

TWENTIETH-CENTURY TALE TELLING: THE ROLE OF THE STORY  
IN WORKS BY KINGSTON, SILKO AND MORRISON

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Council of  
Southwest Texas State University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree  
of  
Master of Arts

Dorie S. Goldman  
(San Marcos, Texas)  
August 1992

## PREFACE

But a tale is only a tale after all, isn't it?  
from A Beggar in Jerusalem by Elie Weisel

Folklorist Linda Degh writes that

. . . the impulse to tell a story and the need  
to listen to it have made narrative the natural  
companion of man throughout the history of  
civilization. (53)

Although often thought of as an activity primarily for children's entertainment or education, or as an activity in which only traditional oral societies engage, all people, even adults in technologically advanced, literate societies, participate in storytelling events. Just as Southwestern American Indian families spend distinct periods of time telling tales in the winter, average Americans spend much of their time telling stories in order to contribute their "two cents worth"--to provide commentary on--already ongoing conversations. Moreover, storytelling has varied functions: it may entertain, transmit knowledge, explain the unexplainable, teach a lesson. This activity is universal, pertinent to people of all cultures, ages, and classes; storytelling is a record of varied peoples' perceptions of the human experience.

This thesis is about storytelling. More specifically, it is about three gifted storytellers, Toni Morrison, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Maxine Hong Kingston, who write stories about storytelling. Because storytelling is both so pervasive and so crucial to the act of novel writing itself, that these authors would address storytelling as a theme in their works should not be surprising.

The inspiration for this project came from Dr. Bella Zweig of the Humanities Department at the University of Arizona; I cannot extend her enough thanks. Her class provided me with the ideas behind this thesis; therefore, she deserves an especially prominent acknowledgment. Were it

not for Dr. Zweig, I might never have discovered the beauty of these writers and never have known that "the story must be told."

Beyond this obvious debt, I am sincerely grateful to several other university professors. I would like to say thank you to my thesis committee: Dr. Martha Brunson, many thanks for your help, encouragement and inspiration during my three-year stint at SWT; Dr. June Hankins, Dr. Ramona Ford and again Dr. Brunson, thank you for serving on my committee, for I could not have put the inspiration to paper without you. I would like to thank University of Arizona's premier folklorist Dr. Barbara Babcock for showing me that one can successfully meld the disciplines of anthropology and English, and also thank University of Arizona professor Dr. Inga Kohn for constant encouragement during my undergraduate career. Finally, a thank you to SWTSU professor Dr. Susan Day. For allowing me to "schmooze" in your office and listening objectively--sometimes--to my concerns, complaints, and successes, I am sincerely grateful.

My friends as well deserve (more than) a note of thanks: Teresa Angulo (my empathetic procrastination partner), Kristen Ballard (who always listened without complaint and showed me the beauties of word processing), and Mark Davison (yes, I'm working on my "book"). Lastly, many "muchas gracias" to Loretta Kneupper, the person who has seen me through academic crises and successes longer than anyone, excluding my parents.

Which brings me to my final acknowledgment. The most heart-felt thanks go to my parents, Joel and Kay Goldman, who let this bounce-back-baby come home, spend their money on tuition, earn a second degree and write this paper. They have endured both my tears and triumphs. Most importantly, however, they read me stories from day one, thereby allowing me to make connections between the stories I know, the stories I read and the one that I have written. The story that follows is for them.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	i
Contents	iii
CHAPTER I	
From Traditional Storytelling to Metanarration: Background on Words and Writers	1
CHAPTER II	
Toni Morrison's <u>Song of Solomon</u> : Listening to the Stories of Others to Find the Story of Self	16
CHAPTER III	
The Storytelling Role in Morrison's <u>Beloved</u> : Telling and Listening to Heal Oneself	46
CHAPTER IV	
Telling, Listening, Experiencing and Telling Again: The Healing Story in Leslie Marmon Silko's <u>Ceremony</u>	80
CHAPTER V	
Maxine Hong Kingston's <u>The Woman Warrior</u> : Storytelling by the Self to Create the Self	125
CHAPTER VI	
Oral/Literary Storytelling: Final Observations	164
Works Cited	172

## CHAPTER ONE

### From Traditional Storytelling to Metanarration: Background on Words and Writers

Stories, folk ballads, jokes, and proverbs are all forms of oral literature. As folklore scholar Alan Dundes points out, "the term 'oral literature' contains a paradox. If literature must be written, how then can one speak of oral (as opposed to written) literature?" (117). However, such a distinction is an ethnocentric, judgmental view (Dundes, Finnegan). Just because a text is not written down, does not mean that it cannot be classified as literature. Such an attitude toward the act of oral telling represents the notion that people who do not engage in the process of writing are somehow less complex, less intelligent than we are, and therefore cannot produce any art that might be considered "literature." However, oral stories, in fact, are just as complex as their literary counterparts (Dundes, Polanyi "Literary", Tannen). Moreover, the term literature now refers to "imaginative compositions," a phrase I might recast as verbal texts--to distinguish them from musical or artistic compositions--which are printed or oral, and may be rendered in verse, prose, or dramatic form ("Literature" Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms).

Of all the types of oral literature mentioned above, stories are probably the most common. First of all, they occur in ritualized as well as everyday contexts, and

second, folk-stories have been analyzed and classified to a greater degree than other folk literatures. While oral literature is classified into groups such as riddles, proverbs, children's games, stories, folk ballads and poetry, folk stories fall into several categories themselves. These classifications, then, are akin to the genre divisions of written literature. Although the divisions vary from folklorist to folklorist, traditional divisions are as follows: myth, folktale, legend (Dundes 117, Degh 59).

Myths refer to sacred stories; such stories are passed down orally, accepted as truth, and used to explain "how Earth and man came to be in their present state" (Dundes 117). Dundes extends this definition to say that myths occur in a time of "pre-creation" rather than human historical time (Dundes 117-18), but I would modify this statement and contend that they relate events that occur during creation. Legends, in contrast, are not sacred, although they are generally accepted as truth. As they usually are told, the storyteller knows a person who knows another person, who knows the person the story is about (Dundes 118); for example, the storyteller might say, "My coworker's cousin knows the girl who . . . and she [meaning the coworker] told me that . . . ." Legends may, like myths, still discuss the supernatural and, consequently, relate events that seem unbelievable, but they still take place, no matter how long ago, within human historical time

(Dundes 118). The story about George Washington chopping down the cherry tree as well as some of the King Arthur stories are examples. Finally, folktales are completely fictitious stories relating the adventures of real or magical characters "who work for their own ends" (Dundes 118). The only problem with this classification is that it omits most oral stories. Most people tell everyday, conversational stories, relating personal events (Polanyi "Literary" 155). These stories may seem mundane, but studies since the early 1960's have shown that everyday conversations follow literary/conversational structural patterns, have complex functions, and contain as much poetic language and as many literary devices as written or traditional oral literature.

Oral literature is as complex as written literature, is categorized as written literature is, uses poetic devices similar to those found in written literature, and, I would argue, has functions similar to those of written literature. Dundes contends that

Oral literature can educate, amuse, promote group solidarity, provide a sanctioned vehicle for group protest, or serve as a means of escape from reality. . . . [Moreover] oral literature not only transmits, maintains, and strengthens acceptable behavioral norms, but it also provides an institutionalized outlet for escapes from those norms. . . . [Finally] it provides an

impersonal, guilt-free acceptable mode of  
communication capable of carrying discussions of  
anxiety-ridden topics. (126)

All these functions can be said to apply to written literature as well; throughout literary history, writings have taught readers, provoked readers, acted as social or moral criticisms or encouragements, and, of course, entertained readers. Oral literature, however, does differ from its literary cousin in its form and abstract content. Because oral literature is just that, oral, "narrative genres float in an unlimited number of variants around a limited number of plots" (Degh 59). Thus basic plot outlines may remain static, while details of a given story are fluid and variable. Additionally, research demonstrates that "oral epics were not memorized but reconstructed at each telling through the imposition of formulaic phrases on the skeleton of a familiar plot" (Tannen 1). Oral literature, then, is dynamic, a living entity. This quality contrasts with static quality of written literature, a genre of literature that does not grow. Although readers may experience a new interpretation with each time re-reading of a written work, that change occurs inside the readers' head, not on the page; thus meaning may change but the story itself does not. Oral literature, in contrast, is transformed by both the teller and the people hearing the story; when one experiences oral literature, both the meaning and the story changes during the telling.



The themes or the subcontent of oral and written literature differ as well. In analysis of a written work, it is "assumed that the expressions contain meaning in themselves," rather than that the expressions are "a convenient tool to signal already shared social meaning" (Tannen 2). This fact reminds us that oral literature, or the act of engaging in an oral performance, is a cultural and social event. All groups--whether ethnic, job related, age-grades or another--possess bodies of oral knowledge, and all groups transmit, or pass down, that knowledge. Therefore, rather than making a personal point about the universe, people engaged in an oral telling session make points about the cultural environment that they inhabit. Additionally, when one reads a text, one interacts with the author's words on the page, rather than with the author personally. Oral storytelling events, in contrast, involve at least two people, and the reader/listener interacts with the teller's words, voice and emotions. Scholar Michael T. Marsden artfully delineates these differences between writers and storytellers: "The popular storyteller is more like the anonymous folk artist than the contemporary writer of 'literature' who mails off his interpretation of life to the world from the confines of a hidden study" (152, emphasis mine).

Since ancient times, though, authors have included oral storytelling within their individualized "interpretation[s] of life" (Marsden 152). The frame story

is a device in which a narrator tells a story within a story. Also called "narrative embedding," this technique of "placing tales within tales within tales" (Babcock 71) is a cross-cultural literary genre. The Homeric epic The Odyssey, while not distinctly a frame story because the poem does not close with a return to the muse, does open with the narrative frame "Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the story / of that man . . ." (I. 1-2). The jataka is an Indian frame story; it is a collection of more than 500 Indian folktales embedded within lessons about Buddhist ethics. The Thousand and One Nights is a frame story as well; Scheherazade escapes death by telling an unfinished story to her husband, the king, every night. Similarly, Boccaccio's Decameron and Chaucer's Canterbury Tales are stories about other characters and the stories they tell; several short, separate stories are told within the whole context of the framing stories, the story about fleeing the Black Plague in the Decameron and the story of a religious pilgrimage in Canterbury Tales.

Because frame stories (stories about storytelling) implicitly call "attention to the act of narrating," folklore scholar Barbara Babcock argues that a "frame tale . . . is the essence of metanarration" (71-2). Yet I would suggest that a distinction needs to be made between literary devices that draw the reader's/listener's attention to the storytelling event, and actual comments which overtly refer to the storytelling event. Such a distinction, then, would

differentiate between writers such as Chaucer, Boccaccio and Homer and writers who make specific comments about the storytelling process or the stories they are telling. For instance, when Elie Weisel writes that "tales, like people, all have the same beginning" (211), he is making a direct comment about storytelling to the reader. This idea, voiced from the narrator, is directly stated; in the frame stories, ideas about storytelling must be inferred from the simple fact that frame tales are stories about stories. Similarly, to refer to an author discussed in this text, Silko informs the reader of the fact that "stories . . . [are] all we have to fight off/ illness and death" (2). It is not necessary to uncover this idea in the text; it is not a deeply buried theme. Instead of leaving the reader to decipher the writer's ideas about storytelling, storytellers tell the audience (listener and/or reader) their opinions on or insights into this topic.

The three writers discussed in this thesis, Toni Morrison, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Maxine Hong Kingston, all explore and comment on the storytelling phenomenon. Each of these authors, in addition to telling the primary story of the protagonist and the characters that surround him or her, tells additional stories. These multiple tellings may be achieved either through storytelling by main characters or others, narrative voices in addition to the chief narrator of the novel, or, finally, through retellings or rewritings of myth and/or folklore. In essence, storytelling is both a

goal of each author--novelists are usually, by definition storytellers--and a theme of the books. To return to Babcock's argument, these women are all metanarrative writers. While all the works are metanarrative, Morrison's Song of Solomon and Beloved lack explicit, overt comments about storytelling. The other two books discussed, Silko's Ceremony and Kingston's Woman Warrior, contain overt metanarrative comments by authors/ narrators.

Not only do these writers engage in metanarrative storytelling, but they also engage the reader in the storytelling which takes place both as the novel and within the novel. Thus, the authors have succeeded in capturing that most elusive factor of a storytelling event, the actual performance. Impossible to reproduce in a written context, and even still not completely captured on tape and film, these three women, nevertheless, have left out information, carefully crafted dialogue, fractured the narrative structure and commented on the action, all in order to make the reading an aural--almost social--experience. Novelist and historian Elie Weisel writes that a story "belongs as much to the listener as the teller" (107), and Kingston, Morrison and Silko have evidenced that fact.

Aside from this connection in theme, these three writers have two other threads linking them together: they are all women and each is a member of a minority group. Thus, each writer has had her authorial voice repressed as a result of gender and background. Toni Morrison, an Afro-

American writer, was born Chloe Anthony Wofford in 1931 in the small mid-western town of Lorain, Ohio (Denard 319). Both sets of grandparents were sharecroppers, and, in the early 1900s, her parents left the economic and social oppression of the south for Ohio (Denard 319). Her parents' experiences in the South led her to cultivate "a strong distrust of whites and an understanding that the only tangible or emotional aid on which she could depend would come from her own community" (Denard 319). Counteracting this negative feeling, though, was Lorain's size and multi-ethnic composition; her hometown impressed upon her the importance of community--a common theme of her novels--as well as "the integrity of cultural difference" (Denard 321). Yet Morrison's most striking influence, in light of the ideas to be addressed here, was her family's means of instilling in the children a sense of cultural history. Her parents and grandparents

. . . provided Morrison with a two generational sense of African American history and a rich involvement with and respect for their ethnic heritage. Her growing years were filled with the jokes, lore, music, language, and myths of African American culture. Her mother sang to the children, her father told them folktales, and they both told "thrillingly terrifying" ghost stories. (Denard 320)

Morrison not only is well versed in the stories of her

heritage, but also is knowledgeable about the western literary tradition. Encouraged by her parents, as a young girl Morrison read works by Austen, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky (Denard 320). She majored in English and minored in classics at Howard University; later she earned her master's degree in English at Cornell (Denard 321). In 1970, fifteen years after receiving her master's degree, she published her first novel, The Bluest Eye. Clearly, then, Morrison lived a story-saturated life, thus providing her with the cultural and literary information that informs her stories. But I would argue that the most important consequence of this influence is not Morrison's knowledge of stories, but rather her understanding of their function and importance in society. In an early interview, Morrison lucidly explains the significance of telling stories:

People crave narration. Magazines only sell because they have stories in them, not because somebody wants to read those ads. . . . People want to hear a story. . . . That's the way they learn things. That's the way human beings organize their human knowledge--[through] fairy tales, myths. All narration. ("Seams" 58, Morrison's emphasis)

Leslie Marmon Silko grew up in Old Laguna, a Keres speaking community which is one of the many groups collectively called the Rio Grande Pueblos (Seyersted 13). Born in 1948 of mixed Anglo, Mexican and Laguna ancestry,

Silko did not feel completely excluded from the Indian population, but instead considered herself a marginal member of the community. Living in a home below the pueblo and near the river she "always thought there was something symbolic about that [where we lived], sort of putting us on the fringe of things" (Silko qtd. in Seyersted 13); this feeling echoes her protagonist's emotions in her novel Ceremony. And just as Morrison's relatives imbued her with the belief that stories are important, Silko's great-grandmother Marie and her grandfather's sister-in-law Susie influenced Silko in the same manner. Marie was a full blooded Native American who, in addition to teaching her some Keres (Seyersted 13), told the young Silko about "stories she remembered hearing when she was a girl" (Storyteller 210). Likewise, according to Silko's 1981 collage of fiction, poetry, autobiography and photography titled Storyteller, Susie was a member of "the last generation here at Laguna,/ that passed down an entire culture/ by word of mouth" (4,6).

Silko, like Morrison, read avidly as a child (Seyersted 14). She earned a bachelor's degree in English; in 1969 Silko entered a program designed to encourage Native Americans to become lawyers, but soon left to pursue her writing and teaching career (Seyersted 14). One need only to skim through the pages of Ceremony, or her other major work, Storyteller, to see the literary and cultural influences of her Laguna ancestry. Moreover, in her work she emphasizes

the connection between stories, myth, history, and the present. In an interview with Kim Barnes she explains that storytelling

. . . [is not] sitting down and telling a once upon a time kind of story. I mean [storytelling is] a whole way of seeing yourself, the people around you, your life, the place of your life in the bigger context, . . . in terms of what has gone on before, what's happened to other people. So it's a whole way of being. . . . (86)

For Silko, storytelling provides the dynamic connection between one's present time world and the past; it is a means of existence. The storytellers then, expose realities and truths. For Kingston, though, storytelling is more closely related to memory than to a way of life, and in a contrast to memory, her storytellers may be telling fictions rather than truths (Kingston "Eccentric" 179, Kingston "Story" 4). Both Morrison and Silko incorporate memories of stories in their writings, but Kingston bases much of her writing on her memories of actual experiences.

Born in California in 1940, Kingston, in her young life, parallels the childhood of Morrison and Silko. An avid reader living in Stockton, California (Medoff 251), she, like the other authors before her, was aware of cultural differences and "conflicting cultural allegiances" (Currier 235). Kingston earned an A.B. from Berkeley,



taught English at both the college and high school level, and then moved to Hawaii, "the place her ancestors . . . had hacked sugarcane farms out of wilderness" in 1967 (Currier 235). After the success of her 1976 novel The Woman Warrior, she decided to make writing a full-time career.

Kingston's inspiration and sources for her books are the stories she heard from both her family members and the Stockton Chinatown community (Currier 235). One of her main concerns is not only to give a voice to her experiences but also to articulate the voices of Chinese women and all Chinese immigrants to America (Medoff 252). Therefore, when Kingston writes she gives voice to a community as well as to individuals. Moreover, Kingston believes that her connection with community is what allows her to write as she does, and she comments that she shares this understanding of the importance of community with both Silko and Morrison:

I . . . feel an affinity [with Silko and Morrison] not only because I love them as people but because we seem to write alike. . . . We care about stories about people, and also that magical real place that we are all visiting. . . . Toni [Morrison's] and Leslie [Silko's] and my aliveness must come from our senses of a connection with people who have a community and a tribe. (Kingston "Eccentric" 184).

While much of the significance of storytelling to these three authors can be determined by looking at their background, an analysis of selected major works will further illustrate their dedication to and interest in the roles, function and importance of storytelling. Each chapter of textual analysis is divided into two sections. The first part analyzes the relationship of inter- and intratextual storytelling to the novel's themes; the second section explores the connections between narrative structure, textual content and the author's own oral-traditional heritage. Chapter two discusses Morrison's 1977 novel Song of Solomon, a work in which the storytelling, performed mainly by the novel's characters, is the means by which the male protagonist discovers his sense of self. Chapters three and four explore Morrison's Beloved (1987) and Silko's Ceremony (1977), respectively. In these two novels, storytelling expands from being a means to finding an identity, to acting as a therapy, a cure for diseased souls. These chapters also discuss the fact that these two novels place a strong burden on the reader to participate in the storytelling event. Chapter five, an analysis of Kingston's The Woman Warrior (1976), examines the relationship between story and history, words and language, marking a progression from more literal works to more abstract and philosophical ones. Finally, chapter six concludes with a discussion of

the implications of this theme, postulating reasons for why storytelling is a prominent theme in the work of late twentieth-century women writers.

## CHAPTER TWO

Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon:  
Listening to the Stories of Others to Find the Story of Self

### I The Search for Self and Community

In Song of Solomon, Toni Morrison opens not with the story of the main character, but with two other stories about people whose lives parallel the protagonist's story:

The North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Agent promised to fly from Mercy to the other side of Lake Superior at three o'clock. Two days before the event was to take place he tacked a note on the door of his little yellow house:

At 3:00 P.M. on Wednesday the 18th of February, 1931, I [Robert Smith] will take off from Mercy and fly away on my own wings. . . .

(Song 3)

Morrison notes that "this declarative sentence is designed to mock a journalistic style; . . . it could be the opening of an item in a small town newspaper" ("Unspeakable" 27). Thus, what could be the beginning--and end--of one story, the life and death of Robert Smith, poses as the beginning of another story, the story of the novel's protagonist Milkman Dead. Actually, a third story surrounds the birth of the protagonist, the story behind Pilate's "Sugarman" song. These three stories, all introduced within the book's opening pages, foreshadow or suggest themes of the novel.

From these opening tales, we learn of the importance of flight, of home and community, of names and identity; and not until after this brief suggestion of ideas to come in the novel does Morrison begin the story of Milkman Dead.

Morrison describes Milkman's birth and then recounts Milkman's childhood. Interspersed among the discussions of Milkman's life, are the stories of his father, his mother, and the family names, including his own. These first stories are told by the narrator to the reader, while other stories are told by characters to other characters. For instance, while giving background information about Ruth Foster Dead, Milkman's mother, Morrison describes the fact that Ruth finds solace in nursing her elementary-school-age son. She then recounts the episode in which Freddie, the janitor, discovers Ruth and devises the nickname "Milkman" for her youngest child (Song 14-15). After this story, the narration switches to Milkman's father's point of view, Macon Dead II, and we read Macon's reflections on his name:

Surely, he thought, he and his sister [Pilate] had some ancestor, . . . , who had a name that was real. A name given to him at birth with love and seriousness. A name that was not a joke, nor a disguise, nor a brand name. But who this lithe young man was, and where his cane stalk legs carried him from or to, could never be known. No. (Song 17-18).

This passage shows that Macon wants to know his "real" name, not the name an intoxicated civil worker assigned his father Jake (Milkman's grandfather), because knowing his real name will cement his identity and re-establish a sense of place he has no longer. Macon has lost his sense of place: his African roots have been obliterated by the actions of the civil servant, and he has been exiled by his local community. The townspeople do not view Macon Dead as "one of them." His car, which might have been an object of admiration, is renamed "Macon Dead's hearse" (32); likewise, he raised two college educated daughters in a town where few men, let alone their female counterparts, attended college. Mrs. Bains, Guitar's mother, succinctly expresses the townspeople's general feelings toward Macon Dead: "'A nigger in business is a terrible thing to see'" (Song 22). Returning to the quotation about naming, we see that the final word in the passage, "no," carries a significant irony. Milkman's name, while originating as a derogatory nickname by the janitor, suggests growth and life continuance; moreover, the image of Ruth nursing Milkman also suggests a drawing out, "his lips were pulling from her a thread of light" (Song 13). Thus, a parallel exists between this drawing out of light and Milkman's subsequent drawing out the threads of his past. Although Macon believes that his ancestral name "could never be known," the son he tried to abort discovers the Dead family history when

trying to establish his own singular sense of place and identity.

At age fifty-two, Macon decides that "maybe it was time to tell" his twelve-year-old son about his past (Song 51). This decision seems to indicate that Macon is finally assuming a parenting role: he takes responsibility for teaching his soon-to-be-adult son what being a member of the Macon Dead family means. After Macon talks to Milkman about his father's farm, Morrison provides the reader with pertinent narration:

Macon paused and let the smile come on. He had not said any of this for years. Had not even reminisced much about it recently. When he was first married he used to talk about Lincoln's Heaven to Ruth. . . . when he was just starting out buying houses, he would lounge around the barbershop and swap stories with the men there. But for years he hadn't had that kind of time or interest. (Song 51-2)

This quotation shows that Macon Dead unconsciously realizes the importance of "swap[ping] stories" and now must transmit this information to his son. But because he still cannot admit publicly that these stories are of any use, he finds it impossible to transmit this information to his son in any meaningful manner. Therefore, Macon fails to fulfill his parental storytelling role. Moreover, these comments reflect his surname, "Dead," for by refusing to find the

"time or interest" to tell family stories Macon refuses to keep the family history, his thread to the past, alive.

Macon interrupts his storytelling in order to tell his son that he must start learning the family business. However, he resumes his storytelling role after Milkman strikes his father, an action prompted by Macon's striking Ruth. Macon explains the relationship Ruth had with her father, and tells Milkman that this relationship is a just cause for his abuse of his wife. Ironically, despite being privy to personal information about his family, Milkman still remains distant: "part of his [Milkman's] sympathy came from the fact that he himself was not involved or in any way threatened by the stranger's story" (Song 75). This story, however, is being told not by a "stranger" but by Milkman's father; moreover, Milkman is involved in this story, for it is the story of his parents' relationship and, therefore, part of his own story/identity. After the conversation with his father, Milkman learns his mother's story. But neither does this story, like his father's, reinforce Milkman's sense of self. Milkman believes that "all he knew in the world about the world was what other people had told him. He felt like a garbage pail for the actions and hatreds of other people. He himself did nothing" (Song 120). While much of what people know in the world is what other people tell them--a way in which culture and knowledge are shared--Ruth's and Macon's attempts at storytelling fail Milkman and serve only themselves and,



ultimately, the reader. Joseph Skerret echoes this point: "Milkman's parents cannot provide him with the key to understanding and identity. To each of them, he is an extension of . . . [themselves] not really an independent person at all" (194). Even Ruth realizes this phenomenon when she visits Pilate about Hagar's attempts to murder Milkman: "Her son had never been a person to her, a separate real person. He had always been a passion" (Song 131).

Thus, for Milkman to discover himself, he will need to fashion his own story out of the stories other people have given him. Since his parents clearly cannot perform this function, another person must, and that person is Pilate, his aunt. Skerret observes that only for Pilate "storytelling is not self- dramatization, self- justification, or ego action" (195). Despite Macon's belief that "Pilate can't teach you a thing you can use in this world" (Song 55), Pilate will teach Milkman more than Macon will or can. The reader, interestingly, is already informed of this fact by a line of Morrison's narration, "[Guitar] would take him to the woman who would have as much to do with his future as she had his past" (Song 35). Milkman's visits to Pilate's house, made at the coming-of-age of twelve, mark the beginnings of his separation from his parents, and consequently the beginning of his journey to adulthood.

