancher, Silko freely, almost casually, redefines racist language that was used to successfully denigrate the Indian. She makes no attempt to replace the Judeo-Christian hierarchical ladder which has placed the European on the topmost rung. Instead, she simply attempts to change the physical features of the victor.

The "Yellow Woman" story purports to indicate that a connection with the mythic Native American past breeds a form of power. But that message is entirely undercut by the ending. As in "Storyteller" and "Lullaby" this type of mythic connection leads to danger and dissolution. After killing the rancher, Silva disappears; it is possible he is soon to be the object of a manhunt. The woman

returns to her family. Her tale of Silva's appeal, of his natural prowess, cannot even be shared. She wants to tell the story to someone but she can only think of her grandfather since "it was the Yellow Woman stories he liked to tell best" (62). Both Silko and this participant in this tale of the ka'tsina spirit know that they will have to cover up this encounter. "I decided to tell them that some Navajo had kidnapped me," she says (62). By offering up this solution for her female protagonist, Silko gives us a clue to how she, herself, has managed to balance the demands of both new world and old world societies. She can invent this supposed "tale of power" but she can also choose to stand apart from the act of violence and, more important, the inevitable retribution that act of violence entails. In order to do this she simply has to lie. The woman in this "Yellow Woman" story pretends that Silva never existed, that that particular type of Native American mythic self was never invented. She can mask event by offering up a modern day equivalent, a renegade Navajo. This young woman has the ultimate power. She can change the story in any way she chooses in order to offer herself protection.

Despite her own desire to distance herself from acts of revenge, Silko continues to dwell on these acts of retribution. In "Tony's Story," Leon has come back from the white man's army. He meets up with Tony at a fair and they begin drinking. A cop comes along and bashes in Leon's face, purely out of spite. Leon, the Americanized Indian, is the one who says, "I'll kill the big bastard if he comes around here again," but it is Tony who dreams of "the big cop . . . pointing a long bone at me--they always use human bones, and the whiteness flashed silver in the moonlight where he stood. He didn't

have a human face--only little, round, white-rimmed eyes on a black ceremonial mask" (125). Tony believes this man is an evil spirit, a relative of the destroyers. Silko's description here echoes the description used by N. Scott Momaday in House Made of Dawn. Abel sees the albino and notices "the strange excitement of the white man's breath . . . the blue shivering lips upon him . . . the scales of the lips and the hot slippery point of the tongue" (82). In that novel, when Abel murders this man, "he seemed just then to wither and grow old. In the instant before he fell, his great white body grew erect and seemed to cast off its age and weight; it grew supple and sank slowly to the ground, as if the bones were dissolving within it" (83). If Silko's cop is a witch, when destroyed he will lose his powers in much the same way.

Leon is someone who is engaged in a constant dialogue with the whiteness of a modern world. He has even integrated the white concept of justice, saying to Tony how "we are just as good as them" (125) when he speaks of the whites. In fact, throughout most of the story, Tony is the one who seems cowardly, or at least more self-preserving. When the cop attempts to pull their car over, Leon keeps on driving defiantly, but it is Tony's voice which registers high anxiety. He says,"Stop, Leon! He wants us to stop!" (126). However, despite Leon's verbal aggressiveness, his defensive posture and his white inculcated form of self-assertiveness, it is Tony who actually has hold of the moral highground. This is why he possesses the power to take revenge. Tony recognizes absolute evil, the indomitable sense of purpose that resides in the cop. And his

recognition of this is consistent with Silko's version of whiteness, that it is a morally bankrupt color.

The cop's desire to physically abuse Leon for being Indian is a type of indiscriminate and irrational cruelty. And this white man possesses none of the physical beauty attributed to Indian men and women, this police officer is a soulless body, his eyes hidden, like the albino's behind his silver frosted glasses. Tony can only find his own reflection when he looks at them. When it comes to an explanation of his aggressively racist behavior, the cop tells them that he has been "transferred . . . because of Indians" (126). His quest is messianic in character. He is after those who he hates and he will "find them" (127). The reason for his hatred does not have to be explained. He is evil, personified.

The white man's laws are useless for Indians. Silko understands that we, as an interested audience, already have a knowledge of broken treaties and bankrupt reservation policies. When Leon throws out an argument about constitutional rights, we are already privy to his faulty logic. Tony knows it too. He says,"the guys who came back always talked like that" (125), dismissing the argument as something that will change as soon as Leon is completely reintegrated into life at the Pueblo. And there is the implication that any contact with the white world leads to self deception, to a certain type of idealistic irrationality. However, if that is true then where does Silko stand? Again, her scientific position and her social success bely the narrative argument she is bent on developing. We see her as more like Leon than like Tony. If Leon's argument is bankrupt, what argument can she use to validate her own positioning?

Not Tony's. His response is entirely Indian. He believes that one must avoid conflict and hide in order to survive. What else can they do when there is this white life force that pursues them and threatens to torture and extinguish them? When the cop tails them and Leon says, "He's following us!" Tony, who has discovered the ritual behind the mask and who is connected with his cultural history and with the true way of eradicating the witchery, says, "there's no place left to hide. It follows us everywhere" (128).

Ultimately, this cop has been coarsened into a generic and simplistic brand of evil. He says little, acts pugnaciously, and offers no comprehensible rationalization for his actions. He is one step further down the human ladder than the rancher who assumed a certain hierarchical control, than the shopkeeper and the men working on the pipelines in "Storyteller." He doesn't sweat, doesn't lust. He simply tortures. Because of this, we almost agree with Tony's definition of him; he is a piece of the witchery, one of the destroyers who has to be killed and burned.

Throughout much of"Tony's Story," Leon has been the one confident of his status, making pronouncements about rights. Yet it's Tony, the Indian-identified character who ends up killing the police officer. Once again, a strong cultural identification forces you into an action that is violent and is ultimately, much like that of the person who is despised. In fact, the best argument against this is the one made by Jack Eisner, author of The Survivor a memoir of life in the concentration camps. Eisner writes, "I can't go through with it, damn you, I can't be like you!"(304) when he is offered an opportunity to execute one of the Nazi guards. Leon is like Eisner. He recognizes the

danger of Tony's pose and he is terrified. Tony tells us that Leon "kept looking at me like he wanted to run" (129). Tony, on the other hand, is cool and rational. "Don't worry, everything is O.K. now, Leon. It's killed. They sometimes take on strange forms" (129).

Silko is torn between invoking this desire for active revenge, and showing the danger inherent in it. In Storyteller, a desire for revenge is only one theme. And this desire is balanced out by the multiplicity of tales in the text. At the end she even invents a modern day trickster story. The playfullness of "Coyote Holds a Full House in his Hand" undercuts the more strident tone of the earlier fictions. However, in Almanac of the Dead Silko forfeits this way of achieving a balance. In that later book she succumbs to what Eisner warns against, the possibility of becoming too much like the oppressor.

And there are plenty of signs pointing to this danger in Storyteller. In the poem that follows Tony's Story, she tells us how a

> long time ago
> in the beginning
> there were no white people in this world
> there was nothing European.
> And this world might have gone on like that
> except for one thing:
> witchery. (130)

Silko has already offered ample evidence of the white man's bad conduct. She has made it clear that whites are inferior morally. Now, halfway through the text, she begins to construct an elaborate survival myth that will attempt to completely annihalate the Anglo-

Saxon presumption of new world ownership. According to Silko, the Europeans are simply a construction of native peoples. Silko purposely includes all of the non-white races in her invention. "Some had slanty eyes / others had black skin" (130). By claiming the right of creation for the native people instead of for some white bearded, ivory skinned God, she is offering a strategy for coopting the Europeans historically sanctioned sense of entitlement. In this poem Silko tells us that whites are a mistake and a plague. She presents them as an invention of a witch who, though an outsider, is still, clearly, from a Native American tribal background even though "no one ever knew where this witch came from / which tribe / or if it was a woman or a man" (132).

This witch said
Okay
go ahead
laugh if you want to
but as I tell the story
it will begin to happen
Set in motion now
set in motion by our witchery
to work for us.
Caves across the ocean
in caves of dark hills
white skin people
like the belly of a fish
covered with hair. (133)

Whites are simply tools in the hand of that one witch, and the witch becomes, in the telling, owned by the Indian. The whites are

> set in motion
> To destroy
> To kill . . . for suffering
> for torment
> for the stillborn
> the deformed
> the sterile
> the dead. (136)

Even the reference to the dead for whom these evil creations are busy working becomes self reflexive; these dead are Laguna Indian dead. The white man's soul is owned by this witch and this witch is Silko's primary tool for enlarging her cultural hegemony. Whites are not just lower on the Judeo-Christian ladder than the Indians they have attempted to obliterate, they are so low that they do the bidding of this, the worst possible example of the Indian race.

Silko's attempt to regain the high ground is not culturally original. The reinvention of a mythology that subsumes the history of white contact is a device that has been used by other Native Americans. A notable example is Handsome Lake, the Seneca leader and holy man who had a series of visions that led to a religious revival. His vision also sought to trap the whites inside of the Indian world. In Handsome Lake's vision he met Jesus who

> reported that his people had slain him in
> their pride and that he would not return to
> help them until the "earth passes away." He

> asked Handsome Lake how the Indians received his teachings. When Handsome Lake said that half his people believed in him, Jesus declared, "You are more successful than I for some believe in you but none in me. I am inclined to believe that in the end it will be so with you . . . tell your people they will become lost when they follow the ways of the white man" (Wallace 244).

There is oral testimony that also attempts to frame the history of white conquest. Dan Katchongva, a Hopi spiritual leader, testified in front of a Washington congressional hearing in 1955 that

> in ancient times it was prophesied by our forefathers that this land would be occupied by the Indian people and then from somewhere a White Man would come . . . . We knew that the White Man will search for the things that look good to him, that he will use many good ideas in order to obtain his heart's desire, and we knew that if he had strayed from the Great Spirit he would use any means to get what he wants. These things we were warned to watch, and we today know that those prophecies were true because we can see how many new and selfish ideas and plans are being put before us. We know that if we accept these things we will lose our land and give up our very lives (Nabokov 7).

Silko attempts to do what a character in "Geronimo's Story" claims to do, to "destroy" her enemy with words (222). However Silko's success depends on her own, skillful withdrawal from the action. She defines herself as the storyteller and says that the storyteller is the one who keeps all the escape stories because "with these stories of ours / we can escape almost anything / with these stories we will survive" (247). Yet after a careful examination of the text one has to believe that this survival narrative describes an individual escape as well as a communal obliteration. This view is further cemented when one looks carefully at the poem. In "The Storyteller's Escape," Silko writes that the escape is "her best story" and she describes the storyteller's singular survival, not the escape of her tribe (247). The female storyteller is left behind, alone. Silko describes her

> thinking
> this was how she would want them
> to remember and cry for her
> If only somebody had looked back. (249)

No one does. There is no one to tell her story because she is the lone and lonely survivor. Her story must diverge from the story of her tribe. In this way she resembles survivors of the holocaust like Simha Rottem who remember how at the end of the war "I was alone all the time . . . . I didn't meet a living soul. At one point I recall feeling a kind of peace, of serenity. I said to myself: 'I'm the last Jew'" (Shoah 200).

The need to tell fuels the storyteller's desire for survival. She claims she would give up without it, saying

I could die peacefully
if there was just someone to tell
how I finally stopped
and where. (250)

But the need to have one's own death recalled is supremely narcissistic. This is a desire to survive that has its roots in the absence of others who could historicize you, who could document your passing and make sure you assume your rightful place.

Silko's skill is like the one Sonny Boy, her modern day Coyote character, has. She is "good at making up stories to justify why things happened the way they did" (259). However, what she ultimately justifies is the importance of finding a place outside of tribal and white society. Her exclusive pose at the end of the book celebrates that difference, that unique position. She is the storyteller who has escaped alone and she has also managed to take care of her cultural task, documenting the horror the victims endured and still endure. She survives because of difference not because of commonality. She is not Indian, not white, but stands balanced between the two worlds, peering down. We see her there but we are unable to clearly state how Silko has managed this neat enough trick.

In The Bluest Eye Toni Morrison chooses a much more traditional narrative approach in detailing ethnic victimization. The dominant white culture makes its first appearance in retelling the easy reader story of Dick and Jane. Morrison assumes that audience will recognize that the pictures which accompanied this series of easy readers are always white-identified. At its most basic, The Bluest Eye

is a novel about the power of white iconography. Dick and Jane are part of the representative discourse of white Grammar School children, and since this is how small children learn to read, the implication is that these two characters are the first people they are required to identify themselves with/and as. Morrison offers us the memory of this instructional tale as a framing device that will stand in stark contrast to the story of Pecola, The Bluest Eye's main protagonist.

As we read this tale, we begin to wonder just who is reading aloud from this child's reader, just who is narrating this story of the bluest eye. It would seem that Morrison or an omniscient third person narrator is speaking. By presenting this text without any attempt at critical direction, Morrison frames the world that she then develops, and this world stands inside the world of the reader, it is a completely African-American world. The whiteness of the Dick and Jane story acts as an exterior and powerful containment vessel.

Morrison does not devise an innovative structure for her first novel. Although her ultimate intentions may be an indictment of white imposed cultural standards, she does not question the accepted novelistic form. Her need to create a different text is only seen in the use of the framing device, the Dick and Jane story and the large chapter breaks, separated into seasons of the year. Yet neither one of these structural choices can really be seen as an argument against white-imposed literary traditions.

Indeed Morrison uses these traditions she has been deeded skillfully. Her dependence on voice has clear Faulknerian antecedents. And as we venture inside the heads of Claudia, the

Breedloves and Soaphead Church we begin to understand Morrison's view of what survival entails in this white-identified African-American community.

The novel's first narrator is Claudia. Claudia's voice sunders any notion we might have of maintaining a foothold in that bland world of Dick and Jane. Not that this is a complete shock because this notion has already been partially dashed by the anxiety of the print, the merging together of words in the preface. Morrison's introduction of Claudia echoes Silko's choice in using her own, autobiographical narrative voice. Claudia effects a pose that closely resembles the one Silko availed herself of in Storyteller. Claudia is the owner of memory, the keeper of historical data. And Claudia is going to tell us about Pecola Breedlove, a daughter impregnated by her father, a girl who loses her baby and then goes mad. Claudia's decision to focus on this victim's tale mirrors Silko's focus on victimization. In Storyteller Silko showed us Ayah freezing to death on the rocks, the Eskimo girl languishing in jail, Tony murdering the cop. Claudia too wants to detail the continued impact of America's racist legacy. Claudia claims that "there is really nothing more to say--except why. But since why is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how" (9).

Claudia is the griot, offering a tale of moral instruction, a tale that is clearly imbedded in the culture of one community. She assumes this special vantage point, standing outside of the action, outside of time. The breaking up of time into seasons is generic in flavor. This year she describes becomes all years. As I noted before, the use of this particular mode of separation resembles the type of style used by a journalkeeper. This style signifies that this novel is

not just a fiction but a record of event that has added authority. It is historical and it is being told to us by someone who looks back on what we will understand shortly is a shipwrecked life. But the disaster is not her disaster, it is Pecola's. Claudia is the survivor.

What do we make of Claudia? From the beginning, the reader is suspicious of Claudia's reliability as a narrator. Although she starts off the narrative in a youthful guise, her older, (or is it the authorial), voice intrudes, using language that would never be available to her in her youth. She says, "being a minority in both caste and class, we moved about anyway on the hem of life, struggling to consolidate our weaknesses and hang on" (18). The words minority, caste and class are all the province of someone older and better educated than the naive girl whose mother has taken Pecola into their household. As the novel continues, we are no longer sure if Claudia is the speaker because we enter the minds of both the Breedloves, and ultimately, most critically, Soaphead Church. However Claudia's narrative voice is used like the tale of Dick and Jane, it is an essential framing device. By the end of this story we have discovered that Claudia, in her blandness, in her disengagement, is the only real survivor. Therefore her stance throughout the novel is critical. In analyzing it we can understand the only safe positioning available to someone unfortunate enough to be born into this particular community.

Everyone else of note in this tale is some sort of victim. The victims range far beyond Pecola and her mother and father who are locked in a barren, vicious marriage. The whores are victims of the high minded morality of those failed light-skinned girls from Mobile (67). Mr. Henry is a victim of his own, lonely lust. Claudia's mother is

a victim of overwork and the dreariness of her own, difficult life. The only one who seems to escape languishing in this victimized state is Claudia. We know she has escaped because she is critical and capable and besides, she is the only one who is able to turn and look back.

If Claudia is the survivor of record then there must be keys to her survival, just as there are keys to Pecola's failure. Indeed there are and Claudia's ability to survive depends on her difference. From the very beginning of the novel, Claudia makes it clear how special she is. Her attempt to take pride in her own racial heritage sets her apart. When her sister and Pecola discuss Shirley Temple's good looks, Claudia is totally revolted. She hates Shirley because she gets to dance with Bojangles. What is at work here is sexual jealousy rather than any envy for Shirley's supposed physical attributes. Her presumption of this competitive sexual stance is a terrifically adult notion. But Claudia is also a small child who is being given white baby dolls. True to her critical, clinical nature she spends a great deal of time disemboweling them.

Claudia has hold of a certain kind of precocious virtue that is hers, alone. She understands the desirable qualities inherent in her blackness. She stands in opposition to Pecola, in fact she stands at the very opposite end of the spectrum. And she has hold of a vantage point that separates her from most of the denizens of the world Morrison describes. Much of The Bluest Eye is an analysis of a society where victims prey on each other. This Ohio community resembles the world of the concentration camp that Primo Levi so vividly describes. Levi writes how "in the Lager things are different; here the struggle to survive is without respite, because everyone is

desperately and ferociously alone" (Se Questo E Un Uomo 80). Pecola languishes in this loneliness, Claudia glories in it.

