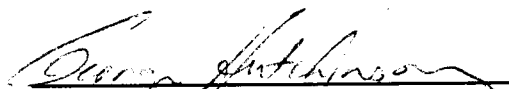


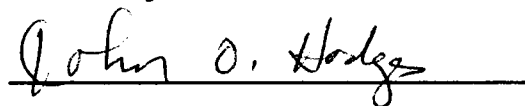
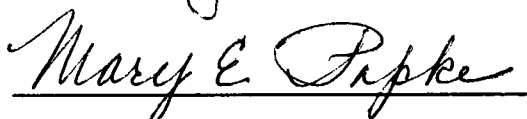
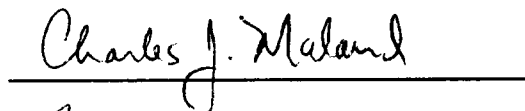
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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Bonnie C. Winsbro entitled "Supernatural Forces: Belief, Difference, and Power in Contemporary Works by Ethnic Women." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.



George Hutchinson, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:



Accepted for the Council:



Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of The Graduate School

**SUPERNATURAL FORCES: BELIEF, DIFFERENCE, AND POWER
IN CONTEMPORARY WORKS BY ETHNIC WOMEN**

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Bonnie C. Winsbro

May 1992

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To
Vic, Sandy, and Ruth,
with love and deepest gratitude

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ABSTRACT

To live in the United States today is to live in a multicultural universe, one in which individual worlds continuously collide, intersect, or exist side by side and in which boundaries, both geographical and sociocultural, are violated daily. This dissertation examines five novels and one autobiography by contemporary ethnic women writers to determine the influence of belief in supernatural forces on bicultural individuals as they mature and define themselves in such a world. How is the process of self-definition affected by one's personal beliefs, by the community's beliefs, and by the outside world's beliefs? When are such beliefs — or conflicts between beliefs — constructive, and when are they destructive, and when is a partial or total reconstruction of such beliefs called for? Ultimately, all six works demonstrate that personal power is acquired through self-definition, that is, through the construction of one's own mythology — or reality — and through the location and claiming of one's own center.

Lee Smith's *Oral History*, for example, tells the story of Red Emmy, whose failure to break out of her externally imposed identity as witch symbolizes the inability of many Appalachian women to escape both the geographical and sociocultural boundaries of Appalachia. Louise Erdrich, in *Tracks*, tells the story of a Chippewa witch, Fleur Pillager, who although defined from both within and without discovers the limitations of her powers as the whites increasingly invade and destroy the Chippewa world. In Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, the half-white, half-Pueblo Tayo, who left the reservation to fight in World War II, finds his way home both physically and spiritually through a revitalization of his belief in the Laguna Pueblo spirit people. In Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*, Cocoa constructs for

herself a new world that combines belief in the powers of the self, drawn from the world of New York, with belief in supernatural powers, drawn from the world of Willow Springs. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* focuses on the power of Beloved, an incarnate ghost, to force Sethe, Denver, Paul D, and the community to redefine themselves and their relations to each other through a confrontation with their individual and collective African American past. Similarly, Maxine Hong Kingston, in her autobiography *The Woman Warrior*, describes her efforts to define herself in relation to her Chinese heritage and her life among non-Chinese Americans by confronting and giving life to the ghosts of her girlhood. Thus, self-definition by the ethnic individuals described in these six works demands that they examine their beliefs in the supernatural, rejecting, renewing, or modifying those beliefs held by family, community, and the dominant culture.

An introductory chapter briefly discusses ethnicity, ethnicization, and the ethnic writer; the realist and postmodernist tendencies of ethnic literature; the value of group and individual self-definition; the role of belief in individuation; and the sociopolitical function of ethnic literature.

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CHAPTER 1

COLLIDING WORLDS AND CONSTRUCTED REALITIES: ETHNICITY, SELF-DEFINITION, AND BELIEF

I . . . want my work to capture the vast imagination of black people. That is, I want my books to reflect the imaginative combination of the real world, the very practical, shrewd, day to day functioning that black people must do, while at the same time they encompass some great supernatural element. We know that it does not bother them one bit to do something practical and have visions at the same time. So all the parts of living are on an equal footing. Birds talk and butterflies cry, and it is not surprising or upsetting to them. These things make the world larger for them. Some young people don't want to acknowledge this as a way of life. They don't want to hark back to those embarrassing days when we were associated with "haints" and superstitions. They want to get as far as possible into the scientific world. It makes me wonder, in such cases, if the knowledge we ignore is discredited because we have discredited it.

— Toni Morrison, "An Interview with Toni Morrison" 428

A primary theme in literature has always been the relationship between humans and their gods. The American literary canon, like that of other nations, traces the history of the religious beliefs of the country, beginning with the early Puritanism of Edward Taylor and Anne Bradstreet and continuing through the Calvinism of Jonathan Edwards, the transcendentalism of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, the pantheism and religious ecstasy of Walt Whitman, and the rebellion of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Emily Dickinson against a restrictive religion and a stern and bullying god. Finally, twentieth-century modernists, confronted with a godless universe and deprived of a living mythology, either denied the need for mythology, turned to ancient or Eastern mythologies, or sought to create new mythologies with which to fill the gap. Despite the changes and variety over time in the depiction by American writers of their relationship to

the supernatural, those works included in the American canon have almost universally focused on the Judaeo-Christian god, praising, fearing, rebelling against, or denying his power. What has rarely been treated seriously in American literature until recently, or at least rarely published, are human relationships with deities other than the Judaeo-Christian god, with the spirits of the deceased, and with those men and women who draw on the powers of such deities and spirits to extend their own mortal power — powers called, variously, supernatural, religious, mythological, magical.

The five novels and one autobiography discussed in this dissertation reflect a view of reality that differs significantly from that presented by the previously established literary canon. According to the reality represented by the works included here, the world is inhabited by a host of spirits and deities, all of whom possess the power to influence or control events that affect humans. Motivated by fear, loneliness, reverence, or gratitude, the humans in this world maintain a continuous and intimate communication with its many nonhuman inhabitants. This world is also inhabited by sorcerers and witches who, manipulating supernatural powers to advance the forces of evil and destruction, are responsible for such phenomena as sudden illness or death, failed crops and dying livestock, flood and drought. To counteract the powers of evil, however, humans can call on conjurors, shamans, and healers who, through incantation, magic, and ritual, work to restore health, fecundity, and balance to the universe. Thus, the works discussed in this dissertation represent an alternative reality to that represented by those American authors who have written and are continuing to write out of a Judaeo-Christian tradition. They also, of course, represent a view of reality that has been "disproved" by science.

Although science has methodically disproved the objective reality of spirits, deities, and supernatural forces, it has failed to destroy belief in the supernatural because that belief provides a logical answer to questions that have plagued humans since the awakening of their cognitive powers. Many cultures, for example, believe that the soul leaves the body during dreaming and that during these dream periods one's soul is threatened by evil spirits who wish to steal it or take its place in the deserted body. This belief is validated for such cultures not only by the phenomenon of dreaming itself but also by the perception that an ailing individual is cured when his soul is returned to him or when a foreign spirit is ousted from his body by the resident healer. "An Iban *knows* his theories are correct," writes research psychiatrist E. Fuller Torrey about a group of people living in Borneo, "because his subjective experiences during dreaming prove it and because when the *manang* captures a lost soul during treatment, the sufferer usually gets well" (123). The Iban's beliefs are not just the product of an overactive imagination; they are both suggested and validated by the experiential evidence of their dreams and of their culture's healing process. The Iban have constructed a reality that serves them in time of need as effectively as a scientific or Judaeo-Christian reality serves others.

This dissertation examines a few of the different world views that constitute different realities for different people. It recognizes that today's world is not defined by one reality but by many realities and that, while these realities sometimes overlap or coexist amicably, they often intrude upon or clash with each other. Although multiple realities have always existed, dominant cultures have historically sought to unify reality by imposing their own version on those around them. As a result, the realities, or beliefs, of marginal cultures have frequently been destroyed; when not totally destroyed, these alternative realities have been

carefully hidden from view and passed on through secret ritual and ceremony, or they have been transformed and modified to merge with or incorporate other realities. Within the United States, the beliefs of those ethnic groups that have been rendered powerless through decimation of their numbers, through enslavement, through an externally imposed silence and invisibility, and through a process of colonization that has denied them the right to construct and represent their own reality are the beliefs that have been most at risk. Since the 1960s, however, a renewed interest in ethnicity has driven members of such groups to assert their differences, to revitalize and reconstruct their own realities and world views, and to represent and validate these alternative beliefs through literature that, although written primarily for their own people, asserts to audiences from all cultures that multiple realities do exist.

This new body of ethnic literature, in addition to celebrating the differences among groups, is also concerned with the individual, with his or her daily concerns both within the group and at the boundary that separates the group from the society at large. The writers discussed in this dissertation are particularly concerned with the responses by ethnic individuals to the collision of worlds, realities, and beliefs when the boundary separating the marginal community from the dominant society is crossed, violated, or destroyed. Frequently, individuals caught between cultures are confronted with a multiplicity of realities, an experience that is confusing, at best, and potentially both physically and psychically destructive. Taken together, the works discussed here argue that the survival and growth of ethnic individuals depend on effective self-definition, the process by which they define who they are and what they believe in relation to surrounding social units — family, community/tribe, and society at large. Such an experience of individuation, if completed successfully, instills personal power, a power that in some cases is supplemented by a belief

in an alternative reality, one that acknowledges the existence of those spirits, deities, and empowered humans that are celebrated and remembered in culturally specific folklore, myths, and religion.

Summary and Limitations of Study

This dissertation focuses on six works that describe the importance of self-definition to ethnic individuals confronting geocultural barriers that separate one group from another. Lee Smith's *Oral History* (1983) tells the story of Red Emmy, whose failure to break out of her externally imposed identity as a witch symbolizes the inability of many Appalachian women to escape both the geographical and sociocultural boundaries of Appalachia. Louise Erdrich, in *Tracks* (1988), tells the story of a Chippewa witch, Fleur Pillager, who although defined from both within and without discovers the limitations of her powers as the whites increasingly invade and destroy the Chippewa world. In Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977), the half-white, half-Pueblo Tayo, who left the reservation to fight in World War II, finds his way home both physically and spiritually through a revitalization of his belief in the Laguna Pueblo spirit people. In Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* (1988), Cocoa constructs for herself a new world that combines belief in the powers of the self, drawn from the world of New York, with belief in supernatural powers, drawn from the world of Willow Springs. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) focuses on the power of Beloved, an incarnate ghost, to force Sethe, Denver, Paul D, and the community to redefine themselves and their relations to each other through a confrontation with their individual and collective African American past. Similarly, Maxine Hong Kingston, in her autobiography *The Woman Warrior* (1976), describes her efforts to define herself in relation to her Chinese heritage and her life among

Americans by confronting and giving life to the ghosts of her girlhood. Thus, self-definition for ethnics, as portrayed in these works, demands that individuals examine their beliefs in the supernatural, rejecting, renewing, or modifying those beliefs held by family, community, and the dominant culture.

The types and consequences of belief in the supernatural differ among the works, as do the relationships between the protagonists and their surrounding social units. All begin with cultural difference, portraying the spoken and unspoken conflicts of being ethnic in the United States, but they present different types of conflicts arising from their ethnicity and different types of resolutions. Some of the protagonists, raised without mothers, suffer from the lack of a mother's nurturing and socializing influence; others suffer from a dual heritage, rejected by both parental groups or confused by conflicting loyalties to two cultures; others are second-generation children, born and raised in America by immigrant parents who cling to a homeland their children know only in abstraction; and still others are so Americanized that they have never fully recognized or acknowledged the contribution of their ethnicity to their personality and behavior. In each work, the individuals suffer the consequences of being different not only from the society at large but also from their families or communities. Their individuation in relation to those sociocultural units is either helped or hindered by beliefs in the supernatural, sometimes by their own beliefs and sometimes by those of the surrounding community. These works suggest that such beliefs are extremely powerful, capable of destroying a fragmented individual and a fragmented community or of healing them. The experience of examining, rejecting, renewing, or modifying the beliefs of several cultures is both liberating and empowering, liberating individuals from a reality constructed

and imposed by others and empowering them with the strength to find both substance and voice in a world that until recently has rendered them invisible and silent.

Early in the planning stages of this dissertation, I recognized that the great extent and variety of ethnic works dealing with empowerment through self-definition in relation to one's beliefs in the supernatural would require that I make certain decisions to help guide the selection of writers to be included. A primary objective of the study was to include several different ethnic groups within the United States to demonstrate that the trend is a cross-cultural one; extending the study across cultures, however, meant that I would need to limit the study in other ways. The two limitations that I chose to impose — works written since 1970 and works written by women — were in some ways dictated by the topic of study itself. The current interest of American ethnic writers in self-definition, for example, can be seen as a direct outgrowth of the renewed desire since the 1960s by ethnic groups of the United States to assert their differences from, rather than similarities to, the dominant culture. One difference recognized by many ethnic writers as distinguishing their group from the dominant culture is the difference in beliefs about the supernatural. The interest in and representation of alternative belief systems by ethnic writers is certainly not new, as demonstrated by the novels and stories of Zora Neale Hurston, Charles Chesnutt, and Margaret Walker dealing with voodoo, conjuration, and herbal healing. Nevertheless, I chose to limit my study to works written since 1970 in order to focus on the reasons for and the strengths of the more recent post-1960s appeal.

Although the renewed interest in and desire to represent alternative belief systems in literature cannot be denied, the beliefs described by the writers included here — in witches, healers, and ghosts — cannot be considered as representative of the beliefs held by most

members of any of these groups. Many members of the groups covered in this dissertation — African American, Native American, Chinese American, and Appalachian — hold strong Protestant or Catholic as well as scientific beliefs and thus may be somewhat dismayed by this tendency of contemporary writers to return to what they, along with many members of the dominant culture, think of as "primitive" beliefs. Many African Americans and Native Americans, for example, have chosen Christianity over the traditional religions of their ancestors because they have witnessed and experienced its power and found it self-affirming. Others, having been raised within Christianity, naturally consider it — whether adopted directly or reshaped to fit their individual needs — to be their traditional and "authentic" religion. For still other, more sociopolitically minded ethnics, the renewal of interest in ancient beliefs and alternative realities threatens to undo past efforts and hard-won successes in stressing similarities to, rather than differences from, the dominant culture. Because racial equality and the consequent social, economic, and educational gains have been so long denied to subordinate groups on the basis of perceived differences, many ethnics continue to see cultural differences as needing to be smoothed over and diminished rather than preserved and accentuated.

