

Spring 2010

The return of the Native American soldier: oral storytelling and healing

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THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE AMERICAN
SOLDIER: ORAL STORYTELLING
AND HEALING

being

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the Fort Hays State University in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts

by

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ABSTRACT

Native American healing focuses on curing all aspects (physically, mentally, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually) of a sick individual. Spiritual healing is unique to Native American cultures, often requiring unexpected healing techniques. Those who are spiritually ill are disconnected from their community and the world around them because of various obstacles that have thrown them off balance. Various ways exist to help heal the spiritual needs of a person; however, the most popular ways is through oral storytelling.

Oral storytelling, a tradition passed down by hundreds of generations in Native American culture, is used to remind sick individuals where they come from, offer a supportive community to listen, and provide an opportunity to participate within their culture by sharing their stories with others.

Oral storytelling is made up of several healing components, and this study focuses on ceremonies and trickster humor. Healing ceremonies allow individuals to slowly come back into themselves while letting go of the past and obstacles blocking their connection to the world around them, as demonstrated by Tayo in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*. Trickster humor allows individuals to heal through humor and release pent-up anger, removing the barrier blocking healing, demonstrated by Rudy Yellow Shirt in *Skins* by Adrian Louis. Through these two methods of storytelling, these individuals heal themselves and reconnect with the world around them and their communities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis was made possible through the help, advice, and support of many individuals. My deepest gratitude to Dr. Sharla Hutchison, my advisor, who had the expertise to guide me through many difficult situations. Thanks also to the members of my graduate committee, Dr. Steve Trout, Dr. Eric Leuschner, and Dr. Steven Kite, for reviewing my thesis and making recommendations along the way.

Also, thanks to my parents, Richard and Norma, and the rest of my family and friends, for always being there for me. You will never know how much I appreciate your love and support!

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Since this thesis was written in the academic area of English, MLA formatting was used.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
INTRODUCTORY NOTE	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
CHAPTER ONE.....	1
CHAPTER TWO	17
The Need for Ceremony.....	18
The First Ceremony: Ku’oosh’s Ceremony.....	25
The Second Ceremony: Betonie’s Interventions	32
The Third Ceremony: Sexual Healing	42
The Fourth Ceremony: Multigenerational Ceremony.....	48
CHAPTER THREE	57
The Need for Humor.....	61
Iktomi’s Influence.....	69
“Avenging Warrior”	74
The Changing Tides.....	80
Healing.....	90
WORKS CITED	99

CHAPTER ONE

“You don’t have anything / if you don’t have the stories”

Silko in *Ceremony* (pg. 2)

Oral tradition in Native American culture and literature is unique in generating cultural memory in different communities. According to Scott Momaday, the “oral tradition’ . . . is used to designate a rich body of preliterate storytelling in and among the indigenous cultures of North America” (105). Geary Hobson in his online article “Native American Literature: Remembrance, Renewal,” clarifies: “Native Americans have been accustomed to recounting their histories and their ways of life through intricate time-proven processes of storytelling.”

To illustrate the true impact of the oral tradition, Momaday offers an interesting example. He describes himself in the act of writing and imagining having a conversation with Ko-sahn, a grandmother-like figure from his childhood. Through her experiences, she describes the result of the oral tradition:

There are times when I think that I am the oldest woman on earth. You know, the Kiowas came into the world through a hollow log. In my mind’s eye I have seen them emerge, one by one, from the mouth of the log. I have seen them so clearly, how they were dressed, how delighted they were to see the world around them. I must have been there. And I must have taken part in that old migration of the Kiowas from the Yellowstone to the Southern Plains, near the Big Horn River, and I have seen the red cliffs of Palo Duro Canyon. I was with those who were rampant in the Wichita Mountains when the stars fell. (99)

Ko-sahn did not experience these events first hand but through several talented storytellers, who made the stories real for her. These events marked milestones in the development of her tribe, ones that recall special moments important to her tribe's history. After being told these stories, and probably telling these stories to others as well, she has become part of the tale. She was "there" in spirit when her ancestors erupted from the log and when they migrated from one place to the next. The story has evolved to include her and anyone else willing to listen, forming a continuous circle of narration. Being part of the story allows her to understand her past, appreciate the trials and tribulations her ancestors went through to secure her freedom, and respect and continue the process of remembrance. According to Momaday, "Man tells stories in order to understand his experience, whatever it may be" (104). The oral tradition creates a sense of community and wholeness through shared stories, connecting people of all ages and forming a collective identity, an identity formed by the participation of the community members. Paula Gunn Allen defines these concepts: "At base, every story, every song, every ceremony tells the Indian that each creature is part of a living whole and that all parts of that whole are related to one another by virtue of their participation in the whole of being" (8).

Through dances, songs, poems, ceremonies, and stories, Native Americans celebrate their past events, communities, victories, and defeats through these methods as a means of remembrance for themselves and their cultural identity. Hobson adds, "In remembering, there has been strength and continuance and renewal throughout the generations." Oral storytelling allows members of these cultural communities to remember who they are, where they have come from, and what they have endured

throughout time. This practice helps to form a community identity.

Momaday clarifies the importance of the oral tradition through a description of Ko-sahn: “Her roots ran deep into the earth, and from those depths, she drew strength enough to hold still against all the forces of chance and disorder” (102) and “No defeat, no humiliation, no suffering was beyond their [Ko-sahn and her ancestors] power to endure, for none of it was meaningless ... the imagination of meaning was not much, perhaps, but it was all they had and it was enough to sustain them” (105). Ko-sahn, because of the oral tradition, understood and was part of her heritage. When she needed support in life, she returned to her roots and community for this support. This support helped guard her from misfortunes and to hold strong to her beliefs despite the obstacle. The oral tradition connects individuals to their past and to a communal support system.

While some scholars define the oral tradition through the process of storytelling and the stories themselves, others describe it through the role of the storyteller, the transmitter of the stories, myths, poems, songs, and legends between generations. Storytellers are the vehicle that transports the history, beliefs, legends, and ceremonies from one time period to the next. Larry Evers and Paul Pavich analyze the role of storytellers in Native American culture: “They [storytellers] remind the people of who and what they are, why they are in this particular place, and how they should continue to live here” (12). These two deem storytellers as important because of their roles within society. Through their stories, they pass vital information from one era to the next, defining contemporary time through the lessons, belief, and values of old. Storytellers are essential to the continuation of tribal culture and the establishment of a community identity. Storytellers shape their tales through their perceptions, adding a new layer to the

story. Each layer contains a voice rich with different experiences and memories. The story grows through each rendition, involving more and more people, forming a cluster of identities, all in sync sharing the same ideas and thoughts. As the story evolves, and as each layer is added, the tale links generations as all layers and perceptions interconnect, forming a unified identity for the community.

Storytellers are essential because they help the story along and present the tale to the public, guiding the oral cycle on its way. Jeffrey F. Huntsman describes how a community shapes a story and how a story shapes a community: “Its [story] owner is both creator and audience, the audience likewise creator and owner. Since it is shared, traditional Indian literature does not instruct except obliquely, but, like the more familiar sacred literature of Western Europe, celebrates and invokes” (89). While both the storyteller and the audience create meaning for the tale, the tale itself, as Huntsman suggests, “celebrates” and “invokes” inspiration and belief in the community. Storytellers provide hope and a sense of renewal through their tales.

So far, when describing the meaning and the function of the oral tradition, this chapter has discussed using stories as a way of remembering the history and heritage of one’s cultures and as a system of communal support. However, one very important function of storytelling that has not been discussed is its healing properties. The oral tradition through storytelling and ceremonies is a method, which helps individuals, families, friends, and communities heal from various issues and problems that interrupt the peace and balance shared between an individual and one’s culture and environment. This balance is what most Native Americans try to sustain throughout their lives. Howard P. Bad Hand, a Lakota academic and healer, describes ways this peace can be lost

through certain types of experiences:

What that (experience) creates within individuals is that they begin to encounter what I would call their hidden enemies, doubts, suspicions. Reactions and fear begin to create little doorways, one opens in the psyche to let in external influences that go deep into their mind. They begin to cause disharmony and dissension. For those who have an aggressive nature, it causes greater aggression in the want to control one's own sense of power rather than influences. (245)

Negative experiences can lead to internal turmoil, which could develop into cruel and harmful actions, which impact others and the community, forming a violent chain reaction, which keeps growing and developing. The stereotypical view of reservation life is always associated with violence, drugs, and alcohol. These images are direct results of the process Bad Hand details above. Negativity leads to violent and cruel actions, causing an evaporation of the harmony of the community. However, one can re-achieve this balance through the oral tradition. Bad Hand clarifies, "Ritual and ceremony [important components of the oral tradition] provide a way for the people to find peace, harmony, well-being, and wisdom in relating to their environment, as well as helping them make a connection to the Spirit world" (19). Kenneth M. Roemer agrees, "But the story can help the 'isolated private self' to establish harmony and balance with realities far beyond day-to-day experiences" (42). Stories, ceremonies, and rituals offer a way to reconnect with one's surroundings

The oral tradition also acted as a teacher for the youth of tribes teaching them right from wrong and as a fun activity to bring communities together. Storytellers and

parents would tell particular stories to children to convey certain ideas, concepts, and beliefs about their culture. Gerald W. Haslam comments, “Oral tales were often used to educate youngsters, validating experiences by providing mythical explanations for existing realities” (1028). Despite using the oral tradition to teach children lessons, storytelling was also used as a fun activity to bring individuals together through entertaining stories, which sometimes told funny anecdotes or told funny stories about particular characters. One such character that was used to teach and entertain others was the trickster character (to be discussed later).

These definitions of the oral tradition and of storytellers by contemporary Native American writers showcase the various reasons why the oral tradition developed in the first place and why it is still important today. These reasons include the oral tradition acting as a means for individuals to connect with their roots—history and myths—and to understand their current place in their community and society, the oral tradition’s myths and legends working as a learning tool for the youth in the conduct of right and wrong, the tradition’s sense of fun, enabling several generations to come together as a community, and lastly and one of the most important, the sense of healing offered throughout the oral tradition’s stories and ceremonies.

The oral tradition offers many distinct ways to aid in the process of healing, but this study will focus on two of them: healing ceremonies and the trickster’s influence and humor. Allen explains the significance of healing ceremonies: “healing chants and ceremonies emphasize restoration of wholeness, for disease is a condition of division and separation from the harmony of the whole. Beauty is wholeness. Health is wholeness. (Goodness is wholeness)” (8). Being part of the whole, not excluded from it, signals a

healthy and balanced sense of self. As discussed before, when individuals break the balance, they are lost and float without connection to the world around them. Ceremonies will help scarred individuals find lost connections between their heritage and who they are today. Ceremonies were conducted to refocus and remind partakers of their dedication to the group. Allen adds, “The purpose of a ceremony is to integrate: to fuse the individual with his or her fellows, the community of people with that of the other kingdoms, and this larger communal group with the worlds beyond this one” and “all ceremonies, whether for war or healing, create and support the sense of community that is the bedrock of tribal life” (10). To be at peace with one’s self is to recognize the importance of the community. The community is the support system of the tribe, supporting each member in whatever situation arises. To summarize, Allen comments, “Each [story and ceremony] serves to hold the society together, create harmony, restore balance, ensure prosperity and unity, and establish right relations within the social and natural world” (19).

While ceremonies and rituals are strong healing elements, humor is another, especially Trickster humor. Native Americans have a strong developed humor system. They crack jokes (an example would be the “Custer Jokes”) and tell humorous stories about their current and past situations to relieve and release pent-up anxiety. Native Americans bond and support each other through these jokes and humorous situations. Bad Hand adds, “we learn to laugh at even the worst times and the worst conditions. We do this not to make fun of each other, but to share humor. One of the great foods of life from *Tunkasila* [Grandfather] is humor and laughter. Laughter nourishes the soul” (217). Humor presents opportunities for individuals to join together to stand in a unified front

against issues and problems of their community. One of the most popular stories involves the trickster character.

Trickster characters exist in all forms of literature. Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz in their introduction in *American Indian Trickster Tales* summarize, “In Germany, it is Till Eulenspiegel; in France they are Reynard the Fox and Gargantua and Pantagruel; in Greece, Karagöz; and in Turkey it’s Nasr-eddin . . . Loki is the mischief-making sky traveler in Norse mythology, and the famous Punch and Judy puppet shows performed in French parks and county fairs were really Trickster tales played out in a domestic situation” (xiii). While these characters only play a minor role in these cultures, tricksters “take center stage” in Native American folklore (Erdoes and Ortiz xiii). Roemer agrees, “The Trickster has been called the ‘most familiar figure’ in Native American stories” (40). Many trickster characters exist within Native American culture and depend upon the tribe; a few include Iktomi (the spider-man or Spider), Raven, Mink, Rabbit, Blue Jay, and Coyote (the most popular). In each region or tribe, one or two supreme tricksters reign dominant. Coyote dominates in “the West Coast, the Plateau and Great Basin areas, as well as the Southwest and the Southern Plains” while the Pacific Coast tribes celebrates the Raven, Eagle, Mink, Fox, and Blue Jay and so on (Ballinger 37). These are just a few examples offered by Franchot Ballinger in his study *Living Sideways: Tricksters in American Indian Oral Traditions*. Other examples include the Sioux’s preference for Iktomi and the Algonquian tribes of the northern Midwest and the Great Lake areas belief in Nanabozho.

Native American tricksters exhibit all forms of characteristics, ranging from lust to shame. Roemer continues, “Trickster’s behaviors can run the gamut from animal lust,

to incredible stupidity, to conscious and more often unconscious acts that are heroic and even godlike” (40). Tricksters focus on “low brow” humor (sex, body, and bathroom humor) to entertain; seem smart and foolish at the same time; prove to be characters that frequently outsmart themselves through backfiring plans; and have the ability to change genders, cross dress, or shape shift if needed. However, while they possess foolish qualities, these characters are much more than fools; some (not all) are cultural heroes with a variety of powers, able to predict the future, and associate with creation myths. These characters love to entertain and to have fun; they also contain a serious and cruel side, a balance of some sort. Eva Gruber explains this balance, “Tricksters are both cultural heroes and fools. Their chaotic exploits are, on the one hand, socially and morally disruptive because they commit sacrileges; yet on the other hand, tricksters’ pranks also have beneficial results for humankind” (95-6). Tricksters are ridiculous and foolish, but in some stories or through some pranks, they help others or fight injustices for their tribes.

Tricksters exist within literature for a couple of reasons, besides providing a good, compelling tale for an audience. Authors use the trickster figure in their work for a couple of purposes: to teach, to rally the people, and to create a separation between Native and White cultures. Evers and Pavich add, “The trickster is pictured as a humorous character who never learns from his mistakes but continually entertains through his absurd antics. At the same time, the trickster tales often teach the listeners the outcome of inappropriate actions” (15). As mentioned above, trickster tales provide to be great teaching tools for the youth. Certain stories detail tricksters’ greedy or selfish actions or lewd behavior and their comeuppance for their actions, providing a “guideline” for children to follow.

Trickster stories provide a moral, one that parents often try to teach their children to follow. This idea also leads to another function—to rally the people. Erdoes and Ortiz explain how the trickster rallies the people through a quotation by Howard Norman, the “Trickster is a celebrator of life, a celebration of life, because by rallying against him [the trickster] a community discovers its own resilience and protective skills” (xxi). Through the trickster stories and jokes, groups of people learn about their particular tricksters, their qualities, and their mistakes. Through knowledge and these lessons, groups of people learn how to act, what not to do, and how to get along with others. This information connects these groups into a learning community; by following the trickster lessons, this community rallies together through and rejects temptation the trickster would find appealing.

Another function (the one that this study is particularly interested in) of using trickster figures within literature is their ability to liberate an audience through humor to imagine a world without certain stereotypes and constraints. Gruber details, “Accordingly, they [tricksters with their unexpected actions and humor] may open up an imaginative liminal space where the monolithic ‘Indian’ chiseled by Hollywood and nineteenth-century literature can be scattered and where one-dimensional reading of Native-White history can be transgressed” (96). In other words, through their unorthodox actions, trickster characters surprise the audience and shatter the “expected” discourse (which mainstream American has constructed of Native American narratives), creating a new and unrestricted world within the native realm. According to Thomas King, the trickster is “an important figure for Native writers for it allows us to create a particular kind of world in which the Judeo-Christian concern with good and evil and order and

disorder is replaced with the more Native concern for balance and harmony” (xiii).

Tricksters allow authors to focus more internally on Native American values, ideas, and beliefs instead of a world defined by Anglo values and images. Audiences get a chance to see an alternative way of life, one that shows how the Native world embraces concepts that disagree with stereotypes of Native Americans defined by Western culture. Gruber summarizes the importance of trickster tales, “Contemporary trickster tales disrupt the pretensions of White superiority and stereotypical representation of Nativeness, directly strengthen Native cultural identity, and mediate the “re-negotiation of cultural values and representations” (96-7).

This study is primarily focused on the healing dimensions of the oral tradition in current Native American literature, concentrating on healing through elements of storytelling and humor (ceremonies and the trickster), Native Americans who have been scarred and plagued by demons induced by the white world and war. These elements will be applied to two different protagonists (Tayo and Rudy) from Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* and Adrian Louis’s *Skins*. Both novels offer a unique storytelling component, one that demonstrates both the healing aspects of the oral tradition and the stereotypes experienced by Native Americans. *Ceremony* is a novel about the circular quality of life, and how Tayo, a war veteran, heals himself through cultural ceremonies and storytelling. Rudy, a tribal cop in *Skins*, finds himself dealing with traumatizing experiences years after he suppresses them by becoming the “Avenging Warrior,” a vigilante bent on providing justice outside of the law; this alter-ego allows him to come to terms with his past actions and history, freeing him of the guilt of war and of past family deeds.

