

SHAPING AN AUDIENCE IN AMERICAN INDIAN WOMEN'S LITERATURE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	4
Chapter One.....	9
Chapter Two.....	20
Chapter Three.....	35
Conclusion.....	71
Bibliography.....	74

INTRODUCTION

Much has been said in popular media regarding the alleged February 8, 2009 occurrence of domestic violence between singers Chris Brown and Rihanna. Radio and television talk show hosts have been discussing what this latest report of abuse means for the African American community and for our wider American culture. On March 19, 2009, the Oprah Winfrey show aired her interview with men who admit to having beaten women, and she provided these staggering statistics: “one in three high school students have been—or will be—involved in an abusive relationship” and “every day, three women die as [a] result of abuse—that's nearly 1,100 killed every year.”¹ Oprah emphasizes the statistics regarding teenagers by calling the attention being paid to the Chris Brown affair a teaching moment for young people: “The message this story sends to teen girls and boys everywhere is disturbing, and it is also dangerous [...]. We need to try to evolve from this moment ... use this as a moment to allow our society to begin to grow.” One of her guests, author and activist Kevin Powell, who himself is in 20 years of recovery from being a domestic abuser, and who has been working for the past 18 years with men across the country to end violence against women, adds that ending and evolving from this national and cultural American epidemic—which, he notes, spans from black urban neighborhoods to American Indian reservations—must be executed by men. Powell says, “every man must step up if they see the men around

¹ Winfrey, Oprah. “Why Men Abuse Women.” The Oprah Winfrey Show 20 March 2009: <<http://www.oprah.com/article/oprahshow/20090319-tows-domestic-violence>>.

them engaging in abusive behavior.” He adds, “Your silence is [a form of] agreement and participation.”

I open with this reference to recent events in popular culture and media to help situate my discussion about American Indian women’s literature as a useful and valuable tool that can guide men to move from a culture of domestic violence and abusive behavior toward personal healing and communal harmony. While I acknowledge that the violence between two famous teen idols may be shocking, and while I recognize that the reactions and discussions surrounding the issue are important—as such conversations suggest that popular cultural figures recognize the roles they play and the effects they have on the greater American consciousness—I also acknowledge and recognize that the narrative of misogyny, oppression, abuse, and destruction that now pervades the news media is sadly an old and all too familiar narrative to Indian people, specifically to American Indian women. And while Kevin Powell and Oprah Winfrey may be right that, within popular culture, we are in “a moment to allow our society to begin to grow,” and that the work to end domestic violence requires the voices and participation of men, the work in American Indian communities has already begun with women, particularly with the work of American Indian women writers. The groundwork for speaking about, dealing with, and healing from violence and abuses between men and women has been set down in American Indian women’s literature—which is often composed of storylines and scenes detailing

abuses within the home—but, as this groundwork has been set by women, and as two genders cooperate with one another to achieve and maintain balance, at least within many traditional tribal worldviews, the work for mapping out a path evolving from personal destruction to societal creation within Indian communities requires the active participation of a male audience.

In her article, “The Familiar Face of Genocide: Internalized Oppression among American Indians,” Lisa M. Poupart argues that the “acts of genocide committed against Indian people are founded on and legitimated by Western constructions of abject Otherness” (Poupart 87), and that “like Others who internalize the dominant subject position, American Indians sometimes express pain, grief, and rage internally toward ourselves and externally within our families and communities” (89). The roots of that Othering exist in memory—“five hundred years of assimilation and acculturation” handed down through and manifested in “devastating social ills including alcoholism, family violence, incest, sexual assault, fetal-alcohol syndrome, homicide, and suicide” (88)—but, she notes, such devastating memories also reside next to memories of ancestral teachings:

Indian people also live in a sort of cultural double consciousness, as portions of our traditional subjective identities persist in the preserved beliefs of our ancestors practiced today. Through the telling of our experiences and stories in a continued oral tradition and through the preservation of traditional ways, many

Indian people resist the dominant culture's subject position, knowing that we, like our Grandmothers and Grandfathers, have not deserved a history of violence and genocide. Moreover, our traditions preserved many stories recounting the subjugation of our ancestors and these stories were passed along through generations creating an alternative interpretation, or knowledge, of the harms inflicted by white society. (Poupart 88)

The oral tradition may preserve the history of subjugation in tribal memory, but it also offers lessons, guides, or methods to escape from the bondage of that history in order to move into a present and future culture of healing and freedom.

In Chapter One, I address the problematic effects of internalized oppression on the oral tradition, and I present the ways in which American Indian women storytellers combat and subvert these problems by coming to voice and telling their stories. In Chapter Two, I argue that the use of the oral tradition in contemporary American Indian women's literature opens opportunities for reading feminist egalitarian messages for a male readership. And in Chapter Three, I offer close readings of three novels, Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony, Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine, and Betty Louise Bell's Faces in the Moon, to illustrate how, directly or indirectly, women writers may be addressing and instructing men toward a return to Indian familial and communal values. Bell's Faces in the Moon, which is the most indirect address, focuses on the absent father, and calls on men to participate in the movement to save families. Indeed, all

three novels reflect the importance for men to be part of saving families, and they offer examples of the kind of male their messages need to reach.

Kevin Powell makes a clear point that our silence is our contribution to destruction in our communities. He calls on every man to “step up” if they see the men around them engaging in abusive and destructive behavior. But stepping up also carries with it some responsibilities, as it means being prepared to give those men who inflict abuse on others some direction or a way out of their oppressive patterns. In the following pages, I hope to demonstrate that American Indian women writers articulate some ways out. Their novels shape useful messages for men through their depiction of approachable protagonists, and they go even further by offering secure male role models who set paths for the protagonists and the rest of us to follow.

CHAPTER ONE

The oral tradition may preserve the history of subjugation in tribal memory, and it also offers lessons, guides, or methods to escape from the bondage of that history in order to move into a present and future culture of healing and freedom. The oral tradition, though, is not without its own issues; it too is marred by what Lisa M. Poupart calls the internalized dominant subject position, a position that results in American Indians expressing rage and oppression “internally toward ourselves and externally within our families and communities” (Poupart 89). Through novels that incorporate the oral tradition, American Indian women storytellers are working to subvert and repeal patterns of subjugation and internalized oppression by coming to voice, and telling stories to a resisting male audience.

An example of internalized oppression can be found in the story, “A Woman’s Fight,” which voices the angst Indian men may feel regarding the power and role of women and the balances between the sexes even within tribal communities. In the story, Crow storyteller Pretty Shield recalls that when she was eight years old her band had moved their village and had been setting up their lodges when a scout signaled that the enemy, the Lacota [sic], were coming. During much running about, the young Pretty Shield notices that the space between two lodges had provided a way in for the band’s horses, but that the space would need to be closed in order to “keep [the] horses from getting out, and the Lacota from getting in” (Allen, Spider 32). She does not

finish building her lodge, however, because Corn-woman finds her and takes her to her mother for safety, but not before praising Pretty Shield's bravery: "'Ho! Ho!' she cried out, 'here is a brave little woman! She has shut the wide gap with her lodge. Ho! Ho!'" (32). When she is safely with her mother, lying behind a traveling pack, out of the line of fire, Pretty Shield watches Strikes-two, "a woman sixty years old, riding around the camp on a gray horse. She carried her root-digger, and she was singing her medicine-song, as though Lacota bullets and arrows were not flying around her" (33). Strikes-two instructs the camp to sing these words: 'They are whipped. They are running away,' and she tells them to keep singing until she returns. Strikes-two rides out, "straight at the Lacota, waving her root-digger and singing that song," and the Lacota, who become "afraid of her medicine," turn and run away (33). Pretty Shield concludes: "The fight was won, and by a woman" (33).

At the end of this story, Pretty Shield attaches commentary that alludes to the internalized male dominant subject position: "The men never tell [this story]. They do not like to hear about it" (33). The men's desire not to hear the story suggests that they may not value women's collective agency: the young Pretty Shield arranges her lodge to help keep the horses in and the enemy out, and Corn-woman carries her to safety and praises her as a 'brave little woman!'; and Strikes-two, with her warrior's chant, and her instructions to her band to sing her chant, leads the band to victory. Pretty Shield's male audience may also not wish to hear this story because a woman won the fight not

with physical weapons but with the suggestive power of her song's words. For Pretty Shield, the men's refusal to tell the story and their refusal to hear it told problematizes a fair or honest representation of women heroes and may continue the patterns of subjugation women are still working to correct. These patterns are continued through the attempted silencing of this story, a silencing that in turn risks losing Strikes-two's song, which is preserved in memory and rendered to the tribe through the oral tradition of storytelling. However, Pretty Shield's resolve is clear: though the men of her tribe may not wish to hear her story, she tells it anyway—"I am going to tell you what happened" (33)—and by doing so she recognizes, upholds, and preserves, through story, this victory won by a woman.

Pretty Shield leaves us with an important observation within the oral tradition, that audiences determine the stories they want to hear—"The men never tell about it. They do not like to hear about it" (33)—a desire that suggests, within an oral tradition, the audience guides the storyteller toward what kind of story to tell. I contend that there are valuable lessons about survival and victory for men, families, and whole communities in American Indian women's stories like Pretty Shield's; contemporary American Indian women writers are shaping messages for changing the patterns of internalized oppression, messages rendered in a literature that is born out of the oral tradition. Like Pretty Shield, contemporary American Indian women storytellers Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich, and Betty Louise Bell refuse to remain silent about the

problems facing today's Indian families and communities: "[they are] going to tell [us] what happened" (Allen 33), what may be happening in some Indian communities, and how to correct the patterns of what is happening. Three novels, Silko's Ceremony, Erdrich's Love Medicine, and Bell's Faces in the Moon, reflect a history of the oral tradition; because of the valuable role audiences play within the oral tradition, the male protagonists of the first two novels can be aligned with a male reading audience in order to reveal how that male audience can participate in mapping out a path evolving from destruction to creation within Indian families and communities, and the female protagonist in the final novel demonstrates that, if there is an absence of men, women can recall a history of male leadership to create new forms of leadership.

The protagonists in all three novels are introduced as children orphaned by their mothers and taken in by family members who do not want them. In Ceremony, Tayo is raised by Auntie, who puts effort into making him know her disdain: "she could maintain distance between Rocky, who was her pride, and this other, unwanted child" (Silko 65). Lipsha, the son of June, the woman whose death is at the center of Love Medicine, is taken in, like his mother, by Marie Kashpaw. About June, Marie says: "I didn't want June Morrissey when they first brought her to my house. But I ended up keeping her..." (85). And about being taken in by Marie, without any knowledge yet that his mother is June, Lipsha says: "I consider Grandma Kashpaw my mother, even though she just took me in like any old stray" (Erdrich 39). And in Faces in the Moon,

when Lucie is left with her aunt Lizzie, Lizzie asks Lucie's mother, "'How long ya planning to leave her?' [a] question [that] had little courtesy in it" (Bell 77). Though the aunts in these novels may be reluctant to take in and raise their nieces and nephews, the aunts do take them, raise them, and feed them with food and nourish them with stories.