Pilate is a character Paula Rabinowitz calls "a magical woman," one who "posses[es] qualities which places

. . . [her] outside of mundane social relations" (32).

Pilate's house has no electricity or running water, she eats when she is hungry rather than three times a day, and she is a biological mystery: she lacks a navel. Moreover, she is the family's storyteller: she knows portions of the family history, traditional lore and folk medicine--knowledge which enabled Milkman to be born, and she captivates the people to whom she talks. Her personality contrasts directly with that of her brother Macon, who is obsessed with achieving the symbols of the upper-middle-class white world. He owns houses and property; he drives his green Packard into wealthy white neighborhoods; he believes that he won his wife by the "magic" of his two rental property keys (Song 23). Pilate, then, possesses the power, the knowledge and the skill to take on the role of cultural historian. Her being historian/storyteller provides two types of information. First she provides the boys with socializing information, what they need to know in order to function in a community. To begin with, she teaches Milkman (and Guitar) that the greeting "hi" is fit only for "pigs and sheep" (Song 37). Next, she instructs them on how to make the perfect soft boiled egg, making sure they know that "the water and the egg have to meet each other on a kind of equal standing" (Song 39), this statement foreshadowing Milkman's later understanding that people must "meet each other on a[n] equal standing." Later we learn that she had "sung him songs, fed him bananas and corn bread and, . . .

hot nut soup" (Song 211). This information simultaneously strengthens his identity and sense of community. Songs are cultural artifacts of a group; most likely, Pilate taught Milkman blues or spirituals that he would not otherwise hear in his sterile, money-oriented environment. Likewise, the foods Pilate exposes Milkman to are ethnic foods. Bananas and corn bread are southern foods, while nut soup is a dish African slaves brought to America. These lessons are cultural stories themselves. The second type of information Pilate provides is background about Milkman's family. We learn that Macon Dead II saved his sister's life and that their father was shot off a fence on the family farm in Montour county (Song 42). Pilate's storytelling transfixes the boys: "The boys watched, afraid to say anything lest they ruin the next part of her story, and afraid to remain silent lest she not go on with its telling" (Song 43). This story, like Macon's storytelling episodes, is interrupted; however, this interruption is unimportant because Milkman has found the source that will lead him to his identity and ultimate salvation.

About halfway through the novel, Macon decides to tell Milkman the remaining information about his family background. He relates a story explaining that he and Pilate saw their father killed, stayed with Circe at a white family's home, ran away, and shot their father's murderer. Additionally, they found several green sacks containing what Macon believed was gold nuggets. Finally,

when he is done, he concludes that Pilate has the gold in a green tarpaulin in her home. He then orders his son to "get the gold" (Song 173). Milkman, believing that the gold will bring him freedom and self-dependence, decides to ask Guitar to help him steal it.

Command. That was what he wanted. . . . He just wanted to beat a path away from his parents' past which was also their present and which was threatening to become his present as well. . . . this latest Jack and the Beanstalk bid for freedom, even though it had been handed to him by his father--assigned almost--stood some chance of success. (Song 180-1)

Ironically, while the quest for the gold leads Milkman away from his parents' immediate past, the quest will take him closer to his father's past than he ever has been before. This escape, however, is not immediate. The police stop Guitar and Milkman and detain them, after discovering that the green sack contains human bones. In order for Guitar and Milkman to be released from jail, Pilate must tell a story and create a new reality for the police. She performs an "Aunt Jemima act" (Song 211), using language to convince the police that the reality--that the two men were attempting to steal gold--is not true reality. This manipulation of language is similar to the way Corinthians, Milkman's sister, creates the story that she is an "amanuensis" (Song 188) rather than a maid. Yet, the

difference lies in the fact that Corinthians's story, like Ruth's and Macon's before, is self-serving; she has created this fiction in order to spare herself shame in front of her parents. Pilate created her fiction selflessly--although one could argue that, of course, she wanted the bones returned-- humiliating herself in order to help her "brother" Milkman (Song 43).

After the botched burglary, the novel begins part two. One critic notes that the two parts of the novel actually reflect two different types of stories. The first part describes Milkman's "private story," meaning his "relationships with his family, his best friend Guitar, and his cousin Hagar" (Wegs 216). Part two, then, describes his public story, his history, the struggle to "find a sense of community with his people" (Wegs 217). Milkman embarks on this journey at age thirty-two, conscious only that he is searching for the gold rather than searching for an identity. Although he has a vague sense that his quest for the gold will allow him to realize his dream of flight, the ultimate confirmation of his fully realized identity, but Milkman does not know that finding his roots will be the key to his flying ability. Morrison reveals the connection between flight, identity and Milkman's decision to find the gold by himself in the following passage:

This one time he wanted to go solo. Into the air, away from real life, he felt free, but on the ground, when he talked to Guitar just before

he left, the wings of all those other people's nightmares flapped in his face and constrained him. (Song 222)

This desire to fly has been with Milkman since childhood. As a young boy, Milkman "knelt in his room at the window sill and wondered again why he had to stay level on the ground" (Song 10). Flight in the novel is associated with freedom and independence. When Milkman leaves Southside to find the gold, he takes the first step toward shedding dependence on his parents and on his Northern, selfish way of life; this journey will provide an opportunity to fly away. It is, however, only a first step. Milkman is not yet a completely realized person; his experiences in the South are what ultimately allow him to fly. The scene with the peacock strengthens the importance of the flying motif. While observing a male peacock on the roof of a defunct Buick dealership, Milkman asks Guitar why the bird "'can't fly no better than a chicken?'" Guitar replies, "'Too much tail. All that jewelry weighs it down. Like vanity. Can't nobody fly with all that shit. Wanna fly, you got to give up the shit that weighs you down'" (Song 179). Critic Jaqueline De Weever suggests flight is impossible for Milkman until he has shed "his psychic baggage" (139), meaning his psychological confusions and delusions about who he is and how he relates to his family and community. This interpretation appears valid in light of Robert Smith's "flight" from Mercy hospital and, consequently, the Seven

Days, the group responsible for avenging murders of black citizens by murdering whites. The pressure of being a Days member weighed Smith down psychologically; as a result, he could not fly, and so he died instead of sailing off into the sky. Milkman must shed not only his "psychological baggage," but also, as Guitar notes, his vanity. By losing his vanity of being a man in relation to women, his vanity of being an educated Northerner, and his vanity of considering himself the most important person in his world, Milkman will discover his self and regain a new sense of place.

Milkman's arrival in Danville, a tiny Pennsylvania town which contrasts sharply with Milkman's urban hometown Southside, demonstrates that he is, indeed, "weighed down" (Song 179) with vanity. He arrives in Danville wearing a "beige three piece suit, his button down light blue shirt and black string tie, and his beautiful Florsheim shoes" (Song 228). All of these clothes are symbols of the middle class, urban society that he has left; he must exchange them for an existence more similar to his aunt's. In addition, he must begin to find his social niche, the psycho-social sense of place that his parents lack in the Southside community. Milkman's re-integration with his past begins when he meets Reverend Cooper:

. . . "I know your people!"

Milkman smiled and let his shoulders slump a little. It was a good feeling to come into a strange town and find a stranger who knew your people. . . . it meant: links. (Song 231)

Reverend Cooper proceeds to tell Milkman the story "that he'd heard many times before but only half listened to" (Song 233). The townspeople, as well, fill in or repeat various versions of the tale of Milkman's grandfather. As the townspeople learn about the fate of the son (Macon Dead II) of their local hero, Jake (Macon Dead I), Milkman realizes that "his grandfather Jake, a prosperous farmer, is venerated for the same qualities his father, a prosperous landlord, is resented for" (Blake 81). Jake had "come out of nowhere, . . . broke as a convict, . . . and in one year he'd leased ten acres, the next ten more. Sixteen years later he had one of the best farms in Montour county" (Song 237). Similarly, Macon begins with "only two keys in his pocket" (Song 22) and becomes one of the wealthiest real estate entrepreneurs of Southside. The difference between the two men, however, lies not so much in their parallel life stories, but in their feelings of security in each of their life-stories. The original Macon Dead, Jake, had a strong sense of place, fit neatly into the community, and never forgot his poor-slave origins. Macon Dead II, on the other hand, is dissatisfied with his name, his wife, his family. He lacks the personal security of his father, and acquires things out of greed, rather than as proof that a



black man can succeed in the white world.

Milkman's encounter with Circe, the midwife who brought both Pilate and Macon into the world, provides him with enough information to head for Virginia. He arrives in Shalimar, clearly an outsider who insults the local men not only by stating that he needed to buy a new car if his old one could not be fixed, but also by neglecting to "say his name" or ask the men about theirs (Song 269). Although Milkman has found the place of his roots, he does not yet belong in the community; he must undergo several tests in order to solidify his place in the town. First he fights with the younger men, settling questions about North/South and White/Black differences in male sexuality and strength. After the fight, the elder males ask Milkman to join them on a hunt, a classic rite-of-passage ritual. The hunt is Milkman's opportunity to lose fully the bourgeois vanity of his urban life and rely on and rediscover

what he was born with, or had learned to use, . . . endurance. Eyes, ears, nose, taste, touch-- and some other sense that he knew he did not have: an ability to separate out, of all the things there were to sense, the one that life itself might depend on. (Song 281)

This process, learning these survival skills, brings Milkman closer to finding his identity and re-establishing a sense of place within a community. Morrison writes that Milkman "didn't feel close to them [the people of Shalimar], but he

did feel connected, as though there was some cord or pulse or information he shared. Back home he had never felt that way. . . " (Song 296). Milkman at this point is near the end of his quest for identity and will achieve what his father, mother, sisters, and best friend can never accomplish. Class separated the Foster-Dead family from the Southside community; revenge separated Guitar from the townspeople. The hunt allows Milkman to integrate with the Shalimar community by forcing him to shed his urban baggage and presumptions. Morrison suggests that he has accomplished this goal after the hunt when she writes, "a peacock soared away" (Song 286). Milkman, unlike his friend-turned-enemy Guitar, will be able to fly. Although not apparent at first, Milkman and Guitar share similar life stories; both act not of their own accord, but as the result of other people's actions, Guitar in reaction to white-on-black violence, Milkman in response to his father. In this sense, Guitar, as Milkman does, lives up to his name; he is not a person of action, he is an instrument to be played upon. Interestingly Guitar, despite his despising Macon, also has much in common with Macon Dead (Mason 572); each is "infected by a nearly single-mindedly rigid pursuit of. . . property and revenge" (Mason 572). Although these two goals are different, the motivations to achieve these goals are the same: both motivations come from the white world, not from personal desires. Thus while eventually Milkman's quest for the gold becomes second in importance to his

search for an identity, and he will, like the peacock, be able to soar away, Guitar, like Milkman's father, will remain locked to the ground.

Slowly, Milkman begins to piece the bits of his story together. He listens, not just hears, the folk song that the children of Shalimar sing, and he recognizes it as a variation of the "old blues song Pilate sang all the time" (Song 303). Unable to write down the words, he memorizes the song--as his ancestors would have done--realizing that it reveals part of his cultural heritage. The song, a variation of a common black folktale about flying slaves returning to Africa (Blake 77), tells the story of a local folk hero, Solomon, who fathered inordinate numbers of children, abandoned his wife Ryna and the only child named in the song, Jake, in order to fly home. Milkman, with information from Susan Byrd, learns that Jake, one of the flying Africans, is his grandfather, that he was left to be raised by Heddy, and that he ran off with an Indian woman named Singing Bird. Knowing this, Milkman discovers that he too can fly.

Milkman returns to Southside intending to tell Pilate his newly found information about their history, but she confronts him and locks him in the basement as punishment for being responsible for the death of her granddaughter, Hagar. Not until now does Milkman realize the consequences of his relatives' magical abilities. His grandfather "left everybody down on the ground" (Song 332) just as Milkman

left Hagar, his sisters and his parents (Awkward 495). Milkman, however, negotiates his release by telling Pilate that she had been "carryin' Papa," her father, (Song 337) in the green bag; he then takes Pilate on a trip back to Shalimar to bury her father. The pair bury the bones, and Guitar, convinced that Milkman found the gold and kept it for himself, misses Milkman and shoots Pilate. Confronted with both Hagar's death and the death of the woman who started him on his quest for self-identity and fulfillment, Milkman concludes that "a human life is precious. You shouldn't go off and leave it" (Song 209, Wegs 219). He also learns that he has a responsibility to carry on the flying African tradition; he needs to continue telling the story, or, in this case, continue singing the song. The dying Pilate asks Milkman to sing for her, and, despite the fact that "he knew no songs," he chants "'Sugargirl don't leave me here/Cotton balls to choke me'" (Song 340). A bird flies off with Pilate's name-box-earring reinforcing the idea that Milkman's family could fly. Armed with this natural sign, Milkman, faced with the threat of being killed by Guitar, chooses to leap into the gulch, not knowing whether he can fly or not. This leap is his most unselfish act in the novel (De Weever 144); he places the importance of tradition in front of himself. Performing this act of selflessness proves that he has won the battle between himself and Guitar, a battle necessary to win if he is to

complete his mythic journey as the hero (Harris 75). Now that Milkman has completed his quest for self knowledge and community, he no longer needs to rely on Pilate to guide him. In the end, Milkman is "as bright as a lodestar" (Song 341), the star like the North star that provides guidance and direction, thus proving that he is now his own guide and, having lost his peacock tail feathers, he can finally "surrender to the air, and ride it" (Song 341).

## II

### Storytelling, Narrative Structure and Oral Tradition A Fusion of Varied Forms and Fictions

As the above discussion notes, several stories contribute to both the themes and to the telling of the entire work Song of Solomon. The story is a classical story in that it closely follows traditional archetypal monomyth structures (Awkward, Harris): the hero embarks on a journey, undergoes several trials and tests, matures emotionally, and (usually) returns home. Before beginning the story of the novel's protagonist, however, the novel opens with introductions to the story of Robert Smith, and to the story of Sugarman/Solomon, one of the fabled flying Africans. Neither of these introductory stories is finished, however; they are interrupted by a physical break in the narrative which finally introduces the story of Milkman Dead, and, as superfluous as they might seem, each of these separate stories is related thematically to Milkman's story. Thus, one could argue that Morrison

provides thematic commentary on her whole novel through the comments made in the individual storytelling episodes. Yet, Morrison's structuring of both the novel's storytelling events and the story of the whole novel not only comment on the storytelling themes, but explore, and at times reproduce, the nature of storytelling as well.

The first story about the protagonist is told not as the story of Milkman, but rather as the story of the son of Ruth Foster Dead and Macon Dead. As readers, we do not know the protagonist's name, neither first nor last, until Morrison begins telling Macon Dead II's story. Macon's story moves from past to present to past, circles around the plot, and must be stopped and started three times in the novel before it is finished. Moreover, not only one person tells his story; the narrator reports it and Macon relates it through memory. This remembering is presented to the reader rather than to any particular character. Macon's story begins in a timeless period; it is told through narration each time the reader reads the novel:

Macon Dead never knew how it came about--how his only son acquired the nickname that stuck in spite of his own refusal to use it or acknowledge it. (Song 15)

Morrison presents this information to the reader in a temporal vacuum. A reader could be presented with this information at any time after a mention of Milkman's birth. The same physical break in the text that separates Robert

Smith's story from Milkman's story separates Milkman's story from Macon's. The double-spacing of the text suggests that the brief story that is to follow could just as well have been the beginning of the novel. Macon then reminisces about early married years with his wife; next, after a brief interruption in present time telling the reader that Macon is walking to work, he remembers the story of how Pilate got her name. He moves to Milkman's birth. This story complete, we return to the present story, Macon's walk to work. Once at work the reader learns that Macon is going to evict the Bains family, but once he has completed that chore, he begins reminiscing once more. Here the narrator intrudes giving the reader information about the relationship of his wife with her father and even gives the reader privileged information about the late Dr. Foster's thoughts. This narrative explication complete, the present story continues and the chapter ends in present-reader time.

Clearly then, many voices, in various temporal modes, engage in the storytelling role. But not all these voices tell their stories in the same manner, and the way in which they tell their stories determines whether or not the storytellers are effective. As pointed out in the earlier discussion, the motivations for telling stories can effect their efficacy; for instance, Macon and Ruth tell their stories only to justify their own behaviors, while Pilate selflessly tells stories in order to benefit the listener. Moreover, not only does the motivation for telling determine

whether or not the storytellers are effective, but how the stories are told effects their power as well.

In Telling the American Story, Livia Polanyi contends that "in recounting a story, a teller describes events which took place in one specific past time world in order to make some sort of point about the world which teller and story recipients share" (16, author's emphasis). Moreover, the storyteller is responsible for "making the relevance of the telling clear" (Polanyi 21). This relevance is indicated by linguistic and textual clues. If storytellers do not engage in these activities, their stories will not be effective. For example, when Macon and Ruth give their parallel stories, each explaining why their marriage has failed, they tell Milkman the story without giving the story any relevance. Macon even states, "'Nothing I'm about to say is by way of apology or excuse. It's just information'" (Song 70). Besides the fact that Macon tells the story more for his own benefit than for the benefit of his son, this lack of relevancy is another reason why the story seems to be a "stranger's" (Song 75). Also, after Macon relates his "information," Guitar tries to empathize with Milkman's distress at Macon's violence by telling a story about killing a doe (Song 86). Guitar, too, fails to provide any context for his story. While he begins with the phrases "'Just listen, Milkman. Listen to me'" (85), thus alerting Milkman to the fact that a story will be told, he fails to



make his point clear to his friend. Guitar tries to explain, but Milkman is unable to use the story.

"So I know how you felt when you saw your father hit your mother. It's like that doe. A man shouldn't do that. . . . "

Milkman nodded his head, but it was clear to Guitar that nothing he had said had made any difference. (Song 86)

Similarly, when Milkman follows Ruth to the cemetery only discover that she has been visiting her father's grave, she begins her explanation "in the middle of a sentence" (Song 123), rather than with the verbal cues that introduce the oral telling of any story. Thus, Milkman does not know why he is hearing the story he is hearing, and, consequently, cannot benefit from it.

The next major storytelling event in the novel is a story Pilate tells Ruth, not Milkman. Ruth confronts Pilate about Hagar's attempts to murder her only son, and then Pilate tells the story of her childhood to Ruth. The structure of this story is unusual in that Pilate, herself, does not tell Ruth all of her childhood story directly. Instead of Pilate's entire life story being represented by dialogue, as it logically should occur since the narrator is recounting Pilate's telling of the story to Ruth, the narration changes to third person. The narration does not read, for instance, that Pilate said "I leapt," or "I saw"; rather, instead of using quotation marks, the text reads

"Pilate leaped" or "Pilate saw" (emphasis mine, Song 142-3). Thus, the "I" of the story has disappeared. This information about Pilate's past, then, in actuality benefits only the reader, instead of the character to whom it is directed. No longer does the narrator relate the story to the reader, but the narrator becomes the story's storyteller. In fact, the story and the chapter close with the narrator reporting that "Pilate was making [her life story] deliberately long to keep Ruth's mind off Hagar" (Song 152), a point which makes the reader fully aware of the importance and reason behind the story.

Morrison employs a similar narrative strategy with a story that Macon tells. He begins

"A long time ago, I told you about when I was a boy on the farm. About Pilate and me. About my father getting killed. I never finished the story: I never told you all of it. The part I left out about me and Pilate. I tried to keep you away from her and said she was a snake. Now I'm going to tell you why." (Song 166)

The story that Macon tells parallels Pilate's story in structure; beginning with an active dialogue, Macon talking to his son, the story changes to a third person narrative. At this point, the reader loses sight of the fact that Milkman is the recipient of this story until Macon closes his tale. After describing the death of his father to the argument over the dead man's gold, Macon finally directs a

statement to his son: "'She took it Macon [Milkman]. After all that, she took the gold'" (Song 173). By switching back and forth between these different types of narrative tellings, the reader can participate in, rather than observe, the story; "I have to provide the places and spaces so the reader can participate," writes Morrison ("Rootedness" 341). Morrison elaborates this point further:

. . . into these [interpretive] spaces should fall the ruminations of the reader and his or her invented or recollected or misunderstood knowingness. The reader as narrator asks the questions. ("Unspeakable" 29)

Thus because the reader must fill in the gaps left open by Morrison, the reader creates the story by completing it. In Morrison's work, the reader's background knowledge answers some of the questions about character's motives, personalities and actions; as in a conversation, room is left for the one not telling the story to participate. The reader hears rather than views/reads the story:

. . . to have the reader feel the narrator without identifying the narrator . . . is what's important. What is left out is as important as what is there. To construct the dialogue so that it is heard. So that there are no adverbs. . . 'he said menacingly.' The menace should be in the sentence. ("Rootedness" 341, author's emphasis)

Any number of examples from Morrison's text support her claim to construct aurally perceived dialogue. For instance, when Ruth tells Macon her story about taking communion at Anna Djvorak's wedding, Macon's angry words to his wife capture his disgust and contempt for her.

"You didn't know that only Catholics take communion in a Catholic church?" . . .

"No, Macon. How would I know?"

"You see them put up their own school, keep their kids out of public schools, and you still think their religious stuff is open to anybody who wants to drop in?"

"Communion is communion."

"You're a silly woman." (Song 66)

Morrison's dialogue captures all of Macon's incredulity and disdain. His opening statement "'You didn't know'" is obviously a sarcastic comment. Moreover, Morrison makes Ruth her timid self by answering "'How would I know" (emphasis mine) rather than "I didn't know." The phrase "I didn't know" would have been a defense of her action; she took communion out of ignorance. Instead, Ruth reinforces her lack of confidence by using the conditional "would" in her reply. Macon's answer to her is in an interrogative tone. The rhythm and structure of his question "you see them do 'x', do 'y' and then you still think 'z'" reminds one of an interrogation. Finally, Macon concludes his barrage by the succinct statement "You're a silly woman."

The sentence, subject, linking verb, adjective plus noun is simple direct and, for that very reason, biting.

A second example of Morrison's aural dialogue occurs when Milkman asks Guitar to help him steal the gold from Pilate.

"What's the split?" [said Guitar]

"Three ways"

"Your papa know that?"

"Not yet. He thinks it's two ways."

"When you gonna tell him?"

"Afterwards."

. . . .

"When do we get it?"

"Whenever we want to."

Guitar spread his palm. "My man." Milkman slapped his hand. "Legal tender. Legal tender. I love it. Sounds like a virgin bride."

(Song 175)

This conversation follows an overall rhythmic pattern of call and response. Guitar asks the questions and Milkman answers them. Critic Joyce Wegs notes that this same structure can be seen/heard in the scene in which Reba and Pilate console Hagar about her abandonment by Milkman (215). This call response pattern creates a miniature blues song (Wegs 215) about two men striking a deal and sharing stolen goods. The importance of this aural dialogue goes beyond the effect it has on the reader. Morrison points out

that while the blues used to be a "healing" art form specifically for Black people as a distinct cultural group, this art form is now in the public domain. Thus Blacks need the novel to function as the blues, ("Rootedness" 340) and, I would suggest, as other orally transmitted texts used to function for an ethnic group. The novel will become, then, a place where a cultural group can express common concerns, individual problems, and the corresponding hope and despair (Morrison "Rootedness" 340; Wegs 212).

Therefore, when Morrison creates an aural text, she creates text that has "the ability to be [and function as] both print and oral literature" ("Rootedness" 341). Oral literature, whether stories, songs, myths or herbal lore, had the function of establishing and solidifying group identity, and Morrison succeeds in having her novel function in such a way.

The blues song that provides the key to Milkman's identity is a variation of a popular Negro folktale that originated during slave times (Blake 77). Several variations of the folktale exist, but the basic plot of each story is the same: An especially cruel overseer is abusing slaves on an extremely hot day. In response, one of the slaves whispers magic African words, and that slave rises above the fields to return to Africa (Hamilton 166, Georgia WPA Drums and Shadows). The adoption/adaptation of this particular folktale, combined with her distinctly aural text, suggests that Morrison has accomplished her goal to

write literature that may "be both print and oral literature" ("Rootedness" 341). Milkman's ancestral history has become part of the oral tradition of the townspeople of Shalimar; one critic states that his history has been "mythologized" (Harris 71). Therefore, the novel Song of Solomon, which is essentially the story of Milkman's family history, becomes an orally transmitted "family legend" (De Weever 143), a legend which is part of the larger corpus of black tradition. Thus Song of Solomon moves beyond being a container for Black folklore and instead becomes a type of Black folklore itself.

The novel, while becoming Black folklore, also includes other references to the Western oral tradition. Part II opens with the lines "When Hansel and Gretel stood in the forest and saw the house in the clearing before them, the little hairs at the nape of their necks must have shivered" (Song 219). This allusion is important both structurally and thematically to the novel. The smell of ginger is linked in the novel to Pilate, the wildness of Southside and the Circe the midwife's overgrown farm, and Susan Byrd's home (Song 339, 241, 324); the scent also refers to Africa (Song 185), and the spice itself is used in folk healing. Thus the fact that Circe's house is the gingerbread house suggests that Milkman is close to finding his roots; he is moving closer to a place that is traditional rather than modern, rural rather than urban.

Structurally, the fairy tale parallels Milkman's search for the gold (De Weever 141). Milkman finds Circe's house in the woods believing that she knows where he can find the gold, an object to satiate his selfish hunger for ownership (De Weever 141), just as Hansel and Gretel enter the gingerbread house in order to find food to satiate their hunger.