Similarly, although male ethnic writers are interested in asserting difference and in redefining group and individual identity, they tend to be less concerned with examining, preserving, and representing cultural traditions, including belief systems, than are women. Thus, despite the existence of works dealing with alternative belief systems by male writers such as Alex Haley, N. Scott Momaday, and Rudolfo Anaya, the subject of my study seemed to lend itself primarily to women writers, whose desire to represent the community fully and accurately demands that they deal with such topics. Dexter Fisher, for example, notes that

among African American writers, males "tend to focus their literature on the confrontation between the black and white worlds" while women "concentrate more intensely on the black community alone and the human relationships within that community" (143). Somewhat contrary to Fisher's statement, however, the works of the ethnic women writers discussed here *are* similar to works by male African American writers in that they are clearly concerned with the confrontation between the ethnic world and that of the dominant culture. However, these works do differ from those by male African American writers in that they shift emphasis from the confrontation itself to the effect of that confrontation on the individual and on his or her relationships to and within the community. For male ethnic writers, one might say, power often derives from *participating in* and perhaps even *furthering* the confrontation, whereas for female ethnic writers power derives from *overcoming* the effects of that confrontation as one moves toward a unity of self and a reconciliation with others.

Although the women writers I have selected — Smith, Morrison, Naylor, Silko, Erdrich, and Kingston — do not necessarily express ideas and views that can be considered representative of their respective ethnic groups, they are certainly representative of a growing desire among women of different racial and cultural backgrounds to, in Bettina Aptheker's words, "make connections . . . , while recognizing and respecting . . . differences, as an integral way of knowing" (20). In fact, for women, this scrutiny and celebration of cultural differences often goes hand in hand with their scrutiny and celebration of gender differences. By discussing the six works separately in Chapters 2 through 7, I hope to emphasize the different responses to similar multicultural situations and conflicts. In the concluding chapter, however, I briefly highlight some thematic similarities among the writers. Before

looking at the individual works, however, I devote the remainder of this chapter to an examination of several issues — ethnicity, the realist and postmodernist tendencies of ethnic literature, the value of group and individual self-definition, the role of belief in individuation, and the sociopolitical functions of ethnic literature — as preparation for the discussions that follow.

Ethnicity, Ethnicization, and the Ethnic Writer

Werner Sollors, in his book *Beyond Ethnicity*, defines ethnic literature as fiction and nonfiction works that have been "written by, about, or for persons who perceived themselves, or were perceived by others, as members of ethnic groups" (7). Although this definition appears reasonable, difficulties begin to arise, as Sollors demonstrates in his first chapter, when one attempts to define "ethnic group" and "ethnicity." Both Sollors (25-26) and social scientist William Petersen (1-5) attempt to gain a better understanding of the concept of ethnicity by reviewing the etymological roots of the word, but such a review threatens to add to rather than alleviate the confusion. On the one hand, the Greek word *ethnikos*, meaning "particular to a race or nation," points to the inheritance of certain sociobiological characteristics — that is, the inheritance of racial or national characteristics through biology (genetic makeup) or through cultural socialization (language, religion, subsistence patterns, family organization). In this sense all people are ethnics since all people have distinct, although often mixed, racial and national origins. On the other hand, when the word "ethnic" was first incorporated into the English language in the nineteenth century, it was used to mean "not Christian or Jewish, pagan, heathen" (Petersen 1), a definition that strongly emphasizes difference from the dominant culture, otherness. Thus, although all

Americans are, in one sense, ethnics, the term is commonly used today to mean "nonstandard . . . or not fully American" (Sollors 25). From this definition comes the idea that an ethnic group is synonymous with a minority or marginal group, which is not necessarily true if one accepts that members of majority or culturally dominant groups are also ethnics.

The common denominator between both definitions of ethnicity — difference as constituted by race or nationality and difference from a politically, economically, and socially dominant group — is their emphasis on differences among groups of people. Ethnicity implies that one group is separated from another by perceived differences, differences that are accentuated, minimized, or modified through the interactive processes of ethnicization, assimilation, and acculturation. The persistence of ethnic differences within multiethnic nations, despite the mixing of groups through intermarriage, social interaction, and the common pursuit of certain national goals, has been explained in two ways. One theory holds that ethnicity is a response to a sociobiological force, or a psycho-physical inheritance, that necessarily separates one ethnic from another. The other holds that ethnics create and maintain artificial boundaries in the absence of true cultural differences to ensure continued separation from the mass.

Horace Kallen, who studied the assimilation of U.S. immigrants in the early part of the century, believed that each human being was separated from another by the inheritance of certain intrinsic psycho-physical features:

Behind him in time and tremendously in him in quality, are his ancestors; around him in space are his relatives and kin, carrying in common with him the inherited organic set from a remoter common ancestry. In all these he lives and moves and has his being. They constitute his, literally, *natio*, the inwardness of his nativity. (94)

Similar to Kallen's view that one's ethnicity is, to a large degree, genetically or biologically determined is social scientist Michael Novak's belief that ethnicity is the result of cultural conditioning: "the individual interiorizes, appropriates, and carries culture" (44).¹ An unconscious victim of cultural and familial experience and conditioning, the individual has very little control over his or her development:

Ethnic identity persists among individuals, it appears, by being passed on in unconscious, tacit ways in their early nurture. . . . It appears that in some families the mother and in others the father . . . pass on some of the values and expectations that he or she internalized from the long line of human tradition. . . .

How often children are held in the arms, by whom, and in which emotional patterns may establish the rhythm of their own future emotional expectations. How many voices surround them and with what qualities of passion, what is encouraged in their behavior and what is inhibited, the repertoire of facial expressions and gesture and information that they absorb — all these are communicated, most often, without theory and apart from conscious decision. So it goes also for the rudiments of religious, political, sexual, and other attitudes. Expectations are established, tonalities become familiar, schemes of approval and disapproval are internalized, emotions are given shape, perceptions are tutored, evil and good are identified. (Novak 51, 52-53)

Novak goes on to say that the existence and continuity of the culture itself depends on this process. The ethnicization of the individual ensures the continuance of the group: "A culture has vitality only if it lives in the skills, disciplines, morals, and manners of individuals . . ." (39).

Although Novak and Kallen differ in their opinions about how ethnic differences are inherited, with Kallen emphasizing genetics and Novak emphasizing cultural and familial

¹Although theories about the biological versus cultural inheritance of certain characteristics are generally viewed as *opposing* arguments, my focus here is on the opposition of two broader theories of ethnicization — the theory that true, biologically or culturally inherited differences clearly distinguish and separate one group from another and the theory that the boundaries that distinguish and separate ethnic groups are artificially constructed and maintained.

conditioning, both agree that ethnic groups are distinguished by distinctly different ways of perceiving and responding to their physical and social environment. "To suggest that only one form of reasoning is valid in all matters," Novak writes, is a form of "cultural imperialism." One would be "naive," to say the least, "to believe that the content of human experiencing, imagining, understanding, judging, and deciding were everywhere the same" (35). In addition to the increasing number of studies that reveal critical differences in perception and classification,² many social scientists now recognize that various cultures display a vast array of behaviors resulting from their differing attitudes about

the divine, the sacred, or the holy; . . . nature, history, and moral striving; . . . intelligence, learning, and ideas; . . . the rein to be given passion and emotion, and in which respects; . . . authority, the past, tradition; . . . individuality or communality of human living, solitude and solidarity, self and family; . . . masculinity and fathering, femininity and mothering; and . . . the power of goodness and the power of evil in human affairs. (Novak 54)

Recognizing the danger, however, of privileging cultural difference or relativity to the point of denying the existence of commonalities among cultures, Novak argues for the adoption of what Kallen first termed "cultural pluralism" (11), an attitude toward the multiplicity of cultures that recognizes both similarities and differences. Novak argues that one must distinguish between certain "invariant human *operations* and the varying *content* upon which those operations work" (35-36): that is, "every human being experiences, imagines, understands (both in flashes and in conceptual expression), judges, decides," but among

²See, for example, the studies of cultural variation in visual perception in M. H. Segall, D. T. Campbell, and M. J. Herskovits, *The Influence of Culture on Visual Perception* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966); of age-related differences in thinking processes in J. Piaget, *The Development of Thought: Equilibrium of Cognitive Structures*, trans. A. Rosin (New York: Viking, 1977); and of differences in perception and conception of reality by different linguistic groups in B. L. Whorf, "Science and Linguistics," *Language, Thought and Reality*, ed. J. B. Carroll (Cambridge: Technology Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1957).

groups and individuals these "invariant human operations" yield "variant solutions to fundamental and common human perplexities such as birth, suffering, love, moral consciousness, and death" (36). The goal of cultural pluralism is to encourage mutual understanding without imposing homogenization. Some ethnics fear that homogenizing influences within the United States are out of balance, threatening to obliterate the cultural differences that define group identity and bolster group cohesion. In fact, as the world itself grows smaller through international communication and travel, "human ways of life increasingly influence, dominate, parody, translate, and subvert one another" (Clifford 22). No culture can remain intact, free of the influences of others. Although the dominant, powerful cultures tend to impose their identities on the marginal cultures, the process is not entirely one-way, as European Americans' ready adoption of African American music clearly demonstrates.

In opposition to Kallen, Novak, and others who emphasize sociobiological differences among cultures and who warn against the dangers of homogenizing influences that threaten to eliminate those differences, Fredrik Barth argues that in fact very little in the actual content of cultures serves to distinguish one group from another. Rather, through a process of self-ascription and ascription by others, groups select from a large group of available alternatives those cultural features that are to be used as "signals and emblems of difference," ignoring others and in some cases minimizing or denying those major differences that do exist (14). This emphasis on ascription of group characteristics in defining group identity means that the continuity of ethnic groups depends not on a naturally occurring, sociobiological force but on the artificial construction and maintenance of ethnic boundaries. To understand ethnic continuity, then, according to Barth, one must study "the ethnic

boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses" (15). In fact, the cultural features that signal membership and exclusion tend to change over time, with a consequent change in the cultural features of the group itself. What remains, however, despite such change is the boundary, the "continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders," and this persistence of the dichotomizing boundary, rather than nonchanging cultural features, is responsible for the persistence of a distinct cultural identity.

The act of constructing boundaries has long been used by all cultures as a means of asserting difference and establishing and maintaining social, economic, and political barriers. What falls within the boundaries is superior, privileged, and dominant; what falls without is inferior, deprived, and subordinate. Implicit in boundary construction is the power of definition — the power to define the ideal identity in terms of the values, beliefs, and attitudes held, the power to define others in relation to that ideal, and the power to include or exclude potential members accordingly. The maintenance of boundaries is, however, an interactive process between members and nonmembers. Frequently, ethnic groups themselves choose not to be absorbed by the dominant culture. They construct and maintain ethnic boundaries to resist homogenization and to affirm their difference from others, particularly from what threatens to be an increasingly amorphous, all-encompassing, amoebically engulfing American identity. As Herbert Gans notes, "Americans increasingly perceive themselves as undergoing cultural homogenization, and whether or not this perception is justified, they are constantly looking for new ways to establish their differences from each other" (215).

Since the civil rights movement of the 1960s, African Americans, Native Americans, and Chicanos have displayed and acted upon a renewed desire to emphasize their differences

from European Americans, partly to distinguish their own beliefs, values, and lifestyles, partly to instill group pride, and partly to seek political power and economic benefits. The creation and maintenance of group boundaries has been a major facet of this renewed emphasis on ethnicization. As Philip Gleason explains, "the new attitude pioneered and legitimated by blacks" during the 1960s

was ethnocentric in the literal sense that it was strongly centered on group membership, group solidarity, and group interests, and in the further sense that it made these dimensions of group existence normative; a thing was judged to be good or bad according to whether it strengthened or weakened the group, furthered or hindered its interests. The claims of the group were equated with the requirements of abstract justice, and hostility to outsiders was justified on the grounds of this coincidence between group interests and universal justice. (128)

The success with which African Americans, followed by Native Americans and Chicanos, have emphasized differences to achieve group solidarity clearly demonstrates the influence of boundary creation on the continuing phenomenon of ethnicization in the United States.

The ethnic women writers discussed in this dissertation also assert difference, reinforcing through their literature those boundaries that set their groups apart from the dominant culture. Thus, these works tend to confirm Barth's assertion that the creation and maintenance of boundaries is a primary factor in promoting and encouraging ethnicization. Movement across those boundaries, whether it involves an invasion of the dominant culture inward or the passage of an ethnic individual outward, causes conflict — an internal division or disunity — that the individual must resolve to regain psychic and sometimes physical health. As a group, the works suggest that individuals of multiethnic origin or of an ethnic origin differing from that of the dominant culture are faced with a choice of identity. As Morrison points out, "Now people choose their identities. Now people choose to be Black. They used to be *born* Black. . . . You can be Black genetically and choose not to be" ("Toni

Morrison Now" 36). Thus, ethnics have the choice of asserting their ethnic origins, maintaining boundaries by differentiating themselves from all other cultures; of acculturating to one of the available cultures, denying or minimizing difference; or of creating a new cultural identity by merging aspects of two or more cultures. Indeed, this choice is not only a right, these works argue, but a necessity; to define oneself, one must define one's beliefs and one's relation to surrounding groups, thus choosing or creating one's own center and one's own boundaries. Despite their emphasis on the power of choice, of what Morrison calls "an effort of the will or a freedom of the will" in creating one's identity ("Toni Morrison" 125), these writers strongly suggest that whether the choice made is the "correct" one, whether it is empowering or destructive, depends to a large extent on the success with which one satisfies, incorporates, or at least understands one's cultural heritage.³ Maxine, in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, may choose to reject aspects of her Chinese heritage, but she does so only after understanding and acknowledging their power to help or harm her in her efforts to be the person she wants to be.