The relationship between an authority figure who is reluctant and the child who is initially disdained can, at its onset, be full of tension, beginning with an untrusting child protagonist who may not want to listen to lessons or stories told by the authority figure. When the protagonists are aligned with a male audience, we can connect the protagonists to Pretty Shield's notion of a male audience's reluctance to hear certain stories: the protagonists may not want to hear stories that offer instruction from someone with whom they are not yet comfortable or stories in which the protagonist or his or her natural parents are rendered in a problematic or troublesome light. In Ceremony, Love Medicine, and Faces in the Moon, there is an important reversal of Pretty Shield's reluctant male audience, because the orphaned protagonists abide by the lessons they receive through the stories. This dynamic may figure the author-reader relationship, as the receptive child protagonist may act as a role model to the male reader on the issue of how to receive stories told by women. By drawing on the relationships between the storytellers and the 'unwanted' child protagonists in these novels, and by focusing on the depictions of men, we find that Silko, Erdrich, and Bell

shape in their narratives a meaningful message intended to reach across gendered borders. They appeal to men to return to family and community values in order to affirm the family structure. Strengthening the family is a central theme in each novel as the families in all three are fractured. Part of the protagonists' challenges in Ceremony and Love Medicine is to re-enter the family in order to reconstruct it. Tayo comes down from the isolation of the ranch and returns to Old Grandma and Auntie. Lipsha delivers his father to freedom but returns to his family. In Faces in the Moon, Lucie reconstructs her family by correcting the paternal lineage in her family's documented history. While calling for the strengthening of families, the authors also remind men to be vigilant of destructive patterns found in the actions of men like Emo, King, and J.D.

In order for borders or divisions to exist, there must also be places where those who are divided from one another eventually come together. For Lucie, that place is the kitchen table: "I was raised on the voices of women. Indian women. The kitchen table was first a place of remembering, a place where women came and drew their lives from each other" (Bell 4). The kitchen table is also a place of sharing and remembering in Love Medicine. When Albertine returns home after June's death, she finds her mother and aunt at the table preparing a meal and "so involved in their talk" (Erdrich 12). The kitchen table serves as more than a setting for meals, however. In Reinventing the Enemy's Language, Gloria Bird and Joy Harjo speak of storytelling at the kitchen table in this way: "Many revolutions, ideas, songs, and stories have been born around the

table of our talk made from grief, joy, sorrow, and happiness. We learn the world and test it through interaction and dialogue with each other, beginning as we actively listen through the membrane of the womb wall..." (Bird and Harjo 19). Bird and Harjo seem to acknowledge only the woman-centered narrative-sharing experience, as they suggest that women's dialogues begin between mother and daughter, in the womb. Their approach also implies no divisions, no borders; the women at their table are likely to be allies. Kathleen Donovan writes: "Women have always talked to each other, bell hooks points out; the necessity now is to find out how and what women communicate across cultural, class, sexual, national, and gendered borders. All of these factors influence the process hooks terms the 'revolutionary gesture' of 'coming to voice'" (Donovan 8).

The idea that women are the audience for this revolutionary gesture formed in women's literature remains too limiting, as it does not address what women communicate across gendered borders, to male audiences. Nor does it allow for the possibility that, despite Pretty Shield's observations that some men may not want to hear stories told by women, some male readers may wish to and may benefit from hearing the stories and messages women have to share. Speaking to a likeminded group that excludes a male audience can be even more challenging, and may risk losing important aspects of the story, if audiences help to shape narratives as is suggested by the Pueblo theory of audience: "storytelling always includes the audience, the listeners. In fact, a great deal of the story is believed to be inside the listener; the storyteller's role

is to draw the story out of the listeners” (Silko, Yellow 50). Indeed, this notion that the story is in the listener can be read in Faces in the Moon, when Lucie reflects on her mother’s storytelling: “My contribution to the story was to pretend innocence and listen, my eyes and mouth wide. ‘Shut your mouth, it gonna freeze that a way,’ my mother said from across the table. I pressed my lips tight and listened with my eyes, watching for a new detail in the turn of a mood, listening for the story in my mother’s face” (Bell 4). In this scene, Lucie is instructed on how to listen, how to act as an audience, even learning how to read the storyteller’s techniques, and perhaps learning how to tell stories herself. In Love Medicine, Albertine also learns to be a silent listener when she remembers June as a “good aunt to have” because she “talked to [Albertine] the way she talked to grown-up people and never told [her] to play outside when [she] wanted to sit at the edge of a conversation” (Erdrich 8-9). Albertine also becomes an agent for informing Lipsha about his identity, and for a moment, she nearly becomes a female storyteller with Lipsha as her male audience: “My voice was serious, all of a sudden, and it scared him. He moved away from me, suspicious. I was going to tell him what I’d heard from hanging at the edge of the aunts’ conversations. I was going to tell him that his mother was June” (Erdrich 39). But, guided by her audience’s response, Lipsha’s physical gestures—“He moved away from me, suspicious”—Albertine refrains from telling Lipsha the story of his mother, as an example of what is potentially lost in Albertine’s failed attempt to reach across gendered borders.

The Pueblo theory of audience—that the audience helps to shape the story—may only work for oral storytelling, as it implies that the storyteller is conscious of the audience. There is certainly an oral storytelling element in these novels: Lucie is told to close her mouth, and Albertine is allowed to stay; both instructions are made so that the girls can hear the stories the women tell. The Pueblo theory also implies that the audience and the storyteller decide to engage in a storytelling moment, one that can be ended when the audience decides not to hear or receive the story: Albertine refrains from telling Lipsha about his mother June, in part, because he moves away from her. If the audience is an unwanted or orphaned child—like Lipsha, Tayo, and Lucie—the storyteller may have to work with greater effort to extract part of the story from the audience, which in turn effects how the storyteller shapes the story she tells. I contend that the orphaned children in these three novels, novels that include many oral storytelling scenes, can signify a male reader, and that the women writers cross gendered borders and speak to the male reader by making him an orphan in order to demonstrate that identity relies in part on the stories shared through the feminine storyteller. I also contend that these authors address gender roles and representation, especially as Lucie has a male role model in Quannah Parker.

Paula Gunn Allen problematizes gender roles in storytelling when she recalls that her mother would often correct her father on his stories, but that this form of “editing” was met with some defiance: “Who’s telling this story, anyway, you or me?”

he demanded. ‘Well, you, of course,’ she admitted.” Allen writes: “But I would have liked to [have] hear[d] her story, too. Hers and his together on simulcast” (Allen, Off 145). For Allen, it seems an ideal approach to storytelling is to hear “hers and his” pitted next to one another, which may reveal the storyteller’s depictions of gender roles or how the gender of the storyteller affects the story; achieving what Allen terms “simulcast” storytelling, though, seems to be the challenge, as it raises questions about who speaks for women, for men, about which stories they tell about themselves, about one another, and for whom. As Donovan puts it, “perhaps the most fundamental issue raised by both Native American literature, particularly that by women, and feminist theories is the issue of voice: Who can speak? and how? and under what circumstances? What can be said? And after the ideas find voice, what action can be taken?” (Donovan 7-8).

Not surprisingly, when men narrate stories, their approach to women’s issues alters, if not entirely omits, the issues, depending on the audience. An example is found when Craig Womack challenges male versions that omit female sexual material and menstruation from the Creek turtle story. During an interview with Creek storyteller Linda Alexander, Womack addresses the influence of audience on the turtle story, which includes a scene where a woman plucks a strand of her pubic hair and wraps it around a turtle that then wears the strand as a silk scarf. Sometimes Alexander’s own father would refrain from telling that version from another. Womack suggests that this

is an issue of audience when he asks Linda Alexander: “When [your father] told the one with the silk scarf, did he only tell that around certain people?” (Womack 79). His question also suggests gender is influential within the oral storytelling tradition: when a man tells a story about women’s bodies, the gender make-up of the audience has some influence on the form of the story he tells. Similarly, when women authors convey messages through male characters—about their bodies, identities, and responsibilities—the male characters, their thoughts and actions, may be influenced by the authors’ preconceived male readerships.

There is certainly a history of male storytellers silencing women and women’s issues: Linda Alexander’s father sometimes omits the element of menstruation from the turtle story, and *Pretty Shield* tells us men do not tell *Strikes-two*’s victory story. It is important to note, however, that many American Indian women writers are actively engaged in the aforementioned revolutionary gesture of coming to voice. Despite male resistance, *Pretty Shield* tells her story, and American Indian women writers who have come after *Pretty Shield*, specifically Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich, and Betty Louise Bell, offer novels with discernible messages for men. In shaping messages for male readers, American Indian women’s novels act as tables themselves, where gendered borders are crossed, where the reader, in his imagination, is asked to take a seat, and listen, so that after the story is told, he can participate in determining what action can be taken.

CHAPTER TWO

In the previous chapter, I suggest that American Indian women writers are crossing gendered borders. Borders suggest divisions and risk pitting, in this instance, women against men or men against women, an ancient trope that disrupts the goals and intentions of visionary feminist thinking. Imagine instead women writers crossing gendered borders in order to recruit into action male members of their communities to fight communal battles. Imagine a hero like Strikes-two, who calls on all members of her band to sing her battle song as she rides out to face the attacking opposition. This is a communal battle scene, not a gendered oppositional one. Indeed, American Indians are engaged in a kind of warfare, presently, regarding many political issues including land claims and sovereignty rights as well as personal identity issues, domestic abuses, and familial and communal destruction. In order to combat these forces on Indian communities, a temporary and strategic opposition is in place, one that pits not one gender against the other, but the community against the destructive force. We are at a stage when American Indian women writers are calling on men by using their stories as a means to initiate dialogue with men, advocating to men a collaborative effort toward working through American Indian issues in order to achieve their personal and political aims. Unlike the men in Pretty Shield's story who wish to silence women or ignore what women have to say, male readers of contemporary women authored texts have nothing to fear regarding an agenda that threatens the unseating or disordering of gender

roles; rather, American Indian male readers may remain open to any voices that mean to re-secure balance and harmony between the genders, to the family, and for the tribe; we can be assured that what is found in American Indian women's writing are messages grounded in an egalitarian world view, which has long been an approach to community building for many American Indian tribal groups.

