1996

Authentic feminine rhetoric: A study of Leslie Silko's Laguna Indian prose and poetry

Kimberly Manning

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AUTHENTIC FEMININE RHETORIC:
A STUDY OF LESLIE SILKO'S
LAGUNA INDIAN PROSE AND POETRY

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
Kimberly Manning

March 1996
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ABSTRACT

Native American women authors have received little attention from feminist scholarship, appearing regularly in fora suitable for race or ethnicity but appearing irregularly in feminist journals, leading to the conclusion that feminism is becoming more Anglocentric in its attempt to filter through patriarchal bias. One reason for the avoidance of these texts may be due to a misunderstanding of tribal cultures, cultures that are rich with the centrality of women. Approaching a text written by an indigenous woman with the concepts of oppression or passivity is inappropriate once the power of Native American women within their tribes is recognized.

A rhetorical analysis of Laguna Pueblo writer Leslie Marmon Silko must be preceded by an understanding of her tribe, an understanding that would increase the awareness of the rhetorical conventions that she uses, for example, her use of sexual metaphors to represent a ritual connection between an individual and the power of femininity. This awareness would help to eliminate the misinterpretations of Silko’s stories; she regularly breaks generic distinctions by mixing such genres as poetry and prose and combining mythic, historical and personal material, not to reflect the psychological state of her characters as some scholars have suggested, but to produce a desired effect on her audience. The desired effect in this case is that the audience experi-
ence continuity, with continuity, according to Paula Gunn Allen, being identified as a feminine concern and cultural assumption among many tribes.

Silko's texts, *Ceremony* and *Storyteller*, provide readers access to authentic feminine writing. Silko comes from a tribe that has always been matriarchal: the primary deity at Laguna is a woman—Thought-Woman—and the centrality of women to Laguna and other tribes has been the source of much of the work produced by many Native American feminists, such as Rayna Green (Cherokee) and Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna). Mainstream feminist scholarship can benefit by understanding how Native American Women have invented, made, and defined themselves for over two-thousand years.
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FEMINISM AND NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN

In 1988, Linda L. Danielson commented on what little attention the writing of Native American women was receiving from mainstream feminist scholarship. Examining Leslie Silko's *Storyteller*, Danielson remarked how the novel seemed extremely well-suited for a feminist approach, noting the female author, the feminine deities, and the emphasis on women as tradition bearers. "But feminism is not all one thing," Danielson stated, "and an Anglocentric feminism will not get us far with *Storyteller* or any other text by an American Indian woman writer" (325).

Lisa Orr, in her article written in 1994, criticizes Charlene Spretnak for the obvious absence of indigenous women in Spretnak's essays on ecofeminist philosophy. Orr acknowledges that feminism owes a debt to tribal cultures if even some of their views on women, such as economic and policy making power has been absorbed into American culture, adding that "[a]pparently, an ethnographer's description of Iroquoian matriarchal culture 'heavily influenced Marx and the development of communism'" (147). She further recognizes some of the problems with feminist misinterpretations of the earth/woman, woman-centered cultures, stating that:

...while the Goddess is meant to be something very different from the patriarchal God, she ends up reinvoking disconnection and distance by creating yet another binary opposition. Instead of God and man over earth, we have Goddess/Earth both over and within woman and man, but with women a step closer to the Goddess....The Goddess has clearly
been imagined as a deity with an ear opened to the sound of female, not male, voices. An old-style hierarchy has been set up, cast with new players (154).

My own study for this thesis has shown that feminist scholarship on Indian women appears regularly in fora suitable for race or ethnicity--American Indian Quarterly and The Journal of Ethnic Studies to name two--but is irregularly present, one could even say rarely present, in feminist publications. Orr's statement is accurate, that American culture could benefit from the women-centered consciousness of Native American tribes. An increase in the appearance of "tribal-feminist" scholarship in feminist journals would inevitably lead to an increased awareness of a "woman's culture," a feminist concept that could finally be freed from male bias through an exploration of how Native American women have made, invented, and defined themselves for over two-thousand years. Leslie Marmon Silko enriches any study of women; her novels reflect female rhetorical conventions when the purpose, audience, and occasion are constructed and derived from the feminine concern for continuity, a concern that is manifested in ceremonies, rituals, societal beliefs and values, social organization, biological predisposition, and most importantly, in the stories, those segments of everyday life where culture is deposited. To understand Silko's work, one must understand the power of Native American women in general, and the power of women in Silko's
Laguna Pueblo tribe specifically.

This power begins with the biological capabilities to propagate the tribe, and continues into several areas that many feminists concern themselves with today: economic power, family status, and position and status reflected in the social organization of a given culture:

The role of biological necessity in communal, non-technological societies such as Indian communities has determined women’s function in a very real sense...the survival of a group’s identity depends [in part] on the production of children. (Kidwell, "Power" 115).

Ceremonial significance is validation of a woman’s role in such communal societies, with women’s biological functions being recognized at every life stage. During menstruation ("in her moon"), a woman can be separated from the rest of her tribe because of the power that surrounds her. Her isolation from the group is recognition of the force descendental on her. "In traditional communities her glance would deprive hunters of their power; her presence at certain ceremonies would anger the spirits and case them to withdraw their favors from the people." Her femininity became a physical manifestation, preparing her to bring forth new life and giving her the power to destroy the power and life forces of others (Kidwell, "Power" 115).

Menstruation is not "contamination" as Robert Lowie has suggested, nor does it prove the "universal" oppression of women as Sherry Ortner contends when she points to the
exclusion of Crow women in ceremonies during their periods (qtd. in Kidwell, "Power" 116). Menstruating women are perceived to have such power that it can cause the death of certain people (Allen, *Sacred Hoop* 253). "They emit such force that, in their presence, any male-owned or -dominated ritual or sacred object cannot do its usual task" (Allen, *Sacred Hoop* 47). Isolation or the ban from rituals is because of this power, this force that women are believed to possess.

Many important ceremonies cannot be held without the presence of women. The balance of power is central to each ritual and each may require a woman in a different life phase: virginal, tumescent, women who have borne children, or postmenopausal women may fulfill the empowering of different ceremonies (Allen, *Sacred Hoop* 47).

The Iroquois and the Cherokee had customs in place that upheld gynocentric views; for example, "they set the penalty for killing a woman of the tribe at double that for killing a man ..." (Allen, *Sacred Hoop* 32). Considering the respect and high regard the tribes held for women, and acknowledging that in killing a woman one killed the children she may have borne, one can reasonably assume that the practice of more severe consequences for killing a female was widespread and not unique to the Iroquois or Cherokee Nations (Allen, *Sacred Hoop* 32). "[T]he expectations that the society placed in the role of women to promote the physical and
cultural survival of the group" is true of many, if not all, nations. The importance of this role in terms of sheer survival and the accompanying pain and sorrow of childbearing can be seen in the attitudes of many Native American women today (Kidwell 122).

