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# Keeping the Native on the Reservation: The Struggle for Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*

**JEFF KAREM**

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As Leslie Marmon Silko was preparing to publish her first novel, *Ceremony* (1977), she faced serious interventions from her editor at Viking Press, Richard Seaver. Most notably, in the final proofs sent to Silko before *Ceremony* went to press, Seaver had eliminated much of the author's most challenging literary and cultural material, particularly her representations of the world-historical forces connected to her protagonist's personal quest. Seaver's battery of revisions suggested a discomfort with the globalizing aspirations of Silko's novel and a preference for a more contained narrative of reservation life. According to Silko, Seaver was so committed to his changes that he "made ominous sounds about 'not being able to support the book' unless [she] gave in."<sup>1</sup> Fortunately, Silko stood by her original manuscript, replying to her editor with a letter entitled "A Commentary on the Galleys," in which she defended the "unconventional" elements of her novel as essential to her fictional and cultural vision. Although Silko succeeded in convincing Seaver to restore her text, it is important for scholars to consider her conflicts with her editor, as this episode offers a cautionary tale about the dangers Native American authors face from a literary establishment that seeks to shape their works into more familiar representations. In this essay I use previously unpublished archival evidence from Silko's papers at the Beinecke Library to document her conflicts with Seaver, reconstructing the "horizon of expectations"<sup>2</sup> against which the author had to struggle in order to realize her innovative vision.

My reading of *Ceremony* refocuses critical attention on Silko's global aims because most of her readers, like her editor, have tried to minimize the globalizing aspects of her work. Many scholars have employed structuralist paradigms for interpreting the text, reading the healing process in the novel as the

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realignment of intracultural vectors, such as a rebalancing of the power of the sun in the east with the power of the mountains in the north.<sup>3</sup> As illuminating as these structuralist approaches may be, they fail to reckon with the convergence of a number of extracultural factors in the novel, such as white incursions into the region, the national demands placed upon the region in World War II, and the global threats that challenge all of humanity by the end of the novel. The structuralist strain in Silko criticism also runs the risk of ahistoricism in relying on Franz Boas's early twentieth century descriptions of Pueblo tradition as the interpretive key to a late twentieth century novel, grounding its interpretations in the mistaken assumptions that indigenous practices must remain the same over time.

Most interpreters of the healing quest completed by Tayo, the novel's protagonist, have kept Silko "on the reservation" by underestimated the scope of the concluding ceremony. Charles Larson argues, for example, that by the end of *Ceremony* "the reservation . . . emerges as a refuge from the outside world" and that in the novel "one can identify a kind of isolationist attitude concerning tribal life today."<sup>4</sup> Karen Wallace reads the novel as a variety of bildungsroman, in which the completion of the quest marks the acquisition of "a secure sense of self" for Tayo.<sup>5</sup> Paula Gunn Allen perceives the concluding work of the novel to be an articulation of a "tribal consciousness" for the Keres Indian tribes.<sup>6</sup> While these statements all point to essential elements of the cultural work of *Ceremony*, they show little regard for the broader geographical context in which Silko explores these questions—namely, the global struggle against the Destroyers that Silko connects to the local setting of Laguna and Los Alamos. Although it is true that *Ceremony* represents Laguna ways as distinct from those of most of the world, Laguna itself is not represented as isolated, but as intricately connected with the world beyond the reservation.

Those scholars who have responded to both the local and the global aims of *Ceremony*, such as Alan Velie and Shamoan Zamir, have limited their interpretations by privileging one side of the global/local dialectic. Velie, for example, pays attention to the novel's broader mythological designs, but apprehends them almost exclusively via European models, such as Jesse Weston's anthropological study of the Fisher King legend, *From Ritual to Romance*. Indeed, Velie argues that *Ceremony* can best be described as a "Laguna grail story"—a reading that has the unfortunate effect of assimilating Silko's narrative into an ahistorical Western archetype, rather than exploring the historically specific cultural and aesthetic work of her text.<sup>7</sup> Zamir, in contrast, shows an unexamined allegiance to the text's localism. For Zamir, *Ceremony* emerges "as a paradoxical mixture of a newly emergent regionalist resistance and an internalization of global forms that simultaneously erases this resistance."<sup>8</sup> Zamir reads the local-global tension in the novel in parallel with the combination of Native narration and Western forms, ultimately criticizing the novel for its debts to Western narrative traditions, which stand as a kind of textual correlative for the external forces threatening Laguna. If Velie values Silko's novel for its echoes of the Western grail story, Zamir criticizes it for that very reason, fearing that Silko's indigenous resistance has been domesticated by her incorporation of non-Native narrative forms. I will argue

an opposite proposition: that rather than letting external forms impinge on her novel's regional allegiances, Silko creates a regional portrait that claims a proprietary share in the shape of modern history, in effect imposing her localist scheme on the Western world's understanding of itself.