FEMINISM AND AMERICAN INDIAN MEN'S LITERATURE

In Feminist Readings of Native American Literature, Kathleen Donovan pays critical attention to the messages being communicated between the genders, specifically between male authors and female reading audiences. She notes that “[d]espite the recent explosion of publication in both fields, very little has been written to date exploring in depth the links between Native American literature and feminist theories” (Donovan 9). Her argument is fueled by her reading of N. Scott Momaday's female characters in House Made of Dawn, a novel that illustrates Momaday's lyricism, elegance, and “finely crafted language” (71). Donovan cites Adrienne Rich in order to remind us that beautiful language can lie and that the oppressor's language sometimes sounds beautiful (71); Donovan excavates Momaday's language in order to reveal his treatment of female characters and, through them, his messages to women: “Momaday depicts women whose duplicitous language, sexuality, transgressiveness, and witchery actively work against the male protagonist's reconciliation with his identity” (Donovan 84). By focusing on Momaday's depictions of female characters, not on the aesthetic

distraction his language creates, Donovan concludes that Momaday's novel effectively illustrates Rich's assertion that the oppressor's language sometimes sounds beautiful but nevertheless remains oppressive: "[t]he characterization of contemporary women in Momaday's novel demonstrates a lack of harmony and balance, [and] an underlying misogyny" (98). By reading Momaday's work through a feminist lens, Donovan reveals that Momaday writes women as "generally negative, manipulative, duplicitous, possessive, perverse, and transgressive; therefore, [for Momaday] they must be objectified and commodified" (98). That "women readers are invited to participate in this objectification and commodification" (98) is disturbing, but what finally disturbs Donovan most in Momaday's representation of women "is that in his refusal to even attempt to sympathetically articulate the experiences of his contemporary women characters, he silences them" (74). Through his silencing of female characters, Momaday's novel reasserts messages of misogyny: "By consistently representing women as negative forces whose perversion of language demands their silencing, [Momaday] effectively perpetuates the phallogocentrism that feminism seeks to undermine" (74).

Donovan's focus on women readers is important, especially if, as she claims, reading is about power: "when women readers have to constantly engage in an act of resistance in order not to be subsumed by a text, they not only cannot expect to find their experiences given a credible voice, but more importantly, they cannot give voice

to the very ideas that shape a more egalitarian ordering of the world” (Donovan 74). Her attention to women readers also relates to the issues of audience I raise in the previous chapter—that the audience’s participation is vital toward shaping the story—and her attention to how Momaday effectively silences his female characters reiterates, even in contemporary American Indian literature, the continuation of the history of male storytellers silencing women as noted earlier with the example of Linda Alexander’s father who sometimes omits the menstruation element from the Creek turtle story, and the history of male subjugation verbalized by Crow storyteller Pretty Shield, who tells us men do not like to tell stories they do not want to hear. Kathleen Donovan’s feminist reading of N. Scott Momaday’s depiction, commodification, and silencing of women and the potential effects his characterizations may have on his female readership lead me to consider novels by American Indian women writers, those women who are not silenced, who can ably give “a credible voice” to “the very ideas that shape a more egalitarian ordering of the world,” and how they depict their male characters. Donovan’s clear connection between Momaday’s depiction of his female characters with his female readers also encourages my previously stated notion that, while their novels do many things, American Indian women writers send messages to their male readers through their depiction of male characters.

FEMINISM AND AMERICAN INDIAN WOMEN'S LITERATURE

Feminist readings of male-authored texts are vital toward undermining male dominance and female subjugation, and feminist readings of women-authored texts applied by a male reader are also vital, as long as such readings do not, in some indirect way, continue the burden of sexist thinking. In Feminism is for Everybody, bell hooks writes that “[w]ithout males as allies in struggle feminist movement will not progress” (11). She adds, “A male who has divested of male privilege, who has embraced feminist politics, is a worthy comrade in struggle” (hooks 11-12). According to hooks, “Visionary feminists have always understood the necessity of converting men” because even if all the women in the world could become feminists, if men remain sexists, women’s lives would still be diminished (115). Indeed, figuring a true egalitarian ordering of the world seems to demand male-female cooperation, as hooks suggests, “[i]t is urgent that men take up the banner of feminism and challenge patriarchy. The safety and continuation of life on the planet requires feminist conversion of men” (hooks 115-116).

Feminist theorists like hooks may demand for the conversion of men and actively invite male participation (and male readers to women-authored texts) within the movement, but American Indian women writers and scholars have varying positions on feminism; their perspectives are informed by complex, traditional tribal value systems and ideas about how to read male-female relationships, which in turn determine whether

or not a feminist ideology can be applied to individual traditional tribal thinking, and in turn to American Indian women's literature. Current and recurring political issues relating to collective tribal groups may also determine how feminist ideology is prioritized and where it is positioned within a tribal ideology. Nez Perce scholar Inés Hernández-Avila says American Indian women writers may be more concerned with land and sovereignty issues than with feminism. She does not find many Native American women writers "particularly interested in locating, in their writings, an 'all-encompassing' or even 'discrete' home within feminism, or at least feminist scholarship per se" (Hernández-Avila 172). Instead, many activist native women are more likely concerned with issues pertaining to their homeland (172). Unlike Hernández-Avila, who seems to separate feminist thinking from land issues, native scholar Cheryl Suzack suggests that any identity category, even one that might come out of feminist thinking, can help to determine American Indian identity, which in turn affects homeland and Indian sovereignty issues: "In Native America, identity categories mean all the difference between land and dispossession, between restorative justice and continued oppression" (Suzack 171). Suzack takes a web-like or interconnected approach to identity formation, one often found in American Indian literature: "It is out of an understanding of the crucial interlocking effects of the political, social, and theoretical for Native peoples" that she studies American Indian texts and argues for "the necessity of gender analysis to Native identity" (171). According to Suzack, American Indian

feminists should work toward non-conformist, non-institutionalized approaches to individual and community identity formation:

In contrast to congressional legislation that privileges a normative male tribal identity, American Indian feminist critics negotiate the arena of history and politics by examining the multiple imbrications of race and gender identity that shape the social subjectivities of Native women. [Indian feminists'] analyses of communal social arrangements include theorizing the valency of feminism and race identity for reconstructing history, and articulating forms of community identity that do not conform to blood-quantum codes. (Suzack 171)

For Suzack, feminism, as a means toward subverting the institutionalized methods of identity formation, is a useful political tool. Gloria Bird and Joy Harjo also acknowledge institutionalized attempts at shaping identity when they assert, “As women, we have confronted institutionalized attacks on our gender—for instance, forced sterilizations” (Bird and Harjo 30). For Bird and Harjo, the fact that Indian women [and people] are still present in the Americas is in itself a political statement: “Our physical presence denies the American myth of the vanishing red man” (30). About feminism specifically, Joy Harjo, the Creek poet, says, “even though the word does not carry over to her culture, a concept mirroring feminism does” (Donovan 7). Still, other American Indian women writers offer varying views on feminism. “Navajo poet Luci Tapahonso does not wish to be identified as a feminist because her tribal

culture does not even recognize the word” (7). And, Laguna writer Leslie Marmon Silko acknowledges that, though she came to feminism differently because of her culture, she is, indeed, a feminist (7). In fact, Silko says that she has benefited from feminism, and seems to echo Cheryl Suzack when she asserts, “anything that undermines the stereotypes on all of us by white men is helpful. What it does is take some of the pressure off those of us who have never lived very close to the stereotypes” (Fisher 28).

American Indian women writers’ positions on feminism may be as diverse and individual as the writers themselves, but what is clear is that, in their own ways, grounded in their respective tribal ideologies, American Indian women writers are “undoing those damaging layers of stereotypes of native people in general and native women in particular” (Bird and Harjo 30). This work can be read as the egalitarian ordering of the world that makes up much of feminist labor. Indeed, it is clear that feminist thinking influences much of the individual writer’s ideologies, even if the writer, for traditional tribal reasons, resists an ‘all-encompassing’ or even ‘discrete’ home within feminism (to borrow Hernández-Avila’s terms). Locating feminist messages in American Indian women’s writing, particularly in their fiction, and how those messages are conveyed to an audience is another matter; it means focusing on the writers’ relationships with the oral tradition; on how the oral tradition is used in American Indian literature; and on how oral storytelling itself operates.

THE ORAL TRADITION AND CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN INDIAN LITERATURE

In “Theorizing American Indian Literature: Applying Oral Concepts to Written Traditions,” Christopher Teuton alludes to Walter Ong’s work on orality when he notes that the usual method for defining oral storytelling is by contrasting it with written storytelling: “The oral communicative context is communal, while writing ‘isolates’ the reader; the oral communicative event is, at the very least, dialectic, but the reader’s text never responds; the oral event exists in the present, writing exists as a record of past thought” (Teuton 194-195). Simon Ortiz offers a less oppositional, more integrated, living definition: “The oral tradition of Native American people is based upon spoken language, but it is more than that. Oral tradition is inclusive; it is the actions, behavior, relationships, practices throughout the whole social, economic, and spiritual life process of people. In this respect, the oral tradition is the consciousness of the people” (Ramírez, Contemporary 3). Dennis Tedlock points out, “[i]n many Native American worldviews... the world is brought into being through stories. This seems to be the case whether the stories are told orally, or written down” (Schorcht 15). Tedlock illustrates a connection between writing and speaking as it relates to the Mayan culture: “the place of books [are] vital in the pre-Columbian world and [...] the authors of these books wrote as performers. They spoke directly to their readers yet were simultaneously very conscious of themselves as writers” (Schorcht 15). Teuton, Ortiz, and Tedlock together maintain, then, that the oral tradition of storytelling is communal; it can form the

consciousness of the community, and it has not always been in opposition to or separated from the written form of storytelling. These conclusions reasonably suggest that elements of the oral tradition can be found in contemporary American Indian written literature.

Paula Gunn Allen defines American Indian literary aesthetics as emerging from and depending on the oral tradition. “Native writers write out of tribal traditions, and into them” (Allen, Spider 5). Like oral storytellers, Native writers “work within a literary tradition that is at base connected to ritual and beyond that to tribal metaphysics or mysticism. What has been experienced over the ages mystically and communally—with individual experiences fitting within that overarching pattern—forms the basis for tribal aesthetics and therefore of tribal literatures” (Allen, Spider 5). Susan Berry Brill de Ramírez, whose work on Silko’s Storyteller collection focuses on the “transformational relationship between a storyteller and her or his listener-readers” (Ramírez, “Storyteller” 333), extends Allen’s basis for tribal literatures and notes that the effects of tribal aesthetics and the oral tradition are apparent in contemporary American Indian literature. She gestures to Tedlock’s work on Mayan authors as writers that are conscious of a reading/listening audience when she asserts that Native writers write as if they are telling a story orally:

[W]ithin the oral storytelling practice, the listener is an active participant whose presence is necessary to the telling-creation of the story. The storyteller and

listener interact throughout the process in a conversation that reflects the inherent interrelationality of storytelling. This is also true of those literary works significantly informed in conversive ways that enable the reader as listener-reader to participate more closely in the written story. (Ramírez, Contemporary 6).