Claudia knows that she is at odds with the thoughts and actions of everyone else the novel focuses on. Her vision of whiteness is one that others deny. Claudia offers up this stereotype of Shirley as "one of those little white girls whose socks never slid down under their heels" (19). By offering this Jane-like image of varnished perfection, she begins a novel-long devaluation of the white world. It is a world of pretense, a world of inhumanity on even this, most basic level. It is plasticized and precious and, ultimately, unsexual. Shirley Temple may dance with Bojangles, but her dance is a dance of denial rather than sensual pleasure. It is crushing in its bland stupidity. However, inside the framework of this novel, Claudia is the only questioner. At least until the very end when Soaphead Church delivers his eloquent indictment.

Claudia believes that her individual survival depends on a distrust and dismissal of white values. In this way she differs from those who survived in the camps, those "mussulmen" who became like their captors and found "by a miracle of savage patience and cunning . . . a new method of avoiding the hardest work, a new art which yields him an ounce of bread" (Se Questo E Un Uomo 80). These "mussulmen" were feared. Claudia is not feared or admired. She is simply separate, different. Pecola, on the other hand, wishes to be admired. She wants attention, wants something from the community of victims who have spawned her. It is this desire that undoes her.

Morrison lets Claudia mimic the pose of the scientist. Claudia is a surgeon, working with her dolls to decipher the mystery of whiteness. She desires to "discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped me, but only me" (20). She describes the doll in a way that mimics Silko's descriptions of the various, malicious whites who range through her tales. This doll has "moronic eyes, the pancake face, and orangeworms hair" (20). It is labeled as "aggressive" when she shares a bed with it, and it has a "bone-cold head" (20). What she wants to do with it is understand it, then analyze it out of existence.

In choosing the doll as the representative of white physicality, Morrison also references a language that was used a century earlier to deratify the humanity of the African slaves. A pro-slavery ethnologist wrote "the negro infant . . . is born with a small, hard, smooth, round head like a gourd. Instead of the frontal and temporal bones being divided into six plates, as in the white child, they form but one bone in the negro infant. The head is . . . smaller than that of the white child" (Cotton is King 708). Claudia has adapted this stance, and taken over the role of ethnologist. She simply replaces the African with the formerly deified white child.

Claudia's response to the animate white girls she sees also takes advantage of this cool voice of the scientific observer. "If I pinched them, their eyes . . . would fold in pain . . . their cry would . . . be . . . a fascinating cry of pain" (22). Her learned ability to ultimately disguise her clinical attack on whiteness and pretend to love Shirley, is also an interesting mimicry of the type of subterfuge practiced today by the white majority.

In opposition to Claudia's position as interested but unscathed observer, Pecola bristles with scars. She is everyone's victim, everyone's scapegoat. She is both unloveable, and unloved, a piece of debris, a cast off of her own community. In fact, she is their most brutalized part. She is one of the "drowned," the backbone of this concentration camp. Pecola's ugliness is inseparable from her blackness. The point of this novel is the way blackness has been historically defined and the effect that definition has on African-Americans. Pecola is the most prominent example of that negative interpretation of self. She and her family "lived there because they were poor and black...stayed there because they believed they were ugly" (34). In focusing on physical appearance, Pecola's apparent ugliness, the purportedly scientific language of ethnology is once again revisited. "The eyes, the small eyes set closely together under narrow foreheads. The low, irregular hairlines, which seemed even more irregular in contrast to the straight, heavy eyebrows which nearly met. Keen but crooked noses, with insolent nostrils" (34). Set this against, "his lips are immensely thicker than any of the white race, his nose broader and flatter, his chin smaller and more retreating, his foot flatter, broader, larger, and the heel longer, while he has scarcely any calves at all to his legs when compared to an equally healthy and muscular white man" (Cotton is King 710). Whether Morrison was aware of the particular text in question or not, the thematic content of the novel is engaged in a discussion of the oppressive concept of a white defined physical beauty. That cultural standard does have its antecedents in the physical descriptions offered up in these types of racist texts. And Morrison is

certainly aware of the historical connection between this intellectual and scientific verbal abuse and social failure. "The master had said, 'You are ugly people.' They had looked about themselves and saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. 'Yes,' they had said. 'You are right' " (34).

Interestingly enough, Claudia remains undefined physically. However, emotionally her separation from others in the community is clear. This is spelled out at the end of the novel where only she and her sister feel pity for Pecola and her child. The reason she wants Pecola's baby to live is in order "to counteract the universal love of white dolls, Shirley Temples and Maureen Peals" (148). But Pecola's child does not live because in this place "the soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers. Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruit it will not bear, and when the land kills of its own volition, we acquiesce and say the victim had no right to live" (160). And Claudia and her shadow sister, Frieda, are the only ones who remain deeply committed to the notion that Pecola does have a right to the life she desired.

Claudia's narration frames the story, but Morrison leaves Claudia to investigate Pecola, Cholly and Pauline's history. She spends time with these victims and offers poignant evidence of how they have come to their abandoned state. In humanizing them she makes them all objects of pity. Even Cholly, a child molester, is offered motivation and excuse. The authorial stance is much like Claudia's. Morrison provides textual evidence to make us understand why these people deserve sympathy rather than disdain. She shows us Cholly's shame after he is forced to perform sex for the racist white

men who happen upon him. And she explains what becomes of it, how "he cultivated his hatred toward Darlene," the girl he was with (119). Cholly understands the rules of survival which is why "never did he once consider directing his hatred towards the hunters. Such an emotion would have destroyed him. They were big, white, armed men. He was small, black, helpless" (119). Pauline also redirects her anger. "She was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen...she learned all there was to love and all there was to hate" (97). On the silver screen, beauty is white, pristine. Thus, ugliness is clear, it is her own face and worse, Pecola's.

Claudia is the only one in this novel who questions and dismisses this imposed value structure. True, her sister, Frieda, often shares her emotions. "Frieda and I were bemused, irritated and fascinated" (53) she tells us. However, Claudia is the speaker of record. And Frieda is too quick to love Shirley Temple. It is a love that she and Pecola immediately share. Claudia's stance is the only real alternative offered to this bankrupt, self eviscerating vision. While the Breedloves have been lost because of their willingness to blame themselves and those they should hold precious, Claudia refuses to internalize the blame. She refuses to redirect her anger into shame. This stance completely isolates her from the community that surrounds her. In this community most adults are full of "unfulfilled longing" for the same dolls Claudia dissects (21). This hatred of self is so widespread that Pecola is right in imagining that finding love for her "ugly black" self will take a miracle (40).

A more positive vision of the African-American community could have offered an ending where members of the community bonded together to save Pecola and sanctify her sense of the worth of blackness. In The Bluest Eye this ending is impossible. Pecola is cast out of the community while Claudia rises above it.

And Pecola has made no mistake about why she is hated. She is disdained because she represents what might happen if one is not careful. She is disdained just as the weak or careless are disdained by other inmates in the Lager. She is dangerous. And yet, unlike those whom Levi calls "drowned," Pecola fights against her fate. She wants the miracle. She wants love. She wants to change the blindness that afflicts people when they look her way. She wants respect. But she is fighting an uphill battle for "how can a fifty-two-year-old white immigrant storekeeper with the taste of potatoes and beer in his mouth, his mind honed on the doe-eyed Virgin Mary, his sensibilities blunted by a permanent awareness of loss,*see* a little black girl?" (42). Instead of claiming a victory by doing what Claudia has done, by wanting to dance with Bojangles, and murder Shirley Temple, (in other words, to usurp a position of power and make it her own in a culturally dominant celluloid recreation of an all-black romance), Pecola decides to change herself. She remakes herself with "pretty eyes. Pretty blue eyes. Big blue pretty eyes . . . . Blue-sky eyes . . . . Morning glory blue eyes" (40). Her choice of weapon is what dooms her.

Pecola loses because she, unlike Claudia, needs to seeks affection from others. She is constantly searching for some way to have an impact on others, to become an important and accepted

person inside the boundary lines of her own community. On the other hand, Claudia never indicates that she has a desire to participate in anything that surrounds her. And considering what the outcome of Pecola's yearning is, it seems clear that a desire for love, a need to be accepted by others, is a crippling liability in this community. If Pecola's story is not enough of a lesson, all one has to do is examine the progress of her parents' lives. Pauline's hope for a good life with Cholly has been blunted. Her need for affection has been subverted and has come to mean a desire for affection from her employers and her employers' children. Cholly also redirects his sexual and emotional desires and the end result of this is his drunken sexual union with Pecola.

In The Bluest Eye, Morrison offers a ringing indictment of the black community. And she offers little hope for its salvation. Later on, in Song of Solomon , Morrison begins to change this view. In that novel she tries to invent a place where the link to the past is potent, where community and inheritance are intertwined. But even in Song of Solomon, the outcome of Milkman's search for family will still leave him isolated, dangling in midair, not even bound by the pull of gravity. Indeed Morrison seems to have a keen distrust of the African-American community. She sees it as a community of victims and victimizers. But this doesn't mean that she doesn't pause to examine the "why" rather than the "how." Morrison makes it clear that an identification with whiteness has savaged these people. Since whites barely enter the narrative in The Bluest Eye, it is those who are white-identified who are seen as the most vicious, the most

morally bankrupt players. Morrison's view of white identification jibes with the analysis Soaphead Church makes that,

> we took as our own the most dramatic, and the most obvious, of our white masters' characteristics, which were, of course, their worst. In retaining the identity of our race, we held fast to those characteristics most gratifying to sustain and least troublesome to maintain . . . we were not royal but snobbish, not aristocratic but class-conscious; we believed authority was cruelty to our inferiors, and education was being at school. We mistook violence for passion, indolence for leisure, and thought recklessness was freedom. We raised our children and reared our crops; we let infants grow, and property develop. Our manhood was defined by acquisitions. Our womanhood by acquiescence. And the smell of your fruit and the labor of your days we abhorred (140).

This imitative community defines its morality by a denial of self. One of the most important elements in this denial is a shunning of sensuality. In Sula, sensuality is seen as a weapon for truth. Sula's sensual nature is seen as more virtuous than the learned and sanctimonious pose of her supposed best friend, Nel. And in The Bluest Eye the depiction of the prostitutes foreshadows a theme that is so prominent in that later novel. These prostitutes are women who

are simply being practical about their own chances for survival and who are proud of the techniques they have devised. As for moral virtue, these women are kinder to Pecola than any other adult in the novel. They have no agenda for her. Meanwhile, Pauline works at convincing herself of her own moral superiority. "She bent toward respectability, and in doing so taught them fear: fear of being clumsy, fear of being like their father, fear of not being loved by God, fear of madness . . . . For her virtues were intact. She was an active church woman, did not drink, smoke, or carouse, defended herself mightily against Cholly, rose above him in every way" (102). Pauline's moral superiority masquerades as love. She believes she "was fulfilling a mother's role conscientiously" (102). In fact, she is denying her daughter the one thing she needs most.

Pauline's assumption of morality is simply a way of achieving power in her powerless situation. Her morality is borne from desperation. "She needed Cholly's sins desperately. The lower he sank, the wilder and more irresponsible he became, the more splendid she and her task became. In the name of Jesus" (37). This is because Pauline is one of "these particular brown girls from Mobile and Aiken" (68). These girls "are not like some of their sisters . . . . They go to land-grant colleges, normal schools, and learn how to do the white man's work with refinement, home economics to prepare his food; teacher education to instruct black children in obedience; music to soothe the weary master and entertain his blunted soul . . . how to behave. The careful development of thrift, patience, high morals and good manners. In short, how to get rid of the funkiness.

The dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of a wide range of emotions" (68).

The desire to obliterate passion is one of the mistakes Soaphead Church alludes to in his evaluation of what has become of this African-American community. The evisceration of the power of the sensual is a way of acceding to the demands of the stringent Puritanism that Morrison sees as a precious piece of the slavemaster inheritance. Morrison argues that this view of man's sensual nature is totally alien to members of an African-American, tribal-based community. Perhaps she recognizes in it the christianity that allowed slaveholders like Harriet Jacobs' master and mistress the privilege of believing themselves good religious folk, even as their slaves starved. These slaves went hungry while "food in abundance lay smouldering in the safe and smoke-house and our pious mistress was aware of the fact; and yet that mistress and her husband would kneel every morning, and pray that God would bless them in basket and store" (286).

In their attempt to eradicate this absolutely essential part of their makeup, Pauline and the other "brown girls" have taken as their territory a territory which was once the province of the white racist proselytizer. In doing so they perpetuate stereotypical views of the African-American nature. Pauline is sanctimonious about the prostitutes in much the same way that the pro-slavery advocates were sanctimonious about their own, supposed, moral superiority to Africans. In attempting to privilege themselves, pro-slavery advocates might write about the "difference between a Hottentot and a Newton" (Bledsoe 299). Indeed this same writer went on to

elaborate on the sexual mores of the Africans, noting that "a warrior would sometimes take a score of young females along with him, in order to enrich his feasts and regale his appetite" (Bledsoe 414). A hundred years later, Eugene Genovese offered a different view of slave sexuality in Roll, Jordan Roll. He noted that "the Victorianism of Mamma and the admonitions of Missus did not always prevail against a thirst for life in a slave community that simply could not bring itself to decry love-making as a crime" (465). However, many authors of slave narratives were inclined to adopt the straitlaced views of morality which were put forth by abolitionists and pro-slavery advocates alike. This was a defensive pose. Harriet Jacobs blamed her master for her own moral degradation. Now, Morrison argues differently. She decries these nineteenth century visions of moral virtue and connects a tribal acceptance of the sensual with our twentieth century view of the positive, healing nature of sexuality.

Morrison offers Pauline as an example of someone who is willing to adopt the most unfortunate, strait laced, characteristics of the master class, even as they destroy her. Asserting this superior moral position does not grant Pauline any real power. And how could it when this view was borne out of a moral condemnation of the "savage." Any fear of difference is punishing. Yet Pauline has misread this new historical moment. She still depends on the oppressor's tool to raise herself.

Morrison believes that it is impossible to sever love from sensuality. This is shown in her depiction of Soaphead Church. He has been thwarted in love and his affections have been perverted. He is like Cholly in this way, but luckily he has no daughter to seek

intimacy with. Church admits to a desire for young girls. But he is also genuinely loving, caring and concerned. His sensuality, though subverted, still exists. He accepts that part of his nature. In this way he resembles the whores. And both he and they are the ones who can deed Pecola some small piece of the affection she desires. Church gives Pecola the one thing the white God cannot. "I changed the little black girl's eyes for her, and I didn't touch her; not a finger did I lay on her. But I gave her those blue eyes she wanted. Not for pleasure, and not for money. I did what You did not, could not, would not do: I looked at that ugly little black girl, and I loved her" (143).

Claudia wants Pecola's baby to live to "counteract the universal love of white baby dolls, Shirley Temples and Maureen Peals" (148). Maureen is another important piece in Morrison's indictment of the actions of this fragmented African-American community. Maureen is a miracle worker. She unifies the dissonant warring elements and "enchanted the entire school" (53). She is described as a "high-yellow dream child" (52). There was "a hint of spring in her sloe green eyes, something summery in her complexion, and a rich autumn ripeness in her walk" (53). Maureen succeeds in a project that Claudia never attempted, she manages to control everyone, simply by being who she is. "When teachers called on her, they smiled encouragingly. Black boys didn't trip her in the halls, white boys didn't stone her, white girls didn't suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their work partners; black girls stepped aside when she wanted to use the sink" (53).

Morrison takes us behind the veneer. Maureen, like Shirley Temple, is not what she seems; she is nasty and conniving, entirely

the opposite of her goody two shoes personality. "I *am* cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I am cute!" (61) she tells Pecola when she gets the chance to openly despise her. Then she goes flouncing away. Yet nastiness doesn't matter, only appearances count in this community. Maureen is seen as special, different, a blending of all things desirable. She is the black embodiment of the Mary Jane stamped on the candy bar with "blond hair in gentle disarray, blue eyes looking at her out of a world of clean comfort" (43). And like Mary Jane she is suspect if you only look hard enough, for the eyes of the girl on the candy bar are "petulant, mischievous" (43). Yet Pecola can only see them as "simply pretty" (43). And even Claudia is susceptible to Maureen's charms, at least in the beginning. She admits that she is "secretly prepared to be her friend" (53). But by the end of the tale, she wants revenge instead of companionship.

The white characters in the text have been marginalized, yet lest we forget who they are, we are reminded that "nasty white folks is about the nastiest things they is" (95). The few whites who appear in the narrative are portrayed as arrogant, unfeeling racists. A doctor examining Pauline as she delivers says,"now these women you don't have any trouble with. They deliver right away and with no pain. Just like horses" (99). However, for the most part, white power is referential. The largely absent whites take on the strength of a godlike, all pervasive force. This could be why Morrison begins to suggest a change in religious iconography and the creation of another form of religious belief that will obliterate the figure of that "nice old white man, with long white hair, flowing white beard and little blue eyes that looked sad when people died and mean when they were

bad" (106). She poses the alternative Soaphead Church presents: the idea that this white man's God must be replaced because he has forgotten "how and when to be god" (143). He is also a god who owns "blue heaven" (144). He is a god who works miracles for whites and whites, alone. It takes a black man to work a miracle for a black girl.

In doing this, in having Church donate blue eyes to Pecola, Morrison offers a bittersweet moment of hope. Could there be a universe that finds strength in the power of the usurper? Church has caused "a miracle" and has found "it meet and right to do so" (143). But further analysis shows that his miracle is hardly golden. Pecola is permanently removed from the community, she cannot be damaged by them anymore but only because she is so completely outside of anyone's control.

In later novels, Morrison allows magic to become a much more potent force, capable of reviving the African-American community. In doing this she offers a vividly imagined link to an African heritage that embraces forms of witchcraft. However, for Pecola, Church's power is only a cheat. It is Claudia who is the lone, and lonely, victor. And it it Claudia who retains the reins of narrative power at the end of the novel.