What is thus lacking from most readings of *Ceremony* is a balanced appreciation of the simultaneously global and local designs of the novel—a vision that manifested itself very early in her drafting of the novel. In an unpublished preface to *Ceremony*, Silko traces the origins of the piece:

Ceremony began as a short story. I wanted to write a humorous story—something light hearted. I had in mind the funny stories I heard while I was growing up, about the lengths some persons would go for a cold beer. I had in mind an alcoholic veteran of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, whose family, primarily his mother, had gone to lengths to keep him away from bars and liquor stores . . . after about two paragraphs, I realized that the story was not light-hearted or humorous as I had intended; and already I was wondering why only some of the veterans were stricken with the “war disease” while many others were able to return to live normal lives.<sup>9</sup>

As Silko describes it, *Ceremony* emerged from her transforming and extending the expected figures of Native American fiction. In particular, Silko takes up a widely disseminated image of Native American identity—the reservation drunk—and puts it to complex use beyond its original boundaries. Rather than attributing the problem of alcoholism to a generalized, ahistorical sense of reservation despair, she repositions it as a specific ailment—the “war disease” emerging from World War II—that afflicts some, but not all, veterans. Long before she finished her first manuscript draft, Silko began sketching potential conclusions addressing the issue of “war disease,” each offering a warning that extended far beyond the reservation. In one version, for example, the narrative voice admonishes humanity not to be fooled by the power of “engines and machines / plastic and steel / electricity and atomic bombs.”<sup>10</sup> The closing fragments also reveal an ambivalent relation to tribal tradition, arguing that the Laguna must not let adherence to the past ossify their culture:

You think it is over?  
Do you think that time has ended?  
You claim to believe in the old way,  
and you say you want to stay with it,  
and let nothing change,  
but in that case, it is dead.  
I believe that time has never ended  
that time goes on even now.  
The stories go on  
just the same  
just the way it always did  
back then.<sup>11</sup>

Silko's drafted conclusion does not advocate a pure loyalty to traditionalist ways, but argues for the dynamism of Laguna culture in the present. Her vision of indigenous traditions as continuous but changing subverts the dominant American assumption that Native culture is either static or moribund. Silko's ideas about cultural dynamism were especially timely in the 1970s, the decade that witnessed a blossoming of white-sponsored Native American anthologies claiming to offer authentic fragments of soon-to-be extinct cultures.<sup>12</sup>

In light of Silko's interest in the meeting of past and present, of ways old and new, it is no surprise to discover that much of *Ceremony* is concerned with questions of entanglement. The central protagonist of *Ceremony*, Tayo, must wrestle not only with the "war disease" brought on by his service in World War II, but also a host of cultural conflicts facing him as a mixed-descent Laguna living in late twentieth-century America. Across the scope of the novel, Tayo encounters traditional and non-traditional ways of life, Native and non-Native influences, and local and global forces. Tayo's quest in *Ceremony* demands a sorting out of all these cultural entanglements, a negotiation of binary oppositions in order to recapture a fruitful connection to the world. At the beginning of the novel, Tayo has not found himself equal to this task, however, and his mind is a cacophony of conflicting influences—Japanese voices, white voices, Laguna voices, and fever voices all course through his brain.

One of Silko's greatest achievements is demonstrating Tayo's mental conflicts via her formal presentation of his consciousness, revealing the intricate associative logic that governs and torments him. Tayo's first extensive reverie begins with a description of his mind as a series of things roped together: "He had not been able to sleep for a long time—for as long as things had become tied together like colts in a single file when he and Josiah had taken them to the mountain, with the halter rope of one colt tied to the tail of the colt ahead of it."<sup>13</sup> In this passage, his family's routine activity of ranching takes on a more troubling cast as Tayo recognizes it as a figure for his conflicted mental state. The concreteness of this image does lead Tayo into a moment of relief, as he recalls his enjoyment of the horses: "He could still see them now—the creamy sorrel, the bright red bay, and the gray roan—their slick summer coats reflecting the sunlight as it came up from behind the yellow mesas" (C 6). The particular colors of the horses remind him of his aunt's sewing threads, evoking, unfortunately, another analogy for his troubled mind: "He could get no rest so long as the memories were tangled with the present, tangled up like the colored threads from Grandma's wicker sewing basket when he was a child. . . . He could feel it inside his skull—the tension of little threads being pulled and how it was with tangled things, things tied together, and as he tried to pull them apart and rewind them into their places, they snagged and tangled even more" (C 6–7).