To illustrate even further her point that the listener-reader becomes a conversive participant, Ramírez cites Stanley Fish, who reminds us “‘that it is the reader who ‘makes’, literature,’ that the reader is ‘in the business of making texts,’ and that ‘interpreters do not decode poems; they make them’” (Ramírez, “Storytellers” 337). Fish’s comments seem to reiterate Leslie Marmon Silko’s Pueblo storytelling theory: “a great deal of the story is believed to be inside the listener; the storyteller’s role is to draw the story out of the listeners” (Silko, Yellow 50). Craig Womack suggests that the story may rest inside the audience as a direct result of repeated storytelling: “The listener in an oral tradition already knows the outcome of the story because she has heard it many times. *How* the story is told, then, and especially the performance of it, becomes almost as important as what is told” (Womack 89). Silko and Womack’s theories are illustrated in Louise Erdrich’s Love Medicine, a novel with multiple narrators telling versions of the same story, resulting in the reader knowing the stories and their outcomes before the next versions are told. By repeating known narratives, the novel offers an approximation of tribal collaborative storytelling that invites readers

to participate. In “The Stories We Tell: Louise Erdrich’s Identity Narratives,” Shelley Reid argues that through a collaborative storytelling method, Erdrich’s “narratives also allow the representation of a larger community identity and weave her audience into the fabric of this extended family and its stories” (Reid 67-68). According to Ramírez, the effect is a hybrid text that reveals the pervading influence of the oral tradition:

Many American Indian writers consciously work to transform literary techniques by infusing them anew with their oral traditions, thereby creating hybrid texts which are neither purely oral and conversational nor purely literary and discursive or dialogic. This fusion of storytelling traditions results in texts that interweave the literary and oral structures of discourse, and conversation into a conversive whole. (Ramírez, “Storytellers” 338)

American Indian literary texts can be read as operating as a hybrid of both oral and literary forms; they can also be read as texts that are in dialogue with a specific reading audience who are meant to participate as “listener-readers” that co-create the stories being told, and if the writers are women with discernible messages for men, the texts may also be political.

POLITICAL STRATEGIES THROUGH STORY

I contend that Silko, Erdrich, and Bell are in conscious political dialogue with men and that their novels carry messages for individual, familial, and communal renewal. These writers and their hybrid oral-literary texts also offer political messages of and political strategies for resistance to internalizing dominant society's modes of oppression. Inés Hernández-Avila reminds us that while feminism itself may not be the political means through which all American Indian women writers work, American Indian women writers are concerned with politics, specifically with land and sovereignty issues, which persist and remain a priority on the Indian political agenda. Cheryl Suzack argues that native political issues are interlocked with native identity formation; indeed, identity categories for American Indians "mean all the difference between land and dispossession" (Suzack 171). Gloria Bird and Joy Harjo add that the very presence of Indian women is in itself a political statement; their presence is voiced loudly in American Indian women's literature. And Craig Womack reminds us of the inherent political role of literature: the oral tradition acts as a means for nationhood; it is through the stories that tribal members and communities understand and know their identity (Womack 60). It seems clear then that a political statement is being made and a political strategy can be found at work in American Indian women's literature.

To suggest that American Indian women's literature acts as a political approach to nationhood or that their literature addresses identity, land, and sovereignty issues may

not be a risky claim. What can be risky, however, is to suggest that American Indian women writers are writing messages to American Indian male readers, as the male/female dichotomy upholds a western binary oppositional mentality often struck down by women writers and writers of color. A precedent for my suggestion, however, can be found in Michael Wilson's reading of Silko's Ceremony, as he notes an oppositional mentality can be read as a necessary but temporary political combat strategy:

Consonant with the tribe's longstanding oral traditions, the novel insists that an oppositional psychology of warfare is always temporary and strategic, existing only as long as the duration of the war. Upon returning home, these veterans must undergo ceremonies so that they move away from oppositions toward more dialogic relationships within a family, in a community, with the natural world and the world of spirits. (Wilson 26-27).

Wilson also notes that binary oppositions are at work in Erdrich's Love Medicine, but again, the oppositions are temporary, as the oppositions shift from what he terms a binary status to dialogic engagement. His analysis of Lulu and Marie's relationship after Nector dies illustrates the point: "No longer stubbornly silent in their antagonism, Marie and Lulu now engage each other, dialogically interpreting community history, each with her own stories about history, each with her own equal, sovereign space. Thus the plot of their relationship moves from adversarial (binary) to coequal and

speaking (dialogic), indicating a healthy exchange between two sides of the community” (Wilson 117). According to Wilson, Ceremony and Love Medicine illustrate the importance and value of a traditional center, of a unitary language that offers a changing place or site that brings families and the community back inward toward a sense of an individual identity in relation to a familial or communal identity. He adds, the role of stories are strategic and significant: “both novels depend upon the use of stories to establish this provisional center, with characters affirming one another by working through the stories of their lives and their communities” (Wilson 130).

I am not suggesting that women are at war with men—such a suggestion would disrupt visionary feminist thinking—but rather I am suggesting that American Indians are engaged in a kind of warfare, presently, regarding not just land claims and sovereignty rights, but personal identity issues, domestic abuses, and familial and communal destruction. Perhaps, at this moment, a temporary and strategic opposition is at work, one that is at a stage when women are addressing men, and unlike Momaday who silences women, American Indian women writers are using their stories as a means to initiate dialogue with men, advocating to men a collaborative effort toward working through American Indian issues in order to achieve their personal and political aims. Ceremony, Love Medicine, and Faces in the Moon can also act as practical modes of instruction, providing men a way into conversation with women and offering a way outward toward action.

CHAPTER THREE

In the previous chapters, I set the groundwork for reading three novels that have oral storytelling elements—with significant attention to the role of the audience within the novels’ storytelling scenes—in order to support my assertion that the novels convey valuable messages to male readers. Three novels, Leslie Marmon Silko’s Ceremony, Louise Erdrich’s Love Medicine, and Betty Louise Bell’s Faces in the Moon, reflect and are rooted in a living history of the oral tradition, and are written conversively (to borrow Ramírez’s term) to create between the storyteller and the listener, the writer and the reader, a co-creative narrative experience, resulting in structurally hybridized texts. All of this guides readings in which the protagonists—whether male or female, speaking directly or indirectly—reveal to a male audience ways to participate in mapping out a path evolving from personal destruction to societal creation within Indian communities.

In order to illustrate the three novels’ roots in the oral tradition, I specifically reiterate American Indian scholars and writers Simon Ortiz, Craig Womack, and Leslie Marmon Silko, whose theories on the relationship between the storyteller and the listener are rooted within their tribal ideologies. Ortiz offers a living definition of the oral tradition: ‘Oral tradition is inclusive; it is the actions, behavior, relationships, practices throughout the whole social, economic, and spiritual life process of people. In this respect, the oral tradition is the consciousness of the people’” (Ramírez,

Contemporary 3). Stories that form the consciousness of the people can be located in Silko's Ceremony, as the narrator tells us specifically that the people "recounted the actions and words each of their clan had taken, and would take; from before they were born and long after they died, the people shared the same consciousness" (Silko 68). Craig Womack extends Ortiz's consciousness-building theory when he suggests that in the oral tradition, the story rests inside the audience's consciousness as a direct result of repeated storytelling: "The listener in an oral tradition already knows the outcome of the story because she has heard it many times" (Womack 89); Silko illustrates this for us at the end of Ceremony when Old Grandma utters, "It seems like I already heard these stories before" (Silko 260). Structurally, Erdrich's novel Love Medicine, with its multiple narrators telling versions of the same story, resulting in the reader knowing the stories and their outcomes before the next versions are told, also illustrates Womack's repetition theory. Womack adds, because the listener has heard the stories before, how the story is told, then, "especially the performance of it, becomes almost as important as what is told" (Womack 89). Betty Louise Bell's Faces in the Moon illustrates this focus on storytelling as performance: "I pressed my lips tight and listened with my eyes, watching for a new detail in the turn of a mood, listening for the story in my mother's face" (Bell 4). Lucie watches her mother's face and listens for "new" details, an attention that suggests she has heard her mother's stories before, and now focuses on the storytelling performance itself. Silko's Pueblo theory of audience—that the

“storytelling always includes the audience, the listeners. In fact, a great deal of the story is believed to be inside the listener; the storyteller’s role is to draw the story out of the listeners” (Silko, Yellow 50)—while applicable to all three novels, is illustrated most readily in Faces in the Moon, when Lucie reflects on her contribution to her mother’s storytelling: “My contribution to the story was to pretend innocence and listen, my eyes and mouth wide” (Bell 4).

Having established links between the oral tradition and three contemporary American Indian women’s literary texts, I reiterate Susan Berry Brill de Ramírez’s assertion that Native writers write as if they are telling a story orally, creating storytelling scenes to convey their novels’ messages: “The storyteller and listener interact throughout the process in a conversation that reflects the inherent interrelationality of storytelling. This is also true of those literary works significantly informed in conversive ways that enable the reader as listener-reader to participate more closely in the written story” (Ramírez, Contemporary 6). Silko illustrates the point about the storyteller and listener engaged in conversation when Tayo and Betonie work together, with Betonie’s questions that prompt Tayo to answer, in order to shape Tayo’s story: “‘Rocky,’ Betonie said softly, ‘tell me about Rocky’” (Silko 124), and then, after Tayo tells as much of his story as he can manage, Betonie takes his turn: “‘There are some things I have to tell you,’ Betonie began softly” (126). This scene illustrates Ramírez’s observation that “within the oral storytelling practice, the listener is an active

participant whose presence is necessary to the telling-creation of the story” (Ramírez, Contemporary 6). Erdrich illustrates the breakdown of active participation between storyteller and listener when Albertine attempts to tell Lipsha the truth about his mother June, but stops when he moves away from her (Erdrich 39).

Finally, all three novels can be read as “hybrid texts” where the “fusion of storytelling traditions results in texts that interweave the literary and oral structures of discourse, and conversation into a conversive whole” (Ramírez “Storytellers” 338); hybridity or fusion is illustrated in Ceremony’s prose interruptions of myths and legends; Love Medicine’s multiple narrators often telling and re-telling versions of the same stories; and Faces in the Moon’s first-person narrator who tells the story of her childhood with third-person distance, as if the events happened to someone else in communal memory. American Indian literary texts can be read as operating as hybrids of both oral and literary forms; they can also be read as texts that are in dialogue with specific reading audiences who are meant to participate as “listener-readers” (to borrow Ramírez’s term) that co-create the stories being told. In the following close readings, I suggest that two of the novels’ male protagonists can be aligned with male listener-readers to whom the authors convey messages of an egalitarian ordering of the world and call for a return to and restructuring of families. The third and final protagonist serves as a reminder and a means for male readers to apply the lessons conveyed in the first two novels.

CEREMONY

Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony invites a gender-balanced approach to individual healing and a return to the family, achieved through the sharing of stories. After fighting in "the white people's war," (36) where he experiences a monstrous kind of destruction "too alien to comprehend" (36), Tayo suffers in an illness of disharmony and unbalance with himself and with his Laguna Pueblo community. His inability to articulate his experiences through story at the beginning of the novel is especially disruptive to the order of the Pueblo people who believe, according to the narrator, that stories are "all we have to fight off / illness and death" (2). Aligned with a masculine listener-reader, Tayo's journey, guided by the feminine, leads the reader toward a sense of harmony between the genders and between negative and positive forces of destruction and creation; Tayo's silence leads his grandmother to direct his healing journey toward two medicine men so that Tayo might retrieve his voice, and so that in the end, he can return to Laguna, share his story, and restore order.