Through these two novels, this essay specifically explores four distinct functions

of storytelling: developing a cultural community through uniting individuals through shared stories; the furnishing of personal strength through a bond between people and their cultural identity; enforcing the destruction of Native American stereotypes; and redefining mainstream narratives discussing colonization, the American way-of-life, war, and violence. These first two functions appear quite frequently in Native American criticism (especially in regards to Silko's novel) because of the basic role of a ceremony or of storytelling—to heal or reconnect an individual or group to its past through the establishment of a cultural identity and the support this community offers. While very important, the first two functions operate and produce a very basic (topical) definition of storytelling and the connection to Native American culture; no in-depth analysis develops. However, while discussing the first two functions of the oral tradition found within of Silko's and Louis's novels, this study will also take it one step further and delve deeper and converse on how these novels function as tools to combat and dispel the common stereotypes of Native Americans and the narratives over their cultures and celebrate their lives and beliefs.

Ceremony and *Skins* are novels that work as “counter-discourse,” a form of discourse described by post-colonial critics that “involve[s] a mapping of the dominant discourse, a reading and exposing of its underlying assumptions, and the dis/mantling of these assumptions from the cross-cultural standpoint of the imperially subjectified “local”” (Tiffin 98). These novels identify several stereotypes imposed on Native Americans by Anglo-European culture. Abdul R. JanMohamed in “The Economy of Manichean Allegory” argues that all processes of colonialisms depend upon the Manichean allegory, one that sets up binary oppositions, such as Anglo-Native and

female-male dichotomies. The Manichean allegory degrades Native Americans to “savages,” needing to be colonized because of the threat that they and their Native world pose to the Western culture’s way of life. “Counter-discourse” redirects the focus of the audience back to Native belief systems and the importance of storytelling and community, while downplaying the binary oppositions established by the Manichean allegory. By focusing exclusively on Native American culture and literature, the audience is shown the depth and complexity of Native American culture so that readers can see how Native American texts oppose the dominant culture’s stereotypes.

Through Tayo and Rudy, Silko and Louis address harsh stereotypes, such as the drunken, trashy, and violent Native American, that operate to denigrate their culture’s identity, beliefs, and ideas as unimportant and worthless. After identifying these binary untruths, these two authors, through their characters, invalidate these stereotypes and recreate and redefine the world through Native American storytelling and culture and their place in it. According to Tiffin, no matter how authors recreate or rewrite the history of their culture, “such pre-colonial cultural purity can never be fully recovered” (95). While Native American authors cannot reclaim their dominance before colonization, they create narratives and stories that display and highlight their resilient and strong culture, demonstrating the complexity of their ideas and beliefs, all elements that oppose mainstream U.S. culture’s view of them. Providing these new narratives, authors remind their tribesmen about their self-worth and importance in the world and educate others about their true identity.

While Silko and Louis detail the healing patterns of their protagonists, they also present their characters as part of a greater cultural paradigm, one that establishes the

value and belief systems of their own culture over the mainstream U.S. culture. Tayo and Rudy are both war veterans, but Silko and Louis minimize this fact in their novels. These authors pull their protagonists out of a world and a discourse filled with stereotypes developed out of colonization. They then put their characters into a larger set of circumstances and environment, one characterized by centuries-old stories, narratives, ceremonies, and rituals. Through these actions, both Louis and Silko thrust Native America culture and identity into the spotlight while downplaying the colonial story. These two authors notably describe Tayo and Rudy as veterans of war, but also as veterans of mainstream culture's stereotypes of Native Americans. They survived the stereotypes developed against their tribes and healed themselves through ceremonies that connected them to their cultural pasts, leading to strong cultural identities in both cases. These two characters survived two wars: a physical one and a cultural one. Tayo's and Rudy's psychological trauma did not begin on the battlefields of WWII or Vietnam, they began at home in the United States fighting stereotypes, resulting in psychological degradation in the Native American community (alcoholism and abuse). Tayo is branded a "mixed-blood" from an early age, a category unacceptable by either culture (Anglo or Native). Rudy is mentally and physically abused by his alcoholic father when a child. So while they each did fight in an physical war, both have been and will always be participants of a cultural war fighting against racism, a task that will never be complete. Their physical war experience was traumatic and is one event on the causal chain that leads to their need to be healed. Since war is only one traumatic event of several, Silko and Louis focus on the overall healing process and the reestablished cultural identity of their main characters instead of focusing on one event (like war).

Chapter one focuses on Silko's *Ceremony* and her protagonist Tayo, who enters a healing journey, after WWII. This section concentrates on the various types of ceremonies in the novel, ones that impact a one single individual and others that encompass several generations. Tayo participates in both within Silko's novel. As he goes through each ritual, he regains parts of himself clouded by the lies of the "ancient destroyers." As his connection grows stronger with his community and environment, he rediscovers his footing on his destined path, taking on the storyteller and protector role within his culture. Through his story, Silko also identifies Native American stereotypes developed by mainstream U.S. culture and redefines them through a "native" viewpoint, refocusing on the role of the community and the balance between the earth and an individual.

Chapter two details Rudy Yellow Shirt's journey of self healing through Iktomi's, the spider trickster's, influence. Iktomi lends Rudy several of his characteristics—sexual prowess, confidence, and trickster humor, which pushes the protagonist to face buried issues and problems from years before. Rudy begins not caring about his or his tribe's position in the Anglo world; however, as Rudy gains more confidence from Iktomi, he emerges and challenges mainstream America's ideas and stereotypes on Native Americans and displays his opinions through a public display of giving George Washington on Mount Rushmore a bloody nose.

At first appearance, these two novels seem to portray protagonists ravaged by the lies of war. However, with a much closer look, readers begin to see that these two characters are dealing with more than just war; they are going against the grain of mainstream American culture, which deems their heritage and culture as unimportant.

The more they fight, the more they are beaten down; they lose their way in their cultures. Only through embracing the oral tradition and storytelling can they heal and be one with their community. While these novels are stories about war and healing, they are also stories about rejecting dominant culture and their stereotypes and expressing alternative ways of thinking about heritage and culture. Silko and Louis use Tayo and Rudy to force their audience to see this alternative Native American life.

CHAPTER TWO

In *Ceremony*, Leslie Marmon Silko emphasizes the importance of ceremonies and storytelling in Native American culture, particularly the Laguna culture. She accomplishes this by detailing her protagonist Tayo's experiences through the healing powers of oral storytelling. Tayo, at the opening of the novel, suffers from his war experiences in WWII, his position between two worlds because of his mixed blood heritage, and the stereotypes inflicted upon him by the Anglo world. Silko weaves together multiple ceremonial rituals for Tayo and his journey of healing. While the author includes several types of ceremonies dealing with all topics within her novel, this study concentrates on the healing ceremonies within the work and how they change Tayo by shaping him into a future storyteller and realign him with his community. For the purpose of this research, the following chapter focuses exclusively on four rituals and ceremonies: Ku'oosh's ritual, the Scalp ceremony/Hoop ceremony with Betonie, Tayo's time spent with Ts'eh, and his role in destroying the "ancient destroyers," a primordial evil that wants to annihilate all. All these ceremonies must occur successfully for Tayo to reclaim his health and his role in the community as a storyteller.

While *Ceremony* does illustrate the effectiveness of healing ceremonies within the Laguna culture, this book also demonstrates the versatility of the ceremony. Each ceremony within the world of Silko's novel is different from the next because each is in a constant state of flux, adapting to fit each new situation and each new person. While a ritual might work for one individual, it might not work for the next, especially in the case of healing. People experience pain, trauma, grief, and hardships all in different ways; the

circumstances of individuals' sicknesses vary, requiring specific and personal ceremonies to combat their pain, not just generic rituals. The ceremonies Tayo undergoes on this path to recovery demonstrate these specific original ceremonies. Each one is different than the next, spanning various lengths of time, containing a variety of methods and goals, and resulting in different conclusions. These ceremonies are each modified exclusively for Tayo and his situation. However, Silko does not only include personal healing ceremonies for Tayo she also includes ceremonies for her readers. One involves her narrative, and the other, as we will see later in this chapter is a multigenerational ceremony.

Her narrative acts as a ceremony because as the story is told and Tayo completes his personal rituals, the white world's influences fade away from Tayo's story, leaving the focus on an exclusively Native sphere and belief system. He loses a part of the Anglo influence, becoming more invested in his Native culture, one that reflects a pure sense of storytelling and community, without the biting stereotypes of mainstream US culture. As Tayo experiences this, so does Silko's audience. Through Tayo's healing journey, Silko leads her readers from a world defined by the Manichean allegory to one that celebrates Native culture, with a special emphasis on the adaptability and survival traits of its members. By bringing her readers into this new paradigm, she provides them with the opportunity to understand the binary oppositions and stereotypes placed upon the Native world by the Anglo world.

The Need for Ceremony

Tayo is a "mixed breed" with hazel eyes instead of brown. Part Native American

and part white, he is raised by an aunt who keeps him at a distance and who flaunts her son Rocky (the pure bred) as the better of the two. Growing up, he had no true identity and was spurned by both of his cultures. Since he is part Native American, the white world rejects him and fellow members of his tribe harass him because of his mother's actions. He grows up feeling ashamed of his mixed breed heritage and disconnected from the world around him. This fact is not helped with his aunt keeping him at a distant and not offering him the comfort of a parent; she is also ashamed of her sister's frequent sexual escapades. While Tayo grows up insecure and teased because of his background, his uncle Josiah and grandmother instill within him the importance of his culture and storytelling, cementing his future involvement in their cultural community. However, this path is interrupted by WWII.

Tayo has no plans to enter the war because he is fairly content with his life and has no need to conquer the modern world like his cousin Rocky. However, he is lured into fighting through a slick white recruiter who spins a glittery tale of acceptance. This is the first spot within the novel where Silko really plays with the stereotypes inflicted on Native Americans by the dominant culture. The audience can tell the recruiter sees Native Americans as inferior through his dialogue: “‘Anyone can fight for America,’ he began, giving special emphasis to ‘America’, ‘even you boys. In a time of need, anyone can fight for her’ . . . ‘Now I know you boys love America as much as we do, but this is your big chance to *show* it’” (64). His dialogue is loaded with cynicism and racial comments. He segregates Tayo and his cousin into a separate category, constantly referring to them as “you boys” and to himself and the United States government as “we.” This comment

proves the recruiter is prejudiced and buys into the stereotypes developed by dominant culture about Native Americans. Silko confirms this point when the recruiter continues, “In a time of need, anyone can fight for her” (64). So, according to this man’s beliefs, the US government will accept *anyone* to fight, even Native Americans, who seem to only be useful or important in a “time of need,” not any other time.

With this type of propaganda, one would think Tayo and Rocky would walk away disgusted; however, this does not happen. The recruiter spins a tale, discussing the military as a family, where acceptance and belonging happen naturally and soldiers develop prestige through their war participation. Even his brochures help develop his tale: “in the background, behind the figure in the uniform, there was a gold eagle with its wing spread across the American flag” (64). Rocky enlists because of the prestige and reputation it offers. Tayo enlists for a very different reason. While he does it to be with his cousin, he enlists also to be part of something defined. Throughout his entire life, he has dealt with a mixed identity, not sure where he really fits in with society. Here, someone is offering an identity, one that comes with prestige and respect. How could he turn this down? By having her protagonist fall for the recruiter’s tale, Silko show how strong of an influence dominant culture really is. Despite his mixed blood, Tayo was raised with a strong Laguna background, yet he still buys into the glitz of war.

Growing up, Tayo (and Native Americans) are exposed to the stereotypes developed by the US mainstream culture (the drunk, worthless Indian). After living in this type of environment, one internalizes the ideas circulating as truth. While Tayo does not believe he is worthless because of being a Native American, he does place the white

culture above his own. So when he has a chance to be accepted by the Anglo world, he takes it without thinking it through. Subconsciously, Tayo has bought into the binary oppositions—white is better than a mixed identity—developed by dominant culture. Silko wants her audience to see this through Tayo, so they realize how harmful and far reaching these stereotypes are when they penetrate Native American culture.

Once Tayo puts on the uniform, assuming the identity of an “American Warrior,” all people look at him with respect and acceptance. He receives attention from women and has a family of comrades to depend upon. What Tayo does not realize is that the uniform is what has changed people’s perspective of him. Once it is gone, he will just be himself again; his newly found identity will be ripped from him once the government no longer needs him. Another element that Tayo does comprehend is the price he must pay for this image and uniform. To wear this uniform, he must do what he is told. The US government commands him to fight and kill if necessary, actions that go against his moral code. He is seduced by power and greed into doing actions that violated his personal values. He has left his cultural path, his one solid anchor in the world, to pursue a fake identity, where he loses his way and finds himself shrouded in lies. By buying into dominant culture’s lies, he sets himself up for failure.

Because of these lies, Tayo no longer can communicate in a community of storytellers. Silko shows this idea through Tayo’s emotional, physical, and mental breakdowns, which happens during combat and when he returns home. He cannot function. He first breaks down when he is ordered to fire upon a row of Japanese soldiers, which he imagines contains his Uncle Josiah: “Tayo could not pull the trigger. The fever

made him shiver, and the sweat was stinging his eyes and he couldn't see clearly; in that instant he saw Josiah standing there" (7). The "fever" is the realization that he would be killing innocent men like his uncle, who like him did not want to be killed. His upbringing prevents him from shooting; while lost from his path, his cultural beliefs still try to protect and save him from making bad decisions. However, the corruption and lies interfere with his values, blinding him from the right way.

When he returns to the United States, he enters a Veteran's hospital, where the doctors treat his problems with drugs instead of kindness. Tayo describes the drug's influence as "white smoke": "The smoke has been dense; visions and memories of the past did not penetrate there, and he had drifted in colors of smoke, where there was no pain . . . Their medicine drained memory out of his thin arms and replaced it with a twilight cloud behind his eyes. It was not possible to cry on the remote and foggy mountain" (15). Tayo prefers this drugged state because otherwise he "cries because they [Rocky and fellow soldiers] are dead and everything is dying" (16). This medicine is a continuation of the lies told to Tayo. Instead of finding the root of the problem, the modern world drugs him. When he is sent home, the doctors warn against native medicine: "'You know what the Army doctor said: 'No Indian medicine.' Old Ku'oosh will bring his bag of weeds and dust. The doctor won't like it'" (34).

Silko leads her audience to believe that the modern world is afraid of native cultures. Modern medicine numbs the part of Tayo that he needs to actively embrace the healing elements of his Laguna culture: storytelling and the ceremony. David A. Rice asserts, "Tayo's return to the landscape of his home and his efforts to refamiliarize

himself with it are essential to his understanding of the stories and ceremonies in which he must participate to heal himself” (121-2). When he buys into the Anglo world’s lies about war and military acceptance, he leads readers to believe he has inherently bought into its harmful Native American stereotypes, confirming to himself that he is the drunk and violent Indian.

Climbing out of this mentality and getting past his violent war actions requires much work and a change of perspective. Tayo seems lost, and nothing anyone does can bring him back into a healthy balance with the universe. He is irritable, depressed, and prone to cry and vomits constantly. Rice adds, “He is mentally disturbed and unable to connect to even the most basic elements of his surrounding for support” (116). He looks like a lost case. However, two instances provide a counterpoint. The first example occurs during WWII when Tayo is transporting an injured Rocky with a fellow soldier (who is about to collapse) after they are captured by Japanese soldiers. Tayo uses storytelling to keep moving and to inspire his fellow comrade in arms: “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, to keep his knees from buckling, to keep his hands from letting go of the blanket” (12). Despite the trauma, he creates a simple story to keep them going. Why does he do this? Silko suggests that he does so because a story is everything: healing, motivation, life. He develops a story to inspire strength and hope for the party in a hopeless situation: “The words gathered inside of him and gave him strength” (12). Throughout all the chaos, he relies on the belief of stories, words, and storytelling; he forms a community within his story with the fellow

soldiers, a story that combats terror and evil. While Tayo is dying inside from the lies fed to him, he still recalls stories and the importance of them. However, his story fails; the other soldier drops Rocky, who is left behind to die. His belief in storytelling died a bit that day. Tayo at this moment cannot comprehend that sometimes a loss or death in the process of storytelling and ceremonies happens; it is a natural phenomenon that occurs, which greatly upsets him.

The second occurrence takes place when Tayo is dreaming after the war. Unable to sleep, he constantly has nightmares that cause him to vomit. Bob Todd explains Tayo's vomiting: "He must retch them out (lies) of his stomach to make room for the healing stories that will rebalance his life, which includes the land, plants, and animals around him." One image offers him a respite from his nightmares of war. This image consists of a deer. He says, "If he could hold that image of the deer in his mind long enough, his stomach might shiver less and let him sleep for a while" (7). Another section of the novel aligns the deer with the older traditional Laguna belief system. The idea that this image comforts him momentarily shows that deep down he still believes in the Laguna culture and stories; it is just hidden because of the lies surrounding it. Rice believes, "As an image of self-contained animal identity, the deer represents all that Tayo is not" (119). The deer allows him moments of comfort from his grief and guilt of surviving Rocky, a glimpse of the peace he used to share with his community. However, the deer image is fleeting, replaced by images of death and corpses, lies, and betrayals. Todd comments, "Like veterans of horror the world over, Tayo loses awareness of the present moment and lapses into reveries in which even pleasant thoughts lead him to relive scenes of

unspeakable inhumanity and evil.” While these two events offer hope that Tayo can move past his pain and the white world’s influences, they also reveal that he still believes in something good. Silko has set the stage for her audience to recognize the harmful binary oppositions set against Native American and the influences they have on the tribesmen through her narrative.