In this novel, Morrison questions the crushing nature of certain social assumptions but she also clings to one particular way of overcoming them. Safety depends on difference and it is a difference from white and black communally held beliefs. Morrison presses for an adoption of Claudia's vision of self and uses Claudia to question long held assumptions of beauty and power. Claudia wants to begin a dissection of whiteness that will lead to an elevation of blackness and

a new belief in the beauty of the African-American self. However, when she escapes from the visions of beauty and success that are embraced by both white and African American cultures, Claudia finds herself standing alone. Some might argue she has her sister with her, but since her sister is largely an extension of self this still seems an isolated position to cling to. In this text, neither Claudia or, by extension, Morrison is willing to journey past a criticism of social structure, white and black, into a larger vision of a new African-American community.

In his book The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity and Class in America, Stephen Steinberg analyzes "the Jewish Horatio Alger Story" (82). He argues that "though subject to overgeneralization and distortion, the basic fact of Jewish success...can hardly be questioned" (82). Roth presents a farcical version of this successful ethnic in Goodbye Columbus and he uses the Patimkins to illustrate all that he finds repulsive in this assimilationist behavior.

Ben Patimkin is the "sink king." We are not quite sure how he as achieved this remarkable success, how he has survived so beautifully. Indeed Leo, Ben's failure of a brother, complains, "I've got more brains in my pinky than Ben got in his whole *head.* Why is it he's on top and I'm on the bottom! *Why!* Believe me, if you're born lucky, you're lucky!" (117). The Patimkins are a notch above the rest. They live in a luxurious suburb while Neil sweats out the summer months in his aunt's apartment in downtown Newark. However, if chance alone has fueled the Patimkins rise to the top, then they are not inherently better or more worthy than others around them.

According to Neil, they actually seem to represent outstanding examples of total mediocrity. By subverting the Patimkins' specialness, Roth uses these fictional versions of an American success to clarify the fallacy of equating social status with any special talent or achievement. And part of the work of this critique is an elevation of Neil's choice, his survival mode.

The Patimkins represent the height of assimilation, Jew made into gentile through some magic fairydust sprinkled down from on high. In this kingdom, Brenda is the W.A.S.P. princess.

> The first time I saw Brenda she asked me to hold her glasses. Then she stepped out to the edge of the diving board and looked foggily into the pool; it could have been drained, myopic Brenda would never have known it. She dove beautifully, and a moment later she was swimming back to the side of the pool, her head of short-clipped auburn hair held up, straight ahead of her, as though it were a rose on a long stem . . . . She caught the bottom of her suit between thumb and index finger and flicked what flesh had been showing back where it belonged. My blood jumped (1).

Roth offers Neil the pose of scientific observer. Neil is detached enough to record all the details of this first chance meeting. Even though he is aware of his own desire, he is able to analyze Brenda. "She dove beautifully" he tells us, "her head of short-clipped auburn hair held up" (1). Neil notices everything as if he is seated beside the pool, watching all the action and recording it in his notebook. Only at

the end do we know that he is at all affected, and this is because his "blood jumped" (1). Neil is like Claudia, like Silko. He is detached from what he observes, someone who offers a disinterested pose even when he is an interested party.

But Neil's is not just the pose of the alienated observer and ultimately, cast off lover. He is the narrator of record, the survivor. In the course of the novella, he survives Brenda Patimkin and he also survives a steamy summer in his Aunt Gladys' apartment. Like Silko's storyteller, like Claudia, Neil is at work finding a place of comfort that dangles between two worlds. At first we think he is just escaping from Newark, a Newark defined by Aunt Gladys and the other, more old-world members of his family. Neil relates tales of these pseudo parents that are comedic and fairly one note. "'You've got clean underwear?' his aunt asks him. 'Who are you calling at this hour? The doctor? What kind of phone calls, one o'clock at night?'" (46). The mixture of overbearing concern and yiddish accent are enough to draw a picture in the mind of an elderly woman, more fleshy than not. She is aggressive yet loving and she represents the oppressiveness of this old-world Jewish community. This community is similar to the one Myerhoff describes in Number Our Days. Myerhoff's elderly Jews had intensified "their dedication to social justice; they not only sought evidence of morality in a shattered, disordered world, but also worked to establish it" (25). Aunt Gladys and Uncle Max go to the Workmen's Circle picnic. The Workmen's Circle, with its socialist tenets is the kind of unified community based group which Neil has no interest in. And since Gladys and Max are aunt and uncle instead of mother and father, they have no real

power over Neil. Instead, they resemble artifacts, dragged out to amuse, but of no real consequence.

David Monaghan characterizes Neil's detachment from community mistakenly. Monaghan tells us it is a playing out of Roth's theme which he believes is an examination of his character's apparent "lack of commitment" (69). But this novella is not simply about the emotional shortcomings of his protagonist. I think Roth is deeply committed to the concept of freedom and self-empowerment that is at the heart of the same American dream that has fueled Ben Patimkin's escape to the suburbs. Yet Neil has no desire to emulate the Patimkins. This is because he sees them as victims. They are not old world victims, they are not Aunt Gladys or Leo. But they are victims, nonetheless.

Roth chooses a first-person narration to describe Neil's escape from bondage. In Goodbye Columbus we have Neil and more Neil. Some would mistakenly have it as Roth, and more Roth but Roth himself describes the difference between fact and fiction. He asserts that fiction is a "personal mythology . . . this legend of the self (the useful fiction frequently mistaken by readers for veiled autobiography), is a kind of architect's drawing for what one may have constructed--or is yet to construct--out of the materials actuality makes available" (106). His choice of first person narration, his insistence on "I" further clarifies Neil's separation from both communities. This choice is markedly different from the type of narrative stances chosen by Silko and Morrison, whose use of third person narration or limited third person interior monologues permits them to deploy a variety of voices. In Roth, we see everyone through

Neil's eyes and we understand that, from the very beginning, Neil is the quintessential outsider.

Roth also depends on humor. Though there is humor in both Silko and Morrison, neither one of them could or would want to be defined as comic writers. However Roth uses his comic sense to enlarge our vision of the communities he observes. And he depends on humor to make us like Neil, to make us want to emulate his survivor's pose. Neil is the only one who is knowledgeable enough to understand the absurdity surrounding him. It doesn't hurt Neil's positioning when much of the absurdity he records has to do with the pretensions of those, ostensibly luckier, others. He describes and does away with his cousin Doris with this neat bit of description, "Doris? She's the one who's always reading War and Peace. That's how I know it's the summer, when Doris is reading War and Peace" (7).

Neil presents Brenda as his perfect foil. For one, she has no sense of humor. "Right from the start she was a practical girl" (7). She is an imitation gentile cast from the Mayflower mold. Her suburban paradise is described, sarcastically, as one step "closer to heaven" (8). Neil is quick to remind us that this mini-Eden is soulless. It has "houses where no one sat on stoops, where lights were on but no windows open, for those inside, refusing to share the very texture of life with those of us outside" (8). To Roth, the American heartland is not Edenic and the suburb where the Patimkins dwell is closer to a vision from Hell. "The sun had sunk, crickets had come and gone, the leaves had blackened, and still Julie and I stood alone on the lawn, tossing the ball at the basket" (27).

Roth's vision of this suburban world as a place cut off from reality recalls Morrison's complaint about those moral "brown girls" who sanitized funkiness and whose main desire was to eradicate difference and transform everything in their life into a piece of sanctified Wonder Bread. Neil's response to Brenda, a desire to fuck her, both physically and mentally, is thinly disguised anger at her stance, at her denial of her Jewishness and of that funky link to sensuality. In the end, Brenda's inability to acknowledge her cultural inheritance is seen as a moral failure. It is this failure, this desire to eradicate sensuality that leads us to Neil's most damning judgement. The Patimkins are not survivors, they are victims. They are drowners; though, granted they drown in luxury.

Many feminists have branded Roth's fury at Brenda sexist. They believe that by turning Brenda into the emblem of the society he dismisses, he confuses his castigation of a culture with a castigation of women. There is a certain amount of justice in that argument; however I don't think Roth intends us to fully buy into Neil's self-promoting stance. Just as Neil stands outside and judges, so does Roth. Neil is hardly a totally likable or saintly character. He is obsessed with self and often mean-spirited. But he is also charming, tender and confused. To objectify him as a sexist is to diminish the conflicts he professes to feel. Indeed Roth's examination of a character who clings to the pose of the observer is even more of a preoccupation in Portnoy's Complaint. In that book, Portnoy's venal actions are often second-guessed by Portnoy himself. Neil has less self-consciousness about his mean spiritedness. In fact, throughout the text he feels justified in his superior pose.

Indeed Neil is constantly, continually, infuriated by Brenda. This fury comes because she doesn't recognize her own victimization. And his anger is introduced at the very beginning of the novella when he tells us that "for an instant Brenda reminded me of the pug-nosed bastards from Montclair who come down to the library during vacations" (11). It continues through his insistence on her use of the diaphragm and finally culminates in the breakup of their relationship. Neil says that he is "sure he had loved Brenda" though he knows that he "can't any longer" (135). Neil's anger is his way of getting revenge and it is also an anger at their, at her, weakness. Their central mistake is their belief in the elevating power of assimilation.

Neil doesn't believe the Patimkins have been elevated. And he presents them to the reader as emotionally bankrupt: the mother with her single-minded devotion to artifice, Ron, the vacuous jock, Julie, the spoiled brat and Ben, whose most visible crime is that he is boring. Brenda is supposedly the most intelligent and compelling of this group and she is shown to be just as superficial. They have sold their souls and gotten nothing back in exchange. In fact, they are like Pecola. They have bought into the belief that appearance is power. Brenda has her nose fixed while her brother intends to. This kind of decision, this need to alter physical appearance dooms her, just as the desire for blue eyes dooms Pecola.

Clues to Neil's view of Brenda exist from the first scene. He sits by the side of the pool. Brenda is underwater, the drowner. Later on, Neil tells us he is attracted to her despite "the smallness of the wings" (14). Neil engages with Brenda because he wants the reader

to acknowledge his victory, and conversely, her defeat. By the end of this love affair, he has established himself as an heroic adventurer. He is ready to journey on into new territory, alone. And the text celebrates Neil's choice and argues that it is the only real route to ethnic survival.

Neil's route depends on an acceptance of the importance of sensual pleasure. This is apparent in his pursuit of Brenda and the resulting sexual intimacy. However this desire for pleasure also shows itself in the description of the Negro boy, Neil's soulmate. This young boy is like Neil because he is also able to elevate himself, to separate himself from the world around him, in a most unique way. He tells Neil he "likes them stairs" and the elevated cubbyhole he is occupying when he reads his Gauguin (60). Gauguin's depiction of island women depends on an acceptance of the sensual. It is that acceptance that Neil also depends on and it is this piece of herself which Brenda is busily trying to deny. Neil's job in the library is also an important clue to his superior positioning, after all, a library is a place where archives are kept, where history is valued. One night at Brenda's house, Neil dreams he is charting a new course along with his youthful Negro companion. He tells us that "I was the captain and he my mate, we were the only crew members . . . we were anchored in the harbor of an island in the Pacific . . . Up on the beach there were beautiful bare-skinned Negresses, and none of them moved" (74). Although he clings to Brenda as he wakes from this fantasy, reality intrudes. It is Ron Patimkin's favorite recording, the absurd chant of "Goodbye Columbus" which pulls him away from these idyllic surroundings and back to the sanitized, suburban world.

But Neil has no desire for this world. He is more than content with the exile he has established for himself. Indeed Brenda's world is simply a place where he has been able to test the seaworthiness of his appointed vessel before shoving off for good. By the end of this novella, Neil has established the importance of funkiness. But he has also established the importance of one other survival tool.

Neil is the king of banter. He tortures Brenda with his gift for language. But his ability to dispute also vests him with unlimited power. In beginning with the choice of the narrative "I," Neil forces us to recognize how he is the owner of this narrative, the taleteller, the moral and literal historian. And Neil's control exists inside the discourse of the story as well. In the old shtetl world, Brenda would have been disbarred from receiving instruction, from becoming knowledgeable, simply because of her sex. In this new world, Brenda is also disbarred from matching Neil's wit. This could be read as another sign of Roth's sexism or simply a sign of Brenda's personal failings. After all, it is her banal craving for social approbation that dooms her and we recognize her moral cowardice. Brenda is crippled by fear. She attempts to avoid commitment to her own Jewish self. "I'm afraid of my nose" (13) she says.

Brenda is afraid that, once recognized as Jewish, she will not be able to avail herself of the social position and privilege that her family has deeded to her. But Neil questions her fear-driven position. He agrees with Soaphead Church. He sees Brenda's pose as an assumption of the worst characteristics of that other, W.A.S.P. aristocracy. Brenda and by extension her mother, sister and brother are failures because they have no pride in self. Neil jibes at her about

changing her appearance. He tells her "why don't you have your eyes fixed" (15) and continues in this vein, saying, "she's going to have her skin fixed" (16). As he eviscerates Brenda for her desire to assimilate, he sanctifies his own version of a survivor's pose.

His pose connects sex with expressions of tenderness. The black boy comes searching for "the heart section" (34). Fear of his black funkiness is invoked by Neil's boss who says, "You know the way they treat the housing projects we give them" (35). He goes on to explain how "there is touching . . . and there is touching" (35). But Neil and his young stand-in rebel against these boundaries even as they mock them. Neil's sensuality depends on tenderness. It is only in the act of sex, that the narrator allows himself a moment of graceful acceptance. "She looked lovely, my Brenda" (46) he tells us and says to her, "go to sleep, sweet, I'm here" (47). In allowing herself to express her own sensuality, Brenda has revealed the one side of herself that has not been bleached into non-being. And this is the one area where she and Neil are able to meet as Jews and equals. This is the one place where Neil can take pride in her . . . and his . . . ethnicity.

And The Patimkins all have this same achilles heel. Their Jewish self exists somewhere. That is why the fruit refrigerator exists, a secret place in the basement where Neil and Brenda "would fill huge soup bowls with cherries, and in serving dishes for roast beef we would heap slices of watermelon" (54). And the preoccupation with food, with how much one eats, is another sign that the Patimkins are still sensual Jews. Ben thinks that Neil eats like a bird. Brenda shares her family's enthusiasm for ingesting. Neil

and Brenda's dates are an epicurian's delight; they inhale "corned beef sandwiches, pizza, beer and shrimp, ice cream sodas, and hamburgers" (54). The old-model fridge is a sign that the Patimkins' cultural identity still lives and breathes inside of them somewhere, even if it is sunk down in the basement. Neil notes that "this same refrigerator had once stood in the kitchen of an apartment in some four-family house, probably in the same neighborhood where I had lived all my life" (43).

Brenda's sexual intimacy with Neil is her act of daring. Her desire for him clearly conflicts with the familial view of sex. Ron's jock strap is inoffensive. It can rest in the bathroom like a toothbrush. Meanwhile, Neil revels in a version of Jewish life that anti-Semitic writers warned against. In the well known text The International Jew, Henry Ford and his hired hand, Cameron accused Jews of a desire to use music to influence morality. "Jazz is a Jewish creation. The mush, the slush, the shy suggestion, the abandoned sensuousness of sliding notes, are of Jewish origin. Monkey talk, jungle squeals, grunts and squeaks and gasps suggestive of cave love are camouflaged by a few feverish notes" (III:65). Ford and Cameron use the same type of logic pro-slavery writers depend on. According to them, Jewish morality stands in opposition to an elevated, civilized version of morality. Jewish music is linked to sex, but the kind of sex cavemen participate in. The Patimkins' musical taste seems to agree with this vision of jazz and "soulful" music. Ron's record collection has "got all the Andre Kostelanetz records ever made" (64). Mantovani and Kostelanetz, Ron's two favorites, write elevator music, a sanitized version of the original that wrings passion from it and presents an

inoffensive final product. Neil's sardonic tone when he describes Ron's musical choices should be enough to clue us into his contempt for Ron's taste. But his description of the moment when Ron unveils his favorite record goes even further. The recording is an absurd celebration of Ron's graduation. He prizes this record above all others and yet when Neil listens he notes that "finally there came a Voice, bowel-deep and historic, the kind one associates with documentaries about the rise of Fascism" (103).

Neil condemns the Patimkins for attempting to merge. He has no desire to become one of the oppressors. When Mrs. Patimkin castigates Brenda for inviting Neil during a moment of family conflict, he makes it clear that his best defense rests in a personal acknowledgement of his difference from everyone. "I sat down on my Brooks Brothers shirt and pronounced my own name out loud" (66). He purports to be imagining marriage when he asks Brenda to purchase a diaphragm, but what he is really imagining is a place beyond the boundaries of both the old-world society represented by Gladys and Max, and the new-world society of the Patimkins. Neil wants to find a tropical island where he can be sensual without guilt. His desire for Brenda to cede to him in this request for sexual protection is a desire for a codification of who he is as a Jewish-American. The request for the diaphragm goes beyond the "pleasures of the flesh" (80). For Neil, sexual intimacy guarantees his individual survival.

Because he is so different, because his moral code is so unique, unlike the old-world version of marriage represented by Gladys and Max and unlike the new world sanitized unions in the Patimkin

family, Neil believes he has no established religious base to turn to. That is why when they go to New York to get the diaphragm, he begins by imagining himself a practicing Catholic. The prayer that rises out of him is basically a lecture to God about inheritance. "If we meet You at all, God, it's that we're carnal, and acquisitive, and thereby partake of You. I am carnal, and I know You approve, I just know it" (100). This Catholic god changes into Neil's personal god. When he asks for an answer from on high, God imitates Neil's behavior. "God only laughed, that clown" (100). This god is not only sensual like Neil, he can also see the joke because the other foolish people in the world don't understand the truth, don't partake in this superior vision.