The Hansel and Gretel image is not the only reference to fairy tales found in the novel. Critic Jaqueline De Weever discovers references to Rumpelstiltskin, and Jack and the Beanstalk, and she sees an inverted parallel of a Hans Christian Andersen story in Morrison's work (134, 138, 140). The flight imagery, particularly Robert Smith's leap from Mercy Hospital, alludes to the Icarus myth. Moreover, there are various references to the Homeric oral tradition. The midwife Circe clearly refers to the Greek enchantress who changed humans into animals. Furthermore, the battle with the men of Shalimar echoes Odysseus' battle with the men who, while courting Penelope, have overtaken the Great Hall. Also, The Odyssey is the "song" of Odysseus (Book I, lines 1-15), just as both the novel and the folksong Song of Solomon is the song of Milkman. Finally, a Biblical oral tradition exists within Morrison's work, as evidenced by the names of Pilate, Ruth, Corinthians, and Solomon. This profusion of the Western folk tradition further reinforces the storytelling theme of the novel; the readers receive



stories beyond the scope of the novel. Even though this novel is about Black characters, and refers to Black folklore, the work transcends this ethnic label. In the discussion of Beloved to follow, we shall see how Morrison has created a text more about history than myth, more about healing oneself than about finding oneself. While in Song of Solomon Morrison has written a song with which all readers/listeners can identify, in Beloved she retells a history which only a few can share.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Storytelling Role in Morrison's Beloved: Telling and Listening to Heal Oneself

#### I

#### Talking as History and Therapy

Morrison's fifth novel Beloved, like Song of Solomon, is a story based on the interweaving of the stories of the novel's main characters. But in Song of Solomon, the reader accompanies Milkman on his identity quest, piecing together Milkman's story as he pieces it together himself. In Beloved, however, the reader must piece together the story of the ghostly figure--the title character--that haunts 124, as well as the life-stories of the novel's main characters; neither Morrison's characters nor her narrator tells the reader a complete story. Also, while Song of Solomon's narrative diverges at times from a standard linear format when various characters tell their respective stories, the framing storyline essentially remains linear. Morrison's technique in Beloved, however, is strikingly different. She pastes together fragments of stories, poetry and stream-of-consciousness narrative to tell both a familial and a historical tale. But despite these differences in structure, many of the basic themes of the novel are identical. Morrison stresses the idea of community, identity and individuality. All the characters, but the three main female characters in particular, work to re-establish their own identities in terms of themselves

and their relationship to their neighboring community and the larger white-dominated world. Yet in Beloved, Morrison moves beyond the simple storytelling theme, and explores the implications of storytelling, language, speech and writing.

As in Song of Solomon, Morrison opens Beloved with a statement that captures--although the reader may not be aware of this fact--much of the significance of the novel and offers clues to the novel's present-time plot: "124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom" (Beloved 3). Morrison comments that beginning the novel with the numbers serves two purposes. First, the numbers give the house where most of the primary actions occur "an identity"; second, because the numbers are numerals rather than the words, they force the reader to hear/speak them rather than read them ("Unspeakable" 31). This hearing contributes to the orality of the novel, thus making the reader an active participant in the storytelling. The numbers themselves are significant as well. Sethe had four children; four men came to take them away (Beloved 148). Baby Suggs had eight children, one times two times four. Also, when the numbers are added together, they form the number seven, a cycle of creation and completion (Samuels 136). No completion exists in this novel, however, a contrast to Milkman's completed quest. But while the stories of Sethe, Denver, Baby Suggs, and Paul D are, for the most part, completed, Beloved's story remains enigmatic; and the true task of the

novel, telling the story of slavery, is never really finished.

We do not learn, until the third page of the novel, why 124 was spiteful. One single line, "a house palsied by the baby's fury at having its own throat cut" (Beloved 5), begins to answer the reader's questions about the opening line. Yet the story behind *Beloved* unfolds slowly, in small pieces, and deciphering her story becomes a principal event of the novel. Whether *Beloved* is the ghost of Sethe's dead daughter or a woman haunted by slavery is ambiguous; Morrison provides textual information to support both contentions. The most obvious support for believing that *Beloved* truly is the ghost-daughter *Beloved* is that *Beloved*'s response to Paul D's query "'What might your name be?'" is "'Beloved.'" Furthermore, she does not have a last name (Beloved 52); this fact suggests that, as a ghost, she uses the only words on the gravestone which Sethe erected for her baby girl to identify herself. Paul D arrives at 124 in 1873; Sethe attempted to murder her children in 1855 (Finney 23). *Beloved* is described as being "about nineteen or twenty" (55), the age Sethe's daughter would have been had she been alive. Moreover, she displays the characteristics of a baby. Her sleeping patterns resemble an infant's; her skin lacks lines of work or age (52-53). *Beloved* is also incontinent (Beloved 54), another feature that links her physically to Sethe's child. Aside from these physical clues, other events

suggest that Beloved is the ghost child. The family dog, Here Boy, runs away at Beloved's arrival; this action relates to the fact that he refused to enter the house after the dead baby's spirit, like a poltergeist, had thrown him against the house walls (Beloved 55,12). Morrison even uses ghostly terms to write about Beloved; she, "like a familiar . . . hovered" around Sethe (Beloved 57). Finally, Sethe compares her need to rush to the outhouse with an uncontrollable urge to urinate, at the moment Sethe, Paul D, and Denver first encounter Beloved, with the "flooding when Denver was born" (Beloved 51); this striking image further suggests that Beloved may be her child. Although Sethe associates this flood with the time Denver was born rather than when Beloved was born, the image still connects Beloved to a birth.

Critic Elizabeth B. House, on the other hand, creates a strong argument against Beloved's being Sethe's daughter. Looking at Beloved's stream-of-consciousness dialogue near the close of Part II, she uncovers various references to a journey on a slave ship. Citing such lines such as "there will never be a time when I am not crouching," "The men without skin," "those able to die are in a pile . . . they fall into the sea" (210, 211), she constructs a convincing argument that Beloved is a young woman brought to America on a slave ship and finds community with Sethe's family (House 17). Her strongest point, though, lies not in this narration, but in an interpretation of the novel's opening

quotation prefacing the novel itself: "I will call them my people,/which were not my people;/and her beloved,/which was not beloved./Romans 9:25" (Beloved frontispiece). House suggests that the last two lines of the biblical quotation are meant to be taken literally: "the mysterious girl is not really Sethe's murdered daughter returned from the grave; she is 'called' Beloved, but she is not Sethe's child" (22).

I would argue, in agreement with critic Susan Bowers, that Beloved is both ghost and former slave girl. She writes ". . . Beloved is much more than Sethe's resurrected daughter. She is the embodiment of the collective pain and rage of the millions of slaves who died on the Middle Passage and suffered the tortures of slavery" (Bowers 66). Additionally, by being both ghost and a people's collective unconscious, Beloved becomes Sethe's rage incarnate as well. The horrors of slavery were what prompted the newly free Sethe to murder her children; therefore, the dead, young Beloved, as well as Beloved the child, is the product of that institution.

Although identity is a theme of the novel, the importance of Beloved lies not so much in who she is, but in what she does. Beloved triggers Sethe's remembering her "unspeakable" past (Beloved 58) and re-activates her storytelling, which, until Beloved's arrival, had been limited to "short replies or rambling incomplete reveries" (Beloved 58). This reaction is important because only

through the remembering will the wounds of slavery begin to heal, a process that both Sethe and Paul D must undergo.

One story is told prior to the re-incarnation of Beloved, a partial telling of Denver's birth and Sethe's journey across the Ohio river. Sethe tells this story before either Paul D's or Beloved's arrival possibly because it is the most positive story she has to relate; the story of Denver's birth demonstrates true compassion and humanity, by both blacks and whites. The complete story, though, is not revealed until after Beloved arrives, and then it is told in two parts (77-85, 90-94). The first story is one that Denver herself remembers Sethe telling and relates to the reader rather than tells herself.

Easily she [Denver] stepped into the told story that lay before her eyes on the path she followed away from the window. There was only one door to the house and to get to it from the back you had to walk all the way around to the front of 124, past the storeroom . . . on around to the porch. And to get to the part of the story she liked best, she had to start way back: hear the birds in the thick woods, the crunch of leaves underfoot; see her mother making her way up into the hills where no houses were likely to be. (Beloved 29)

This passage demonstrates what Sethe begins to explain after Denver concludes her telling/remembering. The narration above implies that Denver must experience part of Sethe's reality before she can enter into the the story; she must "hear" the birds and the leaves and "see" Sethe walking. Thus to ensure that this particular tale is told, Denver must, in Sethe's words "bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else" (Beloved 36), namely the rememory of her mother. When the story is continued, Denver again begins to relive her mother's experience. "Denver began to see what she was saying and not just hear it. . . . Denver was seeing now and feeling it--through Beloved. Feeling how it must have felt to her mother" (Beloved 77). At this stage Denver has begun to internalize these past events, and she attempts to re-create history even though it was "something only Sethe knew" (Beloved 78).

Just as Denver attempts "to feel" her mother's stories, Sethe herself must begin to experience her own memories as she talks to Beloved; if she does not experience the stories, they will die. Even though Sethe never enjoyed talking about the past, "she found herself wanting to, liking it. Perhaps it was Beloved's distance from the events itself, or her thirst for hearing it--in any case it was an unexpected pleasure" (Beloved 580). But this "unexpected pleasure" brings back painful memories. While relating information about her mother, Sethe begins "remembering something she had forgotten she knew" (Beloved



61). She goes back into her oral history, the only type of history to which slaves had access, and remembers what Nan, the one-armed slave woman who nursed all the plantation children, told her about her mother.

What Nan told her she had forgotten, along with the language she spoke it in. The same language her ma'am spoke, and which would never come back. But the message--that was and had been there all along. . . . "Telling you. I am telling you, small girl Sethe," and she did that. . . . "She threw them all away but you. . . . Telling you. I am telling you small girl Sethe." (Beloved 62)

The repetition of the phrase "telling you" suggests that, to Nan, the telling was more important than the information. The story had to be told rather than written down or remembered. Through this particular telling Nan suggests the greater significance that only through telling will the history and the horror of the Black experience stay alive. Also, this passage suggests a striking parallel between Sethe and her mother. Both women killed their children as reactions against slavery, and, we discover later in the passage, that Sethe was the only child her mother named. Therefore, both mothers use naming, or the lack thereof, to connect or disconnect their children to other people in the world.

". . . Morrison uses naming," writes Brian Finney, "as the epitome of the continuing and haunting presence of the past" (27), and names, as in Song of Solomon, have several functions in Beloved. The slavery legacy can be traced by many of the slaves' names. The most obvious "haunting presence of the past" is Beloved, the visitor to 124. As Sethe's ghost-daughter she is the "crawling already?" baby girl (Beloved 93) who remains nameless save for the adjective which adorns her gravestone. If she is a young woman kept imprisoned by her owner, the name becomes an irony; she is one who was "beloved in the dark and bitch in the light" (Beloved 241). Paul D Garner possesses neither a unique first name nor a unique last name; he shares the name "Paul" with other Sweet Home men. Even though Garner "call[s] his own niggers men" (Beloved 11), they have been reduced to objects of ownership. Like the name of Jake (Macon Dead I), the Pauls' names have been assigned by the dominant culture, thus symbolizing their status as slaves. Similarly, Mr. Garner calls Baby Suggs "Jenny," rather than calling her the name by which other people know her, because that name is on her "sales ticket" (Beloved 142). On a different level, names reflect other themes and character traits. Denver, named for the young white girl who saved both Sethe's and Denver's life, suggests a concrete place, which contrasts with the liminal space in which she was born, the Ohio river. Two other Sweet Home men, Sixo and Halle, also possess significant

names. Sixo's name suggests that he is slave number 60; such a name objectifies him and takes away his identity. Halle is etymologically related to the Hebrew "hallel" (Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language, 1922), which means praise or praying. This definition possibly associates Halle with his dedication to Baby Suggs to buy her out of slavery; he is, therefore, one to be praised. Furthermore, as stated earlier, Sethe is the only child named by her mother. Going back to the Biblical tradition, we find that Seth is the child born to Adam and Eve after the murder of Abel; thus both Seth and Sethe are survivors of familial homicide. Finally, according to critic Susan Bowers, Sethe "may be an allusion to Lethe, the spring of forgetfulness in Greek myth" (63). This symbolism clearly relates to Sethe's desire not to remember her painful past, and thus her reluctance to tell her story.

Sethe's story of her experiences at Sweet Home, told in several parts, reflects, among others, the themes of ownership and identity. Of her entire slave experience, Sethe's experiences with Schoolteacher and his nephews are the most significant. Early in the novel Sethe describes the boys' taking of her milk and her subsequent abuse by schoolteacher:

" . . . those boys came and took my milk. . . .  
Held me down and took it. I told Mrs. Garner on  
em. . . . Them boys found out I told on em.

Schoolteacher made me open up my back, and  
when it closed it made a tree. It grows there  
still. (Beloved 16-17)

Morrison does not reveal the setting for Sethe's abuse--  
Schoolteacher's whipping her across her back--until nearly  
fifty pages later; through Sethe's and Paul D's dialogue,  
we learn that Halle, emotionally broken down and physically  
paralyzed, was in the barn watching Schoolteacher's nephews  
steal Sethe's milk. Finally, Morrison provides another  
reference to this event couched within narration about  
Sethe's memory:

She shook her head from side to side, resigned  
to her rebellious brain. Why was there nothing  
it refused? No misery [was]. . . too rotten to  
accept. . . . I am full God damn it of two boys  
with mossy teeth, one sucking on my breast the  
other holding me down, their book-reading  
teacher watching and writing it up. . . . I  
can't go back and add more. (Beloved 70)

This passage demonstrates that although Sethe herself is  
reluctant to remember her past, her mind will "refuse" no  
memory, no matter how "rotten." Clearly then, Morrison is  
suggesting that memory, and the horrible experiences stored  
within it, serves a purpose. Like a victim suffering from  
trauma, Sethe, as well as Paul D, has refused to recall her  
past. However, Paul D's arrival, augmented by Beloved's  
appearance shortly afterwards, forces these memories to the

surface. He makes Sethe undergo a long form of therapy, and until Sethe begins her remembering reverie in Part two, the whole story of Sethe's abuse is not fleshed out:

Bit a piece of my tongue off when they opened my back. It was hanging by a shred. I didn't mean to. Clamped down on it, it come right off. I thought Good God, I'm going to eat myself up. (Beloved 202)

As critics Anne E. Goldman and Brian Finney point out, language, primarily its lack, its destruction and its use by the white slave owners, is what ultimately takes power over the slaves (Goldman 323, Finney 23). Sethe is punished for telling Mrs. Garner about her abuse, thus emphasizing the fact that slaves are "not to speak" but be spoken to (Goldman 323). Because language is what allows one to be recognized as an individual by other people, when Sethe bites her tongue, the instrument of human speech, she loses the last piece of freedom that slavery had left her (Goldman 322). Even more important, I believe, she loses command over the skill that separates her, as well as all human beings, from animals. This loss becomes more significant when one remembers that Sethe made the ink for Schoolteacher's book (Beloved 37) so that his students could "put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right" (Beloved 193) and that Paul D, after learning of her children's murder by her own hand, says "You got two feet, Sethe, not four" (Beloved 165).

Another example of this loss of verbal freedom occurs when Sethe remembers what happened to Sixo after Schoolteacher accuses him of stealing a shoat (Finney 27). Schoolteacher contends that Sixo has stolen the shoat while Sixo calls it "improving your [Schoolteacher's] property" (Beloved 190). Morrison herself, through the role of narrator, comments on this tyranny of language when she writes "Clever, but schoolteacher beat him anyway to show them that definitions belonged to the definers--not the defined" (Beloved 190).

The next portion of Sethe's story is told through Denver to Beloved; at this point we learn of Sethe's escape to Ohio, Denver's birth and their arrival at Baby Suggs' home. This story tells us that

Sethe had twenty-eight days--the travel of one whole moon--of unslaved life. . . . Days of healing, ease and real-talk. Days of company: . . . All taught her how it felt to wake up at dawn and decide what to do with the day. . . . Bit by bit, at 124 and in the Clearing, along with the others, she claimed herself. Freeing herself was one thing; claiming ownership was another. (Beloved 95, author's emphasis)

This passage shows Sethe attempting to own herself, and as a result, establish her identity. Sethe's time of freedom points both to her rebirth as a free person and to her death, assuming the role of murderer. Thus Sethe's freedom ends with her murdering her children, not only because she

is taken to jail, but also because this act signals that she is still owned by the memories and after-effects of slavery. The twenty-eight days, the time of a woman's menstrual cycle, suggests an entire life cycle, the opportunity for new life and creation and then death, or the loss of the potential life. The blood that is shed at the end of this cycle foreshadows the blood of her children.

Additionally, Sethe is taking charge of her self and creating her own identity, for she has lost her self in several ways. First, she was a slave; therefore, instead of working to sustain her own life, she worked to sustain the lives of others. Moreover, she has lost the self of personal, individual motherhood; she gives birth to children not so that she can rear a family that will continue her history but so that her owners could gain more property (Goldman 318). Yet, Sethe has also lost her sense of self in that she no longer can fulfill the mother role. Love is an emotion of caring and protection that has boundaries; passion, however, suggests a love without boundaries and without reason. Paul D's observation that Sethe's maternal love is "too thick" (Beloved 103), or passionate, leads one to compare her with Song of Solomon's Ruth Foster Dead. Ruth Dead knelt down and prayed for her son twice a day; her son "had always been a passion" (Song 126, 131). Similarly, Sethe's children become passions; her emotional scarring is so great that she ignores, or

loses, reason to protect her children. Ironically, before he even knows that Sethe has murdered her children, Paul D recognizes the danger of Sethe's passion for her children:

Risky . . . very risky. For a used to be slave woman to love anything that much was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love. The best thing, he knew, was to love just a little bit; everything just a little bit, so when they broke its back, or shoved it in a croaker sack, well maybe you'd have a little love left over for the next one.

(Beloved 45)

Sethe's decision to kill her children is, like Ruth's nursing Milkman, a selfish act that goes beyond the boundaries of maternal love. That she denies her children their own sense of identity by never allowing them to make their own choice as to whether or not they wanted to be slaves is ironic. Sethe's decision to "put . . . [her] babies in a safe place" (Beloved 164) removes her children's right to make their own decision about the fate of their lives, just as the slave-owners had taken away her rights.

The next section of Sethe's story recounts the slave catcher's arrival at 124 and Sethe's murder of her children. The story begins with the phrase "when the four horsemen came" (Beloved 148) signifying the "four horsemen of the apocalypse" (Bowers 68). Sethe's action separates



her from the community, thus severing her from the very people who helped her survive. Morrison writes that when the sheriff carried Sethe away, people thought that "probably" her head was "too high" and her back "too straight" (Beloved 152). Because of Sethe's pride, then, the townspeople do not mourn the loss of one of their citizens. Morrison writes:

Some cape of sound would have quickly been wrapped around her, like arms to hold and steady her on her way. As it was, they waited till the cart turned about, headed west to town. And then no words. Humming. No words at all. (Beloved 152)

I would argue that the fact that the citizens of the town engaged solely in "humming" rather than singing a song such as a spiritual has a significance other than Sethe's separation from the community. Once again, language has affected Sethe's status. First, Lillian Garner hummed while working with Baby Suggs; thus humming can be associated with slave life (Beloved 141). Also, by not singing, talking, or verbally mourning the event that has just taken place, the townspeople are not acknowledging Sethe's actions. By using words, the "throng . . of black faces" (Beloved 152) would have memorialized Sethe's behavior. Sethe's murder and jailing could have become part of the oral history of the town; a new story may have been produced to link her with the other slaves who had been

memorialized in that manner. Instead, the a verbal humming acknowledges the event rather than mythologizes it.

This scene ends with Baby Suggs left staring after her daughter-in-law while a young boy holds up a pair of shoes for her to repair "by Wednesday" (Beloved 153). The community ostracism faced by Sethe has a precedent in her mother-in-law. Baby Suggs' story, a see-saw life of alternate joy and despair, ends with a loss of identity and community. Baby Suggs, after leaving slavery and getting established by the Bodwins, begins to preach in the clearing. She makes this decision after concluding that since slavery had "'busted her legs, back, head, eyes, hands, kidneys, womb, and tongue,' she had nothing left to make a living with but her heart . . . " (Beloved 87). These decisions and subsequent actions relate Baby Suggs to Pilate, who, after leaving the island on the Virginia coast, evaluated her life with important questions (Song 149). Pilate possesses an "alien's compassion for troubled people" and "a deep concern for and about human relationships" (Song 150). Similarly, "Baby Suggs, holy, loved, cautioned, fed, chastised and soothed" the many visitors to 124 (Beloved 87). Besides this spiritual level, the two women heal on physical levels as well. Pilate is a repository of herbal lore, and Baby Suggs nurses Sethe and Denver back to health. Finally, food is important to both characters. Pilate never converses with anyone without offering that person food; Baby Suggs kept "two pots" on

her stove (Song 150, Beloved 87). Ironically, the communal celebratory feast beginning with Stamp Paid's blackberries is the event that excludes Baby Suggs from the community:

Baby Suggs' three (maybe four) pies grew to ten (maybe twelve). Sethe's two hens became five turkeys. The one block of ice brought all the way from Cincinnati . . . became a wagonload of icecakes for a washtub full of strawberry shrug. 124, rocking with laughter, goodwill, and food for ninety, made them angry. (Beloved 137)

This feast, on the one hand, reflects Baby Suggs' desire to share, just as she shares her self during her services in the clearing. The other function of this feast is to integrate the new arrivals, Sethe and Denver, into the community (Samuels 119). The feast, however, has the opposite effect. In the end, the townspeople think that Baby Suggs is showing off, rather than sharing; their jealousy becomes anger (Beloved 136), and the townspeople consequently ignore and exile the 124 household.

Morrison continues her description of the post-feast reactions with the following:

. . . Loaves and fishes were His powers--they did not belong to an ex-slave who had probably never carried one hundred pounds to the scale, or picked okra with a baby on her back. (Beloved 137)

This statement is clearly an allusion to Jesus' creating a feast from five loaves of bread and two fishes (Matthew 14:17, Samuels 119). Ironically, though, in the Biblical story, the masses consider the creator of the food a saviour, while the townspeople look down upon Baby Suggs. The last line of the quotation also suggests that because Baby Suggs did not "carry one hundred pounds to the scale," the community does not believe that she has suffered enough to deserve this power. Finally, the townspeople begin to "whisper" or, in other words, tell stories, about the family at 124. The community "Whispered to each other in the yards about fat rats, doom and uncalled-for-pride" (Beloved 137). As stated earlier, Sethe's pride after the murders prevents the community from rallying around her, and possibly around Baby Suggs. As much as Baby Suggs resembles Pilate, Baby Suggs' isolation from the community ironically links her to Macon Dead, one who was ostracized by his community for having material goods and being prideful.

While Morrison's allusion to Jesus' creating more food from bread and fish is obvious, the celebration at 124 subtly alludes to another New Testament feast scene: the Last Supper. During the Last Supper, Jesus foretells that one of his disciples will betray him. One day after the party, Baby Suggs senses that some evil event lurks in the near future:

. . . Suddenly, behind the disapproving odor, way way back behind it, she smelled another thing. Dark and coming. Something she couldn't get at because the other odor hid it.

She squeezed her eyes tight to see what it was but all she could make out was high topped shoes she didn't like the look of.

Thwarted yet wondering, she chopped away with the hoe. What could it be? This dark and coming thing. (Beloved 138-9).

I suggest that Baby Suggs makes two predictions in this passage. The smell of the "thing. Dark and coming" is the arrival of the slave catcher and, consequently, Sethe's murdering her children. This event is the only event that can "hurt her now" (Beloved 139), for as she thinks later in the passage, she is beyond being concerned about the fate of her children. Baby Suggs' second foreseeing, the "high topped shoes," would be the arrival of the ghost/slave girl, Beloved. While Morrison makes no specific reference to these shoes, the reader knows that Sethe, after her feet were damaged by her escape, wore only men's shoes, and that Paul D "wondered at the newness of . . . [Beloved's] shoes" (Beloved 53). Additionally, when Denver, Sethe, and Paul D return from the carnival and first encounter Beloved, they notice that she is well dressed; therefore, that Beloved would be wearing men's lace-up shoes, as Sethe must wear, is unlikely.

Seeing Beloved as a "dark thing" connects Beloved to the realm of evil. Critic Brian Finney points out that Part II "is the bleakest part of the book, symbolized by the winter they all endure," and it is also the part in which Beloved becomes more demanding, impatient, and sinister (31); however, Morrison foreshadows this bleakness with an event in Part I. Early in the narrative, we are led to believe, that Beloved chokes Sethe while the pair, plus Denver, are in the clearing; this act suggests that Beloved might be a malevolent force. Combined with Beloved's increase in malevolence in Part II, though, are a series of rememberings by Sethe. Sethe experiences a remembering reverie between the time she leaves work and returns home; she also relates a stream-of-consciousness memory about her motivations for killing Beloved (200-204). Morrison then presents parallel stories by Denver and Beloved, and then finally a dialogue between Beloved and Sethe. The middle section of the novel ends with Paul D's story and brings the reader back to present time with a dialogue between Paul D and Stamp Paid.