The First Ceremony: Ku’oosh’s Ceremony

Silko slowly maneuvers her audience through the obstacles and stereotypes of the Anglo world, focusing more and more on the Native side of the story. While the first section provides examples of the “evil” inflicted upon Native Americans, Silko goes one step further while chronicling Ku’oosh’s ceremony, informing her readers of the vices Native Americans use in dealing with the stereotypes and why they do not work. Through Ku’oosh’s ceremony, Silko also brings her audience to the realization that both cultures value different items, ones that greatly reflect their natures and perspectives on life. The purpose of this ceremony is for Tayo and the audience to take the first step towards a purely Native perspective, one that focuses on community and belonging.

Tayo, by this point, barely believes in storytelling or in ceremonies. However, his family trusts that he can come back to them but not through white medicine. According to his grandmother, ““This boy needs a medicine man. Otherwise, he will have to go away”” (33). White medicine has not worked, so it is time to try native (traditional) medicine. They send for Ku’oosh, the local traditional medicine man, who will perform the initial healing ceremonies on Tayo. “The process of curing Tayo’s disease begins to be transferred from white doctors and their medicines to Indian ‘medicine men’ and theirs—

first old man Ku'oosh, a Laguna medicine man . . . and then, when Ku'oosh determines that his practice . . . isn't the 'good ceremony' needed to 'cure' this case, the Navajo medicine man Betonie," Robert M. Nelson reveals. White medicine dulled Tayo's sense, allowing him to drift without meaning or living. However, Ku'oosh will break this trend by reminding him that traditional methods work.

Tayo wants nothing to do with a medicine man; he wishes to be sent back "to the hospital. Right away. He had to get back where he could merge with the walls and the ceiling, shimmering white, remote from everything" (32). He desires to go back to where time¹ has no meaning, where he could fade into a non-feeling nothingness, where he would cease to exist or remember. He does not want native healing because he knows, being of that culture, that this type of healing will cause him to face all the demons in his head and the evil backing them. He does not think he is worth the effort because he "let" Rocky die. He wants to disappear and die, not live. He is tired and drained and does not want to fight to survive anymore.

Despite his preference of not wanting native medicine, Ku'oosh appears with Indian tea and cornmeal. The medicine man begins his ceremonies by describing certain places and events in the "old dialect" through storytelling: "He spoke softly, using the old dialect full of sentences that were involved with explanations of their own origins, as if nothing the old man said were his own but all had been said before and he was only there to repeat it" (34). The story that Ku'oosh begins has been told several times before in the healing process, only slightly modified to suit the current participant, and will continued

¹ The sense of time that exist between the Western world and the Native world as displayed by contemporary Native American authors is a very engaging topic, a project to be developed at a later time due to its complexity.

to be told, forming a circular pattern. He asks Tayo to recall a deep cave through his chanting voice, forcing Tayo to remember times spent at that cave opening with Rocky and allowing him to remember good memories, not only the bad ones. This particular memory has Tayo recalling his connection to the earth and to his culture. Ku'oosh's ritual focuses primarily on oral communication. He reminds Tayo of this connection to his community through the shared story (between them) and of his connection to the earth through the cave imagery and memory. Todd offers, "Ku'oosh reconnects Tayo with the healing memories of his childhood ventures to the life-restoring cave and with his deep-rooted knowledge of the healing power of words." The medicine man knows that the healing experience takes much longer than one session, and the purpose of this particular ritual is to force Tayo to recall his past.

Silko says much about Native American culture through this ceremony. First, she compares the dominant culture with the native one in regard to how each treats their sick. The white world drugs ill individuals; instead of treating patients like people, they handle them like animals. Instead of finding the root of the illness, the Anglo doctors go right for pills, ones that take away the pain but not the cause, leaving patients adrift in a mindless fog. However, Native American healing is much different; it is a very personal rite. Ku'oosh comes and personally interacts with Tayo, forming a channel of communication. Ku'oosh does not bring drugs but words, tea, and cornmeal. While these are simple items, they make a big difference. The medicine man understands that he must soothe Tayo in several ways, including mentally and physically. He treats the symptoms so as that Tayo no longer suffers; however, Ku'oosh does not take the pain away; he knows that one must

feel and face the pain to fully heal. Native healing is much more personal than Anglo healing; it uses simple items to treat pain as compared to pills, and allows the pain to exist while dominant culture makes it disappear. Through these comparisons, Silko shows her audience two complete methods of healing, one more hands on than the other. She demonstrates through Tayo that Native medicine is much more personal and simpler. By forming a communication channel with Tayo, the medicine man can guide him through story to a healthier state of mind.

Several indicators exist that the healing process has begun because of Ku'oosh's visit. Before the visit, Tayo could not keep anything down or stop himself from having nightmares. After the medicine man's visit and Auntie serving him the Indian tea and cornmeal, Tayo is able to sleep and keep his food down; otherwise, he might have died from lack of nutrients. While these ceremonies do not seem to do much, they do affect his physical and mental well being. Ku'oosh's food and drink soothes Tayo's stomach, and the cave story soothes his mind: "He could eat regular food. He seldom vomited any more. Some nights he even slept all night without the dreams" (39). Through these ceremonies, Tayo is able to relax (to eat and sleep) and physically live and survive. "At that point, the point where Ku'oosh intercedes and reconnects Tayo with sources of life and healing, Tayo must stop vomiting. He must be able to take in and digest Ku'oosh's stories, and then Betonie's, and, later, Ts'eh's" (Todd). He has begun the healing process, without realizing it. Silko sends a clear message about the importance of ceremonies, even simple ones. All the medicine man does is to get Tayo to eat and stop having nightmares; however, this simple ritual is what begins the healing process.

As the text continues, a much more noticeable change takes place in her character, seen when he visits a local bar and meets up with a bunch of army buddies: “These good times were courtesy of the U.S. Government and the Second World War. Cash from disability checks earned with shrapnel in the neck at Wake Island or shell shock on Iwo Jima; rewards for surviving the Bataan Death March” (40). As the drinks flow, so do the “army stories” of conquering the enemy and of U.S. women. They reminisced about the glories of war and the benefits of being a soldier, all except for Tayo, who just listens and drinks. Through these stories and the retelling of these stories, a narrative forms riddled with the lies of war, which plague Tayo. Rice suggests, “They mask their despair under a veneer of barroom camaraderie and tales of the battlefield and sexual conquest in the various American West Coast cities where they ship out” (116). Agreeing with Rice, Todd adds, “Their stories have the power to deepen hatred, resentment, and the self-loathing that fosters violence.” Through this section, Silko once again demonstrates how strongly the dominant culture has taken hold of these war comrades. They returned from war, disillusioned from their war experiences, physically injured, and upset at their instant downgrade in society’s eyes; once the uniform came off, they are just Native Americans again. They bought into the lies the American government was spewing (the respect, the sense of belonging, the social status) and are now paying the price. The government just wanted bodies to help fight, so they promised anything. To make up for what they lost, they tell stories, reminiscing about their past victories; however, as they relive the “glory days,” their resentment deepens because it reminds over and over again of what they lost. The worst thing of all is that they are constantly reminded of what they

had by the monthly government disability or rewards check that comes in the mail, which ironically is what they use to buy their alcohol, increasing the violent mood. No one lets them forget, and because they cannot forget, they do not move on; they are stuck in a miserable state of limbo, hiding behind alcohol

While these characters continue to hide, Silko's protagonist reflects a slightly new view, one resulting from Ku'oosh's ceremonies. Familiar with hiding behind alcohol to keep the lies at bay, Tayo sees the others participating in the building up and celebration of these untruths, so he says nothing as they continue with the glorification of their war exploits. Because of Ku'oosh's ceremony, Tayo begins to recognize the evil (or lies) that makes him sick and does not want to participate in this evil narration anymore. Elizabeth N. Evasdaughter adds, "Tayo sometimes goes drinking with these defiant veterans, but what he defies is the blackness [lies] in their hearts" (89). The others use alcohol to blur the lines of the evil and deception until the lies become truth. Tayo also used to hide behind alcohol, but now when he drinks, he sees the corruption around him. Something within him has changed, something small, but it is a change.

Wanting to discontinue this cycle of lies and to help his friends, he tries to get the others to see what they are doing to themselves:

First time you walk down the street in Gallup or Albuquerque, you knew. Don't lie. You knew right away. The war was over, the uniform gone. All of a sudden 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!' . . . Here they were, trying to bring back that old feeling, that feeling they belonged to America the way they felt during the war . . . Belonging was drinking and laughing with the platoon, dancing with blond women, buying drinks for buddies born in Cleveland, Ohio. (42-3)

He calls them out, trying to get them to admit that times have changed and to accept their decline in social standing. If they can admit the truth, they break free from the lies the group has spun for itself, allowing a chance for healing. However, his buddies ignore him. They want to dwell in the alcohol-induced world, where they are respected war heroes, where they can get any woman they want and as much alcohol they need. They hide from the truth that Tayo is trying to get them to see, so they continue the narrative of lies, sex, and battle (death). Silko uses these comrades as the ultimate pit fall; they are drinking themselves to death because they cannot let go. To survive and heal, Tayo must let go of all thoughts and ideas impacted by dominant culture.

The ceremonies with Ku'oosh helped Tayo realign his mental and physical self with the world around him and his culture, which allows him to see the pain and the evil influences surrounding him. However, he still is not like he was before the war. When Tayo returns from the veteran's hospital for the second time, he is told that members of the community think he is still too ill to continue within society without more help. Upon hearing this, the self-confidence and healthy feeling Tayo gains disappears: "The old feeling was back again. He wanted to fade until he was as flat as his own hand looked,

flat like a drawing in the sand which did not speak or move, waiting for the wind to come swirling along the ground and blow the lines away” (106). Since the first ceremonies, he feels something growing inside of himself, which he acknowledges that night in the bar with his fellow war veterans. He can recognize the “witchery” of war and life and has become confident in his ability to do so. When he comes back, he expects others to see and understand this about him. However, he is told that he is still ill and must seek more help, losing all faith in how far he has come and allowing the others to “take him— wherever they wanted, because they were right. They’d always been right about him” (106). He is unable yet to stand up for himself, so he folds like a deck of cards and allows them to take him where they want. Nelson sums up the situation, “the Laguna ceremonial repertoire Ku’oosh maintains contains no recovery information that works for the veterans of World War II.” Ku’oosh realizes this and sends him to old Betonie, for a new healing ceremony.

The Second Ceremony: Betonie’s Interventions

While Ku’oosh’s ceremonies were successful to a point, they did not do enough for Tayo; they were just step one in his healing process. Silko sets it up this way to enhance her meaning of healing; the healing process is a continual process not just a one stop fix. Tayo must continue his journey step-by-step, just like Silko’s readers. The author slowly leads her audience on their own path of discovery, understanding the different binary untruths imposed on Native Americans and the strong hold that US mainstream culture has on this group of people. However, while readers are beginning to recognize the stereotypes and violence in play on the reservation, they also are allowed to

see a glimmer of hope in Tayo as he begins to identify the evil influences around him. As he discovers what is surrounding him, he begins to fight his way against all through his ceremonies, working his way back towards his Laguna culture and community; he erases the dominant culture's influences and restores the centrality of Laguna culture in contemporary times. As Tayo continues his healing path, Silko slowly guides her readers through a similar path, creating for them the opportunity to see how two cultures exist within the same space.

Betonie marks the beginning of the second group of healing rituals for Tayo. Tayo's time spent with Betonie is central to his healing and the audience's understanding of the concepts of survival and isolation. Silko uses this section and Betonie to discuss how the isolation caused by stereotypes of dominant culture can lead to the destruction of culture and community. Tayo is the prime example of this. He bought into the false sense of belonging offered by the US government and the drunken, broken Indian image after the war. This taken with the verbal abuse over his identity he endured from both the white world and his Laguna world causes Tayo to feel alone. Stereotypes bring isolation through the restrictions mainstream US culture places upon individuals of different ethnic backgrounds. These restrictions bear down upon individuals, forcing them to eventually change their way of thinking and behaviors. Silko shows this process through Tayo; he has borne the weight of two different worlds' expectations and finally cracks, breaking all solid connections with each, especially his Laguna culture. He no longer knows who he is and becomes the drunken, broken Indian.

Silko wants her audiences to see how the influences of dominant culture wraps

around individuals like a cocoon, blocking any ties with their heritage until they feel forced into a particular mold. Through her novel, Silko makes it clear that people are not molds, and when pushed and urged to fit within prescribes ones, vital parts of their psyches become damaged and/or lost. Being isolated is the worst thing that can happen within a community of storytellers. Unable to connect with another person and share stories and gain support signifies loss, a loss detrimental to the Native American. Tayo has reached this point; he is unable to communicate with anyone. However, Silko does not leave her protagonist to suffer. She offers a way back from his state and a way to resist the influences caused by dominant culture; she introduces Betonie, the modern medicine man.

Betonie, through his upbringing and beliefs, defeats the binary oppositions posed by dominant culture on Native cultures. Silko makes her medicine man, like Tayo, of mixed blood, with a Hispanic grandmother. He is connected to both the Native world and the white world. As a young child, Betonie was sent off by his grandmother to a white school in California to learn the Anglo culture. He has traveled several places, as indicated by the selection of phonebooks he picked up on his journeys: “He [Tayo] could see . . . barricading piles of telephone books with the years scattered among cities—St. Louis, Seattle, New York, Oakland” (120). While he has experienced Anglo culture, he has maintained and practiced his Native culture, allowing him to believe in a different perspective of the barrier between the white world and the Native world, which makes him the perfect person to help Tayo. He is fighting against the binary untruths discussed earlier because he represents both white and Native cultures and believes that both are

equal in regards to all things; each just has different ways of interpreting the world around them. Not only does he believe in the two cultures, he uses them both to shape his ceremonies for others.

Betonie believes in both worlds, shown through the mixture of traditional and contemporary items in his home: “under the medicine bags and bundles of rawhide on the walls, he saw layers of old calendars, the sequence of years confused and lost as if occasionally the oldest calendars had fallen or been taken out from under the others and then had been replaced on top of the most recent years” (120). His environment signals that Betonie is comfortable with both worlds and able to move between them, something that Tayo cannot do. Tayo is stuck between the two worlds because he cannot move past the stereotypes and influences of dominant culture. From birth, he has faced these obstacles and ideas without giving into them; however, when he goes to war and loses his family and friends, he crumbles under the responsibility of fighting the stereotypes: he gives into them. Betonie is the type of medicine man that Tayo needs because he has moved beyond stereotypes and the discrimination; he understand the situation at a deeper level.

Betonie is Silko’s answer to the stereotypes imposed upon Native Americans by mainstream US culture. He defeats their influences and molds by knowing both cultures and being able to operate within both. His grandmother, a medicine woman in her time, sent him to a white school for a reason, to learn the culture and the language, so that he would understand how things were done in a different society. He tells Tayo that the white world is neither good nor bad, which is similar to the Native American world:

“you don’t write off all the white people, just like you don’t trust all the Indians” (128). Tayo should not feel ashamed of his mixed heritage but should be proud of it. He should appreciate both the white schooling he had and the Laguna traditions he learned as a child. Neither society is wrong in presenting its ideas; each is just a different way of thinking and expressing concepts and ideas. Being able to see both is a true gift that Betonie has and is what he is trying to get Tayo to develop. He uses the boy/bear story (also the story of Shush, his assistant) to underscore his point.

In the story, a boy wanders away from his family and into a bear den, where he is adopted by the bears and becomes one of them. The only way the family can get him back is through the help of a medicine man, who tricks him out. When he returns, the boy has changed because of his experience. This story of a boy who becomes a bear demonstrates a transformation that white culture sees as impossible. Betonie explains that the boy does not actually become a bear physically, but that he thinks he is a bear and therefore acts like one, allowing him to be accepted by the bears as one of their own. Saying that the boy became a bear is not wrong, but it is only one way of expressing the situation. In other words, Betonie’s story illustrates Tayo’s reality. The boy in the medicine man’s story has lived in and become a part of two completely different worlds. To deny this fact would invalidate the boy’s identity—the truth about who he is and what he has experienced. Tayo, as a character who lived in both traditional Laguna culture and Mainstream American culture, experiences a similar fate. By denying one culture and accepting another, Tayo cuts off a significant part of his past and denying his heritage. Through this story, Betonie tells Tayo to embrace both worlds, not just one. To clarify,

Betonie says, “don’t be so quick to call something good or bad. There are balances and harmonies always shifting, always necessary to maintain” (130). Neither culture is bad.

