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Repetition as Cure in Native American Story: Silko's *Ceremony* and Momaday's *The Ancient Child*

Paul Beekman Taylor

*Orantes autem, nolite multum loqui, sicut ethnici, putant enim
quod in multiloquio suo exaudiantur.*

[In your prayers, do not repeat yourselves the way the pagans
do, who think that by speaking much they will be heard]

(Matthew 6, 7)

“Dog, Dog, Dog, Dog, Dog, Dog,” she said, inflecting each
“Dog” differently.

(Momaday *The Ancient Child* 26)

The present “canon” of the Native American novel constitutes ceremony, or ritual healing, as Leslie Marmon Silko makes clear in the title of her first novel, *Ceremony*, which refers not so much to the healing of the main character as it does to the story as a cure for us, the reader. As the front matter to the novel foretells:

The only cure
I know
is a good ceremony,
that's what she said. (3)

The essential feature of healing ceremony throughout Native American practices is repetition, often in the form of story; and, expectedly, the structure of Native American story consists of interlacings of verbal and incidental repetition. That repetition and the ceremonial purposes to which it is put is an ideological arm in the constant defensive struggle of the Native American against an oppressive Anglo, or “American” culture.

Again, as Silko's pre-text chants:

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

In the following pages I will display some of the ideological implications of ceremonial repetition in two novels, the first by the Kiowa N. Scott Momaday, and the other by the Laguna Pueblo Leslie Marmon Silko, though I will have occasion to cite evidence from other works in the mainstream of Native American, such as novels by the Blackfoot James Welch, the Ojibwa (Chippewa) Louise Erdrich, and the Chickasaw Linda Hogan.¹

The focus on Silko's first novel, *Ceremony* (1977) and Momaday's recent novel, *The Ancient Child* (1989) is not in itself an argument for the pre-eminence of these writers in the current canon of Native American literature, though Silko and Momaday are perhaps the best known current tellers of Native American story. Silko writes from the perspective of a woman from a New Mexico Pueblo with an agricultural tradition, and Momaday from the perspective of a man from a plains tribe, whose cultural traditions center on hunting; and this balance, though arbitrary, promises a fair comparison of structures and style which I would emphasize as generic features of all Native American story.

Let me summarize the two plots briefly. *Ceremony* is the story of the healing of a young Laguna pueblo man from the effects of his wartime experiences in the South Pacific. His wounds are both physical and cultural, for he has fought and been imprisoned by the Japanese in the

¹ One should also mention Thomas Sanchez, who writes Washo story, and Thomas King, the Cherokee novelist, but they are not yet part of the "standard" canon, though they deserve to be. If I exclude the shorter fiction of Simon Ortiz, Paula Gunn Allen and others, as well as the the poetry of Mike Kaboutie, Simon Ortiz and Lance Henson – among too many others to list here, it is not only because they are less accessible for classroom use as well as to the general reader, but because this material is largely beyond my limited expertise.

Philippine jungle, has witnessed the death of his cousin Rocky – with whom he grew up as a brother – has been infected by malarial fever, and has been treated in an Anglo hospital in Los Angeles where the white man's medicine was dedicated to driving out of him his self-consciousness as an Indian. Returning home, he undergoes a series of healing ceremonies, and goes on a vision quest which involves retrieving the cattle he and his uncle Josiah had bought before the war, but which since Josiah's death have wandered off. Finally, after combatting former friends whose war experiences have turned them against their native culture, the hero, called Tayo, is reintegrated into his pueblo community.

Momaday's *The Ancient Child* is also the story of a Native American's retrieval of a lost cultural heritage. The hero, Locke Setman, or just "Set," is orphaned and adopted out of his Kiowa origins as a young child, grows into manhood and becomes a painter in San Francisco with no consciousness of being anything but White Anglo-Saxon American. Called to Oklahoma to honor an elder in his now-forgotten family clan, he meets a young mixed Kiowa-Navajo girl whose medicines and affection restore his latent ancestral power of being and expression which had been concealed beneath the veneer of his Anglo life.

Though such cursory summaries slight the artfulness of the telling of these stories, they provide at least a few points of reference for the study of style which follows. These two novels reflect what I would identify as the generic marks of the Native American novel: (1) One or more healing ceremonies whose purpose it is to reintegrate a Native American within his community, despite an alienating oppositional ideology and social regulations of the Anglo usurper of his land; (2) a belief in the sacred nature of the earth and man's essential attachment to his ancestral land; (3) dreams and visions which constitute "real" and "true" experience not for the individual alone, but for the community of which he is a member; (4) an accommodation with, or selective use of, Anglo technological tools;² (5) a vision quest to harmonize one's being with community and landscape, to retrieve a lost cultural heritage and to endow a dislocated memory with story-making capacities;³ (6) a sense of story as oral performance, or

² A character in Linda Hogan's *Mean Spirit* makes a general, if inaccurate list: "The whites have a lot to offer us . . . dentistry, aspirin, Bromo-seltzer, and Burma Shave" (296).