Just in case we haven't understood the power inherent in Neil's stance, Roth invents Leo. Leo offers another lesson in what can happen if you are not enough like Neil. Ben may be old world enough to speak of being a "gonif" but Leo, the failure, is part of the reality of that world. Leo is part of Aunt Gladys' Newark, he lives in a place where you have to struggle daily, just to get by. But he has also had his chance at salvation. Inside of the verbal barrage that he throws at Neil we find the story of Hannah Schreiber who believed in "oral love" (116). Leo's attachment to this moment of sensual happiness is what links him to Neil. His worldly failure separates him from the upper-middle class Patimkins. But Leo makes a fatal mistake. He abandons Hannah and chooses to cling to his mundane existence. His desire to resist sensuality and grub for every penny is what severs him from Neil and his superior positioning. By evaluating his life and comparing it with Neil's, we understand the choice that one must

make. Leo's trademark is "let there be light" and he does shed light upon the rigid and sterile morality that is enforced as part of the codification of success in this sanitized and anglicized version of America (117). Hannah was his moment of happiness. Now "the world was Leo's territory . . . . He pursued discomfort and sorrow" (118-19).

Neil has no desire to be a philosopher like Leo; he would rather be a judge. By the end of the novel, we understand what was inside of him "that had turned pursuit and clutching into love, and then turned it inside out" (135). It was his desire to prove himself a better American Jew than Brenda. She may not see herself as a victim, but he does. And his indictment is powerful. She has given up something she wanted, an important piece of herself, in order to cling to her family's newfound vision of purity. But Neil believes that sensuality pursued without guilt is not evil. True evil is Brenda's type of pursuit, where sex is used as a weapon in the war against her mother and where Brenda denies her own passionate nature.

Despite the clarity of Roth's vision, there are problems here. Brenda, despite her supposed educational achievements, never rises above the level of a one note, one dimensional character. In this, she unfortunately mimics the rendering of whiteness, (in this case attempted waspishness), that Silko offered in Storyteller. In an attempt to afford members of embattled ethnicities a superior moral stance, both Silko and Roth end up demonizing their versions of the cultural other. However despite the limitations of Brenda's characterization, we still buy into her moral failure. We understand that she is the cheat, while Neil has honored the power of his

convictions. This is why he sounds so confident when he says, "Brenda, the choices aren't mine. You can bring Linda or me. You can go home or not go home" (134). He knows exactly what she can and can't do and knows just how bad she will look to us when she chooses to break up with him.

Brenda goes home defeated. Neil is the conqueror, the survivor. He stands at the edge of a new world. But he, like Silko and Claudia, has no real community to turn to. The Negro kid from the library has disappeared. Brenda has abandoned him. However, he is not unhappy. In the photograph at the end of Storyteller, Silko perches on the rocks, a smile wreathing her lips. She has avoided the pitfalls her characters contend with, and yet she has deeded her voluntary Native American self the moral highground. Neil accomplishes this same neat feat. He is the lone survivor. And one can imagine Neil wearing an even more self-satisfied grin.

Lonely Hearts Beat as One: The Importance of Family

Although the narrative structure of The Bluest Eye, Goodbye Columbus and Storyteller differs dramatically, the stances adopted by Claudia, Neil and Silko (the omniscient narrator of Storyteller) take advantage of the power inherent in difference. Each one of these narrators creates a new version of a Native American, Jewish-American or African-American self that is removed from both a purely ethnic community and a community based on total assimilation. However, this route to survival has pitfalls. For one thing, it is a terrifically lonely route. In Song of Solomon, The Almanac of the Dead and Portnoy's Complaint these writers examine the loneliness these survivors feel. Each of these novels speaks about a longing for community, for some type of family structure and all tackle a stated desire for the resurrection of some sort of ethnic identified, communal spirit. Yet the resolutions Roth, Silko and Morrison propose are markedly different.

Although Portnoy's Complaint has been examined as a Freudian text, it is also, quite obviously, a critique of cultural strictures. Roth says that "Portnoy's pains arise out of his refusal to be bound any longer by taboos which, rightly or wrongly, *he* experiences as diminishing and unmanning" (Reading Myself 19). When the novel was published, the outraged response to this unexpurgated analysand's confession was any author's dream. The Jewish community was split, some castigating Roth, others applauding his honesty. Allen Guttmann suggested that the novel is "like Black

Humor--a kind of terminus, a suggestion that the satirist of assimilation has grown tired of the harvest he himself desired" (62). Other Jewish and non-Jewish critics were more generous. Tony Tanner wrote that "Portnoy's Complaint can readily be appreciated and enjoyed by anyone who can recall anything of the awesome mystery and humiliating farce called growing up" (68).

Looking at Portnoy's Complaint now, so many years after its publication date, the novel seems somewhat tame. The world has become an overheated place, full of public displays of the most lurid events. When Lorena Bobbitt and O.J. Simpson are daily television events, Portnoy's story seems fairly benign, even innocent. Portnoy's exhibitionism could never shock in our America. And Portnoy has two other traits to set him apart from the many exhibitionists foisted on us today: his guilt and his sense of humor. In fact, Portnoy relies on his shame. This cannot be said for those real life perpetrators who parade their neuroses and psychoses on various television talk shows.

Tanner wrote that Portnoy was a "transitional figure" (68). That seems quite true, though I would argue with his definition of the word "transitional." Tanner argues that, while Portnoy "has left the ghetto he has not yet arrived at a place where he can have a confident new identity" (68). I disagree. I think Portnoy has arrived at a place we are already familiar with simply because Neil perched there in Goodbye Columbus. Portnoy may be torn between two worlds, yet his choices are bursting with confidence. He chooses independence from both the old and new worlds. It is this conscious choice, this assertion of an individualistic identity that "unmans" him

because that posture places him in a completely isolated position. "So alone! Nothing but *self,*" (248) Portnoy complains to his therapist.

What to Neil was a desirable and powerful perch, to Portnoy is a dangerous and icy precipice. Yet they cling to the very same type of positioning. Therefore it would appear that Neil's and Portnoy's journeys of discovery have led them to strikingly different sorts of conclusions. And I would argue that Portnoy's is the more worldly knowledge.

Portnoy shows us that Neil's formula for success is not really effective. Portnoy has allowed Neil's love of sensuality to run rampant. He moves through Newark and through his family dinner like a steam engine. At least he pretends to. Yet in reality, Portnoy does not actually have sex with that many women. His fantasy life is rich but his sexual experiences are fairly traditional. The Monkey is the only woman who permits him to really act out these fantasies. In fact, the Monkey is his soulmate on Portnoy's journey of self-discovery. In this she replaces the black youth who accompanied Neil to his island paradise.

However, it does take Alex a long time to get to the Monkey. Along the way he finds plenty of women who resemble Brenda Patimkin. In pursuing them he adopts the pose of the conqueror. "I assaulted and she surrendered" (234) he tells us, then elaborates. "What I'm saying Doctor, is that I don't seem to stick my dick up these girls, as much as I stick it up their backgrounds--as though through fucking I will discover America. *Conquer* America--maybe that's more like it. Columbus, Captain Smith, Governor Winthrop, General Washington--now Portnoy" (234). Without question, this

kind of reference points to a sexist positioning on Portnoy's part. As I noted in the discussion of Goodbye Columbus, because Roth parallels sexual and political conquest, feminists have had a field day with him. Sarah Blacher Cohen says "it would seem that Roth's Jewish-American heroes are more immature than the first Hebrew, Abraham. He could respect his women and appreciate their contributions, while Neil Klugman and Alexander Portnoy can only denigrate women and engage in juvenile retaliations against them" (216). I would argue that Cohen's analysis of Roth misses the mark in several ways. While it does respond to the cruelty of Portnoy's behavior, it doesn't address his own self-knowledge. Portnoy understands that he is unfair to women. Even as he spars with the Monkey and denigrates her, an interior voice admits the truth. "It turns out she is also a human being--yes, she gives every indication that this may be so! *A human being! Who can be loved!*" (194).

Portnoy could be Neil writ older and both Neil and Portnoy both begin their stories by clarifying their position as a community of one. Portnoy's diminishment of family is simply more long-winded. One might call it a sanctification, a way of driving out the devil that possesses him. He must do this work that is typically the domain of a shaman or a priest simply because his mother "was so deeply imbedded in my consciousness," because she is "The Most Unforgettable Character I've Met" (1). Portnoy, like Neil, seems to require some way of banishing familial ties, banishing history, in order to make himself over as a Jewish-American success. He explains this to the reader by noting, satirically, what happens if this exorcism does not take place. Look at the best of those "good Jewish

boys." They end up like that paragon of virtue Ronald Nimkin who swings "from the shower head . . . a note pinned to the dead young pianist's short sleeved shirt" (97). The note reads, "Mrs. Blumenthal called. Please bring your mah-jongg rules to the game tonight" (119). Ronald is dutiful even in death. Roth does not expect us to believe he is Ronald Nimkin, but this darkly comedic suicide points to the feeling of obliteration he experiences at the hands of his all consuming mother. Survival demands an escape.

Portnoy initially defines that escape in social terms. According to Stephen Steinberg "the classical expression of the American success legend is found in the hundred or so novels that Horatio Alger wrote in the late nineteenth century . . . . Alger's unmistakable message was that, whatever, the obstacles, the individual can triumph by living an exemplary life and piously observing all the middle-class injunctions concerning hard work and moral rectitude" (83). Portnoy certainly fiddles with the components of this formula but he basically abides by it. He crosses the river to Algerize himself. He becomes a successful member of city government, a member of the Lindsay administration.

But Portnoy's escape is short-lived. This is because he is riddled with survivor's guilt. This guilt fuels his attempts to educate the Monkey. He wants "to save the stuipid *shikse;* to rid her of her race's ignorance; to make this daughter of the heartless oppressor a student of suffering and oppression; to teach her to be compassionate, to bleed a little for the world's sorrows" (208). He wants her to feel as he does. Then he would possess the perfect soulmate. But Portnoy claims he is unable to reeducate her. However

his attempt to do so is suspicious. He has already told us that he sticks his "dick" up his girlfriend's "backgrounds." He has already made it clear that he is furious and that women are a stand-in for the real focus of his anger. Perhaps he is unable to transform her because he, like the island men Soaphead Church describes, believes that "womanhood" should be defined by "acquiescence" (140). Yet the Monkey would seem to be the most perfect version of an acquiescing woman. And in the end, Portnoy flees her.

Portnoy seems to suffer from the worst sort of survivor's guilt. Neil had no apparent desire to dedicate himself to social justice. Portnoy is consumed with this desire. He attempts to educate the whore. "I couldn't believe that she had never heard of either the diaphragm or the birth-control pill. I told The Monkey to explain to her about modern means of contraception that she could surely avail herself of" (139). He feels deeply about those less fortunate than himself and about human rights in general. He happens "to believe in the rights of man, rights such as are extended in the Soviet Union to *all* people, regardless of race, religion, or color" (73). He thinks this morality is borne out of a desire to contradict, to sever himself from his parents; however, it is the link that pulls him back to them. He cares about the victims, the victims being those who have suffered like his father suffered. Indeed, he cares so much that he cannot bring himself to love someone who is not one of those victims.

Ford and Cameron wrote that "Jews have been quick to adopt the names and colors of whatever country they may be living in" (IV: 111). According to these anti-Semitic writers "the Jew...has his own name among his own people, regardless of what 'cover name' the

world may know him by" (IV:112). Portnoy lives out the truth of this statement. And it is why, despite all his attempts at escape, Alexander Portnoy is first and foremost his mother's son.

Portnoy begins his survey of self by noting the physical resemblance. He has her "long Egyptian nose and clever babbling mouth" (2). According to Portnoy his mother was so powerful she "could accomplish anything" (9). She is morally potent as well. His mother "herself had to admit that it might even be that she was actually too good" (9). Mrs. Portnoy can make things that defy "the law of gravity" (9). But Portnoy is not a woman; he has no entree into her powerful world. And Portnoy's father depends upon his own victimization as a way of deeding him moral authority.

The older Portnoy has never been accepted by the gentile Insurance company he works for. He will ultimately be used and discarded, despite years of faithful service. This is not solely anti-Semitism at work. It is not simply that his father is "doomed to be obstructed by this Holy Protestant Empire! The self-confidence and the cunning, the imperiousness and the contacts, all that enables the blond and blue-eyed of his generation to lead, to inspire, to command, if need be to oppress" (38). In fact, Portnoy Senior is too Jewish, which we translate as too angry. Failure has become his weapon of choice. He glories in his position because it celebrates his difference. He would never give it up. As Alex explains, "how could he enjoy triumph, when he so despised the triumphant?" (38).

Alex's father believes that the moral highground is held by the victim. He resembles survivors like Sandra Brand, the author of I Dared To Live. She depends on the same sort of assumptions. She

carefully plans the murder of a German child. She tells herself this act of revenge will compensate her for the loss of her own children. Yet when the opportunity arises, she finds she is helpless. Brand says how "unaccountably my fingers had loosened their hold on the gun. I tried to tighten them but the gun slipped from their slack wet grip to the bottom of my pocketbook" (201). It is better to be a victim with humanity intact, than to take revenge and become one of those triumphant power mongers.

Portnoy is aware of his father's moral strength and he admires his father's implacable devotion to this brand of rebellion. Indeed, Portnoy senior is a man in every way for "he was constructed like a man of consequence, two big healthy balls such a kind would be proud to put on display, and a shlong of magisterial length and girth" (41). But Alex wants success, not failure. He wants to figure out how to have both success and moral superiority. Perhaps he can be the "Assistant Human Opportunity Commissioner" and still hold onto the moral highground. After all, the job forces him to help others, to atone.

The problem for Portnoy is that his anger gets in the way. He is angry at women. But more than that he is angry because he feels trapped. Neil chooses a vantage point that permits him a view of two worlds: his Aunt Gladys at home in Newark, the Patimkins, comfortably ensconced in suburban splendor. He feels superior to both. But Portnoy is no longer able to revel in that feeling of superiority. Indeed, he despises himself for clinging to this superior stance yet he has nothing to replace it with.

Portnoy blames his masculinity for this weakness. "If my father had only been my mother! and my mother my father!" he wails (40). Portnoy wants to have both the "magisterial" shlong and the magic (41). In Portnoy's Complaint, Jewish women have the ability to survive, to endure, without becoming victims. Naomi, the Israeli woman he attempts to bed, is more clinically detached than any scientist. And more comfortable in her sexual needs. When Portnoy grovels because of his inability to maintain an erection, when he begs to give her sexual satisfaction, she offers a well placed kick to the balls. Naomi is cool, Portnoy is full of whining heat. Naomi is a representative of the new Israel. But Portnoy is a Jewish-American. And Portnoy's vision of America is a land where dependence on self is critical. This is why he chooses to begin to explain himself from the psychiatrist's couch.

Portnoy's Complaint can be read as a story of a quest. Initially it seems as if Portnoy flees the Jewish community because he is seeking a sensual soulmate. It seems that Alexander envisions a society where sexual pleasure will replace other rituals which define intimacy. This view parrots Neil's view of what he expects to achieve through his union with Brenda. But Portnoy's quest is even more hopeless than Neil's. His search takes him into the heartland of America where he "assaulted and she surrendered . . . on her mahogany fourposter (a Maulsby family heirloom)" (234). At the end of Goodbye Columbus we could easily believe in the existence of a woman who would understand and satisfy Neil. In Portnoy's Complaint we are forced to come to a different conclusion. At the end

of his search, Alexander finds the Monkey. She is a woman who tells him "pick a hole, any hole, I'm yours!" (195). But he dismisses her.

Portnoy's journey of discovery turns into an appraisal of his illusions. He comes to understand that there is no one person who can provide a replacement for the old structures, for the family life he has abandoned. The Monkey has Portnoy's number. "You don't know what you want me to be" she tells him (197). Through his relationship with her he comes to realize how impossible his position is. Portnoy gives the lie to Neil's vision of freedom. He is not happy anywhere. He is too guilty to relish his newfound sexual freedom. Not with someone like the Monkey who represents "America." Not with someone who needs to be educated about social responsibility. After all, according to Portnoy non-Jews are even more morally suspect than Jews. He describes a friend's kitchen where "tacked above the Girardi sink is a picture of Jesus Christ floating to Heaven in a pink nightgown. How disgusting can human beings be! The Jews I despise for their narrow-mindedness, their self-righteousness, the incredibly bizarre sense that these cave men who are my parents and relatives have somehow gotten of their superiority--but when it comes to tawdriness and cheapness, to beliefs that would shame even a gorilla, you simply cannot top the *goyim*" (167). But Portnoy is emasculated when he tries to bed a Jewish girl. He wants no piece of the old-world Jewish man's power. That power is based on the moral highground of identification as a part of the "we," as one of those "victims." Portnoy ends up nowhere, but having contempt for everything and everyone.

In his savaging of others, Portnoy becomes less and less attractive to the reader. Roth's purpose is to make us critical of Portnoy, critical of his need to cling to this place of safety. Portnoy, himself, critiques his self-preserving attitude. When he rejects the Monkey, he is ashamed of his own cowardice. His sarcastic riff makes that clear. "Ah, but there is (let us bow our heads), there is 'my dignity' to consider, my good name. What people will think . . . . this girl once did it *for money* " (199).

The Monkey is simply another version of Portnoy. She is as gifted at disguise as he is. The Monkey has "the hillbilly routine, the Betty-Boop-dumb-cunt routine, the teeny-bopper bit" (196). She can assume the guise of a sexual boy-toy but she can also act surprisingly intelligent and unaffected. Portnoy is the good Jewish boy who "in honor of his courageous stand against bigotry and hatred, was invited to the Essex House in Newark to attend the convention of the C.I.O. Political Action Committee . . . . who skipped two grades of grammar school" (129). He is the one who "in 1946, because they wouldn't let Marian Anderson sing in Convention Hall . . . led my entire eighth-grade class in refusing to participate in the annual patriotic-essay contest sponsored by the D.A.R." (129). But he is also the kid who "fucked my own family's dinner" (133).