This emphasis on the conflict between one's own cultural heritage and that of other groups is exactly what makes the writers included here "ethnic writers." An ethnic writer

³These works, then, seem to support both theories of ethnicity to some extent: their thematic emphasis of the freedom to select and create identities suggests that cultural boundaries are artificially constructed and maintained; at the same time, however, the works suggest that one's cultural conditioning does pass on certain beliefs, attitudes, and characteristics that prove quite difficult to deny, ignore, or change. My personal belief is that each individual is the product of complex and unpredictable interactions among genetic inheritance, cultural and social influences, individual experiences during all stages of development (not just childhood), and the choice/will of the individual to imitate, rebel against, or modify biologically or socially inherited tendencies. Any developmental theory that attributes differences among individuals or among groups to a single phenomenon (genetic inheritance, cultural conditioning, or boundary creation) or to a single component of one's total makeup (race, gender, or class), although helpful in explaining the causes of difference, is far too limiting to be realistic.

is any writer who chooses to emphasize racial or national differences from others, whether those differences are indeed real or are only perceived to be real. Although ethnicity is not synonymous with marginality, ethnic literature, like feminist literature, incorporates a consciousness of marginality; both ethnic literature and feminist literature depend on the writer's consciousness and expression of differences from a normative world view, value system, and/or literary style. The motivation for emphasizing difference varies among ethnic writers. It may be to instill group pride and to foster group solidarity; it may be to obtain sociopolitical power and economic benefits; or it may be to preserve traditions and beliefs of the past, either to prevent their total loss from memory or to inspire present and future generations who feel alienated in the modern world. An ethnic writer, like a feminist writer, acknowledges that differences and boundaries do exist and examines the options for and consequences of preserving, modifying, or eliminating those differences and boundaries.

Realist and Postmodernist Aspects of Ethnic Literature

In a 1981 interview with Thomas LeClair, Morrison said, "I write what I have recently begun to call village literature, fiction that is really for the village, for the tribe. Peasant literature for *my* people" (26). When LeClair suggested that "not all readers are going to catch" certain culturally specific nuances of her novels, Morrison responded that to her "that business of being universal" implies that "to write for black people is somehow to diminish the writing. From my perspective, there are only black people. When I say 'people,' that's what I mean" (28). To write for one's own people is certainly not unprecedented, Morrison reminds LeClair, and to expect her to write for European Americans rather than African Americans is unrealistic: "I never asked Tolstoy to write for

me, a little colored girl in Lorain, Ohio. I never asked Joyce not to mention Catholicism or the world of Dublin. Never. And I don't know why I should be asked to explain your life to you" (28). Nevertheless, Morrison herself admits that the "peasant literature" she writes for her people "also allows [her] to get in touch with all sorts of people" (26). Ultimately, the novels written for African Americans do, to some extent, explain life to European Americans — in a way, furthermore, that they have rarely, if ever, viewed it. In the world represented in Morrison's novels, European Americans are outsiders rather than insiders; they exist outside not only the center but also the boundaries of that world rather than within them.

Ethnic literature, then, has a dual nature: depending on the ethnicity of its reader, it may be experienced as either realistic or postmodernist.⁴ Bonnie Zimmerman believes that "most fiction by women writers . . . remains committed to realism, to creating an authentic female voice, and to portraying authentic female experience" (186). The same appears true for ethnic women writers. Fisher emphasizes the success of African American women writers in mirroring for their readers the communities and daily living that define and sustain them:

what the women writers emphasize is the importance of place and community as character. By defining their landscapes of action to the community and examining the routines of daily life and feeling under a magnifying glass, black women writers accomplish two things: they highlight the art of daily

⁴The depiction of a past way of life that is common to many ethnic works, particularly those discussed here, might suggest to some the nostalgia of romantic literature. However, the emphasis on the past inherent in these works is almost always political in its emphasis on the need for future change. As Morrison explains, "the point is not to soak in some warm bath of nostalgia about the good old days -- *there were none!* -- but to recognize and rescue those qualities of resistance, excellence and integrity that were so much a part of our past and so useful to us and to the generations of blacks now growing up" ("Rediscovering Black History" 14).

living and give back to the community a mirror of itself; and in that mirror, they can correct the stereotypes about black life that seem to proliferate so irresponsibly in our society. (144)

In portraying realistic, nonstereotyped characters, the writers included here also seek to capture those characters' voices. Erdrich, speaking of the characters in her novel *Love Medicine*, says,

These are works of artifice, invention and fiction But there's a reality to the people. The people whose lives were similar to the characters in the books have read the books. One of the most wonderful things anyone said was, "You finally got it down the way people talk around here." . . . (17)

Similarly, Smith says that one objective when she wrote *Oral History* was to capture the change in the language over the hundred-year span of the novel. "The language," she says, "interested me enormously, . . . all those wonderful terms and phrases and incredible strength and eloquence in the spoken language that changed and has become diluted toward the end through t.v. and everything else" (246). Capturing in print what is unique to their people's language and oral traditions is a central concern shared by all these writers.

Morrison explains that

It is important that there is sound in my books — that you can hear it, that I can hear it. . . .

. . . The way black people talk is not so much the use of non-standard grammar as it is the manipulation of metaphor. . . . I am not experimental, I am simply trying to recreate something out of an old art form in my books — the something that defines what makes a book "black." . . . And in doing this my own style has evolved. It is not the only style it is not a question of a black style, but . . . of recognizing the variety of styles, and hanging on to whatever that ineffable quality is that is curiously black. . . . ("Interview with Toni Morrison" 427)

Thus, Zimmerman's statement about the realism of women's writing in general certainly holds true for ethnic women's writing as well: ethnic women's writing is clearly realistic in

its commitment to depicting daily life and to locating and expressing an authentic voice and an authentic experience.

Paradoxically, this very commitment to culturally specific authenticity is what renders ethnic women's writing postmodernist to those readers who, upon entering the world represented in realistic ethnic literature, encounter a new reality, a new sense of their own identity, and a new literature that is at least partially closed to them. Brian McHale argues that "the dominant of postmodernist fiction is ontological" (10). To explain his use of the term "ontological" in relation to postmodernism, he cites Thomas Pavel's definition of an ontology as "a theoretical description of a universe":

the operative word in Pavel's definition . . . is the indefinite article: an ontology is a description of *a* universe, not of *the* universe; that is, it may describe *any* universe, potentially a *plurality* of universes. In other words, to "do" ontology . . . is not necessarily to seek some grounding for *our* universe; it might just as appropriately involve describing *other* universes, including "possible" or "impossible" universes. . . . (27)

Rather than attempting to understand and know *the* universe, then, as McHale says modernist fiction does (9), postmodernist fiction is concerned with multiple ways of being, with the juxtaposition of, collision of, and movement between worlds. Postmodernist fiction, he says, asks such questions as "What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?" and "What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?" (10).

McHale, focusing on postmodernist examples of science fiction, fantasy, and metafiction, emphasizes the boundary between this world and "impossible" worlds, giving little if any notice to the boundaries between the many "possible" worlds of differing cultures. He does comment, however, when discussing Latin American literature, that

Objectively, Latin America is a mosaic of dissimilar and, on the face of it, incompatible cultures, languages, world-views, landscapes, ecological zones. Its condition is, we might even say, *intrinsically* postmodernist. Even a "straight" realistic representation of the continent would have to take this multiplicity into account; and from such a representation to a postmodernist one is only a few short steps. . . . (52)

What McHale says here about the "*intrinsically* postmodernist" condition of Latin America is equally true for the United States, with its mixture of European, African, Asian, Native American, Spanish, Mexican, and West Indian cultures, languages, and world views. Furthermore, I suggest that the "'straight' realistic representation" of any ethnic writer is experienced as postmodernist by those readers who do not share the author's sociocultural and historical background. European Americans reading Morrison, Naylor, Silko, Erdrich, Kingston, and Smith continually confront representations of a reality — both of the world and of European Americans — that differ from their own. European Americans reading ethnic writers must question the reality not only of the world as they perceive it but of their own identity and their own location — marginality rather than centrality — in this differently constructed and represented world. "Postmodernist fiction," Linda Hutcheon writes,

asks its readers to question the processes by which we *make* sense of and *construct* order out of experience in our particular culture. We cannot avoid representation. We *can* try to avoid fixing our notion of it and assuming it to be transhistorical and transcultural. . . . (*Politics* 53-54)

An ethnic writer's realistic representation of his or her world validates and confirms reality for members of that writer's sociocultural group while simultaneously forcing members of other groups to "become aware of the means by which we *make* sense of and *construct* order out of experience." Ethnic literature is postmodernist in the sense that it does, as McHale says postmodernist fiction does, "hold the mirror up to reality; but that reality, now more than ever, is plural" (39).

Contemporary ethnic writing, then, tends to be postmodern primarily in its *effect* rather than in its *intent*. Most ethnic literature does not take "the form of self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement" that Hutcheon identifies as inherent to postmodernist literature (*Politics* 1). However, it does — either intentionally or unintentionally, either seriously or playfully — recognize its dual or multiple audience as well as its inaccessibility to one or more subsets of that audience. Kingston, whom I see as the most overtly postmodernist of the writers discussed here, admits to her own recognition of the multiple audiences of *The Woman Warrior*:

I address Chinese Americans twice, once at the beginning of the book and once at the end. I ask some questions about what life is like for you, and, happily, you answer. Chinese Americans have written that I explain customs they had not understood. I even write for my old English professors of the new criticism school in Berkeley, by incorporating what they taught about the structure of the novel. I refer to Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Shakespeare; but those who are not English majors and don't play literary games still will find in those same sentences the other, main, important meanings. There are puns for Chinese speakers only, and I do not point them out for non-Chinese speakers. There are some visual puns best appreciated by those who write Chinese. I've written jokes in that book so private, only I can get them; I hope I sneaked them in unobtrusively so nobody feels left out. I hope my writing has many layers, as human beings have layers. ("Cultural Mis-readings" 65)

Kingston is fully aware, then, that her autobiography — and thus she herself — cannot be fully penetrated, fully comprehended, fully known by any individual reader. It simultaneously includes and excludes audiences drawn from all those sociocultural groups, including her English professors, that have influenced her development as a Chinese American female. Other ethnic women writers, such as Morrison, writing primarily from the folkloric and magical center of African American life, and Silko, writing from the spiritual and ceremonial center of Pueblo life, may incorporate culturally specific language, symbolism, and mannerisms that are at least partially inaccessible to non-African American

and non-Native American readers simply because they are writing primarily for their own people, capturing and authenticating their voices and experiences.

Ethnic literature, because it incorporates culturally specific voices and experiences, has been disparaged both for its lack of universality and for its failure, as Paul Lauter notes, to be "self-contained, complete within itself" (74). Lauter suggests, however, that ethnic literature is no less universal and no less complete than European American literature:

in many traditional cultures, those of Native Americans for example, the audience for a tale or ritual presentation would a priori be familiar with characters or situations. It would be superfluous, indeed meaningless, for the artists to introduce, describe, and elaborate upon what is known and shared, like Coyote and his machinations, the role of the storyteller, or the recent experiences of the tribe Thus, a tale may not be "complete" precisely because the expectation is that the audience will bring to it whatever is left unstated. In fact, when we look closely, we find that the notion of a work of art as self-contained, complete in itself, is a chimera. Any art work plays upon, or sometimes against, the expectations, the patterns of knowledge, and the assumptions about form and content — not to speak of the conventions of language — an audience brings to it. . . . (74)

Thus, a poem written by T. S. Eliot that is judged by new critics to be both self-contained and universal is likely to seem as incomplete and inaccessible and as culturally specific to a Native American reader as one of Silko's poems about Coyote or Yellow Woman seems to a new critic. Lauter suggests that "in the past two decades, minority and ethnic writers have increasingly and consciously invoked details . . . likely to fall outside the cultural pale of much of their readership" (61). The result, he continues, is to force readers "into a process of active encounter," not only with the text itself but also with the contexts — the history, world view, experience — out of which it grew. Minority and ethnic writers transform their literature into "a cultural challenge to its nonminority readership. That is, such texts tax readers to place intellectual resources where their sensibilities lie" (61). Such works, then, ask a central question of their readers: how seriously do you want to understand my reality

and its difference from your own? Those who accept the challenge of learning about alternative realities experience, to some degree, a process that the American education system categorically imposes on all students, no matter what their cultural background: the process of comprehending, accepting, and assimilating "reality" — scientific, religious, historical, and literary — as constructed and represented by an alien culture.

Readers of ethnic literature who do not understand the historical, aesthetic, and cosmological contexts from which it springs will neither recognize nor comprehend the worlds such literature represents. Too often European American readers, reading and judging the literature from their own perspectives of reality will dismiss a work as implausible, "romantic," or insignificant. Paula Gunn Allen reminds readers of Native American literature that "significance, what moves a person to the core, what instructs a person, and what enables a person to transcend the constricting limits of everyday concerns, is largely a culturally defined matter" (*Spider Woman's Granddaughters* 8). Native American narrative conventions differ, she says, both thematically and formally, from those of European American narrative. Trinh T. Minh-ha warns that if traditional European American criteria for good literature — a provocative opening, an orderly and complete sequence of events, a climax that makes a point, and a satisfying closure — are applied to all literature, "then countless non-Western stories will fall straight into the category of 'bad' stories":

An example among endless others is the moving story of "The Laguna People" passed on by Marmon Silko, which ends with a little girl, her sister, and the people turning into stone while they sat on top of a mesa, after they had escaped the flood in their village below. Because of the disquieting nature of the resolution here, the storytellers [Marmon Silko and her aunt] then add, as a compromise to the fact-oriented mind of today's audience: "The story ends there. / Some of the stories / Aunt Susie told / have this kind

of ending. / There are no explanations." There is no point [to be] made either. . . . (142; brackets are Minh-ha's)

This lack of a neatly packaged "point" and a satisfying closure, particularly prevalent in traditional Native American oral literature, is disturbing to European American readers who have other expectations about literature, and in fact the traditional closure of European American literature is one of the many aspects of literary form being questioned by postmodernists.⁵ Again, however, one must remember that the intent of Native American writers, unlike that of European American postmodernists, is not so much to violate European American conventions as it is to recover and realistically represent Native American conventions. Morrison says that she, too, in an attempt to recover and realistically represent an African American aesthetic, avoids ending her novels with the type of closure common to European American literature and music:

I think about what black writers do as having a quality and disturbance that never ends. Classical music satisfies and closes. Black music does not do that. Jazz always keeps you on edge. There is no final chord. There may be a long chord, but no final chord. And it agitates you. Spirituals agitate you, no matter what they are saying about how it is all going to be. There is something underneath that is incomplete. There is always something else you want from the music. I want my books to be like that — because I want that feeling of something held in reserve and the sense that there is more — that you can't have it all right now. ("Interview with Toni Morrison" 429)

European American readers entering the worlds represented in ethnic literature are likely to encounter worlds that are alien — both in their representation of reality and in their

⁵Hutcheon argues that "postmodernism is a fundamentally contradictory enterprise: its art forms (and its theory) at once use and abuse, install and then destabilize convention in parodic ways In implicitly contesting . . . such concepts as aesthetic originality and textual closure, postmodernist art offers a new model for mapping the borderland between art and the world . . . (*Politics* 23).

adherence to another aesthetic — and thus incomprehensible. Those differently constructed worlds, however, are no less real than the world to which such readers are accustomed.