³ The "communal" aspect of vision is not exclusively Native American, of course.

writing as a compromising of spoken story; and, finally, that which occupies my particular attention in this paper, (7) a structure and style of repeated incident, image and word which weaves all of these elements into a large design of ceremony,⁴ a healing reattachment of an individual to the land, his family and community, as well as a converging of the two cultural worlds which he finds himself straddling. The writing of ceremony in English, then, is an ideological bridge between Native American and Anglo cultures.

Repetition of incident is not just recurrence of leitmotifs such as healing ceremonies, vision quests, communication with animals – though these and others are common features of Native American story – but a matter of narrative structure and style; that is, repetition of incident is a distinct and essential narratological strategy within these novels. Most broadly speaking, stylistic and structural repetition inform an ideology common to all Native American arts. That ideology denies the eurocentric obsession with progress by denying a conception of “reality” tied to temporal sequence. This is marked one way in the link between the horizontal lines of plot action and the vertical design of traditional oral myth.⁵

So, repetition of name in these novels carries with it repetition of background myth. In Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*, Tayo, who admits

C. G. Jung (*Modern Man* 190) notes that what appears in visions is a collective unconscious, a psychic disposition shaped by heredity.

⁴ Leslie A. Standiford (“Worlds Made of Dawn”) isolates the following properties of distinctively Native American narrative: a reaction to racial genocide, an attachment to the land and belief in an integrated life force, a reliance upon the inherent power of the performed word, and a style featuring a holophrastic nature of language; that is, words as nucleate texts in and of themselves.

⁵ It should be noted that there is considerable complexity in the manner in which old oral tales are fashioned into the generic shape of the European novel. Momaday, for one, is known for writing what I might call “tone poems,” combining poetry, rhythmic prose and suggestions of music. This is particularly evident in his *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969), which has plot material similar to *The Ancient Child*. The latter, however, is announced on its cover as “a novel,” while its front-matter has a Cast of Characters. Whatever Momaday’s intention, the apparent incongruity destabilizes our expectations of form.

that the name he carries is but a convenient nickname (233), is a typological reflection of the Tayo of old Laguna myth who is carried by an eagle to the top of Tse'pina, the sacred place of his people's emergence (Swan "Laguna Prototypes" 58; Lincoln *Native American Renaissance* 235 suggests another typological relationship). In Silko's novel, Tayo ascends that same mountain in order to find the speckled Mexican cattle, a task essential to his personal "cure," his rehabilitation and reintegration into his tribal community. The ascension of Tse'pina, whose Navajo name means "woman-with-her-head-in-the-clouds," counters the Anglo's despiritualization of that sacred mountain by naming it "Mount Taylor," to honor an American President. Such translation kills the sacred force resident in names, so to repair such tears in the fabric of traditional mythic typologies in Tayo's story, Silko weaves throughout the novel pieces of the myth of Hummingbird and Fly who purify the people from the Ck'o'yo magic which caused drought and starvation (56).

Similarly, the hero of Momaday's *The Ancient Child* senses vaguely something of his "ancestral intelligence" in shadow form (64), and struggles to remember what his Kiowa father had long ago told him of his name (58). Momaday inserts into his novel scattered echoes of the old Kiowa myths which are at the source of name power. As she lies dying, the old medicine woman Kope'mah thinks of Set in a genealogical line of great figures in Kiowa story:

The grandmother Kope'mah had begun to speak
names: Set-pago, Set-tainte, Set-angya, Setmante.

Setman.

Set. (35)⁶

In the course of his adventures, Set comes to realize the latent meaning in his name, and at the end of the story, having reintegrated himself into the

⁶ Set-tainte (White Bear) is known in American history books as Satanta, the most famous of Kiowa warriors. One of his comrades was Set-angya, or Satank (Sitting Bear), who at Fort Sill in 1871 was shot down trying to escape while singing his death-song. Set-pago is probably the Pago-to-goodle, who in 1872 led a raid into Texas from the Fort Sill reservation with nine other Kiowas including Set-maute (Bear Above). Other well-known Kiowa heroes with Set- as basic name element include Set-Tadol (Lean Bear) and Sett'an (Little Bear). See Mayhall *The Kiowas*.

culture of his Kiowa heritage, he undergoes ceremonially the process of becoming Tsoai, the Rock-tree-boy of the Kiowa story which Momaday recalls in the prologue to his novel:

Eight children were there at play, seven sisters and their brother. Suddenly the boy was struck dumb; he trembled and began to run upon his hands and feet. His fingers became claws, and his body was covered with fur. Directly there was a bear where the boy had been. The sisters were terrified; they ran, and the bear after them. They came to the stump of a great tree, and the tree spoke to them. It bade them climb upon it, and as they did so it began to rise into the air. The bear came to kill them, but they were beyond its reach. It reared against the trunk and scored the bark all around with its claws. The seven sisters were borne into the sky, and they became the stars of the Big Dipper.