In response to this tension, Tayo struggles for a stabilizing image, a figure that will bring this tangle of a consciousness to a halt: "he had to sweat to think of something that wasn't unraveled or tied in knots to the past—something that existed by itself—standing alone like a deer" (C 7). But even that idea becomes connected to something else in Tayo's mind: "It worked as long as

the deer was alone, as long as he could keep it a gray buck on an unrecognized hill; but if he did not hold it tight, it would spin away from him and become the deer he and Rocky had hunted" (C7). The hunted deer becomes a double torment to Tayo, as it evokes memories of his friendship with his dead brother, as well as a specific scene on "some nameless Pacific island," when they discussed the deer in the moments before the Japanese attack that killed Rocky. With this recollection Tayo's mind has, to his frustration, come full circle, and the past has once again become mired with the present. The very image in which he sought solace—the solitary deer—returns him to the troubled state in which he began.

Tayo's flow of consciousness across time and space demonstrates, early in the novel, that his personal struggle cannot be confined to the physical space of his tribal land, or to the particular challenges he faces in the present. In fact, many of Tayo's entanglements, according to Silko, are part of the legacy that all Native Americans struggle with in the wake of European conquest. The influence of the Europeans has been so far-reaching that even the most reliable source of grounding—the tribal earth—has become potentially alien to its people, for it "had become entangled with European names: the names of rivers, the hills, the names of the animals and plants—all of creation suddenly had two names: an Indian name and a white name" (C 68). This general change has a personal impact on Tayo, as the European words obstruct his own sense of self: "now the feelings were twisted, tangled roots, and all the names for the source of this growth were buried under English words, out of reach" (C 69).

The account of Tayo's linguistic and emotional entanglements was one of the key passages that Silko's editor tried to change. Seaver emended Silko's depiction of an oppressive power relationship into a portrait of neutral intermixture: "the feelings were twisted, tangled roots, all the names, Indian names, white names, buried out of reach."<sup>14</sup> Seaver's version suggests an equal relationship between the Indian and white names, in which both suffer the fate of being "buried out of reach" in Tayo's consciousness. What is lost in this revision is Silko's attribution of agency to the English language—in her version, the white words are not themselves buried, but are burying Native words as they assume dominance. By erasing the political confrontation staged in Silko's description, Seaver exonerates the English language of any responsibility for the problems facing Tayo and the reservation.

Seaver's version of the relationship between English and the Laguna language allows the reservation to be understood by readers as a cultural preserve, a place safe from external incursion. Such faith in the security of the local runs counter to the entire spirit of *Ceremony*, as both Tayo's afflictions and his redeeming quest are bound up with forces far beyond the reservation. At the beginning of the novel in particular, the legacy of the war in the Pacific looms large in Tayo's consciousness. Both during and after the war Tayo is haunted by the face of his Uncle Josiah that he saw on a Japanese corpse. While this idea is dismissed as a "hallucination" by his superiors, and indeed by some scholars as well,<sup>15</sup> Tayo is recognizing a commonality in life and death, across the lines of friend and foe. Indeed, one of the most powerful

lessons that war teaches him is that death abrogates all differences, even changing the appearances of racial color: “even white men were darker after death. There was no difference when they were swollen and covered with flies” (C 7). The Laguna reservation’s struggle with death by drought is also represented as connected to Tayo’s war experience. Because “jungle rain had no beginning or end,” Tayo “damned” the rain in the war (C 14). The narrative links this curse to the present drought: “So he had prayed the rain away, and for the sixth year it was dry; the grass turned yellow and did not grow” (C 14). That what Tayo wishes for on one continent will affect another suggests the deep interdependence that Silko perceives as binding together people and places across the globe. At the same time, Silko roots the drought firmly in Laguna tradition by explaining the disaster according to the Native tale of Reed Woman and Corn Woman. According to this tale, Corn Woman scolded her sister, Reed Woman, for splashing water all day, but when Reed Woman stopped her seemingly frivolous bathing, the earth below dried up (C 13–14). This tale, along with the power of Tayo’s curse, demonstrate his uncle Josiah’s belief that all natural forces are “part of life,” and that you ought not to “swear at them,” because disaster can result from upsetting those forces (C 46).