Reed Way Dasenbrock argues that the incomprehensibility or "unintelligibility" of multicultural works for some readers is exactly what makes these works meaningful; our reading of such works, he says, "offers us above all an experience of multiculturalism" (12). While reading a multicultural work, monocultural readers experience a feeling of exclusion from knowledge or language shared by the multicultural group. For example, Rudolfo Anaya's novel, *Bless Me, Ultima*, uses bilingualism — English frequently interspersed with Spanish phrases — to completely exclude those readers who speak Spanish only and to hamper understanding by those who speak English only. "Thus," Dasenbrock says, "the voyage of the reader through the book mirrors Antonio's [the Hispanic protagonist/narrator's] experience. No one translates for Antonio, no one cushions his transition into English. He is thrown into the school world of English and forced to find his way in it" (16). The book is written in such a way, however, that by the time monolingual, English-speaking readers reach the end of the book, they are sufficiently bilingual to understand the bilingual, bicultural world of the text: "biculturalism is clearly where the author wants to lead the reader," Dasenbrock says, "but by not beginning there, the monocultural reader may have a richer experience of the work, richer because he or she has had to do that much more work" (16).

The ethnic woman writer, then, although writing realistic literature for her own people, invites other readers to enter her world, experience her reality, confront her view of history. This literature, with its confrontation or collision of worlds, its crossing of boundaries, its movement into and experience of alien environments, is postmodernist to the

extent that it forces readers to question their own reality, seeing it not as "truth" but as a sociocultural construct. Ethnic literature is postmodernist to the extent that it disturbs a reader's sense of his or her own identity: "To understand *ghost* in *The Woman Warrior*," Dasenbrock says, "non-Chinese readers need to understand the Chinese use of the word, which means that we must, momentarily at least, learn to see ourselves as ghosts. As we experience the word, we also experience a perception and a category of thought, and in so doing we learn a good deal about Chinese perceptions of us" (14). The use by the Chinese of the term "ghost" to define foreigners originated, David Leiwei Li says, "in the late nineteenth century when Western imperial powers invaded the Chin Empire of China with guns and opium. For the first time in history the citizens of the 'Central Kingdom' were decentered and they strove to retain their centrality by defining their oppressor as the other, the 'ghost,' the 'Kuei' which takes on the meaning of 'devil and demon'" (508). In reading ethnic literature, European American readers cannot avoid confronting this perception of themselves as ghosts, devils, destroyers, oppressors and questioning its relation to their own perceptions of themselves. At the same time, European American readers of ethnic literature must question their perceptions, definitions, and labelling of members of other groups. Ethnic literature, like feminist literature, uses "representation both to reveal misrepresentation and to offer new possibilities" (Hutcheon, *Politics* 23); both literatures assert the right and the necessity of all marginalized peoples to represent and define themselves from within, both as groups and as individuals.

Ethnic Identity and Self-Definition

Julia Kristeva argues, in "Women's Time," that the feminist struggle for power, both collective and individual, passes through three phases, each distinguished by the way in which women relate female power to male power. She describes the first two phases as, first, "the identification with power in order to consolidate it" and, second, "the constitution of a fetishist counter-power" (203). During the first phase, then, women seek power by attaining rights similar and equal to those enjoyed by men; during the second phase, they seek power by rejecting male ideas and structures of power, replacing them with female ideas and structures. The first phase is faulty because it defines female power in terms of collusion with male power; the second is faulty because, in defining female power in opposition to male power, it "runs the risk," Toril Moi explains, "of becoming an inverted form of sexism. It does so by uncritically taking over the very metaphysical categories set up by patriarchy in order to keep women in their places, despite attempts to attach new feminist values to these old categories" (13). Kristeva expresses the belief, and the hope, that women will move on to a third phase in their search for power in which "the very dichotomy man/woman as an opposition between two rival entities may be understood as belonging to *metaphysics*. What can 'identity,' even 'sexual identity,' mean in a new theoretical and scientific space where the very notion of identity is challenged?" (209).

This dismissal of both the "notion of identity" and the concept of difference by contemporary theorists disturbs both feminists and ethnics. Moi, for example, argues for the need to retain Kristeva's second phase of feminism even as women move toward phase three: "it still remains *politically* essential for feminists to defend women *as women* in order to counteract the patriarchal oppression that precisely despises women *as women*" (13). On a

somewhat different although related note, Hutcheon argues that both feminists and ethnics — "ex-centrics" — are not yet ready to give up notions of identity because they have not yet had the freedom to experience their own subjectivity: "unlike the male, white, Eurocentered poststructuralist discourse that has forcefully challenged humanism's whole, integrated ideal of subjectivity, however, these more ex-centric personalities know that they cannot reject the subject wholesale, mainly because they have never really been allowed it" (*Poetics* 68). Similarly, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., says, in response to the contemporary move to dissolve the subject, that

the Western male subject has long been constituted historically for himself and in himself. And, while we readily accept, acknowledge, and partake of the critique of *this* subject as transcendent, to deny us the process of exploring and reclaiming our subjectivity before we critique it is the critical version of the grandfather clause, the double privileging of categories that happen to be *preconstituted*. Such a position leaves us nowhere, invisible and voiceless in the republic of Western letters. Consider the irony: precisely when we (and other third world peoples) obtain the complex wherewithal to define our black subjectivity in the republic of Western letters, our theoretical colleagues declare that there ain't no such thing as a subject, so why should we be bothered with that? . . . (105)

Members of ethnic groups, Hutcheon and Gates remind us, are speaking and writing from a reality and experience that differ significantly from those of European Americans.

Indeed, members of ethnic groups, because they have already *experienced* both cultural annihilation and individual alienation, share neither the modernist nor postmodernist need to *contemplate* or *theorize about* such experiences. The Native American population has been decimated from a pre-contact number estimated at twelve to twenty million to a current population of about one million, with a low early in this century of only about two

hundred and fifty thousand ("Louise Erdrich" 17).⁶ "Many Native American cultures," writes Erdrich, "were annihilated more thoroughly than even a nuclear disaster might destroy ours, and others live on with the fallout of that destruction, effects as persistent as radiation — poverty, fetal alcohol syndrome, chronic despair" ("Where I Ought to Be" 23). African Americans were forcibly uprooted from their homeland, transported across the ocean in murderous conditions, enslaved for three hundred years, and perceived and treated as animals and children. An estimated sixty million Africans died either in captivity in Africa or during transportation on slave ships (Morrison, "The Ghosts" 75). As for Asian Americans, Chan et al. state that seven generations of racism in America have left them identity-less, alienated from both European Americans and Asians:

Seven generations of suppression under legislative racism and euphemized white racist love have left today's Asian-Americans in a state of self-contempt, self-rejection, and disintegration. We have been encouraged to believe that we have no cultural integrity as Chinese- or Japanese-Americans, that we are either Asian (Chinese or Japanese) or American (white) or are measurably both. The myth of being either/or and the equally goofy concept of the dual personality haunted our lobes while our rejection by both Asia and white America proved we were neither one nor the other. . . . (197)

Asian Americans, Chan et al. continue, "live in and accept a state of euphemized self-contempt" that is "nothing more than the subjects' acceptance of white standards of objectivity, behavior, and achievement as being morally absolute and their acknowledgment

⁶Numbers on pre-contact populations of Native Americans vary tremendously. James S. Olson and Raymond Wilson, in *Native Americans in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: U Illinois P, 1984), in discussing the population in the continental United States only, state that "most historians and anthropologists put the figure at approximately one million on the eve of contact, although other estimates by reputable scholars put the number considerably higher" (29). Fisher, however, uses numbers similar to those cited by Erdrich: "By 1910 the government estimated that 210 thousand Indians were left of the 10 to 15 million people who were natives of America when Europe first made contact with the New World at the end of the fifteenth century" (6). Even allowing for the difference in geographical areas for which the estimates are given, the discrepancy between the two estimates is quite large.

that, because they are not white, they can never fully measure up to white standards" (209). Similarly, Allen says that, for those Native Americans who survived white contact, the "compulsory indoctrination" to European American values, world views, scientific facts, and thinking processes has resulted in "thousands of Native people [who] suffer the ravages of despair brought on by too much shame, too much grief and too much irrepressible and helpless fury" (*Spider Woman's Granddaughters* 15).

To fully appreciate the degree to which the dominant culture of the United States has alienated marginal groups, rendering them powerless by erasing ethnic differences and destroying group identity under the guise of promoting American unity and homogeneity, one need only consider the effects of cultural dominance on the language and religion of Native Americans. Irene Mack Pyawasit, of the Menominee in Wisconsin, tells of how her grandmother prepared her as a child for the attempts by whites to deny her her own language and religion:

My grandmother knew they were going to whitewash us [at the mission school]. She knew the methods they employ, and she knew that we were going to have to learn to speak nothing but English because they were not going to let us speak our own language, and they would try to take our religion away. She said, "You have to keep your religion inside you, in your heart." They wouldn't let us practice our religion because to the government employees, we were just a bunch of pagans, uncivilized savages. So I had to keep within me all that I had learned from her. (153)

To survive the experience of "compulsory indoctrination" to European American standards of civilization, ethnics like Pyawasit learned from their grandmothers how to surround themselves with the remnants of their own culture, sustained by the fact that they could periodically return for renewal to a group sharing their own world view. Similarly, John Big Bluff Tosameh, a fictitious character in N. Scott Momaday's novel *House Made of Dawn*, tells of the last time the Kiowas gathered as a living sun dance culture:

They could find no buffalo; they had to hang an old hide from the sacred tree. . . . Before the dance could begin, a company of armed soldiers rode out from Fort Sill under orders to disperse the tribe. Forbidden without cause the essential act of their faith, having seen the wild herds slaughtered and left to rot upon the ground, the Kiowas backed away forever from the tree. That was July 20, 1890, at the great bend of the Washita. My grandmother was there. Without bitterness, and for as long as she lived, she bore a vision of deicide. (122)

The destruction by one group of another group's gods, of its living mythology, is one of the most effective, even if unintended, means of achieving group disintegration and disorientation and the consequent psychic alienation of its members. When the European Americans destroyed the buffalo, Joseph Campbell writes, they destroyed the "binding symbol" of the plains tribes in North America, for whom the relationship between humans and the animals on which they relied for food had been the "central, pivotal concern of the religiously maintained social order," and within a few years the religion of the tribes became archaic and died (89).

The emphasis by contemporary ethnic writers on the threat posed to individuals who have been denied the right to a strong, empowering group identity suggests that the primary danger of the cultural dominance of one group by another is not, then, that one group obtains and maintains political and economic power over the other. The real threat is that it robs a group of its psychological and spiritual power. As Aptheker, speaking here of the colonization of women by men, writes,

The process of colonization is not only one of limiting access, of subjugation, of political domination, of racial superiority, of a poverty of material resources. It also involves an internal corrosion, a loss of esteem, a loss of confidence in one's knowledge, an inability to give expression to experience. To understand the colonization of women is to understand its interior dimensions, its psychological consequences, its hold on the imagination, and the enormity of effort, individual and collective, which is required to break its cycle. At the heart of the colonization is a belief in the superiority of

men; in the superiority of male judgment and authority; and in the absolute priority given to achieving male approval and validation. (135-36)

Colonization, whether it entails the oppression of women, classes, or other cultures, always involves the imposition by only one race or one class or one sex (or one subset cutting across these categories, such as white upper/middle-class males) of its values, traditions, beliefs, and world view — its "reality" — on a society that is actually composed of multiple races, classes, and genders. As colonization progresses, the way of life of the dominant society is gradually believed to represent a "natural" or "given" order when in reality it represents the perspectives of only a single subset of that society.

Eventually, the maintenance of the way of life desired by the dominant culture depends on the continued silencing of marginalized groups and their internalization of the dominant culture's beliefs, values, attitudes, opinions, and style. Elizabeth Janeway, exploring power relationships among humans in her book *Powers of the Weak*, believes that the

power to disbelieve, the first power of the weak, begins . . . with the refusal to accept the definition of oneself that is put forward by the powerful.

It is true that one may not have a coherent self-definition to set against the status assigned by the established social mythology, but that is not necessary for dissent. By disbelieving, one will be led toward doubting prescribed codes of behavior, and as one begins to act in ways that can deviate from the norm in any degree, it becomes clear that in fact there is *not* just one right way to handle or understand events. . . . (167)

This is another way of saying that attitudes follow behavior; by first disbelieving and then rebelling against the prescribed order, acting in new and different ways, one begins to develop a new sense of self. As part of the movement toward cultural self-definition, many ethnics reject the order prescribed by the dominant culture and return to their own traditions.