In a very real sense, the anatomical aspect of their being has been a primary determiner of behavior for Indian women, but in other aspects of life they have had greater flexibility of role behavior. The persistence of their biological function and role in society has provided a sense of security and stability in a changing Indian world, and their flexibility in adapting to other roles has been a survival factor in processes of acculturation. (Kidwell, "Power" 120).

Childbearing means empowerment in many tribes and shifts the focus of many feminists who believe that the source of oppression and domination can be traced to the biological burden of giving birth. Childbearing "was the passport to maturity and inclusion in woman-centered culture." But women could also reject, for a variety of reasons, such as a personal disinclination or upon Spirit-direction, bearing children, and they were provided other ways to achieve stabilization of the tribe and to exercise power (Allen, Sacred Hoop, 251).

As already stated, women-centered social systems tend to have greater flexibility regarding sexuality, gender roles, and expression; they are systems embracing different personalities and character types. Economically, they are based on an even distribution of goods, and as a result,
status is regarded in non-materialistic ways (Allen, Sacred Hoop 2). One of the most important areas of economic endeavors, planting, was often entirely in the realm of women. "Her pride in her contribution the larder, the basis of her central power as the giver of food and of life, not only in the domestic scene, but in the entire tribal existence sustained her in hard work" (Mathur 14).

Women-centered societies endure. Gynocentric tribes have faced hundreds of years of colonization, physical and cultural genocide, disease, poverty, loss of sovereignty and religion and still they carry a vision, a dream. Women-centered societies are spirit-centered societies (Allen, Sacred Hoop 2-3). Vine Deloria Sr., speaking from a Lakota perspective, addresses the issue of the "centrality of Indian women to the spiritual well-being of their tribes," and notes that women have the responsibility of maintaining tribal beliefs and values (Batille and Sands 18). Women are able to stabilize the tribe "through both spiritual and generative power" and have always been active decision makers (Batille and Sands 18).

From the time of contact until now, Indian women have not been spared the inferior status given to all women. American Indian women must be understood within the context of their own cultures, that much is a given. But this understanding must go beyond the usual ethnic and racial considerations and grasp the differences in patriarchy and
matriarchy as well. D'Arcy McNickle, an Indian historian, anthropologist, and novelist, estimated that "at least 70 percent" of the tribes were women centered, egalitarian, matriarchal cultures (Allen, Sacred Hoop 266).

Paula Gunn Allen contends that matriarchies can be defined as egalitarian societies. Women-centered tribes derived from matriarchal attitudes are egalitarian, relating events and experiences to one another. "This egalitarianism is reflected in the structure of American Indian literature, which does not rely on conflict, crisis, and resolution for organization..." (Allen, Sacred Hoop 59). In contrast, patriarchy is an organization of life that depends on hierarchies for the structuring of social systems, life forms, and experiences and holds a belief in binary opposition:

[O]ne could say there are certain major value themes still widely held by most Native American people, regardless of their tribal identities: the values of cooperation, of cohesiveness, of concern for others, and of scorn toward egotistical or self-seeking behavior on the part of one as against the group. In short, Native American culture is largely collegial or circular as contrasted with non-Indian organizational structures which tend to be hierarchal (Miller 37).

Allen's claims that matriarchies are egalitarian are further supported by Eleanor Leacock. Leacock examines what is still valid in Engle's perceptions of women's past, claiming that "matriarchy" actually refers to a matrilineal social structure. "Therefore, a matriarchy, defined as the class power of women, never existed because power as such
was not a component of egalitarian society" (Webster 146). Paula Webster, using Leacock’s work in her article that seeks to identify and define matriarchy, admits early on that her search was misguided by the notion that matriarchies would be the gender-opposite of patriarchies; that is, maintaining a hierarchal structure where women have power and authority over men. "We did not expect that hierarchy itself would have to be eliminated..." (Webster 142). She ends her essay by calling for a redefinition of terms such as egalitarian, a redefining that will stretch cross-culturally and be free of male bias at the same time. In other words, Native American women don’t have power over men; they simply have power because they are women.

This study of power can be seen in the differences between feminism as it has been popularly applied, and the values American Indian women have maintained for themselves. Rayna Green, a Cherokee feminist, agrees with Allen that studying Native American women as objects of oppression is inappropriate, and she further acknowledges the contradiction, that while most feminists are calling for change, tribal women desire a return to tradition, reaffirming the notion that traditional roles means something quite different for Native and Euroamerican women (Krumholz 99).

In an interdisciplinary review of work done on Native American women, Green states that:

[t]he increasing amount of work on female-centered
symbolic systems in language and myth received
decent treatment in the forties in anthropological
and folkloric studies, though such useful work
never attracted the attention that matriarchy and
puberty ceremonies drew. (253)

Her comment is useful, urging scholars to expand their study
of women’s roles, but what she neglects mentioning is that
many of the studies done on matriarchies and puberty rites
were erroneous and distorted because those conducting the
studies approached their subjects from a male-centered view.

Often the absence of Indian women in the women’s move­
ment has been noted as their disconnection and disinterest
in liberation, noting as well the lack of female leadership
in the American Indian Movement and the reluctance by
Indian women to attend consciousness-raising sessions (Kid­
well, "Power" 116). When a leader is defined as an agent of
change, as someone who uses her power for the good of her
community, then Native American women have always been
leaders. Of course, we realize that twenty years after
Clara Sue Kidwell addressed this issue that liberation has
different meanings. But as she realized then, while middle­
class, white women are lamenting their roles as women-wife­
mother, precisely within those roles indigenous women are
 accorded respect and power (Kidwell 117).

Allen also counters the idea that American Indian women
have been uninvolved. "Like our sisters who resist in other
ways, we Indian women who write have articulated and ren­
dered the experience of being in a state of war for over
five hundred years" (Allen, Granddaughters 2). Clearly, resistance can take on many forms.

Edith Blicksilver contends that although Indian women may not be liberated according to the modern standard (meaning white) they at least know their own worth; but Blicksilver goes on to assert that "[t]he woman's role as wife and mother changed when her man no longer had freedom of movement, challenge, or self-determination in his life" (153). With women placed at the center of society, it is doubtful that their roles changed only in response to changing male roles.

A debate continues over which gender can better adapt to change after colonization. Some claim women had a smoother transition because their roles centered around family and the household and had supposedly changed little as compared to men who had lost their basic ways of life, mostly hunting and war. This theory is incorrect. Women are given reverence because of their ability to continue the People, to create, to sustain, and to transmit culture. Watching the dissolution of the tribe, witnessing the physical and cultural genocide taking place, having their children taken from them and carted off to evangelical Christian boarding schools to "kill the Indian to save the man," as General Sherman notoriously stated, could be nothing short of emotionally devastating, simultaneously displacing their identities within their cultures.
I do not mean to suggest that men had an easier time of coping. Genders are complimentary forces in Native American cultures; when one force is threatened and in danger, so is the other. Balance and harmony depend on each force realizing their full power, self-worth, and place within the tribe and all of creation. Clearly, women needed to devise survival strategies for extreme circumstances if they were to fulfill their valued positions.