According to Evasdaughter, “Silko lets her special mixed-blood medicine man Betonie answer those Indians who oppose any change in traditional rituals” (87). Because of his position between the white world and the native world, Betonie has a different perspective on ceremonies. Because of constantly changing circumstances and events, ceremonies must change to match the evolving problems. Traditional medicine men use ceremonies and rituals that have existed for generations, only changing them to fit the participant and not to fit changing situations. While they might work most of the time, they do not account for new situations, such as Tayo’s. How can he be cured with traditional ceremonies when a different culture stimulated the cause of his illness? Betonie believes, “At one time, the ceremonies as they had been performed were enough for the way the world was then. But after the white people came, elements in this world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies. I have made changes in the rituals. The people mistrust this greatly, but only this growth keeps the ceremonies going” (126)., “Old Betonie serves as a model here because he is able to translate Western and Native discourse into the new ceremonies and ceremonial vision” adds James Ruppert. If the ceremonies did not change in accordance to changes in society, they would become useless. Betonie, because of his grandmother, understands this and evolves his ceremonies based on who he works with and the situation. Because he changes traditional ceremonies by modernizing them, many fear him and accuse him of siding with the white world. Despite trusting the medicine man, Tayo doubts that he can

be cured: “‘And so I wonder,’ he said, feeling the tightness in his throat squeeze out the tears, ‘I wonder what good Indian ceremonies can do against the sickness which comes from their war, their bombs, their lies?’” (132).

Silko suggests that by understanding the dominant culture’s way of life, Native Americans can break free of its stereotypes and influences. By understanding how dominant culture creates stereotypes, individuals can take steps to combat these false ideas. Like Betonie and soon-to-be Tayo, Native Americans must understand and comprehend the prejudice against them before they can act. Having lived in both worlds, Betonie knows both cultures well and understands the different types of images that Anglo society creates for Native Americans—the savage, the drunkard, the guide, and the villain. Because he knows the types of stereotypes and can recognize Anglo influence, he easily avoids it, choosing instead to live according to his Navaho principles and ideas. While he operates within white society, he avoids certain vices—drinking and drugs—by following his own ideas and rules, which is why several people are afraid of him. He does not fit into a stereotype and does not care what others think of him; he knows what he believes and is satisfied with his lot in life. Silko informs her audience, through Betonie, ways of rejecting the influences by dominant society. Individuals must understand the stereotypes pitted against them, have a strong grasp of their self worth and a strong connection to their Native culture, and realize that stereotypes happen to groups of people because they let them. Only through the realization of these concepts can people avoid stereotypes. They reject them and the influences by changing their opinions about themselves and their placement within the world. Native Americans are not inferior to

white society or any other group; they are equal, do not fit within a particular stereotypical mold, and should act accordingly to this thought. Betonie does and hopes to teach this to Tayo as he begins the Scalp ceremony.

Betonie and Shush take Tayo up into the mountains to perform the modified healing ceremony, the Scalp ceremony. This place is special, a place that makes Tayo feel strong. The medicine man begins telling the story of a man who was hunting but overtaken by coyote. By the time the man is found, he is nearly gone, being replaced with the coyote's presence. To bring him back, a ceremony was performed where the man had to travel through five hoops to come back into himself. As Betonie tells this tale, he paints the story around Tayo and performs the same ceremony from the story. He acknowledges the place where Tayo was lost (WWII) and attempts to pull him back from the war's influence just as the medicine man in the story pulls the hunter from the coyote. He prays and chants over the wounded man and cuts his scalp, leading him then through the five hoops, displaying the journey that Tayo undertakes as he fights his way back to being in balance with both of his cultures.

After the ritual, Tayo sleeps and dreams about his uncle's lost cattle. When he wakes up from his dream, he "wanted to leave that night to find the cattle; there would be no peace until he did" (145). Through this ceremony, Tayo has received a task to find the cattle and raise them like his uncle wanted. Nelson explains the connection between the cattle and Tayo: "As Silko crafts it, both Tayo and the cattle are hybrids of a variety new to Laguna: the speckled cattle are originally Mexican, continually described as a virtual cross between cattle and desert antelope . . . while Tayo is . . . a cross between Indian and

Anglo, 'brown' and 'white'." Like the cattle, Tayo is a hybrid of cultures and has lost his way. By finding the cattle, he would release his feelings of guilt over leaving Josiah for the army and help himself find his own way: "a star pattern . . . will guide Tayo to Mt. Taylor, where he will discover the stolen cattle and effect their recovery, along with his own, back onto Laguna land and back into the mainstream of Laguna life" (34). Through this task, he would be keeping his promise to his uncle and to his family and realigning himself in his destined place within the community.

Tayo thinks "about the ceremony the medicine man had performed over him, testing it against the old feeling, the sick hollow in his belly formed by the memories of Rocky and Josiah . . . he could feel the ceremony like the rawhide thongs of the medicine pouch, straining to hold back the voices, the dreams, faces in the jungle in the L.A. depot, the smoky silence of solid white walls" (152). The old memories of war and of the lies told to him are not as strong as they once were. Through the ceremony, Tayo lets go of some of his pain, a release achieved through telling his story to someone, ridding himself of pent-up pain, grief, and anger. Later on in the novel, he comments, "The Scalp Ceremony lay to rest the Japanese souls in the green humid jungles, and it satisfied the female giant who fed on the dreams of warriors" (169). Memories no longer plague him like they once did. The memories still exist, faded yes, but still remain, blocking his spiritual return to his cultures. Occasionally, the memories and feelings gang up on him, returning him to a state before the second ceremony but only for a short while. Nelson adds, "after this episode, it's clear to even casual readers that Tayo is in the process of recovering his Laguna identity, of seeing himself as Indian and moving back into his

identity with a community who came to own him as one of their own.”

Before he leaves Betonie, the medicine man tells Tayo that the ceremony is not over. He has been involved in one large ceremony all along from the beginning, one that he must participate in; one that involves deploying the witchery from the world, for the time being. Witchcraft is behind all the bad things in life, and there are people who, through their actions, either fulfill and perpetuate the evilness or defeat it for a short amount of time. Nelson adds, “By the time Tayo hears about this story in the postwar twentieth century, we are to understand, the world all over has indeed become acutely ill.” Tayo will be the one who decides this at a future time, but he is not yet ready for this responsibility. Betonie says, “‘One night or nine nights won’t do it any more,’ the medicine man said; ‘the ceremony isn’t finished yet’” (152). He means that this ceremony is going to take longer than the ones that Tayo has gone through so far, and by the time that he needs to perform the final ritual of the ceremony, he will be ready which will mark the moment that he is completely healed and back in balance with the natural world.

Betonie’s ritual leaves Tayo with a lot to think about, a stronger connection to his heritage (both white and Laguna); he is less angry and guilty, and with faded memories. Rice adds, “The Scalp Ceremony allowed Tayo to come to terms with the war, but the violent social structure surrounding the war, especially Eur-american colonization and imperialist urbanizing tendencies, remain” (130-1). His memories will never go away, but they begin to fade away, like scars, now as only reminders. He also realizes that the witchery and evil in the world exist in all cultures, not just the white world. He can also

see more clearly and identify the lies originally told to him and how they impact a person.

The Third Ceremony: Sexual Healing

While Tayo's sexual healing is a ceremony, it is one that does not follow a strict set of rules or procedures; instead, it details his time with Ts'eh, a woman who Betonie predicts that he would meet. She helps him with the next ritual of his ceremony, a ceremony to strengthen his belief in himself, his cultural beliefs and history, and his connection to nature. Because this so called ceremony does not follow or resemble the previous two rituals, some consider Tayo's time with Ts'eh as part of the plot, not a significant event. While this woman does forward the plot through her actions, this period of sexual healing is very important and functions as a ceremony in Silko's narrative for several reasons. Ceremonies, as previously stated, do follow a basic structure, but they also evolve and change form to meet present day demands and needs, which is no different in Tayo's case. Silko uses his time with this woman to build upon what Tayo has learned and enhances his self confidence through sexual reassurance.

Ts'eh is not named in the beginning; the audience learns later that her nickname is Ts'eh, that she is a Montano, and that she has a large family. She reveals only this about herself. Silko's description of this woman also is a hint to her audience about her importance in the story. Tayo describes her as having eyes that "slanted up with her cheekbones like the face of an antelope dancer's mask . . . Her skin was light brown; she had ocher eyes" (177). Later, when Tayo talks with Ku'oosh and the other men, they tell him that he had met the mythical A'moo'oooh.

A'moo'oooh is represented by the elk, similar to the antelope, which is how Tayo

characterizes her features—light brown skin, ocher eyes, and high cheekbones. She has an infinite amount of knowledge on herbs and medicine and can predict the future traits of a cosmic figure. John Peacock believes that this woman, also like Night Swan before, represents “the Laguna oral tradition of Yellow Woman. In *Ceremony* her name is Ts’eh. It is she who re-connects the troubled protagonist Tayo to his culture through sexual healing” (303).

Throughout the novel, Silko has her protagonist interact with larger than life women, first Night Swan and now Ts’eh. These women possess qualities—connection to the earth, absolute faith in their culture, and detailed knowledge of the earth around them—that resemble cosmic characters within the Laguna culture, powerful individuals, known for their sexual prowess. Silko makes these connections for a couple of reasons. The first involves reminding her audience that the text and Tayo are heading towards a more centralized Native viewpoint, one that showcases the Laguna culture as opposed to highlighting the stereotypes imposed on Native cultures by dominant culture. As Silko begins to introduce cosmic characters, ones that have been around in stories and tale for several generations, she pushes her audience to see that Native American literature (or the oral tradition) happened before and after colonization. The stories might have changed a bit under colonial influences, but they evolved and survived into contemporary times, highlighting the survival of Native people. These cosmic female characters remind the audience of this survival.

Silko also uses these cosmic female characters to illustrate the importance of Tayo’s healing journey. These women, especially Ts’eh, represent the culture that Tayo

is disconnected from. Because of the importance of these women, the fact that Tayo interacts with them is monumental. He literally is interacting with his heritage, with figures that have key parts in Laguna history. These characters, through sexual interactions, build Tayo's confidence in himself, his surroundings, and his culture.

Tayo's confidence in himself and his culture develops during his time with Ts'eh. She supports him and slowly leads him back from the pain and distrust of war through her loving embrace. That first night he arrives at her place, she takes care of him by sheltering and feeding him. Another way that she takes care of him is through sex; she is the first partner that the audience has heard of since Night Swan, but this experience seems different. While Night Swan was his first, the two really did not share much of a bond. However, between Tayo and Ts'eh, a strong connection forms, which fills Tayo with thoughts other than death and depression. He feels loved and supported, allowing him to believe in himself and his culture once again: "Being alive was all right then: he had not breathed like that for a long time" (181). He realizes that he is worth something and that living is worthwhile. Ts'eh gets Tayo to trust her, and he allows her to lead him back to his beliefs and to overcome his issues with his identity, finally accepting his mixed background. Ts'eh is able to do this because she is the example of how there is no separation between storytelling and life—no matter how old/ancient the story it; it is alive. She reminds Tayo of the importance of stories within his culture. Her story (as Silko defines her) has been around for several generations and shows that stories continue to live as long as someone remembers them and passes them on.

Because of her support, he successfully finds and rescues the missing cattle from

the white rancher who stole them, completing the task assigned him. He comments, “He had been so intent on finding the cattle that he had forgotten all the events of the past days and past years. Hunting the cattle was good for that. Old Betonie was right. It was a cure for that, and maybe for other things too” (192). His mind has been on other things (more productive things) than his past problems, distracting himself from the pain. He finds where the cattle, but by the time he cuts through the fence holding them, they disappear. He searches for them for hours but without success. Because of this setback, all of the old “sick” thoughts of his came back:

What ever made him think he could do this? The woman under the apricot tree meant nothing at all; it was all in his head. When they [the ranchers] caught him, they’d send him back to the crazy house for sure . . . All the rest—old Betonie and his stargazing, the woman in her storm-pattern blanket—all that was crazy, the kind of old-time superstition the teachers at Indian school used to warn him and Rocky about . . . As the army doctors had told him; it was superstition, seeing Josiah when they shot those goddamn Japs; it was all superstition, believing that the rain had stopped coming because he had cured it. (194-5)

He believes that because he has not found the cattle that he has failed in his mission and that maybe what all these medicine men have told him were useless and lies. His faith in the ceremony has faltered but only briefly.

Because of the fact that he truly believes in his Laguna heritage and in the process of shedding his “war and pain” image, he receives help at his weakest moment in the

form of a mountain lion (and later in the form of a hunter—more cosmic characters helping Tayo on his way). As he feels sorry for himself, the animal appears. It walks right up to him, not afraid, stops, and stares at Tayo. Innately, Tayo begins a ceremony with the animal: “‘Mountain lion,’ he whispered, ‘mountain lion, becoming what you are with each breath, your substance changing with the earth and the sky’” (196). He begins a story and a ritual that pays respect to the animal and requests help at the same time. He does this ritual without really thinking about it, a strong indication that Tayo is accepting and embracing the storytelling nature of his Laguna culture. After the mountain lion leaves, he continues with the ritual by putting yellow pollen into the animal’s footprints, a gesture asking for help from the mountain lion. Tayo begins searching for the cattle again with renewed hope and finds them minutes later. As he rides home, he realizes that because of the ceremonies, his connection to the tribe and nature is returning: “it wasn’t as strong as it had once been. It was changing, unraveling like the yarn of a dark heavy blanket wrapped around a corpse, the dusty rotted strands of darkness unwinding, giving way to the air; its smothering pressure was lifting from the bones of his skill” (198). The tension that once strangled him is unwinding and disappearing, allowing him to breathe and live.

The mountain lion saves him two more times. After herding his cattle through the fence, Tayo is thrown and found by two angry ranchers, who want to punish him for wandering onto private property. Right when they begin to take him to the police, they spot tracks of a mountain lion, which is a better trophy than Tayo. They leave in order to pursue the animal, leaving Tayo wounded, passing in-and-out of consciousness. Waking

up, he heads towards Ts'eh's house, not really sure where it is. As Tayo walks around, trying to find the right path through the snow, he runs into a hunter (the mountain lion), who helps him find his way back. Evidence that the hunter is the mountain lion is in the description of the man's hat: "the cape he wore over his ears was made from tawny thick fur which shone when the wind ruffled through it; it looked like mountain-lion skin" (207). The hunter represents the human embodiment of the mountain lion. Because Tayo is meant to finish his task, the hunter and Ts'eh help him as much as possible for him to succeed. They arrive at the house, where Ts'eh has captured all of the cattle for Tayo. He leaves her, so that he can take his cattle home where they belong. He knows he will see her again because she has more to teach him and that she said, "I'll be seeing you" (213).

He returns to Auntie's home a changed man, a man confident in his abilities and beliefs. He comments, "The terror of the dreaming he had done on this bed was gone, uprooted from his belly; and the woman had filled the hollow spaces with new dreams" (219). Because of his relationship with Ts'eh, he realizes that "the dreams had been terror at loss, at something lost forever; but nothing was lost; all was retained between the sky and the earth, and within himself. He had not lost nothing" (219). When he was terrorized by his dreams, he thought he had lost his connection to the world around him; however, he only hides from it and did not lose it. Ts'eh, through her support, allows him to remember who he is and what he truly believes. Because of these realizations, he becomes confident, which others notice. His grandmother says, "So old Betonie did some good after all' . . . 'you're all right now, aren't you, sonny?'" to which he answers

in the affirmative (215). The fact that he can say yes means a lot; he has been healed, with only a trace of the hurtful memories left. His Auntie also notices, but she also waits for him to regress and go out drinking. However, he no longer needs to drink to forget the pain; he has let all the pain go. He demonstrates this when he tells his Aunt that he is going to the ranch to watch the cattle personally because he does not “want any of those others around. They can do their drinking some place else. Not at our place” (218). Through this statement, he proves that he is not going to regress, that he is not interested in drinking away life, and that he is a working member of this family, much to his Aunt’s displeasure.

Once again, he resembles the figure he was before WWII, with two vast differences. He now knows of the evil in the world and how it can affect all people and accepts his mixed-blood ancestry to the best of his ability and adapt to the world around while remembering his cultures’ pasts. Rice adds, “He (Tayo) realizes that the knowledge acquired there [modern world] is essential to his understanding of the forces at work in the world. His ability to incorporate this understanding into a framework that is both traditional and adaptable is crucial not just for his survival but for everyone’s” (115). He is healed but not yet really a true participant within the storytelling community; he has not yet told his story to his community. He will only be completely healed when he tells his story to others, becoming a member of the community once more.

The Fourth Ceremony: Multigenerational Ceremony

Silko skillfully leads her audience through the stereotypes constructed by the Anglo world to that of a world focused on storytelling, ceremony, and community

through Tayo's healing journey. However, she is not finished; Tayo is yet to be healed completely, and Silko has more to show her readers. While her readers have experienced the effectiveness of the Laguna ceremonies, Silko has not demonstrated the enduring power of the rituals until she introduces Descheeny, a great Pueblo medicine man, known for his successful ceremonies. This great medicine man exists many years² before the novel takes place. Throughout the novel, the author constantly refers to "evil" or "ancient destroyers" and how they impact the world. Silko introduces Descheeny to explain this evil. During his time, he begins to sense a new evil influence on the world, one "working for the end of this world" (149). This evil influence, also referred to as the original evil, manipulates individuals and their actions, all in the pursuit of destruction. These actions then persuade others, creating a chain reaction and infecting the world with corruption and hate. Sensing this, Descheeny develops a new ceremony, one that will take several years to complete, to defeat the new emerging evil. He does this by interacting and having a child with a half-blood (White and Hispanic), mingling the cultures from three different groups of people into one individual: "this is the only way," she told him. "It cannot be done alone. We must have power from everywhere. Even the power we can get from the whites" (150). Only the combination of all or several cultures can defeat these ancient destroyers. When cultures adapt and work together, only then will their customs, stories, and people be safe from evil.