This compelling myth foreshadows and shapes Set's own career, orphaned and adopted out of his Native American ethnic identity. Coordinate with this development is Set's interest as a boy with astronomy because of its suggestion of the infinite. His favorite piece of encyclopedic information is the description of Ursa Major, though he does not yet know that his own name means "bear."⁷

The epilogue to the novel recalls the same Kiowa story in the dream of the great-great grandson of the legendary Koi-ehm-toya, who witnessed in person the leaving of the six, or seven, or eight to play in the forest; and we can imagine that the dreamer witness now is, in fact, Set, "*who knew Tsoai in himself*" (315).

Both novels, then, use typological repetition to translate, or metamorphose character from weak to strong forms (Swan "Laguna Prototypes" 43). Repeated recollections in the memory of both heroes is a manner in which they can move backwards in time through generations of family and tribe toward an essential idea of self that holds steady in ancient story. A converging of past and present is a way of renewal

⁷ Set's baptismal name, Locke, is transformed into "Loki" by his friends, thus unwittingly identifying him with the trickster god of Scandinavian myth who is noted for the magical power - *seiðr* - to change his shape at will.

and reanimation of both the land and the individual's collaboration with it (*Ceremony* 230, 258, 267). Travelling back through time is the path home, toward source and instant of emergence. This is the purpose of ceremony, and metamorphosis and translation are part of the same ceremonial process, repairing and shoring up native cultural identity.

In both novels, ceremony does just this by obliterating chronological order and by metamorphically merging the protagonist's identity with a personal "power animal."⁸ In *Ceremony*, as Betonie's helper, Shush (Navajo for "bear") grunts and raises his hands like paws over Tayo, the medicine man slashes Tayo across the forehead with a sharp flint to prepare him for the cleansing hoops (149-50). In *The Ancient Child*, Set is slashed across the throat with a bear claw by the Jemez medicine man, Perfecto Atole, to bring him closer to his merging of being (288; coincidentally, in *Ceremony* the only food Tayo can hold in his stomach before his cure is *atole*, or blue corn meal).

Set finally achieves a merging of forces in himself that was always potential, and as he flies from his Anglo world of San Francisco back to Oklahoma, his memory travels back and mingles worlds of his conscious behavior with vague worlds beyond (54-6). Each thrust back through time and across borders of being is marked in the text by the same phrase: "And Set remembered" (54 *et passim*), suggesting the waves of images of the past that break upon his consciousness.⁹ What he remembers spans past, present and future. For example, he remembers painting in acrylic a monstrous form of someone, or thing, emerging from an apparently empty background. The recollection is treble, once in the context of his agent's criticism of it, and twice in relation with Nola Bourne, the wealthy and sophisticated woman who buys it and with whom Set shares a deep affection (106, 145). The painting is inspired by a vague ancestral memory, and its latent power, held in check by his white education and milieu, is bound to another culture and to another woman, the Kiowa-

⁸ In his novel *Cyrus Cyrus* (47), Zameenzad remarks appropriately: "Animals see only places, and no time . . . Animals possess this knowledge through a higher understanding of the nature of the universe, an instinctive understanding that transcends the intellectual gropings of the word-bound homo sapiens."

⁹ In his review of Momaday's novel, *House Made of Dawn*, William James Smith lamented that this sort of repetition is style getting in the way of content (Standiford "Worlds" 187).

Navajo girl Grey who sent him the telegram and who draws him to her in order to cure him of his American malaise which is the commodification of his talent.

Throughout the novel Set finds himself going through similar motions in two distinct worlds and times. He visits the grave of his Kiowa father (105) and then senses the power of the spirits in the medicine bundle Grey gives him (115). Later, he visits the empty house of dead white foster-father Bent (238), where he senses an enduring spirit (239-40). This is psychic travel, and such flights of the spirit are characteristics of ceremony for Native Americans (Allen "The Sacred Hoop" 17).