"The need for pride and dignity," writes Aptheker, "the need for the development of a

collective self-identity freed from the constraints and prescriptions of the normative, white culture, the need for analysis unfettered by the boundaries of the white world, and the need to direct energy positively into the community rather than out, against the oppressor, have informed all such movements" (118). To redefine themselves in their own terms rather than in those of an alien culture, ethnics are returning to the stories, the representations of reality, of their ancestors as a basis for the construction of new, empowering identities.

The ethnics of the United States, having already experienced the destruction and dissolution of identity and subjectivity that postmodernists tend to contemplate and theorize about, are now in the process of reclaiming and, in many cases, reconstructing both group identity and individual subjectivity. Because of their experience of being defined and reconstructed from without, many ethnics, like contemporary theorists, have come to realize that both group and individual identity are social constructs. In defining themselves, then, not all ethnics are returning to old identities; many are experimenting with the *construction* of possible new identities. While working within their own culturally specific and sometimes ancient traditions, contemporary ethnic writers, in depicting their characters' efforts to define themselves, demonstrate their understanding of the need for change rather than simple regression. They recognize, as Lauter does, that "the functions of culture in the life of a group of people change significantly over time, as social realities and evolving consciousness about them change" (53). They also recognize that, just as group power derives from the construction of a group identity, individual power derives from the construction of an individual identity. Clifford Geertz suggests that "becoming human is becoming individual, and we become individual under the guidance of cultural patterns, historically created systems of meaning in terms of which we give form, order, point, and direction to our lives" (52).

Despite this influence of "cultural patterns," the individuality of each ethnic must be recognized no matter how close his or her ties to the group.

Kristeva, for example, warns against the trap of viewing "woman" as a monolith devoid of individual specificity and difference: "The apparent coherence which the term 'woman' assumes in contemporary ideology . . . essentially has the negative effect of effacing the differences among the diverse functions or structures which operate behind this word. Indeed, the time has perhaps come to emphasize the multiplicity of female expressions and preoccupations so that from the intersection of these differences there might arise, more precisely, . . . the real *fundamental difference* between the two sexes" (193). Hutcheon extends Kristeva's desire to view women as individuals to all "ex-centric" groups:

What is always important to recall . . . is that difference operates *within* each of these challenging cultures, as well as against the dominant. Blacks and feminists, ethnics and gays, native and "Third World" cultures, do not form monolithic movements, but constitute a multiplicity of responses to a commonly perceived situation of marginality and ex-centricity. (*Poetics* 62)

"Difference," Hutcheon says, "suggests multiplicity, heterogeneity, plurality, rather than binary opposition and exclusion" (*Poetics* 61). The variety of responses to marginality, the different ways in which ethnics define themselves in relation to the multiple cultures that influence them, positively or negatively, is emphasized by contemporary ethnic writers, who demonstrate that the process of individuation differs significantly among protagonists.

Power Through Individuation

When we think of oppression, we normally think of the oppression of one culture, class, or gender by another. Not all ethnic individuals, however, experience the dominant culture as the most damaging source of oppression. Some suffer more from oppression

within their own families and communities, which insist on conformity to group values to assure group cohesion, strength, and continuity. Like all oppressive groups, families and communities maintain the status quo through a process of social reward and punishment. Those who fulfill "the highest ideals of the culture" are praised and rewarded while those who do not are punished, usually through exclusion and ostracism. As a result, those ethnics whose individuality is stifled or whose difference is cause for ostracism by the community may actually welcome contact with other cultures, finding such contact both liberating and invigorating. Novak, in studying the adaptation of emigrants to the American identity, noted that they "sometimes experience a release in the new culture, which rewards in them qualities of mind, heart, or action that may have been repressed in their culture of origin. . ." (Novak 49).

The narrator of Ursula Le Guin's novel *Always Coming Home*, in describing her development from childhood to maturity, comments at one point:

As a kitten does what all other kittens do, so a child wants to do what other children do, with a wanting that is as powerful as it is mindless. Since we human beings have to learn what to do, we have to start out that way, but human mindfulness begins where that wish to be the same leaves off. (29)

The process by which children stop imitating and patterning themselves after others and begin thinking and choosing rather than blindly following the path they have been trained and conditioned to follow is what psychologists refer to as maturation, individuation, self-realization, self-definition. "The aim of individuation," Campbell writes, "requires that one should find and then learn to live out of one's own center, in control of one's for and against" (68). To develop that sense of self that is necessary for achieving one's full potential, psychologists Dennis A. Bagarozzi and Stephen A. Anderson write, one

must reconcile those aspects of the self that are in conflict and those aspects of the self which act as internal censors It does not matter whether these internal censoring agents are called conditions of worth or referred to as the superego — some harmonious integration must be achieved among all conflicting components if full maturity is to be attained. . . . (34)

Achieving this goal of "harmonious integration" is difficult and thus, according to Bagarozzi and Anderson, rarely achieved.⁷ If difficult for those born into the dominant culture and to parents of a single heritage, the task becomes formidable for members of subordinate cultures or individuals of mixed heritage, torn on the one hand by the self-hatred that comes from discrimination and colonization by a dominant culture and on the other by the confusion caused by conflicting cultural loyalties or the alienation caused by exclusion from both parental cultures.

Many ethnics suffer from a sense of being caught in the middle, not knowing whether to attain personal power by adhering to traditional values and lifestyles or by fighting the enemy on its own ground, by asserting one's difference or one's similarity. Minh-ha expresses her own angry confusion resulting from the conflicting attitudes about whether members of ethnic groups should strive for "authenticity":

Every notion in vogue, including the retrieval of "roots" values, is necessarily exploited and recuperated. . . . To persuade you that your past and cultural heritage are doomed to eventual extinction and thereby keeping you occupied with the Savior's concern, inauthenticity is condemned as a *loss of origins*

⁷As Moi notes, some feminist literary theorists argue that this goal of achieving harmonious integration is a phallic goal, based on the desire for an autonomous, self-contained entity freed of all conflict, contradiction, and ambiguity (8). A primary thesis of the present study, however, is based on my own conviction that emotional, mental, and spiritual health and power depend on the recognition and acceptance of the multiple conflicting aspects of one's identity and the continuing attempt to bring those differences into some semblance of accord and cooperation. Not to do so runs the risk of the colonization of marginal selves by a dominant self, which has most likely attained dominance in accordance with or reaction against external, socially dictated assessments of what is strong, valuable, praiseworthy.

and a whitening (or faking) of non-Western values. Being easily offended in your elusive identity and reviving readily an old, racial charge, you immediately react when such guilt-instilling accusations are leveled at you and are thus led to stand in need of defending that very ethnic part of yourself that for years has made you and your ancestors the objects of execration. Today, planned authenticity is rife; as a product of hegemony and a remarkable counterpart of universal standardization, it constitutes an efficacious means of silencing the cry of racial oppression. We no longer wish to erase your difference. We demand, on the contrary, that you remember and assert it. At least, to a certain extent. Every path I/i take is edged with thorns. On the one hand, i play into the Savior's hands by concentrating on authenticity, for my attention is numbed by it and diverted from other, important issues; on the other hand, i do feel the necessity to return to my so-called roots, since they are the fount of my strength, the guiding arrow to which i constantly refer before heading for a new direction. . . . (89)

The problem for Minh-ha and others is that to privilege one identity over the other — that is, to assert one's "authentic," different self at the expense of the "inauthentic," assimilated self or vice versa — is to risk losing one's identity entirely. This constant pull between difference and similarity, combined with the insistence that one must find and assert one's "true" identity to attain and maintain personal health, results in an increasingly self-conscious, and thus increasingly futile, search for identity.

This single-minded search for self or identity has been criticized by some as being a narcissistic or regressive form of subjectivity rather than a liberating one.⁸ Inherent in this

⁸See, for example, Christopher Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: Norton, 1979), which suggests that contemporary psychotherapy in the United States, in its attempt to fill the void left by the death of religion, politics, and competitive individualism, encourages a narcissistic preoccupation with the self. Richard Sennett's argument in *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Knopf, 1977) that the single-minded self-absorption inherent in a search for an authentic self renders the search futile and meaningless reflects the fears voiced by Minh-ha. Bell Hooks attacks the individual search for autonomy for a different reason, arguing in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End, 1984) that such a goal is ultimately apolitical because the attainment of personal freedom by a few privileged (white middle-class) women fails to eradicate the pervasive ideology of domination that continues to keep many groups oppressed.

preoccupation with the self, Rita Felski writes, is the belief in the existence of "a 'good' inner self, beneath the layers of oppressive social conditioning, which needs only to be liberated" (106). However, like Minh-ha, Felski warns that

the "authentic self" is itself very much a social product, and the attempt to assert its privileged autonomy can merely underline its profound dependence upon the cultural and ideological systems through which it is constituted. The more frantic the search for an inner self, for a kernel of meaning untouched by a society rejected as oppressive and alienating, the more clearly subjectivity is revealed to be permeated and dependent upon those very symbolic constraints from which it seeks to liberate itself. . . . (104)

There is no pure inner self, Felski asserts, that is untouched by cultural conditioning, whether by an affirming culture of origin or by an alienating dominant culture.

Nevertheless, the pervasive and persistent belief that an authentic inner self does exist, defining and delineating each person, forms the basis of much autobiographical literature, including that of ethnics. Indeed, the fear of having betrayed one's authentic self is the central focus of several early ethnic novels that pose as autobiographies. In writing of two of these works — James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* and Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky* — Sollors suggests that both protagonists believe at the end of their lives that they are guilty of having sacrificed some "lost potential of childhood" in order to achieve success in the world of "practical" men (171). Sollors believes that choosing one identity over the other, ethnic over American or vice versa, is doomed to failure; the only possible success lies in a synthesis of the two:

The "ideal" realizations for Johnson's and Cahan's heroes could come about only in a process of *synthesis*, by a fusion of "birthright" and the realm of descent — defined as the legacy of mother, childhood, folk, parish, poverty, education, social vision, and artistic potential — with "mess of pottage" and the world of consent — embodied by manhood, marriage, America, secular world, picaresque roaming, and financial success. . . . Their ideal vision was that of a synthesis of specific descent and cosmopolitan consent. . . . (172)

Sollors argues that to develop a workable identity, bicultural individuals must merge both identities available to them — one's visionary birthright of descent with one's existence in a world of practical consent — to create and authenticate new, rather than "traditionally anchored," identities that simultaneously represent both ethnic individuality and an Americanized identity (207).

Sollors, basing his conclusions in part on the previous work of Barth and of social scientists Herbert Gans and Ulf Hannerz, argues that in an attempt to maintain their ethnic boundaries, ethnic groups tend to find or invent new symbols to mark their differences from others rather than to borrow traditional symbols or styles inherited from the past. He cites the "natural" hairstyle adopted by African Americans and the clenched fist symbol adopted by the Jewish Defense League as being new, "modern" ethnic markers which emerged or were invented and were only later thought of as "traditional" (244). Sollors believes that "ethnicity is continuously created anew," that "assimilation and modernization take place in ethnic and even ethnocentric forms," and that "modern ethnicization is a form of symbolic boundary-constructing which increases cultural vitality . . ." (245, 247). In their desire to maintain the boundaries that mark them as different from others, ethnic groups continuously create new symbols or styles when existing markers have become assimilated by the dominant culture. This creation and invention of new styles in an effort to avoid assimilation results in a continuous revitalization of American culture, particularly its music, art, and literature.⁹

⁹Black music is used both by Sollors and by Hannerz, in "Some Comments on the Anthropology of Ethnicity in the United States," *Ethnicity in the Americas*, ed. Frances Henry, (Paris: Mouton, 1976), as a clear example of the way in which creative expression is continuously revitalized as an anti-assimilationist reaction to its rapid absorption into mainstream music.

Anthropologist Michael Fischer, in his review of recent ethnic autobiographies, echoes Sollors' belief that the experience of multiculturalism offers ethnic individuals the opportunity for creating or inventing new styles and symbols. However, Fischer suggests that the contemporary ethnic identity, rather than being primarily anti-assimilationist, reflects a "pluralist, multidimensional, or multifaceted concept of self":

what is discovered and reinvented in the new works about ethnicity is . . . something new: to be Chinese-American is not the same as being Chinese in America. It is a matter of finding a voice or style that does not violate one's several components of identity. (196)

The authentic inner self of a Chinese American is neither purely Chinese nor purely American; it is a fluid, dynamic composite of, or interaction among, characteristics from both cultures. Fischer believes that the "inter-references" that occur when an individuating ethnic incorporates two or more cultural traditions constitute the primary source of cultural revitalization in the United States: "It is the inter-references, the interweaving of cultural threads from different arenas, that give ethnicity its phoenix-like capacities for reinvigoration and reinspiration. To kill this play between cultures, between realities, is to kill a reservoir that sustains and renews humane attitudes" (230). The new ethnic autobiographies, Fischer believes, demonstrate that a truly personal ethnic identity emerges from an intersection, rather than a separation and isolation, of multiple worlds.

The Chicana writer and poet Gloria Anzaldúa, although not mentioned by Fischer, is an example of the type of writer who actively seeks to create a new voice from multiple traditions, both cultural — Mexican, Indian, and Anglo — and religious — Aztec and Catholic. Anzaldúa refers to her existence among these various traditions as life in the Borderlands, "la Frontera." She sees the creation of a personal voice as necessary for survival but also as an opportunity; by developing one's own voice, one can transform the

experience of living in the Borderlands from one of living in a cultural margin to one of living in one's own center. Anzaldúa describes the way in which Chicanos have developed both a language and a religion that mediate between multiple cultures. Chicano Spanish, she says, grew out of the Chicanos' need to identify themselves as a people distinct from both Spanish and Anglo cultures just as the Chicano allegiance to *La Virgen de Guadalupe* mediates between the powerful, transforming serpent goddess *Coatlicue* and the pure and passive Virgin Mary. Caught between Spanish, Indian, and Anglo worlds, the Chicano or *la mestiza*, Anzaldúa says, is constantly torn between opposing forces:

Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, *la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war. Like all people, we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing, messages. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes *un choque*, a cultural collision. (78)

Out of this collision, which is painful but transformative, comes a "new *mestiza* consciousness," the "consciousness of the Borderlands" (77). Anzaldúa has used her own "cultural collision" to create not only a new consciousness but also a personal mythology, an individual culture, and a unique voice:

Though I'll defend my race and culture when they are attacked by non-*mexicanos*, . . . I abhor some of my culture's ways, how it cripples women. . . . I do not buy all the myths of the tribe into which I was born. . . . I will not glorify those aspects of my culture which have injured me . . . in the name of protecting me.