After the destruction of the tribal life, after the death of nearly all the warriors, after the strength of the people had been spent, Native American women emerged to deal with the horrible realities of life. They sold and traded whatever they had to keep their people alive. Many were taken as "squaws" by traders, trappers, and military men. They endured slavery, abuse, scorn and outrage. They nursed and preserved their half-breed children and fed their people whenever they could. (Miller 38).

One survival strategy sustaining women for hundreds of years was, and still is, storytelling. Literature has become a major form of resistance for Native American women, and resistance for these women means continuance. The stories, the ceremonies, have been there since time immemorial, but since contact rhetorical considerations changed and purpose and audience had to be re-visioned. When Native American women tell their own stories, a contradiction to the stereotypical oppressed, subservient, and inferior woman is revealed. Through the literatures, the complimentary nature of gender-as-life-forces achieves clarity (Kidwell 122). Women are continuity. "The American Indian woman has
been the tie that bound her people together, sometimes transmitting her culture through song and story from generation to generation" (Blicksilver 149).
THE ORAL TRADITION AS CONTINUANCE

In creation myths and in the storytelling tradition, women have been repositories and transmitters of culture...American Indian women's literature covers a whole gamut of experiential and emotional landscapes: the interrelationship between traditional values and new lifestyles, the development of the artist, the difficult and complicated relationship with feminism and white women's organizations. The sense of wholeness, which women represent metaphorically or in recurring images...speaks of continuity, self-definition, and universal cosmologies as opposed to cultural disintegration. (Coltelli 5)

The oral tradition has managed to prevent the complete destruction of tribal identity. The stories are able to hold connections to the past while adapting to present circumstances (Allen, Sacred Hoop 45). In some ways, the oral tradition reflects the flexibility seen in gynocentric social structures. The oral tradition is fluid; it records and transmits culture and can adapt to changing circumstances of people's lives, which can also render it vulnerable to racist, sexist, and classist assumptions by shaping a people's consciousness when elements of oppression are allowed to enter the stories, barely noticed (Allen, Sacred Hoop 224).

Perhaps the best demonstration of the efficacy of colonization and how feminism can be mis-applied to Native American literatures can be seen in the story of Kochinnenako.

Paula Allen does an in-depth analysis of Kochinnenako in The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American
Indian Traditions, juxtaposing feminist and tribal-feminist interpretations of the same story.

Kochinnenako is the daughter of the ruler, Hut-cha-mun Ki-uk, and she is married to Sh-ah-cock, the spirit of winter, who manifests his presence in blizzards, snow, sleet, and freezing cold. Because of her alliance to him, crops in her village won't grow or mature. One day she is out gathering cactus and happens across a handsome stranger, dressed in green and yellow and who lives in the south. He gives her some corn, tells her how beautiful his home is, and asks her to return with him. She can't go, she tells him, because she is married to Sh-ah-cock, although she admits he is cold, disagreeable, and that she does not love him. The stranger cautions her when she leaves not to throw away the husks from the corn, and they agree to meet again the next day. Upon returning home, Kochinnenako tells her story to her father, who knows the identity of the stranger—it is Mi-o-chin, the spirit of summer, and her father urges her to bring him home with her.

Mi-o-chin returns to her village the next day and the people are very happy. Everyone was happy until Sh-ah-cock returned home to find Mi-o-chin. The two forces did not fight that night, but went and collected their powers. A great battle began, and finally, Sh-ah-cock admitted defeat. He agreed to turn the village over to Mi-o-chin. Later, the two spirits agreed to share ruling the village, each would
govern a half-year.

A modern feminist interpretation of this story could assume that it is about male power, and that Kochinnenako is a passive pawn, submissive to her husband even though he is perhaps cruel, and one could even speculate that she is so submissive that when given the chance to escape, she does not do so. A tribal-feminist perspective would see Kochinnenako's marriage to Sh-ah-cock as a ritual connection; she is the agency through which the transference of power is taking place, because of her winter and summer have assumed harmonious positions in the village; she, as a woman, is at the center of "...harmonizing spiritual relationships between the people and the rest of the universe by empowering ritual activities..." (Allen, Sacred Hoop 239).

I acknowledge that this brief summary does not do Allen's work justice, but it does illustrate the necessity of having an awareness of the position and esteem of Native American women within their own cultures in general and that feminist interpretations of tribal literatures must be accompanied by this awareness to insure accuracy. It also points out the need to have familiarity with the particular tribe of the author being discussed.

The preceding version of Kochinnenako is John Gunn's version, and shows what happens when a Euroamerican, patriarchal vision blurs tribal stories. A woman versed in Keres traditions will listen to the story for information about
the people. She will know the symbolism of the colors white, green, and yellow; she will know that "married" means ritually connected; she will know of the sacred places where the spirits live, and she will know that something odd is happening in the Gunn rendition. She will know that the Laguna people don't have rulers and that the ruler-father and ensuing male conflict (Lagunas are passivists) and heroic implications have skewed the focus from women at the center of ritual to males in primacy positions. The feminist interpretation of the Kochinnenako tale is valid because Gunn's version is patriarchally slanted. But the tribal-feminist interpretation is much more accurate because it focuses on the power of a woman and woman as agency rather than powerlessness, objectification, and oppression. Knowledge of Laguna would filter through the patriarchal bias of the story and allow the reader to understand that what is important are the values of "harmony, balance, and the centrality of woman to maintain them..." (Allen, Sacred Hoop 234). "If we are to grasp the social and symbolic significance of the feminine in Native American writing, then Western presumptions must be set aside so that they do not adversely bias or manipulate tribal structure of meaning" (Swan 309).

Knowledge about social structures, values, and cosmology, having an understanding of the people's relationship to the land, and knowing how humor is functioning in a society,
which, by the way, is one of the most overlooked aspects of Native American life, enriches explication of any text, but for Native American women this knowledge is necessary for a more accurate analysis of their roles and the rhetoric they use to articulate their experiences.

The oral tradition is a powerful force. One of its strengths is that it can survive cultural transference and misinterpretations.

[The stories remain and strengthen the fabric of the people’s lives, like fragments from old pots remain and strengthen new ones. Storytellers, in the way of the Pueblo potters, take those story-herds, grind and mix them into new contexts. They shape the fragments of the old stories into new stories, strong yet part of all that has gone before. (Allen, "Voice" 25)]

Stories, whether written or told, embody the essence of continuity. But continuity is reflected in several ways within Native American tribes, including the social sphere.

At Silko’s Laguna Pueblo, the clan system is the organizational means of social structure and provides further evidence of the connection between women and continuance and emphasizes the centrality of women. Women are at the center of the social sphere at Laguna because of the clan system, but men can access lines of authority through the female line. Clan names come from the natural environment and most clans are given one of the four cardinal directions, thus weaving a continuous "systematic framework of symbolic representations, the matri-clans [link] social customs to
land, nature, and gender, while knitting the individual into ontology by acknowledging a common source for all existence (Swan 315).