Morrison begins Part Three by describing a happy relationship between Sethe and Beloved, but this relationship soon becomes unbalanced. "At first they played together," writes Morrison, but this play is not the balanced give-and-take of a stable friendship (Beloved 240). Beloved becomes demanding and selfish; as Morrison writes, "Anything she wanted she got, and when Sethe ran

out of the things to give her, Beloved invented desire" (Beloved 240). Although it may appear that by indulging Beloved Sethe is trying to compensate for her previous unmotherly action, the murder, Sethe never gets to fulfill the mother role. Because at one point Denver cannot tell the difference between the two women (Beloved 241), it soon becomes clear that Sethe has taken on the role of abused younger sibling rather than over-indulgent mother:

Then the mood changed and the arguments began. Slowly at first. A complaint from Beloved, an apology from Sethe. A reduction of pleasure at some special effort the older woman made. . . . [Beloved] took the best of everything--first. The best chair, the biggest piece, the prettiest plate, the brightest ribbon for her hair, and the more she took, the more Sethe began to talk, explain, describe how much she suffered, been through, for her children, . . . . None of which made the impression it was supposed to. (Beloved 241, emphasis mine)

As Beloved develops a "basket fat stomach," Denver realizes that instead of "protecting Beloved from Sethe" she must now start "protecting her mother from Beloved" (Beloved 243). She has lived such an isolated life, however, that Denver does not know from whom she can ask help. Standing on the porch of 124, a place that until the murders had

been an isolated, unreal Eden, she wavers at the thought of seeking help "out there [where there] were whitepeople"

(Beloved 244). Baby Suggs' voice then comes to Denver:

"You mean I never told you nothing about Carolina? About your Daddy? You don't remember nothing about how come I walk the way I do and about your mother's feet, not to speak of her back? I never told you all that? Is that why you can't walk down the steps? My Jesus My."

. . . .

Then what do I do?

"Know it, and go on out the yard. Go on."

. . . .

It came back. (Beloved 244-5, second ellipsis the author's)

Baby Suggs' dialogue reinforces the idea that the stories heal and act as agents of salvation. While the assertion that "Denver is the redemptive figure in this novel"

(Bowers 69) is true, before Denver can act as a redemptive agent she has to muster the courage "to leave the yard; step off the edge of the world" (Beloved 243). Until the power of remembered stories "comes back" to her, she finds asking for assistance an impossible task.

Once Denver steps outside, the neighbors begin to assist Sethe. Although at first their assistance is marked simply by donations of food, the reunification of the 124 family with the community completes itself with the



exorcism of Beloved. Ella, the woman who took care of slaves who had just crossed the river, believes that Sethe "was prideful [and] misdirected" but she decides to help Sethe because she "didn't like the idea of past errors taking possession of the present" (Beloved 256). This statement as well reflects the idea that storytelling is healing. Sethe's silences seem to have contributed to the backlash from Sethe's ghost-daughter, for not telling the story allowed the ghost's rage to fester. Morrison is recreating a slave narrative so that the modern Black community may identify with this experience and subsequently learn from it once the experience is recontextualized as knowledge (Bowers 75). Similarly, once Sethe begins telling her tale, explaining to her own community why she attempted to kill her children, her personal story may be transformed into knowledge which will become part of the community's collective identity. While one would never want to forget past errors, if "past errors take possession of the present," a phenomenon Ella considers dangerous (Beloved 256), then the life of the modern generation will be dominated rather than enlightened by those errors. All of history, not just its "errors," must be transformed into something useful--agents of healing, remembrance, prevention or understanding. Therefore, once Beloved has been exorcised from the house, Sethe must begin to share her story.

After Beloved disappears, Paul D returns to 124. The present time narrative here is interrupted and Morrison recounts an abbreviated version of Paul D's story. This recounting begins Paul D's final remembering; he realizes that Sethe "is a friend of . . . [his] mind" (Beloved 272). This statement suggests that Paul D can share his past with Sethe, thus unlocking the rusty tobacco tin in which he stores his memories (Beloved 72-3), and not lose his integrity. Their shared experiences allow them to exchanged stories on an equal basis; the horrors that they both endured preclude either storyteller from being shamed by the other. Armed with this knowledge, Paul D concludes that "he wants to put his story next to hers" (Beloved 273), but Sethe, by this time, has given up on life as Baby Suggs did before her. After discovering Sethe lying sick and exhausted in her mother-in-law's bed, Paul D determines that, since she has fought so hard and so long to establish her sense of self, he will not allow her to die without a concrete sense of self. Paul D tells Sethe "'You your own best thing, Sethe. You are'" (Beloved 273), in an attempt to convince her of her own self worth. The present time story, nonetheless, ends not with Sethe being convinced that she is her "own best thing" but with her responding to Paul D with the question "'Me? Me?'" (Beloved 273). Thus, Morrison leaves the ending of the story incomplete. Clearly if Sethe is questioning Paul D's assertion that her

self is more important than anybody else's, the stories have not finished their healing function; however, since Paul D decides to "put his story next to" Sethe's (Beloved 273), the healing may have yet to take place.

The last pages of the novel contain the words and thoughts of an unnamed narrator. This narrator relates observations and commentary about Sethe's, Paul D's, and Beloved's present-time experiences. For instance, the reader learns that the townspeople ". . . forgot her [Beloved] like a bad dream. After they made up their tales, shaped and decorated them, those that saw her that day on the porch quickly and deliberately forgot her" (Beloved 274), just as Sethe and Paul D "forgot" their stories of slave life. From this narration, we know that Beloved has become a story in her own right; Sethe's experiences with her ghost-child are now part of the folklore of the town. However, even though the townspeople have "shaped and decorated" their tales, whether Sethe and Paul D's story shall ever be told again is unclear, for sandwiched between the narrator's commentary are the following three statements.

It was not a story to pass on

. . .

It was not a story to pass on.

. . .

This is not a story to pass on. (Beloved 274)

Morrison's use of the non-referenced pronouns "it" and "this" make her concluding chorus unclear. As readers, we do not know whether the story of Sethe and Beloved and Paul D was the story not to be "passed on" or whether the whole story of slavery was not meant to be passed on. Although repetition of stories can lead to banality and meaninglessness, if a story is told only once, that story will be limited in its effects. First, it will affect only the people who hear it that one time. Secondly, it will never evolve into a culturally relevant piece of literature because a story must be retold in order to gain and maintain cultural or historical significance. Morrison, by creating/telling a portion of the slavery legacy has made a culturally and historically significant piece of literature; therefore, that Morrison would state that this story was not to be retold seems ironic.

Alternatively, one could argue that the key word in these three statements is the verb "was," meaning that while years ago the slavery legacy "was not a story to pass on" or, rather, retell, now it is one to pass on or to retell. Moreover, critic Karla F.C. Holloway contends that Morrison's phrase "to pass on" is the colloquial expression for "to die." Therefore, Morrison is noting that it was not a story to die (Holloway 517, my emphasis); in contrast, it is a story to live. Finally, perhaps this story (either the slavery story or Sethe's story) is one on which a person should not pass. In other words, nobody can

afford to ignore, pass over, deny this story. In light of these possible interpretations, however, I would contend that this chorus is polysemous. Rather than containing one meaning or another, the concluding sentences contain all these meanings, just as the ghost Beloved simultaneously represents Sethe's dead daughter, a young slave girl and a collective memory. Yet the most important aspect of Morrison's conclusion is that it marks the end of her writing/telling the story, leaving us, the readers, recipients of the story. As recipients of this tale, we now have the power to become storytellers and determine for ourselves whether the story should be told or not.

## II

### Story Structure, Folklore and Myth

As we can see, Morrison puts a great deal of responsibility on the reader in her Pulitzer prize-winning novel. The reader is forced to sort out the fractured storyline of Beloved--a structure which sharply contrasts with the linear, or spiral, structure of Song of Solomon--and the reader is left with the burden of deciding whether or not to become a storyteller. But Morrison recognizes the fact that the overall narrative and the narratives of the individual characters are fractured, and she effectively links this fact to one of the story's themes.

Morrison, as chief storyteller of the novel, describes the stories as fragments rather than as wholes;

each story segment, while understandable as an individual element, is not completely functional until it becomes a whole, completed story. Denver "swallowed twice to prepare for the telling, to construct out of the strings she had heard all her life a net to hold Beloved" (Beloved 76). Morrison's use of the strings and net imagery suggests that once the whole story of Sethe's and Paul D's experience in slavery is told it will heal them, while portions of the story cannot. Strings can strangle; like rope, they can be used to hang or kill someone. A net, on the other hand, is used to catch or cradle a person; nets can provide protection. Perhaps, then, once the story cycle is complete, the stories themselves will provide a cradle for the experiences of future Afro-American generations. These stories act simultaneously as warnings never to forget as well as memorials to the age of slavery, much in the same way that post-holocaust writers try to memorialize that instance of racial oppression (Bowers 61). Therefore, the complete stories will be an instrument of protection--both against forgetting or "disremembering" this age in history and against the recurrence of such an event--rather than an instrument of pain. Continuing with the net imagery, we can observe that nets gather and hold groups of things together. The stories of a common past, then, provide bonding for a community, a common ground upon which diverse people and experiences can connect.

During the same storytelling event, Morrison depicts the small pieces of information that Denver knows as the dead component parts of a living being. According to the narrator, Denver, while talking to Beloved, begins "giving blood to the scraps [of the stories] her mother and grandmother told her--and a heartbeat." (Beloved 78). What is important about this quotation is that the life or "heartbeat" comes from Denver's telling the stories to Beloved; as information stored in her mind, the stories have no life. Thus, these "scraps" are similar to the memories that Paul D has preserved and stored "in that tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be. Its lid rusted shut" (Beloved 72-3). Both the scraps and Paul D's memories have become mummified artifacts. In an oral culture, stories/memories die if no one tells them. Thus these preserved, untold stories can be said to have no life, and can give no life to others, an idea that Silko emphasizes in her novel Ceremony. As long as the stories remain "strings," "scraps" or stored in an old "tobacco tin," they cannot bond the community, provide solidarity, teach the young, or perform any of the functions in the social group that stories are meant to perform.

The overall structure of the work reinforces thematic ideas as well. The fact that the novel is divided into three parts echoes the trio of women who dominate the novel. Moreover, it reflects the holy trinity, Father, Son

and Holy Ghost, having as its fictional parallel, the mother, daughter, and ghost--either Beloved or the collective being of dead slaves. Sue Park reminds readers that a tombstone motif separates the portions of the novel, and argues that the black and white grave designs reflect "the grim reality of existence under slavery . . . " (3). Furthermore, she points out, "the three books, despite their differences in length, begin identically with the numeral '124' followed by the verb 'was'" (3): "124 was spiteful," "124 was loud," and "124 was quiet" (Beloved 3,169,239). Each of these phrases alerts the reader, albeit perhaps unknowingly, to the action to come in each portion of the novel. Additionally, to expand on this discussion of the gravestones, I would like to suggest that each individual grave design also reflects the content behind it. The first grave design is a frowning skull with wings. The skull's frowning seems to reinforce the idea of "spite;" the wings suggest flight, perhaps Beloved's supernatural flight to 124. The motif embellishing section three is also a skull with wings; however, in this case, the skull is smiling. Perhaps this motif reflects a finally contented Beloved, who returns to her place beyond earthly reality. The motif decorating part two shows a head, decidedly not skull-like, surrounded by spirals and two pin-wheel-esque flowers enclosed by circles. This image suggests "the chains of memory that tie Sethe to things too horrible to remember and yet impossible to forget . . ."



(Park 5). Moreover, the absence of wings reinforces the idea that Beloved is inhabiting the 124 home. Finally, because the black and white lines contrast so starkly here, as a result of the image's line design, the middle gravestone may reflect the fact that this section is, as argued in the previous section, the most grim section of the novel.

If the narrative structure of Beloved contrasts sharply with Song of Solomon, so too does the presence (or absence) of folklore. Unlike the tapestry of literary and mythic allusions that enrich the storyline of Song of Solomon, few references to specific oral traditions exist in this novel. One can find the Biblical tradition in several areas of the novel: the characters' names, the allusion to the Last Supper, the four slave catchers. Sethe's name, as mentioned earlier, may be rooted in Greek. However, the Southern Afro-American folk tradition is loaded with ghost tales (Puckett, Georgia WPA Drums and Shadows) and Morrison's use of a ghost as a character should not be surprising for she is describing a culture whose older members thought that "'As fuh ghoses, ain't uh got tuh believ in um?" (Drums and Shadows 2). Morrison's ghost does not seem to reflect any particular tale described by ethnographic informants. Certain behaviors of Beloved do reflect typical southern ghost story patterns, however. For instance, ghosts will avenge their creators (Puckett 122), a trait that Beloved certainly plays out.

Moreover, ghosts experience hunger, wear clothes, and "'looks an do's jes' lak the [original living] man hisse'f'" (Puckett 102,99,101). Again, Beloved's voracious appetite for sugar, her passion for fancy clothing, and baby-soft, unwrinkled skin all echo, if not parallel, the characteristics listed above.

Thus, whether the specific story of Beloved is part of the African American oral history is unclear. Yet, that the story is based on the true story of American slave Margaret Garner is clear. Critic Marion Tatum believes that her research indicates that, at least during Morrison's adult life, there was never a time during which Morrison was not aware of the Margaret Garner story (Tatum, personal interview). Morrison does, however, admit that she was reminded of the story after working on a project entitled The Black Book (Samuels 95). The Black Book, a collection of Afro-American history, culture, and folk-knowledge, includes a newspaper clipping relating the following story:

. . . when the officers and the slave hunters came to the house in which they were concealed, she caught a shovel and struck two of her children on the head, and then took a knife and cut the throat of the third, and tried to kill the other,-- . . . she was unwilling to have them suffer as she had done. (Harris 10)

Yet whether or not the *Beloved*/Margaret Garner story has entered the realm of Afro-American folklore, critic Karla F.C. Holloway explicitly states that "myth dominates the text" (516). Holloway, in this statement, is referring to myth as a timeless, historical-become-literary event, rather than a specific mythical allusion(s). Morrison's work then is a mythic synecdoche. By telling Margaret Garner's story, Morrison rewrites the history of slavery from a woman's perspective. By telling *Beloved*'s story, she turns the historical event, slavery, into a literary one. But by telling one in order to tell the other, Morrison has done her best to ensure that the story will be told. History may be forgotten, and literary texts may be buried in the coffin of a canon. But as we have discovered here, and will discover in the discussion of Silko's novel Ceremony, myth, a literary event that receives its life through telling, never dies.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Telling, Listening, Experiencing and Telling Again: The Healing Story in Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony

#### I

#### Becoming One With Words and the Land

In Ceremony, Leslie Marmon Silko addresses many of the themes that appear in Morrison's novels. Both authors write of characters who, in varying degrees, have been affected negatively by the dominant community and must reintegrate with their communities and reestablish their identities. Both authors suggest, through their narratives, that storytelling is the means by which characters may empower themselves to rediscover community and identity. Yet the relationship between the themes of community and identity, and storytelling theme, separates these two authors. In Morrison's novels, the power of storytelling is understood by recognizing the importance of the characters' achievement of community and identity. But in Silko's novel, a metanarrative and multi-narrative work, the narrative structure and story/ies focus on the power of storytelling itself, a focus which in turn reflects her themes.

Two voices, those of Silko and a traditional tribal figure I would suggest is Betonie, frame the present-time story. Silko's voice is the first frame; in the opening of the novel, she introduces herself as a storyteller:

Ts'its'tsi'nako, Thought Woman  
is sitting in her room  
and whatever she thinks about  
appears

She is sitting in her room  
thinking of a story now

I'm telling you the story  
she is thinking  
(Ceremony 1, my ellipsis)

The last two lines of this passage, "I'm telling you the story/ she is thinking," indicate to the reader that Silko is acknowledging the fact that she, not the unnamed third-person narrator who relates most of the primary text of the novel, is telling the story. The question raised when reading this passage, however, is "which story?" Silko tells the story about Betonie's healing story which is the story/ceremony which Tayo undergoes. Silko tells some minor stories. Finally, Silko also tells a mythic story, the story of the exorcism of the world witchery, a mythic story which has as its parallel the curing of Tayo. Essentially, Silko's voice--as well as Betonie's--frames the entire novel; Silko, then, has a double storytelling role: she tells the story Ceremony and retells, within her novel, ancient Laguna pueblo myths and other stories.

In addition to telling Tayo's story, Silko acts as the medium for a mythic voice as well. While at first appearing to be interruptions of the plot, these mythic tales reflect the action and themes of the main story (Hoilman 56). In the first part of the novel, for example, we learn that the

Laguna reservation is experiencing a drought. We also learn that Tayo blames himself for this drought because he cursed the jungle rain which prevented his cousin Rocky's wounds from healing (Ceremony 11). Next, Silko informs the reader that Corn Woman, who worked all day in the hot fields, scolded her sister Iktoa'ak'o'ya-Reed Woman for spending "all day long/sitting in the river/splashing down/ the summer rain" (Ceremony 13). Reed Woman becomes angry at her sister, returns to the "original place/ down below," and causes a drought (Ceremony 13-14). Clearly, then, this myth relates to the drought image. While the Corn Woman myth helps explain the imbalance in the native community (Gross 91), other myths are concerned with how to rectify the "disorder" in the native community (Gross 91); the Pa'caya'nyi myth is one such example. According to the myth, the people become entranced by a witch named Pa'caya'nyi, and, as a result, ignore the corn altar. Angered by this neglect, the mother, like Reed-Woman, takes away the rain thus preventing all growth; this early portion of the myth echoes the discontent of the veterans, a symptom of "disorder" as well as the drought (Ceremony 46-49). Throughout the remainder of the myth, Hummingbird and Fly try to convince Corn Mother to send the rain. Her appeasement, a long, involved process, is recounted in eight separate episodes within Silko's novel (53-54, 71-2, 82, 105-6, 113, 151-2, 180, 255-56). Each of these separate episodes, nevertheless, parallels Tayo's individual

experience as he undergoes the healing ceremony that Betonie conducts.

The second framing voice in the novel is, I would suggest, Betonie. These two framing voices, then, allow one to view the novel as several concentric circles. Betonie, like Silko, has multiple roles in the novel. Because he directs the healing ceremony/story that Tayo must experience, he is present in the beginning of the ceremony/novel/story; a mythic--but not mythical-- figure, he exists/talks before Silko tells the story of Tayo's cure. In order to direct Tayo's healing, however, he must be a part of Tayo's present-time story as well.

#### 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,  
all we have to fight off  
illness and death.  
. . . . .

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  
(Ceremony 2, my ellipsis)

The passage above is an excerpt from the second preface of the novel; at this point, Silko's voice has disappeared and a narrator relates Betonie's thoughts and speech. Betonie

first tells the reader that the stories combat "illness and death," or what the reader will later come to see as witchery. In addition, stories are kept in his "belly," and "in the belly of this story/the rituals and the ceremony/are still growing." This image of being pregnant with story and of stories being new life suggests that stories are living entities which are recreated or born anew with every telling. Moreover, it suggests that stories evolve and grow, and the information the stories contain, namely rituals and ceremonies, grows and evolves with the stories as well. This poetic passage, then, essentially restates what Betonie tells Tayo in the present time tale:

"The people nowadays have an idea about the ceremonies. They think the ceremonies must be performed exactly as they have always been done.

. . . But long ago when the people were given the ceremonies, the changing began. . . . You see, in many ways, the ceremonies have always been changing."

". . . only this growth keeps the ceremonies strong."

"She taught me this above all else: things which don't shift and grow are dead things. They are the things the witchery people want. Witchery works to scare people, to make them fear growth. But it has always been necessary, and more than ever now, it is. Otherwise we



won't make it. We won't survive." (Ceremony  
126)

Both Betonie's preface and his comments above provide an overarching theme for the novel: for the people to survive, all things must evolve. The stories/ceremonies must grow and change and, in order for this change to occur, the people--the mediums through which the stories/ceremonies are enacted--must evolve as well. Silko herself reiterates this idea in an interview: "I was always given to feel [that] . . . you should know the stories just as they are in the BAE [Bureau of American Ethnology]. I won't do that . . . the things in the BAE sort of looked dead and alien" ("Running on the Edge of the Rainbow" 6). In this comment, Silko explains that once oral stories are written down, they stagnate, thus becoming "dead and alien." She continues by commenting that she "couldn't do anything with" these dead stories ("Rainbow" 6). While Silko in this context is probably referring to her use of the stories within her literary works, she could be referring to the stories' uselessness to the Laguna people. If a story has been frozen in time by writing, it may not meet the needs of the contemporary Laguna people; Silko considers these stories artificially preserved (Silko "Interview" 89). Or even if the core of the story is still relevant to the community, if the story is written down, preserving it through writing will prevent the story from evolving to meet the future needs of the pueblo.

The scene in which Tayo remembers carrying Rocky through the jungle is the first time within the primary text that Silko reminds the reader of the power of storytelling:

Tayo talked to the corporal almost incessantly. . . . He made a story for all of them, a story to give them strength. The words of the story poured out of his mouth as if they had substance, pebbles and stone extending to hold the corporal up . . . ." (Ceremony 12)

Storytelling is empowering; it provides "strength" and a support structure. The image of the support structure and the implication that stories have physical mass is significant. Stories, especially myths, create a framework for people's lives. They explain why things are the way they are, and, for that reason, provide order and strength for the life of a people. While Tayo is in the veterans' hospital, he cannot tell stories. This inability to tell stories is a symptom of his own personal and cultural disorder. While the doctor questions Tayo, Tayo relates the following third person comments:

"He [meaning Tayo himself] can't talk to you. He is invisible. His words are formed with an invisible tongue, they have no sound."

He [Tayo] reached into his mouth and felt his own tongue; it was dry and dead, the carcass of a tiny rodent. (Ceremony 15).

Not only does Tayo believe himself to be invisible, but Tayo's tongue, "dry and dead," reflects the image of the drought-stricken Laguna landscape. Therefore, just as the reservation land can neither create nor sustain life--plant, animal, human--Tayo can neither create nor sustain speech or stories. Furthermore, the image of the "carcass of a tiny rodent," the desiccated animal rather than the living whole, reflects both Silko's and Betonie's ideas about the nature of stories. Silko believes that recorded, unchanging, stories are dead, and Betonie believes that if stories do not change the people will die. Thus Tayo, while ill and unable to tell stories, is, metaphorically, as dead as his physically dead cousin Rocky.

Stories provide a sense of order for times of disorder. Since Rocky's death is a sign of disorder within the family's life-plan for Rocky, Tayo's adopted family uses stories to try to maintain the illusion that Rocky is still alive:

They [Auntie, Grandma] all mourned Rocky that way, by slipping, lapsing into the plans he had for college and for his football career. It didn't take Tayo long to see the accident of time and space: Rocky was the one who was alive, buying Grandma her heater with the round dial on the front; Rocky was there in the college game scores on the sports page of the Albuquerque Journal. It was him, Tayo, who had died, but

somehow there had been a mistake with the  
corpses, and somehow his was still unburied.

(Ceremony 28)

When a family wants to create the illusion that a black-sheep-family-member is no longer living, the family members cease to speak about that particular person. The reverse is also true. Memories, or unverbilized recollections of some person or event have little life-giving function; however, verbalized memories do. Thus, to maintain the illusion that Rocky, the favored child, rather than the fatherless Tayo, still lives, Auntie and Grandma create stories about Rocky. These stories, though, do not help Tayo reorganize his world. Just as in Song of Solomon, both effective and ineffective storytellers exist in the novel, and these different types of storytellers have varied effects on the protagonists. In order to cure himself, then, Tayo must seek out the effective storytellers and avoid the others.

Auntie, Harley, Leroy and Emo are Ceremony's ineffective storytellers. As mentioned above, Auntie uses storytelling to counter Tayo's healing. She tells, or does not tell, stories in order to protect the family name. She says, "'Your uncle and grandma don't know this story. I couldn't tell them because it would hurt them so much'"; she continues, "'Poor old Grandma. It would hurt her so much if she ever heard this story'" (Ceremony 70-71). Auntie then begins to tell Tayo that, before he was born, his mother returned one morning, walking along the river

"completely naked except for her high-heel shoes" (Ceremony 70). This story is meant to help Tayo "understand" (70) why Auntie considers her sister to be such a great disgrace to the family; however, it only succeeds in confusing and hurting Tayo. As Tayo already knows of some of his mother's exploits, there was no need for Auntie to tell him this particular story. In this scene, Auntie uses storytelling to recover or maintain an illusion that she has control over the uncontrollable. Auntie could not prevent Rocky's death; therefore, she reincarnates him through storytelling. Similarly, Auntie had no control over her sister who became lost in Anglo ways; thus Auntie must tell judgmental stories about her sister to reinforce her sense of family power, and ultimately, maintain control over Tayo. Interestingly, Auntie comments that the story about Josiah's affair with Night Swan "'doesn't bother me'" (Ceremony 88). She continues, in an echo of her comments above, that the rumor about the affair, however, "hurts old grandma so much" (Ceremony 88). These statements are ironic because Auntie is the family member who worries about the stories; "Grandma," in contrast, "didn't care what anyone said" about either Tayo's mother or Josiah's affair (Ceremony 89). In fact, Grandma often tried to tell "better" stories about the people who were gossiping about her family (Ceremony 89). Auntie, then, uses storytelling to her own personal advantage, while Grandma, accepts stories for what they are. Instead of trying to overcome the gossip, Grandma

simply plays the gossip game.

While Auntie and Grandma use storytelling to benefit only themselves, Harley, Leroy, and Emo use stories to benefit neither themselves nor the listeners. Harley, Leroy and Emo tell their war stories in the bars, but with the exception of other veterans or women, few people listen to their stories. Moreover, even those who hear the stories are unlikely to benefit from the telling because the stories are old and tired; even Helen Jean "knew all the stories" (Ceremony 165, my emphasis). Silko writes:

Here they were, trying to bring back that old feeling, that feeling they belonged to America the way they felt during the war. . . . They repeated stories about good times in Oakland and San Diego; they repeated them like long medicine chants, the beer bottles pounding on the counter tops like drums. Another round and Harley tells his story about two blondes in bed with him.