So, don't give me your tenets and your laws. Don't give me your lukewarm gods. What I want is an accounting of all three cultures — white, Mexican, Indian. I want the freedom to carve and chisel my own face, to staunch the bleeding with ashes, to fashion my own gods out of my entrails. . . . I will . . . stand and claim my space, making a new culture

I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent's tongue — my

woman's voice, my sexual voice, my poet's voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence. (21-22, 59)

The right to develop a uniquely individual mythology, culture, and voice is one Anzaldúa claims as essential to her self-definition both as a person and as a poet and to the self-definition of every person who is torn between two or more cultures.

Individuation and Belief

The effort by Gloria Anzaldúa and other ethnics to create their own self-images rather than to assume images imposed from the outside, to make self visible and responsive to self, is part of the process of individuation, separating oneself from the dictates of oppressive cultures, oppressive communities, oppressive families. As part of this process of individuation and self-definition, Bagarozzi and Anderson state, each child begins to create his or her own personal mythology:

we are born into and raised by a family group from which we must separate and individuate. As we attempt to master each successive developmental task, to disentangle thoughts from feelings, to develop a true self (as opposed to a false or pseudo self), to free oneself from the enmeshed confines of an undifferentiated family ego mass, to achieve self-realization, and to actualize our inherent potentials, we create our own personal mythology, complete with attendant rituals, rites, and taboos. (3)

Development of personal, workable mythologies is a task for each individual, and yet no mythology is separate from the family, community, and society that nurture the individual. As Novak writes, "each individual appropriates the ideals of a culture in a free and distinctive way, sometimes by rebelling against them, resisting them, muting them, or playing counterpoint against them" (48). In the same way personal mythologies may incorporate, rebel against, or resist the existing mythologies handed down by previous generations.

All the works discussed in this dissertation argue for the need of ethnic individuals to define themselves in relation to surrounding sociocultural units, that is, to construct their own identities and their own mythologies — or realities — in relation to those constructed by others. To live in the United States is to live in a multicultural universe, one in which individual worlds continuously collide, intersect, or exist side by side and in which boundaries, both geographical and sociocultural, are violated daily. The works discussed in Chapters 2 through 7 depict the multiplicity of responses by ethnic individuals to the collision with and intrusion by representatives of another world or to their own passage into and return from that world. My own focus in examining these multiple responses is to determine the role of the individual's belief in supernatural forces in his or her individuation. How is the process of self-definition affected by one's personal beliefs, by the community's beliefs, and by the outside world's beliefs? When are such beliefs — or conflicts between beliefs — constructive, and when are they destructive, and when is a partial or total reconstruction of such beliefs called for? Ultimately, all the works argue for power through self-definition, for the construction of one's own world and one's own identity, for the location and claiming of one's own center.

Smith's *Oral History*, for example, clearly demonstrates the consequences of being defined from without. The failure of Red Emmy, labeled by Granny Younger and the community as a witch, to redefine her identity in her own terms serves to highlight the powerlessness of many Appalachian women to break out of their socioculturally defined identities. The curse Red Emmy passes on to succeeding generations is the curse of being hopelessly confined within both geographical and sociocultural boundaries. As *Oral History* demonstrates, belief in the supernatural in the world of Appalachia is double-edged: it serves

both to entrap the women and to offer them their only means of escape. Because of this double-edged nature of Appalachian belief, the reader, at novel's end, is both dismayed and relieved by what Rosalind B. Reilly sees as "the end of a great era of belief" (92).

Erdrich's *Tracks* also tells the story of a witch, but that witch — Fleur Pillager — differs from Red Emmy in being defined from within as well as from without. Fleur receives her identity as a witch in several ways: she is born into a family known for its power in dealing with supernatural forces, she alone survives the consumption that kills the rest of her family, and she survives two drownings before the age of ten, a clear indication to both her and the community that she has been befriended by Misshepesu, the Chippewa water god. Because Chippewa culture allows for and respects the role of the witch, or evil shaman, within the community, Fleur's identity as witch enhances her power both in her own eyes and in those of the community. With the increasing intrusion of whites into the Chippewa community, however, Fleur discovers that her own supernaturally endowed powers are insufficient to stop both their intrusion and their destruction. In her characterization of Fleur, Pauline Puyat, and old man Nanapush, Erdrich suggests three possible responses of the Chippewa to the intrusion of whites into their world, an intrusion that threatens to destroy them by destroying their belief in the powers of the Chippewa gods and spirits.

Whereas *Tracks* suggests that Native American beliefs in the supernatural cannot survive white contact, Silko's *Ceremony* suggests that such beliefs not only survive but remain essential to the health and well-being of the modern Pueblo. *Ceremony* suggests that a Pueblo who wanders too far from home, crossing an invisible boundary that separates the Pueblo world from the white world, risks being both physically and psychically transformed by that experience. Simply returning home in body, recrossing the geographical boundary,

is ineffective unless one can return home spiritually, healing the internal division arising from one's inability to reconcile conflicting world views. Returning home to Laguna after World War II, Tayo must reconcile his Pueblo beliefs, as related in old Grandma's stories, with European American beliefs, as related by white teachers and doctors, in order to cure himself and, by extension, the tribe and the universe. Unlike Red Emmy, entrapped by Appalachian beliefs in the supernatural, Tayo has the freedom to define himself, and, through a painful but healing process of individuation, he succeeds in locating what Allen refers to as one's "right relationship to earth and society" (*The Sacred Hoop* 209).

Naylor's *Mama Day* is similar to *Ceremony* in that it dramatizes a confrontation between two worlds and world views. The world of New York is characterized by its emphasis on culture, alienation, and science, whereas the world of Willow Springs is characterized by its emphasis on nature, community, and supernatural forces. Thus, George, born and raised in New York, relies on the power of the self to accomplish goals while Bernice, born and raised in Willow Springs, relies on the power of external forces to accomplish miracles. Miranda suggests that both sources of belief are valuable, each supplementing and extending the power of the other. Her grand-niece Cocoa, however, finds herself caught between the two worlds and their opposing approaches to accomplishment and self-empowerment. Cocoa, recognizing that life in New York threatens to transform her into "a total stranger" (49), returns home once a year, home being a place where she knows herself because she is known by others. Her movement between two worlds, however, without a firm identity to sustain her results in a constant struggle. Until she learns, as she does at novel's end, to draw on strengths from both worlds to construct a personal world and personal identity, she can know no peace.

Morrison's *Beloved* also depicts characters searching for peace — and power — through self-definition. Self-definition becomes possible for the characters in *Beloved* only through a painful confrontation with the past, as incarnated in Beloved, Sethe's deceased daughter. Only by confronting Beloved, an egoless ghost who mirrors their own fear, guilt, desire, and loneliness, can Sethe, Denver, Paul D, and the community come to know themselves and restore the connections among them that were originally severed by Sethe's actions eighteen years earlier. In *Beloved* the belief in ghosts — in the return of the spirits of the beloved dead to their families, homes, and communities — is consoling. When, however, the return of a spirit becomes, as Ella describes it, an "invasion" (257), it can become potentially destructive. Morrison suggests, nevertheless, that only by confronting, knowing, and exorcising one's ghosts — the past — can one move forward toward health and power.

Kingston's autobiography, *The Woman Warrior*, makes a similar argument: only by knowing one's ghosts, giving them life and substance, can one know oneself. By imagining her ghosts' lives, by filling in the details of those lives, Maxine transforms them from "forever wandering" (209), forever haunting ghosts into people — fully fleshed and permanently grounded — who no longer threaten her. By understanding her relationship to these ghosts, the ways in which she resembles and differs from them, Kingston defines herself in relation not only to the ghosts but also to the sociocultural heritage she shares with them. Through a process of self-definition, she learns how to do battle against all those — her parents, the community of emigrant villagers, and the larger world of white bigots and bosses — who would attempt to entrap her in a predetermined identity. Eventually, Maxine

creates for herself an identity and a voice that transcend the sociocultural barriers that threaten to, alternatively, enclose or exclude her.

The depiction by these six ethnic women writers of the coexistence of natural and supernatural worlds might be considered by some readers to be postmodernist. McHale, in his discussion of postmodernist fiction, points to the number of works that present "a dual ontology, on one side our world of the normal and everyday, on the other side the next-door world of the paranormal or supernatural, and running between them the contested boundary separating the two worlds" (73). In comparing such postmodernist fiction to the "genre of the fantastic" (73), McHale explains that, for Tzvetan Todorov, the fantastic involves a hesitation "between natural and supernatural explanations, between the uncanny and the marvelous. Hesitation, or 'epistemological uncertainty,' is thus the underlying principle of the fantastic according to Todorov" (74). McHale goes on to explain that Todorov, when confronted with a work such as Franz Kafka's "Metamorphosis," in which marvelous events are treated by the characters as quite ordinary, concludes that fantastic literature is no longer viable in the twentieth century. McHale, however, suggests that the fantastic still exists, not as a hesitation between two genres — the uncanny and the marvelous — but as a "zone" or "frontier" between "this world and the world next door" (75). "The fantastic," McHale says,

involves a face-to-face confrontation between the possible (the "real") and the impossible, the normal and the paranormal. Another world penetrates or encroaches upon our world, or some representative of our world penetrates an outpost of the other world, the world next door. . . . Either way, this precipitates a confrontation between real-world norms (the laws of nature) and other-worldly, supernatural norms. Sometimes the confrontation is understated to the point of bland acquiescence, and the fantastic flattens out into that tone of unfantastic banality that Todorov found so problematic; at other times, as we shall see, it is strenuously agonistic. (75)

Miranda and Abigail Day, in Naylor's *Mama Day*, speak in similar terms about the coexistence of two worlds. When the two women recognize that New York-bred George's belief is necessary to save Cocoa, Miranda has hope because she knows that "he'd do anything in the world" for Cocoa. "I know that," Abigail responds. "But we ain't talking about this world, are we?" Miranda is forced to agree with her sister, "No, . . . we ain't talking about this world at all" (267-68). The two sisters from Willow Springs recognize and accept the occasional intersection of the supernatural with the natural. George, however, who does not recognize the existence of this second world, becomes involved in what McHale calls an "agonistic struggle."

"One of the means postmodernist writing uses to emphasize the ontological confrontation inherent in the fantastic," McHale says, "involves *dramatizing* the confrontation, turning the resistance of normality against the paranormal into an agonistic struggle" (77). The other means used, he says, is "to acquiesce in the fantastic, reducing it to banality" because in such fiction "some *resistance* of normality against the paranormal continues to be felt — if not by any of the characters, then at least by the reader. As long as such resistance is present, the dialogue between the normal and the paranormal will continue — more than that, it will have been heightened, foregrounded, by the contrastive banality of the characters' bland non-reaction" (77). This is exactly the effect achieved in Morrison's *Beloved*. Both the tone of the narrator and the response of the characters attest to the naturalness, the ordinariness, of not only the haunting of 124 Bluestone by a baby ghost but also the return of Beloved, eighteen years after her death, in the flesh. Although the characters experience no resistance or hesitation, the reader does, wavering between belief and disbelief, expecting right up to the novel's end that Morrison will provide some

"natural" explanation for the apparent reincarnation of a long-dead child. No easy answer is provided, however, and the reader is left hesitating between "the possible and the impossible."

McHale's discussion of the "close affinities" between postmodernist fiction and the fantastic (74) raises again the question of whether the works discussed here, dealing as they do with the intersection between natural and supernatural worlds, could be considered postmodernist literature. My response is the same as stated earlier: the writers write realist fiction which, however, because it represents a different reality — one in which the natural and supernatural coexist, sometimes as two distinct worlds but often as a single, inseparable entity — may provoke some readers to question their own perception of reality. My first reading of *Beloved* had this effect on me, its assumption that the return of Beloved was entirely possible forcing me to ask, can this be possible? How can this be possible? What is Morrison doing here and why? What Morrison is doing, of course, is presenting a different reality, one that, although constructed and to some extent artistically contrived to present Beloved as a metaphor for the past, may not seem as alien to her intended audience as it was, on first reading, to me. "All her early life," writes Jean Strouse, Morrison

absorbed the black lore, music, language, myths, and rituals that give her prose its special flavor and tone. "We were intimate with the supernatural," she [Morrison] recalls. Her parents told thrillingly terrifying ghost stories. . . . Morrison's world, like the world of her novels, was filled with signs, visitations, ways of knowing that reached beyond the five senses. ("Toni Morrison's Black Magic" 54)

Discussing her novel *Song of Solomon*, Morrison says, "Black people believe in magic. Once a woman asked me, 'Do you believe in ghosts?' I said, 'Yes. Do you believe in germs?' It's part of our heritage" ("Talk with Toni Morrison" 50). Morrison, in *Beloved*, of course, is not telling just a ghost story; she is, as she explains to Mervyn Rothstein,

dealing with a past that haunts, a past that she chose to present not as memory but as an "incarnate" presence ("Toni Morrison Defends Women" C17). For Morrison, then, who grew up in a world in which belief in ghosts is not just common but both *natural* and *normal*, a world in which the past can return in incarnate form is a "possible" world, not an "impossible" one, as it may be for many readers of both African American and European American background.

Silko, on the other hand, represents the presence of the "supernatural" in the "natural" world not as a "possible" world but as "the" world. Native Americans experience no separation between natural and supernatural, no boundary dividing the two realms, and thus no collision or confrontation between two alien worlds. The Native American world view, Allen explains, combines both natural and supernatural identities into a "tribal community of relatives," which includes far more than "human kin: the supernaturals, spirit people, animal people of all varieties, the thunders, snows, rains, rivers, lakes, hills, mountains, fire, water, rock, and plants are perceived to be members of one's community" (*Spider Woman's Granddaughters* 11). For Silko, then, the confrontation or collision between worlds is not one between natural and supernatural but one between two world views — the Native American view in which all the universe is imbued with spirituality and the modern European American view in which the existence of a spiritual world is denied by science or safely separated from the "real" world through a process of mental compartmentalization.