Women's traditions and rituals also embrace continuance and can be found in the oral tradition which "expresses the idea that ritual is gender-based, but rather than acting as a purely divisive structure, the separation by gender emphasizes complimentarity" (Allen, Sacred Hoop 80). Women's rituals and stories center on the maintenance of life and are mostly about continuity. Men's traditions are centered on transitoriness or change (Allen, Sacred Hoop 82). Transformation and continuance are the common themes in Native American novels, not conflict and resolution (Allen, Sacred Hoop 101).

Imagination plays a large role in shaping new dimensions from the old and merging stories from the past with the present, continually changing the structural dynamics, "ever the same in their unending continuity in tradition" (Coltelli 2). The narrative structure generally avoids a linear design and instead takes the form of a circular progression, operating more as an ongoing concept, resolutionless rather than resolved.
Leslie Marmon Silko

Leslie Silko has made significant contributions to the continuance of her nation. She has devastated the stereotypical notions of Indian women by providing a general audience access to an authentic text by a Native American. Emerging as an eloquent voice for her people, steeped in folkloric traditions, she has provided modern and traditional levels of interpretation for future generations (Blicksilver 159). She was born in Albuquerque in 1948 of mixed ancestry—Laguna, Mexican, and white. An educated woman, she embarked first on a legal career but abandoned that for writing.

Her earliest childhood memories are of hearing the stories. As she grew up, she became more and more familiar with the rich tribal stories and cultural lore of the Laguna people. Her grandmother Lillie and her Aunt Susie had "a deep influence on Silko, passing down to her an entire culture by word of mouth" (Coltelli 135). Silko denies that she started writing to preserve stories. She has said:

Writing down a story, even tape recording stories doesn't save them in the sense of saving their life within a community. Stories stay alive within the community like the Laguna Pueblo because the stories have a life of their own. (Barnes 88)

Silko was awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities Discovery Grant after her first short story, "The Man to Send Rainclouds," was published. While she was teaching in Ketchikan, Alaska, she wrote her first novel, Ceremony.
She now lives near Tucson on a mountain covered with saguaro. A small coral stands near the house, her two dogs bear the scars of coyote bites, and she occasionally stuffs newspapers under the back door to keep snakes out (Coltelli 136).

Not far from Laguna, is "the largest open pit uranium mine in existence, the Jackpile Mine near Paguate on Laguna land and the deepest uranium mine shaft, sunk into Mt. Taylor, a mountain northwest of Laguna, which is sacred to Navajo and the Pueblo people" (Seyersted 12).

At Laguna Pueblo, genders range freely; children range freely, "men and women range freely" and "the division of labor... is much more flexible [than Anglocentric cultures]" (Barnes 92). This flexibility is often seen in Silko's work, particularly in Ceremony where Tayo, a male character, experiences movement toward feminization, a move that restores harmony and balance.
CEREMONY

Ceremony is a novel about a WWII veteran’s "quest for sanity and [Silko] makes him achieve it through reopening the life line to the constructive elements in his roots" (Seyersted 26). It is a novel about tradition and change and how those seemingly difference concepts can be harmonized and balanced. The characters are living representations of the old ways and new forces. Tayo, the novel’s protagonist, is a mixed-blood, part white, part Laguna. He belongs on the one hand to the colonizing group, and on the other hand to the people who have been colonized. As the novel begins, he hasn’t found a place in either world, experiencing distance, isolation, and hostility from both cultures. Tayo’s mother abandoned him and his "Auntie," his mother’s sister, is ashamed of him because his illegitimacy offends her Catholic sensitivities. Auntie is a character who manifests the effects of colonization.

Other characters are also consumed with white ways and are disconnected from their pasts and Indian heritage. Tayo’s grandmother and his Uncle Josiah are his familial sources of tribal ways. From them, the stories of Laguna culture become a part of Tayo’s existence. The ceremony of the title centers on Tayo and is necessary because of his illness, diagnosed as battle fatigue by Euroamerican doctors but as witchery by Betonie, a Navajo medicine man. Through an ensemble of women, Tayo begins to reconnect to the land.
He learns his place in things, and as Allen has said, he learns "motherhood": the importance of nurturing, sustaining, and continuing life (qtd. in Swan 318). Tayo is ritually connected to the earth, the mother, continuity through two women, Night Swan and Ts’eh. Balance and harmony are restored; his isolation from the tribe deteriorates. "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" (Allen, "Landscape" 127).

The story begins:

Thought-Woman, the spider
named things and
as she named them
they appeared.

She is sitting in her room
thinking of a story now

I’m telling you the story she is thinking (1).

Thought-Woman is the primary deity at Laguna; she is also called Spider-Woman, the thinker, the creator of the Laguna people. Her name does not imply "She Who Bears," which would deny, limit, and oversimplify the power of "femininity." She is central to Keres cosmology as "She Who Thinks," and the Keres people understand that reality, material and non-material, originates with female thought (Allen, Sacred Hoop 15).

Thought-Woman is not passive; her potential is dynamic
and powerful. She brought:

- corn and agriculture, potting, weaving, social systems, religion, ceremony, ritual, building, memory, intuition, and their expressions in language... and blessed the people with the ability to provide for themselves and their progeny. (Allen, *Sacred Hoop* 15)

When attention shifts from the transitory, the male, to continuance, the female, the People are fated to endure rather than face extinction (Allen, *Sacred Hoop* 267).

Thought-Woman is the supreme spirit; her thought is in everything: corn, tamaracks, willows, antelope, women, and men. She is powerfully (in an empowering way) connected to mothering, but not simplisticly as the power to give birth but as the more encompassing power to make, create, balance, harmonize, and transform (Allen, *Sacred Hoop* 29).

The relationship of Thought-Woman to stories and stories to continuity can be seen on pages 2-3:

**Ceremony**

I will tell you something about stories, [he said]

They aren't just entertainment
Don't be fooled.
They are all we have, you see,
almost we have to fight off
illness and death.

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.
So they try to destroy the stories
let the stories be confused or forgotten.
They would like that
They would be happy
Because we would be defenseless then.
He rubbed his belly.
I keep them here
[he said]
Here, put your hand on it
See, it is moving,
There is life here
for the people.

And in the belly of this story
the rituals and the ceremony
are still growing.

What She Said:
The only cure
I know
is a good ceremony,
that's what she said.

Silko’s Indian audience is aware that the stories have always been more than entertainment. A non-Indian audience is immediately initiated into how powerful the stories are to cultural endurance. The rhetoric used in these poems demonstrates resistance to oppression: "They are all we have/to fight off/illness and death," and that without the stories the people are defenseless.