The primary solution *Ceremony* offers as a remedy for these entangled forces is the image of the web. The medicine man Ku’oosh describes the world to Tayo as “fragile,” using a Laguna word that the narrator explains is “filled with the intricacies of a continuing process, and with a strength inherent in spider webs woven across paths through sand hills” (C 35). The image of the spider web stands as a more fruitful arrangement of the filaments of life than the entangled yarns that have formed Tayo’s consciousness. As an image, the web conveys an idea of strength through balance and interdependence. Each strand must be anchored—none can stand alone—and each depends on its brethren for support. Deploying the image of the web within Tayo’s own experience, one finds that his mistake in Asia was thinking that those strands would not have resonance back home, that his actions there could not touch his native land. Ku’oosh also finds a similar interdependence characteristic of language: “it took a long time to explain the fragility and intricacy because no word exists alone, and the reason for choosing each word had to be explained with a story about why it must said this certain way” (C 35). In its narrative structure, *Ceremony* bears out this principle in its periodic shift to Native stories that provide backgrounds or parallels to events in Tayo’s life, such as Reed-Woman and her role in rains and drought. Within the folktales, Silko evokes the fragile threads of creation in a different register, revealing a chain of cooperation among natural creatures in a parallel quest to redeem the drought-stricken earth. According to the legend, the Laguna call on Hummingbird to send an offering of atonement to Mother Corn to end the drought. Hummingbird, in turn, relies upon the help of a series of fellow creatures, such as Fly, Caterpillar, and Buzzard, to complete his quest. Humanity’s survival is revealed to be dependent on the cooperation of all beings in creation.

Given this sense of interdependence, it is no surprise that Tayo’s sickness is connected to issues beyond his personal experience of the war and the reservation. Toward the end of the novel, as Tayo prepares for his healing cer-

emony, the medicine man Betonie begins to provide the global perspective that Tayo has fumbled for but failed to grasp. Tayo has come to perceive the breadth of the affliction he is confronting, tracing it to the whites in the New World. He asks Betonie, "I wonder what good Indian ceremonies can do against the sickness which comes from their wars, their bombs, their lies?" (C 132) Betonie replies by explaining that the source of this violence is outside of whites, and traceable to a deeper evil extending beyond racial lines: "white people are only tools that the witchery manipulates; and I tell you, we can deal with white people, with their machines and their beliefs. We can because we invented white people; it was Indian witchery that made white people in the first place" (C 132). Betonie's assertion that the whites were created by the Laguna stands as a crucial power play in *Ceremony*. Betonie tells the story of a Laguna witches' contest to see who can develop the most sinister spell—in which one witch wins by proposing the idea of "white skin people" who "see no life" and who will exploit the world as a "dead thing" (C 135).

By assigning cultural priority and global power to indigenous Laguna, Betonie's story reverses traditional Western narratives, making the New World the Old, and reincorporating white civilization into a Native view of the world. Betonie reveals an even more specific local-global connection in the witch's prophecy of what the whites will find in the region: "Up here / in these hills / they will find the rocks, / rocks with veins of green and yellow and black. / They will lay the final pattern with these rocks / they will lay it across the world / and explode everything" (C 137). Betonie alludes to the uranium in New Mexico that went into making the atomic bomb, giving rise to the Trinity Test and to the Los Alamos National Laboratory in the area. With this gesture, Silko situates this specific region in New Mexico as the alpha and the omega of the world's fate: it is here that the whites were conjured, here that the whites came for the deadly rocks, and here that the witchery must be stopped via Tayo's ceremony. By giving Tayo a perspective on his problems that extends beyond his interiority, Betonie forges a renewed connection among Tayo, the land, and the world. In Silko's words, Betonie "puts Tayo in touch with this larger feeling . . . that he is part of humanity, and feeling a part again, not just of the tribe, but of humanity."<sup>16</sup>

As part of his revision of the traditional understandings of evil and the whites, Betonie emphasizes to Tayo that the old ceremonies themselves must be revised, that change itself is a crucial tool in his quest. According to Betonie, because of changes in the world "it became necessary to create new ceremonies . . . things which don't shift and grow are dead things" (C 126). Betonie's tale about the witches demonstrates these principles. In its language and form, his story is a prose poem that mixes folk legend with contemporary references. He compares the contest, for example, to "baseball tournaments nowadays" (C 133) and puts ordinary American speech in the mouths of the characters: "Okay you win; you take the prize, / but what you said just now— / it isn't funny / It doesn't sound so good" (C 138). Such modern elements jar with ethnological expectations of mythic majesty from "pure" folktales, but they help Betonie convey his message to Tayo by speaking in a language that he understands.