Descheeny and this woman begin this ceremony, hoping for the best but not knowing the end results, which worries the female: "Sometimes I don't know if the

² Silko does not define specifically when Descheeny exists, only several generations before Tayo. Descheeny is Betonie's grandfather.

ceremony will be strong enough to stop them. We have to depend on people not even born yet. A hundred years from now” (150). In which, the medicine man responds, ““It will take a long long time and many more stories like this one before they are laid low”” (150). While Descheeny does not know the future, he does have faith in it and his community. He hopes his stories are remembered and repeated for future generations, encouraging the development of new stronger stories, ones that imbibe the storytellers and their audiences with the strength to fight the approaching evil. Only through remembering and adapting can the world survive.

With the introduction of this medicine man, Silko provides opportunities for her audience to see that the ceremony is not a fashionable idea or a superficial belief but one that has survived over generations and is ingrained in Native American culture from the beginning. Descheeny created his ceremony to help rid the world of evil and protect all cultures, not just his own, from destruction. While showing the importance of the ceremony, she also demonstrates the resilience of her culture. Ceremonies and Native American beliefs existed before the arrival of the Western world and its prejudices. After colonization, the Laguna (and several others) culture has survived the stereotypes, temptations, and violence of the Anglo world, continuing to exist based on its beliefs, storytelling practices, and community support. While mainstream culture has influenced Native American practices, the core of the tribes remain consistently strong because of the beliefs and ceremonies of the native people. Silko also uses her novel to admit that many Native Americans have fallen victim to the temptations—alcohol, greed, and violence—of the outside world, but she also reminds her readers that these individuals

can return to the core through community support and ceremonies. Tayo represents this lost soul, who is slowly working his way back to the center of his Laguna culture.

While Silko continually leads her audience through a narrative ceremony of realization and understanding, Tayo embarks on the last leg of his ritual. During the summer, Ts'eh helps Tayo to refine his understanding of the destroyers and the ceremony begun by Descheeny. She defines the destroyers: ““Their highest ambition is to gut human beings while they are still breathing, to hold the heart still beating so the victim will never feel anything again. When they finish, you watch yourself from a distance and you can't even cry—not even for yourself”” (229). Tayo begins to understand what he has survived. He was one of those victims: ““He recognized it then: the thick white skin that had enclosed him, silencing the sensations of living, the love as well as the grief; and he had been left with only the hum of the tissues that enclosed him”” (229). Because he knows what the destroyers' lies do to people, he wants to do all that he can to help drive the evil back from the world. Tayo remembers Betonie discussing Descheeny's ceremony, but he did not ask about it because he was not ready. However, Silko has Tayo ask Ts'eh about it. The very fact that she knows so much about is further evidence of her being Yellow Woman or thought woman. Tayo says, ““Old Betonie said there was some way to stop—[the destroyers]””, signifying that Tayo is ready to take action (230). Ts'eh replies, ““It all depends . . . How far you are willing to go”” (230). This reply lets him know that he must choose to participate in the ritual, which he does when he further inquires about the ceremony. He needs to change the ending of the story, to take back the ending from the destroyers: ““The end of the story. They want to change it. They want it

to end here, the way all their stories end, encircling slowly to choke the life away. The violence of the struggles excite them, and the killing soothes them” (231-2).

Tayo must face the momentous task ahead of him, a task that leaves him wondering if he can do it. Because of his doubt, he looks for support, which he believes he finds in his friends Leroy and Harley, who betray him. Converted by the powerful lies of Emo, they take him to the vilest place around, the uranium mines: ““He knew why he had felt weak and sick; he knows why he had lost the feeling Ts’eh had given him, and why he had doubted the ceremony; this was their place, and he was vulnerable”” (242-3). These mines are evil because the United States Government mined uranium from them to use within the nuclear bombs dropped during WWII, which killed and hurt tens of thousands. Rice adds, “He is at the geographical crux of the ultimate result of the witchery, the symbolic birthplace of the atomic destruction that followed him all the way to the Pacific and back” (134). Tayo is weak and doubts his memories of the ceremony because of all of the destroyers’ lies around him. However, once he realizes this, he responds accordingly. He has been betrayed by his friends, but he is capable of protecting himself from the lies and does not succumb to them.

Once he recognizes where he is, he understands his purpose in the ceremony and how all the stories within his life interconnect. Everyone, not just Native Americans or whites, faces destruction from these destroyers and their bombs. Evidence of this can be seen through Tayo’s dreams where the voices of various cultures become one:

The lines of cultures and worlds were drawn in flat dark lines on fine light sand painting. From that time on, human beings were one clan again,

united by the fate the destroyers planned for all of them, for all living things; united by a circle of death that devoured people in cities twelve thousand miles away, victims who had never known these mesas, who had never seen the delicate colors of the rocks which boiled up their slaughter. (246)

It is up to him to reject the terrible end the destroyers plan for him and the world; ““He had only to complete this night, to keep the story out of the reach of the destroyers for a few more hours, and the witchery would turn, upon itself, upon them”” (247). If he can survive the night, the evil would be defeated for the time being.

The moment of truth comes when Tayo must decide whether or not to rescue the betrayer Harley. Tayo hides while Emo and his group try to force him to reveal himself through insults and jokes. It is only when they take Harley out of the trunk, beaten and tortured, that Tayo almost responds, ““He was certain his own sanity would be destroyed if he did not stop them [Emo] and all the suffering and dying they caused—the people incinerated and exploded, and little children on streets outside Gallup bars”” (252). He hears them torturing Harley, which sickens him into a decision; he will attack with his screwdriver. However, something stops him. For some reason, his head clears, and he understands that this is the deciding moment; what he chooses now will decide the ending of the story. Evasdaughter comments, “Tayo realizes that he must not kill Emo, and even that he must refuse the more adamantly, the more cleverly Emo tempts him to attack. Instead, Tayo has to watch and know, to avoid being seen or known, to resist every pressure, even appeals to his goodness” (93). The witchery had almost gotten him to do

its deed: ““The witchery had almost ended the story according to its plan: Tayo had almost jammed the screwdriver into Emo’s skull the way the witchery had wanted . . . He would have been another victim, a drunk Indian war veteran settling an old feud”” (253). If he would have committed the act, he would be just another drunk Indian who fell for the destroyers’ lies. Rice agrees, “Had he gone through with the murder, people would have blamed him, Emo, the war, white people, or themselves and would have gone on, oblivious to the continuing destruction” (135). His actions would have continued the vicious cycle of hatred and lies between different cultures, making it easier for the destroyers to win.

However, his decision not to kill Emo breaks the current cycle of evil for now and rewrites the ending of the story in more peaceful terms. Tayo understands that ““Accordingly, the story goes on with these stars of the old war shield; they go on, lasting until the fifth world ends, then maybe beyond. The only thing is; it has never been easy”” (254). The world would go on as will Descheeny’s ceremony because despite the fact that the destroyers have lost this time does not mean that this is the end of the war. They will continue to try and make the world in their own image, one of death and destruction, which is why the ceremony must continue throughout the coming generations. Through her novel, Silko shows the ceremonies and storytelling must continue in order to survive and will continue because of the resilience and the beliefs of the Laguna people.

Tayo’s transformation, however, is not yet finished. To fully complete his part of the ceremony, he must tell the story of what happened, so that future generations know and can prepare for the evil and upcoming battles. He tells his tale to Ku’oosh and to the

other older men of the tribe: ““It took a long time to tell them the story; they stopped him frequently with questions about the location and the time of day”” (257). Through several types of ceremonies, he recovers his balance with the world, his culture, and his identity. He defeats the destroyers only after rejecting the influences their lies had on him and through understanding that one culture is not better than the next. Rice sums up, “In the end, Tayo’s triumph is his ability to disengage from witchery with the help of his community and, in turn, to provide others with a model for breaking the destructive cycle” (136). He has fulfilled his role in the ceremony and remains a teacher and storyteller for future generations.

Through *Ceremony*, Silko guides her readers and Tayo through a journey of self-discovery, dissecting the stereotypes placed upon Native Americans by the Anglo culture, to understand resilient Native American cultures and their importance placed on storytelling and healing through ceremonies. Ceremonies are the foundation of Native American healing. Silko shows the importance of storytelling and ceremonies in two distinct ways: the personal ceremonies Tayo endures on his path to recovery and the ceremonies she weaves into her narratives for her readers. Each ceremony Tayo encounters, the audience encounters also. The readers are given the chance to look beyond the Native American stereotypes and focus on what really matters—the belief and support systems of Native Americans. As Tayo completes each ritual, the readers are given the opportunity to understand that while Native cultures have adapted because of Western culture they have not disappeared; these cultures have survived and will do so because of their beliefs. Silko’s protagonist reconnects with his culture and destinies

through a series of ceremonies, ones that help the protagonist to reconnect with his Laguna culture, battle evil for his culture, and participate in the end of the novel within his oral community by telling his story so future generations know of the “evil” in the world.

CHAPTER THREE

Storytelling consists of several components. Just like ceremonies, humor exists as another such component of storytelling that aids in the healing process. Being able to laugh allows individuals to release pent-up frustrations and bond with others in their communities, forming a support system. Native Americans use humor in various ways, but the most important is battling stereotypes developed by the Western world. Such stereotypes include the drunken and violent Indian and the Hollywood savage depicted in movies and TV shows. Being able to laugh at these stereotypes allows Native Americans to put the aggression they feel for the Western world behind them and just live their lives. However, they also use humor to educate others who believe the stereotypes are true.

Humor unites cultures divided by stereotypes. For years, stereotypes portraying Native people as inferior have been imposed upon Native cultures, but Native American writers are standing up and demanding recognition through literary devices such as humor. One such writer is Adrian Louis. His novel *Skins* addresses alcoholism, abuse, violence, and sex through Native humor. Eva Gruber describes Louis's purpose in using humor as one that redirects attention away from the stereotypical ideas about Native Americans to their actual core beliefs: "When readers laugh *with* Native characters, narrators, or authors *at* stereotypical or restrictive images of 'Indians' and notions of Euro-American superiority, for instance, they subconsciously subscribe to new conceptualizations of Nativeness and new perspectives on Native-White relations" (2). Louis uses Native humor to push both Native and non-Native audiences out of their prescribed opinions and into an unbiased playing field, where new interpretations can be formed. Native audiences are targeted also because often Native people, facing these

harsh stereotypes, begin to believe what the Western world says about them, forcing them to forget and lose connection with their culture and beliefs. Louis uses humor to remind them where they have come from and helps them reconnect with their community.

Native humor in contemporary writing exists in several forms: “Light-hearted laughter and gallows humor, teasing, and acerbic satire, healing and self-deprecating humor, flat jokes, carnivalesque laughter, and intricate wit all appear in contemporary Native writing” (Gruber 3). Of these categories, Louis uses healing and self-deprecating humor throughout his novel *Skins*, and Louis demonstrates both forms of humor in the cosmic character of the Sioux trickster Iktomi, the Spider. Trickster characters and their stories exist in most cultures (as discussed in chapter one), but the Native American tricksters exist beyond entertainment; they exist as teachers, stress relievers, and cultural champions/heroes. Like the ceremonies discussed in chapter two, trickster stories are passed down from generation to generation through oral storytelling. While these stories are humorous and entertaining, they also offer lessons on life and recount important cultural beliefs (the beginning of the world).

Tricksters constantly make bad choices, which cost them in the end. For example, Iktomi, the Spider-Man, loves to play tricks, and in one story, he asks Hawk for a ride, who agrees. After awhile the trickster becomes bored and begins making rude gestures, calling the Hawk a “stupid, no-account *hlete*, good for nothing” as they would pass others (Erdoes and Ortiz 119). Hearing this, Hawk drops Iktomi into a dry hollow tree, which soaks up with water after it begins to rain, crushing the stuck trickster. Only by humbling himself to the Great Spirit and admitting his foolishness was he able to leave the tree:

“His former pride and wickedness made him feel very small, so small that he was able to crawl out of that tree” (Erdoes and Ortiz 120). This particular story teaches the importance of being humble, keeping one’s pride in check, and being kind to others, all very important lessons. Besides teaching children and others life lessons, trickster stories also document important historical beliefs, such as a tribe’s creation story and the way the world was created.

Each tribe has its own trickster character—Coyote, Iktomi, or Raven to just name a few—that is highly unique and dependent upon the tribe’s region and beliefs. As discussed previously, Louis uses Iktomi, specifically the Lakota Sioux trickster, in his novel *Skins*. Alternate names for Iktomi include Ikto, Ictinike, Inktomi, Unktome, and Unktomi, depending on the differences in tribal languages, as this spider deity was known throughout many of North America's tribes. Iktomi has the traditional trickster characteristics—an obsession with sex and food, the desire to play tricks on others, and a clownish personality that makes a fool out of himself or others. However, he takes on a much more important role than other trickster characters because he is a cultural hero for the Sioux. Erdoes and Ortiz add, “Iktomi, the Sioux Spider-Man, and Rabbit are complicated culture heroes . . . Iktomi is a supernatural character with broad powers . . . [and] is powerful as well as powerless; he is a prophet, a liar who sometimes tricks by using the truth. He is a spider but transforms himself into a man, bigger than life and smaller than a pea. He is a clown, often with a serious message” (xiv). This trickster has been credited with the creation of time, the naming of the animals, and the prediction of the coming of Europeans. While almost completely driven by sex and known for keeping

his penis in a sacred box, Iktomi is an important sacred character, one who is respected yet feared by his believers.

Louis uses Iktomi as the trickster in his novel for two reasons: his ability to shock the audience with low-brow humor and the healing guidance he offers through his humor. Gruber comments, “Trickster characters are similar to native ritual clowns and sacred fools; both “breach boundaries in permitted disrespect. They challenge accustomed patterns, subvert authority, hold up a mirror to the audience, and address issues that otherwise would not be discussed openly” (8-9). As readers devour *Skins*, they are confronted and shocked by Iktomi’s actions and humor right from the beginning. As early as page two Iktomi appears to surprise and delight the reader: “The large female spider had raped his [Rudy’s, Louis’s protagonist] gonads” (2). Right away, Louis assaults his readers with Iktomi’s low-brow humor and actions, shocking them into a state of disbelief, a state where Louis allows his audience to reconsider preconceived ideas about Native cultures. Gruber adds, “ The tradition of teaching through humor, of making readers stumble, laugh, and reconsider, very much continues in contemporary Native writing, where humor also forces the audience to ‘read between the lines’ and to reexamine their frame of reference” (9). Through such shocking humor, readers are forced to step back and rethink their frame of reference concerning Native Americans and their tribes; they enter into an unbiased position of learning. Through each incident, readers laugh and begin to understand that humor is a thriving element of Native American culture, one that reveals a way of life lost among vile stereotypes.

Iktomi in *Skins* serves as a healing and coping agent. Louis’s novel depicts Native

Americans and their lives on the reservation, describing crime, abuse, violence, alcoholism, and sex through a tribal cop's eyes. Louis does not romanticize reservation life; he tells every dirty and violent detail throughout his novel, something he has been criticized for by other Native American scholars, such as Allen. While he does tell of the violent and hopeless living conditions of the reservation, he also highlights the belief system in place through his Trickster humor. Gruber describes, "Humor is indispensable to Native cultural survival and that it constitutes a principal means to cope with life" (10). Humor offers a means of escape for individuals plagued with harsh realities. Tricksters through their crude humor and actions offer others the chance to laugh and to leave behind the pain of stereotypes, violence, and alcoholism. This type of humor allows people inflicted with pain and sorrows to connect with each other, forming a support group with the ability to release pent-up frustrations with their lives. With their frustrations abated for now, these people once again have the strength to battle the problems in their lives. In *Skins*, Louis demonstrates Iktomi's healing influence through Rudy, when the trickster seems to inhabit during most of the novel. Rudy, a psychologically traumatized tribal cop, exorcises his past and current demons through the trickster's influence, becoming a strong and proud Sioux, who, by the end of the novel, stands up for himself, his beliefs, and his culture by giving George Washington on Mount Rushmore a bloody nose.

The Need for Humor

Rudy Yellow Shirt is the perfect candidate in this novel in relation to Native American healing. Raised in a violent environment on the reservation, he has encountered

several traumatic events in his life that he has pushed back to the recesses of his mind, refusing to deal directly with them.

Rudy's parents, brother, grandfather are all alcoholics. He concludes after discussing his family's history with his *Unci* (grandmother) that "Liquor was an integral part of their history . . . And the blood-lust, with its host of pains and tragedies, had migrated from their grandfather, to their father, to Mogie and, to a certain degree, to Rudy himself" (271-2). Drinking in the Yellow Shirt Family has become a tradition, a way to deal with life and the stress of the reservation. Once individuals go beyond drinking socially and indulging in it to forget pain and problems, they seem to be doomed, unable to get out of the vicious cycle of liquor. Rudy's parents began to drink more and more after Sonny Yellow Shirt (Rudy's father) loses part of his foot while working; once his father can no longer work, he develops a vicious state of mind.