What Silko depicts in *Ceremony*, Erdrich in *Tracks*, and Naylor in *Mama Day*, then, is a conflict between opposing realities, both of which are sociocultural constructs. Bicultural individuals, who cross boundaries separating a world that accepts one reality from a

neighboring world that accepts a different reality, are forced to determine who they are in relation to these two worlds, two conflicting realities. If, as contemporary theorists suggest, individuals can never locate an essential or unified self, those individuals can, nevertheless, construct and adopt an identity that serves them for the present time. All individuals have the option of positioning themselves on one side of a boundary or the other or of creating, as Gloria Anzaldúa does, a zone or borderlands, a new space situated at the boundary itself, drawing beliefs from both sides to construct an individual world view, reality, and identity that constitute one's center — a center that may or may not ever coincide with that of another person. What both contemporary ethnic and postmodernist literatures ultimately offer readers is the knowledge that all worlds are possible and that defining one's own world is the first step toward creating it.

Ethnic Literature as Social Literature

The works discussed in the following chapters portray through fiction and autobiography the ways in which ethnic individuals respond to difference, drawing on traditional beliefs in supernatural forces as one aspect of self-definition and self-empowerment. Individually and collectively, the works deliver a strong message about the need for self-definition, allowing one to transform the necessity of survival in the margin to the potential for growth radiating from one's own center. The works are important for this reason alone. They are also important, however, for the ways in which they reflect, preserve, and create contemporary American culture. They reflect the process of ethnicization as experienced by various ethnic groups in the United States; they preserve the myths and beliefs that sustain those groups; and they create visions and models of healthy

individuation by ethnics. By reflecting conflicts typically experienced by ethnics, by capturing and preserving in writing those mythologies that are useful for the future, and by creating new ways of resolving those conflicts, these works perform a social — and ultimately political — function of value to both marginal and dominant cultures in the United States.

These literary works by ethnics are, then, of value to scholarly as well as casual readers because they provide information about the process of acculturation and ethnicization that is lost in the accounts presented by social scientists.¹⁰ The stories are particularly valuable because they are told directly by ethnics themselves rather than being translated by an outsider, a problem plaguing anthropologists today, who only now are beginning to recognize the value of *listening to* and *learning from* the voices of other cultures rather than merely *studying* them.¹¹ They are also important to social scientists because they focus on individual rather than general responses and reactions. One function of literature, Novak writes, is

to hold up a mirror to culture in which such secrets of the inner life may be reflected, not by abstractions, but in the full concrete texture of represented

¹⁰Sollors warns, however, of the potential for circularity since some novelists, such as Ralph Ellison, have been strongly influenced by their own in-depth study of current sociological research.

¹¹As Paul Reisman comments in a review of Carlos Castaneda's first three books ("The Collaboration of Two Men and a Plant," *New York Times Book Review* 22 Oct. 1972: 7, 10, 12, 14), "Our social sciences generally treat the culture and knowledge of other peoples as forms and structures necessary for human life that those people have developed and imposed upon a reality which we know — or at least our scientists know — better than they do. We can therefore study those forms in relation to 'reality' and measure how well or ill they are adapted to it. In their studies of the cultures of other people, even those anthropologists who sincerely love the people they study almost never think that they are learning something about the way the world really is. Rather they conceive of themselves as finding out what other people's *conceptions* of the world are" (14).

situation. Literature succeeds as an instrument of understanding where scientific description may fail, by rendering the lived forms of life in anecdotal segments so that tacit understandings and practices may be rendered for inspection through a method different from that of abstraction. (50)

Whereas scientific studies are limited by necessity to the formulation of hypotheses and theories based on generic responses, fiction and autobiography provide other means by which to explore the multiplicity and complexity of individual responses.

The tendency of ethnic literature to mirror the process of ethnicization is also valuable to ethnic readers because it can help them to step outside themselves, their own cultural conditioning, to the degree that they can recognize and identify those aspects of cultural life that have been internalized unconsciously. Literature allows readers to see themselves as represented or reflected by others; each character serves as a reference by which readers can examine and compare their own experiences. This social function of literature of reflecting the experience of daily life, Felski argues, is especially important to oppressed groups who often need models for validating their own way of being or creating a new one. Literature, she says, "can profoundly influence individual and cultural self-understanding in the sphere of everyday life, charting the changing preoccupations of social groups through symbolic fictions by means of which they make sense of experience" (7). Felski believes that making sense of one's experience, which she sees as a first step towards liberating oneself from continuing cultural oppression, is aided by reading autobiographies and narratives written by those who are similarly oppressed.

For Native Americans, subjected for years to "compulsory indoctrination" to a European American world view, storytelling is critical to preserving the myths that explain who and why they are. Tosameh, in Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, talks about the importance of storytelling to preserving the myths, generation after generation through

hundreds of years, which represent "the best and oldest ideas" the Kiowa have of themselves. Passed on only by word of mouth, the myths were always threatened by extinction, the constant threat of loss increasing the degree to which they were cherished and revered. The words themselves, he says, become magical in their ability to heal and to bind listeners with something "sacred and eternal":

My grandmother was a storyteller; she knew her way around words. . . . She had learned that in words and in language, and there only, she could have whole and consummate being. . . . When she told me those old stories, something strange and good and powerful was going on. I was a child, and that old woman was asking me to come directly into the presence of her mind and spirit; she was taking hold of my imagination, giving me to share in the great fortune of her wonder and delight. She was asking me to go with her to the confrontation of something that was sacred and eternal. It was a timeless, *timeless* thing; nothing of her old age or of my childhood came between us. (88)

When Native Americans talk about the importance of storytelling to the preservation of their culture, then, they are referring not only to the stories themselves but also to the connection those stories provide to the "sacred and eternal" powers from which they receive their power as a group. The stories, by explaining the beginnings of their own culture, are their mythology, their reality, their identity. Native Americans believe that by retelling their stories and by acting out the rituals connected with the stories, they are making a connection with the most powerful of spiritual forces. To lose the stories is to lose that connection.

The preservation of these myths by contemporary ethnic writers is not, then, merely a form of regressive romanticism; by preserving a connectedness to sacred powers, the recitation of myths through storytelling ensures the survival of individuals and groups living in the midst of a culture that denies their beliefs because it does not share them. By recounting the myths and stories and folklore that have inspired past generations or by creating fictional characters who are empowered by their belief in these myths, ethnic writers

help create potential roles and ways of being for their readers. Thus, ethnic literature not only reflects or imitates life as it is lived but also creates a vision of how life can be, encouraging new responses and reactions by ethnics to the conflicts they experience. The literary text, Felski argues, needs to be seen not only as a reflection or representation of reality but also as a creation or construction of reality:

Writing should be grasped in this context as a social practice which *creates* meaning rather than merely communicating it; feminist literature does not reveal an already given female identity, but is itself involved in the construction of this self as a cultural reality. . . . (78)

That is, literature can go beyond the reflection of culture to a process of creation by providing new models, new symbols, new ways of merging mixed cultural identities.

By performing such a function — by constructing individual identity and, by extension, group identity — ethnic literature, like feminist literature, is not only social but political: its goal is not just to reflect but to change reality. Hutcheon, in discussing the relationship between feminist and postmodernist literature, suggests that feminisms are similar to postmodernism in that both focus attention on a central question: "What systems of power authorize some representations while suppressing others?" (*Politics* 143). In her view, however, the two literatures must remain distinctly separate because postmodernism, which she defines as "complicitous critique," is limited to "exposition" while "feminisms want to go beyond this work to *change* those systems, not just to 'de-doxify' [de-naturalize] them" (*Politics* 153). For me postmodern literature and ethnic/feminist literature represent two sides of a larger movement aimed at reconstruction or "re-vision-ism." Both literatures are fueled by the need to question a vision of reality that is today revealed as a sociocultural construct. The differences between the two literatures, as I see them, are that one questions that vision from the inside, while the other questions it from the outside; one achieves and

maintains a tone of objectivity and distance, theorizing about projected worlds within the safe confines of the text, while the other is emotionally and intimately engaged, arising from a devastatingly subjective experience of annihilation and alienation in "real life"; one is a matter of intellectual play, while the other is a matter of physical and spiritual survival. Because of these differences, postmodernist literature is concerned only with questioning the existing vision of reality, as Hutcheon suggests, while ethnic and feminist literature is concerned with rejecting, changing, and reconstructing that vision.

Kingston, when asked about her sense of connection with writers like Morrison and Silko and the differences between their writing and that of the postmodernists, responded:

I do feel an affinity [with Morrison and Silko] not only because I love them as people but because we seem to write alike. There is so much human emotion and richness and story and imagery and colors and things to eat. Nobody is alienated from life; everybody is warm. I feel that we write like that because we are warm We care about stories about people, and also that magic real place that we are all visiting. When I compare our work to some of the mainstream work, it seems as if many of them are *only* playing with words. The "language" people's world seems grey and black and white. Toni's and Leslie's and my aliveness must come from our senses of a connection with people who have a community and a tribe. We are living life in a more dangerous place. We do not live in new subdivisions without ceremony and memory; and if those other writers have to draw from that non-magical imagination, then of course, their writing will be gray and black and white. ("Eccentric Memories" 184)

The warmth and color and richness and magic that come from living in and writing from "a more dangerous place" than that of the postmodernist writers, whose work is characterized by writing from within the Eurocentered systems they critique (Hutcheon, *Politics* 12), helps explain the commercial appeal of the ethnic women writers discussed in this dissertation. Their commercial appeal — and particularly their critical acceptance — must also be explained in relation to contemporary postmodernist theory. As Hutcheon writes,

In postmodern psychoanalytic, philosophical and literary theory, the further decentering of the subject and its pursuit of individuality and authenticity has had significant repercussions on everything from our concept of rationality to our view of the possibilities of genre.

. . . The move to rethink margins and borders is clearly a move away from centralization with its associated concerns of origin, oneness . . . and monumentality . . . that work to link the concept of center to those of the eternal or universal. The local, the regional, the non-totalizing . . . are reasserted as the center becomes a fiction — necessary, desired, but a fiction nonetheless. (*Poetics* 58)

The wide, multicultural acceptance and appeal of ethnic women's writing can be attributed, in part, then, to the fact that postmodernist theory has helped prepare audiences of the center to accept different visions of reality, as perceived and constructed by writers from the margins. "Difference and ex-centricity," Hutcheon says, "replace homogeneity and centrality as the foci of postmodern social analyses" (*Politics* 5). Furthermore, the recognition by anthropologists and ethnographers of the extent to which they have misconstrued other cultures by their tendency to view and judge them through their own monocultural perception of reality has led to a move to encourage the subjects of ethnographic study to speak for themselves, describing reality as they perceive it.

The appeal of the writers I have selected to include in my study can also be explained by another characteristic they share, one which served in fact as a primary requirement of selection. I selected these writers because all of them, although they deliver a strong social and political message, ensure that the delivery of that message is secondary to the primary objective of telling a story. The Canadian writer Robertson Davies, in a message to the reader included in the Franklin Library edition of his novel *The Lyre of Orpheus*, says that when students ask about his theory of the novel, he replies that "it is storytelling." "The novelist," he says,

is descended from the ancient storyteller who spread his mat in a corner of the marketplace, and cried aloud: "Give me a copper coin and I will tell you a golden tale!" When he had a group of hearers he passed his bowl of coppers, and when his story was on the brink of his denouement he passed it again. He had to hold his audience, or his bowl would be empty; every word he spoke was carefully chosen, and every part of his tale finely shaped, because his audience had good ears, even if they could not read, and they liked rhetoric (but not too much) and fine flourishes (but not as a substitute for narrative). (n.p.)

All great novels, Davies writes, are "a great revelation of life, a parable, and unquestionably a tale," and he faults E. M. Forster for having, in his *Aspects of the Novel*, first "made it fashionable to decry the story":

The story was deprecated, almost as something unworthy, because, after all, anybody can tell a story — can't they? Thousands of aspiring novelists have tried to pin down their direct revelation of reality first, and then wrap it in a parable, and fudge up some sort of story and a few characters to carry their splendid message to a breathless world. But it seems to me that the parable and the revelation, if they exist, are implicit in the story, rooted in it as a tree is rooted in the earth. . . . (n.p.)

Davies completes his message to the reader by expressing the hope that, while reading the book, the reader will think of him as a storyteller sitting on his mat, telling the story at a certain pace and punctuating the telling with well-timed pauses, gestures, and eye contact. "Whether it [*The Lyre of Orpheus*] is a parable or not, whether it contains some revelation of reality," Davies concludes, "is not for me to say." His first and guiding principle in writing any novel is to tell a story.

The writers I have selected tell a story first and let the message and what Smith refers to as the "DHM, the Deep Hidden Meaning," take care of themselves (248). They never allow their desire to deliver a message to take precedence over their desire to tell a story; they offer a wide spectrum of possible options for gaining mastery over one's life, one's physical and social environment, but always do so within the context of vivid, dramatic, and

entertaining narrative. This privileging of story over message is, I agree with Davies, one of the prerequisites of true, great, and enduring literature. It is also a prerequisite, as Davies says, for capturing and holding the interest of a wide and varied audience, which is in turn a prerequisite for the reception of a message, should there be one, by the many rather than the few.

CHAPTER 2

A WITCH AND HER CURSE: EXTERNAL DEFINITION AND UNCROSSABLE BOUNDARIES IN LEE SMITH'S *ORAL HISTORY*

"Little lady," Mr. Bristol said — he always called me that — "You ought to make something of yourself." His words seemed to hang in the air like his breath, all the way into town, the same way I was hanging myself between what I might do and what I was doing, between Hoot Owl Holler and leaving these hills, and I was wrapped up in it all like the fog of his breath, like the fog that hung on the side of Black Rock Mountain which I used to look at of an evening, sitting on our porch.