Repetition of ceremony as well as the repeated linkings of timeless myth with time-bound plot makes a pattern of return and retrieval of something essential which has been lost or hidden, one aspect of which Grey identifies for Set as the property of ancestral land. When Set asks her what kind of place is Lukachukai, where he will undergo his bear healing ritual, she says: "hózhón'í! . . . It is a place of great beauty" (269). *Hózhó* in Navajo designates a cluster of related things: "good, happiness, beauty and harmony" (Witherspoon *Language and Art* 23-7). It is also the power of speech and song, and is a force understood in creation and evoked by ritual healing. In *Ceremony*, the Navajo medicine man Betonie translates the term across both linguistic and cultural boundaries for Tayo:

"We are comfortable here." There was something about the way the old man said the word "comfortable." It had a different meaning – not the comfort of big houses or rich food or even clean streets, but the comfort of belonging with the land, and the peace of being with these hills. (123)

The repetition of "comfort" in this ceremonial context evokes the timelessness of certain vital values. Repetition of song, story and remembered images destabilize an Anglo sense of temporal progress. In *Ceremony*, one's sense of time is lost in the hero's fragmentary recollections which laminate present with past events. If the novel begins at the point when Tayo stumbles in some direction toward cure, the healing process itself involves moving backwards in time from the present moment to the beginning of his troubles and, most urgently, to the mythic moment in the distant past when all of man's troubles erupted from the magic of the Destroyer, or Gambler, a figure often associated with the Anglo and those

Native Americans who are bent on the destruction of their indigenous culture.¹⁰

Similarly, in *The Ancient Child*, a sense of time for Set becomes a progressively sharper awareness of the process of his cure. Like Tayo he must shift his consciousness backwards, not only to his pre-Anglo life, but back to mythic and historical models he can feel but cannot conceptualize. Nothing shows how the human imagination can obliterate temporal boundaries more graphically than Grey's visions of Billy the Kid which yoke together events in 1879-81 with her own life a hundred years later. Entering Billy's world through visions – "Never had Grey to quest after visions" is the repeated entry into her visionary world (77 *et passim*) – she is able to remove temporal boundaries between past and present lives, between Anglo worlds of "fact" and Kiowa and Navajo worlds of "story."

Phrasal repetition is Momaday's typical mark of shifts from normal conceptions of time. While Billy the Kid plots his escape from the Lincoln County jail, Grey sits on a chair in front of a hotel across the street. The narrative flow is broken repeatedly by the bare statement, "There had been a shot." It appears even before Billy has a pistol in his hand (83), and continues until the shot is heard by the participants in the story (86). The shot is an axial instant at the core of Grey's vision. The shot of which this one is but a faint echo is the shot which kills Billy. The novel begins with Billy's last words, "¿Quién es?," uttered twice, which draw Pat Garrett's bullets: "And in that moment the first shot was fired and then the second" (7). The words are repeated each time Grey's vision goes back to that instant, and are heard for the last time when the story is achieved in Billy's posthumous recollection of the moment: "He sees the two men on the porch, and he turns and enters into oblivion. '¿Quién es?' And the next moment is forever to come" (227).

Repetition not only breaks down the borders between time periods, but between life and death. A single and decisive moment in story life has,

¹⁰ The Gambler is, apparently, an indigenous figure. In *Ceremony*, he is Ck'o'yo, a medicine-man who creates the "destroyers" in a contest of powers (49-50). In Welch's *Fools Crow*, the gambler is the trickster creator, who decides whether or not man is to live forever (160). The grammatical amphibology of my phrase "their indigenous culture" is meant to refer to the Anglo as well as the Native American, for the Anglo is conceived of as one who has willfully forsaken his own founding myths for a myth of progress.

in effect, many moments in the imagination of the artist shaping it, and Grey's imagination contains the medicine of repetition which removes its wound. There is no limit to the experience that may be retrieved and healed by the magic reality of dream and vision which [re-]unites disparate things (Allen "The Sacred Hoop" 14-15).¹¹

Ceremony, then, purges the old and makes way for the new; and so it is not surprising that the typical features of ceremony are repeated within one story or from one story to another. One such feature is vomiting, which for the Native American in the Anglo world is caused by excessive drinking of the kind Tayo and his friends indulge in regularly, and which he witnessed consistently as a young boy in the bars of Gallup. Alcohol is a poison gift from the European to the Native American, but the vomit of waste which it induces is, in his own ceremonial world, a mark of healing. It carries the familiar medicinal idea of emetic purging to a fuller cleansing of man's imagination and spirit. Vomiting is an obvious mark of expelling the indigestible nutrition of Anglo culture. Set vomits uncontrollably as he and Grey near Luckachukai (276). In Linda Hogan's *Mean Spirit*, Belle Graycloud explains the Osage custom of inducing vomiting in those who have been in Anglo company: "They give her a stone cup full of the black drink. It takes out of her what the world puts in . . . Then they will gather around her and listen as she empties herself even of words" (339).

Vomiting is, then, an act of cancellation. It is also, like Billy the Kid's "¿Quién es?" a translation and restoration. "Who is there," is a linguistic bridge and invitation to a destroyer, but its repetition in Grey's test is a restorer of life. So vomiting in ceremonial context is a preliminary act to the translation, or metamorphic process known as "vision quest," the Native American's search for the latent power invested in his name – in the case of Set – or in his "power animal," like the mythical eagle who transports Tayo, or the bear of Betonie's healing-way and the mountain lion which helps Tayo retrieve the Mexican cattle.