Sonny begins to drink more and more, causing him to lose his temper and make bad decisions. Once Sonny becomes a full-fledged alcoholic, his violent nature erupts; he abuses both his wife and children: "They'd been there (*Unci's* house) on those dark occasions after Sonny Yellow Shirt had beaten his wife black and blue and then gone to ransack the house" (272). He taunts and makes fun of his boys whenever he could, constantly teasing Rudy about his name and his spider incident (to be explained later), causing the boy to hate him: "Often, when Sonny was drunk and vicious, Rudy hid and took out the little crucifix he'd gotten in the third grade and prayed to God to give his dad a heart attack or at least chop his head off" (134). Through his alcoholism, Sonny's family suffered physical and mental distress, went without certain items because all

money went for liquor, and grew ashamed of their father.

While this violence was traumatizing, it is nothing compared to what Mogie does to Rudy. Rudy sees his brother Mogie as his protector, one he trusted with his whole heart: “He knew that Mogie would never let him down. He believed that he could always depend on him” (6). This belief in his older brother continued for years during their childhood. Mogie took care of Rudy and his siblings when their parents took their booze trips, defended Rudy from Sonny’s verbal and physical attacks, and was Rudy’s best friend. Mogie took care of him: “Mogie made them a plateful of fried Spam sandwiches and mixed up a gallon jar of lime Kool-Aid. He made Rudy sit at the kitchen table and served him first. They ate and then took turns using the outhouse. Then Mogie sat him down and trimmed his Beatle bangs” (134). Mogie made sure his brother was cared for and comfortable. However, Mogie does something that Rudy cannot forgive him for; he sexually abuses their mother while she is passed out.

After their parents have a public fight, the boys take their mother home. After Rudy returns from dumping Sonny off in front of the police station, he sees that “Mogie had his large prick out and was leaning into her [their mother], rubbing it up against her red panties . . . She was passed out cold, and what Mogie was doing was vile beyond anything Rudy could have ever imagined A searing flame of hatred and embarrassment shot from his brain to his heart and then down to his stomach” (159-160). Rudy is so shocked by this incident that he runs away horrified: “He fled from the house and the horror he’d seen and ran shoeless into the night away from his insane family” (160). He no longer wants to associate with his family, especially Mogie, his former hero. He runs

until he finds two drunks and proceeds to get drunk. This is not the first time he drinks, but it is the first time he drinks to forget. He does not understand how his once protector became so corrupt and could do what he did to their mother. So, Rudy drinks wine and Jim Beam whiskey, until he passes out. However, when he wakes up, he remembers nothing of the night before; this event is so traumatic that his mind blocks it from his memory. He believes everything is normal, and this way, Rudy can still look up to his brother. But as time goes on, Rudy develops a certain disdain for Mogie but without knowing why.

Another event that scars Rudy is his participation in the Vietnam War. While readers hear multiple stories of the Vietnam War from several characters, especially Mogie, the protagonist only mentions his experience few times. Rudy mostly talks about Mogie's war experience, not his own. He does not want dwell on the Vietnam War because he is trying to forget his time spent there. He is detached because he is trying to separate his feelings and conscious from the acts of war. There exists, however, one moment in the narrative that clearly shows Rudy traumatizing war experience. This moment is one of the only few that he really discusses. Rudy meets up with his brother in Saigon on leave, drinking and partying. They go to a party and witness a pointless murder, causing the crowd to flee. This event haunts Rudy: "Many times that night Rudy woke up sweating and shaking from the nightmare of the blood-spurting white officer he'd just seen killed" (194). Seeing someone killed for no reason or purpose scares him, which he still feels currently in the novel: "Rudy rubbed his eyes and shuddered at the memory" (194). While he does not show how Vietnam affected him, there are small

textual clues that reveal his discomfort to the audience.

One last thing that traumatizes Rudy is his role as a tribal cop on the Pine Ridge Reservation, where he grew up. Every day he works, he is reminded of the violence that he grew up with through the cases he investigates. Throughout the novel, Louis has his protagonist discussing the reoccurring drunks he picks up every Friday night, the spousal abuse he breaks up, and the high school parties he has to disband. However, there are several violent cases that get to Rudy. Investigating a spousal abuse brawl, he discovers that the husband has stabbed the couple's one year old baby and has thrown her into the dumpster for no reason. While the child survived, this event enrages Rudy: "The much larger part of Rudy Yellow Shirt's conscious mind wanted to exercise the vote to whack Blue Hawk's [the father] balls off" (25). Another such event is when Rudy finds Corky Red Tail, a neighbor kid of his, dead, beaten, and raped by two other boys. Because of his acquaintance with this teenager, this crime hits close to home for him: "Rudy had seen a lot of gruesome crimes on the rez, but this made his stomach do flip-flops. This one made him want to kill whoever did it" (42). These types of crimes remind Rudy of his people's violent nature since Western influence. Being surrounded by this constant and personal violence, Rudy loses his faith in his community and in mankind. When he was young, he looked forward to his job; now, "a middle-age cop, he was filled with dread and twitching anxiety" (19).

These events, all in different ways, influence Rudy's life in both negative and positive ways. Negatively, Rudy encounters more sad and depressing events than anyone should, forming his opinion of his community. Positively, these events have shaped him

into who he is now, the respected and experienced cop on the reservation. However, the reason Rudy is in need of healing is because he has not processed these traumatic events properly. When things happen, he pushes the events to the back most of his mind, thinking of them occasionally and moving on. He does not dwell on anything (until later) and proceeds on with his life. While others fall into severe alcoholism, depression, and violence because of their situations, drugs, or the war, Rudy is able to graduate high school, survive the Vietnam war, go to college, become a cop, marry Vivianne, and resist the urges of liquor (for the most part) and the violence from his past. Since he represses all the bad, he is able to focus on the positive and work towards his goals. This moment (near the beginning of the novel) in the narrative signals Rudy's contentment with the world: "Rudy felt a brief wave of pride, of accomplishment . . . His brother was talking to him, his wife seemed fairly happy with him, and he'd just cooked a nice rabbit that was given to him by *Maka Ina*, mother earth" (10). This contentment is about to change though. He has succeeded where others have failed, all by avoiding the bad in his past. However, these events and memories are going to manifest itself in Rudy's future, destroying his peaceful life. This happens after Rudy's appendix bursts, and he becomes obsessed with his health. He begins taking blood pressure medication, which makes him impotent, and cuts down on the drinking and smoking, which shuts down his fragile relationship with Mogie. While his life is not the greatest anymore, it is not the worst that it could be.

One telling moment in the narrative demonstrates Rudy's disconnection with his community and heritage: "The individual and his acts were only good if they did good for

the people. Rudy knew that had changed for the most part. The family unit was mostly broken now” (21). He sees his community as broken and greedy, where people act for the individual rather than for the good of the community, a reversal of the old thought. Rudy feels this way because of what he has seen and experienced; he disconnects from everyone because of these tragic circumstances.

Louis has created a man separated from his culture and community by the violence and stereotypes created because of colonization. Rudy is damaged but will not admit it. He is a ticking time bomb waiting to happen; when he goes off, there will not be any left to save. However, he is not a lost cause because he still believes, albeit weakly, in his culture.

Louis brings in the cosmic trickster figure Iktomi to help heal Rudy through his influence. This trickster enters Rudy’s life as a young boy of twelve and then again when he is forty-three through a spider bite and a rock. As mentioned earlier, the trickster is of two extremes, as described by Erdoes and Ortiz through the opinion of various friends from Pine Ridge and Rosebud Sioux tribes, “Ikto [Iktomi] can be powerless, a nobody, lower than a worm. But he can also be a creator, more cunning than humans. When he is in power, Iktomi can do anything. He can uproot mountains. He can transform himself. He is a mischief maker. He is good and bad at the same time” (xv). Because of this reputation, most individuals try to avoid the trickster’s influence, but with this type of status, how can this figure help heal Rudy? Iktomi is not the cause of Rudy’s healing but the vehicle for his trip. Rudy self-heals through the phenomenon of the trickster and his humor. This cosmic fiend offers help to Rudy through the use of his foul humor and

through his motivational powers (inspiration and sex).

Louis introduces Rudy as a terribly flawed character, damaged by the after effects of colonization and in need of healing; the author snares his audience's attention through the back story of Rudy and his family. He forces the readers to care for this character through the tragic and violent events that have happened to him as his story unfolds. They become entranced in his story, wanting to see what happens to the main character, wanting to know if he moves past his hidden demons to a place of peace. Once Louis has readers' attention, he redirects their concentration through trickster discourse from that of a single character to the plight of all Native Americans: a stereotypical image. Gruber illustrates, "The multilayered 'stories' told in contemporary Native texts sneak trickster-like into the readers' imagination in order to rework the restrictive images of 'Indians'" (104). As the readers become involved in Rudy's story, they enter into a world created by Louis, one that he can change and shape as needed. He uses trickster discourse to slowly guide his readers from a world defined by Western standards to a place that reflects Native American thinking. They become part of this Native American world created by Louis as they continue through *Skins*. "Introducing new, imaginative truths of their [Native American authors] own that oppose a Eurocentric Truth, they create seemingly stable deceptive narrative surfaces that eventually, however, reveal rather than conceal the fact that reality is but a construction" (Gruber104). In Louis's world, readers see the stereotypes placed on the Native Americans and how wrong they actually are. This new perspective allows these individuals to understand that one's image is defined by those around him/her, need it be true and false. As Rudy's story continues so does the

audience's journey through this revealing world developed by Louis.

Iktomi's Influence

Iktomi first enters Rudy's life as a black widow spider, who bites the boy's sex organs when he uses the outhouse: "The large female spider had raped his gonads. For an instant he had the horrifying vision of his balls ballooning up and splitting open to free millions of little black widow babies" (2). While the spider is not directly called Iktomi in the beginning, it can be said to represent the mystical figure for three reasons. One of the trickster's most common forms is the spider, and the location of the spider bite suggests the humor of Iktomi. The most important indicator that this event must be significant is that Louis opens his novel with it. These three ideas signal that the spider is Iktomi.

Louis begins his novel with Iktomi's nibbling on Rudy's gonads for several reasons. The location of the bite is very symbolic. The spider attacks his testicles, the symbol of Rudy's manhood. Because of where he was bitten and the fact that he is never allowed to forget the event thanks to his father, Rudy is robbed of his male power by the spider. He cannot regain his power because of those around him, who constantly remind him of the event and make fun of him, like his father and his buddies: "Imagine getting bit on the nuts, and by Iktomi, yet," Rudy could hear his father telling one of his drinking cronies some weeks later. Sonny and his friends would nearly double over in laughter" (4). This episode also forces him to develop a sense of humor, one that is sarcastic and foul. Of all the places he could have been bitten, the spider bites him in one of the most sensitive spots of the boy's body. If he doesn't learn to laugh this event off, he would be shunned by his community for his inability to laugh at himself, a needed trait for survival

at this reservation. While he does develop this sense of humor, he is never allowed to forget that this incident happened, and it becomes ingrained in his memory as a pivotal childhood memory, one that has inspired a disdain for Iktomi.

The spider trickster marks Rudy at an early age for his future involvement in the tribal cop's life. The bite represents a promise of the trickster, a commitment to return one day and inspire Rudy to move beyond his pain and sorrows. One might argue that this incident is what causes all of Rudy's issues in the future because he has lost his male power; he is unable to move on with life because part of him is missing, forcing him to coast through life without being his own person. However, while this event does hold negative connotations for the main character, he is still surrounded by an abusive father, a violent reservation, and harmful stereotypes forced upon him by popular culture. Rudy would have turned out the same if the trickster had not bitten him. The bite is not a curse but a promise of future help when the time is right. Iktomi comes back to help Rudy regain his male power once he has become literally and figuratively impotent

The next time that Rudy meets the trickster is when his life begins to deflate: his wife leaves him due to his indifference to her and lack of sex; his career is at a standstill, riddled with grotesque amounts of violence; his relationship with his family (especially Mogie) is strained; and his beliefs in his community have dissolved. He has reached the bottom, which is the perfect moment for the trickster to reenter his life. Iktomi meets him in the form of a rock that Rudy hits his head on. Ed Little Eagle, a medicine man, tells Rudy that "While the people always tended to think of Iktomi coming in the form of a spider . . . the trickster could just as easily appear as a rock" (47). When Rudy trips and

falls and hits his head on the “trickster rock,” he experiences a reawakening of various feelings, thoughts, emotions, and beliefs that he has pushed away in the past and begins to exhibit certain characteristics that shock and surprise him, traits of the trickster Iktomi. The two most notable changes are Rudy’s need to punish wrongdoers and the reemergence of his libido: “One, his vigilante other self, the one he called the ‘Avenging Warrior’ was born. And two, he grew horns: his libido awoke from its middle-aged hibernation” (39). These two things develop slowly through the narrative after he hits his head.

The development of his libido and surging erections—he gives giving himself the names “King of the Boner” and “Emperor of Erections”—is a humorous event, especially with his inability to have a “normal” erection the year before the rock incident. The first real example of his new potency is while driving to investigate a double decapitation accident. On his way there, he is forced to pull over to wrestle a tumbleweed from his windshield, and while doing this, he looks up at the stars seeing them clearer than ever before. Here, Iktomi possesses Rudy. By looking at the stars, Rudy connects with nature, forming a path for Iktomi to reach him. At that exact moment, “His mind and body exuded a deep tenderness for everything around him, and at the same time he had the desire to be cuddled” (50). Some might argue that Rudy is just reminiscing and just feels this way; there is nothing mystical here. While that might be true, one must consider why Rudy stopped at this particular moment and time in the first place. While he was driving, “Halfway there, a strong, hot wind came up and began to roll tumbleweeds down the sloping hills and onto the highway. They rambled rapidly in large numbers, like the ghost

of the buffaloes that had once roamed these hills” (50). A sudden wind emerges around him, which leads him to think of ancient buffalos roaming. Also, after his possession, “Then, as if on cue, the wind died down completely” (50). The wind dies down on purpose it seems, after Rudy receives his “feeling of love.”

The most convincing item that something happens to Rudy is when he gets out of his car and develops an erection on the way to a crime scene. This erection develops out of the blue, something that never happened anymore since taking his blood pressure medicine, and it develops right when he is about to investigate a violent accident. He is flabbergasted as to why he would be sexually excited at a moment like this: “Maybe, he thought, the rock that hit his head had somehow sent its density, its atomic mass migrating down to his groin” (51). He is also disgusted that he is having sexual fantasies about his ex-wife while two dead girls lie before him: “There was blood and guts and brains splattered all over the place, and the cop named Rudy was thinking about his next piece of tail” (51). He absolutely has no idea why he is acting the way he is. This is just one example of his new sexual prowess.

Iktomi is driven by sex, fueled by raw passion, and proud of his manhood. These are the exact qualities that Rudy begins to portray. Once never imagining that he would have an affair with a married woman, he begins sleeping with women everywhere, including his cousin’s wife Stella: “Rudy had also become a backdoor man, a full-fledged, full-blooded *tipi* creeper. With desperate regularity, he had begun his ritual of drinking the life fluids of other men, that primeval ooze clinging to the walls in the scented wells of their wives” (73). While he knows his actions are wrong, he cannot help

himself: he is driven by his sexual urges, as seen in the following: “His penis took him by the hand and led him out into the night in search of someone to do nasty deeds with” (65). This sexually rampant man is much different than the middle-aged protagonist we first meet. Something has definitely changed. The trickster has him in his grasp, which is especially seen by Rudy’s growing obsession of his penis. Not one chapter goes by that he does not discuss his manhood and its current condition at least five or six times. This obsession is in sync with Iktomi, who keeps his penis in a box, like a prized possession. Rudy echoes similar thoughts about his own because he keeps track of who he is sleeping with and how many times they have been intimate. He is extremely proud of his conquests, a strong indication of a trickster. Once almost impotent, Rudy has been transformed into a very virile man.

Rudy, while fueled by sexual passion, also becomes passionate about his work, something that he has not had an interest in for years. He believes that “police work deadened the soul and was really a kind of lobotomy for an educated man” (73). He has been a cop for over fifteen years and has seen enough violence to deaden his soul, a needed quality to survive as a cop. With these deaden feelings, his job becomes routine, boring, and just a money source, which “paid his bills and bought his beer” (74). Because of his job and his boring marriage, Rudy becomes zombie-like, someone who did what they had to in order to survive and operate within society. He really had no interest or hope for the world around him or the future. He was just living in the moment. However, after the rock, he begins to “think like a journalist again after many years of dark and deadly cop work. His eyes were reopened to all that surrounded him” (73). He becomes

interested in the world and cares about his community again. Several times throughout the narrative, he becomes angry over elements destroying his community, such as alcohol: “The very soul of their Indian nation was drowning in booze and everyone was either unconcerned or too drunk to shout out for someone to toss them a lifeline” (119).

As Louis creates the story of Rudy, he slowly moves his readers past the stereotypes placed upon the Indian nations by Western society. When the audience first meets Rudy, he is a dispassionate individual, one who has born the weight of the abuse and violence of reservation life; while he helps limit the violence on the reservation as a tribal cop, he does not actively or vocally try to stop it or the stereotypes the tribe faces every day. He just lives with it and deals with the pain through jokes. However, a change takes place once Iktomi enters his life. The trickster gives him new confidence and reawakens the spirit of Native beliefs within him. Louis shows his audience the importance and impact a cultural character has on an individual. Iktomi is not just a character; he is the spirit of the tribe, one that battles harmful Western ideas.