Feminists and others will notice that the power behind the creation of a story comes from a woman, Thought-Woman, and that the male speaker of the poem keeps the stories in a metaphorical womb, linking the biological qualities of women to stories, both sharing the importance of continuance. The stories are the people’s defense against destruction as women are the tribe’s defense against extinction. The feminine speaker acknowledges that a ceremony is the only cure (ostensibly for Tayo) and as already established, women
are the agency through which transformation takes place. The transformation in Tayo's case is the movement from a diseased state (despair) to a condition of wholeness and harmony. Because *Ceremony* is a Native American text, one can reasonably anticipate that the feminine will be an active player.

The text is based on the mythic narrative paradigm, which:

in their New World variations on the hero-quest pattern--the worldwide "monomyth" of separation, initiation, and return--most American ceremonial myths provide a hero or heroine who gets into a series of predicaments or suffers injuries (usually transformations in mind and body) that require supernatural aid. (Bell 47)

*Ceremony* is written to mirror the characteristics of the oral tradition, which by its very nature is adaptable to change while allowing core beliefs and values to continue. "In the telling, stories at once teach survival and demonstrate it" (Evers 71). One of the problems with writing, Bernard A. Hirsh has said, is that "it is static; it freezes words in space and time. It does not allow the living story to change and grow, as does the oral tradition" (1). But Silko counteracts the finite nature of writing by the way she structures her book. The circular design of *Ceremony* is characteristic of the oral tradition; the merging of past and present, and the historical, mythical, mystical, and cultural levels are a part of the same thought, as one holds many thoughts together at one time, rather than having
distinct categorizations (Hirsch 2).

This is a novel that challenges audiences to "expand and merge" their cultural frameworks and at the same time serve as an instructional tool (Ruppert 78). Stories are in part where lessons come from, where the values of a culture are passed on while demonstrating to an individual how to live within the group. When Josiah tells Tayo the story of the greenbottle fly, Silko frames the occurrence so that Indian and Anglo audiences are aware of the importance of continuity and its relationship to storytelling.

Josiah comes in from outside and asks Tayo what he is doing. Tayo proudly points to a pile of dead flies on the kitchen floor:

Josiah looked at them and shook his head. "But our teacher said so. She said they are bad and carry sickness."

"Well, I didn't go to school much, so I don't know about that but you see, long time ago, way back in the time immemorial, the mother of the people got angry at them for they way they were behaving. For all she cared, they could go to hell--starve to death. The animals disappeared, the plants disappeared, and no rain came for a long time. It was the greenbottle fly who went to her, asking forgiveness for the people. Since that time the people have been grateful for what the fly did for us."

Tayo let the willow switch slide out of his hand. He stared at it on the floor by his feet. "What will happen now?" he asked in a choked voice.

"I think it will be okay," Josiah said, poking at the dead flies with the toe of his boot. "None of them were greenbottle flies--only some of his cousins. People make mistakes. The flies know that. That's how the greenbottle fly first came
around anyway. To help the people who had made some mistakes." He hugged the boy close. "Next time, just remember the story." (101-02)

The different cultural perspectives of a white teacher compared to the Laguna uncle are apparent to Indian and non-Indian audiences; both audiences can see how mythic qualities have connections to modern day life (drought and the disappearance of plants and animals is exactly the predicament Tayo later finds himself in); and they can also see how culture is transmitted through stories and the importance of those stories continuing from Josiah's last words and loving reminder; "He hugged the boy close. 'Next time just remember the story’" (102).
FORM AND CONTINUITY

Silko has carefully constructed her novel to embody continuity in its structure. No chapter divisions exist, and "[p]erhaps the most immediate way the reader sees its uniqueness is in its form. Ceremony merges what we call poetry and prose" (Ruppert 78). The novel proceeds as one continuous story: boundaries of time—past and present—disappear; myths material, presented in poetic form, is interwoven into the text rather than separated or made distinct by dividing myth into one section and Tayo's quest into another. The mythical content of the poems is not separated from the main story. And although Mary Slowick sees the "god’s tales" (presumably myth) which appear in the form of poetry as interruptions, "Silko says that ideally these sections should be heard, not read, so that they approximate the position of a listener before the storyteller" (108 emphasis mine; Ruppert 78). Without chapter breaks "[a]s the prose flows continuously from beginning to end, the reader is encouraged to perceive the novel as one unified experience" (Ruppert 80).

James Ruppert sees the formal structure of Ceremony as an expression of the novel's thematic content and that one obvious explanation for the merging of different genres is that the narrative structure reflects the psychological state of Tayo: fragmented and shattered (Ruppert 80). But if readers accept what is said in the poem on page two of
Ceremony, that the stories are the culture's defense against
destruction and insure continuity of the people, along with
the knowledge that the novel is a ceremony as well as a
story, then what the novel more appropriately reflects is
the ceremonial process. "In the telling, stories at once
teach survival and demonstrate it" (Evers 71); therefore,
Silko is engaging in a conscious rhetorical strategy; sto-
ries are continuance; this story is continuous; this is what
continuity does and how it feels. She teaches the impor-
tance of continuity because it is survival, at the same time
demonstrating what continuity is. The continuous form
reflects more the purpose of stories than it does thematic
content:

The structure of tribal narratives, at least in
their native language forms, is quite unlike that
of western fiction; it is not tied to any particu-
lar time line, main character, or event. It is
tied to a particular point of view—that of the
tribe's tradition—and to a specific idea—that of
the ritual tradition and accompanying perspective
that informs the narrative. (Allen, Sacred Hoop
79)

Patterns that emerge in the rhetorical structuring of
most rituals are designed, not to imitate a particular state
of mind, but to produce a desired effect on the conscious-
ness of the participants (Allen, Sacred Hoop 63). Tayo's
quest for "motherhood," with motherhood equalling contin-
unity, is embraced by the form, which demonstrates and pro-
vides the experience of continuance.

Ruppert has it half-right—that the form reflects
Tayo’s thoughts, but the form is more representative of what Tayo is learning than of what he is thinking.

What Leslie does is interesting. She writes a novel all about the feminization of a male. That’s really what it’s about. And the ideal for a Laguna or an Acoma male is that he learn how to be a woman. That’s because at those pueblos God is a woman... What matters is that the people stay, and that we all live. That’s what’s important. And that the land be healthy so she can bear... Once again she pulls Tayo, the protagonist, back into the tradition... he always moves in the direction of Pueblo manhood, which is to walk in balance in a mothering sense or, shall I say the feminine sense. Not that he’s got to wear skirts and lipstick, but that he has to learn how to nurture, how to be a mother... (Coltelli 21)

Silko draws on her own tribal traditions to present her novel. When Laura Coltelli asked Allen if she perceives any difference in the way characters, themes, and events are developed in the writings of American Indian male and female authors, Allen responded by saying that both genders will be drawing from tribal traditions. But Allen went on to say that because the tribes have always been ritualistically sex segregated, and that many rituals are gender specific, that women will draw from one set of symbols and narrative structures and men from another. Allen also sees some similarities in theme: spirituality, land, family, and tribe, but that the writer’s preoccupations with these themes shows a very real difference, with these differing preoccupations and perspectives showing up in the structures as well as in the content (Coltelli 15-16).