(Ceremony 43)

Like Auntie and Grandma who keep Rocky alive by storytelling, Emo, Leroy and Harley keep their roles as accepted citizens alive by telling their war stories to anyone who will listen. Silko's comparison of the war stories to medicine chants suggests that Tayo's fellow soldiers use the stories to help them heal their war wounds; however, all their tales about women accepting them, U.S. citizens praising them, and the government viewing Indians

as valuable citizens simply serve to create the illusion of a sense of community and self-worth. Tayo's friends believe that storytelling will enable them to recover the "feeling they belonged to America" (43), but this belief is only illusory. Only Tayo understands that "it was white people who gave them that feeling and white people who took it away" (Ceremony 43). Additionally, Silko's use of the phrase "they repeated stories," rather than 'they told' or 'retold stories' reinforces the idea that these stories are worn-out and unfunctional. To repeat is to duplicate, while to retell a story is a dynamic, creative process. Neither the stories nor the tellers have changed since the war, and this stagnant state is a condition that Betonie argues is a deadly one.

The Pa'caya'nyi myth reinforces the idea that the war veterans' behavior has reached a stagnation point; the vignette suggests that through the witchery of alcohol, the veterans have been fooled into believing they are still war heroes. As the people become entranced by a witch named Pa'caya'nyi, they ignore the corn altar. Therefore the mother, Nau'ts'ity'i, angered by this neglect, declares that "'if they [the people] like that magic so much/ let them live off it'" (Ceremony 48-9). Afterwards, the mother takes the plants, the grass, the rainclouds, and prevents the birth of baby animals. Critic Dennis Hoilman contends that this myth reinforces the drought motif, and I do not disagree. I do, however, believe that his analysis is

incomplete. I suggest that this myth reflects the consequences of the Indian veterans' alcohol abuse. The ancient Laguna people "thought this [Pa'caya'nyi] magic/could give life . . ." (48), just as Emo, Harley, Leroy and Tayo believe that the alcohol can give them the life they lost after the war. In response to the Ck'o'yo magic, the mother takes away vegetation, rainclouds, and the birth of new animals; in essence, she takes away all potential for growth. Similarly, alcohol has taken Emo's, Harley's and Leroy's lives; they are emotionally dead, stagnant, and cannot create new stories. All these men are liminal characters, existing neither within the Native American community nor within the dominant community; they exist between two concrete worlds and cannot evolve. Therefore, if the veterans are to reintegrate into their community they must begin to grow, and this growth can begin only with renewed, rather than repeated, storytelling.

Tayo attempts to use storytelling to reverse his friends' self-destructive convictions. But even within the ritualized storytelling context, Harley, Emo, and Leroy refuse to accept the following story that Tayo tells:

[Now that the war is over,] "that man at the store waits on you last, makes you wait until all the white people bought what they wanted. And the white lady at the bus depot, she's real careful now not to touch your hand when she



counts out your change. You watch it slide  
across the counter at you, and you know.  
Goddamn it! You stupid sonofabitches You know!"  
. . . Tayo got quiet. He looked across at Emo,  
and he saw how much Emo hated him. (Ceremony  
42)

Emo hates Tayo because Tayo's story takes away "the good  
times" (Ceremony 42) the veterans are trying to recover  
through the witchery of alcohol. Emo, though, is more than  
a victim of the witchery; he is an "agent of witchery"  
(Gross 94) that has a mythic origin.

Betonie tells Tayo that a "Long time ago/in the  
beginning" a group of witches gathered to have a "witches'  
conference" (Ceremony 132-3). They begin having a contest  
"in dark things" when a foreign witch supersedes the powers  
of the other witches (Ceremony 133).

"What I have is a story."

At first they all laughed  
but this witch said  
    Okay  
        go ahead  
    laugh if you want to  
but as I tell the story  
it will begin to happen  
            (Ceremony 135)

This passage is significant in several ways. First, it  
demonstrates the creative and evolutionary power of the  
storytelling act. Silko writes that "as I [the witch] tell

the story/it will begin to happen"; clearly this statement means that the world will change or evolve in the form of the reality of the story. Such creative power also reflects the ideas presented in the framing stories of the novel: that Thought-Woman creates when she thinks and that stories are, like unborn children, stored in one's belly (Ceremony 1-2). The story that this witch recounts tells of the white man's taking of the Indians' land, the decimation of Indian populations by disease, and the destruction of Indian land by the atomic bomb (Hoilman 63); moreover, certain references in this mythic story suggest that Emo has become a participant in the witchery. The witch states that the white people "will carry objects/which can shoot death/faster than the eye can see" (Ceremony 136). Likewise, Emo "had liked what they [the army] showed him: big mortar shells that blew tanks and big trucks to pieces" (Ceremony 62). Also, the alien witch states that this killing will provide "corpses" for the witches' survival (Ceremony 136). This statement about the dead bodies, too, reflects Emo's condition: ". . . Emo grew from each killing. Emo fed off each man he killed, and the higher the rank of the dead man, the higher it made Emo" (Ceremony 61). Finally, that Silko renders one of Emo's stories in verse form, the same form used for the mythical tales, further reinforces the idea that Emo is a witch agent (Gross 94).

We went into this bar on 4th Ave., see,  
me and O'Shay, this crazy Irishman.

We had a few drinks, then I saw  
these two white women  
sitting all alone.

. . . . .  
Next day my buddy  
was dying to know

. . . . .  
I told him  
"Well, I scored  
all right."

(Ceremony 57-9, my ellipsis)

In order to be cured, Tayo must overcome the effects of the world witchery; more specifically, however, Tayo must escape from Emo, a present-time incarnation of the mythic witchery. To do so, Tayo must engage in a combination of ancient stories and actions as well as non-traditional ones. Moreover, he must recall the stories Josiah told him and experience the ceremony that Betonie will foretell. Elaine Jahner writes that Josiah "knew how to make the right stories relate to the right points in the ongoing movement of life" (243), and Tayo must re-assimilate that same knowledge. He must understand that myth, words, life, and land connect, and this understanding will allow him to see how he, himself, fits into a universal, that is mythic, scheme.

. . . when he and Rocky had climbed Bone Mesa, .  
. . he felt that the sky was near and that he  
could have touched it. . . . Distances and days  
existed in themselves then; they all had a  
story. They were not barriers. If a person

wanted to get to the moon, there was a way; . .  
. it depended on whether you knew the story of  
how others before you had gone. (Ceremony 19)

The quotation above suggests that objects ("days"),  
abstractions ("distances"), and processes ("a way" "to get  
to the moon") all have stories. Thus, stories are paths to  
self discovery, for not only are they a path to knowledge,  
but they are the more important path to experience. Tayo,  
however, in his unwell state, believes that the "distances  
and days" are "barriers." He cannot perceive the world  
within its mythical, timeless, yet still evolving framework  
(Jahner 241). Trapped in the bounded time of the war and  
Emo's stories, Tayo remains unable to recover a complete  
sense of self.

Tayo's entrapment within artificial European time  
forces him to see the world in a rigid, regulated manner.  
This particular world view, then, deprives him of the  
ability to use stories effectively. We can see this  
deprivation at work in the following examples. Josiah tells  
Tayo two stories that are designed to guide the behavior of  
the Laguna people. However, while stationed in the  
Philippines, Tayo's actions do not conform to teachings set  
out in the stories:

Josiah had told him about the spring while they  
waited for the water barrels to fill. . . .

"You see," . . . "there are some things worth  
more than money." He pointed his chin at the

springs and at the narrow canyon. "This is where we come from, see. This sand, this stone, these trees, the vines, all the wildflowers.

This earth keeps us going." (Ceremony 45)

Despite having been told that the earth and the rain sustains the Laguna people, Tayo "damned the rain" (Ceremony 12) because the constant dampness prevented Rocky's wounds from healing. Elaine Jahner contends that Tayo's cursing of the rain demonstrates that he fails to realize that his words, like Thought Woman's, will result in a created event (241); I, however, disagree. The fact that Tayo blames himself for the drought at Laguna pueblo (Ceremony 14, 39) suggests not that he has forgotten the story related above, but that he has instead forgotten Josiah's lesson about moderation. Tayo, as the result of his illness, no longer remembers that "Nothing was all good or all bad either; it all depended" (Ceremony 11). Josiah's lesson suggests that absolutes are worthless. Moreover, this concept reinforces the theme that there can be no absolutes in either stories or ceremonies, for if absolutes are present, the stories will not grow and then they shall die.

In the second story, Josiah tells the young Tayo that the people have always protected the green bottle fly because Fly asked the Mother of the people to return the rain (Ceremony 101). He tells Tayo, too, that the next time he thinks about killing flies he should "'just remember the

story'" (Ceremony 102). Silko immediately contrasts this advice from Josiah with the following information:

But in the jungle he had not been able to endure the flies that had crawled over Rocky; they had enraged him. He had cursed their sticky feet and wet mouths, and when he could reach them he had smashed them between his hands. (Ceremony 102)

Again, I would suggest that the story quoted above shows the absurdity of absolutes. More specifically, these two mini-stories about stories demonstrate that stories function primarily for the world in which they were created; therefore, they must be adapted or interpreted differently for different worlds. We read that Betonie tells Tayo that "' . . . after the white people came, elements in this world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies'" (Ceremony 126); in other words, once an environment has changed, the stories/ceremonies must change to retain their effectiveness. Thus because Tayo is fighting in an area geographically the opposite of the one which created the original Laguna stories, he needs to be able to adapt the old stories to his new context. But, as the war is an aspect of the witchery, he kills the flies and curses the rain instead of being able to "transform the story to fit the locale" (Zweig, personal interview).

The witchery is only partly responsible for Tayo's

illness; the other cause behind Tayo's sickness is his lost sense of identity. Tayo is not only of mixed white and Laguna ancestry, a biological outsider to the Laguna community, but he is also a familial and cultural outsider. Auntie never allowed Rocky to call Tayo "brother", and she ensured that he saw just enough of the family activities to make him "feel excluded, to be aware of the distance between them" (Ceremony 65, 67). Although Allen contends that in addition to this familial exclusion "Tayo was not taught Laguna traditions and did not share the arcane knowledge of his Laguna people" (Allen 140), Josiah has taught him stories and other cultural information. These lessons, present in Tayo's mind, have just been rendered inactive, smothered by Tayo's contamination with the white world. Ironically, Rocky and Auntie, both full blooded Lagunas, have become voluntary cultural outsiders (Allen 141). Rocky and Auntie are similar to Leroy, Emo and Harley in that both the family and the veterans try to capture what they see as benefits of the white world. However, while the three veterans try to recapture their past by telling stories in the bars on Route 66, Rocky and Auntie work actively to change their life story. "He [Rocky] was an A-student and all-state in football and track. He had to win; he said he was always going to win. . . . Rocky deliberately avoided the old-time ways" (Ceremony 51). Similarly, Auntie, through her "new struggle" with Tayo's illness, wants to prove that "above all else, she was a good Christian woman,"

(Ceremony 30), not that she was a good Laguna woman, or, simply, a good woman.

Tayo's isolation, however, is not simply an isolation from the words, i.e. mythology and knowledge, of the Laguna community. Being a cultural outsider has separated him from the land (Allen 119), which is, itself, a manifestation of Laguna stories and words.

The spider came out first. . . . He remembered stories about her. . . .

Dragonflies came and hovered over the pool. . . . There were stories about the dragonflies too. He turned. Everywhere he looked, he saw a world made of stories, the long ago, time immemorial stories, as Grandma called them. It was a world alive, always changing and moving; and if you knew where to look, you could see it, sometimes almost imperceptible, like the motion of the stars across the sky. (Ceremony 95-96, my emphasis)

Since the world is a manifestation of stories, it is, as suggested earlier, the physical manifestation of the words of Thought-Woman, otherwise known as the spider, or Spider Woman. It follows logically, then, that if the world is alive and changing then the stories must be alive and changing as well. Moreover, as humans are part of the world, they too are part of the changing stories. While Native American author and critic Paula Gunn Allen contends



that Tayo heals himself by realizing that he is part of the "ancient unity of person, ceremony, and land" (119, my emphasis), I would argue that Tayo's healing arises from his acting out and experiencing this realization. He must participate and become one with the story/ceremony outlined by Betonie, which will eventually reconnect him with the land.

To complete the ceremony, Tayo must participate in two types of ceremonies: traditional curing rites and contemporary ones. The dual nature of his cure parallels the synchronization of the mythic story with Tayo's present-time life-story. Betonie and his helper utilize prayer-sticks, sand paintings, ritual chants and the scalp ceremony (all traditional healing activities) to begin Tayo's cure. To complete the ceremony, however, Tayo must find "the cattle.. . , and the stars, the mountain and the woman" (Ceremony 167). Although Betonie, a medicine man, outlines Tayo's healing process involving these four elements, women are the primary agents of his healing. This fact, though, should not be surprising when one remembers that "it is specifically against Anglo men that Tayo must struggle to reclaim the cattle . . . and it is specifically against Indian men that he must struggle to keep himself out of the circle of [Anglo and self] hate" (Bremer 31, author's emphasis).

First of all, Grandma starts Tayo on his healing journey. She tells Auntie: "'That boy needs a medicine

man'" (Ceremony 33). When Auntie objects on the basis that "It [the gossip about the family] will start all over again," Grandma tells Auntie to "'Let them talk if they want to. Why do you care what they say?" (Ceremony 33). Grandma's response is further proof that although she seems to be a character who has turned her back on Tayo and tradition--she constantly mourns Rocky and goes to church every Sunday--she knows that traditional storytelling is useful and valuable. Also, even before Grandma informs Auntie of her conclusions, Grandma "begins Tayo's ceremonial healing" (Bremer 33). While Tayo is lying on the bed, Grandma "held his head in her lap and she cried with him, saying 'A'moo'oh, a'moo'ohh' over and over again" (Ceremony 33). The word a'moo'ohh is a Laguna term of endearment for young children (Bremer 33, Storyteller 34), thus allowing Tayo to experience an expression of love. This emotion is one which he has been denied, as evidenced by Auntie's and his mother's rejection of him; however, love is a counter-agent to the witchery (hate incarnate) and, as a result, a key to Tayo's healing. Finally, Grandma's cry invokes a mythic aspect of Tayo's curing, for "no [Laguna] word exists alone . . . [there is a] story behind each word" (Ceremony 35). Once she utters this Laguna word, then she brings storytelling back into Tayo's storyless world.

While Grandma initiates Tayo's healing, three other women are primary factors in Tayo's healing. According to Paula Rabinowitz, Tayo encounters three "magical women,"

"through either story, sex or dream" (32), on his healing quest. These women are Betonie's grandmother (Descheeny's lover), Ts'eh, and Night Swan. Tayo's first encounter with one of these women occurs before his illness. He meets Night Swan after praying for rain, one year before the war. Because of a thunderstorm, Josiah cannot see Night Swan; he sends Tayo, instead, to see her.

The whole room [Night Swan's] pulsed with feeling, the feeling flowing with the music and the breeze from the curtains, feeling colored by the blue flowers painted in a border around the walls. . . . she was like the rain and the wind; age had no relation to her. (Ceremony 98)

Night Swan is associated with the color blue; in addition to the "blue flowers," she possesses a blue door, a blue kimono, blue slippers, and blue sheets. This motif, the color of the southwestern sky, reflects her own timelessness as well as the power of elements associated with the sky such as the sun and the rain. Additionally, her room "pulsed with feeling" suggesting that she is some aspect of a life-giving force. All of these associations relate her to the mythic realm; she is an integral part of the global story/ceremony in which Tayo, albeit unknowingly, is taking part.

Night Swan gives herself sexually in order to induct him into the story/ceremony. "She moved under him, her rhythm merging into the sound of the wind shaking the

rafters and the sound of the rain in the tree" (Ceremony 99). The phrases "her rhythm merging into the sound of the wind. . . and the sound of the rain" show Night Swan becoming one with the Earth, the physical manifestation of the stories, and Tayo becoming one with her; therefore, this sexual initiation reconnects Tayo with the land. I would argue that his experience reinforces the idea that ultimately it is with the Laguna landscape with which Tayo must find community and a mental sense of place, and this reunion with the land is what will allow him to find community with the Laguna people. Appropriately, then, Night Swan also explains to him the nature and importance of change, an intrinsic trait of the land.

" . . . 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." She laughed softly. "They are fools. . . . "

. . . .

"You don't have to understand what is happening. But remember this day. You will recognize it later. You are part of it now."

(Ceremony 100)

Night Swan is deeply connected to the Earth; for instance, when she moved to Cubero she made sure to settle in an area where she could view the rain-cloud gathering mountain Tse-pi'na (Ceremony 87). Therefore, that she would understand

the importance of change and evolution is logical. Night Swan's comments foreshadow Betonie's lecture about changing stories, hint at Tayo's role in the mythic story, and imply that "the ones who look different" (Ceremony 100) are important agents of change, and therefore, important agents of sustaining life (Jahner 243). Moreover, her comments take on a more universal meaning. Not only do they relate to Tayo's specific story, but they again indicate that only through change do "the prototypical myths remain a vital part of human life" (Jahner 243).

Betonie's grandmother, the "remarkable Mexican with green eyes" (Ceremony 119), is the second healing woman whom Tayo encounters. She has many similarities to Night Swan, including her eyes, the color blue, her power over men, and her social status. Night Swan's room is saturated with blue; Betonie's grandmother has a blue lace shawl (Ceremony 147). Night Swan is said to have "eyes like a cat," while the eyes of Betonie's grandmother "had a peculiar night shine of a wolf or a bobcat" (Ceremony 87,147). Night Swan mesmerized, or possibly killed, a man with her dancing; Betonie's grandmother stared at her captors "until they were afraid to look at her" (Ceremony 85, 147). Finally, both women are outsiders to the Indian community and invite hostility from the Indian women. However, while Night Swan brings Tayo into the ceremony/story, Betonie's grandmother, together with Descheeny, "plotted the course of the ceremony" to counteract the witchery (Ceremony 151). This

act suggests that she is a more mythical character than Night Swan, for she, like Thought-Woman, is an agent of creation.

The most mythical woman that Tayo encounters, however, is Ts'eh, "the woman" that Betonie said would help Tayo find the cattle. Like Night Swan and Betonie's grandmother she has "ocher eyes" (Ceremony 177); also, she is either a Mexican or of mixed ancestry as Silko describes her skin as "light brown" (177). Unlike the other two women, Ts'eh has a Pueblo Indian mythical counterpart: "Yellow Woman" (Gross 91, Zweig personal communication). According to Native American literary critic Paula Gunn Allen, Yellow Woman stories "highlight her alienation from the people: . . . she is in some way atypical, maybe . . . one who is known for a particular talent" (227). Ts'eh lives on an isolated area of Mount Taylor; she also is skilled with healing herbs and possesses some metaphysical powers. When Tayo first arrives she comments "Somebody sent you" (Ceremony 176), obviously knowing that Tayo's arrival is mythic and not accidental, an action that links her to another mythical female, Thought Woman.

While at Ts'eh's house, Tayo, as he does with Night Swan, re-associates with the land. Ts'eh, like Night Swan before her, gives herself sexually to Tayo; these actions parallel Sweet's behavior in Morrison's Song of Solomon. Again, Silko uses nature imagery to illustrate Tayo's sexual experience:

He . . . felt the warmth close around him like river sand, softly giving way under foot, then closing firmly around his ankle in cloudy warm water. . . . it was the edge of a steep riverbank crumbling under the downpour until suddenly it all broke loose and collapsed into itself. (Ceremony 181)

The specific images of "river sand," cloudy water," and "downpour" (Ceremony 181) are especially important. They possess life-giving potential, and contrast with the drought imagery which pervades the first half of the novel. Tayo also finds Betonie's stars while staying with Ts'eh. Once Tayo finds these stars, he "loses his mechanical time sense" (Allen 152), and, in addition, his "mechanical" spatial sense. The placement of stars in the sky can signal the seasons, thus making them elements of time; however, they also provide directional markers. Therefore, Tayo's reliance on these cosmic space/time points of orientation marks his integration into a mythic space/time reality.

Although part of Tayo's healing involves his reuniting with the land, and as a result connection with the Laguna people, Tayo must also regain the ability to comprehend "the importance of the conjunction of the right place and the right time" (Jahner 243). This comprehension allows him to combat the witchery:

He turned. The moon was rising above the last mesa he had crossed from the east. A transition

was about to be completed: the sun was crossing the zenith to a winter place in the sky, a place where prayers of long winter nights would call out the long summer days of new growth. But there were others who would be working this night, . . . His protection was there in the sky, in the position of the sun, in the pattern of the stars. he had only to complete this night, to keep the story out of reach for a few more hours, and their witchery would turn, upon itself, upon them. (Ceremony 247)

Here, Tayo is seeing the "conjunction" (Jahner 243) of time and place. Just as Betonie's stars are simultaneously time and place markers, Silko omits a distinction between time and space markers in the above narration. Although the sun was moving to "a winter place in the sky," this event marks a specific seasonal-celestial time. This time is especially dangerous for Tayo because it is a liminal point of time. It is a time of "transition" from summer into winter; it is the transition time of the ceremony, meaning neither before nor after the ceremony. Moreover, he is in the place of the witches (Ceremony 243)--beings neither human nor animal--rather than on the mountain. But here Tayo relies on the ancient, timeless markers of the stars and sun. They guide him through space, as directional markers, and through time, as he journeys from night to dawn; his reliance on these mythical agents enables him to survive this dangerous, liminal period.



After finding the cattle, Tayo experiences a third part of his healing; he recognizes another unbounded sense, the emotion of love (Jahner 244-45):

The mountain outdistanced their [the witches'] destruction, just as love had outdistanced death. The mountain could not be lost because it was in their bones; Josiah and Rocky were not far away. They were close; they had always been close. And he loved them as he had always loved them, the feeling pulsing over him as strong as it had ever been. . . . nothing was lost as long as the love remained. (Ceremony 219-20)

This passage demonstrates Tayo's realization that, despite having been denied love from member of his family, he still feels love for them. Yet were it not for Ts'eh, Tayo would never have been able to acknowledge this emotion:

She [Ts'eh] was with him again, a heartbeat unbroken where time subsided into dawn, and the sunset gave way to the stars, wheeling across the night. The breaking and crushing were gone, and the love pushed inside his chest, and when he cried now, it was because she loved him so much. (Ceremony 227)

At this point, it appears that Tayo has completed the ceremony. He has found the spotted cattle, he has found the woman; he has discovered love, lost his sense of bounded time and space, and re-united with the Earth. Despite the

presence of all these positive factors, however, the ceremony is not complete. Not only did Tayo need to be cured, but the world needed to be cured as well: "it is time for the witchery to be undone" writes Paula Gunn Allen (152). Ts'eh tells Tayo that "'The end of the story; they [the destroyers] want to change it. They want it to end here, the way all their stories end, encircling slowly to choke the life away'" (Ceremony 232). To combat the witchery, then, Tayo must face one last encounter with Emo and his destructive accomplices, before the ceremony can close.

Ironically, Tayo first believes that without his war friends "he didn't have a chance of completing the ceremony" (Ceremony 241). Shortly afterwards, though, he realizes that "they were not his friends" (Ceremony 242). Next he understands the witches' complete plan, prompted by his recognizing the uranium mine outside Cebolleta. The climax of the story, however, occurs while Tayo watches Emo abuse Harley:

Harley had failed them [the witches], and all that had been intended for Tayo had now turned on Harley. There was no way the destroyers could lose: either way they had a victim and a corpse. . . .

He [Tayo] visualized the contours of Emo's skull; the GI haircut exposed thin bone at the

temples, bone that would flex slightly before  
it gave way under the thrust of the steel edge.  
(Ceremony 252)

Strengthened by love and the power gained by existing in a  
mythic rather than bounded reality, Tayo resists the  
temptation to succumb to the witchery:

It had been a close call. The witchery had  
almost jammed the screwdriver into Emo's skull  
the way the witchery had wanted, . . . . Their  
deadly ritual for the autumn solstice would have  
been completed by him. He would have been  
another victim. . . . (Ceremony 253)

Tayo's release from Emo's power is paralleled not by  
the conclusion of the Pa'caya'nyi myth--and the purification  
of the town by Hummingbird and Fly--but rather by the  
conclusion of a myth about a man who, through witchery, has  
been transformed into a coyote. Silko relates this myth in  
three places in the novel (139-41, 153, 258), concluding  
with the lines "Every evil/which entangled him / was cut/ to  
pieces" (Ceremony 258). This verse, while indicating Tayo's  
freedom from the witchery, also seems to parallel the fact  
that Harley and Leroy were killed in a car wreck, crushed by  
their pick-up truck, a fact that Silko relates in the very  
next paragraph. Because this allusion to the coyote-witchery  
myth does not occur until after Tayo tells his story to the  
tribal elders, the placement of this mythic fragment

suggests that Tayo's ceremony did not end when he left the scene of Harley's killing. Instead, the ceremony concludes with Tayo relating his experience to the elder men of the tribe. By telling the story of his experience, Tayo, rather than being simply a participant in a story, becomes "a storyteller, a guardian of tradition" (Gross 96).

The final three scenes of the novel close each of the story-units of the text. The primary text ends with Tayo talking to Auntie and Grandma; Auntie tells Tayo that Emo killed Pinkie and left for California. Grandma closes the scene with the statement "'It seems like I already heard these stories before. . . only thing is, the names have changed'" (Ceremony 260, ellipsis the author's). Grandma's statement closes the evolving stories theme. That Grandma did not know the traditional myth of which Tayo became a modern part is highly unlikely. Therefore, the story of Tayo and the demise of his friends, the witchery agents, remind her of the story of Hummingbird and Fly.

The verses following Grandma's comments close the "he said" and "she said" prefaces to the novel. Betonie, or some other tribal leader, finishes the global mythic aspect of the novel with this final poetic passage. The prefaces tell the reader that stories are kept in "his belly," but at the end of the work, we learn that "its witchery/has returned/ into its belly" (Ceremony 2, 261). The witchery is "dead for now."