¹¹ Jung (*Modern Man* 198) points out that "the effectiveness of art is to be found in a return to the state of *participation mystique* – to that level of experience at which it is a man who lives, and not the individual." He points out (182) that visionary experience is cloaked by both historical fact and mythological event and identifies the task of the critic to find the concealed meaning behind the "cover-figures" of a primordial vision.

Other essential repeated features of ceremony include story-telling and ritual chant. Grey's stories of Billy are part of Set's cure, and old Betonie tells Tayo stories of his grandfather. In both cases, a healer's story told unloosens the patient's story power, and the ceremony becomes, progressively, a collaboration. The ritual chant of ceremony accumulates by repetition the same words and designs into a full and complete vision. Ceremonial names, names of mountains, colors, animals, and spiritual powers are repeated a fixed number of times in order to work the magic which achieves union between the singer and the spirit his song and his dance evoke. The same words said in six different directions – the four cardinal points and up and down – have six different effects – like Grey's solemn repetition of the name "Dog," with which she invests a horse – whose earlier name when he belonged to his Anglo owner was "Murphy's Law," – with greater powers.

Silko relies heavily in *Ceremony* upon ceremonial word and phrase repetition. An obvious example is the chant that Hummingbird teaches the starving people, and which includes the four-fold repetition of:

"After four days
you will be alive" (74).

This is a partial remedy for the witchery performed on the people by the earlier fourfold repetition of whirling (144) by the Witch Gambler.¹²

More striking is the four-fold repetition of Betonie's Bear ritual chant (149-51):

en-e-e-ya-a-a-a-a!
en-e-e-ya-a-a-a-a!
en-e-e-ya-a-a-a-a!
en-e-e-ya-a-a-a-a!

The second repetition of the chant contains five lines, each of which moves Tayo along beartracks successively through five hoops. Each identical

¹² So it is among the northern Plains Blackfeet. In James Welch's *Fools Crow*, So-at-sa-ki "Feather Woman," prays to the four directions four times, to evoke the help of other residents of the landscape, in this case, cranes, to help her dig out the sacred turnip (351).

grouping of lines is followed by a different English translation which represents the meanings “accumulated” by repetition. The first is rendered:

In dangerous places you traveled
 in danger you traveled
 to a dangerous place you traveled
 in danger e-hey-ya-ah-na!

And, the last:

I'm walking home
 I'm walking back to belonging
 I'm walking home to happiness
 I'm walking back to long life.

This is incremental repetition, accumulating sense and force through repetition of the same essential words; but, only through translation into English are we able to appreciate that each identical link in a concatenation of sound means something different by the virtue of its being repeated “differently.”

The entire novel is enclosed by such a ceremonial repetition. Tayo's story begins with the single word “Sunrise” and concludes with the prayer:

Sunrise
 accept this offering,
 Sunrise.

These are Silko's frames for her story as novel, but within the story itself, Tayo rediscovers the same practice. As he prepares for his quest to retrieve the speckled cattle, he prays to the dawn:

Sunrise!
 We come at sunrise
 to greet you.
 We call you
 at sunrise.

Father of the clouds
 you are beautiful
 at sunrise.
 Sunrise!

... "Sunrise. He ended the prayer with 'sunrise' because he knew the Dawn people began and ended all their words with 'sunrise!'" (189-90).

Repetition of English words in such contexts expands their conventional Anglo semantic ranges.

These are stylistic strategies of translation, a means of drawing attention to distinct significances in different cultural *continua* of the same thing. Momaday stresses the macaronic features of language, that is, the manner in which words in one language reverberate with sense in another without translation. For example, as a boy Set is fascinated with Ursa Major and, as a man realizes the bear power signified by that constellation. To stress that "fatality" of association, stars appear throughout the novel in overt and concealed forms. The nun who directs his early schooling, and who tells him about the bee-wolves, or bears, is named Sister *Stella* Francesca. Nola Bourne, who buys the painting which seems to represent Set's own emergence as a bear, compares it to Emil Nolde's *Sternenwandler* (147). These "echo" repetitions are, if you will, macaronic mergers spanning language boundaries.