The women are really good at dealing with continu
ance, at holding on. The men are better at deal-
ing with war and death. But that's because the
men's traditions are about war and death and wo-
men's traditions are about continuance. (Coltelli
19).

Silko constructs the narrative to resemble the ritual
tradition that she is most connected to—continuity. It is
almost too Euroamerican, too male-centered to believe that
the entire novel, with its avoidance of chapter divisions
and genre distinctions, has been constructed to reveal the
psychological state of the male protagonist. More compati-
ble to Silko is the idea that she has drawn on her woman-
centered perspectives to present the tradition of continu-
ance.

Silko's words energize by granting form, sub-
stance, and worth in a way consistent with basic
Laguna ideology... [she] taps Spider Woman's vivi-
fyng principles of articulation: Silko becomes
Her voice, Her storyteller, following her tech-
niques. (Swan 310)

Clearly, the form embodies continuance.
"Tayo's initiation into motherhood--his rite of passage--is encoded in his interactions and indoctrination by two women, Night Swan and Ts'eh" (Swan 318). They are the women, who, through their liaisons with Tayo ritually connect him to the spirit of endurance. His healing depends on restoring harmony and balance, and to repeat what Coltelli espouses, women are metaphorical representations of such a unity. Tayo's sexual encounters with these women, much as Kochinnenako's "marriage" to winter, are also metaphorical representations, symbolizing a ritual connection to the spirit of what each woman represents. Night Swan and Ts'eh are what Robert M. Nelson describes as "... an ensemble of generative powers..." (286).

Night Swan is Josiah's lover. Tayo's sexual experience with her occurs when Josiah asks him to deliver a note; the rain has come to the fields and Josiah is now too busy to drive her to Grants.

He watched her read the note and wondered what she kept behind the curtains. He could feel something back there, something of her life which he could not explain... [s]he did not look old or young to him then; she was like the rain and the wind; age had no relation to her... He dreamed it again and again, sinking and rolling with the light blue sheets twisted around his thighs and ankles, and the excitement of wet smells of rain, and their sweat... "I have been watching you a long time, she said... You don't have to understand what is happening. But remember this day. You will recognize it later. You are a part of it now." (98-100)
A non-Indian audience, although they may be unsure of Night Swan's role, will be aware that something is happening, something that Tayo does not understand himself. Rhetorically, Night Swan is a preparation device for what is to come later, namely Ts'eh and the successful completion of the ceremony. Night Swan is aware that Tayo cannot comprehend his pathway to feminization quite yet, just as Silko understands that her audience is not yet ready to comprehend it. Tayo wonders what is behind the curtains (mystery/femininity) and knows that there is something about her life that he does not yet have knowledge of. Silko's use of sensual detail provides an experiential atmosphere to the ceremony; and Night Swan's words, "remember this later" are a cue to the audience to anticipate a coming occurrence.

Night Swan also instructs Tayo, and readers, on the nature of change, that recognizing and accepting it is an important component of Indian continuance and survival. Tayo, the mixed-blood, tells her that he wished he had dark eyes, that kids used to tease him, and, because of his eyes, the people around him remember things.

"They are afraid Tayo. They feel something happening, they can see something happening around them and it scares them. Indians or Mexicans or whites--most people are afraid of change... They are fools. They blame us, the ones who look different. That way they don't have to think about what has happened inside themselves." (99-100)

Night Swan is Tayo's connection to the exterior forces of change and the inner holdings of tradition. She is at
the center, through her each force passes; she knows how to handle change and continuance and we are willing to accept her opinions or risk being "fools." She also foreshadows Ts'eh, the woman who finalizes Tayo's feminization.
Yellow is the color connected to women at Laguna and there can be no doubt that Ts’eh is Yellow Woman, the mythical heroine of cultural lore. She is the maternal source of the Antelope clan and "the personage Allen considers to be an ultimate 'role model... she is, one might say, the spirit woman'" (Swan 320). Ts’eh is Tayo’s connection to this spirit, a spirit that is inseparable from the land.

Tayo, having "been prepared by his reencounter with a form of the spirit he seeks to reestablish in himself" (Nelson 293), finds Ts’eh after following the trail she has left for him. She reminds him of an antelope; her eyes and cheekbones slant upwards like an "antelope dancer’s mask" (Nelson 293).

Ts’eh’s ties to the land are extremely important in Tayo’s quest.

We are the land, and the land is mother to us all. There is not a symbol in the tale [Ceremony] that is not in some way connected with womaness, that does not in some way relate back to Ts’eh and through her to the universal feminine principle of creation... (Allen, "Landscape" 127)

Everything about Ts’eh is washed in yellow and everything about Tayo becomes yellow after he is with her. She wears a yellow skirt and Tayo first glimpses her standing under an apricot tree. She feeds him chili with dried corn. "Corn codifies the origin, maintenance, and blessings of life; it represents sustenance and becomes a critical at
tribute connoting the essence of matriliny and the matrix—it symbolizes above all the feminine" (Swan 319).

Silko repeats the sexual metaphor to signify Tayo's unity to the spirit of the land: "He dreamed he made love with her there. He felt the warm sand on his toes and knees; he felt her body, and it was warm as the sand, and he couldn't feel where her body ended and the sand began" (232). Tayo is unable to differentiate Ts'eh from the earth. "As though to confirm that Tayo's identification of the woman with the land itself is crucial to the efficacy of the broader ceremony, their lovemaking leads to a 'continuous' 'uninterrupted' dream" (Nelson 292).

Silko uses the words "continuous" and "uninterrupted" consciously, now, in the novel. As when Thought-Woman names things they become a reality, the audience's increasing awareness about the connection between the feminine and continuance becomes a reality. The community of participants in the ceremony can now name what has been experienced.

Tayo learns about roots and plants from Ts'eh, and later when he cries it is because she loves him so much. "[She] is grounded and enduring: through her Tayo comprehends the sacred reality that the tribe embodies. She is the source, the female fulcrum of this gynocratic system" (Swan 324).

Tayo's metamorphosis occurs when his urine changes
color. "His color symbolism switches from white (father) to yellow (mother) as he takes on qualities of his maternal blood in the process of assuming his tribal identity" (Swan 310). Earlier in the novel, after Tayo gets into a bar fight with his buddy Emo,

his urine has no color but yellow surrounds his body: "The yellow stained walls were at the far end of the long tunnel between him and the world... He looked down at the stream of urine; it wasn’t yellow but clear like water. (Swan 58)

Once he has absorbed Ts’eh and all that she symbolizes, Tayo changes to a "yellow person;" "he pissed a yellow steaming slash through the snow" (214). The words of Night Swan are now powerfully familiar, that change is an inner condition more than an external force. Tayo’s transformation is complete. The ceremony has transformed one state of being into another.