Like Portnoy, the Monkey has been unsuccessful in forming long-term intimate attachments. She has been through marriage and sexual manipulation. However, when he meets her, she is on the cusp of change and desperate for something more. We get to judge her desperation from afar, through his eyes, as something pathetic. She calls him constantly. He finds this embarrassing. She picks the largely

unavailable Portnoy and tries to cling. He shoves her aside without admitting how much her survival package resembles his own. She would like to "not have to go back" to the unsatisfactory world she has invented (195). She says "wouldn't it be nice someday to live in the country with someone you really liked" (195). The Monkey is willing to shed the ability to live solo. But Portnoy cannot go that far. Not with her. And apparently not with anyone.

By the end of the novel, we understand how trapped he is. Portnoy tells us "I love those men! I want to grow up to *be* one of those men! To be going home to Sunday dinner at one o'clock, sweat socks pungent from twenty-one innings of softball . . . a robust Jewish man now gloriously pooped--yes, home I head for resuscitation . . . and to whom? To *my* wife and *my* children, to a family of my own . . . . Hard work in an idealistic profession; games played without fanaticism and violence, games played among like-minded people, and with laughter; and family forgiveness and love" (245-247). This passage may be written in Portnoy's sarcastic tone of voice, but it also contains a heartfelt plea for a sense of place, for an identification with the past and with his Jewish identity. The need for this Jewish community is central to Portnoy's psychic makeup. And the sharpness of his pain at its loss surprises Portnoy. "How could I be feeling a wound in a place where I was not even vulnerable?" he asks (230). By returning to childhood images and offering them a softened, romanticized glaze, he shows us that he can change his perception of things he has abandoned. Indeed, his romanticism points to an important admission on his part. He has failed to completely understand the importance of this piece of his

identity. "What has become of my purposes . . . Home? I have none. Family? No" (248).

Despite his professed longing, Portnoy rejects any resuscitation of that old ideal. Jewish women are too much like that prestidigitator he so admired, then fled from. According to Portnoy, Naomi is, after all "my mother" (258). But the Monkey is someone else who "would have me a saint" (249). For Portnoy, any establishment of family is suspect. This is why Portnoy clings to this place of safety, even as he derides himself for doing so.

Portnoy is, finally, suspicious of any form of community, even a community of two. His disdain for Israel and its group identity cements his vision of himself as self and nothing but. This is a place where "the system is humane and just . . . the community owns the means of production . . . all needs are provided by the community, as long as no man has the opportunity to accumulate wealth or to live off the surplus value of another man's labor, then the essential character of the kibbutz is being maintained" (262-263). Israel stands in opposition to Alex's version of America. Naomi would agree. She sees America as a place that fosters "rivalry, competition, envy, jealousy, all that is malignant in human character" (261). In Israel, on the other hand, virtuous communal life is possible. His American audience identifies with Alex. Roth's version of Jewish socialism is so extreme, so dogmatic and inhuman, we immediately feel ourselves stifled. We understand why Portnoy would feel like a misfit in this type of enforced communality.

Roth's version of this Jewish-American survivor depends on an identification with America. Portnoy's "endless childhood" consists of

cultural artifacts that denote this American self (271). "I am a patriot," he tells us. "The newspapers I carted to school! My booklet of defense stamps, all neatly pasted in rows so as to smash the Axis! My model airplanes--my Piper Cub, my Hawker Hurricane, my Spitfire!" (271). His patriotism, his desire to be American, has also destroyed his ability to seek communal happiness. And for Portnoy intimacy with a woman inevitably leads to a form of incarceration. He will be forced to become a saint like his father. He will be forced into the role of morally superior victim. Portnoy is American in the most basic sense. He wants nothing to do with a sense of victimization. He wants superiority instead and a worldly success. Indeed he clings to the stance Neil gloried in in Goodbye Columbus. Yet he has tried out Neil's version of a new world plan and found it has one central flaw. It hasn't taken into account the deep-seated conflicts that exist between his desire for escape and his need for communal identification. Because of this central conflict, he will never find a woman good enough for him. He will never find someone who can assuage his guilt, offer him sexual intimacy and also free him from sainthood. This is why his new world plan leaves Portnoy unbearably lonely and drowning in self.

Insurance, a dependence on others' fear of infirmity and death, is the sole support of the Portnoy family through Alexander's youth. An insurance salesman also plays a key role in Song of Solomon. In a way he offers the same limited version of the future delineated by Portnoy Senior's dutiful career. As the novel opens, the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance agent is going to fly "from Mercy to

the other side of Lake Superior" (3). Instead, he crashes to the ground. Milkman Dead's mother watches this attempt at flight. A day later Milkman, the protagonist of this novel, is the first black child to be born inside Mercy hospital. Smith's attempt at flight is a way of referencing time and circumscribing failure because Smith discovers that "only birds and airplanes could fly" (9). For Milkman, the impossibility of human flight has a strong impact, it "saddened him and left his imagination so bereft that he appeared dull even to the women who did not hate his mother" (9).

Song of Solomon is a survival narrative that details Milkman's quest for a connection with his past. He needs this connection in order to resurrect his inherited ability to soar above the mundane. Without it, he, like Smith before him, will take to the air and plunge to earth, a goner. But he has been warned by this nose dive at the beginning of the novel. Smith is one example of what it means when one quests, but yet fails in achieving the object of one's quest.

In this novel Morrison presents a family that is so richly dysfunctional, they make the Breedloves in The Bluest Eye appear normal. This can partially be explained by the breadth of the novel. Song of Solomon is heavily plotted with a large cast of characters. It is a much more ambitious and more lyrical book than its predecessors, The Bluest Eye and Sula. Because of its ambitious nature, it is a clear step forward for Morrison as a novelist. Yet the concerns of the novel mirror those in the earlier works, most particularly the inability of the black community to nourish its own.

From the beginning, the novel focuses on the Deads and Milkman, Macon Dead's only son. Milkman depends on a pose of

dissociation from the world around him. This is a pose we are familiar with. It resembles Claudia's alienated viewpoint in The Bluest Eye. Unfortunately Milkman has scorn for his family; his need to escape the bonds they attempt to form with him is also reminiscent of Nel's desire to free herself from Sula. In Nel, we recognized this as moral weakness. Milkman's desire for freedom from responsibility is also suspect. His purposeful inability to connect with family and lovers leads to an emotional carelessness in Milkman. Milkman desires a separation from his mother because she nurses him "until I was . . . old. Too old" (126). He needs to be rid of her in the way that Alex needed to be rid of Mrs. Portnoy. And he, like Portnoy, learns to believe that intimacy is dangerous, in fact, fatal. Still, like Portnoy, he longs for a form of intimacy. This is why he seeks to nurture his friendship with Guitar and his familial relationship with his Aunt Pilate.

Milkman is a sympathetic character despite this guise of emotional coolness. This is because we don't blame him for his tunnel vision. Indeed, his family is so oppressive, the community he lives in so bereft, we immediately understand his need for escape. He is surrounded by the living Dead, he is surrounded by victims. His father, Macon, is a victim of his own misreading of his own family history. His mother, Ruth, longs for intimacy with her dead father and goes to lie on his grave in secret. His best friend, Guitar, is a member of the Seven Days, a group that takes white lives for blacks in order to equal out the balance. No wonder Milkman tells us that "deep down in that pocket where his heart hid, he felt used. Somehow everybody was using him for something or as something.

Working out some scheme of their own on him, making him the subject of their dreams" (165-6).

Morrison returns to her indictment of those holier than thou "brown girls" when she describes the Deads. This family is mortal in more than name. There is an absence of intimate feeling, of sensual pleasure that would cause anyone to retreat or flee from them. The Deads condemn sensuality but they, like those Aiken girls, possess untapped longings which end up being twisted into "dirty" sexual desires. Once again, an honest interest in affection and sensuality is perverted. In Song of Solomon as in The Bluest Eye, an incestuous relationship plays havoc with family feeling. But in this novel Morrison is examining middle class blacks and wiping away the carefully applied veneer, dissecting what lies hidden away, underneath the polished surface. While Pecola wanders the streets, an obvious victim of parental abuse, Ruth lives in middle class comfort, her longing for her father a well kept secret. This longing simmers for years, fueling the furious disapproval that will energize Macon. Then he discovers her with her dead father and "the fact is she was in that bed sucking his fingers, and if she do that when he was dead, what'd she do when he was alive" (74). When Macon discovers Ruth's real passion, it becomes his secret too, a weapon to be used against her for the rest of their married life.

Macon enjoys his power over Ruth. This is why, no matter what Ruth does to eradicate this history, it will never be denied or expunged. As Morrison writes, "what might hide this single flaw on the splendid wood: Vaseline, tobacco juice, iodine, sanding followed by linseed oil. She had tried them all. But her glance was nutritious;

the spot became, if anything, more pronounced as the years passed" (11). Indeed, Macon Dead makes it clear there is no room for unacceptable sensuality in the world he wants to inherit. It is the same world Ruth has been born into, the same world those good Southern girls in The Bluest Eye longed for as they stilled their own brand of funkiness. It is the world that sneered at Sula and her triumphant sexuality. Ruth's longing for intimacy is apparent in the breastfeeding of her son, but once that act becomes public, it is stamped down. In denying her need, her passion, Ruth denies the most primary part of herself. Ruth's sensuality is not sinful, but it has been twisted, worn away by years of unredeemed longing. What began as a need for intimate connection has become something most peculiar. She explains this to Milkman when she describes her attachment to her father. "I had no friends, only schoolmates who wanted to touch my dresses and my white silk stockings. But I didn't think I'd ever need a friend because I had him . . . . When he left . . . I kept on reigniting that cared-for-feeling that I got from him" (124).

The Deads are not a linked family but a house full of boarders. They are people thrown together by chance. In their case, chance is their possession of the same last name. In every other respect, they are severed from each other. And the Deads are also ostracized from others in their community. However they have not been abandoned because they are poor and ugly. They are abandoned because of their desperation. Their desperation is more carefully internalized, their madness less apparent than Pecola's. But their longing for love and acceptance is still overwhelming.

In The Bluest Eye Soaphead Church delineates the basic misreading of inheritance which has thrust the black community into the abyss. In Song of Solomon Morrison focuses on naming as the central act that impels Macon and his family into this iconoclastic and lonely future. Macon Dead's mother had a belief in the power of assimilation. This belief is what dooms them. Macon's "own parents . . . had agreed to abide by a naming done to them by somebody who couldn't have cared less. Agreed to take and pass on to all their issue this heavy name scrawled in perfect thoughtlessness by a drunken Yankee in the Union Army" (18). Macon tells Milkman that "Mama liked it. Liked the name. Said it was new and would wipe out the past" (54). Meanwhile, Milkman is named by the black community when he is discovered sipping his mother's milk. His first and last names stand in opposition to each other. Dead is the name acquired from the white, uncaring establishment. It has doomed this family and is a symbol of the history of African-American oppression. But Milkman is a nickname that will stand as a living symbol of all that his mother and others in the family have denied. The name betrays the power of their hidden sensuality, the power of their true heritage.

In offering these contrasting visions of the process of naming, Morrison is making it clear how dangerous the American concept of ethnic blending is for African-Americans. Renaming is an attempt to sponge out the past but there is no way to eradicate the racism that began with America's slaveholding history. If you attempt to deny the impact of this racial history, you are doomed to become another statistic, as Smith did when he leapt into the unforgiving air. Macon

Dead attempts to deny his past. He becomes as avaricious as the Butlers who shot his father to take over his fertile strip of land. Instead of facing his own anger, Macon buries it. His father's murder impels him towards this eradication of his own personal history. Macon advises Milkman to "own things. And let the things you own own other things. Then you'll own yourself and other people too" (55). Like those islanders in the world Soaphead Church described, he is bent on acquiring the "worst" and "most obvious" of the white master's characteristics (140).

Morrison has contempt for his decision, even as she has sympathy for the loss this character experiences. She makes it clear she disagrees with any attempt to hide the past. Yet even though she calls for a close examination of African-American victimization, she does not brook revenge. Instead, she offers a stinging indictment of that way of coming to terms with racism. She does this in her portrayal of Guitar. Guitar is as afraid of commitment as Macon is, his personality also one constructed on loss. Guitar's loss of his father is meant to resonate against Macon's earlier loss. And both lost parents were victims of a white racist power structure. According to Guitar "everything I ever loved in my life left me" (311). He, like Macon, chooses to divorce himself emotionally. His excuse is that he believes "if I loved anything it would die" (311). To counteract this fear, he decides on an aggressive response. Macon victimizes his family and the poor black tenants he rents to but Guitar chooses a more obvious, and perhaps more appropriate, target for his rage. He believes in the biblical strategy of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Morrison shows how his choice is as morally corrupt as Macon's.

Milkman warns him that murder is "a habit. If you do it enough, you can do it to anybody. You know what I mean? A torpedo is a torpedo, I don't care what his reasons. You can off anybody you don't like. You can off me" (162). And Guitar proves him right. He hunts down Milkman and murders Pilate.

Cynthia Davis offers an excellent analysis of Song of Solomon, linking the structure of the text to the traditional construction of the heroic myth. According to Davis, "Milkman's life follows the pattern of the classic hero, from miraculous birth . . . through quest-journey, to final reunion with his double" (16). I would call Milkman's journey a quest but also a narrative of survival. Again, as in The Bluest Eye, there is a clear link to the topology of the concentration camp narrative. Levi writes that in the Lager the struggle is "of each one against all" (Se Questo E Un Uomo 38). Milkman is someone who "avoided commitment and strong feelings, and shied away from decisions. He wanted to know as little as possible, to feel only enough to get through the day amiably and to be interesting enough to warrant the curiosity of other people--but not their all-consuming devotion" (181). This description of Milkman indicates his desire for anonymity and his attempt to defend himself from any link to a larger society. He understands the value of detachment. In the Lager "the struggle to survive is without respite, because everyone is desperately and ferociously alone . . . and if someone, by a miracle of savage patience and cunning, finds a new method of avoiding the hardest work, a new art which yields him an ounce of bread, he will try to keep his method secret, and he will be esteemed and respected for this" (80). Although Milkman is not full of "savage patience and

cunning," he too desires complete separation from others, and he too wants "to warrant the curiosity of other people" without those people attempting to take something away from him.

Milkman wants to project an image of heroic strength, but he has no desire to bear responsibility for the pose. He sees intimacy with Hagar as a battle. He believes that it is only safe to be "ferociously alone" (80). He wants to be admired without bearing responsibility, wants to be loved without being tied down. In fact, he wants no one weaker depending on him. But while total divorce from community was seen as a positive in The Bluest Eye, in Song of Solomon it is shown to be an unbearably lonely and morally suspect position.

We understand from the beginning of the novel that Milkman will want more. When he first visits Pilate as a child, he is entranced. He "could have watched her all day: the fingers pulling thread veins from the orange sections, the berry-black lips that made her look as though she wore make-up, the earring" (38). His mesmerized stance is the first inkling of a need for an extended family that sets him on the road south. Even so young, Milkman understands. Pilate represents another possible route to survival.

In his narrative of concentration camp life, Levi offered this analysis of the three poses that allowed someone to endure. One way was to join those who learned "to sharpen one's wits, build up one's patience, strengthen one's willpower" (Se Questo E Un Uomo 84). There were others who learned "to throttle all dignity and kill all conscience, to climb down into the arena as a beast against other beasts, to let oneself be guided by those unsuspected subterranean

forces which sustain families and individuals in cruel times" (84). However only a few were able to exist "without renunciation of any part of one's own moral world" (84). Pilate is one of those few; she is one of those "superior individuals, made of the stuff of martyrs and saints" (84). "I wish I'd a knowed more people," she says. "I would of loved 'em all" (340). For much of the novel, Pilate represents a tantalizing alternative, but one Milkman is terrified to emulate. Yet at the end, Milkman changes. He eulogizes Pilate by saying "there's got to be at least one more woman like you" (340). He needs to believe because he recognizes that "without ever leaving the ground, she could fly" (340).

Milkman may attempt his own sort of flight at the end of the novel but for much of it he pursues a path of survival at any cost. His relationship to Hagar resembles the relationship that Portnoy establishes with the Monkey. Portnoy feels empathy for the unwashed masses. However, because of his own conflicted feelings, he cannot extend that empathy and include Mary Jane. Milkman has no social conscience. He constantly attempts to divorce himself from responsibility for anyone. And with Hagar he is at his most brutal. This is because he has convinced himself that Hagar's kind of love will destroy him. "He lay there as still as the morning light, and sucked the world's energy up into his own will. And willed her dead. Either she will kill me or she will drop dead. Either I am to live in this world on my terms or I will die out of it" (129).

Milkman would like to believe that his decision comes out of a sort of bravery on his part, but we don't agree. His inability to feel sympathy, pity or love for Hagar, his desire to turn her into an

enemy in the most impersonal sense, belies any connection with an heroic stance. In fact, he simply wants Hagar gone the way he wants all the rest gone, so he can maintain his distance and keep the walls of his safe house intact. Mary Jane mirrored Portnoy's own dependence on disguise and she successfully manipulated her life, gladly taking on the pose of the canny survivor. However, Hagar is no survivor. In fact, she is completely different from Milkman. She depends on a strategy of communal living. According to Morrison, "she needed what most colored girls needed: a chorus of mamas, grandmamas, aunts, cousins, sisters, neighbors, Sunday school teachers, best girl friends, and what all to give her the strength life demanded of her" (311). Hagar believes she is living in the world outside of the Lager, the place where community is allowed to function. Out there "a man is normally not alone, and in his rise or fall is tied to the destinies of his neighbours; so that it is exceptional for anyone to acquire unlimited power, or to fall by a succession of defeats into utter ruin" (Se Questo E Un Uomo 80). But Hagar has been misled. Her community is unable to sustain her.