In order to establish a benchmark for balance, egalitarian gender codes are settled at the beginning of the text as the non-gendered narrator introduces the gendered concept of Thought-Woman: "She is sitting in her room / thinking of a story now // I'm telling you the story she is thinking" (1). Thought-woman is gendered as feminine, but when the narrator uses gendered attributions, the masculine pronoun is invoked; the sense of balance between the genders is nevertheless maintained, as the lines reveal

physiological actions specific to females: “He rubbed his belly. / I keep them here [he said] / Here, put your hand on it / See, it is moving. / There is life here / for the people” (2). The narrator, now attributed to a masculine voice, is pregnant with stories, establishing female gestation of narratives and narration, which is further illustrated by the narrator who tells us that all stories come out of Thought-Woman: “whatever she thinks about appears” (1). This opening seems troubling, even unsettling, to our gendered society—as we may long to establish who and what is telling a story so that we might read gender throughout the text—however, for Tayo’s narrative progression from illness to wellness, unbalance to balance, disharmony to harmony, the novel necessarily establishes first this benchmark of balance between the genders within one voice, in order for the reader to measure how far Tayo has gone and how much work he will need to do in order to reach and achieve his own sense of harmony.

The reader is usually meant to empathize with any novel’s protagonist, and so it is in Ceremony; the reader is distinctly aligned with Tayo, and through him, the listener-reader is masculinized. Though the reader is addressed at the beginning of the novel with the second person: “I’m telling you the story” (1), the reader is soon aligned with the half-breed orphan male, Tayo, when both the reader and Tayo are bombarded with indiscernible voices leaving us silenced together: Japanese voices, Laguna voices, the voices of his dead uncle Josiah and his dead mother, until finally a voice “suddenly broke into a language he could not understand; and it was then that all the voices were

drowned by the music” (6). Tayo’s inability to articulate his suffering to his doctors at the Army hospital and his silence at home, signified by constant crying and sleeping, secure his position with the reader, as both are silenced. He is unable to articulate a coherent form of his story to the doctors and to Ku’oosh; and because of the nature of written text, the reader is also unable to articulate a response of any form to Tayo; both are effectively silenced, but the listener-reader and Tayo participate with the story to discover how he finds his voice, and to learn how he participates in his own healing.

Because the masculine is suffering and silenced, the suggestion of the need for healing comes from the feminine through Old Grandma, the matriarch of the family, who observes her grandson’s fitful sleeps and childlike cries: “She sat down on the edge of the bed and she reached out for him. She held his head in her lap and she cried with him” and “when Auntie got back from the store, Old Grandma told her, ‘That boy needs a medicine man’” (33). Auntie, who works hard to maintain “distance between themselves and [Tayo]” (67), is aware of the workings of the “consciousness of the people” (Ramírez, *Contemporary* 3), and resists: “Oh, I don’t know, Mama. You know how they are. You know what people will say if we ask for a medicine man to help him [...] It will start all over again. All that gossip about Josiah and about Little Sister” (Silko 33). A short verbal battle ensues between Auntie and Old Grandma, the matriarch forcing her daughter to fall into alignment with her insistence on healing Tayo: “‘Let them talk. By planting time they’ll forget.’ Old Grandma stood up straight

when she said this and stared at Auntie with milky cataract eyes” (34). Old Grandma does not deny that people will talk; in fact, she seems to allow for them to talk, but she points out that specific details within the consciousness of the people are temporarily evoked; through time and distance, stories can be called back as well as forgotten: ‘By planting time they’ll forget’ (34). Auntie’s own words support this notion of temporarily evoked specifics: “[All the stories about us] will start all over again;” the start suggests a stop.

Once the women are aligned or in agreement with one another, they send for Ku’oosh, the Laguna medicine man. Ku’oosh and his medicine, however, seem out of alignment with Tayo, the incongruity marked by the failure of a conversive sharing and healing between them. When Ku’oosh asks Tayo questions, Tayo simply nods or listens to the wind; he cannot find a voice to answer Ku’oosh:

He didn’t know how to explain what had happened. He did not know how to tell him that he had not killed any enemy or that he did not think he had. But that he had done things far worse, and the effects were everywhere in the cloudless sky, on the dry brown hills, shrinking skin and hide taut over sharp bone. The old man was waiting for him to answer. (Silko 36)

When Tayo asks Ku’oosh to help him despite Tayo’s inability to articulate his own suffering—“Do something for me, the way you did for the others who came back” (36)—Ku’oosh shakes his head slowly, leaving Tayo with no help in achieving wellness

but also leaving him “certain of something he had feared all along, something in the old stories. It took only one person to tear away the delicate strands of the web” that holds the fragile world together (38). And though Auntie agrees with Old Grandma that Tayo needs to get better with the help of a medicine man, Tayo feels certain, too, that she has calculated some discretion about this new story about her family: “he knew she had asked Ku’oosh not to mention the visit, except to the old men” (39).

Understanding fully that Tayo’s wellness affects the wellbeing of his family and community, Ku’oosh suggests another medicine man to Old Grandma; again the dominant female character directs Tayo’s healing; she decides to accept Ku’oosh’s suggestion, and sends Tayo to Betonie. Silko emphasizes the importance of balance for mutually conversive storytelling and healing through Ku’oosh and Betonie. If Ku’oosh is unable to align with Tayo, he and Old Grandma find a medicine man who can, someone with whom Tayo can feel comfortable, someone in whom Tayo can see a reflection of himself, and someone who will ask the right questions in order to draw Tayo’s story out of him. Betonie, like Tayo, is a half-breed, mixed with Navajo and Mexican blood: “All along there had been something familiar about the old man [...] Tayo looked at his eyes. They were hazel like his own” (119). The shared physical trait creates an alignment between the two, and allows for Betonie to share some stories first, before he engages in a conversive storytelling practice with Tayo, which also

allows for Betonie to learn how Tayo is suffering. From this information, Betonie is able to convey to Tayo how destruction, illness, and evil work in the world.

Betonie's ceremony includes a story about 'the trickery of witchcraft,' which rests in the belief of extremes, divisions, and separation: 'They want us to believe all evil resides with white people. Then we will look no further to see what is happening. They want us to separate ourselves from white people, to be ignorant and helpless as we watch our own destruction' (132). The narrator gives us the witches' creation story of white people who are designed to act as forces of destruction—"They fear the world. / They destroy what they fear" (135)—and the creation of destruction is said to be "set into motion" through the story and in a state of "whirling / whirling / whirling" (138), a state when order is without distinction until the story takes its form and finds its pattern in reality. Betonie performs the ceremony, which includes a "white corn sand painting," (141) a design at the center of which Tayo sits, and through which Betonie directs Tayo to emerge from the state of "whirling darkness;" Betonie instructs Tayo to follow his "footprints" to "long life and happiness" (143). Betonie sets for Tayo a path away from destruction and chaos toward creation and harmony. After the conversive performance of the ceremony, Betonie sends Tayo off to finish the rest of the ceremony himself, to apply the stories and set into order the designs Betonie makes for him: "the ceremony isn't finished yet.' He was drawing with his finger. 'Remember these stars,' he said. 'I've seen [Josiah's] spotted cattle; I've seen a mountain and I've seen a

woman” (152). Tayo is set out on his own to complete the ceremony and, in the end, he comes out of the whirling darkness by finding the cattle and the woman with whom he engages in an act of creation (222).

All stories contribute in important ways to Tayo’s consciousness and to the consciousness of the people in the novel. In Tayo’s childhood, Josiah tells him stories rooted in a sense of balance between the elements and all things: “Nothing was all good or all bad either; it all depended” (11). Josiah reminds Tayo that the people come from the springs at the narrow canyons and that drought happens ‘when people forget, when people misbehave’ (46). There is a sense of balance between the elements in this origin story, as the people must remember the springs as a source of life in order to maintain life; but if they forget, drought, the opposite of an abundance of water, acts as a reminder. Josiah also instructs Tayo on temperance. When Josiah finds Tayo killing flies “because it was fun” (101), he teaches Tayo not to take life unnecessarily by telling him the green bottle fly story, which sets into Tayo’s consciousness the belief system that everything in life has a purpose as defined through their stories: ‘Next time, just remember the story’ (102). The Night Swan also sets her message about change into Tayo’s consciousness and tells him to remember: ‘You don’t have to understand what is happening. But remember this day. You will recognize it later. You are part of it now’ (100).

Unlike the stories Betonie, Josiah, and the Night Swan tell, some stories may be designed with and intended to have negative effects on the listeners. Emo's stories about killing the enemy, fighting with guns, and using women during the war illustrate his removal from a Pueblo sense of balance and harmony; his stories create within his listeners a similar dislocation, particularly as the settings for his storytelling scenes are not in homes, where renewal might take place, but in bars where alcohol is consumed and violence often occurs. According to Silko, "a great deal of the story is believed to be inside the listener" (Silko, Yellow 50) as a result of shared experiences as well as repetition. Emo and his listeners are all veterans of the war, and during moments of storytelling, he is prompted by his listeners to tell stories they already know: 'Hey, tell the one about the time that guy told on you' and 'When you were balling that little redhead and what's his name—the Irishman?...' (Silko 59). When Emo does not feel like telling the story, his listeners reconstruct it together by telling it to one another: "Leroy and Pinkie finished the story and went for more beer" (60). Throughout Emo's storytelling scenes, Tayo is present but resists participation, resistance that sometimes makes physical demands on his body: "Tayo was clenching all his muscles against their voices" (55). When Emo refrains from telling the story that Leroy and Pinkie finish together, Emo notices Tayo's resistance, perhaps calling Emo himself to question the validity of his own stories: "There was something about the story Emo didn't like. Tayo was watching him; he didn't turn his eyes away when Emo looked back at him.

They sat staring at each other across the big round table” (60). Perhaps this “something” Emo does not like, revealed to him by looking at his story through Tayo’s eyes, is Tayo’s resistance. In his silence and refusal to participate in Emo’s story, Tayo models for us a way to “engage in an act of resistance in order not to be subsumed by a text,” even an oral text, especially if we do not find “experiences given a credible voice” toward an egalitarian ordering of the world (Donovan 74). Also, the male listener-reader is reminded that men like Emo exist and that it is precisely because of him that Silko’s messages of healing and creation is needed. Tayo serves as a model for successfully receiving the messages, and works to resist any counter messages by Emo.

There is a sense, too, that the people in Laguna society know the importance of tempering Emo’s narratives of destruction with Tayo’s narrative of healing. After Tayo finds the cattle and decides to stay on the ranch with Ts’eh, away from the community, Old Grandma reminds him that soon he will need to share his story with Ku’oosh and the other old men: ‘Old man Ku’oosh came around the other day. He said maybe pretty soon you would have something to tell them. He said maybe you would go talk to them sometime’ (218). At the end of the summer, Robert visits Tayo and asks him to return, again citing Old man Ku’oosh’s request, but this time adding information about Emo’s counter stories: ‘And Emo has been saying things about you. He’s been talking about how you went crazy and are alone out here. He talks bullshit about caves and animals. [...] Maybe if you came back for a while. You know, so they could see that

you are all right. So you could talk to them, and then they could see what a liar Emo is' (228). It is finally the female character Ts'eh who convinces Tayo of the importance for him to return to his family, and to Laguna, to tell his story. She argues if Emo is the only one telling the people who Tayo is, Emo is the one with power who can manipulate the people's consciousness: 'there are only a few others with Emo. The rest have been fooled; they're being used.' (232). About Ku'oosh and the old men, she says, 'they haven't been able agree [...] They are trying to decide who you are' (233). She reminds him of what only he knows: 'He knew the rest of the story' (233).