What Tayo recovers from Mt. Taylor, where Ts’eh lives, what he takes away from that place,

is a fragile but powerful web work of vision in which his revitalized relationship to the land on the one hand and to the spirit of that land on the other are constellated so as to function as metaphors for one another without distortion of either the natural shape of the land or the necessary patterns of the ceremonies attached to it. (Nelson 299)

The novel ends as it began, at the time of sunrise, dawn, renewal.
STORYTELLER

Silko’s concern with continuity is also primary in Storyteller. The formal structuring, as in Ceremony, supports the content by avoiding divisions and chapters; the construction of the subject matter is again centered on continuance. Silko has said that:

... the structure of Pueblo expression resembles something like a spider web—with many little threads radiating from a center, criss-crossing each other. As with the web, the structure will emerge as it is made, you must simply listen and trust, as the Pueblo people do, the meaning will be made. (qtd. in Danielson 332)

Silko remains true to the literary conventions of her People, rejecting the postcolonial, Euroamerican traditions that she is familiar with. She uses as some of her devices, structural and thematic elements to affirm the "woman-centered cosmos to which she belongs" (Danielson 332). She has absorbed the oral tradition and is steeped in the rhetorical issues of purpose, audience, and occasion, recognizing a creative community that "... consists of listeners as well as artists or tellers... a great deal of the story is said to be inside the listener, and the storyteller’s role is to draw the story out of the listener" (Danielson 330). Silko’s denial of authorship in Storyteller, "constitutes a feminist stance" (Danielson 331) as that term is understood at Laguna—loyalty to family and tribe, the continuity of culture, and storytelling are essentially communal concerns, with Silko acting as the tie that binds
her people together. According to the Laguna world view, Silko is the ultimate feminist and will probably serve as a role model for the young women and men of her tribe in the near future.

Her writing is her resistance to a colonized world. Allen sees all Native American women as fighting a war; "Like our sisters who resist in other ways, we Indian women who write have articulated and rendered the experience of being in a state of war for five hundred years" (Allen, Granddaughters 2). Storyteller is powerful resistance, furthering the centrality of women and their connection, their preoccupation with continuance.

Linda Danielson has identified the structure of Storyteller as that of a web, continuous and connected, with various thematic clusters constituting the radiating spokes of the web. The first cluster uses literal and literary grandmothers, and by placing them first Silko suggests that they are the source of continuance, with the theme in this section centering on "...the old people as a source of survival information, as a way of being, of creating oneself and the world" (334). In this cluster, Silko gives credit to her Grandma Am’ooh and Aunt Susie for passing down the culture with stories.

The next cluster, or "radiating filament" (Danielson 336), is the Yellow Woman sequence. "In this [section], Silko reclaims the creative and instrumental power of this
Everywoman figure of Keresan mythology from the colonized and trivial figure we often see in modern anthropological documents" (Danielson 336). Appearing in this section are other Yellow Woman stories, along with Silko's personal hunting stories, signifying free-ranging gender roles in the social sphere and affirming Yellow Woman's ceremonial agency (Danielson 338).

"With the next strand of Grandmother Spider's web, Silko moves away from her examination of the roles of men and women in society and toward the relations of all living beings within a harmonious universe" (Danielson 340). She establishes that continuation is dependent upon the relationship of human beings to the deities being practically and spiritually created.

At the physical center of the book is the witchcraft section, representing the dark side of existence and demonstrating what can happen when a "selfish individualist abuses power" (Danielson 342). However, this dark side is also where Grandmother Spider lives because that is where the People need her help. Two of the three narratives in which Grandmother Spider appears are in the witchcraft section of Storyteller (Danielson 340).

The next strand embraces water and fertility and almost speaks for itself on the importance of this section to the scheme of continuity. Water in the arid southwest is powerful and sacred. Fertility is the biological focus of women
as tribal progenitors. Laterally connected to this strand is "The Man to Send Rainclouds," a story that develops the ideas of community, loving, separation, loss, return, taking, and giving. The lateral connection extends to the Coyote section, linking "The Man to Send Rainclouds" to humor.

Coyote, a spirit of over-indulgence and disorder, assures the continuance of life as much as Grandmother Spider:

Whereas the preceding section of Storyteller looked to love and ceremonial interchange to reveal a wholeness and balance, the Coyote section suggests that out of chaos, exaggeration, the improper and the silly, the unlovely and the diverse come creativity and the possibility of a new synthesis, a new balance. (Danielson 350)

The stories in this section are humorous, and "teaching and laughter assume that life will continue. The people will survive" (Danielson 350).

These various clusters in Storyteller can be identified as the essential phases of continuity; they are not separate or divided phases but connected and unified. Survival, Yellow Woman, spirituality, witchcraft, water/fertility, and Coyote/humor are definitions of endurance when considered as a whole, and the web, one continuous structure holding them together, as one holds many thoughts together at one time.

Perhaps one of the most intriguing aspects of Storyteller is not its form, but the absence of Silko's mother. Mother is so central to the clan system of matriliney, of
handing down the clan name, which in turn defines an individual’s position in the community, to creation stories, to ceremonial preparations, that Silko’s mother is conspicuous because she is only briefly present twice in a tale so heavily focused on family and tribe.

The husbands are responsible for economic support, the wive’s brother for ritual activities, and the clan system [is] the most important social grouping... the mother-daughter and sister-sister ties [are] important and furnish the core of social groupings. (Blicksilver 159)

"The Pueblo women enjoy a high status: besides being responsible for the household, they own the house, they make the important decisions" (Seyersted 9). The society is a matrilineal one. In Silko’s tribe, lineage is traced through the women; matriarchally speaking, the female has "priority and seniority" (Blicksilver 153). Tasks are not gender-specific, they are not divided into men’s or women’s work. "In Laguna Pueblo, little girls aren’t kept with the women, and little boys aren’t kept with the men. Children sort of range freely, and men and women range freely" (Barnes 92). Given this fact, Silko’s refusal to engage in power games becomes easier to understand. Her loyalty is to family and tribe and womanness. This loyalty existed before male-dominated American colonizers and has survived in spite of oppression (Danielson 328).

Always present in Silko’s writing, and one could speculate in her consciousness as well, is the Laguna relation
ship to the land. "It is clear that the Laguna's regard the land as feminine" (Allen, "Landscape" 130). The overly simplistic interpretation of this would equate earth and grain to woman and child. But Allen describes the land/person relationship as one of unity. To repeat her words, "[w]e are the land," she says, and "to the best of my understanding that is the fundamental idea that permeates American Indian life; the land (mother) and the people (mothers) are the same" (Allen, "Landscape" 127). In this "fundamental idea" can be found one explanation for the absence of Silko's mother. Not only is it more tribal to consider the entire family and community, men included, in a person's life, but "mother" is a strong, powerful component of the main-stream consciousness and she doesn't require special mention. She is powerful enough to exist in absence, to exist in the land, to exist in the psyche.