It is Hagar's death that saves Milkman. After her death, Milkman rejects the defensive stance his father and best friend cling to. He realizes that he never really believed that Hagar "would succeed in killing him, or that she really wanted to. Her weapons, the complete lack of cunning and intelligence even of conviction, in her attacks were enough to drain away any fear . . . . He had used her--her love, her craziness--and most of all he had used her skulking, bitter vengeance. It made him a star" (304). Because of what he did to Hagar he had given in to a desire to become a "prominent,"

someone who Levi notes is "esteemed and respected" (Se Questo E Un Uomo 84). He has diminished Hagar in order to raise himself up. He, like his father and his pseudo brother, chooses to imitate the white man at his most racist and culturally obliterating. But Milkman finally recognizes that this choice is unacceptable.

Milkman comes to this simply because he has never severed his link with Pilate. Pilate is completely her father's child, born without a navel, without a link to her mother. Her father was one of Shalimar's children, Solomon's child who was lifted up, but was too heavy to be carried off out of slavery. Both Macon and Pilate have lost the same father. This was a man who is described by towns-people as "the farmer they wanted to be, the clever irrigator, the peach-tree grower, the hog slaughterer, the wild-turkey roaster, the man who could plow forty in no time flat and sang like an angel" (237). Pilate and Macon Dead's father represented more than a link to an African past. He was more than one of Solomon's children. This farmer believed in the possibility of reconstruction, the aptly named moment when blacks were asked to become equal partners in a remade America. Others in his community admire him for "this here is what a man can do if he puts his mind to it and his back to it . . . . We live here. On this planet, in this nation, in this country . . . . Grab this land!" (237).

Macon Dead was shot protecting his dream. The Butlers present a lesson. They are not supposed to represent the larger flaws of a capitalist society as Marxist critics like Doreatha Drummond Mbalia would suggest, rather they represent the flaws inherent in an attempt at individuation in one society alone, this American society.

Mbalia believes that the concept of individual liberation "leads some Africans to see themselves in isolation from their people, from the community that has in fact shaped, protected, nurtured and guided them" (51). But Morrison sees no sign of that nurturing, nourishing community. If it exists anywhere, it exists in Pilate; it exists in an African pre-slavery past. Yet even Solomon can only save himself. He leaves his son behind. Milkman depends on the hope that there are more women like Pilate out there but the ending of this novel is ambiguous. There is no communal future described in glowing terms.

In The Bluest Eye Morrison indicated that a separation from community was the only route to safety. In Song of Solomon she shows how separation from community creates an unbearable loneliness and isolation. Yet she cannot imagine a paradisial alternative. The closest we ever get to Paradise is the night when Macon Dead stops near his sister's window. There "he felt the irritability of the day drain from him and relished the effortless beauty of the women singing in the candlelight" (30). Pilate's is the ideal of a community founded on love and compassion. But it is a community that consists of Pilate, Lena and Hagar. Pilate's community is based on one central belief. It is a belief that Milkman comes to by the end. He learns that "a human life is precious. You shouldn't fly off and leave it . . . . if you take a life, then you own it" (209). Once he believed himself capable of coldly determining who shall live and who shall die. But that would make him into one of the Days, a pose that becomes thoroughly detestable by the end of the narrative. It doesn't matter how much sympathy one might have with Guitar's political agenda which states that "the earth is soggy

with black people's blood. And before us Indian blood. Nothing can cure them, and if it keeps on there won't be any of us left and there won't be any land for those who are left" (159). Guitar is still morally suspect if not morally bankrupt. He becomes a singleminded owner of revenge. It is Milkman who learns that his world is a world peopled with ghosts. "You better believe boy, they're here," Freddie has told him (109). In Beloved these ghosts will offer the key to salvation. Here, it is only important to acknowledge their existence.

For Milkman understands that change comes slowly. When Milkman returns north after his visit to Shalimar, he notes "there was relief in his mother's crooked smile" (338) and "it was nice. No reconciliation took place between Pilate and Macon . . . and relations between Ruth and Macon were the same and would always be. Just as the consequences of Milkman's own stupidity would remain, and regret would always outweigh the things he was proud of having done" (338-39). His regret is part of what fuels the change in his family, the opening of a way to tenderness. And his regret turns him into a penitent. He has gone from an absence of feeling to a belief in the power of guilt. In Portnoy's Complain, guilt was an unwieldy burden. But in Song of Solomon an acknowledgement of guilt, of responsibility to others becomes the first step along the route to true salvation. By acknowledging his own complicity, Milkman comes of age. Only now will he be able to search for someone who can share this understanding with him. However, at the end of the novel Milkman leaps towards Guitar. Does he take off because he knows that "if you surrendered to the air, you could *ride* in it" (341)? Or does he end up in "the killing arms of his brother" (341). Milkman

may imagine a future that contains a means of entrance into some new place that is not so utterly alone, but Morrison is not willing or able to show us how he completes that journey.

While Song of Solomon derides any commitment to revenge, Silko's latest novel Almanac of the Dead glorifies that desire. In The Ethnic Myth Stephen Steinberg analyzed the Native American position, noting that Native Americans "had always been regarded as semihuman and uncivilized, but as long as whites were dependent upon them, this image was tempered by a romantic image of the Indian as 'noble red man.' Gradually this gave way to an image of the Indian as bloodthirsty savage and a menace to white civilization. This new image not only reflected the increasingly violent relationship between whites and Indians, but also set the ideological stage for wars of extermination that would eliminate the Indian 'menace'" (15). As I have pointed out before, Silko depends on an upending of these stereotypical descriptions in order to deed moral power to her own Native American characters. In Almanac of the Dead the need to attack "whiteness" derails the more ambitious concerns of the novel.

Morrison repeatedly focuses on the difficulties of establishing a functioning African-American community in America. Silko has also concerned herself with an examination of a dysfunctional Native American community. In Storyteller and Ceremony she chose to work from the inside out, fictionalizing life inside of the "double boundaries" which Anya Peterson Royce proposes. Indian life takes place inside of "the boundary maintained from within, and the boundary imposed from outside, which results from the process of

interaction with others" (29). However in Almanac of the Dead, she chooses to attempt to paint a much larger canvas.

The characters in this text are myriad and Silko recognizes the difficulty of keeping score. This is why she includes a "Five Hundred Year Map" at the very beginning of the book. It has the names of all the characters on it as well as their various points of origin. This map echoes a Faulknerian conceit, Yoknapatawpha county writ large. This "Almanac of the Dead Five Hundred Year Map foretells the future of all the Americas" (14-15). In the bottom left hand corner there is a square box with a "Prophecy" that states that "when Europeans arrived, the Maya, Azteca, Inca cultures had already built great cities and vast networks of roads. Ancient prophecies foretold the arrival of Europeans in the Americas. The Ancient prophecies also foretell the disappearance of all things European" (Preface). Silko also notes the "The Indian Connection" telling the reader how "the defiance and resistance to things European continue unabated. The Indian Wars have never ended in the Americas. Native Americans acknowledge no borders; they seek nothing less than the return of all tribal lands" (Preface).

Portnoy has found no peace in either the new world or the old. Neither do any of the characters in the world Silko invents in this seven hundred and sixty three page novel. No one has a history of familial warmth or communal acceptance. Each character is alienated: from family, from community, from each other. They flail at each other sexually or with murderous intent. However, their inability to forge intimate ties does not lead the reader to empathize with them. Portnoy's howl is alternately amusing, tantalizing and repulsive, but

it is human. In this novel, almost all the myriad characters are denied a basic humanity that would make a reader concerned with their suffering.

Only two characters earn our empathy. One of them is the character who is most intimately identified with Silko's own heritage. He is a Laguna Indian named Sterling. He has been kicked off of the Laguna Pueblo reservation for taking a movie crew to a shrine. Sterling's relationship with his Aunts is one of the only tender family relationships in the novel. "The younger generations of women had not really matched the likes of Aunt Marie and Aunt Nora," (87) he notes. Sterling "would think about all the dear old grandaunts now gone on to Cliff House where they had planned a great many of their favorite activities for all eternity. He missed all of them around a table teasing each other, joking about old lovers and sexual escapades" (87).

Seese is the other character who prompts the audience's concern. She is a young mother seeking her lost baby. Her child has been kidnapped by the man who fathered it, a bisexual named David. Seese is a worn out ex-druggie. Yet she, like Sterling is capable of tenderness. Her tenderness comes when she thinks of the one who has been lost. "After Monte had been kidnapped, Seese could not bear to look at shadows or shapes of clouds, patterns the dampness made on the beach sand, because instantly her brain gave them definite forms. She would see the toy giraffe in a cloud. She would see the print of a small hand left by the splash of a wave" (44).

Throughout the rest of this long novel, no character is permitted the kinds of tender moments Silko allows Seese and

Sterling. It is impossible to ignore the alliteration, the fact that these two characters' names, like Silko's, begin with the letter "s." This could be entirely unconscious on the part of the author. But Silko does make it clear these two, alone, are bonded. She uses their tenderness to link them. They work together on a ranch and talk to each other. Because of their friendship, because of their intimacy, Seese recognizes "how long it had been since she had laughed without a weight pulling from somewhere behind" (43).

Seese's search for her child is the first plot thread that pulls you into the novel. In order to find her baby, she gets a job with Lecha, a Mexican psychic. Lecha and Zeta, her twin sister, are major players in this novel. It is Lecha who is attempting to transcribe certain mystical diaries, those almanacs of the dead. Silko's literary conceit is that the diaries have messages which will offer clues to the future.

Almanac of the Dead is a futuristic novel. Though there are hints of actual historical event in some of it, much of it is cataclysmic, a dark vision of a future where all the disenfranchised will take up arms and overwhelm the Europeans. This novel depends on a strategy she employed in Storyteller, the concept of a Native American link to a timeline outside of the one invented by Europeans. In Storyteller she wrote of the Eskimo girl who knew the story of the great bear who moved outside of the continuum of the white world in a land peopled by spirits, a land overseen by Indians. Silko wrote how a

> long time ago
> in the beginning

there were no white people in this world
there was nothing European. (Storyteller 130)

Ceremony also depended on this version of history. In that novel, Silko introduced a Montano woman who appeared from out of nowhere but knew the old ways and who turned out to be an embodied ghost. This woman led Tayo to emotional safety. She led him away from the witchery that spawned the white culture. In Ceremony the Indian witchery was powerful enough to invent whites. Now in Almanac of the Dead, she attempts to predict the moment when the witchery will come full circle and the whites will be destroyed.

Silko believes she has a vision of a new community that will provide a place of safety for Native Americans and for all tribal peoples. Portnoy recognizes his own interior conflicts which have denied him a way of comfortably ending his search for a sexual and communal paradise. Meanwhile, Milkman is beginning to be able to define the moral foundations of a working African-American community. Silko's vision of community goes past Portnoy's own self-searching, past Milkman's tenuous connection with history. She is ready to define a new world where "it was up to the poorest tribal people and survivors of European genocide to show the remaining humans how all could share and live together on earth, ravished as she was" (749). This idea of a communal future seems perfectly suited to address the loneliness and isolation felt by characters like Seese and Sterling. However Silko's vision is barely realized. Instead the novel gets bogged down, almost immediately, in what seems to be its real work. For this is a novel of revenge.

In Almanac of the Dead Silko goes to town with the notion of whites as subhuman, vicious or simply ineffectual and weak. Lecha and Zeta, the twin half-Indian sisters are main characters in this novel. One has the diaries and the other is a powerful seer. Their father is white. He kills himself and when he is discovered he is "as dry and shirveled as a cactus blown down in a drought" (123). He doesn't even have the human attribute of having a stinking corpse. Their mother, a half-white Indian who identifies with whites, dies because, according to Yoeme, their Mexican Indian grandmother, she is overtaken by a "jaguar that devoured a live human from the inside out" (116). Their white grandfather is a coward as well; he won't stop the other whites from hanging the Indians from the cottonwood trees.

Yoeme, their Indian grandmother, is the one who deeds the girls their inheritance. This inheritance consists of the old notebooks which hold the "Spirit Snake's Message." This snake has been talking to "you people from the beginning" (135). The snake has been speaking about the tribal peoples' return to power. Unfortunately, in order to effect that positive outcome, Silko works hard at making us believe in the inhumanity and the venality of everyone associated with those first Europeans. In doing so, she takes up the racist cudgel and becomes too much like what she derides. Indeed, she achieves the dubious distinction of being the only one of these three writers who glories in vilification, who has no doubts about her dependence on it. Roth sneers at W.A.S.P. behavior and Morrison writes about "nasty white folks" but neither one of these writers lets a hatred of this white other take hold of the manuscript and ruin it.

Thomas Jefferson wrote that immigrants bring with them a "licentiousness, passing, as is usual from one extreme to another" (Steinberg 12). Silko imitates this verbal anxiety about those who are culturally different. She accuses the European descendants of sexual misconduct, a desire for flesh and flesh only. And in pinpointing the sins that she is anxious to enumerate, Silko reveals an even more unfortunate personal prejudice. She is fixated on a particularly negative vision of homosexuality. She sounds like an evangelist speaking about Sodom and Gomorrah when she offers homosexual behavior as proof of the white race's dissipation.

Homosexual characters people the text. Of all the despicable characters, these gay men are clearly the most morally bankrupt. David, Seese's lover is a bisexual who plays Seese off against one lover, Eric, and another, Beaufrey. When Eric becomes too despondent and kills himself, David brings a camera to photograph his dead body laid out in a bloody suicide pose. David painstakingly captures his dead lover on film. Then he calls the police. David displays the graphic work in a gallery and it is his most successful show. Meanwhile Beaufrey has Seese's baby kidnapped. He and David take the baby with them and leave the country. But Beaufrey is vicious and jealous. When he notices that David might actually have some interest in the child, he kidnaps the baby again, then has it killed and sells off its body parts for profit.

Silko's homophobia crosses crosses racial boundary lines. Lecha's son, Ferro, is also gay. He has two lovers and "could not believe he had settled for Paulie when something so much finer had been available" (181). Like all the other homosexuals described in

the book, Ferro is a heavy drug abuser. He has a boyfriend named Paulie who seems to find dogs more attractive than people. "The only time Sterling had ever seen Paulie's face relax and soften was when he was handling the dogs" (38). Paulie's obsession is a repetition of Silko's belief that bestiality is a white man's fixation. The quick take she offered in "Storyteller" is elaborated on in Almanac of the Dead.

"White people are unnatural," Guitar tells Milkman (157). Silko would agree. Whites are described as soulless, people who make money off of snuff films and human vivisection. And her modern day killers are direct descendants of the white colonial invaders. "Hitler got all he knew from the Spanish and Portuguese invaders. De Guzman was the first to make lamp shades out of human skin . . . . De Guzman enjoyed sitting Indian women down on sharp-pointed sticks, then piling leather sacks of silver on their laps until the sticks poked right up their guts. In no time the Europeans wiped out millions of Indians" (216).

In her attack on whiteness, Silko depends on a fairly Puritan discomfort with sex. How else can one explain her constant use of sexuality as a weapon? When Silko writes of Maximilian and his doomed Mexican foray she tells us that "Maximilian regained his potency only in the dark flesh of Indian women" (488). Alegria, his descendant, practices infidelity, sleeping with Bartolomeo, a Cuban agent, Sonny Blue and her husband to be, Menardo. Similarly, in America, Leah Blue, the wife of a Mafia hitman, has numerous affairs. Her vision of sex is decidedly cold and bordering on the perverse. "She ignored Trigg as she always did when they had sex, and she visualized a brutal French dwarf in a medieval castle who

forced her to ride his huge, hairy rod instead" (659). The attention to this type of sexual detail, these sordid fantasies, makes one question Silko rather than her characters. Aren't there other ways to delineate someone as morally repugnant? However, when she strays from her vision of sexual perversity, Silko gets even more gruesome. Beaufrey believes "there had always been a connection between human cannibals and the aristocracy. Members of European aristocracy were simply more inclined to hunger and crave human flesh and blood because centuries of *le droit du seigneur* had corrupted them absolutely" (535).

In contrast, the sexual activities of the straight, non-white characters, if just as confusingly diverse, certainly seems more normal. Angelita, the Mexican revolutionary, sleeps with El Feo, a resistance leader, and Bartolomeo, the Cuban agent, but her sexual proclivities are not described. Moreover, in Angelita, this desire for more than one sexual partner is not seen as an act of infidelity. Her sexual nature makes Angelita "delicious" and "powerful" (522). Meanwhile Calabazas, a Mexican American smuggler, marries one sister and is in love with another one, yet his mistake is not sexually suspect, in fact, it is a sad joke. "How stupid! How blind! How arrogant! A more humble man would have seen it. Sarita had been in love with the monsignor when she had married Calabazas in the cathedral. Her lover had given the Mass and his blessing to their marriage. All of this Calabazas had not seen because he had been in love with Liria. Calabazas had started laughing then" (239). Sexual contact between straight Native Americans proves to be no more

monogamous than the contact between the whites, but Silko describes it much more generously, more affectionately.

Each of the characters Silko focuses on is left on their own lonely precipice. The only family described in the novel, the Blues, are a dysfunctional unit. The father is a mafia hitman, the mother frigid in manner and only concerned with real estate and her sexual conquests; the two sons grub after money and power in one case, and in the other, drugs and sexual intimacy. As for the rest of the characters, they have been thrown out by their families. Like Seese, they exist alone, apart from the cultures that spawned them.

The novel is supposed to read as a tale of disparate lives, all coming together at a point where unrest will develop links between formerly separate groups. Then the revolution will return the world to a tribal society. In talking about the Indian unrest, a Mexican General links the Indians to the Jews. "If Hitler had not been crazy he might have realized it was not necessary to kill all the Jews. The general himself would have killed only key figures, and the remaining Jews would have been demoralized and docile the way the remaining Indians were" (495). In the world Silko imagines, there is a plan formulated by the aristocracy to capitalize on divisions because the day might come when "the world was overrun with swarms of brown and yellow human larvae called natives" (545). And in the opposing camp, Clinton, an African-American revolutionary points to "homeless white men and homeless black men" (738). These men "work together for a common cause--survival" (738).