“Avenging Warrior”

Because of his new budding concern for this community, Rudy decides to be the one who acts instead of just complaining; the “Avenging Warrior” is born. This is a pivotal spot in Louis’s narrative because the protagonist creates a physical replica of Iktomi through his alter-ego and his disguise, a sign that Iktomi’s spirit is breaking down the walls Rudy has built around himself. Rudy is beginning to embrace the trickster and his ways within his life much like Louis’s readers, who have slowly been led away from Western ideas, enchanted by Rudy’s encounters with Iktomi. Louis teases his readers

away from set Western belief through his trickster and his antics, allowing them to rethink Native-Western relations. Gruber defines Louis's purpose in using trickster discourse in his novel, "So just as trickster characters in their complexity transgress categories and classifications, the trickster as narrative principle transgresses (Western) narrative conventions, and in the process liberates the readers' imagination from restrictive distinctions and predetermined expectations" (104). Louis inspires his readers to free themselves from popular culture and to look around with fresh eyes, not judging the world around them but really *seeing* it. He encourages this act of liberation through Rudy as he takes on more and more trickster characteristics. The protagonist is slowly breaking free from the chains that bind him to his passive life, choosing instead to experience life and make constructive decisions, like helping his community.

As he first begins to take an interest in his community and wanting to act upon his vigilante ideas, he believes that he is going crazy: "A middle-aged man who had spent more than sixteen years in law enforcement and then started thinking about going out and burning down a liquor store didn't make a hell of a lot of sense" (39). He does not understand why he goes from a content middle-aged man to wanting to punish those who commit hard crime. This is a dramatic change for a policeman. He knows what would happen if he would get caught; he would end up serving time with those who he had sent to jail, not a promising situation. However, his desire to act overpowers his logic, another trait of Iktomi. Rudy, a very intelligent and logical man, suddenly decides to take on an alter ego to punish evil-doers and to burn down liquor stores in the name of justice. Something definitely has changed in his persona, and Iktomi is the cause of it. The more

sexual conquests and confidence he achieves, the more extreme his desire to “save” his community becomes, until he finally takes on the task personally.

The first sighting of the “Avenging Warrior” takes place when Rudy identifies Corky Red Tail’s killers by one of their green shoelaces. He follows them while they buy beer and head out to the middle of the country alone, all while Rudy follows them without his headlights. While following them, “He felt an overpowering surge of raw sexuality” (61). He is in charge and this knowledge fuels his plan to retaliate for Corky. Once the boys admit the deed, Rudy decides to act. He feels “a bit scared and slightly giddy, like a virgin in a whorehouse, but he did not feel guilty. He’d seen the blood body of their victim and he had to do something. That horrible killing had offended his eyes and had oozed into his brain, etching itself permanently there” (63). The crime made such an impact on Rudy that he must act. Because of Iktomi’s encouragement, Rudy becomes active instead of passive in his life. He puts on an elaborate disguise—covers his skin with shoe polish, puts pantyhose over his face, and covers his body with parched clay soil—and attacks the boys and cracks their knee caps; he then runs. The disguise is very reflective of the trickster himself. He looks “worse than something out of a ‘Freddy Krueger’ movie” and so “damn evil that he knew he could’ve made Arnold Schwarzenegger himself howl and poop his Hollywood panties” (62-3). He describes himself as evil, devil-like, and frightening—qualities of the trickster Iktomi. While this trickster can be fun, obsessed with sex, and helpful as a healer, this is just one side of this mystical character; he can also be mean, vicious, and possessive, with the ability to change forms. Iktomi is present at this moment through Rudy and his alter ego’s disguise.

Iktomi's extreme dark side is displayed through Rudy's grotesque costume and the actions he commits.

Besides looking like an evil character, Rudy is also motivated by the same things as Iktomi: raw sexual power and control. He is in control of the situation, complete control. He controls the boy's fates. If he wanted to, he could kill them and seek complete revenge for Corky. He is running on pure adrenaline and turned on by his control over the situation. When home, "Rudy went directly home and took a long, hot shower . . . He felt light-headed and he was unaware that he was warbling 'Yesterday' by the Beatles out loud" (63). He is so turned on that "He soaped his groin and then masturbated." He is floating on a high, releasing his sexual frustration and giving into Iktomi's sense of justice and humor. While he embraces Iktomi's trickster nature in this movement, he still retains his logical cop persona. He could have killed those kids but he does not. He also knows that he violated their civic rights by taking the situation into his own hands, but he does not care because "he *had* carried out true human justice" (64). While he is very proud of his actions, he also begins to worry that he will be caught, a sign that he is coming down from his trickster high. When the boys do not recognize him, he is relieved: "The boys had not recognized him as the Babe Ruth of the kneecaps. And they'd be able to walk again. That eased his mind . . . They'd confessed to the murder of Corky, so they could roast in hell. All in all, it had been a good day" (71). Rudy has embraced Iktomi's spirit and is delighted in the outcome of his current affairs.

This trickster has enhanced certain qualities of Rudy (libido and interest in life) that have allowed him to move forward in certain areas of his life that have been stagnant

for years. Of course the most obvious change is Rudy's sex drive, going from zero to supercharged in a matter of a few days. This is a fundamental change in Rudy because it makes him feel years younger, creating a confidence within Rudy that his failed marriage, health concerns, and his soul-draining job destroyed. This new confidence allows him to make decisions and choices that he once saw as ridiculous. Because of his renewed sexual drive, he develops a deep interest in Stella, his cousin's wife, whom he eventually becomes exclusively involved with and marries. His self image of himself improves dramatically because of his confidence, all because of Iktomi.

A sense of fun and spontaneity also has entered Rudy's boring and routine life. He is constantly creeping out to meet women, seeking revenge for the innocent, or spending time with his family. By one such moment of "humor or fun," he punishes Wally Trudeau for his uncaring manner about a man getting caught and dying in an animal trap on his land. Since the man who died was a friend of his brothers, Rudy decides to seek revenge on Trudeau's most prized possession: his mini RV. While he and his brother do blow it up later, Rudy first defecates in it while seeking shelter from a freak snow storm: "Halfway there, he doubled over with a tremendous cramp . . . and he did what he had to do right in the middle of the floor of the Winnebago" (258). He even admits his action was childish, but he is really proud: "He didn't know if he'd let the 'Avenging Warrior' take credit for his aromatic act of vengeance or not. He figured it was slightly childish, maybe psychotic, but he still wished that somehow he could be there, a fly on the outhouse wall, when Wally Trudeau got into his RV" (258). This act of defecation is not the usual method of revenge for a middle-aged man, but for the trickster

within Rudy, the prank was hilarious.

While Louis uses the trickster and his humor to “shock” the audience into reexamining the Native American and Western culture’s relationship, he also highlights the healing powers of the trickster humor with Rudy. Gruber explains, “Even though Native cultures underwent massive changes as a consequence of colonization, humor and laughter continue to hold a special place in traditional ceremonies and in everyday life” (9). Humor is a device that allows individuals to gain perspective of a situation by laughing at it, usually with a group of people. Through the act of laughing, all of these people form a community of support, one that offer help through a difficult time. Throughout *Skins*, everyone on the reservation makes jokes about Custer, the Indian nation, reservation life, and sex, all issues with negative meanings. By making these harsh issues funny, Louis’s characters are making them easier to deal and live with. Trickster humor is just one form of humor but an effective one concerning Rudy. As Iktomi becomes more involved in the tribal cop’s life, Rudy experiences more humor (foul humor) in his life than before. Before the trickster, he jokes and has fun but not with wild abandonment; now, he does. He is able to let go of some of his frustrations and just have fun. By letting go of a few of his frustrations, Rudy has deeper issues bubble up to the top, ones he has pushed to the back of his mind, forcing him to deal with hidden emotions over his failed marriage, violent upbringing, and his deadening job. Acknowledging and accepting that these issues exist is the first steps in healing and reestablishing his connection with his community. While Iktomi does not heal Rudy himself, he provides the tools to do so—confidence in one’s self and the vital component

of humor. Louis has his protagonist become more confident through his sexual escapades, which helps Rudy to tackle other areas in his life that are problematic.

Through humor and Iktomi, Louis has effectively transformed Rudy from a depressed middle-aged man on blood pressure medicine with no connection to family, friends, or his job to a vibrant (confident) sex-crazed maniac bent on achieving justice through vigilante means. However, Rudy is not the only transformation Louis is working on. As he redirects his readers' attention from Western influences to a more Native one, he pushes his audience to reconsider the Native world. The more Iktomi become involved in the narrative, the more readers must readjust their view of the continuing story and develop new associations for various subjects, like the purpose of humor and trickster characters within Native cultures. Louis offers his audience the chance to see things from the other side of the spectrum, the side where stereotypes are hurtful and demeaning.

The Changing Tides

So far, the trickster's influence in Rudy's life is positive—renewed libido, self-confidence, and interest in Rudy's job and the confession from the boys involved in Corky's murder.. However, with a trickster character with such extreme moods, change is in the air for the protagonist. This is why Rudy has not had a ceremony done to remove the essence of the trickster from his body and spirit. Right after he hits his head on the rock and notices odd changes in his action, he contacts his second cousin and medicine man Little Eagle and asks his advice, which is to give it [the changes] time and “if things didn't get better, he would hold a healing ceremony for Rudy if he wanted. But only if he wanted” (47). Little Eagle will only perform a ceremony to aid in the removal of Iktomi

when Rudy requests it. The trickster will only disappear if Rudy truly wants to get rid of him; however, at this moment, Rudy is happy with the mythical figure's involvement in his life. Why would he want to ruin that? He constantly says "If it was Iktomi or any other evil spirit messing with him, then he would get a ceremony done" (48). He does not ask for the ceremony because he is happy with his life.

A change begins with his second act as the "Avenging Warrior" when he burns down the local liquor store in revenge against its and the white man's hold on his people and family. Once again when putting on his costume, he feels powerful and in control: "The disguise gave him a sense of freedom that bordered on the erotic" (120). He becomes excited because no one knows who he is, and he truly believes that he is helping his people with his actions. However, he is also conflicted about this second outing: "Part of him felt very guilty and yet another part of him felt giddy with glee, like he was doing something important for his Lakota subgroup of humanity" (120). While the police part of him is upset with the idea of taking law into his own hands, the trickster part is excited to cause mischief and maybe help the tribe through trickery. However, this incident will not turn out like the previous act of vengeance. This act causes harm and becomes pointless in the long run.

After setting fire to the liquor store, he returns home still felling guilty yet excited: "He felt ashamed of himself and at the same time experienced a tinge of pride. Iktomi had really split his soul in two" (124). He cannot fathom why he feels both shame and pride at the same time and concludes that Iktomi is really beginning to mess with his feelings, ideas, and thoughts. He exhibits two extreme feelings at the same time, which

represents the extremity of the trickster character. However, Rudy begins to worry over his split soul. It is not natural to feel torn in two. While Iktomi's involvement in his life has been good, it is beginning to impact his life in unexpected ways, like the development of shame and guilt over his unexpected actions. Rudy begins to feel uncomfortable with these developments and seriously starts to think about removing Iktomi out of him with a ceremony: "He wasn't acting right and he concluded that maybe he should take up Little Eagle on that healing ceremony he had offered" (124). Rudy feels that the spider man has done enough in his life; however, Iktomi is not done with him yet. Through this trickster's intervention in his life, Rudy has moved forward and has begun to deal with the past trauma, allowing him to start down the path of self healing and reconnect with one's culture. To heal, one must face the problem head in which the trickster, through his influence, pushes Rudy into those types of situations.

The fire of the liquor store affected more than the owners; it also affected Mogie, who was on the roof trying to break in when Rudy torched the place: "Mogie's shirt and pants and hair were aflame and he was shrieking, spinning out of control, and trying desperately to climb down from the roof of the building" (127). Because of his actions, Rudy caused his brother pain from severe burns; he lit his brother on fire. While unintentional, he still did it. Because of the event, Rudy doubts and questions Iktomi and the "Avenging Warrior": "he couldn't help thinking about rocks, Iktomi, and Mogie. He understood what an ignorant child's game this whole 'Avenging Warrior' business had become. A silly and deadly game" (132). While he has had fun, he has hurt others. This event helps Rudy to realize how much his brother means to him, despite all the bad that

has passed between them. This realization offers him a chance to reconnect with Mogie and maybe help out with his guilty conscience over starting the fire.

This opportunity with Mogie forces Rudy to recall certain memories to the present, which he has pushed to the back of his mind—the memory of Mogie and their mother. It all comes back when Mogie accuses him of setting the fire and hurting him; the shock of Mogie accusing him makes him remember: “something had been locked away for many years and now it had come to the surface like the shark in *Jaws* rising up to bite the balls of an unexpected swimmer” (154-5). He remembers seeing his brother sexually abuse their mother. This locked away skeleton rattles Rudy to the core, forcing him to tell Mogie that he knows his secret, which was worse than setting the fire. While he is horrified by this memory, he can see how it has affected his life after the event: “Now he knew why he had betrayed Mogie and had tried to screw his wife Serena. He was trying to get even. Now he was starting to believe that ghosts in his subconscious had guided vital moments of his life” (156). He did not cry at his mother’s funeral and also now knows why he tried to sleep with Serena, his brother’s wife. He blamed his mother particularly and Mogie and had to get back at them for hurting him. Rudy loved his family but subconsciously wanted to punish them for their actions.

This realization allows Rudy to face the ghosts and process the event. He turns to his brother, who says, “As to what you seen a long time ago you’re right. You seen what you seen and I’m sorry. Nothing I can do now to change it. You know, I’ve had nightmares about what I did my whole life. That’s the truth” (157). Mogie was young, stupid, and did not think. He did something in the moment, which he now regrets deeply.

He knows what he did was wrong, and that has haunted him, one of the many causes of his alcoholism. Several passages within this novel reveals his distress over his actions. One such example is when he is dreaming after the liquor store fire about his mother taking revenge: “The witch had his mother’s eyes . . . She took one [match] out and ignited it by snapping it against her fingernail. She smiled sadly at him and lowered the match towards his genitals” (130). He dreams about a witch who tortures him sexually, and as the dream continues, the witch becomes his mother. Obviously, this dream is the personification of Mogie’s guilt and shame. When he is in the graveyard by his mother’s grave, he apologizes, “Mom,’ he whispered. ‘I’m sorry’” (164). While he is sorry, this memory haunts him almost thirty years later. His actions embarrass and shame him in front of his family, especially Rudy.

Because both men admit this event happened, they are able to discuss it, forgive each other, and move on. After Mogie confesses and breaks down, asking for Rudy’s forgiveness, Rudy himself begins to cry, crying for all that has affected his life:

His own nerves were strung like a tightly wound rubber band. He let everything go and started bawling too. He was crying for Mogie and he was crying for their mom. He even cried for their Indian nation. He cried for their dad and he cried because he hadn’t cried at his mom’s funeral.

But Rudy mostly cried for himself. Huge tears poured from his eyes, and he sobbed so hard that torrents of mucous flooded down from his nose.

(162)

Rudy sobs and cries for all the bad that has gone on in his life, in his brother’s, in his

family's, and in the Native American world. He cries because he releases all the pent up anger and frustrations that he has held inside for so long; he lets it all go, freeing his spirit and road block in healing. After this clarifying moment, Rudy forgives Mogie, and they "hugged like brothers who hadn't seen each other in many years" (162). They truly have not seen each other for years until now, both forgiving each other for their actions. Rudy has his brother back, and that makes all the difference.

Once he and Mogie makeup, Rudy begins to wonder what really caused him to recall that lost memory from so long ago. He finally decides or suspects that the "fall on the rock or Iktomi has something to do with this recollection of something long forgotten" (155). Iktomi, the trickster, delights in messing around in his life forcing him to have a raging hard-on for any women that walks by or to crack knee caps in the name of vengeance or cause old memories to resurface. Each of these has caused problems in his life but result with surprisingly good items. Because of his raging libido, he beds and begins a relationship with Stella, which becomes monogamous late in the novel; his libido also makes him more confident in himself. Taking the law into his own hands allows him to feel like he is doing something for his community instead of sitting ideally on the wayside. Setting his brother on fire allows the two to reconnect and start over. The trickster's influence in Rudy's life may have unexpected twists and turns; however, this influence has guided Rudy on the path of healing. Iktomi has forced Rudy to face the past and conquer past demons, allowing him to move on in his life.

Mogie and Rudy begin to act like brothers not enemies or acquaintances, and both make efforts to continue their new relationship. Mogie stops insulting Rudy while Rudy

tries to understand where Mogie is coming from. Rudy tries very hard and even tells his brother about the “Avenging Warrior,” the only person he lets know about his alter ego: “I’m just a friggin’ vigilante, a secret stupid vigilante doing what I think is right for our people . . . I’m sick and tired of what I see on the rez and I’m trying to change it best I can . . . I don’t want to sit here all day trying to explain something I have a hard time explaining” (186-7). He trusts his brother enough now to tell his secret; while Mogie makes fun of him, Rudy still tells him, despite their history. While they are on better footing, Rudy has another reason to preserve his relationship with this brother; he’s told that Mogie is dying from cirrhosis of the liver because of his drinking. This information inspires Rudy to make the time left worthwhile with his brother. So, they get drunk, seek revenge on someone by pipe bombing an RV, and make plans to give George Washington on Mount Rushmore a nosebleed. They make up for lost time.