Amid criticism that her female characters lack complexities and vulnerabilities, Silko explains that she "grew up with women who were really strong, women with a great deal of power. The mother is a real powerful person, and she's much more the authority figure" (Barnes 97). In much of Storyteller, Silko subverts issues such as patriarchal prejudice by investing a female character with strength, power, and a concern for continuity, as in the character of Ayah in the short story "Lullaby." But male characters, like Tayo in the novel Ceremony, are also given these quali-
ties. Basic to Silko's belief is that "on that deep, deep level, that deep level where we're moved to fear, sorrow, loss, joy, camaraderie, on that deep level, men and women are the same, just like all human beings are" (Barnes 91). One reason feminist approaches to American Indian writers and texts is scarce, is because a gender-unifying, gender-specific principle operates, which can appear to be oppositional concepts, but to Native American thought, are complementary forces.

This is how "Lullaby" can be seen as the embodiment of what is important to American Indian people. Tribal loyalty, survival, and women serving as vehicles for the continuity of tradition all come into play in this short story that has a small, but extremely important role in Storyteller.

[Silko] has avoided the dangers inherent in writing from an ethnic woman's point of view, never presenting a mechanical and collectivist view of a human being or subordinating the individual in complexity and unpredictability to the service of some sociopolitical cause. (Blicksilver 150)

The description Silko gives of this old, Navajo woman illustrates the character as a strong force despite adversity, and the group she represents also remains undefeated. "The old woman's heroic fortitude is the most sensitively delineated aspect of the characterizations depicted" (Blicksilver 153). Silko's concern with the feminine, continuity, and tradition can be further found in the "Yellow Woman" section of Storyteller.
Yellow Woman is the mythical character connected to the abduction tales. In some versions of these tales, a woman member of the tribe is carried off by a handsome stranger, usually a spirit from the north, and returns to the community with a story, something of value.

A purely feminist interpretation could conclude that the story is about a woman seeking to alleviate the unbearable conditions of her social and familial positions through mental and emotional fantasy. But in an interview with Kim Barnes, Silko denies that Yellow Woman is used as a means of escaping social and sexual domination. "The need for that kind of escape is the need of a woman in middle America." She then goes on to explain that, at Laguna, the lineage of the child is traced through the mother, that houses and land are passed through the mother, and that one of her earliest memories is of a crew of women showing up to replaster her house because the women maintain what they own. The forces of "domination, powerlessness, and inferior status," the forces operating to drive a white, middle-class woman to mental escape are non-existent at Laguna. The Yellow Woman stories are a link between the human, spirit, and animal worlds" (Barnes 95).

Ambrose Lucero elaborates on this further when he states that "the ambiguity Silko produces so painstakingly in 'Yellow Woman' is the inevitable result of the mystic purity of her intentions" (10). Silko's purpose is to
illustrate women’s relevance to Laguna culture. The value of the story lies in the internal struggle of an individual woman and her relationship to the tribe.

"The focus in 'Yellow Woman' is on the unnamed narrator. She tells her story, which concerns her evolving consciousness of who she is, and although that story has definite communal implications, its focus is interior and personal" (Hirsch 14). The old "yellow Woman" stories have affected contemporary Pueblo women. The abduction of women serves more as a personal renewal that results from experience outside the Pueblo (Ruoff 10). The sometimes conflicting worlds of traditional and modern attitudes become bridged. When the narrator returns to her Pueblo, her mother is showing the grandmother how to make Jell-o, suggesting a "world somewhat at odds with itself" (Hirsch 14): more of an Anglo world, a world turned somewhat topsy-turvy with the mother’s instructing the grandmother. But after the narrator’s journey of self-discovery, after acknowledging the demands of passion, and accepting, intuitively, the guidance of her grandfather’s stories, the oral tradition is kept alive (Hirsch 14).

"Silko is less concerned with the events involved in Yellow Woman’s abduction and her subsequent return home than with the character’s confusion about what is real and what is not" (Ruoff 12). But in order to keep at bay the "polluting spirit of domination (which is the spirit of America)
this struggle [the character's confusion] is the priceless component in the preservation of continuity and solidarity of the people..." (Lucero 10).

Bernard Hirsch points out, "the five short pieces that follow 'Yellow Woman' and the Cottonwood poems focus on learning to see the land rightly and developing the proper relationship to it" (17), the land is an inseparable component to the mother, according to Paula Allen. To interpret that connection in the simplistic sense, to see it as earth/grain, woman/child, would deny the Laguna's association of the "essential nature of femininity with the creative power of thought." It is the women deities of Laguna who think things into being, "they are certain kinds of thought forces if you will" (Allen, "Landscape" 130). Thought-Woman "created the cosmos by thinking everything into existence" (Seyersted 7). And the land, a term interchangeable with mother, is not a place separate from the human spirit. "We must not conceive of the earth as an ever-dead other that supplies us with a sense of ego identity by virtue of our contrast to its perceived nonbeing" (Allen, "Landscape" 128).

Silko, as a woman of two societies, must be concerned with a text like Storyteller finding solid ground. The text is not in the oral tradition of her Laguna tribe, nor is it in the conventional Euroamerican form of subjective autobiography.
In adopting the written English literary tradition as her expressive vehicle, she moves into an artistic world that is shaped largely by white men and is not prepared to deal sympathetically with Indians of either sex nor with women of any color. So in effacing her own authorship, crediting the community, mixing once sacrosanct genres, and abjuring linear structure—in short, by denying the standards and customs of white male-dominated literary criticism—Silko reclaims the making of books from the white male critical establishment. (Danielson 330)

Silko has created a text in which she denies individual authorship, in which she denies everything that has been white-male imposed. "The myths and stories come to her from specific others who she credits" (Danielson 329). The book is told in the voice of a woman, calm and consistent, "whose place in the community it is to speak the truth of the world without the distortion of intense ego" (Lucero 1). She manages to connect the oral tradition and written text, blend genres, combine poetry and prose, provide a visual continuity of her subject matter—landscape and family—through photographs, and she writes female characters that are "as far from shy or reticent about declaring their love, using earthy terms to express physical needs..." (Blicksilver 156).

Silko earns the respect given to Storytellers by carrying on the tradition of the Pueblo, allowing the stories to survive. "The book is for people who are interested in that relationship between the spoken and the written" (Barnes 84). Realizing the delicacy of the oral tradition within
her culture, "Silko is determined to preserve literary treasures for future generations" (Blicksilver 159). Laguna Pueblo is preserved; it endures and persists.
ENDNOTES

1. *continue* / fr. L *continuare* to connect continue
   1a: to be steadfast or constant in a course or activity: keep up or maintain esp. without interruption a particular condition, course, or series of actions: PRESERVE, ENDURE, PERSIST 2: to be permanent or durable: remain in existence.

2. When I attended her reading, sponsored by the Lannan Foundation at the Pacific Design Center in West Hollywood in 1993, she read from her latest stories about water, saying that she has grown frustrated with the publishing world and is now working closely with her father, Lee Marmon, proprietor of BlueEyed Indian Bookstore, to publish her own work.
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