The Almanac of the Dead is a survival narrative, but it is also a survival manual. It is a how-to guide because it details a coming war when all the survivors will attempt to create a new Eden. In order to survive, Silko proposes a banding together of the right minded. They will follow twin Indian brothers who are travelling north. They will be made up of Native Americans, ecology activists, African American revolutionaries, homeless men and women, the disenfranchised, the have-nots versus the haves. This group will also include AIDS activists. A gay eco-warrior writes we should "avenge gay genocide by the U.S. government" (729). In order to survive they "must be able to let go of a great many comforts and all things European; but the reward would be peace and harmony with all living things" (710).

However the content of Silko's novel belies her message. She is incapable of letting go of the racist philosophy that she so derides. This novel is a racist and homophobic construct. Because of this, Silko's belated vision of a new society rings false. Silko has spent seven hundred and forty pages debasing the white other. It is impossible to construct a vision of an egalitarian new world in the twenty pages left after that.

Each one of these three novels Almanac of the Dead, Song of Solomon and Portnoy's Complaint tackles the concept of how one might go about reestablishing a new version of an ethnic community. In addressing this issue, Roth, Morrison and Silko examine a deep-seated sense of loss and isolation. In Portnoy's Complaint the need for community, for intimacy weighs off against Portnoy's own desire

for individuation. For Alex, self wins out. In Song of Solomon Milkman finds a different answer. He is willing to forgo his desire for independence, he is willing to embrace someone else, as long as she is enough like Pilate, as long as she can love " 'em all." And Silko's narrative is the most ambitious of the three. She attempts to invent a brave new world. She wants the ending of her novel to be read as a life affirming future where "the streets of downtown Amsterdam were full of Indians from all the tribes of the Americas . . . Indians crowding the streets of Amsterdam and no Dutch; many of the Indians had looked pale, as if they had been born there" (756). However, of the three it is her futuristic vision which rings the most hollow. While Portnoy continually wrestles with his survivor's guilt, alternately raging against others and abasing himself, Silko has no insight into the effects of rage. She accepts it as something positive. She could be a one of the Seven Days who keep the numbers equal by killing innocent whites, only in her case language has become the best tool for committing her acts of revenge.

The Ghost: A Link Between Two Worlds

The ghost is a figure who returns to haunt or bargain with those who survive. As such, it serves as a natural bridge between the world of the living and the dead. In Almanac of the Dead, Silko writes that "Europeans did not listen to the souls of their dead. That was the root of all trouble for Europeans" (604). She adds that what the European souls are saying is that "we are outnumbered here" (604). For Silko, for Roth and for Morrison, ghosts are critical elements in a balancing of the needs of the old-world and the new. All three of them create ghosts that are both human and feminine in form in order to create an other who is capable of intimacy, compassion and finally acceptance or even capitulation. In doing this, they are able to offer a route to integration that fulfills the longing for community and for family, that has been a painful part of the inheritance ceded to them.

Paula Gunn Allen points out that "while Ceremony is ostensibly a tale about a man, Tayo, it is as much and more a tale of two forces: the feminine life force of the universe and the mechanistic death force of the witchery" (127). It is interesting that after writing Ceremony, a book that shows the curative power of this "feminine" force, Silko went on to write Almanac of the Dead. In that novel, as I have argued, Silko moved one step backwards instead of forwards, burying herself in a stance that was not one of reconciliation or acceptance. Instead she spent inordinate time glorying in a particularly brutal and vilifying type of anger. If you were to use

Almanac of the Dead as your sole reference, it would seem that the reason the Europeans' spirits were outnumbered was simply because of the cruelty they inflicted on others. However, in Ceremony Silko is able to conjure up a way of retelling the world that allows the spirits potency without a complete demonization of the white world. Indeed, she manages to do what Morrison does so successfully. She encapsulizes the novel, forcing the white world outside so completely that by the end it simply doesn't exist. Her decision to ignore whiteness, to make Tayo choose his Indianness is important. Tayo is half-white and a complete demonization of the white part of himself could mean the obliteration of any potential for his own survival.

Tayo meets a woman who becomes his spiritual guide and healer. Allen calls her "Ts'eh," "the matrix, the creative and life-restoring power" ("Feminine Landscape" 127). Ts'eh is introduced as fully human. She claims to be a "Montano" but "Tayo couldn't remember hearing of that family" (223). This imagined and embodied spirit is reminiscent of Silva in the "Yellow Woman" story in Storyteller. In that tale, the embodied spirit took the form of a sexually potent male. Silko chooses a female rather than male spirit this time. This choice is of critical importance. It reflects a belief in regeneration that she links to a force that lies within the earth. "Mother Earth" (Almanac of the Dead 734) has "inestimable power" (724). In Almanac of the Dead, the earth is outraged. But in Ceremony, an earlier work, a cure for this outrage is still possible. The ghost dance described in Almanac of the Dead is a dance of revenge. "When they dance, their hearts are reunited with the spirits of beloved ancestors and the loved ones recently lost in the struggle .

. . who cry out, who demand justice, and who call the people to take back the Americas" (724). This ghost dance is intentionally referenced, set against the massacre of the dancers at Wounded Knee. Black Elk described his participation in that nineteenth century ceremony in this way. "I thought of my father and my brother and sister who had left us, and I could not keep the tears from running out of my eyes. I raised my face up to keep them back, but they came out just the same. I cried with my whole heart, and while I cried I thought of my people in despair. I thought of my vision, and how it was promised me that my people should have a place in this earth where they could be happy every day. I thought of them on the wrong road now, but maybe they could be brought back into the hoop again and to the good road" (239). In Almanac of the Dead Silko exacts revenge for this massacre. However, In Ceremony, the real ghost, that Montano woman, brings a different, more generous and personal kind of response to a history of Native American victimization.

When Tayo and the Montano woman make love, "he was afraid of being lost, so he repeated trail marks to himself: this is my mouth tasting the salt of her brown breasts; this is my voice calling out to her" (180). Tayo knows how to mark space in the old Indian way, the way that Siteye taught to his young nephew. Ultimately this ghostly woman offers Tayo a route for a return to a community that he has felt completely severed from.

The choice of Beloved, the daughter who has been murdered, offers another variation on this feminine principle. When the women of the town finally view the reanimated ghost they acknowledge that

this "devil-child is clever . . . and beautiful. It had taken the shape of a pregnant woman, naked and smiling in the heat of the afternoon sun" (261). However, Beloved is not a generous sexual being. She is a ghost who is full of revenge. "What if Beloved really decided to choke her mother?" (104) Denver wonders. And Beloved is pregnant, but hers is a completely female-created and female-held, child.

Beloved is created to offer a palpable reconciliation with the past. But she also represents a physical response to the need for family. Before she comes, Denver is lonely, to the point of aching, "lonely as a mountain" (104). Denver imagines Beloved as the cure for her solitude. Meanwhile, Sethe's attempts to bond with Paul D are thwarted by Beloved's arrival. She appears on the day when they are most like a family, most like what they could have become . . . if . . . . Beloved is the punishing past that refuses Sethe entrance into the normal life of her community.

But Beloved is, more than anything, Sethe's creation. Sethe bargains her into being and believes that she represents the ultimate face of redemption. She claims that with Paul D beside her and "if her boys came back one day, and Denver and Beloved stayed on--well, it would be the way it was supposed to be, no?" (132) It is Paul D's fear of the past, fear of Beloved that begins the downhill spiral that almost destroys Sethe. And it is Denver's power to love and ultimately discard Beloved, admitting her own intimacy with her mother and her own ability to forgive, which causes her to send for the townspeople. Thus Beloved becomes a way of resurrecting broken ties, even as she seems, initially, to be the most potent force

acting against them. She is one of those resurrected ghosts who Milkman has learned about.

Amy Gillette, nee Anne Frank, is the third ghost in this triad. She is the most base and basic of them all. When she confronts Lonoff, she says, "Oh Manny, would it kill you just to kiss my breasts?" (150). Roth's merging of this modern sensual identity with the identity of the girlish Anne Frank is his solution to the problem of castigation. He has continually written about a feeling of estrangement from an old-world Jewish community. This resuscitation of a world famous survivor is Roth's neatest solution to the survivor's guilt that tortures Portnoy and makes it impossible for him to find any safe place of residence.

Neil's distance from family was a given. Alexander spent much of his therapeutic time attempting to analyze his desire to flee from his demanding mother and his victimized, sanctified father. And Portnoy spent inordinate time noting the contradictions between this flight and his idealization of some part of that Newark past, his identification with that Jewish self, his own longing to return. Nathan's separation from family and community is a worst case scenario. He is no longer the one doing the rejecting. He has written about them and in doing so revealed too much. Now he feels "hated and reviled and disowned" (151). This is why Amy presents the perfect bridal possibility for Nathan: she acts like a most modern girl, capable of sexual intimacy and flagrant desire, yet she is also the ultimate Jewish date.

Zuckerman overhears Lonoff's intimate talk with Amy from the room below. But what Zuckerman imagines doing with Amy is

completely the reverse of his position as curious outsider. He wants to wed her and bed her. Zuckerman imagines a route to recovery, a road to a future that is both free of guilt and full of sensual promise.

> I kept seeing myself coming back to New Jersey and saying to my family, "I met a marvelous young woman while I was up in New England. I love her and she loves me. We are going to be married."
> "Married? But so fast? Nathan, is she Jewish?"
> "Yes, she is."
> "But who is she?"
> "Anne Frank" (195).

Though each of these female spirits has a markedly different personality, they all serve the same purpose for these writers. Their appearance offers a way of bridging the gap between the demands of a problematic ethnic identity and the desire for a sanitized, guilt-free version of self. By making ghosts into full blooded characters, Silko, Morrison and Roth are able to maintain the ultimate control, forcing history into one particular body. They can study the demands that history has made on that person because of their ethnic background, then choose to discard or revive them at will. Roth, Morrison and Silko all imagine a country where ghosts like these exist, to be bargained with, made love to, or finally conquered. In focusing on this particular form of creation, they have drawn up the blueprint for their unique and personal vision of an ethnic-American community where their characters could comfortably take up residence.

In Beloved the reappearance of the dead daughter is a threat to Sethe, whose passive acceptance of this manifestation of her guilt is her attempt to erase, not only the act, but the motivation for it. This denial of history is a continuation of the discourse begun in The Bluest Eye when Whitcomb/Church retells the history of colonization and ends with the indictment that "our manhood was defined by acquisitions. Our womanhood by acquiescence" (140). Sethe's acquiescence here is what threatens to destroy her. Sethe's decline is linked to Beloved's empowerment. Beloved's pregnancy, her actual engorgement of Sethe, is also a metaphor for any attempt to drown out or whitewash history. This is the same type of activity that threatened Milkman, making him into a person incapable of intimacy, someone who just wanted to get by in the world.

Beloved is well aware of her own power as well as the ultimate purpose of her visit. "Sethe's is the face that left me . . . her smiling face is the place for me it is the face I lost . . . she is my face smiling at me . . . now we can join" (213). Using Beloved as a key, Morrison is attempting to show the power of ethnic identity. She is also making it clear that the African-American history of enslavement has forced the distortion of familial relations, twisting this mother's love into a desperate and defensive act of murder. And Sethe's act is one that seems morally impeachable, what is worse than killing one's own child? Yet it seems forgivable when you consider the depth and breadth of the alternatives. As Sethe says, "it ain't my job to know what's worse. It's my job to know what is and to keep them away from what I know is terrible. I did that" (165).

Yet the one thing Sethe cannot really do is accept responsibility for this act. She cannot admit her own guilt. She decides that doing what she had to do in order to save her children should be enough. She is as unreflective as Milkman before his trip to Shalimar. She cannot accept her son's abandonment and Denver's lack of intimacy as scars left by that one, violent act. Beloved's embodiment, her entry into the real household world is misread by Sethe, who sees this as a way towards happiness without understanding that no happiness is possible unless she can examine and come to terms with the loss she has inflicted. Beloved's appearance is a miracle and as such it will not stand close examination. When the miracle turns sour, when Beloved enacts revenge instead of salvation, Sethe is unwilling to unbend from this pose and this rigidity dooms her. Sethe too suffers from survivor's guilt. And this guilt almost consumes her.

But Sethe is luckier than Hagar. This is because, in Beloved, Morrison allows the African-American community a healing power. Indeed, Beloved can only be vanquished, the tie between visible and invisible worlds broken, after she has merged with Sethe and after Beloved, herself, has been acknowledged as a force, as part of the town, as part of everyone's history, a living embodiment of their past.

Thus Morrison finally has it both ways. She is able to present a character, Sethe, who is accepted by the community, despite her stubborn stance, her desperate independence and despite her commission of an act that goes against their self righteous, jealous and supposedly christian temper. This is because Morrison is finally willing to permit the African-American community the vanity of

pride. After all, these are the same people who adopted the worst ways of the whites and who ostracize Sethe for her actions because they present too strong a dose of "reality." Morrison constructs this solution by creating an individualistic character who is resistant to compromise. Sethe is as cut off as the community. Neither one is able to come to any sort of honest resolution on their own. And it is also important that Sethe's alienated stance be seen as defensive. She is rejecting because she has been rejected.

By the end of Song of Solomon, Milkman comes to learn to be like his Aunt, to love "'em all" (340). He sees that his family had reasons. At the end of Beloved, the community realizes that Sethe had her reasons too. Meanwhile Sethe understands the full meaning of the obligation Milkman shouldered as his own. If you take a life you owe something for it. Sethe's history is part of the history of her own community, one cannot be severed from the other. In The Bluest Eye, an embracing of Pecola would have mean a sharing of her shame. In Beloved that shared burden is possible. The community acts aggressively in The Bluest Eye but their act is one of dismissal. In Beloved the community also forces someone out, but this time their aggressive act is an act of salvation. They reject Beloved but embrace Sethe. By creating a ghost victim who can be expunged, Morrison offers an out. Sethe no longer needs to be ostracized; Beloved has taken her place as evil totem. And it is history that is being demonized. This is a history which will never be expunged through a grafting on of a newer racist ideology. No Seven Days logic can compete against the complexities of human experience. Morrison makes us believe this, makes us understand that neither Sethe's

version, protection of her children from the prison of slavery, or the town's version, a brutal and murderous act, can be read as the real truth.

In Ceremony Silko allows herself the same type of complex vision of community. Tayo's residence is as tenuous as Sethe's. He is ostracized from the white world and the Native American pueblo. Sethe only has Beloved to contend with, but Tayo has a triad of ghosts. The Montano woman is only the most visible of the group. Tayo's survivor's guilt has been compounded by the deaths of his cousin and his uncle. Homelife and the battle waged there are indistinguishable from the battle he has fought as a combatant overseas. "While they fired at the soldiers . . . he watched his uncle fall, and he knew it was Josiah" (8). Tayo is an embodiment of ethnic ambivalence, he is half-white, yet every step he takes in his tortuous journey is a step back towards his Native American heritage. The desirable nature of that heritage echoes the conceptualization of whiteness that Silko has devised in Storyteller where the only good white is one who is, like the Captain, a "squaw man" (215).

Tayo's journey into selfhood requires that he merge with this Montano woman who has historical and emblematic importance. "He could feel where she had come from, and he understood where she would always be" (Ceremony 230). His merging with this woman is markedly different from Sethe's with Beloved, although Beloved and this Montano woman both attempt to educate the object of their affection. In Tayo's case he has to acknowledge this woman's superiority. In return, he gets his cattle back. She is knowledgeable about things that the people knew. "The people had made such traps

for a long time because they were easy to build and because they enable one or two people alone to corral many horses or cattle" (210). She is also aware of her own powerful badge of protection. "They won't come down here," she tells him, when he wonders whether he will be pursued (213). The implication is that the place is sacred, special and invisible to the whites. And when he asks why they won't come, "she gave him a look that chilled him" (213). She is like Silva, that embodiment of mythic Native American power. But she does not have to take physical revenge in order to dominate. She has better magic available to her.

This ghost gives Tayo the ability to discover a way to connect his own personal survival with the survival of his tribe. She returns him to himself but this self is one who will be accepted by the Native American community. Now he can live with his Auntie, who "talked to him now the way she had talked to Robert and old Grandma all those years" (259). This Montano woman's sensuality is even more vivid than Amy Gillette's and her sensuality is critical. It is Tayo's sexual bond that has allowed him to change emotionally. He has arrived at the spot that Zuckerman is angling for, a spot where old world acceptance and individuality can finally maintain an uneasy, but permanent truce.

It would seem that Amy Gillette could be as complete an answer to communal acceptance as either the Montano woman or Beloved. However, it is not to be. Zuckerman's response to meeting up with this apparition made flesh is the most farcical of these three ghost stories...and the most full of self. "Oh, marry me, Anne Frank, exonerate me before my outraged elders of this idiotic indictment!

Heedless of Jewish feeling? Indifferent to Jewish survival? Brutish about their well-being? Who dares to accuse of such unthinking crimes the husband of Anne Frank" (210). Estelle Novak tells us that Zuckerman "is neither at home in his art nor in the world where his art and his actions are misunderstood" (70). He is like Neil Klugman and Alexander Portnoy in this way. But he is markedly different from them in other ways. He is not superior like Neil, nor driven by anxiety and guilt like Portnoy. He is self-interested but also self-confident. And Anne Frank is not only his perfect bride, she is able to voice a complaint that is also Zuckerman's. "I'd like at last to be my own. Child Martyr and Holy Saint isn't a position I'm really qualified for any more . . . . Love has to start somewhere . . . and as for who I am--well . . . you've got to be somebody, don't you" (191).