While Rudy has had an interesting life since his encounter with Iktomi, he begins to feel uneasy about the violent urges he has occasionally: “Rudy Yellow Shirt really felt like cracking more knees with his baseball bat, and that scared him. Jesus, he wondered, just how had he come to be so damn far out of control” (178). He wants to be angry and seek revenge, which hasn’t bothered him until Mogie gets hurt. His actions had never hurt someone close to him before. Through this event, Rudy realizes that something within him is unusual. He has blamed Iktomi for all of his strange behaviors lately, but soon realizes that this opinion might be wrong: “He also knew it was getting a little lame to blame all his crazy thoughts on Iktomi” (178). These crazy thoughts he has been having are hidden behaviors Rudy encountered during his childhood, released by the

trickster's influence. He grew up in a very violent household and community. He saw his dad beat up his family with no qualms about it. This pattern of behavior exists within Rudy because of his upbringing; however, he has suppressed it because he did not want to deal with his aggression and anger towards his father. Now that Iktomi has forced him to face events from his past, the aggression has come to the surface in the form of violent urges. He, however, feels that he can control these urges and does seek help and guidance; this decision comes to haunt Rudy later on when he rapes his ex-wife.

While Rudy heals and faces demons from his past, he still hankers for his almost ex-wife Vivianne: "He dreamed of his Anishinaabe wife Vivianne returning to their happy intertribal home" (181). While he is still with Stella (now exclusively), Rudy still harbors unresolved feelings for his ex, ones that he desperately wants to discuss. Vivianne represents a section of his past that was safe or neutral. While they were not overly happy, they were never overly unhappy either. Louis has his protagonist yearn for his wife because Rudy yearns for the routine of his safe life that he had with her. His life now consists of extreme ups and downs, but Rudy wants routine again which he wants through Vivianne. As his relationship develops with Stella, Rudy becomes scared with the seriousness of it: "She [Stella] loved him too, she said, and lately she'd started dropping hints about marriage. That made him a little nervous in the service" (180). Stella wants to become official through marriage, which frightens Rudy because at the unpredictability of this new adventure. With Vivianne, there were no surprises, but with Stella, everything is unknown. So when Rudy receives a message from his ex wanting to talk, he jumps at the chance. However, Iktomi, in a roundabout way, warns Rudy not to

go.

Right before Rudy leaves to see Vivianne, Louis has the trickster warn him with a whirlwind and tumbleweed: “Then, a sudden, harsh wind began to blow . . . A large whirlwind spun through a muddy part of the yard where grass refused to grow . . . A huge, dead tumbleweed was hurled against the screen where it imbedded itself . . . The tumbleweed had vanished” (202-3). While the tumbleweed sticks to the door in front of him, he remembers the night when his car was suddenly attacked by tumbleweeds: “He remembered that night because it was the first time he’d gotten an uninvited boner since he’d been young, and full of piss and vinegar” (203). This night marks Iktomi’s first appearance in Rudy’s adult life. Because the tumbleweed happened at the same time as his erection, the audience can safely assume that Louis links Iktomi and the tumbleweeds together. This association pushes the readers to see that Rudy is being warned by the trickster through the disappearing tumbleweed. More hints that Iktomi sent this message are the suddenness of it and the mystical way the tumbleweed suddenly disappears. Being the trickster, these clues all fit Iktomi’s nature. However, what makes the message a warning? Rudy displays the answer to this with his reaction to the event: “Something about the weed and its disappearance bothered him. He began to have stirrings of negative feelings about going up to see Vivianne” (203). Obviously, something will go wrong if Rudy goes to see Vivianne; however, tired of cosmic figures or people telling him what to do, he goes anyway.

His meeting with Vivianne turns sour from the very beginning because she serves him divorce papers, which both sadden and anger him. He wanders about for awhile, both

lusting after his ex and cussing at her, a dangerous combination, especially with the trickster's imprint on his spirit. He returns to the hotel, finds Vivianne, and then rapes her, clouded in the emotions of lust and frustration: "Rudy grabbed her arm and shoved her down on the bed. She was on her back, but she bicycled her legs, trying to kick his head off his shoulders . . . he grabbed her ankles and rolled her over on her stomach, pulled her bathrobe up to her waist and started to spank her plump bottom with his hungry hand" (217). After raping her, he tries to convince himself that they had made love like a married couple instead of what he did do. However, especially when Vivianne says no—"Rudy, no . . . God damn you, you bastard." It was not a weak *no*," he knows he raped her despite his excuse (217). The way the audience knows this is displayed through how Rudy feels after the deed: "But he was no conquering hero. He felt depleted, a little guilty, and strangely displeased. What he had just done came horrifying close to rape, even if they were still legally married. No, it was rape, period" (218). He realizes that he has acted like all those whom he has arrested for spousal abuse; he crossed a boundary and channeled his father, which scares him. These sudden violent urges that have come to light within Rudy are ignited by his anger and lust, two very powerful emotions. The violence, which he has internalized, that he witnessed and experienced as a child materializes in his actions now. This is the first time that he has become violent with someone close to him, except for Mogie (an occasion fist fight between the two is common). Since Rudy has not acknowledged and worked through the violence from his youth, it is now manifesting itself in his everyday life. Since Iktomi has entered his adult life, he has been increasingly more violent (cracking kneecaps, burning down buildings,

and raping his wife). While the trickster does enflame his emotions and ideas, he does not make Rudy act; he does that all by himself.

Healing

Raping Vivianne scares Rudy enough that he finally seeks out Ed Little Eagle to perform a healing ritual on him through *yuwipi* and *inipi* (sweat lodge) ceremonies. He finally decides to go through with the ceremony because he “wants to be cured of all the spirit-guided negative events that were happening in his life. He wanted to kick Iktomi’s spidery madness out of his life” (224). He is frightened of what he may do next and is tired of all the craziness that has happened since hitting his head, so he attends an *inipi* (sweat lodge) ceremony and a *yuwipi* (Lakota/Sioux healing ceremony).

The sweat lodge ceremony serves as a purification ceremony for the men taking part, a ceremony that strips them of their everyday struggles and preps them for the healing ceremony. While not excited about the sweat lodge ceremony, he participates and is excited when it’s over. However, he is suddenly frightened of attending the healing ceremony: “He wished that he had not agreed to participate in the ceremony. It reminded him of trying to brake on black ice. No control . . . *Iktomi*, the spider, was in the room for sure” (226). Rudy is frightened of losing more control of his life than he already has. Since the spider has entered his life, he has lost control in various aspects of his life, following his penis and vigilante wiles where they lead. Since he does not know how the healing will go, he does not want to face the trickster, afraid of what events will transpire. But, he does go through with the ceremony.

The healing ceremony entails a medicine man being tied up in a special blanket

while he prays for a specific group of people. While this is happening, the participants of the ceremony pray for each other in complete darkness. Rudy is afraid of the unknown as the ceremony begins, once again commenting on the lack of control: “The blackness seemed chaotic and dangerous to him” (228). As the ceremony begins, the participants are covered in darkness where miraculous things begin to happen: green and blue sparks dance above the men, spirits appear to the men, buffalo stampede through the room, and dreams overtake some of the participants. Rudy is frightened when a spirit / figure emerges before him: “For a moment Rudy believed he saw a big, hairy man with red, blazing eyes. The hairy man was Indian-dancing and shaking gourd rattles wildly a few feet to the left of him” (229). While readers are not sure what this figure represents, they can safely conclude that this hairy man has to do with Rudy’s struggles in life. His obstacles confront him in this ceremony, forcing him to face them, which he does: “He [Rudy] stared hard and the hairy man vanished” (229). The man vanishes because Rudy stands up to him, forcing him to retreat. By facing his struggles, he moves on to the next event in the ceremony.

Once the hairy man leaves, a buffalo or *tatanka* enters the room and stands directly in front of Rudy, making him wonder: “Rudy wondered if the spirits had driven him totally insane. Nothing had prepared him for this. Nothing” (229). The buffalo, the life-giver of Native American tribes for centuries, guides Rudy from his terrified state into a dream-like consciousness after breathing on him: “He [Rudy] felt its fur, felt its hot breath on him . . . Rudy began to weep like a woman, and then an unexpected calmness enveloped his heart, mind, and spirit” (229). He is calmed by the buffalo’s spirit and

transported from the ceremony site into a dream world, one filled with all types of plants, animals, and women:

Then he opened his eyes and saw a green valley shimmering and filled with luxuriant emerald plants and trees of every description. Birds, animals, women, and even the flowing water were singing a song of eternal happiness. The nearby hills were thick with sunflowers and wild clover, and small, friendly animals were everywhere Rudy looked. He assumed that he must have died and gone to the spirit world. (229-230)

The world Rudy enters is a paradise, one ruled by nature and peace, which is why he thinks he has died. However, this peaceful world is interrupted by a gigantic white granite head rising to tower above the beautiful landscape: it is the head of George Washington on Mount Rushmore.

To Rudy, “it was the symbol of the European retards and rejects who came to this new world to own mother earth . . . offending and desecrating everything that was holy to him as a redman . . . It was a filthy intruder in his beautiful valley. He felt degraded by this *wasicu* symbol of the murder and cultural enslavement of his wild and beautiful Indian people” (230). His perfect dream world is destroyed by the granite head, who takes everything the Earth has and destroys it. He understands that this is a monument celebrating the Western world’s destruction of the Native world. This monument celebrates the destruction of his people, culture, and beliefs; he believes that statue is the “truest representation of evil he had ever seen” (230). Once he makes this conclusion, a woman dressed in official Native garb appears and hands him a bow and an arrow, which

he takes and shoots at the monument, striking Washington's nose, causing a nosebleed before the statue crumbles. After this event, the "beautiful Indian woman gave a war cry and then walked up and touched him on the chest" and kisses him. He has tackled and destroyed the evil invaders in this perfect world and is rewarded by a beautiful figure with a kiss; however, this woman isn't who Rudy thinks she is.

While kissing Rudy, the woman shape shifts into Iktomi, the trickster: "Rudy saw that he was lovingly embracing a huge, rancid, ugly spider the size of a human . . . *Iktomi!* He was French-kissing *Iktomi* and the trickster had sucked something from his spirit, his body, his soul" (231). As he kisses the woman/spider, Rudy feels something being pulled from him. Iktomi sucks all trickster traits out of him through the kiss. Iktomi's essence has left Rudy, leaving him physically the way he was before the rock incident. Proof that Iktomi has detached himself from the "Emperor of Erections" is Rudy's inability to have an erection after the healing ceremony, as seen when being intimate with Stella: "she went to work, manipulating him in every conceivable grope . . . Up and down, left and right, sideways, one-handed, two-handed, she really choked the chicken, but nothing happened" (236). This scene is vastly different than before when he would become erect at a passing thought or image. Louis has his protagonist lose his libido to demonstrate that Iktomi has really left the man, once again becoming the man before the rock incident. Slightly alarmed, Rudy tries to masturbate later, only to discover he is unable to achieve an erection: "He pounded his reluctant pud for forty-five minutes trying to make it hard. It simply would not stand up and defend itself" (236). After this incident, he realizes that he once again was "a middle-aged man on blood

pressure pills” (236). The sexual prowess he has long enjoyed is gone, leaving behind an impotent man.

The healing ceremony gave the trickster the opportunity to finally leave Rudy, but through his time with Iktomi, Rudy reclaims his male power and is able to move on with his life. When he had a raging hard-on, his confidence in himself grew, allowing him to gain control over his life; he refocused with his community through the various circumstances that the spider-man brings into his life. His renewed interests in his family, sex life, job, friends, and community become vibrant when Iktomi was around, but Rudy doesn't lose these new found interests when the trickster leaves; they remain part of his life, just more manageable.

While the trickster's essence no longer governs within Rudy, his influences still radiates within Rudy's life; Rudy does many things after the healing ceremony that suggests he is in control of his life and able to move past the obstacles of his past, all that exhibit hints of the trickster. While Rudy really enjoyed his renewed sex life, he admits, “He had to admit a large part of him was relieved that he no longer had a teenager's lust. Rudy's penis had been nothing but a medium-small, tubular shark hell-bent on a recent feeding frenzy. He didn't miss its frantic agonies, its desperate yearnings, or its ephemeral glories” (301). He glad to be a regular middle-aged man with a beautiful fiancé (Stella). However, his raging libido leads him to Stella, which deepened into a strong connection. When his sexual appetite disappears, the connection with Stella is still there, providing a foundation on which to build a relationship for his future: “Some days *Iktomi's* gift of the hard-on was taken back, but that just opened up other avenues of

pleasure between Stella and him” (300). Their connection goes beyond sex, a strong indicator that Rudy will have a successful relationship with her. She even helps him control his diet, drinking, and smoking, which permits him to cut back on his medication, allowing his impotence to disappear.

Besides his budding relationship with Stella, his relationship with his family and his dedication to his work improve dramatically. Rudy is able to deal with his family’s traumatic past and confront Mogie about his actions toward their mother because of his vigilante act. Once he confronts Mogie, he is able to forgive him and release all his pent-up anger from his past, allowing him to communicate and embrace his family once again, especially when Mogie dies. His entire family bonds over his death, especially Rudy and Vinny, who admits to his older brother that he is HIV positive. By talking to each other, Rudy’s family forms a support group for each other. Because he has this support, he is able to deal effectively with his grief and move on with Stella.

Two days after Mogie’s funeral, Rudy returns to work with a new sense of determination: “two days later, he strapped on his holster. Wild Indians were waiting for him to arrest them. And after he’d spent the day locking skins in jail, he would have Stella to look forward too” (300). He no longer looks at work as a soul killer but takes pride in his work. He does not dread work but does his best with his job. He comments, “He did his police work with efficiency” (301). He does his job well and is proud of it. The trickster’s humor allows Rudy to relax and regain his male power (seen especially through his sexual exploits) and confidence in himself, family, and his job.

However, one thing that Rudy is still unresolved about is his vigilante’s actions

and the vision he is given by Iktomi as a parting gift. Why does Louis add the vision to his novel? He adds it because Rudy isn't completely healed yet. Iktomi has brought Rudy far on his healing path with the tools he has given the tribal cop. Rudy has used these tools to help himself move beyond the obstacles of his past and regain his male power within his life. However, there is one last step Rudy must complete, which is revealed in Rudy's vision: "He had been given a vision and now he had to decide what it meant, what he was to do to help his people, to help himself" (232). Regaining his male power and control within his life has affected mostly Rudy; no one else has really benefitted from the trickster. The final step in Rudy's healing is to give back to his community, sharing his new positive attitude with everyone else. By helping others, he, in return, realigns himself with his community and the support system it offers. However, the trickster means for Rudy to do more than simply help his immediate community but help his entire Native community.

Rudy stands up for himself, his beliefs, and his culture by giving George Washington on Mount Rushmore a nosebleed. Mogie's dying wish was to give Washington a nosebleed and that obviously is what his vision meant. He is supposed to show his disdain of Western society by defacing its monument, protesting the violation, stereotypes, and trauma imposed upon all Native people. While Rudy is uncomfortable with the idea, he plans to complete this task since he promised his brother. Standing beneath Washington's head, he has a sudden realization and makes a decision: "He [Rudy] doubted if this act would do anything positive for his people. It would do nothing for him, except get the promise [to his brother] off his back. Nobody would even connect

that act of vandalism specifically to Indians” (305). He decides not to do the task, making his *own* decision without the influence of others; he exerts his male power through his decision. After making this decision, “he felt he had tossed away his guilt over Mogie. He felt he had also discarded *Iktomi*’s hold on him. And, finally, he hoped he had thrown away his alter ego, the ‘Avenging Warrior.’ Rudy Yellow Shirt felt a huge flood of spiritual relief” (305). By making his own decisions, he is able to let go of the rest of the guises he was hiding behind—Mogie, *Iktomi*, and the “Avenging Warrior”—to become the person in charge on his life.

Now that Rudy is in control of his own life, he still feels incomplete, like something was unfinished: “For once, he felt almost complete. Almost, but not quite. Something was still missing” (305). He realizes that *he* wants to vandalize Washington’s nose, not because others want him to. He wants to do it for him. He wants to demonstrate his feeling about Native-Western relations, hoping to inspire others to speak their minds, forming a chain of political protesting. Of his own free will, Rudy continues *Iktomi*’s legacy of protesting the unjust treatment of Native Americans by giving George Washington a bloody nose: “He said a brief prayer and stared down into the can of the brilliant red, oil-based paint. It looked so much like blood . . . A wide path of red paint stretched down Washington’s face, from his forehead to his chin” (306). He declares his support and belief in his Native culture and community, hoping to inspire a future generation of Native Americans to stand up to Western society. This act is a beginning for Rudy; he has finally moved beyond the obstacles hidden in his past to a place where he makes his own decisions, is content with several areas of his life, and is at peace with

himself and his community.

Louis uses the trickster humor of Iktomi to help aid Rudy on his healing path, to deal with all of the traumatizing events of his past and to regain his male power. As Rudy becomes possessed by Iktomi, he takes on the trickster's characteristics—sex-crazed, violent, playful, and foolish—which causes him to regain confidence in himself and his male power. These two new found traits give him the strength he needs to put past events behind him indefinitely. As Rudy travels along the path of healing, Louis's readers also travel down a path of discovery. They are shocked into a state of disbelief by the trickster humor used by Louis in his narrative. Through Rudy, he forces his audience to recognize the impact—violence and alcoholism—of stereotypes on some Native people. Many are crushed by these preconceived ideas and are never able to brush them off. Rudy is able to push through the stereotypes placed upon him and his community to eventually speak his mind at the end of the novel, where he gives George Washington a bloody nose in the name of justice. Louis uses humor to connect his readers with his characters, forming a sense of community through laughing together. His purpose in this is to push his audience to reconsider the Native world with fresh eyes and demonstrate the importance of healing within trickster humor.

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