Finally, on the last page of the novel, Silko's voice returns with the words "sunrise,/accept this offering,/Sunrise" (Ceremony 262). We learn, from the the primary text, that "the Dawn people began and ended all their words with 'sunrise'" (Silko Ceremony 182, my emphasis). Therefore, these lines bring closure to the novel as a whole, even though Silko opens only the primary present time text with the word "Sunrise" (4), rather than the complete written work itself. Moreover, the sunrise, part of the eternal cycle of night and day, suggests that the stories will continue. Even though the dawn represents the death of the witchery, an ending, it is also a beginning; the story will be carried out, only, as Grandma reminds us, it will have new names. Left with this image of cycles and rebirth perhaps the reader, through experiencing Silko's narrative, will perceive that the words on the page are living and will remember Betonie's comments that within the stories "there is life here/ for the people" (2).

## II

### Meta- and Multinarrative Fiction: Myth and the Storytelling Event

Clearly some of Silko's thematic concerns include the preservation and evolution of stories, the ability of stories to empower people and groups, and the creative force of narrative. Yet after examining the threefold conclusion of Ceremony, we can see that Silko's main concern is the primacy of the storytelling act itself. Tayo becomes a

storyteller, Betonie tells the reader that the story of the witchery "is dead for now," and Silko concludes the novel--that is her story--with the word "sunrise" (Ceremony 257, 261, 262). Thus, Silko makes storytelling a primary theme of her novel not only by addressing this theme, but by making the characters' storytelling reflect "standard" storytelling structures. In addition, the work is multi-narrative. Aside from being steeped in Pueblo Indian mythology, Ceremony includes stories other than Tayo's mythic/present-time tale. Because these other stories seem to have little relation to the present time story, the reader becomes a story creator in making a connection between the miscellaneous vignettes and the mythic retelling in which Silko is engaged.

We can see the primacy of storytelling by looking at two examples of conversational storytelling. Storytellers, whether conversational or professional/traditional, always signal their listeners that they are going to be beginning a story. This signalling, called "keying," may be done by verbal or linguistic clues (Bauman 15); the cliched "once upon a time" beginning is one such example of these signals. Tayo, who unlike his friends knows how to tell stories properly, attempts to use the veterans' ritualized drinking stories in order to counteract his friends' false sense of community.

"Come on Tayo! They didn't keep you on latrine duty the whole war, did they? You talk now!"

. . . .

[Tayo begins to talk] "One time there were these Indians, see. They put on uniforms, cut their hair. They went off to a big war. They had a good time too. Bars served them booze, old white ladies on the street smiled at them. At Indians, remember that, because that's what they all were. Indians. . . . They were MacArthur's boy's; white whores took their money same as anyone. . . . Tayo stopped. He realized the others weren't laughing and talking any more. . . . Harley yelled, "Hey Mannie!" to the bartender. "Plug in the jukebox for us!" But Tayo yelled, "No! No. I didn't finish the story yet. See these dumb Indians thought these good times would last. (Silko 41-2, my emphasis)

The statement "You talk now," invites Tayo to begin a story, and Tayo announces his story with the sentence "One time there were these Indians, see," a variation of the "once upon a time" introductory phrase. Tayo then relates his story, and after being interrupted by Harley's request to hear the jukebox, states that he "didn't finish the story yet." He marks the close of the story with a statement which resembles a moral; one can almost hear Tayo saying "and the moral of the story is that 'these dumb Indians thought these good times would last.'" These particular sentences all demonstrate the primacy of the storytelling

event; more importantly, however, they also show Tayo contextualizing, within the veterans' drink/talk rituals, his attempts to force his comrades into self-awareness about their true mental and social state. Despite Tayo's sincerest efforts, though, his story does not change his companions' misconceptions.

For a story to be effective the teller must, as we saw in the discussion of Morrison's Song of Solomon, make "the relevance of the telling clear" to the listener (Polanyi Telling 21). Thus, for a storyteller simply to "key" the telling of a story--that is, alert the intended audience that one is about to tell a story--is not all that is required for the story to take effect. Perhaps if Tayo had explicitly explained his reasons for telling his folklorized recounting of the American Indian veteran experience, his companions--except perhaps the witch Emo--would have accepted the story. Even so, sometimes indicating the importance of the story is not enough to make the passage affect the listener, as evidenced by the following passage:

"Nobody will ever tell you this," . . . [Auntie] said, "but you must hear it so you will understand why things are this way." She was referring to the distance she kept between him [Tayo] and herself.



. . . "I'm only telling you this because she  
was your mother, and you have to understand."

(Ceremony 70)

This dialogue occurs immediately before Auntie tells her young nephew about the morning his mother walked home naked. Auntie's introduction to this story demonstrates her concern that Tayo "understand" why she is relating this tale; she wants Tayo to comprehend the reason behind their strained relationship. But even though Auntie fulfills all the requirements of the storyteller's role--she keys her performance and she informs the listener as to why she is giving the performance--her story still fails to make Tayo understand why their relationship is strained. For a story "to work," as it were, the teller must relate the story for the benefit of the listener, not himself. Auntie's story fails because she tells it for her own benefit rather than for the benefit of her nephew.

Just as the signals from the characters constantly remind of the reader of the primacy of the storytelling event, Silko does not allow the reader to forget that he is reading a story which is being told. In three places in the text, Silko, as authorial voice, comments on the action of the story. Aside from Silko's framing the novel with the "sunrise" invocations, her voice appears three times within the primary text. She makes comments to the reader/audience during two episodes of the Pa'caya'nyi myth (Gross 93); these comments inform the reader that the process of

appeasing the corn mother "wasn't easy" and was "complicated" (Ceremony 113, 180). These two episodes are metanarrative devices (Babcock 67); although they do not specifically comment on the storytelling act itself, they bring attention to the storytelling event by commenting on the content of the story. Silko's voice also appears when Tayo visits Betonie. After reading about Shush, Betonie's helper, Silko includes a "Note on Bear People and Witches" in the middle of the primary, present-time text (131). This detached discussion reads like an Indian's response to an anthropologist's question and provides the reader with information about Laguna witch mythology. Without this note, one not well-versed in Pueblo mythology might assume that Shush, because he has undergone an animal transformation, is a witch. To prevent such a misreading, Silko points out the difference between Shush's experience and that of a witch transformation by stating that witches wear "the skins of dead animals" (Ceremony 131, Parsons 66) while bear people "do not wear bear skins" (Ceremony 131). Once again, Silko makes the reader conscious of the fact that he is participating in a (actually more than one) storytelling event.

From the discussion in part one of this chapter, it is obvious that Laguna mythology and folklore are integral parts of the text. As seen earlier, Silko's primary, most symbolic, myth is that of the Pa'caya'nyi witchery and Hummingbird and Fly's attempts to combat it; this story,

combined with the story of the man who was turned into a coyote, reflects Tayo's spiritual journey. But critic Dennis R. Hoilman points out that another myth parallels Tayo's journey: the Keresan myth of "The Witches and Arrow Youth" (57). Unlike the Pa'caya'nyi myth, Silko retells only a fragment of the Arrow Boy story:

Arrowboy got up after she left.  
He followed her into the hills  
up where the caves were  
The others were waiting.  
They held the hoop  
and danced around the fire  
four times  
The witchman stepped through the hoop  
he called out that he would be a wolf.  
His head and upper body became hairy like a wolf  
But his lower body was still human.  
"Something is wrong," he said.  
"Ck'o'yo magic won't work  
if something is watching us." (Ceremony 247)

The passage above retells the start of the the traditional myth. Arrow boy's wife, a witch, attends a witches' meeting, only to be followed by her husband. The witches cannot work their evil magic with Arrow-Youth present, and and he falls under their spell (Boas 130). In the remaining portion of the tale, Old Woman Squirrel and Old Woman Spider assist Arrow Boy, allowing him to reverse the magic and take revenge on his wife by killing her (Boas 130-40). Clearly, this myth reflects Tayo's experiences. Emo parallels the Arrow Boy's witch-woman wife, and Ts'eh and Night Swan have counterparts in Old Woman Squirrel, and Old Woman Spider.

The myth above, the Pa'caya'nyi story, and the opening creation tale, a somewhat modernized and edited version of

the original Keresan story (see Boas 1-9) are all overt references to Laguna mythology. Silko also more subtly alludes to various other elements of Pueblo myth and metaphysics. For instance, Tayo is a mythical character; however, the Laguna story about his flying with an eagle to meet Spider Woman (Boas 146-7, 267) seems to have little relation to the actions undertaken by the novel's main character. Although Tayo may not match up to his mythical counterpart, the character of Ts'eh Montano definitely represents the mythical figure of Yellow Woman, and her companion, the hunter, clearly represents the mountain lion Pueblo spirit. As discussed earlier, Ts'eh's personality reflects the standard Yellow Woman character type, but the colors that surround her, blue and yellow, also reinforce this connection to Yellow Woman and the hunter both. Ts'eh has a blue silk shawl, and blue morning glories grow outside her home (Ceremony 234, 183), but the dominant color which surrounds her is a yellow or orange. An apricot tree stands near her home, and "orange sunflowers were still blooming among dry corn stalks" (Ceremony 183). Ethnologist Elsie Clews Parsons notes that "the supernatural pair of male and female is associated with color-turquoise and yellow" (Vol. 1, 102), clearly linking Ts'eh and the hunter to these mythical beings. Moreover, Ts'eh's last name, "Montano," a variation of the Spanish montana, meaning mountain, combined with the fact that she lives on Mount Taylor, suggest that

she is a mountain spirit (Hoilman 61) because Pueblo Spirit Chiefs dwell in mountains (Parsons vol. 1, 172). Finally, Silko describes the hunter as wearing a hat that "looked like mountain-lion skin" (Ceremony 207). The mountain lion is a "patron of the hunt society" as well as being associated with the North (the direction of Mount Taylor) and the color yellow (Parsons vol. 1, 188, 186).

Two other elements of Tayo's ceremony need to be examined: Betonie's stars--also significant because they, like Morrison's grave-markers, are the only visual art in the book--and the time during which the ceremony takes place, the winter solstice. Probably, Betonie wants Tayo to find the Pleiades. First of all Silko, in a mythic interpolation (Ceremony 170-176), retells the story of the Gambler. In the myth, Sun Youth must guess what the Gambler has hidden in a container and, instructed by Spider Woman he learns that the Gambler has captured the Pleiades and Orion and stored these stars in his home (see Boas 76-82, 253-54). Aside from the fact that Silko includes this myth that specifically mentions these constellations, the Pleiades and Orion "are the two constellations known best to the Pueblos. They time night ceremonies" (Parsons vol. 1, 182); they are also important markers for some Pueblo initiation ceremonies (Parsons Vol. 2, 612-13). Both of these significances relate to Tayo's experiences. He completed the most difficult part of the ceremony at night, as evidenced by his

seeing the stars (Ceremony 247) and his becoming storyteller at the ceremony's close reflects an initiation theme. Although Parson's discussion of winter solstice ceremonies appears to indicate that no obvious connection exists between the timing of Tayo's ceremony and Pueblo calendar rituals, there may be a less obvious connection. In Apache tradition, stories are told only during the winter season ("Ba'Ts'Oosee" 14) and Silko points out that during the winter solstice Laguna people gather together for four days and nights to retell the story of the emergence ("Interview" 85). The destruction of the world wide witchery, as described in the novel, could parallel the emergence story, for while the emergence tale is about creation, Silko's and Tayo's story is about the similar process of rebirth. A less abstract connection is that Tayo tells his story to the elders after he survives the test of the winter solstice. Perhaps, then, Tayo could not have assumed his role as storyteller, telling a story of rebirth, during another time of the year.

Silko's novel, like Song of Solomon, contains a wealth of traditional folklore and myth and has multiple storytellers. But in contrast to Morrison, Silko includes two stories which are neither mythic allusion nor comments on the storytelling act, and are only tangentially related to the overall text. These stories, though, create a storyteller outside of the novel: the reader. The first substory describes the squalor and despair of the alcoholic,

homeless Indians. After this description, though, an unnamed narrator tells the story through the voice of a young boy. We learn that he lives with his prostitute mother in a Gallup slum, moves to the arroyo, and then is abandoned by his mother (Ceremony 111-113). This may be Tayo's story, or it may be allegorical; neither the boy nor the mother is named. The other mini-story is the story of Helen Jean. We learn that she left Towac pueblo to earn money so she could send it home to "Emma or the girls" (Ceremony 162). But as Silko writes, "It didn't work out" (Ceremony 162). Instead of working as a secretary at the local movie theatre, Helen Jean is, contrary to what she imagined, hired as a maid.

Both of these stories appear to be unnecessary diversions from the main plot, Tayo's story. Yet each of these vignettes demonstrate the consequences of abandoning Pueblo life, thus abandoning the landscape, for a white existence in the city of Gallup. The young boy, his mother and Helen Jean, I would argue, are all victims of the witchery, and these two mini-stories reinforce not Tayo's story, but rather Silko's story of the conquering of the witchery. This uncontextualized illustration of the pervasive nature of the witchery invites or even forces the reader to both interpret on a broader than scale than is required to see the link between the myths and Tayo's present time story. While the myths require the reader to

recognize similarities in plot and action and then make inferences about theme, these other stories require one to make a connection on the basis of theme only. Therefore, readers must try to connect these isolated vignettes to the novel as a whole, thus becoming, at least for that moment, storytellers in their own right.

Silko's stories, then, have three functions: they cure Tayo, they rid the world of witchery, and they enable the reader to become actively involved in the story. Tayo lives the story to prevent the destroyers from "chang[ing]" "the end of the story" (Ceremony 231); therefore, experiencing the story ensures that the story will be told/experienced as it is supposed to exist. In the next chapter, however, we will see how Kingston relives and rewrites the stories of her past not to maintain them for the future, but to alter the past and provide a new script for the future.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior: Storytelling by the Self to Create the Self

#### I Rewriting Stories to Rewrite Identities

At first, Maxine Hong Kingston's novel The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts seems not to relate to either Morrison's work or Silko's. To begin with, Kingston uses--for the most part--a first person, "I", narrator. This structure, then, further separates Kingston's novel from Song of Solomon, Beloved and Ceremony. The first three novels discussed are works of fiction, works created by interweaving myth, allegory, oral tradition, and the authors' imaginations. In contrast, Kingston's novel is autobiographical. This fact is even evident from the subtitle of the book, Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (my emphasis). Despite this difference in genre, however, the themes Morrison and Silko address can be found in Kingston's work as well. While exploring the meaning of identity and community for a marginal character, in this case Kingston herself, Kingston also examines, analyzes and comments on the nature of the means by which her identity and community is created, the act of storytelling itself. Yet she moves one step beyond Morrison and Silko in the way in which the stories are told both by the protagonist and author. Morrison tells the story of

Milkman listening to other people's stories and becoming part of a story; Morrison tells the universal story of slavery as Sethe slowly and somewhat reluctantly becomes her own storyteller. Silko tells Thought Woman's story, which is the story of Tayo listening to stories, telling stories, experiencing a mythic story and being transformed into a teller of ancient tales. Kingston, however, does not evolve into a storyteller; she, as protagonist, is a storyteller who "talk[s]-story" (Woman 24) from the beginning of the work.

Kingston's achieves her goal to discover a sense of self is achieved, like the male protagonists in Ceremony and Song of Solomon do, by finding a sense of community as well as a personal identity. As a Chinese-American, she must determine "What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies?" (Woman 6). While Milkman Dead and Tayo are busy rediscovering their roots, Kingston must sort out the cultural elements which make up her being. Kingston contends that her parents "stuff our [her siblings and her own] heads" with Chinese stories to the point that she cannot live an "American-normal" life (Woman 102). Reflective of Milkman's feeling "like a garbage pail" for other people's emotions--and stories-- (Song 120) and Tayo's memories "tangled up like colored threads" (Ceremony 6), Kingston cannot make sense of the stories her mother and others have told her. Therefore, not only must she sort out the elements of her Chinese-American heritage, but she must

determine how to relate to that heritage and how that heritage relates to her.

The myths that nourish the imagination and the spirit also relegate women to an inferior position; and the community, instead of suffusing them [the women] with warmth, suffocates them, limits them to a role of serving men, and hinders their growth. (Rabine 478)

Because her Chinese background is emotionally and mentally stifling, Kingston must retell and rewrite her mental store of stories to make them apply to her culturally mixed identity. Ironically, the mythical/historical knowledge which enables Milkman Dead and Tayo to re-establish their respective identities provides a stumbling block for this female protagonist/author. Woman Warrior's protagonist, then, resembles Morrison's Sethe more than the male protagonists in either Song of Solomon or Ceremony, for these two women characters must overcome stifling mythologies (stories) about their respective identities. Sethe must convince herself that she is her own "best thing" (Beloved 273), despite Schoolteacher's writings to the contrary; Kingston must convince herself that, even though her grandfather believes that "feeding girls is feeding cowbirds," she is "worthy of eating the food" (Woman 54, 62). Thus, Kingston creates five stories (the five sections of the novel) in order to forge an identity; her actions as

literary storyteller allow her to compare herself to various images of Chinese women. In the end, Kingston must simultaneously redefine herself as a Chinese-American and as a Chinese-American woman.

Unlike the previously examined authors who begin their work with a narrative story (Morrison), or a framing device (Silko), Kingston begins her 1976 novel with an immediately recognizable, dynamic, storytelling event:

"'You must not tell anyone,' my mother said, 'what I am about to tell you. In China your father had a sister who killed herself. She jumped into the family well. We say that your father has all brothers because it is as if she had never been born.'" (Woman 3)

Kingston's mother then tells her daughter that this aunt, the "No Name Woman," of the chapter title, becomes pregnant out of wedlock, so provoking the wrath of the villagers that they raid the house. After the aunt "gave birth in the pigsty," she drowns herself and the baby in the family water well (Woman 5). This story and the mother's introduction to the story suggest that storytelling is used to order both reality and behavior. Kingston even comments that this story is "a story to grow up on. . . . [a means to] establish realities" (Woman 5). First of all, Kingston's mother, who we later come to know as Brave Orchid, uses this gender specific story--no reason exists in Brave Orchid's mind to tell this story to a male--to set rules to govern

her daughter's behavior: "Now that you [Maxine] have started to menstruate, what happened to her could happen to you" (Woman 5). But not only is she attempting to govern her daughter's behavior, she is trying to maintain the "reality" that this aunt never existed. The family tells other people that the father "has all brothers" in order to negate the presence of a family member they wish to forget, an action which is the inverse of Auntie's and Grandma's storytelling designed to recreate the presence of Rocky. After concluding this story, Brave Orchid repeats the following: "Don't let your father know that I told you" (Woman 5). Not telling the story of the unfortunate aunt, or telling only "the useful parts" (Woman 6) with instructions to the listener not to tell the story, is another way to keep the aunt in the realm of the unborn. Despite Brave Orchid's warning not to tell the story of her dead aunt, however, Kingston tells her aunt's story to the reader. This telling allows the aunt to return to the land of the living. Kingston's retelling, though, is not the story her mother told her; rather it is her transformation of her mother's story.

Kingston, through the voice of her young girl narrator, transforms her aunt from a moral parable into a personality (Smith 155). Just as Denver, while talking to Beloved, brings her mother's stories to life, our narrator fleshes out her mother's story, giving the aunt feelings, emotions and motivations. We learn that even though "a woman who tended her appearance reaped a reputation for

eccentricity," Kingston imagines that her aunt "combed individuality into her bob" (Woman 10). Moreover, she was an individual with personal desires and complaints:

Such commonplace loveliness, however, was not enough for my aunt. She dreamed of a lover for the fifteen days of New Year's. She plied her secret comb. And sure enough she cursed the year, the family, the village and herself" (Woman 11).

These elaborations give the "No Name" aunt an identity other than that of "Ghost! Dead Ghost!" (Woman 16). But not only does Kingston elaborate on her personality, she also recreates a scenario that may have lead to her aunt's demise.

My aunt could not have been the lone romantic who gave everything up for sex. Women in the old China did not choose. Some man had commanded her to lie with him and be his secret evil. (Woman 7)

By making the aunt victim to the stranger's orders, Kingston places the blame of her aunt's situation on the cultural mores of China rather than on the aunt herself. Yet, this hypothesis does not satisfy the narrator's questions about the aunt's motivations. Perhaps, she hypothesizes, this aunt ignored China's stringent moral codes altogether and was "a wild woman, [who] kept rollicking company" (Woman 9).

Kingston eventually negates this theory though, and concludes her transformation of the story by depicting the aunt not so much as a victim of her sex, but as a woman avenging herself against the family and town that turned against her.

Kingston writes that "she was a spite suicide, drowning herself in the drinking water" (Woman 19). Kingston's label for her death, "a spite suicide," as opposed to her mother's comments that she simply drowned herself, give the "nonexistent" aunt the power of revenge. According to Kingston, Chinese families did not let unwanted family members leave; instead they, "hung on to the offenders and fed them leftovers" at an "outcast table" (Woman 8). This separation, echoing Auntie's behavior to Tayo in Silko's Ceremony, clearly demonstrates the fact that she was no longer part of the family community. Yet this female figure does not really let herself "be forgotten as if . . . [she] had never been born" (Woman 5). Because ghosts of suicides are prominent and often malevolent (Dennys 74), drowning herself in the family well has more consequences than simply poisoning the family's water supply.

The Chinese are always very frightened of the drowned one, whose weeping ghost, wet hair hanging and skin bloated, waits silently by the water to pull down a substitute. (Woman 19)

No Name Woman has contaminated both the water and the community; her suicide is an act of revenge. She will forever remain a ghostly presence, a haunting reminder to the community which tried to erase her very existence.

Kingston's revisioning of her aunt's story, though, is not so much to give voice to another person's experiences, as to solidify her own sense of identity (Juhasz 178). Although her mother intended the story to be advice, a lesson for becoming an adult, the mother's version of the story is not effective. Like Silko's character's who must change and adapt their stories so that they meet the changing needs of a person or community, Kingston must adapt her mother's story to help herself. "Unless I see her life branching into mine, she gives me no ancestral help" (Woman 10). By fleshing out the story of her suicidal aunt, Kingston has created a model of a Chinese female, specifically her "forerunner" (Woman 9), against whom she can test out identities.

Paradoxically, Kingston's opening chapter, in direct contrast to that chapter's name, names her dead aunt. Although her aunt lacks a Chinese or American full name, the fact that Kingston has labeled her "No Name Woman" provides her with an appellation and an identity; she is a woman who, through her family's manipulation of her life-story, has lost her name. David Leiwei Li even contends that her lack of a name "impart[s] a collective identity to the aunt who has now joined the forces of the rejected women and has



become a type and a sign" (503). While one could argue that her "becoming a type" is negative because it denies the aunt's individuality and selfhood, becoming a "collective identity" demonstrates her power. Just as the ghost-woman Beloved represents the "sixty million and more" (Beloved, frontispiece) who died in slavery, No Name Woman symbolizes the Chinese women who, under pressure from a patriarchal society, were forced to kill themselves and/or their female babies.

The other, named, characters in Kingston's mythologized autobiographical novel possess significant names as well. In traditional Chinese naming practices, names have three functions. They may signal a wish or desire, help bring a certain attribute to that person, or describe the gender of the child (Li 501). Female names, in particular, often express the woman's femininity, rather than her individuality (Li 501). The mythical women, Fa Mu Lan and Ts'ai Yen, are the only characters who possess Chinese names, instead of translations of those names. Li suggests that because the translation of Fa Mu Lan is "Sylvan Orchid," and one translation of Ts'ai Yen is "Well Wrought Jade," two expressions that suggest beauty and adornment rather than strength and intelligence, Kingston purposely chose to leave the mythical women's names transliterations (501). "By rendering Fa Mu Lan and Ts'ai Yen in sound symbols and by emptying the semantic content the characters originally have," he writes, "Kingston has

discarded the patriarchal reinforcement of woman as sexual/aesthetic object and material commodity" (Li 501). By manipulating these words, labels for an identity, Kingston alters the reader's perceptions of that identity. Thus, even though the personality of the character may not actually have changed, Kingston, through the power of her written storytelling, can recast entire identities for posterity.

Not only does Kingston reshape identities, but in her revisioning of herself through her revisioning/rewriting of her mother's stories, she recasts traditional myths. Her work, like Silko's, includes allusions to the ancient Chinese oral tradition. The second chapter, "White Tigers," retells the story of Fa Mu Lan. Kingston introduces her telling of this story with the statement "When we Chinese girls listened to the adults talk-story, we learned that we failed if we grew up to be but wives or slaves." She immediately counters this prophecy with the comment "We could be heroines, swordswomen" (Woman 23). Her second statement contains an implied "but" and suggests that the tradition that women were useless unless they were "wives or slaves" is not true. Perhaps, then, this tradition is only what Kingston calls it, "talk-story" (23), for not only does her mother tell her the story about the woman who "invented white crane boxing," but her mother also tells her "the chant of Fa Mu Lan," the woman warrior. The mother's tales, then, do not provide a stable framework from which Kingston

can build her identity; her stories alternate between portraying negative figures such as the deceased aunt and positive ones such as the warrior woman. Faced with these contradictory tales, Kingston rewrites the stories by writing herself into them, thus telling her own tale.

Based on a Chinese folk ballad dating back to the fifth century, the original ancient Fa Mu Lan tale tells the story of a young woman who replaces her elderly father during wartime, returns home a triumphant soldier, and then "shed[s] her armor only to put on her old dress" (Li 505). But while the themes of the original folktale are "vengeance and filial piety" (Blinde 67), Kingston's transformation of the myth focuses on the individual training and motivations of the heroine, thereby making her development into a heroine, a process which benefits hers, more important than her actions as a warrior, which are actions performed for the benefit of other people.

The child warrior begins her training by becoming one with nature. Granted, her training could be viewed negatively because women are often associated with nature--reproduction and arationality--in contrast to the men who are associated with culture--production and rationality (Ortner). Fa Mu Lan's training however, gives her physical skills beyond normal human abilities and, eventually, provides her with a mental skills as well. We read that the narrator

. . . learned to move my fingers, hands, feet,  
head, and entire body in circles. . . . After  
six years the deer let me run beside them. I  
could jump twenty feet into the air from a  
standstill, leaping like a monkey over the hut.