Tayo and Sethe choose to close a bargain, to find a way of returning to the communities they have been isolated from. Zuckerman toys with this option, but realizes it is only a fantasy. Morrison and Silko offer up these female ghosts as ways of purging guilt. Roth keeps hold of his survivor's guilt. His cure is to continue the act of invention that has begun with this reborn vision of Anne Frank. Roth believes in the quest, not in its resolution. "Oh, if only I could have imagined the scene I'd overheard! If only I could invent as presumptuously as real life! If one day I could just *approach* the originality and excitement of what actually goes on" (151).

For these writers, cultural history and the baggage that it bears, seeps into every part of their identity. For Roth, for Silko, for Morrison, attempts to balance the need for individual survival with the pull of communal and cultural imperatives, offer mixed results

for their heros and heroinnes. In Ceremony, The Ghost Writer and Beloved, these novelists have invented spiritual guides. Although Silko and Morrison are able to invent a new version of community which embraces their protagonists, Roth cannot imagine, cannot envision this new world. However each of these novelists does believe that this spiritual guide should force both hero/heroinne and audience to admit that we and they can never be allowed to forget the past. They have survived, even past death. They are here because they have to "tell the story" (Se Questo E Un Uomo 36).

In order to construct a self, these writers discover that their characters can only endure if they "define a coherent experience of 'I', a sense of continuity with one's past selves" (Myerhoff 222). In these three ghost stories, Roth, Morrison and Silko have come upon the most satisfying answer to their common dilemma. They have decided that in engaging with the past, it is necessary to revitalize it. This fictional construct enables the writer to straddle the pose of literary master and communal scribe. Zuckerman understands that the use of his family life in print is seen as the ultimate betrayal, but he also knows how Jews prize storytelling, believing it is an intimate part of their cultural life. Myherhoff writes that "storytelling was a passion among these people, absolutely central to their culture" (37). Roth evades a return to the communal structures which exist in the old world-Newark world. But Zuckerman is the hero least tortured by his escape. He is the one most convinced of his own righteousness.

Roth makes it clear that Zuckerman is a new world version of the "storyteller." In creating this fantastic vision of Anne/Amy, Roth makes up a tale which allows his own anger a voice. Anne/Amy can

invoke the self-righteous anger of a victim. She"will always be this half-flayed thing" (189). Zuckerman records Amy's beliefs with pride and power. "I will never be young, I will never be kind or at peace or in love, and I will hate them all my life" (189). Zuckerman finds the key that has eluded Neil and Alex. He realizes he can escape her fate by inventing her and offering up her words instead of his own.

By telling the story within the story, by inflating his guilt so that it takes on human form, Zuckerman is able to create a direct link to the cultural imperatives of the shtetl. In doing so, this Nathan offers more than a passing resemblance to his folktale counterpart "Nathan with a Halo" whose "love . . . gnawed at him like a fatal illness" (Jewish Tales 65). Yet Zuckerman, unlike his old-world counterpart chooses to move past his infatuation without integrating the virtues of religious enlightenment. While "in time" the old-world Nathan "became so learned that he sat at the right hand of the master in the House of Study" (Jewish Tales 168), this new world version confronts Amy with his version of the story, and when he does, his well- constructed myth, the ghost he has energized, deflates.

> "It's just that you bear some resemblance to
> Anne Frank."
> . . . . "But," she said, bringing her eyes directly up
> to mine, "I'm afraid I'm not she" (208-9).

The power of the fable, however, is stronger than her denial. Even after she offers this distracted response, Nathan is planning their future. He wants "to be wed somehow to you, I thought, my

unassailable advocate, my invulnerable ally, my shield against their charges of defection and betrayal" (210). Ultimately, what Nathan wishes to create for himself is a world where he will be protected and loved. He wants to be a "great writer" like Lonoff, because for him "Amy had chosen to become Anne Frank...to enchant him, to bewitch him, to break through the scrupulosity and wisdom and the virtue into his imagination and there, as Anne Frank, to become E.I. Lonoff's *femme fatale*" (192). Zuckerman wants to be permitted his sensual nature, his personal achievements and have it be enough to salve the guilt he feels. He wants, ultimately, "to choose to be a Jew, and not to be turned into one, without his free accession, by a hostile society" (American Jews 487).

Yet it is convenient for Zuckerman that his relationship with Gillette/Frank will never be possible. She has no interest in Zuckerman, he is invisible to her, as if he, not she, were the vanishing spirit. She desires Lonoff, that "dean of Jewish writers" and Zuckerman can continue his quest, alone. By inventing Amy he has managed to placate those voices from the past, at least momentarily.

Zuckerman, Sethe and Tayo all suffer from the same kind of survivor's guilt which racked members of the old age home Barbara Myerhoff studied. And, as with those elderly Jews, guilt has become a "transformative agent" (24). This guilt makes it impossible for them "to lead the unexamined life" (24). Like these immigrants from vanished old world communities, Zuckerman, Tayo and Sethe are "more afraid of oblivion than pain or death" (33). And the writers who created them have chosen to revivify ghosts. Could it be that they choose to do this because they recognize this guilt and

understand that in this guise it can "become visible" to everyone? (Myerhoff 33).

Tayo goes through ritual acts, through a ceremony of induction, before he is able to acknowledge "as long as you remember what you have seen, then nothing is gone. As long as you remember, it is part of the story we have together" (231). His ghost and partner reminds Tayo, as Lonoff reminds Zuckerman, of his own, unique place in this history. He can be the bridge between the old world and the new. After his spiritual reawakening, "he cried the relief he felt at finally seeing the pattern, the way the stories fit together--the old stories, the war stories, their stories--to become the story that was still being told" (246). Tayo's reconnection to his past, his identification with his Indian self, revitalizes him. Tayo achieves a ratification of his own sanity and a return to some form of community. What he realizes is that "he had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time" (246).

This is the same world that Zuckerman describes when he invests Amy Gillette with Anne Frank's spirit, when he creates a moment of dual selfhood, of dual citizenship for the two of them as man and wife. Yet, while Zuckerman ultimately turns away from it, Tayo's choice is different. His new form of Americanness will come from his ability to remake himself, casting out his white identity. He divides himself from the whites. "If the white people never looked beyond the lie, to see that theirs was a nation built on stolen land, then they would never be able to understand how they had been used by the witchery" (191). Tayo knows that the destroyers are the true enemy. "The lies devoured white hearts, and for more than two

hundred years the white people had worked to fill their emptiness . . . and always they were fooling themselves, and they knew it" (191).

Because Tayo is half-white, he "consents," as Sollors would have it, to become Native American. He attempts to obliterate his "descent" (Sollors). But that is not the whole package. It is precisely because of the complicated nature of his racial makeup that he can pause and examine and then reintegrate the elements of Native American spirituality. It is significant that he, the half-white, is the chosen survivor while his cousin and his uncle have fallen away. In fact, his cousin Rocky was the one who attempted to integrate himself into the white world. "The subject was books and scientific knowledge--those things that Rocky had learned to believe in" (77). This mimics Leon's belief that "we are just as good as them" (125) and Chato, whose "fine-sounding English didn't change things" (47). Any attempt to become white dooms the Indian. Rocky talked "about the places he would live, and the reservation wasn't one of them" but he dies in the war, dressed in the white man's uniform, that is all the good his dream of parity brought him (77).

"A fully dressed woman walked out of the water. She barely gained the dry bank of the stream before she sat down and leaned against the mulberry tree" (Beloved 50). The invisible becomes visible in these novels, the unsaid, said. Sethe carries the dead with her, and finally it creates the dead, incarnate, which is "Dearly Beloved . . . what she got, settled for was the one word that mattered" (5). When Sethe invokes this ghost of her past, she gets blood and flesh, woman-eating flesh. Sethe's attempts to discipline

her past, to bury it by unsaying it. But instead, Beloved, her guilt, begins to take her apart piece by piece:

> Denver saw the flesh between her mother's
> forefinger and thumb fade. Saw Sethe's eyes bright
> but dead, alert but vacant (242-3).

In order to survive, Sethe must be saved by an outside force. She, like Tayo, is overwhelmed by the conflict between present and past. However, her spiritual rebirth cannot be accomplished through the merging of ghost and human. Because her act was so deadly, it is the visible, physical world that must come to her rescue in no uncertain terms.

The symbiotic relationship of mother and daughter described in Beloved has folk tale roots. "This is what one woman did. She was then living in the bush and never showed herself to anyone except her daughter" (African Tales 314). In both Beloved and "Mother Come Back" any integration into society threatens to separate mother from daughter. Furthermore, in Beloved, acceptance by society will also sever Sethe from the only power she has been able to adapt as her own, the power to act alone, both preventively and vengefully. In the folk tale, it is the mother's return to the village, to that closed tribal society, that saves her daughter in the end. The same is true in Beloved, for Sethe has two daughters and it is Denver who is saved when the village women arrive. This band of women shoo the ghost daughter away and acknowledge Sethe.

Beloved's appearance has forced the opposite approach to the desire for invisibility. Beloved's development into a fully fleshed out person has forced Sethe outward. Morrison herself makes an

argument for "noticing," and it this kind of noticing that the women of her community must avail themselves of in order to see the ghost. "To notice is to recognize an already discredited difference. To enforce . . . invisibility through silence is to allow the black body a shadowless participation in the dominant cultural body" (Playing 10).

In accepting Sethe as their own, the community changes as well. They adopt her brand of defiance. And they gain from it for "the first thing they saw was . . . themselves. Younger, stronger, even as little girls lying in the grass asleep . . . . They sat on the porch, ran down to the creek, teased the men, hoisted children on their hips or, if they were the children, straddled the ankles of old men . . . . there they were, young and happy, playing in Baby Sugg's yard, not feeling the envy that surfaced the next day" (258). They receive the blessing of their own pasts too. By embracing Sethe, they all achieve regeneration.

According to Chief Seattle, "the ashes of our ancestors are sacred and their resting place is hallowed ground" (394). Whites "wander far from the graves of your ancestors and seemingly without regret" (394). This speech mirrors the doom that Silko predicts for whites in Almanac of the Dead, because the "Europeans did not listen"to their dead (604). In reanimating ghosts, these writers make it clear that they cannot deny their own dead, their own pasts. Ghosts are soldiers in the battle between possible and impossible versions of a new world existence. Sethe, Tayo and Zuckerman "have done as much fighting as we could do and still survive" (128). They want out of this war.

Ultimately, in all of the novels, the ghosts are seen as angry predators. They have a feeling of entitlement which threatens to swallow these human survivors whole. "When once or twice Sethe tried to assert herself--be the unquestioned mother whose word was law and who knew what was best--Beloved slammed things, wiped the table clean of plates, threw salt on the floor, broke a windowpane" (242). Amy Gillette attempts to break up a marriage and ruin a life. She reports to Lonoff how she "took the sweet name-to impersonate everything that I wasn't" (189). While one of Tayo's ghosts is a spiritual guide, even she scares him. "She must have seen his fear" (213). The other two are vengeful. They cause him to physically sicken. "It was Rocky's smiling face from a long time before, when they were little kids together. He couldn't vomit anymore, and the little face was still there, so he cried at how the world had come undone" (18).

But these angry ghosts serve as the ultimate link between the visible and invisible, between guilt and the banishment of guilt. Although "remembering seemed unwise,"these writers acknowledge that it is their cultural duty to remember (Beloved 275). By permitting the ghosts entry into the real world, they have created victims that can be vied with, and ultimately joined with or discarded. For Morrison, for Roth, for Silko, the act of separation entails a resurrection in order to ratify their role as survivors. Perhaps this is because they recognize that most unAmerican of truths, that those who do not study history, will be condemned to repeat it.

Santayana Speaks

The first time I studied these three writers together, I did so in order to write a paper for an elective. I was interested in how Silko, Morrison and Roth used animate ghosts because it was a technique I had employed in my own fiction. However, when I began to think further I noted vital similarities between these three novelists. These similarities caused me to reflect on a host of social constructions. Some of these are questions that continue to be raised as the country swings to the right. Multiculturalism is no longer the fashion. In The Ethnic Myth, Steinberg wrote that "as a nation we must give up our ethnic heroes and racial villains, and wage a frontal assault against the dangerous divisions of race and class that rend our society" (302). This task seems even more difficult these days.

As I worked on this thesis, I thought about racism and anti-Semitism and I found myself repulsed by racist language in ways that I hadn't been before. I had always believed racist language to have a historical mission. In this country, the "cultural preeminence of the English" (Steinberg 9) was the initial task of the diminishing language used to describe immigrant groups. What disturbed me was the easy assumption of this racist dialogue by many members of these minority groups. And I began to wonder what it was in ethnicity that is so deceptive and yet so compelling a bond, forcing each of us to identify ourselves with separate ethnic groups. This identification does not simply seem to be a desire for political power.

It also seems to spring from the most base and basic human desire, a need for a personal self that betrays a need for an us/them battlefield. Why else do I automatically identify myself as Jewish as soon as I leave the New York area and search for people with my own physical appearance in what seems to me to be a sea of blond-haired, blue-eyed, and faintly generic faces? I do this out of discomfort but I also do it to feel superior. Is it true, as I often say to friends, that every one of us is a racist at heart?

Particularly in this electronic age, people glory in simplification. Many survival narratives of the seventies, eighties and nineties are personalized documents detailing an interior journey through depression, or incest, or alcoholism, and then reveling in the joy of salvation. One writer who detailed his trip through depression tells us that at the end "my last fears have vanished . . . I have come to the last words about my season in hell" (Knauth 111). Salvation these days seems to take on the generic tones of a ten-point plan that is good for everyone and makes everyone a sufferer, worthy of being tapped on the head, chosen and saved, to be elevated into a special new life in the holy city, where freedom from pain and conflict is the norm, not the exception.

Life seems so much more complicated than this. There are no one-note answers. After all, the political writing and private beliefs of the founding fathers were often at odds. At least there is a deep division between what we have been taught to believe they represented, and what they really did represent. That is for those of us who dare to study history. Without question, we all harbor prejudice. Yet when I bring that up in my classes, there are always a

few disbelievers who shake their heads at my naivete. "I'm not a racist," they say and then slowly, or dramatically, depending on my mood, I shake them out of their complacency and prove, invariably, that they are. Each of us has deep-seated fears and, not surprisingly, many of these have been inculcated through the educational system, little pieces of the American historical puzzle we pay lip service to. Even those of us who are taught to question that staid analysis of virtuous entitlement we call colonial history still bring an unfortunate residue of presumption about privilege and who gets to hold onto it.

I suppose that one reason I chose this topic is because I'm disturbed and distressed by misinformation. My students, largely African-American and Hispanic working class students, imagine that Jews are in control of this country. The types of comments they make about Jews range from laughable to frightening. Indeed, they echo in exact syntax, the language used by Henry Ford and Cameron in their seventy-year-old, anti-Semitic texts. Meanwhile, when castigating their own groups or abusing others, they use the same language that has been employed for the last century and a half in service of a powerful elite who they often misidentify. I have begun to want to understand their own easy assumption of this racial discourse, so that, ultimately, I can feel more able to question it in a way that might make them think, and think hard about their simplistic notions. However, part of this work is an examination of self as well, for I'm no different from anyone else in that respect. I distrust Germans, all Germans, no matter how many times I tell myself that the Holocaust is long over, that this kind of stereotyping is unfair,

and worse, inaccurate. I'm only older and more careful than my students, I hide my beliefs and pretend.

What I might have hoped to find, in examining these three writers, was a neat answer to the assumption of that racist dialogue. What I found instead were lists of questions. In addressing the pull of their own ethnic persuasions and their own racist feelings, their response was complicated and often, unnerving. Of course, in that sense their responses resembled my own. Roth, Morrison and Silko presented less than perfect worlds in their fiction. They offered alternative stances that seemed to indicate a distaste for the oppressor yet mimicked the oppressor's own distaste for them. They took revenge with words in ways that made me squeamish. I found myself complaining about Silko's racism to friends, and in a way I was steeling myself for what I perceived would follow, an attack on my discussion of her. I was afraid that I was being racist by acknowledging that I believed she was racist.

There is a difference in understanding why someone does something and in accepting how it is done. One of the best examples of that would be in understanding that Silko was capable of writing an entirely successful first novel, Ceremony, that barely touched on images of whiteness, and then wrote a sprawling failure of a third, The Almanac of the Dead, which focused on ethnic delineation and condemnation. Morrison and Roth avoided her excesses, but still shoulder the burden of this racist dialogue.

All in all, I have found the process of analyzing these texts to be a restorative process. It has forced me to examine my own brand of survivor's guilt. It has forced me to dredge up my own prejudices.

And in a world where the curious, as Lewis Carroll said, only becomes curiouser, it is a relief to find writers who are willing to investigate the complexities behind a survivor's course of action. Roth, Morrison and Silko certainly are committed to asking and attempting to answer dangerous questions. They are also skillful in creating ways to artfully allow a character to survive without completely erasing either ethnic or American identities. I don't think it is a tremendous leap of faith to imagine that these narratives might offer ways of reenergizing a dialogue about difference. Not that I would think it likely that at anytime soon, we could people this country with reanimated ghosts.

In understanding the choices these three writers have made, perhaps we can also examine our own survival techniques. It takes a certain type of bravery to sit down and write a work of fiction. And I believe more than the usual self confidence and yearning for artistic success is required, if you are willing to pose the kind of questions that Roth, Morrison and Silko pose. At times, they opened themselves up to attacks from both sides, from their own ethnic communities and from critics in an ethnically diverse and infinitely larger national arena. But they felt it imperative that they examine the stress placed on an individual who wanted to be successful, wanted to view themselves as American, but did not want to completely dismiss the boundaries claimed by Native American, Jewish-American and African-American ethnicities. For Roth, for Silko, for Morrison, assimilation is not a virtue, but a challenge.

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