The shape of Silko's text itself bears out Betonie's principles: it is a cultural and formal hybrid that draws upon many different genera and traditions. It has plot and character development typical of a novel, but finds a new kind of polyphony in the periodic interruption by parallel folktales. Although these tales are drawn from the oral traditions of Laguna, they are by no means a set of "authentic" or pure stories. Silko has explained in interviews that she draws upon both Pueblo and Navajo mythologies,<sup>17</sup> and Shamoan Zamir has demonstrated that the global witchery story is Silko's own invention.<sup>18</sup> Silko also hybridizes the Laguna storytelling tradition by using the same formal and typographical structure to represent both the venerated folktales and the veteran's bawdy stories: both are set apart as interpolated narratives, differentiated from the prose text by separate, italicized stanzas. As David Moore explains, Silko is committed to representing "even quotidian events as part of the mythic song, breaking boundaries of sacred and profane."<sup>19</sup> By juxtaposing foundational narratives with contemporary stories, Silko depicts the continuity and inclusiveness of the Laguna oral tradition—that the old ways live on but are always changing, as Betonie suggests to Tayo.

Hybridity and change are important not only to the form of the novel, but also to Tayo himself, as he, like Silko, is the product of mixed parentage. His mother was Laguna and his father was Mexican—a combination that gave him the unusual eyes that so disturb his fellow Laguna. His uncle's companion, the Night Swan, herself of mixed descent, explains to Tayo why people find his hybridity so threatening: "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 think that if their children have the same color of skin, the same color of eyes, that nothing is changing. . . . They are fools. They blame us, the ones who look different" (C 99–100). The Night Swan suggests that concern for ethnic purity is a kind of misplaced concreteness, a preoccupation with physical continuity that overlays much deeper fears about changes in the entire world. As Rachel Stein has suggested, "polarization itself, rather than any group of people is the core problem" that confronts the characters in *Ceremony*.<sup>20</sup>

Over the course of the novel, Tayo's cultural mixture, which has been a liability for him in other contexts, actually emerges as instrumental in his quest. When he is a fugitive in the mountains trying to complete the ceremony, he avoids capture because the Laguna elders and government officials cannot decide who has proper jurisdiction over him. The mountain woman Ts'eh tells him, "they haven't been able to agree. . . . they are trying to decide who you are" (C 232–233). Hybridity as a concept also finds support in Betonie's warning to Tayo about the precariousness of using racial lines to navigate the world. When Tayo worries that his plight is the product of his mixed heritage—he wonders if it is "because my mother went with white men"—Betonie replies, "Nothing is that simple. . . . You don't write off all the white people, just like you don't trust all the Indians" (C 128). Silko singles out this discovery as one of Tayo's most important realizations: "Tayo discovers that the Destroyers and the destructive impulse don't reside with a single group or a single race, and that to manipulate people into war or other conflicts is a

human trait, it is a worldwide thing. It's not just one group of people, that's too simple."<sup>21</sup>

Betonie's admonishment "don't write off all the white people" mitigates some of the critical energy that would confront white readers of the novel, but Silko's editor still showed considerable discomfort with the representation of white power in *Ceremony*. Consequently, Seaver adjusted Silko's description of the "witchery" to effect a greater exculpation of whites. In the original typescript, Tayo realizes that a key strategy of the Destroyers is convincing their victims that evil is a product of whites alone: "the people would see only the losses, the land and the people since the whites came; it would work so that the people would be fooled into blaming only the whites and not the witchery."<sup>22</sup> This passage already shows that blaming whites exclusively for the present troubles is a mistake—it is also the witchery at work—but Seaver emended this passage into an even softer statement: "The witchery would be at work all night, the people down below would be blaming the whites for all the evil and not the witchery."<sup>23</sup> Without "only" to modify "whites," this passage suggests that the mistake the Laguna might make is to blame whites at all, rather than them exclusively, for the "losses." In addition, Seaver replaced the stinging mention of lost people and lost land with the less pointed term of "evil."