And that she

. . . learned to make . . . her mind large, as  
the universe is large, so that there is room for  
paradoxes. (Woman 28)

These passages show the young warrior transcending her stereotypical role as woman. The circle, although a decidedly feminine shape, also symbolizes timelessness and power. Thus the young warrior enters a mythic realm of time, space and energy. Her ability to run with deer and jump like monkeys contrasts sharply with the image of fragile Chinese women hobbling on bound feet. But the warrior's mental development is even more striking. She comprehends paradoxes--perhaps a metaphor for the conflicting female and conflicting Chinese/American images with which she is bombarded. After completing a survival test, Fa Mu Lan begins training in "dragon ways" (Woman 34), philosophical, metaphysical training. But not until she "could point at the sky and make a sword appear, a silver bolt in the sunlight, and control its slashing with . . . [her] mind" is Fa Mu Lan ready to return home to fight for her village (Woman 39, my emphasis), thus demonstrating the primary importance of mental strength over physical prowess.

Although Fa Mu Lan's training has isolated her from her family and village, she does not reunite with either community as the woman Fa Mu Lan. She is welcomed, as Sidonie Smith points out, as "a son" (158, Woman 40) rather than as a long lost daughter returned. Moreover, the fact that her parents "carve revenge" on her back (Woman 41) suggests that she has become a metaphor for revenge rather than the agent of it. Kingston appears to rewrite the myth from a feminist perspective: Fa Mu Lan asks her husband to join her in battle, she fights through her pregnancy and carries the nursing child with her. In the end, though, she returns home not a war hero but "a legend about . . . [her] perfect filiality" (Woman 54, my emphasis). Instead of talking-stories about her extraordinary training and battle record, the villagers will remember and talk about her fulfilled duties to home and family.

Within this expanded myth, though, is a brief story telling of "the real female avengers" (Smith 158):

When I [Fa Mu Lan] broke down the door, I found women, cowering whimpering women. . . . These women would not be good for anything. . . .

Later, it would be said, they turned into the band of swordswomen who were a mercenary army. They did not wear men's clothes like me, but rode as women in red and black dresses. They bought up girl babies so that many poor families welcomed their visitations. When slave girls

and daughters-in-law ran away, people would say they joined these witch amazons. They killed men and boys. I never myself encountered such women and could not vouch for their reality.

(Woman 53)

Two significant themes can be found in this passage. First of all, Kingston transforms the "cowering whimpering. . . not good for anything" women into powerful warriors. This transformation is more significant than the transformation of the Fa Mu Lan myth. Here the women fight as women, in "red and black dresses," and they avenge themselves by killing "men and boys" against the men who enforced and will be enforcing China's misogynist cultural norms (Smith 159).

The other idea present in the above quotation is a comment on the nature of Kingston's transformation of this story. Two phrases, "it would be said" and "I could not vouch for their reality," point to the primacy of this event as myth or story. Here Kingston draws the reader's attention to the fact that she is recasting a tale, a story that is "said," a story that may or may not be true. Therefore these comments guide the reader through Kingston's literary stew of myth, history and autobiography, providing information that Kingston's mother did not provide when she talked-story to her daughter. Kingston's frustration at her mother's refusal to differentiate between fact and fiction can be seen in the following: "'You won't tell me a story and then say "this is a true story," or, "This is just a

story." I can't tell the difference'" (Woman 235).

Kingston's authorial voice, however, ensures that the reader knows that the tale interpolated into the Fa Mu Lan retelling, and the majority of her tellings, is "just a story" and provides evidence, or lack thereof, to determine the truthfulness of the tale.

Near the end of her version of the Fa Mu Lan myth, Kingston compares her life to that of the woman warrior's. Her comparison of actual life events to imaginary constructs is the means by which she shapes her identity. Compared to Fa Mu Lan, Kingston believes her "American life" to be a "disappointment" (Woman 54). In contrast to the woman warrior who challenges out-loud, orally, the enemy baron before beheading him (Woman 51-2), when the present time protagonist must fight her American battles, her power to verbally alter her reality fails her. Wanting to tell a boss who sold "nigger yellow" paint that she finds that word offensive, she responds not with an angry shout of protest, but in a "small-person's voice that makes no impact" (Woman 57). Likewise, faced with typing invitations to a restaurant known for racist policies, her anger is "whispered [her] voice unreliable" (Woman 58). Kingston's loss of voice, at this point, seems to render her as powerless as the victim No Name Woman. But just as No Name Woman regained her power by becoming a haunting presence at the well, Kingston regains her voice as well. Not only does Kingston recover

her ability to speak, but she also develops her ability to write and rewrite the problematic stories. Finally, instead of comparing herself unfavorably to the mythical woman warrior, she understands how she can use the Chinese legend so that it no longer "tasks" her (Woman 62). By rewriting the myth, she makes a place for it within her American life (Frye 296).

The swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar. May my people understand the resemblance soon so that that I can return to them. What we have in common is the words at our backs. The idioms for revenge are "report a crime" and "report to five families." The reporting is the vengeance--no the beheading, not the gutting, but the words. (Woman 63).

We can see that Kingston understands her own role as warrior; substituting pen, or voice, for a sword, she tears down the stories that have smothered her. She achieves her vengeance not by actively protesting against words she cannot accept, but instead by "reporting," writing and telling about those words and stories.

After relating the stories of Fa Mu Lan and No Name Woman, stories which are "antithetical opposites of potential female identity," Kingston relates stories about these women's real life counterparts, Brave Orchid and Moon Orchid (Chua 49). Her mother, a naming paradox because bravery is a masculine trait while orchids are obviously



fragile and feminine (Li 502) is labeled "Shaman" according to the chapter title. Kingston, however, focuses more on her mother's storytelling ability than on her mother's implied-magical, healing properties.

Brave Orchid's story like Fa Mu Lan's, is one of independence and personal strength. After waiting several years for her husband to send for her to come to America, Brave Orchid enrolls in medical school. Kingston comments on the nature of her decision in an allusion to Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own. "Not many women," she writes, "got to live out the daydream of women--to have a room, even a section of a room, that only gets messed up when she messes it up herself" (Woman 73). By secretly studying, she becomes known as a "brilliant, . . . natural scholar who could glance at a book and know it" (Woman 75). Although her great intelligence appears to parallel the young warrior's mental power, her identity as a "natural scholar" is a story. The fictive nature of her scholarly brilliance perhaps accounts for her response to her own daughter's receiving "straight A's" at school; instead of commending her, she replies, "'Let me tell you a true story about a girl who saved her village'" (Woman 54). Brave Orchid's most famous trait, however, is her power to exorcise ghosts, the activity in which Kingston, by writing this novel, is engaged.

When a ghost invades the women's dormitory, most of the women assuage their fears "with science"; after all,

these students "were new women, scientists who changed the rituals" (Woman 77, 88). Brave Orchid, in contrast, told "stories as factual as bats into the listening night" (Woman 77) in order to alleviate her fears. She tells stories to the Boulder ghost that visits her in the ghost room. She tells the ghost that it "made a mistake haunting a medical school" and , "instructs it," another form of telling, that she will cook it for breakfast (Woman 82-3). After talking-story to the ghost, she tells the other female students that

. . . a full-grown Sitting Ghost loomed up to the ceiling and pounced on top of me. Mounds of hair hid its claws and teeth. No true head, no eyes, no face, so low in its level of incarnation that it did not have the shape of a recognizable animal. It knocked me down and began to strangle me. . . . I would have cut it up, but--a Sitting Ghost mutation--it had an extra arm that wrested my hand away from the knife. (Woman 85).

Brave Orchid's narration of her nocturnal experiences is her "story" (Woman 84), her version of the many ghost stories the other women tell. Eventually the tale she tells the women, which differs from the previous narration describing her interaction with the ghost, convinces them to fight the ghost. Just as her daughter has been convinced, through talk-story, that she can be a warrior, Brave Orchid's classmates are convinced that they can be "hero[es] in a

ghost story" themselves (Woman 87). The subsequent actions of the young women, then, attest to Brave Orchid's narrative and rhetorical power.

Kingston finishes describing her mother's pre-America life story by describing her experiences as a doctor in the Chinese villages. Like the amazon women of the addendum to the Fa Mu Lan myth, Brave Orchid wears "a silk robe and western shoes with big heels" (Woman 90). Kingston explains that she continued to fight ghosts (98) and "was midwife to whatever spewed forth" (Woman 100). But the woman who was a "Shaman" has "fallen [since] coming to America" (Woman 90). At the end of the medicine woman tale, Kingston tells the reader "the 'truth'--her [Kingston's] actual memories of her mother, a laundress in America" (Juhasz 180), memories which contrast strongly with her life as a venerated village doctor.

The "true" section of the chapter shows Brave Orchid unsuccessfully fighting "Urban Renewal Ghosts," "work[ing] her life away," and washing other people's clothes when in China she "never even had to hang up . . . [her] own clothes" (Woman 122-3). Brave Orchid is no longer a real life image of Fa Mu Lan; instead she has become a ghost to her own daughter (Smith 163): "My mother would sometimes be a large animal, barely real in the dark; then she would become a mother again" (Woman 118). Brave Orchid does, however, continue to tell stories, but, as we learn later in the novel, the stories are not functional, not connected. The

mother tells her daughter that people have monkey feasts when they have much money, but does not tell her daughter why (Woman 107); she tells a tale about encountering "Sit Dom Kuei" ghosts on a bridge, but fails to translate the words her daughter cannot understand. The family performs traditions without explaining why they need to be performed. Instead of receiving useful information, Kingston is fed fragments of cultural and historical knowledge. As Kingston writes

I don't see how they [the Chinese] kept up a continuous culture for five thousand years. Maybe they didn't; maybe everyone makes it up as they go along. If we had to depend on being told, we'd have no religion, no babies, no menstruation (sex, of course, unspeakable), no death. (Woman 216).

Her mother's stories may be "always timely" (Woman 113), but they are not useful. Unable to make sense of either her mother's stories or the overheard fragments of the Chinese oral tradition, Kingston suggests that perhaps all the stories are fictitious stories. Her mother's talk clouds or creates reality instead of clarifying it.

Kingston turns from rewriting her perceptions of her mother to indirectly rewriting scripts for herself. If Brave Orchid's story is a real-life manifestation of Fa Mu Lan's, then Moon Orchid's story is the real life parallel to No Name Woman's. The chapters "Shaman" and "White Tigers"

show woman as hero, while the chapters "No Name Woman" and "At the Western Palace" show woman as victim. Yet although Kingston's revision of her deceased aunt's tale essentially brings her back to life, the story of Kingston's other Aunt, Moon Orchid, writes her into the past.

Continuing the series of contrasts that she has been making throughout the first two chapters, Kingston describes Moon Orchid and Brave Orchid as distinct polarities. Brave Orchid is a woman of action and speech. For example, she used the money her husband sent to China for funds to attend medical school; her ability to talk story is a "great power (Woman 24). Moon Orchid, in contrast, simply lived an elite Chinese woman's life while waiting for her husband to send for her. Moreover, she does not use speech as a means of constructing her own reality and determining her destiny. Even though she wanted to emigrate to America, Moon Orchid "never told . . . [her husband] that she wanted to come to the United States. She waited for him to suggest it . . . ." (Woman 144). These differences in their personalities are also evident in their names. While both possess the name of a fragile, tropical flower, the modifiers in front of this word clearly have opposite significances. Brave Orchid retains aspects of her femininity, but still manages to exorcise ghosts, heal the sick and, in Fa Mu Lan style, "plots to avenge her sister against Moon Orchid's husband and his second wife" (Rabine 485). Moon Orchid's name, on

the other hand, suggests that she is weak, dependent, and not a complete self. Just as the moon cannot be seen without the light of the sun, Moon Orchid cannot create her own existence from within. She is dependent on her husband to provide her with an identity. Smith elaborates on the moon metaphor by explaining that Moon Orchid is "a decorative satellite that revolves around and takes its definition from another body, the absent husband" (164). Finally, Critic David Li reminds us that the moon, or luna, is associated with being insane; he postulates that Moon Orchid's name foreshadows her final mental condition (502).

Once Moon Orchid arrives in California, Brave Orchid attempts to teach her how to perform household chores and work in the laundry, but Moon Orchid never learns to "work any faster than she did on the first day" (Woman 162). But this deficiency in her physical and mechanical capabilities is not as important as her verbal deficiencies:

"Oh, she's going to school now. She's choosing a plain blue dress. She's picking up her comb and brush and shoes, and she's going to lock herself up in the bathroom. They dress in bathrooms here." She pressed her ear against the door. "She's brushing her teeth. Now she's coming out of the bathroom. She's wearing the blue dress and white sweater. . . . Today she's taking her green book and her blue book. And

tablets and pencils. Do you take a dictionary?"

Moon Orchid asked. . . .

"She's driving me nuts!" the children told

each other in English. (Woman 163-4)

Moon Orchid's mindless descriptions of her niece's and nephew's actions demonstrate that she does not know how to use language, or storytelling, to empower herself. Instead of observing the behavior of her relatives and analyzing or commenting on it, she simply repeats the behaviors as she sees them. Moon Orchid's speech, then, does not provide her with any true knowledge or understanding of these unfamiliar Western behaviors. Able to state only facts in a completely passionless tone, Moon Orchid clearly does not have the ability to use language to move people to action. Her lack of verbal skills, then, renders Brave Orchid's determination to make Moon Orchid take back her husband absurd.

On their way to Los Angeles, Brave Orchid tells an allegorical tale about the Empress of the East, "good and kind and full of light," who comes to free the Emperor from the Empress of the West (Woman 166). Brave Orchid believes Moon Orchid to be the Empress of the East, but what she fails to understand is that this story is culturally bound to the Orient. The concepts that it embodies do not apply to life in the United States (Smith 166), just as Josiah's lesson about the rain does not apply to Tayo's experience in the Philippines. The husband, a wealthy brain surgeon, rejects Moon Orchid and makes the obvious comment that she

"'can't talk'" to Americans let alone to himself. More importantly, though, he states that the rest of the family had become "'people in a book . . . [he] read a long time ago'" (Woman 178, 179). His final words demonstrate the fact that Brave Orchid and Moon Orchid had been living an outdated story. As Smith writes: "The husband has turned the two sisters into characters from a book read long ago, a devastating recapitulation of their efforts to turn him into the fictional Emperor" (166).

After the humiliating episode with her estranged husband, Moon Orchid becomes 'insane:

Brave Orchid saw that all variety had gone from her sister. She was indeed mad. "The difference between mad people and sane people," Brave Orchid explained to the children, "is that sane people have variety when they talk-story. Mad people have only one story that they talk over and over." (Woman 184).

The statement "Mad people have only one story that they talk over and over," is especially pertinent. If storytelling is to be functional, it must be dynamic, and storytelling cannot be dynamic if the person who tells the stories does not grow and change as well. That the aunt possesses "only one story" suggests that she has died or stagnated, much like Tayo's soldier-friends in Ceremony. Earlier, Moon Orchid encloses herself in a dark house (Woman 183), an action similar to burying herself in a coffin (Smith 165).



Moon Orchid develops "a new story" (Woman 185) eventually, but her role as mother to the wards of the mental institution fails to preserve her and she dies.

In the next chapter, "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," the narrator/Kingston informs the reader that she, herself, did not hear the long, involved story of Moon Orchid's trip to Los Angeles: "What my brother actually said was, 'I drove Mom and Second Aunt to Los Angeles to see Aunt's husband who's got the other wife'" (Woman 189). Moreover, contrary to the opening lines of this final chapter, not even her brother told her about this trip. Not until eighteen lines later do we learn how the narrator learned of her aunt's experience: ". . . one of my sisters told me what he'd [her brother] told her" (Woman 190). These comments make the reader aware that the last chapter may have been fiction, and reinforce the fact that the reader has been listening to an subjective storyteller in the chapter "At the Western Palace." In the first two chapters, we know who is telling and who originally told, the stories: the young Kingston and her mother, respectively. At the end of the chapter "Shaman," we learn that her mother "has given . . . [her] pictures to dream," painted stories of her life before California. But in the chapter about Moon Orchid, Kingston never informs the reader who told the present-time storyteller the story. At this point in the book, it becomes clear that Kingston is aware of the power, or danger (Smith 167) inherent in receiving,

then altering and embellishing stories.

His [my brother's] version of the story may be better because of its bareness, not twisted into designs. The hearer can take it away without taking up much room. Long ago in China, knot-makers tied string into buttons and frogs and rope into bell pulls. There was one knot so complicated that it blinded the knot-maker. Finally an emperor outlawed this cruel knot, and the nobles could not order it anymore. If I had lived in China, I would have been an outlaw knot-maker. (Woman 190).

The "knots" described in this brief tale are metaphors for Kingston's stories. Thus, the story above suggests that embellishments, or "twist[s]" to use Kingston's word, clearly have dangerous consequences; the knot-maker was blinded as a result of complicating his knot. Kingston's comment that if she were in China she would be "an outlaw knot-maker," lets the reader know that her embellishment of her stories may be dangerous. Armed with this clue to her identity, then, Kingston begins to ask questions and offer possible answers about her childhood experiences.

The final third of the book is where Kingston's grapplings with her many identities--Chinese, female, American--are the most striking; it is where she, finally, tells her own story (Ling 159, Chua 50). After her introductory allegory about the knot-maker, Kingston tells

the reader that her mother "pushed my [her] tongue up and sliced the frenum. Or maybe she snipped it with a pair of nail scissors" (Woman 190). This image echoes the image of Sethe biting her tongue while being whipped by Schoolteacher as well as Tayo's dessicated, useless tongue (Beloved 202, Ceremony 15). But just as Kingston experienced Moon Orchid's embarrassing reunion with her husband second-hand, Kingston remembers not the actual event but "only her [mother] telling . . . [her] about it" (Woman 190). Like the story of Kingston's drowned aunt, this story then, rather than its experience, becomes part of the narrator's memory and, Smith argues, part of her history (168).

When questioned about her reasons for cutting the narrator's tongue, her mother answers that it was so that Kingston "'would not be tongue-tied'" (Woman 190). In spite of her mother's intentions, however, Kingston has "a terrible time talking" (Woman 191):

My silence was thickest--total--during the three years that I covered my school paintings with black paint. I painted layers of black over houses and flowers and suns. . . . I was making a stage curtain, and it was the moment before the curtain parted or rose. . . . I spread them [the pictures] out (so black and full of possibilities) and pretended the curtains were swinging open, flying up, one after another, sunlight underneath, mighty operas. (Woman 192)

One critic argues that the painted-over pictures symbolize the smothering of Kingston's imagination resulting from her inability to speak (Cheung 166). While I do not disagree with this interpretation, I would like to offer an additional one. I would suggest that the black paint may represent the layers of stories, the cultural baggage, that shadow Kingston's life and, consequently, prevent her from acting out the "mighty operas" or scripts, which she would like to write for herself.

Not only could Kingston not speak, obviously an impediment to her discovery of self, but she could not understand one of her new American labels:

I could not understand "I." The Chinese I has seven strokes, intricacies. How could the American "I" assuredly wearing a hat like the Chinese, have only three strokes, the middle so straight. Was it out of politeness that this writer left off strokes the way a Chinese has to write her own name small and crooked? No it was not politeness; "I" is a capital and "you" is lower case. (Woman 193).

David Li notes that "the Confucian stress on the communal worth of self" combined with a "resistance to categorical schemes" precludes the development of an "'I' concept in Chinese culture" (504, emphasis mine). This inability to name a singular "I", however, is generally non-western, not

just Confucian. Milkman and Tayo and even Sethe--despite her having to realize that she was "her own best thing"--cement their identities through a connection with community. Such a "communal worth of self" (Li 504) contrasts with the American world-view of the rugged individual. Therefore, Kingston's struggle to assert the American half of her Chinese-American heritage is compounded by her Chinese, that is ethnic minority--world view. Moreover, a conflict exists between the Chinese female "I" and the American "I" (Li 504). Kingston writes that the word for the Chinese female "I" is "slave" (Woman 56), while obviously the American "I" stands for the entire complex of a person's identity. These three conflicting labels contribute to Kingston's self-identity confusion. How can she simultaneously be "a slave" and self "assured"? How can one "I" be "intricate," the other simple? These questions articulate the complexity of a Chinese-American identity, and parallel an ambiguity inherent in her Chinese background: "For . . . [Kingston] the maddening paradox is that the same culture that has produced the No-Name Woman and Moon Orchid has also produced Fa Mu Lan and Brave Orchid" (Kim 203).

Once Kingston finds her voice, she explores "her childhood confusion about speechlessness" (Smith 168). This exploration, however, comes in the form of bullying another Chinese American girl, one who will not talk even while attending Chinese school. Wearing a "China doll haircut," "pastels," and possessing "Pink and white. . . baby soft"

skin (Woman 201, 205, 204), this girl is a young version of Moon Orchid, passive and voiceless, an example of personhood that Kingston finds unacceptable:

"Talk," I said. "Are you going to talk?" . . .

I looked right at her. "I know you talk," I said. "I've heard you." Her eyebrows flew up. Something in those black eyes was startled, and I pursued it. . . . ". . . You don't see I'm trying to help you out do you? Do you want to be like this, dumb (do you know what dumb means?), your whole life? . . . What are you going to do for a living? . . . If you don't talk, you can't have a personality. You'll have no personality and no hair. You've got to let people know you have a personality and a brain." (Woman 205,206-7,210)

Here Kingston is using her voice to threaten and to mold another person's sense of self, instead of using it to reconstruct her own sense of self. Ironically, using or misusing speech in this manner is precisely what Kingston disliked about her mother's storytelling (Rabine 491). The depressing scene concludes with Kingston hitting the young girl, a displacement of Kingston's own anger. Neither No Name Woman nor Brave Orchid had "a personality" as a result of their voicelessness, and the fact Kingston did not know English, a type of voicelessness, suggested that she lacked

a "brain." Thus when Kingston performs the physical assault upon her classmate, she is "striking" violently at her own failure to take a voice and at . . . her mother's prior narratives of female voicelessness" (169). Kingston's attempts to force the girl to speak fail, just as Brave Orchid's plans for Moon Orchid do. Kingston becomes not a heroine, but ill, not speaking for another eighteen months (Woman 211-12).

"Without a voice," writes Cheng Lok Chua, Kingston "risks being forced into the mold of the victimized No Name Woman or Moon Orchid" (51). Kingston's animation of that fear comes in the guise of the retarded man who sits on his boxes of pornography, and who Kingston believes is the person her family has chosen to be her husband (Chua 51). Kingston describes this man as a "monster" (Woman 228), a description reminiscent of Brave Orchid's description of the Sitting Ghost. Kingston uses her voice to exorcise this particular ghost (Chua 52) and asserts that, despite her mother's prophecy, she will not allow her mother to "turn me into a slave or a wife" (Woman 234).

After telling her mother to "tell that hulk, that gorilla-ape, to go away," Kingston concludes her outburst with her final frustrations about her mother's storytelling:

"And I don't want to listen to anymore of your stories; they have no logic. They scramble me up. You lie with stories. You won't tell me a true story and then say 'This is a true story,'

or, 'This is just a story.' I can't tell the difference. I don't even know what your real names are. I can't tell what's real and what you make up. Ha! You can't stop me from talking. You tried to cut off my tongue, but it didn't work." (Woman 235)

Kingston's middle statement, "I don't even know what your real names are," symbolizes her overall frustrations with her mother's storytelling. If she cannot determine what is "real" and what is "ma[d]e up" about her parents, then Kingston cannot be expected to sort out truths and untruths about the (other) fictions her parents tell. Ironically, Kingston's mother answers her daughter's uninterrupted tirade by commenting that her daughter is stupid because she "can't tell the difference" between the "real" and the "ma[d]e up," when it is Brave Orchid's failing to clarify truth and fiction that render her daughter unable to make this distinction. Furthermore, Brave Orchid's statements provide no real answers for Kingston because, as a person who is neither Chinese nor American, Kingston lacks the cultural background to separate, analyze and use her mother's stories in order to help herself forge an identity. As Margaret Miller writes:

. . . how can the immigrant child be expected to [separate "real" from "made up"] when the cultural context in which everyone agrees about



what is true, what is false, is gone? Her [Kingston's] understanding of Chinese culture comes in scraps that she must piece together; her mother doesn't help her with the process because for her, raised in China, there are no gaps. (25)

Kingston, then, is forced to embellish and expand upon the stories she hears from her mother (Miller 25), making her own judgments about what might be true and what might be false. Thus she is forced to ground her cultural and personal identity on her own, and truly fabricates her own distinct sense of self. When this task becomes overpowering, however, she must leave the source of her confusion and retreat to a place where there are "no ghosts" (Woman 237):

I had to leave home in order to see the world logically, logic the new way of seeing. I learned to think that mysteries are for explanation. I enjoy the simplicity. . . . Give me plastics, periodical tables, TV dinners with vegetables no more complex than diced peas and carrots. (Woman 237)

Her escape, however is only illusory. Kingston's mother leaves her with the name "Ho Chi Kuei," a name for which Kingston cannot find a precise definition, leaving one more mystery without an "explanation." For some questions of

identity, no concrete answers exist: " I continue to sort out what's just my childhood, just my imagination, just my family, just the movies, just living" (Woman 239).

Kingston, then, unlike Milkman or Tayo never finds a "home," a sense of community. Forever a liminal character, Kingston's sense of self is defined by constant flux and her constant shaping, that is rewriting, of that flux.