Momaday also plays with repetitions of the same word which have different senses according to their cultural context. For one example, as Grey composes her poems and stories, she drinks Earl Grey tea (164). This is an understandable coincidence, considering her name; but, the name itself bridges animal worlds as well, for *grey* in the European world is a female dog, while in the American world it is a name for a class of horses (and not surprisingly, the name she gives her new horse to translate its power, is "Dog"). Another example is the name of Set's father, Catlin Setmaunt, or "Cate." The name echoes that of George Catlin (1796-1872), the famous painter of North American Indian scenes particularly known for his portrayals of the Kiowas in the nineteenth-century (Momaday's own interest in him is evident by frequent references to Catlin's work in his autobiographical *The Way to Rainy Mountain*). Set, Catlin's son, is a painter who is moving toward redepicting Kiowa and Navajo worlds, having been cured of the Anglo disease of painting for the market. These repetitions of words whose sense in one cultural context is different from

its meaning in another, are commonplace.¹³

What I call the “Anglo disease” does not only break the natural bond between name and thing, like mountains, animals and people, but it is also the destruction of bonds between person and thing on the landscape, the forcing of arbitrary cultural as well as linguistic boundaries. Ceremony reharmonizes Set’s participation in three distinct worlds – Kiowa, Navajo and American – and Lukachukai is a mediating locus between contesting Kiowa and American values. Silko’s Tayo has a harder time of it, simply because of the pain he suffered being torn apart between worlds. He, too, is involved in two compatible native American worlds – Laguna and Navajo – and an incompatible Anglo world. Tayo is particularly sensitive to the stark contrasts between the cultural attitudes he was taught at home and those insisted upon by Anglo social institutions. Such differences are magnified by contrasts of place.

A simple example is the town of Gallup, New Mexico. It is the town where Tayo is born, and as a place between Navajo and Anglo worlds, rival cultural ideologies, it figures Tayo’s predicament. He lives there until he is five, when his mother abandons him to her family in Laguna Pueblo. When he returns to Gallup, the scenes of filth, prostitution, poverty, cruelty and decay come back to him. He remembers seeing there once the corpse of an abandoned baby, a foreshadowing of his own abandonment. What is wasting away in Gallup, on the fringes of the Navajo reservation, is the Native American’s land, culture, and self respect, all under the effects of

¹³ In *Winter in the Blood*, Welch plays similarly with his repetitions of names. His hero goes after fish without any success in the polluted Milk River, though the strange “Airplane Man” he meets in a bar insists that the river is full of fish. The allusive irony here is the fact that the Blackfeet medicine man, Fish, is the one who predicts the coming of the white man and the destruction of nature by his hands (35). In her novel, *Mean Spirit*, Linda Hogan explains the origin of one such homophonic irony. Along the “Trail of Tears” which the Cherokee marched from the Carolinas to Oklahoma, women, having no material to bind their feet, tore their dresses into strips, and in memory of that hard time, later made dresses of strips and called them “tear dresses.” In the same novel, she uses the same macaronic technique of Momaday. While the Chickasaw girl Grace Blanket is being murdered, in church the Native American congregation is singing “Amazing Grace” (12); and the Chickasaw make jokes themselves of how their *barren land* becomes *baron* land once oil is found in it (8).

Anglo self-interested exploitation of natural resources. Nonetheless, when Tayo returns to Gallup, it is to Betonie's hogan above the town, where his bonds with the land and with his people are renewed. In effect, under Betonie's guidance, Tayo is reborn, and the place of his emergence, though corrupted and decayed, is the scene of his resurgence. In short, ceremony purges the decay of the land by purging the spirit of its viewer.

That rebirth with its reconnections depends upon Tayo's realization of the values at stake on each side of cultural boundaries, including language, race, medicines and traditional privileges given to items on the landscape. His military experience in the Philippines seems to turn all of his native values concerning the landscape upside down. The jungle flies which crawl over Rocky's bleeding wounds and which carry the malarial fever which wracks his own body are not the desert flies that are venerated back home. Tayo remembers that as a boy he had once proudly displayed to Josiah all the flies he had killed in the kitchen, only to see his uncle shake his head sadly. When Tayo explained that he was taught in school that flies carry disease, Josiah told him the Laguna story of the green-bottle fly who interceded with the mother of the people to save man from drought and destruction. He took Josiah's lesson to heart then, but now in the jungle he crushes the flies that suck the wounds and sweat off his and Rocky's bodies (106-7); and later, back home, he cannot retrieve his earlier confidence and bond with the things of the desert.

So it is with other images repeated in the disparate worlds of foreign jungle and familiar desert landscape. If flies are guardians of desert life, frogs are emblems of the continuity of cyclical rebirth, but in their South Pacific context, they are grotesque harbingers of death. The late summer rain, whose essential role in the delicate balance of desert life is figured in the cactus bloom, is an agent of jungle rot, and caught between this polarity of value, Tayo cannot but believe that his prayers to stop the rain in the jungle have caused a drought in the desert (11). In trying to combat death in one place, he has caused it in another.