Because "the lines of cultures and worlds were drawn in flat dark lines on fine light sand, converging in the middle of witchery's final ceremonial sand painting," (246), Tayo must guard himself and the ending of his story, even as Emo tortures Harley, in order for Tayo to return to Laguna and give his story to the community: "He had only to complete this night, to keep the story out of the reach of the destroyers for a few more hours, and their witchery would turn, upon itself, upon them" (247). And when, at last, he arrives "at the center of the kiva," he is surrounded by Ku'oosh and the other old men, and tells his story: "It took a long time to tell them the story; they stopped him frequently with questions about the locations and the time of day; they asked about the direction she had come from and the color of her eyes" (257). By telling his story, and remaining in the kiva, drinking only water by "cupping it in his hands"—perhaps to remind him of the spring, the source of life, the end of drought—

Tayo restores order within himself and at Laguna. At home, he also reconstructs the once fractured family. Auntie, who, for the length of Tayo's life, has worked to make him feel as an outsider, now regards him without suspicion: "her eyes dropped from his face as if there were nothing left to watch for" (259).

Through Tayo, Silko invites a gender-balanced approach to healing and for a return to family through story. Betonie's ceremony includes a story that Tayo must complete on his own. His journey out of the whirling darkness, marked by his inability to articulate his experiences in story, ends with his finding his voice and telling his story. Tayo's grandmother directs his healing journey to the medicine man Ku'oosh, who is not yet aligned with Tayo, then to Betonie, who matches Tayo's experiences of difference. Tayo is also nurtured by Auntie's harsh treatment, which is tempered by Josiah's balanced life lessons; Tayo corrects Emo's misogynistic, destructive narratives by experiencing in his own story moments of healing and creation, illustrated in scenes with the feminine, the Night Swan and Ts'eh. Through a balanced approach to life that includes listening to and being guided by the feminine, Tayo retrieves his voice, returns to Laguna, shares his story, and restores order. If Tayo is aligned with male listener-readers, he models for us respectful consideration of the feminine, and the need to resist becoming a man like Emo, as Tayo rejects a life of destruction and embraces a life of temperance and creation.

LOVE MEDICINE

Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine offers an approach to identity formation, achieved through the communal and repeated sharing of stories. After being taken in by Marie Kashpaw, "like any old stray" (39), from whom he learns repeatedly about "what a bad state" he was in "when she first took [him] home" (232), Lipsha Morrissey learns about his identity from other members of his Chippewa community. His inability to forgive his mother, whoever she may be, at the beginning of the novel, is disruptive to the process of his identity formation, but, for this reading, gives the novel its purpose. Aligned with a masculine listener-reader, Lipsha's identity formation process, rooted partially in the feminine identity of his mother, which is built on his family's stories about their relationship to her, leads the reader toward an understanding of how communities help to form individual identity; also, because much of Lipsha's controlled identity is set in contrast to his half-brother King's abusive hyper-masculinity, and in relation to his father Gerry's criminality, Lipsha serves as a model for tempered masculinity and responsible familial contributor. Lipsha's ignorance of his identity is challenged after his mother June dies inexplicably; the question of Lipsha's identity is opened for him by the feminine, by Albertine, and closed for him by Lulu. After he learns the story, Lipsha puts the information to action when he helps his father flee; when Lipsha returns home, he knows who he is, and is prepared to position himself

within his family structure, finally bringing that which has been used and worked over so extensively throughout the novel, his mother's memory, to rest.

The opening scenes serve as an introduction regarding the role of stories in the novel: storytelling as conversive and co-creative practice that depends on the participation of the storyteller and the audience. When Albertine arrives to find her mother Zelda and aunt Aurelia baking in the kitchen she also finds them telling stories: “when I walked into the dim, warm kitchen they hardly acknowledged me, they were so involved in their talk” (12). The talk is of June, speculation about her death: “‘Well I heard,’ said Mama. ‘I heard she was with a man and he dumped her off’ [...] ‘Heard nothing,’ Aurelia snapped. ‘Don’t trust nothing you don’t see with your own eyes’” (13). Aurelia establishes that while stories are important, the kind of trust placed on them depends on the listener's subject role in them. Soon, other family members arrive to join in the conversive storytelling, each participant working to create the larger story about June. The opening scenes effectively illustrate Craig Womack's repetition theory: “[t]he listener in an oral tradition already knows the outcome of the story because she has heard it many times” (Womack 89). While the family knows the stories about June, they do not refrain from telling them; the only time storytelling ceases is when a listener does not already have the story inside her. When Grandma Kashpaw recalls June's hanging story, Aurelia and Zelda fall silent, as Albertine recalls: “they were both uneasily silent, neither of them willing to take up the slack and tell the

story I knew was about June [...] They looked at me, wondering if I knew about the hanging, but neither of them would open her lips to ask. So I said I'd heard June herself tell it" (21). The tension of this moment underscores the importance of the story existing inside the listener; whether or not it exists affects whether or not the story will be told, and if it is told, how it will be told, and how the listeners will be expected to contribute. Consider the rest of the scene as Albertine tells it:

'You had to lick her too.' Aurelia laughed, wiping her eyes.

'For saying hell and damn...' Grandma nearly lost her balance.

'Then she got madder yet....' I said.

'That's right!' Now Grandma's chin was pulled up to hold her laughter back.

(22)

Albertine's contribution is small, probably because she is not a primary player in the story, which is set in her mother's childhood, but she demonstrates that she has heard the story, and understands that her role as listener is to encourage the story's progression using what she remembers from previous renderings. In storytelling moments, the tellers and listeners work together to create the story, but they also draw lines and make connections between other stories, turning "conversation into a conversive whole" (Ramírez, "Storytellers" 338). The explanation about King and Lynette's new car triggers commentary that adds to the conversive whole as it informs the listener-reader about how the car matters in relation to June and, in turn, to Eli:

“‘Just recently he bought this new car,’ Zelda went on, ‘with the rest of that money. [...] Eli doesn’t like it, or so I heard. That car reminds him of his girl. You know Eli raised June like his own daughter when her mother passed away and nobody else would take her’” (23).

Through this narrative sharing approach, the novel acts as a means of identity formation for June. But as she is dead, the novel’s progression depends on the living characters; each character has a purpose for remembering June except Lipsha, her son who does not know that June is his mother. The stories in the novel then act as a means for shaping not just June’s but also Lipsha’s identity. Though the listener-reader is introduced to the novel’s cast and is informed about their relationship to June through their stories, the listener-reader is aligned with the orphan male protagonist Lipsha, whose arrival is emphasized by his lateness: “One more of us had arrived by this time” (29). Lipsha is described as “more [of] a listener than a talker, a shy one with a wide, sweet, intelligent face” (29). Both the reader and Lipsha do not know how he will come to know what Albertine calls his secret: “One secret I had learned from sitting quietly around the aunts, from gathering shreds of talk before they remembered me, was Lipsha’s secret, or half of it at least. I knew who his mother was” (30). Lipsha’s ignorance of his mother’s identity gives the novel its purpose, and secures Lipsha’s position with the listener-reader, as we discover Lipsha’s secret together, which in turn directs and affects how each narrator tells his or her stories.

Because Lipsha is ignorant about who his parents are, the suggestion of the need for knowing his identity comes from the feminine first through Albertine, who learns Lipsha's secret from the other women of the family, "from sitting quietly around the aunts, from gathering shreds of talk" (30). After drinking with King and Lynette, during which violence ensues, and as King kicks and screams at Lynette who is locked inside the new car, Lipsha removes himself from the rest of the family and finds solace alone; Albertine walks down to where she knows Lipsha is, "at the bottom of the hill below the house" (37). There she enters his territory, and there they share a drink, a preparatory suggestion to the reader that some conversive storytelling might take place: "He passed me a bottle of sweet rosé, I drank" (37). The two talk about how Lipsha deals with volatile men like King: "I steer clear of King. I never turn my back on him, either" (38). King is abusive and prone to drunken violence; Lipsha's approach to King models for us ways to deal with such men, but Albertine also reminds us that domestic violence will continue if male observers only stay quiet and steer clear of men like King. Albertine nearly encourages a confrontation when she tells Lipsha not to be afraid of King, reminding him that King is scared, a fear that manifests itself in violent behavior: 'Don't be scared of him,' [...] He's scared underneath' (38). This conversation, which results in "a wash of love" sweeping over Albertine, opens up for her an opportunity to initiate a storytelling moment:

‘I am going to talk to you about something particular....’ I began. My voice was serious, all of a sudden, and it scared him. He moved away from me, suspicious. I was going to tell him what I’d heard from hanging at the edge of the aunts’ conversations. I was going to tell him that his mother was June.

Since so many others knew, it was only right that he should, too. (39).

As conversive storytelling moments depend on both the teller’s and the listener’s participation, and as this particular moment seems to have only one of the two important elements, Albertine’s storytelling is hardly successful. Lipsha “moves away” from Albertine, a physical response that matches his statement about his mother: “‘I can never forgive what she done to a little child,’ he said. ‘They had to rescue me out of her grip’ (39). Lipsha’s use of ‘they’, that group that includes Marie, who saves him, suggests the story of his rescue is situated firmly within his consciousness. Craig Womack writes that in the oral tradition, the story rests inside the audience’s consciousness as a direct result of repeated storytelling: “The listener in an oral tradition already knows the outcome of the story because [he] has heard it many times” (Womack 89). Lipsha himself tells us he often does what Marie asks of him, in order to prevent her from repeating the story of how she rescued him: “I didn’t want to [put the touch on Grandpa], but before Grandma started telling me again what a bad state my bare behind was in when she first took me home, I thought I should at least pretend” (232). About this dynamic, Lipsha observes, “[o]ne reason she remembers so many

details about the trouble I gave her in early life is so she can flash back her total when she needs to” (240). For Lipsha, Marie’s repeated storytelling has taken root in his consciousness so much so that he acts on the memory of the stories, in order not to hear the stories again. Marie’s stories seem to act as a form of control over Lipsha, so when Albertine insists on talking about Lipsha’s mother, he claims Marie as his mother, a claim that carries with it a hint of Marie’s story that also shapes how he regards himself: ‘I consider Grandma Kashpaw my mother, even though she just took me in like any old stray’ (39). He ends the conversation about his mother, but leaves open the possibilities of one day meeting and knowing his father.