Had Seaver succeeded in separating the whites from the witchery, he would have rendered a grave disservice to the conclusion of the novel, which attempts to forge a newly fruitful connection between local Native cultures and the white world beyond. The fact that both whites and Natives are manipulated by witchery gives them a common fate, which obligates them to step outside their traditional cultural boundaries to fight the witchery together. In particular, Tayo recognizes that the global threat of nuclear destruction demands the cooperation of a common humanity. When Tayo visits an old uranium mine shaft, he 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 that time on, human beings were one clan again, united by the fate the destroyers planned for all of them, for all living things; united by a circle of death that devoured people in cities twelve thousand miles away, victims who had never known these mesas, who had never seen the delicate colors of the rocks which boiled up their slaughter" (C 246). In this passage Silko brings together the local and the global with great force, as the region becomes the nexus for deadly nuclear forces. Silko draws a striking portrait of death and alienation, in which the slaughter of atomic war is made even more horrific by its distant quality. The victims of Tayo and his fellow soldiers in Asia did not see their killers' faces, and these atomic-blast victims are equally alienated from the beautiful landscape that gave birth to their death.

The mountains also hold the beginnings of a solution, however. It is there that Tayo witnesses the fight between Emo and Harley, and makes a decision that speeds him on the path to recovery and completion of the ceremony. This scene proved to be a key point of conflict between Silko and her editor, as she used the violent confrontation as a microcosmic representation of humanity's battle with witchery. In Silko's typescript, when Tayo witnesses

Emo murdering Harley, his horror at the violence before him assumes a broad scope that extends beyond the immediate scene: "Tayo could not endure it any longer. He was certain his own sanity would be destroyed if he did not stop them, all the suffering and dying, people incinerated and exploded, the little children sleeping on sidewalks outside Gallup bars."<sup>24</sup> The expansiveness of Tayo's vision hinges on a capacious sense of "them," with the pronoun referring not only to the combatants in this scene, but also to the other Destroyers circulating in the novel. Tayo recognizes that the fight before him is not an isolated conflict, but a component of larger patterns of violence afflicting both the reservation and the world beyond, encompassing not only other deaths on the reservation, but also victims of nuclear bombardment across the ocean, whose death was prepared by the Trinity tests conducted near Laguna. Seaver's change was simple but sweeping: he eliminated all the material predicated on Silko's extended sense of "them," confining the scope of Tayo's frustration to the immediate fight at hand among the friends. Seaver shortened the passage to read: "He was certain his own sanity would be destroyed if he did not stop them."<sup>25</sup> Silko was especially angered by this change, and wrote on her commentary, "The deletion of the words 'and all the suffering etc.' loses the sense of the wide-reaching impact which the witchery activity has upon the world."<sup>26</sup> Seaver's proposed revision was especially damaging, as it stripped the climactic scene of any resonance beyond the personal conflict between the two veterans. By using the fight as a synecdochal representation of more general conflicts, Silko succeeds in drawing together multiple thematic lines in her novel, from veterans' personal struggles with war disease, to the broadest threats of nuclear destruction that now face all of humanity.

Tayo's choice of what to do, or rather *not* to do, during the fight has provoked some critical controversy. Despite all his rage at the violence encapsulated before him, Tayo does nothing to save Harley, because in order to do so he would have to kill Emo. For Zamir, the fact that Tayo allows Harley to die, and that his recovery follows the fight scene, suggests that his friend's death provides a sacrificial regeneration, and thus the novel mistakenly "internalizes the very logic of capitalist sacrifice Silko's work sets out to resist."<sup>27</sup> But Harley's death is not the source of regeneration in this scene—it is not even its climax. The decisive moment is Tayo's choice of *how* to react to the death and whether to join in the violence himself, to accede to the cycle of destruction he has been observing around him throughout the novel. His refusal to kill Emo stands as a rejection of all resolutions rooted in violence, sacrificial or otherwise; he opts instead for a restorative path, returning the native cattle to the mountains and planting Ts'eh's seeds. Tayo's *inaction* brings an end to the cycle of violence planned by the Destroyers: "The witchery had almost ended the story according to its plan; Tayo had almost jammed the screwdriver into Emo's skull the way the witchery wanted. . . . Their deadly ritual for the autumn solstice would have completed by him" (C 253).