Kingston's final story is a partial transformation of a story told to her by her mother and a traditional Chinese folktale, as Kingston explains the transformation, "The beginning is hers [her mother's], the ending, mine" (Woman 240). The first of story, the "beginning," shows Kingston's grandmother insisting that the entire family attend the theatre, even though leaving the house would leave their home vulnerable to attack by bandits. Bandits attack the theatre, however, but as the entire family returned safely to unransacked homes, the grandmother becomes convinced that the "family was immune to harm as long as they [it] went to plays" (Woman 241). This story suggests that stories (plays are presentations of stories), contrary to what Kingston has come to conclude, provide protection. To make this story effective, then, Kingston adds her embellishments to the tale.

"I like to think," she begins, "that at some of those performances they heard the songs of Ts'ai Yen, a poetess born in A.D. 175" (Woman 241). We learn that Ts'ai Yen, kidnapped by a barbaric tribe, gave birth to two children

who "did not speak Chinese" but only uttered "senseless singsong words" (Woman 242). One night Ts'ai Yen hears flutes and begins to sing "about China and her family there" (Woman 242). Surprisingly "the barbarians understood their [her] sadness and anger," and she is ransomed back to her homeland. Ts'ai Yen may be either Brave Orchid (Smith 172) or, like the knot maker mentioned earlier in the story, a metaphor for Kingston herself. Smith contends that this last story is Brave Orchid's story because, like Ts'ai Yen, she was a hostage in a barbarian land (America) and her children could not speak (172). Other critics (Li, Bremer, Miller) argue that Kingston is Ts'ai Yen. "The poet in exile is no longer alienated," and moreover, "the ethnicity that once seemed a handicap is now her strength" (Li 511). I however, would argue that who Ts'ai Yen represents is not important. Rather, the fact that she uses poetry--art and stories--to make the "barbarians" understand and empathize with her confusion is the important point. This fact reaffirms, for both Kingston and the reader, that words have the power to effect change. In the end, Kingston never defines herself in terms of a community, never defines her role as a Chinese American woman; instead, she defines herself in terms of her role as creator. Even though Kingston has been "talking-story" throughout the entire novel, not until she comes to this final realization about the power of words can she confirm the following assertion: ". . . I also talk-story" (Woman 240).

## II Narrative Structure and the Oral Tradition: Restructuring the Self

As suggested above, each of the chapters of The Woman Warrior presents a working through, a rewritten model, of identities for Kingston to reflect on. Each chapter, then, does not always relate to the stories told before or after it. They are separated by time, space, content and narrator as the lines between fiction, autobiography ("truth") and myth (a "fiction" generally accepted as "true" at one time) begin to blur. Unlike Song of Solomon, whose narrative structure is predominantly linear, and Ceremony, whose narrative structure is primarily spiral, the narrative structure of Kingston's novel is collage-like. The pastiche of stories echoes the fragmented mixture of tellings by Sethe, Paul D, Denver, Beloved, and Morrison herself in Beloved. Rabine contends that Kingston's narrative structure, and one could include Beloved's as well, is nonlinear and noncircular because men tend to embark on quests for home and community, thus giving them a specific point at which to end their story, but women, because of their gender, have been denied a home or community to which to return (477). Critic Patricia Lin Blinde, however, offers a different but compatible explanation:

It is as if the richness of a bicultural life experience cannot be contained within the limits of literary dictates and that a "spill-over"

from one form to another is the only justice  
that can be done in the rendition of such a  
life. (53)

I would contend that both of these critics are  
correct. Essentially, Kingston's work is in narrative flux  
because her identity is in flux. The community which would  
ordinarily provide the base for establishing selfhood does  
not exist for this protagonist/ author/ narrator; she is  
simultaneously subject to often conflicting American and  
Chinese influences and is a fully integrated member of  
neither community. Therefore, reiterating the thematic  
discussion above, we find that

. . . Kingston is unable to come to terms with  
anything as rigidly defined as "self." Her  
inability results in a work that reports  
"reality" at its most real--namely the  
unstructured flow of events, thoughts, places,  
and people without the constraints of time,  
place or other predetermined concepts. (Blinde  
61)

Kingston's struggle to define the self, then, is  
simultaneously the cause and the result of her text. Her  
narrative is in flux because her identity is in flux; yet,  
that flux, at the same time, is her identity. Blinde argues  
that this structure is "fundamentally Chinese" or Taoist  
(62). David Teh-wei Wang confirms this contention in the  
article "Storytelling in Chinese Fiction":

Although at a very fundamental level, narrative in both China and the west is rendered in a successive order, classical Chinese fiction has constantly avoided foregrounding events as sequential units, preferring instead to place nearly equal emphasis on the overlapping of events and on non-events alongside of events, thereby reflecting the simultaneous existence of all things in time. (141)

Clearly then, Kingston's narrative structure not only has roots in her struggle for an identity; her personal struggle as well as the Chinese oral tradition are obviously sources for the narrative.

Aside from this philosophical connection to her ethnic heritage, Kingston pays homage to Chinese culture through the stories she retells in the novel. Kingston's references to post-birth ceremonies, ghosts, and dragons in the mountains (Woman 48, 18, 34) are all examples of Chinese tradition and folklore (Dennys 13, 71-79, 108). The two prominent myths of the novel, Fa Mu Lan's and Ts'ai Yen's, are integral parts of Chinese folklore. Yet, while Kingston tells the reader which parts of the Ts'ai Yen myth are hers and which are the original, that is her mother's, we do not know this information in the Fa Mu Lan myth. Li points out that Kingston's embellishments are significant; the

original is a fifth century ballad that is only sixty-two lines long, composed of 6 lines per stanza (506).

Therefore, not only has Kingston altered the content, but she has altered the folktale's structure (506), that aspect of literature which provides or affects meaning as much as the content. Furthermore, he adds, Kingston revisions this myth with American as well as feminist embellishments, turning the story of the woman warrior into a "Western pop hero" which "signals the victory of good over evil, justice over injustice and feminists over chauvinists" (507). This rewriting, then shows that Kingston, if not able to settle her identity, can alter texts to fit her cultural and temporal surroundings. Her stories, like the song "Eighteen Stanzas for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," have "translated well" (Woman 243).

## CHAPTER SIX

### Oral/Literary Storytelling: Final Observations

The connection between storytelling and literature, as we have seen, goes back to ancient times. Certain types of literature are stories; authors from Europe to the Orient have written stories about people telling stories, and now, in contemporary modern fiction, writers are exploring the very nature of the storytelling act itself. Furthermore, stories may take several forms. Aside from the classical divisions into myth, folktale, and legend, stories may take the forms of gossip, family histories, personal memories and recollections, lies, or creative texts based on a kernel of truth. Each of these types of stories is a valid form, and each author discussed in this paper explores one or more of those forms. Also, storytelling, the process, has as many functions as stories, the product, have forms--entertainment, teaching, the transmission of culture, reinforcing group unity, healing, a means of making a connection with the experiences of someone other than oneself. For Silko, Morrison and Kingston, too, storytelling has multiple functions. As we saw in the four novels discussed here, people may engage in storytelling to exact control over their lives or another person's, to work through a tragedy, to clarify confusing issues; likewise, people may listen to stories in order to exert control over



a life, to work through tragedy, to clarify a confusing issue. Storytelling and story-listening are means to an end (or ends) rather than ends in themselves. Their main function is to empower the teller/listener to effect change.

The main characters of both Ceremony and Song of Solomon, Tayo and Milkman respectively, listened to--and in Tayo's case told--stories in order to recreate an identity fractured by influences from a foreign, European-American world. Each character needed to rediscover and or reconnect with some aspect of his heritage: Milkman learned his family history; Tayo reunited with the land. These events, too, occurred through the use of storytelling. Also, both men engage in quests. Milkman sets out to find the gold and ends up finding himself, while Tayo sets out to find the cattle and becomes one with the story and the myth. These two works also contain multiple stories. Morrison deftly integrates various aspects of the western oral tradition into her novel; her sometimes deeply buried allusions, or "sub-stories," include references to the Bible, Greek mythology and Black folklore. Silko includes Pueblo Indian mythology in her works, setting these myths apart in order to reinforce the novel's themes. Finally, both authors strive to capture the oral nature of storytelling. Morrison integrates call-response patterning in her dialogue, an attempt to reproduce the rhythm of Afro-American speech. Likewise, Silko visually alters the text, in order to ensure that the reader recognizes certain passages as

separate stories that are being told. Despite these similarities, however, one key difference remains between these two novels: the emphasis placed by the author on the storytelling event. In Song of Solomon, the reader must determine whether storytelling is important by looking at the position storytelling, as an activity, has in the novel. Because it is the most frequent action in which the characters take part, it is easy to recognize storytelling as an important activity. The words and dialogue in Ceremony, however, draw the reader's attention directly to the storytelling event. Silko overtly tells the reader that she is about to tell a story, and then tells the reader why stories are important.

Beloved and The Woman Warrior are not as strongly parallel as Ceremony and Song of Solomon. Aside from the obvious fact that these two novels have female protagonists--in contrast to Ceremony or Song of Solomon--the two books contain similarities in structure and the author's treatment of the storytelling event, similarities that separate them from Ceremony and Song of Solomon. Sethe tells stories to heal herself; the traumas of slavery have scarred her emotionally, and storytelling is one way by which she recovers. Additionally, Morrison's authorial voice has Sethe, as well as Denver and Beloved, tell stories in order to write a history that has been ignored. Kingston tells and retells stories in order to sort out her (her mother's) Chinese past, a history which prevents her from living

effectively in America, a symbol of the future. Although not traumatized by the past as Sethe is, Kingston's narrator, like Sethe, is haunted by the past. The Chinese stories and cultural baggage she carries in her mind are substantial ghosts; they possess as much mental presence as Sethe's ghost has physical presence. Both of these ghosts oppress their respective haunted characters. As Sethe bows to Beloved's demands, she becomes ill, unable to think for herself, and cannot recognize her own self worth. Kingston's story-ghosts, the tales and proverbs her family told as truth, prevent her from establishing an identity, and on a larger scale prevent her from distinguishing between truth and fiction. Chinese women are to be passive, dependent, and quiet, but this culturally determined norm conflicts with Kingston's American environment. While Sethe, with help from the community, had to fight off physically the ghost-child Beloved, Kingston must sort out her ghosts, put them in their proper place and context, so that she can use them to write a new cultural script for the future.

In addition to sharing the theme of establishing self and the motif of haunting or past ghosts motif, Beloved and The Woman Warrior share similarities in structure. Both storylines are convoluted, inverted, distinctly nonlinear and non-chronological; this narrative structure is often considered to be, by the French feminist literary theorists, distinctly female writing. Beloved, a collection of

flashbacks, present-time narration and authorial commentary, is pieced together more thematically than chronologically--perhaps reflecting the image of the patchwork quilt which comforts Baby Suggs on her deathbed. The Woman Warrior is not so much a collage as a blurring; no temporal framework exists within the text. When reading Beloved, one knows, or at least learns further in the book, that all the events mentioned in the novel actually occurred at some point; in contrast, whether Kingston is reciting fiction, history, or myth is usually left unclear, unless she takes time to tell the reader this information. Morrison's female protagonist slides in and out of memory and the present--what we generally regard as truth, but Kingston's protagonist slides in and out of the present, memory, fiction and legend, without telling readers where they are--thus altering one's perception of truth. Both of these narrative structures, then, place a burden on readers. While reading these works, the reader becomes more than an interpreter; instead, one must shape the stories, uncover the overarching story--provided there is one--and determine which narratives are fictional stories and which are not. In these two works especially, and in Silko's novel to a lesser degree, the reader's mind writes the tale while it is being read. If Morrison's Beloved is structurally a patchwork quilt, then Kingston's novel is a play on the now-clichéd Zen riddle, "If nobody hears or sees (in other words, perceives in some tangible way) a tree falling in the forest, did the tree

actually fall?" We perceive Kingston's stories, but neither we nor the author/narrator is convinced of their actuality; the Zen riddle trusts perception as a vehicle for truth, but Kingston's novel does not permit us to do so.

These differences among the novels' storytelling structures in relation to the gender of the protagonist suggest that the fact that these three writers are a double minority--they are members of various ethnic groups and are women--is important. In his seminal article "The Narrative Turn in Recent Minority Fiction," Jay Clayton argues that the reason for this recent focus on narrative and storytelling in contemporary ethnic minority fiction is a political one (Clayton 379). More specifically, storytelling and stories "help people to escape disciplinary control" (381) by preserving knowledge in a memory, a form that cannot easily be taken over by the dominant group. Finally, he contends, because storytelling often involves cultural, localized, or personal information--Milkman's family history, for example, or Silko's Laguna mythology--such a theme is appropriate in this multi-cultural as opposed to melting-pot world (383). In other words, stories that carry meaning for all people or contain what some scholars call "universal truths," such as Joseph Campbell's conception of the monomyth, are outdated (Clayton 383). With the exception of his final point, I have to agree with Clayton's contentions. He does, however, omit a discussion of one important point. Of all the works Clayton cites as examples

of minority fiction with an emphasis on the power of storytelling, only six are by minority men; the majority of the writers he mentions are women, including Kingston, Morrison and Silko. But Clayton never does discuss possible reasons for this representation.

I would hypothesize that the fact that these women are double minorities factors in their use of the storytelling motif. In traditional, that is oral, societies, women may or may not have been, or currently be, excluded from formal ritualized storytelling; this phenomenon varies cross-culturally. Casual speech by women, though, at least in America, has been dismissed. Men may visit the corner store to "catch up on the news," while women are known to sit on the porch and "gossip." Incorporating female storytelling into a literary work, then, empowers women and credits their speech. Moreover, women have been continually excluded from the realm of writing, the realm of permanent self expression--as opposed to the ephemeral oral expressions--and this exclusionary theme is present in many writings by women. Therefore, since women's communication has been primarily limited to oral forms, it is completely logical that women writers would want to acknowledge, even glorify, that fact by including various types of storytelling in their novels. Finally, with the exception of Beloved, all the books were published within one year of each other in the mid 1970s, an era during which women in general, not only women writers, were raising their voices and demanding

to be heard. Thus, to return to Clayton's political analysis, these works may represent the author's desires not only to acknowledge verbal oral power, but also to demand that this power be recognized by others.

In a broader interpretation, though, perhaps this new emphasis on storytelling is a reaction against or a reflection of our isolation in a technologically advanced world. Contemporary people receive stories indirectly. We either read them in newspapers or see them on television. Moreover, time and space impede the communication of personal stories; like Tayo in his spiritually unwell state, we perceive the "distances" and the "days" to be "barrier[s]" (Ceremony 19). We greet each other with an impersonal "How are you?" when we really do not want to know the story behind that person's day. Additionally, we now communicate through secondary mediums, such as telephones, fax machines or electronic mail. To communicate through the mediums mentioned above is an individual, isolating, personally deadening event; in contrast, participating in a storytelling exchange is an intimate social happening. One person must tell the story, and another must be present to listen. These three writers, then, may be moving beyond the realm of feminist political or ethnic commentary to offer us another message entirely. Perhaps they are reminding us that Betonie is right: within the stories

There is life here  
for the people.

## WORKS CITED

### I

#### Primary Sources

- Kingston, Maxine Hong. The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts. New York: Vintage, 1977.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Eccentric Memories: A Conversation with Maxine Hong Kingston." With Paula Rabinowitz. Michigan Quarterly Review 26 (Winter 1987): 177-187.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "'This is the Story I Heard': A Conversation with Maxine Hong Kingston and Earl Kingston." With Phyllis Hodge Thompson. Biography 6 (Winter 1983): 1-12.
- Morrison, Toni. Beloved. New York: Penguin New American Library, 1987.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation." Black Women Writers (1950-1980) A Critical Evaluation. Ed. Mari Evans. Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1984.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Song of Solomon. New York: New American Library Penguin, 1977.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature." Michigan Quarterly Review 28 (Winter 1989): 1-34.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Seams Can't Show: An Interview with Toni Morrison." With Jane Bakerman. Black American Literature Forum 12 (1978): 56-60.
- Silko, Leslie Marmon. Ceremony. New York: Viking, 1977.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "A Leslie Marmon Silko Interview with Kim Barnes." Journal of Ethnic Studies 13 (Winter 1986): 83-105.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "A Conversation with Leslie Marmon Silko." With Lawrence J. Evers and Dennis W. Carr. Sun Tracks: An American Indian Literary Magazine 3 (Fall 1976): 28-33. Qutd. in Leslie Marmon Silko by Per Seyersted. Western Writers Series 45. Boise, Idaho: Boise State University, 1980: 13.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Storyteller. New York: Seaver Books, 1981.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Running on the Edge of the Rainbow: Laguna Stories and Poems with Leslie Marmon Silko" Transcript. 1981, Univ. of Arizona Board of Regents.



## II Secondary Sources

- Allen, Paula Gunn. The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986.
- Awkward, Michael. "'Unruly and Let Loose': Myth, Ideology and Gender in Song of Solomon." Callaloo 13 (1990): 482-98.
- Babcock, Barbara. "The Story in the Story: Metanarration in Folk Narrative." Folk Narrative Research Studia Fennica 20 (1976):177-84. Rpt. in Verbal Art as Performance Ed. Richard Bauman. Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1977. 61-79.
- "Ba'Ts'Oosee: An Apache Trickster Tale with Rudolph Kane." Transcript. Words and Place: Native Literature from the Southwest.
- Bauman, Richard, Ed. Verbal Art as Performance. Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1977.
- Blake, Susan L. "Folklore and Community in Song of Solomon." MELUS 7 (Fall 1980): 77-82.
- Blinde, Patricia Lin. "'The Icicle in the Desert': Perspective and Form in the Works of Two Chinese American Writers." MELUS 6 (Fall 1979): 51-71.
- Boas, Franz. Keresan Texts. Vol 8 of Publications of the American Ethnological Society. Ed. Franz Boas. New York: American Ethnological Society, 1928.
- Bowers, Susan. "Beloved and the New Apocalypse." The Journal of Ethnic Studies 18 (Spring 1990): 59-75.
- Bremer, Sidney H. "Literary Perspectives on Ethnic Minority Women's Leadership Styles." Ethnicity and Women. Ed Winston A. Van Horne and Thomas V. Tonnesen. Milwaukee: U. Wisconsin System, American Ethnic Studies Coordinating Committee/Urban Corridor Consortium, 1986. 24-45.
- Cheung, King-kok. "'Don't Tell': Imposed Silences in The Color Purple and The Woman Warrior." PMLA 103 (March 1988): 162-74.
- Chua, Cheng Lok. "Golden Mountain: Chinese Versions of the American Dream in Lin Yutang, Louis Chu, and Maxine Hong Kingston." Ethnic Groups 4 (1982): 33-59.

- Clayton, Jay. "The Narrative Turn in Recent Minority Fiction." American Literary History 2 (Fall 1990): 375-93.
- Currier, Susan. "Maxine Hong Kingston." Dictionary of Literary Biography Yearbook, 1980.
- Degh, Linda. "Folk Narrative." Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction. Ed Richard M. Dorson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972. 53-84.
- Denard, Carolyn C. "Toni Morrison." Modern American Women Writers. Ed. Elaine Showalter. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1991.
- Dennys, N.B. The Folk-lore of China, and its Affinities with that of the Aryan and Semitic Races. London, Hong Kong: Benjamin Blom 1876; reprint ed., New York: Benjamin Blom, 1972.
- De Weever, Jaqueline. "Toni Morrison's Use of Fairy Tale, Folk Tale and Myth in Song of Solomon." Southern Folklore Quarterly 44 (1980): 131-44.
- Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms Ed. Roger Fowler. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1987.
- Dundes, Alan. "Oral Literature." Introduction to Cultural Anthropology: Essays in the Scope of Methods of the Science of Man. Ed. Samuel A. Clifton. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1968. 117-129.
- Finnegan, Ruth. Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context. Cambridge, England: Cambridge U.P., 1977.
- Finney, Brian. "Temporal Defamiliarization in Toni Morrison's Beloved." Obsidian II: Black Literature in Review 5 (Spring 1990): 20-36.
- Fry, Joanne S. "The Woman Warrior: Claiming Narrative Power, Recreating Female Selfhood." Faith of a (Woman) Writer. Ed. Alice Kessler-Harris and William McBrien. Contributions in Women's Studies 86. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1988. 293-301.
- Georgia Writers' Work Project Administration, Savannah Unit. Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies Among the Georgia Coastal Negroes. Athens: U. of Georgia Press 1940.

- Goldman, Anne E. "'I made the Ink': Literary Production and Reproduction in Dessa Rose and Beloved." Feminist Studies 16 (Summer 1990): 313-330.
- Gross, Konrad. "Survival of Orality in a Literate Culture: Leslie Silko's Novel Ceremony." Modes of Narrative: Approaches to American, Canadian and British Fiction Ed. Reingard M. Nischik and Barbara Korte. Wurzburg: Konigshausen and Neumann, 1990. 88-99.
- Hamilton, Virginia. The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985
- Harris, A. Leslie. "Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon." MELUS 7 (Fall 1980): 69-76.
- Hoilman, Dennis. "'A World Made of Stories': An Interpretation of Leslie Silko's Ceremony." South Dakota Review. 17 (1979): 54-66.
- Holloway, Karla F.C. "Beloved: A Spiritual." Callaloo 13 (Summer 1990): 516-25.
- Homer. The Odyssey. Trans. Robert Fitzgerald. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1963.
- House, Elizabeth B. "Toni Morrison's Ghost: The Beloved Who Is Not Beloved." Studies in American Fiction. 18 (Spring 1990): 17-25.
- Jahner, Elaine. "An Act of Attention: Event Structure in Ceremony." American Indian Quarterly 5 (1979): 37-46. Rpt. in Critical Essays on Native American Literature. Ed. Andrew Wiget. Boston: G.K. Hall 1985. 237-46.
- Juhasz, Suzanne. "Maxine Hong Kingston: Narrative Technique and Female Identity." Contemporary American Women Writers. Ed. Catherine Rainwater and William J. Scheik. Lexington: U. P. of Kentucky, 1985. 173-89.
- Kim, Elaine. Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context. Philadelphia: Temple U.P., 1982.
- Li, David Leiwei. "The Naming of a Chinese American 'I' Cross Cultural Sign/Significations in The Woman Warrior." Criticism 30 (Fall 1988): 497-515.
- Ling, Amy. "Thematic Threads in Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior." Tamkang Review: A Quarterly of Comparative Studies Between Chinese and Foreign Literatures 14 (Autumn-Summer 1983-84): 155-64.

- Marsden, Michael T. "Chin Music: Popular Storytelling as the New Oral Tradition." The Incarnate Imagination: Essays in Theology, The Arts and social Sciences in Honor of Andrew Greeley, A Festschrift. Ed. Ingrid H. Shafer. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1988. 150-55.
- Mason, Theodore O., Jr. "The Novelist as Conservator: Stories and Comprehension in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon." Contemporary Literature 29 (Winter 1988): 564-581.
- Medoff, Jeslyn. "Maxine Hong Kingston." Modern American Women Writers.
- Miller, Margaret. "Threads of Identity in Maxine Hong Kingston's Woman Warrior." Biography 6 (Winter 1983): 13-33.
- Ortner, Sherry B. "Is Female to Male as Male is to Culture." Woman, Culture and Society. Ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere. Stanford, CA.: Stanford U.P., 1974. 67-87.
- Park, Sue. "One Reader's Response to Toni Morrison's Beloved." Unpublished Paper. Presented at the Conference of College Teacher's of English; San Antonio, TX. Spring 1991.
- Parsons, Elsie Clews. Pueblo Indian Religion. 2 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939; rpt ed, University of Chicago Press, Midway Reprints, 1974.
- Polanyi, Livia. "Literary Complexity in Everyday Storytelling." Spoken and Written Language: Exploring Orality and Literacy. Ed. Deborah Tannen. Volume 9 of Advances in Discourse Processes. Ed. Roy O. Freedle. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Co., 1982. 155-70.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Telling the American Story: A Structural and Cultural Analysis of Conversational Storytelling. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989.
- Puckett, Newbell Niles. Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro. n.p.: U. North Carolina Press, 1926; rpt. New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968.
- Rabine, Leslie W. "No Lost Paradise: Social Gender and Symbolic Gender in the Writings of Maxine Hong Kingston." Signs 12 (Spring 1987). 471-92.

- Rabinowitz, Paula. "Naming Magic and Documentary: The Subversion of Narrative in Song of Solomon, Ceremony and China Men." Feminist Re-Visions: What Has Been and Might Be. Ed. Louise A. Tilly and Vivian Patraka. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan's Women's Studies Program, 1983. 26-42.
- Samuels, Wilfred D. and Clenora Hudson-Weems. Toni Morrison. Twayne's United States Authors Series 14. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1990.
- Seyersted, Per. Leslie Marmon Silko. Western Writers Series 45. Boise, Idaho: Boise State University, 1980.
- Skerret, Joseph T. "Recitation to the Griot: Storytelling and Learning in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon." Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction and Literary Tradition. Ed. Marjorie Pryse and Hortense J Spillers. Bloomington: Indiana U.P. 1985. 192-202
- Smith, Sidonie. A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation. Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 1987.
- Tangum, Marion. Assistant Professor of English, Southwest Texas State University. Personal Communication. July 3, 1992.
- Tannen, Deborah. "The Oral/Literate Continuum in Discourse." Spoken and Written Language: Exploring Orality and Literacy. Ed. Deborah Tannen. Volume 9 of Advances in Discourse Processes. 1-16.
- Wang, David Teh Wei. "Storytelling Context in Chinese Fiction: A Preliminary Examination of It as a Mode of Narrative Discourse. Tamkang Review 15 (Autumn-Summer 1984-85): 133-150.
- Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language, 1922.
- Wegs, Joyce Ann. "Structural and Thematic Unity in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon." CEA Critic 49 (Winter/Summer 1986-87): 185-98.
- Wiesel, Elie. A Beggar in Jerusalem. Trans. Lily Edelman and Elie Wiesel. New York: Schocken Books, 1985.
- Zweig, Bella. Professor of Humanities, University of Arizona. Personal Communication. May 6, 1992.