Over the course of the novel, we learn about June through each surviving family member; simultaneously, with each story, we learn about the narrators themselves. Marie Lazarre, who first adopts June, tells us about her life in the convent with Sister Leopolda, and how she meets Nector Kashpaw, who is already in love with Lulu Nanapush. Nector tells us about courting Lulu then accidentally finding and staying with Marie, who seems to take in “unexpected shipments [of babies] from time to time” (135). Lulu tells us about leaving government school and living with her old uncle Nanapush and his wife Margaret Kashpaw, also known as Rushes Bear; Lulu tells us about finding a husband in Moses Pillager then Henry Lamartine after Nector finds a wife in Marie. She tells us how Henry Senior commits suicide, and she speaks of her sons, specifically Gerry, Moses’s son, and one of June’s lovers; he is “a natural criminal

and hero whose face appeared on the six-o'clock news" (118). Lulu's son Lyman, who finds something unusual between Lulu and Lipsha, tells stories about his relationships with his brother Henry Junior who suffers from posttraumatic stress syndrome and who kills himself. After these identity narratives, told in a collaborative storytelling method, in which the "narratives also allow the representation of a larger community identity and weave [Erdrich's] audience into the fabric of this extended family and its stories" (Reid 67-68), the novel transitions back to the issue of Lipsha's parents, set up at the beginning by Albertine. Albertine's story "Scales" introduces Dot and Gerry. She remembers Gerry Nanapush as having been "some kind of boyfriend to Aunt June" (195). Together, Albertine and Gerry attend Dot's birth of Gerry's child: "From time to time Gerry paced in the time-honored manner of the prisoner or expectant father" (208). Albertine's story about witnessing Gerry become a father again reminds the listener-reader of her position as the witness to "half" of Lipsha's secret, only this time, unbeknownst to her, she is in the physical presence of the other half of that secret. Then the narrator tells us of June's husband Gordie, who in a drunken state, hallucinates that he kills June. We are brought back to the issue at hand, learning about a dead June, her relationship with Gerry, and their son Lipsha, as we at last get the first person story by Lipsha Morrissey himself.

In the story, "Love Medicine," Lipsha reiterates and summarizes what it has taken each storyteller several pages to tell. His Kashpaw grandparents are now at the

Senior Citizens apartments, where he goes often to visit and care for them, but also where he sees Lulu Lamartine: “There is a woman here, Lulu Lamartine, who always had a thing for Grandpa. She loved him since she was a girl...” (231). We also learn that Lipsha is a passive listener of stories, as marked by his retelling of events that occurred in the community, events that he “heard” from others, and remembers. Also, his identity and personal approach to life is formed in part by the story Marie has put into him: “Now it isn’t my style, in no way, to get depressed. So I said to myself, Lipsha Morrissey, you’re a happy S.O.B. who could be covered up with weeds by now down at the bottom of this slough, but instead you’re alive to tell the tale” (244). His attitude about depression reflects a sense of indebtedness and dedication to his grandmother, for whom he would “do anything;” his commitment to her leads him to create a love medicine that kills his grandfather Nector. Nector’s death, however, opens up the opportunity for old feuds and secrets to be put to rest; Lulu and Marie become “co-conspirators,” and Lipsha Morrissey learns from Lulu the truth about who he is: “I was King’s half brother, see, a bastard son of June’s” (332).

Erdrich emphasizes the importance of balance for mutually conversive storytelling, and in this case, identity formation. Despite their both being about the same age, and share the same grandparents, Albertine is unable to align with Lipsha, which prevents her from telling him about June. Another kind of alignment is required. Although Lulu Lamartine seems an unlikely candidate to align with Lipsha in order to

engage in a conversive storytelling moment, as Lipsha himself notes, he and Lulu have something more powerful than age or family ties in common:

I was quite careful. To tell the truth I was afraid of her. She scared people after the bandages came off her eyes, because she seemed to know everybody else's business. No one understood that like I did. For you see, having what they call the near-divine healing touch, I know that such things are purely possible. If she had some kind of power, I wasn't one to doubt. (333)

Lulu's son Lyman hints at this shared trait between his mother and Lipsha, whom Lyman thinks strange: "people treated him special, as though he were important somehow, but I couldn't see it" (304). And when Lyman notes that Lipsha "rarely spoke" he also notes that he does not have to speak, because Lyman's mother, Lipsha's "great admirer," speaks instead, an observation that suggests Lulu and Lipsha share a voice and perception of the world. Therefore, in terms of a novel centered around medicine and the complexities of how medicine works, it seems entirely correct that Lulu, who allegedly "put a spell on Grandpa Kashpaw" (332) should reveal the secret of his parentage to Lipsha, the man whose medicine kills Grandpa Kashpaw.

Lulu reveals to Lipsha that his mother is June and his father is her son Gerry, who is the son of Moses Pillager, a lineage that makes Lipsha a Nanapush man: "You should be proud that you're on" (336). After she gives him the story, she says, "You never knew who you were. That's one reason why I told you. I thought it was a

knowledge that could make or break you' (337). Her statement leaves Lipsha to decide what he will do with the story, because in whatever way he uses it, the story will help to define him. Lulu also underscores the role stories play in positioning individuals within families: 'I either gain a grandson or lose a young man who didn't like me in the first place' (336). The story about his parents also helps Lipsha to understand how to read some of his medicinal gifts, about which he now says, "I have some powers which, now that I think of it, was likely to come down from Old Man Pillager" (341). This information, reasoning, and insight "inherited from Lulu" combined with the "the familiar teachings of Grandma Kashpaw" (341) give Lipsha a more complete sense of his identity.

After he decides to meet his father Gerry, who escapes while being transferred between prisons, Lipsha visits his half-brother King who had once been in prison with Gerry, and who, as boys, treated Lipsha like dirt: "I just had to see him knowing what I knew. Maybe things would change now that we were formally brothers" (341). And then suddenly, the "famous Chippewa who had songs wrote for him [...] sat down at the dirtiest kitchen table in Minnesota with his son and his cellmate" (352). The scene reflects in some ways the novel's opening family scenes in which the family gather around a table and talk; here, a family of men sit around a table and play cards; and again the controversy over the car King buys with June's insurance money is put on the table, literally, as the three men play a game of cards for the car. The now agential

Lipsha suggests this prize: “‘Let’s play for the car,’ I said to King. ‘Let’s play for the Firebird you bought with June’s insurance. At the mention of my mom, Gerry’s face got stiff around the edges” (356). After a moment of quiet, during which Lipsha projects what Gerry must be remembering about his romance with June and the baby they have together, Gerry agrees: ‘Let’s play for the car’ (357).

When Lipsha wins and drives Gerry to Canada, the father and son engage in a conversive act of storytelling; together, they remember and co-create an impression of June:

After a moment Gerry [answers that] he knew June, way back when. A little while after that he blurted out, ‘Hell on wheels! She was really something... so beautiful.’

‘You sound like you was in love with her,’ I promptly said.

‘In love with her like everybody else,’ he told me. (363)

Gerry asks Lipsha, ‘What’s your story?’ a question that he answers with a story that includes his running away from the army before the physical, but also a story that does not yet include Gerry as his father, leaving Gerry to take on the responsibility to contribute this part to their conversation: ‘I didn’t have to go in the army because my heart is slightly fucked. [...] You’re a Nanapush man [...] We all have this odd thing with our hearts’ (366). By assuring Lipsha that he too will fail the army physical because of this shared heart condition, Gerry acknowledges Lipsha as his son.

Before the novel ends with Lipsha delivering his father into Canada, Lipsha thinks on life: “So many things in the world have happened before. But it’s like they never did. Every new thing happens to a person, it’s a first. To be a son of a father was like that” (366). These sentiments can be read with Tayo’s observations that new experiences can sometimes act as barriers to achieving ends, but that barriers can be broken depending on “whether you knew the story of how others before you had gone” (Silko 19). Lipsha has not been told any stories about his father, or about how to relate to a father once he finds one, so he feels, despite a world full of father and sons, without any stories about them, he is not prepared for having one, and so he feels that the experience is entirely new; this does not discourage him, however, as he is encouraged by his thoughts of June, and the stories about her, which his father also shares with him: “she was part of the great loneliness being carried up the driving current” (366), part of the greater story being told, one in which Lipsha is now an identifiable player. As Simon Ortiz says, ‘Oral tradition is inclusive; it is the actions, behavior, relationships, practices throughout the whole social, economic, and spiritual life process of people’ (Ramírez, Contemporary 3). For Lipsha the conversive stories created about June help to bring him into or include him in the life process of his people, his family. Lipsha now knows his place in the story, and has a sense of direction, allowing him to put the memories of June to rest: “The morning was clear. A good road led on. So there was nothing to do but cross the water, and bring her home” (367).

Through Lipsha, Louise Erdrich offers an approach to identity formation, achieved through the sharing of stories. Also, because much of Lipsha's controlled identity is set in contrast to his half-brother King's abusive hyper-masculinity, and in relation to his father Gerry, the fugitive, Lipsha serves as a model for tempered masculinity and responsible familial contributor. He avoids confrontation with King until he is certain of his own power and position, and he non-violently confronts King with a game of poker, and takes from King the one thing of June's that he has over Lipsha: the Firebird. Lipsha uses the Firebird to help his father flee; unlike his father who admits to having no sense of home, Lipsha returns home, likely to care for his Grandma Kashpaw, as suggested by his mentioning her hankie in his pocket in the last scene. Lipsha is told about his identity by the feminine, first in part from Albertine, the one girl he ever trusted, and then more fully from Lulu, the one woman he ever feared. Lipsha returns home, knowing who he is, and is prepared to position himself within his family structure, finally bringing his mother to rest. If Lipsha is aligned with a masculine listener-reader, the identity narratives, his journey through them, his confrontation of the drunken and abusive King, he models for us the respectful consideration of the feminine voice in order to move out of ignorance and a lack of identity and into a life of knowledge and an empowered sense of self, so that he can return home and participate in reconstructing the family.

FACES IN THE MOON

Betty Louise Bell's Faces in the Moon differs from the previous two novels discussed as it may be the most indirect address and appeal to men to reconstruct and strengthen the family. Bell also reminds us that women shape identity for one another, and that, if there is an absence of male participation in the home, women will accept roles typically applied to men in Indian families and communities. Like Tayo and Lipsha before her, Lucie is a child without a mother, if only temporarily. And like Albertine, who learns to sit at the table and listen to the aunts tell stories, Lucie also sits at tables and listens to the stories the women in her family tell. But unlike Ceremony, which offers a gender-balanced approach to individual healing rendered through Tayo; and unlike Love Medicine, which privileges a communal approach to identity formation for Lipsha, Faces in the Moon offers a female protagonist with a mission to find a father for herself and for her family history. After J.D. "moved into their tiny house" (64) any harmony shared between Lucie and her mother Gracie is disrupted, leading Gracie to make a choice: J.D. tells Gracie, 'I don't aim to stay in no house with that brat, always looking at me like she got no respect. You hear me? You get rid of that brat or I'm a-leaving!' (70). Gracie takes Lucie to live with her Uncle Jerry and Aunt Lizzie, who tell Lucie stories of Quannah Parker and about their family, stories that detail the family's paternal origin that Lucie must correct at the end. While Silko's and Erdrich's novels guide and encourage men to participate within the communities, Bell indirectly

addresses male listener-readers who have abandoned familial responsibilities by emphasizing the absence of viable father figures for Lucie, and by suggesting that the absent father and the fractured family may well have far-reaching social effects.