Even more telling is the repetition of colors in discrete contexts. The most significant color in the story is yellow. In Tayo's desert landscape, yellow is sun, corn pollen and sand. It is also the color of the mountain lion and the color associated with the direction North (Swan "Laguna Prototypes" 52). It is, most essentially, the name of the spirit woman Ts'eh

who, like Betonie, guides him in his search for the speckled cattle.¹⁴ On the other side of the coin, yellow is the skin color of the Japanese soldiers who are shot by his unit. This event is pivotal in Tayo's confusion, and it is worthwhile quoting briefly:

That was the first time Tayo had realized that the man's skin was not much different from his own. The skin. He saw the skin of the corpses again and again . . . That was the worst thing for Tayo: they looked too familiar even when they were alive. When the sergeant told them to kill all the Japanese soldiers lined up in front of the cave with their hands on their heads, Tayo could not pull the trigger. The fever made him shiver and the sweat was stinging his eyes and he couldn't see clearly; in that instant he saw Josiah standing there . . . So Tayo stood there, stiff with nausea, while they fired at the soldiers, and he watched his uncle fall, and he *knew* it was Josiah lying there. (7)

It is precisely Tayo's inability to separate the distinct values in recurring images that causes his sickness. He feels responsible for the death of Josiah as well as for the disastrous drought. So, his particular cure involves a realignment of these imagistic suggestions so that Josiah and Rocky can regain life in him; and the collective cure of his pueblo is a coordinate rainfall which comes as he retrieves Josiah's cattle.

The insistent recurrence of images in incompatible contexts represents irreconcilable cultural differences in the two worlds between which the heroes of both novels find themselves.¹⁵ The malaise is only temporary for Tayo and Set, for they are fortunate enough to undergo cures which

¹⁴ Different readers see different though compatible values in the name of Tayo's lover and guide. Ts'e is water (Rannow "Tayo, Death and Desire" 81), Yellow Woman and a feminine principle (Swan "Laguna Prototypes" 56), and with the family name she reveals – Montaña – she is water mountain, atole and sky (Lincoln *Native American Renaissance* 222f.).

¹⁵ A propos of the outlook for a better harmonization of minority and "mainstream" interests in the United States, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. ("A Pretty Good Society" 86), in commenting on the prospects of a new cultural community in America in the Clinton administration, notes that "in a day of multiculturalism, a day of rapidly changing demographics, the challenge of rebuilding the architecture of community looms larger than ever before," and hopes for a "bringing of disparate interests and values into some sort of equilibrium."

conjoin differences, and converge the best of the worlds which share their lives. Their fruitful survival depends upon not only an imaginative acceptance of difference, but overcoming it.

Betonie's medicine exemplifies this lesson. In his pharmacopoeia are old telephone books and Santa Fe calendars he keeps in his hogan. They are "the leftover things the whites didn't want" (133), repeated names and numbers, ready to be put to work to converge alien worlds. "All these things have story alive in them," he tells Tayo (127), and as stories accumulate, ceremony must change to incorporate them. "Only this growth keeps the ceremonies strong" (133). His lesson, which prepares Tayo for the healing ceremony, is that man can adjust to differences:

"Don't be so quick to call something good or bad. There are balances and harmonies always shifting, always necessary to maintain. It is very peaceful with the bears; the people say that's the reason human beings seldom return. It is a matter of transitions you see; the changing, the becoming must be prepared for closely. You would do as much for the seedlings as they become plants in the field." (137)

In effect, Betonie provides us with the ideology behind ceremonial repetition. Besides signalling rebirth, continuity and wholeness – that is, mediating *hózhó* – repetition is a means of transition, a vehicle for moving someone away from one state of being to another. It is a way of accepting and living in and between many worlds.

One way to escape the debilitating effect of the white man's culture is to take heed of its difference in order to escape it. The better way is to merge those worlds; as Grey and Betonie do, to discover and use the best of both. Since story is the pivotal feature of healing, as Momaday's Grey as well as Silko's Betonie perform it, repetition is a pivotal stylistic feature of the Native American's narrative art.

Momaday translates experience across cultural bounds by means of a narratological calque; that is, a transfer of sense from one language to another. In Paris, Set, who knows no more French than Bizet's lyrics to *Carmen* (an opera itself notorious for its curious blend of Spanish setting and French lyrics), rides in the automobile of Alais Sancerre on the way to dinner (206-7). As they drive through the rainy streets, they hear Jacques Brel on the radio singing:

Laissez-moi devenir
 L'ombre de ton ombre.
 L'ombre de ta main
 L'ombre de ton chien
 Ne me quitte pas
 Ne me quitte pas
 Ne me quitte pas
 Ne me quitte pas.