Silko and Seaver differed strongly in their visions of how the novel should conclude. As Silko had planned from the first typescript drafts, she finished *Ceremony* with a closing poem. At the end, after Tayo has avoided the

Destroyers all night, his family learns that Emo, the source of the most immediate violence in Tayo's immediate world, has fled to California. The disappearance of this threat, along with Tayo's completion of the ceremony and restoration of the plants and cattle, suggests that the troubles have passed for a time. After these plot details are explicated, the narrative steps back to present a more general poem addressing the larger evils at work in the typescript:

Whirling darkness  
started its journey  
with its witchery  
and  
its witchery  
has returned upon it.  
Its witchery  
has returned  
into its belly.<sup>28</sup>

The poem concludes with a fourfold repetition of the line "It is dead for now," suggesting that the witchery has been temporarily suppressed but not ultimately defeated. The final lines of the novel address the sun—"Sunrise, / accept this offering, / Sunrise"—in order to figure the text itself as part of the ceremony that has been completed.<sup>29</sup>

Silko notes in a personal journal that Seaver desired a more conventional ending, rather than a ceremonial poem: "Dick wanted to end CEREMONY as if it were just a novel. My ending makes the novel end as if it is itself a healing CEREMONY."<sup>30</sup> Seaver's change to Silko's concluding poetry was simple—he deleted all of it, ending with Tayo's family's conversation about the fleeing Emo:

Auntie paused. "I heard he went to California," she said.  
"California," Tayo repeated softly, "That's a good place for him."  
Old Grandma shook her head slowly, and closed her cloudy eyes again. "I guess I must be getting old," she said, "because these goings-on around Laguna don't get me excited any more." She sighed, and laid her head back on the chair. "It seems like I already heard these stories before . . . only thing is, the names sound different."<sup>31</sup>

Seaver's change substantially diminishes the impact not only of Silko's conclusion but also of her cultural work throughout the novel, as his ending implies that the crucial issue at stake for Tayo is whether or not he can escape his rival. Seaver's version elides the broader issues connected to that personal conflict—war, disease, the trouble afflicting the reservation, and the global violence jeopardizing all of humanity. Silko's original conclusion links Tayo's resolution of his individual conflicts to humanity's broader struggle against the witchery unleashed by the Destroyers. Silko's version reveals that settling the details of the Tayo-Emo plot is not the true end of the novel, but rather a prelude to the triumph over the witchery that has haunted the world in the preceding pages of the novel.

Perhaps the greatest reason Seaver and subsequent interpreters have resisted Silko's globalism is an ongoing interest in making indigenous authors serve as cultural representatives. As Native writers breach the expected boundaries of indigenous literatures, they risk disappointing readers who seek in their texts an authentic Native voice. This burden of representation has been especially heavy since the 1970s because of an expectation, fostered by such texts as Carlos Castañeda's *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (1968) and its successors, that Native Americans should serve as wisdom-resources to revitalize the Western reader. In this respect, Seaver's attempts to soften Silko's cultural criticism and to reduce her world-historical designs worked to shift her from the challenging position of globally minded author to the more comfortable—and more marketable—role of local shaman. In fact, many readers of *Ceremony* have insisted on apprehending Silko as more mystic than author. A European scholar, for example, has praised *Ceremony* for offering Westerners "those primal mythic values that are figured and refigured in American Indian story."<sup>32</sup> An American scholar has confessed that "I had been taught . . . to consider work separate from private life. I had learned to compartmentalize my life. But Leslie Marmon Silko, that spiderwoman, threw me a strand and as I followed its pattern through time, I came to understand my life work in a new light."<sup>33</sup> Although these individuals are entitled to their own personal reader-responses, these enthusiastic testimonials run the risk of participating in the disturbing tradition of Westerners' "going Native" or appropriating Native culture as a method for their own regeneration.

Even when readers of *Ceremony* have not figured Silko as a shaman, they have blunted her authorial power by ascribing to her a limiting representative role, characterizing her, for example, as "the most accomplished Indian writer of her generation."<sup>34</sup> Silko has made it quite clear that she dislikes this economy of cultural representation because of the lack of respect it shows to both the complexities of Native culture and the complexities of authorship. She has warned readers not to overestimate her representative power: "I hesitate to say that I am representative of Indian poets or Indian people, or even Laguna people. I am only one human being, one Laguna woman."<sup>35</sup> Silko also has expressed frustration at the limitations inherent in the role of "accomplished Indian writer," noting that "They never say Norman Mailer is the best white man writer of his generation. . . . I just want to be known as a novelist."<sup>36</sup> The richness of *Ceremony* may make it impossible to read her as "just a novelist," but one ought to beware of reading her as a "just a representative." It is only when one ceases to treat Silko as a local informant that one can appreciate the scope of her achievements in *Ceremony*: her hybrid narrative experiment, her depiction of the changing shape of Laguna culture, as well as her challenging call to humanity to respond to the destruction threatening the modern world.

## NOTES

1. Leslie Marmon Silko, Note on the conclusion of *Ceremony*, Leslie Marmon Silko Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Box 231.