Faces in the Moon calls on men to return to fatherhood in order to affect stories, which in turn build families and nations. In the previous two readings, I align the protagonist with a male listener-reader, determining and basing the alignment, in some part, on the gender of the protagonist, but that process does not apply to Lucie. Instead, male listener-readers can find in Lucie an opportunity to apply the lessons given to Tayo and Lipsha: to be open to the messages found in the voice(s) of women. Just as Lucie is “raised on the voices of women” (4), male listener-readers can witness how vital Indian women’s voices are to “raising” not just the individual but whole families and communities out of destruction and into a strengthened, more secure structure. An adult Lucie also observes that raising families involves time and participation: “History is written in this complicity, an infinite regression of children forgetting and remembering. It takes a long time to remember, it takes generations, sometimes nations, to make a story” (22). And sometimes, it takes stories to make a nation, as Craig Womack notes in “Reading the Oral Tradition for Nationalist Themes,” when he writes, “Literature plays a vital role in [establishing a concept of nationhood], since it is part of what constitutes the idea of nationhood; people formulate a notion of themselves as an imagined community through stories” (Womack 60). Directing the imagination

through story puts the storyteller in a powerful position. A great deal of power then rests not just in the reading of stories, as Kathleen Donovan suggests, but also in writing and asserting oneself as a storyteller.

Bell's conversive co-creative storytellers and listeners are female, women talking to women, interacting with one another in the living experience of storytelling. Gracie and Rozella teach Lucie about their girlhoods and their mother Hellen Evers, emphasizing women's power in their mother's one-sentence reminder:

'You member, Grace, what she used to tell us?' Momma and Auney laughed, and I saw Lizzie turn from her work at the sink and almost smile.

'I sure do.' Momma leaned toward me, as if I hadn't heard it a hundred times before, and said slowly, 'Don't mess with Indian women.' (18)

Certainly, there is a message of women's self-empowerment here, as women are marked as indeterminable forces. Lizzie also tells Lucie stories about the Cherokee family value system: 'The Cherokee always been a proud people. They took care of their children and families. That always come first. When my grandaddy [sic] come from Georgia he didn't leave no body behind' (122).

The novel illustrates bell hooks's observation that "Women have always talked to each other" (Donovan 8), but Lizzie also points out that men play an important role in families and stories, and in fact any participation on their part is vital. Uncle Jerry, who shares some stories with Lucie, also teaches Lucie about the importance of

criticism, as he engages in a kind of conversive critical practice with his Motorola radio: “Uncle Jerry advised Amos in his schemes, counseled women in the soap operas, knew a fib when he heard one, believed the Shadow was invincible, and always greeted the Lone Ranger with the same objection. ‘Now whoever heard a Indian named Tonto?’” (102). Uncle Jerry’s “interaction” with the radio serves as a form of criticism; he listens to and critiques the radio, and, when necessary, he voices his resistance:

‘I git tired all these white voices talking, and I try to give ‘em the Indian point of view. Like my daddy woulda done. Just the other day, this man in the radio talking ‘bout how this here Eisenhower’s a great chief. Shoot! I put ‘im straight away. ‘Ain’t ya ever heard a Quannah Parker?’ I asks. He didn’t know what to say.’ (116)

Talking back to the radio, he says, is his way of warding off evil, sending back any witchery that might come through it; talking back also serves to correct errors; no matter how deaf the object may be, Uncle Jerry finds power in the act of voicing corrections over remaining completely silent. Lucie learns the lesson, as she becomes a university professor who sets out to correct an error in her grandmother’s death certificate, her documented history.

Lizzie tells Lucie some of her family history. She learns about her grandmother Hellen, and about her great-grandfather Robert Henry Evers who “come from Georgia” and left no one behind. She also tells Lucie about Hellen’s favorite story, “the story

‘bout Quanah Parker,” the Indian Jesse James (142). According to Lizzie, Quanah Parker and his band of renegades protected Indian land by running white settlers off: ‘And if ya were a white settler, a-squatting on Indian lands, ya didn’t wanna wake up in the middle of the night an’ find him standing right over your bed’ (142). Lucie’s family history is connected to the larger story of Quanah Parker, as Lizzie’s own mother met him when she was a child, when he found shelter in the family barn while the soldiers searched for him: ‘All night her momma and aunties stood guard outside that barn. [...] When their men come back, they told ‘em, and my momma’s daddy figured Quanah Parker had knowed Indian women and children needed his protection’ (143). The story of Quanah Parker moves from oral story and into Lucie’s consciousness. She dreams that she meets Quanah Parker, and that she rides with him in a parade down Main Street; she goes as far as to claim him as her father: “The people roared and cheered, pushed close to the fire engine to get a look at her father” (151).

Several years after her mother’s death, with the aim of correcting Hellen Evers’s death certificate, which lacks her father Robert Evers’s name, Lucie visits the Oklahoma Historical Society. She researches for “proof that [her] grandmother had had a father” (190). At the library, she is confronted with a white librarian’s bigotry; to him, she asserts her identity, revealed to her through the oral tradition:

I am a follower of stories, a negotiator of histories, a wild dog of many lives. I am Quanah Parker swooping down from the hills into your bedroom in the

middle of the night. And I am centuries of Indian women who lost their husbands, their children, their minds so you could sit there and grin your shit-eating grin. [...] I am your worst nightmare: I am an Indian with a pen. (192)

Lucie effectively identifies herself as the Indian renegade hero she learns about through stories, and she sends the message to white men and to Indian men, that if there is work to be done in Indian families and communities, anyone can do it, as long as she is armed with the stories of the heroes that have come before her. This culminating scene illustrates what Inés Hernández-Avila contends, that many activists women are concerned with issues pertaining to their homeland. In Lucie's case, the issues pertain to Robert H. Evers, her great-grandfather, whose identity she learns through his land allotment story; the issues also include affirming his position as her grandmother's father, an important task for a woman who grows up without a viable father figure. By identifying herself as Quanah Parker and as "an Indian with a pen," Lucie also evokes a history of protecting land claims, as Parker is known as the Comanche chief who removes white squatters from Indian land. In so doing, Lucie subverts expected gender norms and institutionalized identity formation, and declares herself a male Indian hero in order to combat white male bigotry; as native scholar Cheryl Suzack suggests, for Indian people, subversive identity formations and identity categories can mean all the difference between restorative justice and continued oppression (Suzack 171).

Betty Louise Bell's Faces in the Moon, though distinct from the previous two novels discussed, offers an indirect message to male listener-readers. Bell reminds us that Indian women shape identity for one another, and that, if there is an absence of male participation, women accept roles typically applied to men in Indian families and communities. Bell also emphasizes the absence of fathers. Lucie does not know who her father is, and J.D. is not a viable father figure for her, which leaves her to search for a father through the oral narratives Aunt Lizzie and Uncle Jerry tell her. In Uncle Jerry, Lucie finds a model for criticism, vigilance, and resistance to the world's evil messages. In Quannah Parker, Lucie learns about responsibility to her family and to the land. Although Lucie is not aligned with a male listener-reader, her story offers male listener-readers a testimony to witness how vital Indian women's voices are to identity formation, and to "raising" and saving individuals and whole families. And perhaps most importantly, Lucie's story reminds male listener-readers of the valuable and important responsibilities of fatherhood, as they relate to forming stability within the home, a foundation on which communities and nations are built. To establish stable families, even in the absence of men, women work to correct errors in history, as illustrated by Lucie's final effort to prove that her grandmother had had a father. Lizzie teaches Lucie to care for her Cherokee family: 'That always come first' (122). And in maintaining this priority, Lucie continues the spirit in which her great-grandfather claims a land allotment in the first place: "For myself and my children" (130).

CONCLUSION

I opened with a reference to recent events in popular culture concerning issues of misogyny and the lack of male participation in healing families and communities, to help situate my argument that American Indian women's literature can serve as a useful and valuable tool that can guide men to move from a culture of domestic violence and abusive behavior toward personal healing and communal harmony. Lisa M. Poupart reminds us that the roots of oppression, for Indian people, exist in memory—"five hundred years of assimilation and acculturation" handed down through and manifested in "devastating social ills" (Poupart 88)—but, "[t]hrough the telling of our experiences and stories in a continued oral tradition" and in contemporary written literature, Indian people practice a form of resistance to dominant society's oppression (88). I have attempted to show that the oral tradition is reconstructed in the written texts of American Indian women writers; and while it preserves the history of subjugation in tribal memory, storytelling also offers lessons, guides, or methods to escape from the bondage of that history in order to move into a promising present and a future culture of healing and freedom.

In Chapter One, I addressed the problematic effects of internalized oppression on the oral tradition, and I presented the ways in which American Indian women storytellers combat and subvert these problems by coming to voice and telling their stories. I began with Pretty Shield, but by no means am I suggesting that she is the first

or the only woman storyteller of her era to speak out against oppression. In Chapter Two, I argued that the use of the oral tradition in contemporary American Indian women's literature opens opportunities for reading feminist egalitarian messages intended, directly or indirectly, for a male readership, and I worked to connect the history and theories of the American Indian oral tradition with feminist political concepts. And in Chapter Three, I offered close readings of three novels, Leslie Marmon's Silko's Ceremony, Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine, and Betty Louise Bell's Faces in the Moon, to illustrate how women writers may be instructing men to a return to Indian familial and communal values; these novels do many things, one of which may be a movement to save families, a movement that men need to be part of.

In Ceremony, Silko urges her male listener-readers out of "whirling darkness" and into an ordered or corrected pattern of life. She guides Tayo through a healing process that is rooted in the concept of balance—balance between nature's elements, balance between destructive and creative forces, and balance between the genders—in order to steer men away from the destructive consciousness found in Emo's stories, and toward a position of creation and renewal. In Love Medicine, Erdrich reminds her male listener-readers that identity depends on community. She guides Lipsha through a discovery process that includes sharing and listening to the many voices and stories around him. Erdrich also illustrates the threatening and destructive forces that confront American Indian families depicted in the abusive relationship between King and

Lynette. She encourages men away from living life like King and offers Lipsha as an example of a male who successfully hears her message to return to the family. In Faces in the Moon, Bell emphasizes the power that women's voices have on identity, and indirectly underscores the importance of responsible fatherhood. She reminds us that if there is an absence of men, women have within them the capabilities of embodying male role models, which requires only knowing the stories of male leaders. Lucie pronounces herself the Comanche renegade Quanah Parker, but she also calls him her father, which again suggests that at her core, she needs the foundation a mother and a father provide—her and his voice, together.

The narrative of destruction that now pervades the news media may be old and all too familiar to Indian people, but much progress has been made in the work of American Indian women writers. Speaking about, dealing with, and healing from destruction can be found in novels by Silko, Erdrich, and Bell, who present for their protagonists and their listener-readers worthy male role models that have mapped out paths for us to take. Betonie asks us to follow in his footsteps; Moses Pillager offers us medicine, and Quanah Parker calls us to protect the land and families. We may be emerging from a state of whirling darkness, but as Betonie reminds us, 'It is a matter of transitions, you see; the changing, the becoming must be cared for closely' (Silko130). Caring for the transition from personal destruction to societal creation now rests with the active participation of American Indian male listener-readers. 'It's up to you.' (152)

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