Alais translates: "He says, 'Let me become the shadow of your shadow. Don't leave me'" (for the entire song, see Clouzet *Jacques Brel* 94-6). Regardless of what Set knows of himself or understands of the song, it is a spontaneous passage between worlds, for the lyrics are not only pertinent to the sexual attraction between them which they will consummate in a few minutes, but they describe the movement toward his Kiowa heritage which is momentarily retarded. "The shadow of your dog" reflects his involvement with Grey, whose first step in drawing Set to her is the acquisition of the horse named Dog (not "dog" in the familiar Anglo sense of a domestic pet, but dog as the basic pre-horse transporter of Native American travois for people and goods).

L'ombre ('shadow') also pre-figures the last chapter of the novel – "Shadows" – in which he *becomes* his name and merges with his Kiowa mythic past. "Shadows" is also the last line of his story. It is the four-fold repetition of "*Ne me quitte pas*," however, which accomplishes the merger of time, place and language. Not only does it repeat the fourfold directional chant of ritual ceremony, but it addresses four attachments which are essential to Set at this juncture in his course toward a full being. First is his bond to his foster-father Bent, who is dying at this very moment back in San Francisco. Second is the magic of Kope'mah's medicine bundle which he must acquire to fulfill himself. Third is his natural father Cate, who lies in a grave besides Kope'mah, whose part in a legacy of Kiowa story he cannot afford to lose; and, finally, it is Grey who must not abandon her quest to complete the ceremony that will bridge his disparate worlds. Brel's voice here spans all ages and cultures. His is a universal voice as ceremony healing the breaking of barriers between beings as well as between oral and literary texts.

Silko makes the same point with sharper force into the quick of our conscience. As Tayo flees his former buddies who would kill him, he hides in an abandoned uranium mine, a poisonous legacy of the White's war

effort at the expense of the health of the pueblo and the land. He remembers the terrified wonder of people in the pueblos at the explosion of the first atomic bomb at Trinity Site, south of Laguna on White Sands. He realizes that he is now between that point and the Los Alamos laboratories where the bomb was perfected. The mountain side where Los Alamos is perched also houses a traditional sacred shrine to the twin mountain lions. Remembering all this, Tayo realizes that:

He had arrived at the point of *convergence* where the fate of all living things, and even the earth, had been laid. From the jungles of his dreaming he recognized why the Japanese voices had merged with Laguna voices, with Josiah's voice and Rocky's voice; the lines of cultures and worlds were drawn in flat dark lines on fine light sand, *converging* in the middle of witchery's final ceremonial painting. (257-8, italics mine)

The instant he sees a design in the color of the uranium ore his ceremonial cure is completed:

The gray stone was streaked with powdery yellow uranium, bright and alive as pollen; veins of sooty black formed lines with the yellow, making mountain ranges and rivers across the stone . . . He cried with the relief he felt at finally seeing the pattern, the way all stories fit together – the old stories, the war stories, their stories – to become the story that was still being told. (258)

Tayo has finally realized what Betonie had suggested is a convergence of patterns, Anglo and Native American, into one continuing story. To see both worlds in one design, or story, is to know how to hold on to what is good of both old and new.

As storytellers, Momaday and Silko, like the storytellers of the indigenous traditions which inform their art, are healers. The stylistic use of repetition is a narrative ceremonial medicine by which the trickster curandera novelist can out-trick the destroyer, the Anglo gambler who infests Native American land, body and spirit with European physical and cultural diseases. So, repetition of word and picture in story is not only a traditional practice passed down from generation to generation, but it is refashioned into a strategy of restoration and immunization. This strategy involves a controlled exposure to and use of certain tools of the enemy, including the English language and the European-styled genre of the novel. The ceremonial use of repetition is a means of converging the most

effective powers of alien and indigenous literary style.

Silko and Momaday make something new out of old patterns of expression. The repetition which is a process of making the old into something new expropriates for Native American use the power in the English word of his oppressor, simply by setting his own fresh English and changing ceremony against the worn word and stale form of the dominant literary establishment. Repetition of story and ceremony means, as well, writing Native American story into the Eurocentric genre known as "novel." It is symptomatic of Momaday's and Silko's awareness of this convergence of modes of expression that Silko's "novel" combines prose with poetry, and that Momaday's is called "A Novel" on its cover, but announces in its front matter a cast of characters. Writing is the White's tool of political oppression, and now the Native American is using it as an arm for cultural defence.¹⁶

Repeating ceremony and the story it contains and which contains it, writing is an ideological tool for cultural as well as political and spiritual survival. As Silko's ceremonial voice chants:

You don't have anything
If you don't have the stories.
. . . Their evil is mighty
but it can't stand up to our stories
. . . There is life here
for the people.

¹⁶ At the end of Erdrich's *Tracks*, the old traditionalist Ojibwa, Nanapush, decides that he must move to town and take a political and literary role in order to help his people. Michael Horse, in Hogan's *Mean Spirit*, takes to writing a correction of the Bible. When his own people ask, "Why can't you just speak it?" he replies: "They don't believe anything is true unless they see it in writing" (361).

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