2. I use this phrase of Hans Robert Jauss to denote the criteria and assumptions that shape readers' judgments of texts in a particular historical context (see Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982], 19).

3. See, for example, Carol Mitchell, "Ceremony as Ritual," *American Indian Quarterly* 5, number 1 (1979): 26–35 and id., "Healing Via the Sunwise Cycle in Silko's *Ceremony*," *American Indian Quarterly* 12, number 3 (1988): 213–220. See also Edith Swan, "Laguna Symbolic Geography and Silko's *Ceremony*," *American Indian Quarterly* 13, number 1 (1988): 229–249.

4. Charles Larson, *American Indian Fiction* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1978), 150, 170.

5. Karen Wallace, "Liminality and Myth in Native American Fiction: *Ceremony* and *The Ancient Child*," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 20, number 4 (1996): 93.

6. Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 82.

7. Alan Velie, *Four American Indian Literary Masters* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 106–121.

8. Shamoon Zamir, "Literature in a National Sacrifice Area," *New Voices in Native American Literary Criticism*, ed. Arnold Krupat (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 397.

9. Leslie Marmon Silko, unpublished preface to *Ceremony*, Leslie Marmon Silko Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Box 232.

10. Leslie Marmon Silko, draft for a conclusion to *Ceremony*, Leslie Marmon Silko Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Box 232.

11. Ibid.

12. Kenneth Rosen, for example, in introducing his seminal anthology of Native American fiction, argued that these Native American authors were writing primarily "because theirs is a culture threatened with extinction" (Kenneth Rosen, introduction to *The Man to Send Rain Clouds* [New York: Viking Press, 1974], x).

13. Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1977), 6. Future citations will appear in the text as C.

14. See Silko's correction on editor's galleys for *Ceremony*, Leslie Marmon Silko Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Box 231, 29.

15. Charles Larson perceives Tayo's visions of the connections between his own life and the life off the reservation as "distortions," a reading that seems entirely contrary to the interdependent logic of *Ceremony* (Larson, *American Indian Fiction*, 152).

16. Per Seyersted, "Two Interviews with Leslie Marmon Silko," *American Studies in Scandinavia* 13 (1981): 32.

17. See Larry Evers and Denny Carr, "A Conversation with Leslie Marmon Silko," *Suntracks* 3, number 1 (1976): 31–32.

18. Zamir observes, "While Silko has drawn upon these [Navajo] stories in *Ceremony*, the largest part of the witchery myth in the novel, the narrative of the witchery's creation of white people and its manipulation of whites as the primary instru-

ments of a horrific and global destruction . . . is almost entirely Silko's own creation" (Zamir, "Literature in a National Sacrifice Area," 401).

19. David L. Moore, "Myth, History, and Identity in Silko and Young Bear," *New Voices in Native American Literary Criticism*, ed. Arnold Krupat (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 377.

20. Rachel Stein, *Shifting the Ground: American Women Writers' Revisions of Nature, Gender, and Race* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997), 131.

21. Seyersted, "Two Interviews with Leslie Marmon Silko," 33.

22. Leslie Marmon Silko, typescript of *Ceremony*, Leslie Marmon Silko Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Box 231, 310.

23. Silko, editor's galleys for *Ceremony*, 100.

24. Silko, typescript of *Ceremony*, 314.

25. Silko, editor's galleys for *Ceremony*, 101.

26. Leslie Marmon Silko, "A Commentary on the Galleys," Leslie Marmon Silko Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Box 231.

27. Zamir, "Literature in a National Sacrifice Area," 400.

28. Silko, typescript of *Ceremony*, 319–319a.

29. Ibid.

30. Silko, note on the conclusion of *Ceremony*.

31. Silko, editor's galleys for *Ceremony*, 104.

32. Paul Beekman Taylor, "Silko's Reappropriation of Secrecy," *Leslie Marmon Silko: A Collection of Critical Essays*, eds. Louise K. Barnett and James L. Thorson (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 23.

33. Alanna Kathleen Brown, "Pulling Silko's Threads Through Time: An Exploration of Storytelling," *American Indian Quarterly* 19 (Spring 1995): 178.

34. Frank MacShane, "Ceremony," *New York Times Book Review*, 12 June 1977, 15.

35. Leslie Marmon Silko, *Laguna Woman* (Greenfield Center, NY: Greenfield Review Press, 1974), 35.

36. Kathleen Kelleher, "Predicting a Revolt to Reclaim the Americas," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 January 1992, E1.