— Lee Smith, *Oral History* 259-60

The people of Southern Appalachia constitute what is perhaps the least recognized marginal group in the United States. One reason for this lack of recognition is that they share the same racial background as that of the dominant WASP society. How, one might ask, could a people descended from predominantly English, Scotch-Irish, and German ancestors, be considered marginal? The phenomenon that first set the people of Appalachia apart as a distinct group was their geographic isolation within the mountains.¹² Although most pioneers passed on through the mountains on their way west or, increasingly after about 1800, bypassed the entire area, some stayed behind — first because of the region's fertile coves and later because of the lack of roads and because of the inability of those who did venture forth to become socially integrated within the external world. As the years passed, the small mountain communities became more and more isolated, both from each other and from the economic and technological progress that was transforming the rest of the United

¹²Southern Appalachia encompasses the Appalachian Mountains, Appalachian Valley, and Allegheny Mountains as they extend from Maryland to Alabama.

States from a pioneer wilderness to a thriving, industrialized society. As early as the 1870s travelers passing through the region began to report that the people living in the mountains, despite having an ethnic background similar to their own, seemed different from those living in other parts of the nation. By 1900 Appalachia was perceived as a region in which time had stopped, freezing the inhabitants in the pioneer, frontier lifestyle of 1750, isolated from and forgotten by the rest of the nation. Today, the people of Appalachia continue to maintain a lifestyle and system of values, beliefs, and attitudes that tend to separate them from the mainstream WASP culture of the United States. One trait of these people, inherited from those ancestors who first settled Appalachia, is an especially strong spirit of independence, self-sufficiency, and individualism. Although bonding and loyalty among families and within communities are also quite strong, many homesteads and communities are still located in isolated pockets and coves, separated from each other by miles of undeveloped mountainside and poorly maintained roads. The people of Appalachia seem unable to band together to form a single, cohesive group and to find a strong, unified voice with which to demand economic assistance. This aim is further hampered by the people's insistence on self-sufficiency and independence, which would prohibit them from asking for aid even if they could locate a unified voice.

Historian Henry D. Shapiro, in his book *Appalachia on Our Mind*, argues that the Appalachian region, as a geographically and culturally discrete entity, is not natural but was instead "invented" between 1870 and 1890 by two movements prevalent at the time — the local color movement and the home missionary movement. Whether the designation of Appalachians as a separate ethnic group is natural or artificial, they are nevertheless set off from other Anglo-Celtics by a distinct boundary, defined from both within and without, that

has effectively included and excluded membership in both groups since late in the nineteenth century. Today, however, continuing industrialization and modernization of the Appalachian region threaten to dissolve the differences that define that boundary, erasing still another marginal group. Writers such as Lee Smith, Bobbie Ann Mason, Denise Giardina, Fred Chappell, John Ehle, and Cormac McCarthy, following the earlier examples set by Wilma Dykeman, Harriet Arnow, James Still, and Mildred Haun, attempt in their novels to capture and preserve the peculiarities that define Appalachians as a unique sociocultural group. In *Oral History* Smith succeeds in portraying not only those characteristics that continue to distinguish many Appalachians today but also the degree to which Appalachians have over the past hundred years become increasingly acculturated to the lifestyle of the dominant culture. By the time *Oral History* ends in the 1970s, the novel's characters are assuming a lifestyle — attending college, selling Amway products, and transforming the old homestead into Ghostland — that cheapens even as it enriches. Thus, Smith poignantly captures the loss experienced by so many marginal groups in the United States: as one way of life is gained, another is irretrievably lost.

Through her portrayal of Appalachian culture over a hundred-year span in *Oral History*, Smith suggests that the Appalachian character, like its language, has become diluted with time. For example, Sally, the last speaker of the novel, is a strong woman, clearly intended as "a positive image"; nevertheless, Smith says, Sally is also weaker than Granny Younger, who spoke a hundred years earlier. Sally is "in a hurry," Smith says. "She has to get dinner on the table . . . , and she just hasn't got the narrative feel because she doesn't have the words, she doesn't have the time" ("Interview with Lee Smith" 246). Indeed, one intended objective of *Oral History*, Smith admits, is to show that "once life is homogeneous,

once it gets all pasteurized and evened out . . . , the grandeur isn't nearly as possible" (247). Rosalind B. Reilly suggests that *Oral History* chronicles the dissolution of "a great era of belief" (92).¹³ Along with that belief emotion too is lost; for better or worse, the wildness, passion, and desire that drive Almarine, Emmy, Dory, and Pearl are gradually diluted, even repressed, over time. Despite her regret for the inevitable dilution that comes with homogeneity, Smith warns against sentimentalizing and romanticizing Appalachia. She sees the changes and the exploitation that have accompanied economic progress as perhaps regrettable but inevitable. Furthermore, life in Appalachia can be unbearably hard, in a way and to a degree largely unimaginable by outsiders, and any lightening of that hardship must be considered as good ("Interview with Lee Smith" 247-48).

Of the works included in this dissertation, *Oral History* must be viewed as the least positive in its treatment of the power of belief and of one's ability to define oneself and to cross sociocultural boundaries. The novel demonstrates how beliefs that empower and sustain the group necessarily victimize those who stand outside its boundaries. The power that springs from deep conviction is always double-edged: it can kill as well as cure; it can inhibit as well as foster self-definition and growth. Granny Younger, empowered and ennobled by her belief in supernatural forces and revered by the community, is nevertheless guilty of denying another woman the right to define and change herself. By defining Red Emmy as a witch, Granny Younger prohibits Emmy not only from defining herself but also from crossing the sociocultural boundary that separates and excludes her from the community. Even after Emmy attempts to conform, modifying her behavior to meet the

¹³Reilly gives a superb reading of *Oral History*, discussing the novel in terms of enchantment, dream, imagination, and the healing power of the storyteller.

standards of civilization held by the community's dominant society, she remains an outsider. The curse of being defined from without and of being barred from or unable to adapt to the dominant society is not limited to Emmy alone. The same curse falls on all those who attempt to cross the barrier that separates Appalachia from mainstream America, whether they are attempting to move inward or outward. *Oral History* demonstrates the trauma experienced by those who attempt to move from one world to another.

Presenting a kaleidoscopic view of white Southern Appalachia through the voices of eight first-person narrators and a third-person omniscient narrator, *Oral History* demonstrates the construction not only of identity but also of a history and a myth that become reality. Recreating the process by which history is pieced together from stories told by its witnesses and participants, *Oral History* demonstrates the futility of ever capturing a clear, unified, static account of events. Smith admits that part of what she hoped to capture in the novel was the way in which

the truth of anything changes in the telling of it There's never really any ultimate truth in any story: it entirely depends on who's telling it, on whose story it is. Even people who don't have anything to do with it will make it their story while they're telling it. The story is always the teller's. . . . ("Down from the Mountain" 5)

All history is a collection of individual truths and fictions, as perceived by minds already laden with certain beliefs and expectations. Because of the mind's preconceptions, all perceptions and representations of reality are as fictitious as they are true. In *Oral History* Smith skillfully demonstrates the way in which humans, limited by their expectations, desires, and needs, create or invent reality: they see what they expect to see, hear what they want to hear, believe what they need to believe. Through this kaleidoscopic history pieced together from individually crafted fragments over a period of one hundred years, the reader

witnesses first-hand the power of sequential storytellers, refining and adding to a preexisting tale, to create a myth that becomes reality.

Appalachian Women and Belief

Emma Bell Miles, in her book *The Spirit of the Mountains*,¹⁴ published in 1905, suggests that the supernatural beliefs of her people — both their continuing belief in witches and ghosts and their belief in God and the devil — are related to the strategies they have developed to confront and cope with the hardships under which they live. About the typical Appalachian woman's beliefs in omens and haunting spirits, Miles writes:

early in childhood she grows into dim consciousness of the vastness of human experience and the nobility of it. . . . She gains the courage of the fatalist; the surety that nothing can happen which has not happened before; that, whatever she may be called upon to endure, she will know that others have undergone its like over and over again. . . . To her mind nothing is trivial, all things being great with a meaning of divine purpose. And if as a corollary of this belief she is given to an absurd faith in petty signs and omens, who is to laugh at her?

. . . .
She has heard the stories of everything in the house, from the brown and cracked old cups and bowls to the roof-beams themselves, until they have become her literature. From them she borrows a sublime silent courage and patience in the hour of trial. From their tragedies, too, a sense of the immanent supernatural. It is almost as if they were haunted by audible and visible ghosts. Who would not fear to sit alone with old furniture that bears the marks of blows, stains of blood and tears? They are friendly, too. They stand about her with the sympathy of like experience in times of distress and grief. . . . (66-67)

¹⁴Miles was born and raised in the mountains of Tennessee but later moved to Chattanooga, where her success as a writer and painter opened the way for her acceptance by the wealthy society of the city. Her experiences from both inside and outside Appalachia gave Miles a bicultural view that makes *The Spirit of the Mountains* superior to similar books written by outsiders looking in at Appalachia.

The women of Appalachia find the strength to endure because they see themselves as a part of the continuous flow of history. The knowledge that one's mother and one's mother's mother and one's mother's mother's mother have all experienced and survived similar trials transforms the past into a living entity continuous with the present, empowering the mothers of the past to speak through present omens and investing the artifacts of the past with life. The voices of the past, both haunting and empowering, impinge on the present.

The omniscient narrator of *Oral History* suggests that those who know how to listen can still hear the voices of the past murmuring in the "little wind" that precedes a summer storm:

It ruffles the leaves of the shade trees, sighing, rising stronger now up from the creek and blowing across the year, it's sighing up the holler toward Hoot Owl Mountain, moaning around the house. It has voices in it, and thunder coming, and Jennifer on the steps and Ora Mae in the yard incline their heads in the wind like they're listening. (13)

Jennifer, however, is unable to hear the voices in the wind. If she were able to hear and interpret them, Jennifer could learn far more about the past than she can by asking direct questions and by capturing "banging and crashing and wild laughter" on a tape recorder left running in an empty house. Although Ora Mae could perhaps teach Jennifer how to interpret the wind, she chooses not to, preferring to protect Jennifer from the past and the past from Jennifer.

The ability to hear and see things that go unnoticed by others sets women such as Ora Mae and Granny Younger apart from normal humans with limited perceptions: "Sometimes I know the future in my breast," says Granny Younger. "Sometimes I see the future coming out like a picture show, acrost the trail ahead" (27). Granny is highly regarded by those who have witnessed the truth of her predictions, the effectiveness of her healing techniques, and

her assumption of a nobility that derives from her total confidence in her power to know and her ability to act on that knowledge to save others. Ora Mae, too, despite her refusal to apply her gift as a healer, occasionally seems to take on mythic proportions. When Ora Mae throws Pricey Jane's cursed golden earrings into a river gorge, Sally witnesses the woman's rise to a level of almost divine presence, only to shrink back into the same old mountain woman normally scorned by Sally:

She pulled something little out of the pocket, pulled it out slow and painful . . . and then she let out the awfulest low sad wail I ever heard. It did not sound like a person at all. It sounded like something right out of the burying ground, some rising up of age and pain. . . . That old, old ugly woman! . . . Then she slung both arms straight out and threw the earrings into the swirling clouds in the gorge and they went down, down, I guess, to the river so far below

But she stood there with her arms flung out, like a big black statue in a church or something, for the longest time.

She gave me the creeps.

Then she lowered her arms real slow, and while I watched, she shrank back from whatever she was to old Ora Mae again, so old she can't even drive. . . . (283)

Ora Mae is ennobled and Granny Younger is empowered by a belief in signs, omens, ghosts, witches, and curses. That belief allows them to perform superhuman feats, enabling Granny Younger, for example, to rise up off her death bed to try to save Pricey Jane and Eli from what might be simple milk-sickness but might just as well be the revenge of the witch Red Emmy.

The beliefs that ennoble Ora Mae and empower Granny Younger can, at the same time, however, produce far less noble effects in others. Such beliefs can also produce a Ludie Davenport:

I pick up on stuff. I know things afore they happen sometimes, I seen my daddy dead in a dream. I seen two black-headed babies in a dream and I had black-headed twins. It was me, you recall, way back — must of been twenty-five years ago — that seed the witch a-leaving after Almarine had throwed

her out, that heard her laugh. It was old Nick in a woman's form and I'll swear it It put me to bed for a week. So you can talk about devils and witches all you want, and it ain't none of it news to me. I been in on this thing from the word Go. (177)

Ludie, claiming the same powers as Granny Younger and Ora Mae have and expressing the same beliefs in "devils and witches," appears only ridiculous whereas the other two women appear wise. Ludie appears ridiculous because she exaggerates, she chatters mindlessly (whereas Ora Mae is economical with her words, and Granny chooses hers carefully for optimum effectiveness), and she draws obviously false conclusions:

I have knowed the Devil for real ever since the first time he appeared to me when I was not but eight years old at a church dinner on the ground, and told me to do something nasty. Not me, I said, you go on, old Devil, and find you somebody else! So he up and disappears, and it was not but five or ten minutes later that Mama's little chow dog, which was always so nice and sweet, come a-running out of the woods all wild-like, and bit Grandaddy on the knee right through his Sunday trousers! Old Devil had got into Mama's little chow dog. . . . (176)

Furthermore, in Ludie's personal experience, both the devil and the witch Red Emmy use their powers to play mischievous pranks, getting into chow dogs or chasing Ludie down a mountain path, causing her to lose her wart poultice, rather than using them to kill and destroy human lives. Ludie's belief in witches and the devil is an outgrowth of her belief in God:

Now you know me and how I love the Lord And anybody that loves the Lord as much as me, you know they fear the Devil too. You can't have one without the other any moren you can have the dark without the light. It don't make no sense if you leave out the other half, is what I'm a-saying. . . . (176)

Ludie's belief, then, is based on reasoning: "It don't make no sense" not to have a dark counterpart to God's light. Granny and Ora Mae's belief, however, does not stem so much from a belief in God as from their personal perception and experience of supernatural forces

around them. Granny Younger and Ora Mae see, hear, feel the existence of other forces, and they witness the effects of those forces in the illnesses, deaths, and misfortunes — and the miraculous recoveries — of those around them.

Despite the differences, however, in the *quality* or *source* of belief among the three women, the *consequences* of belief can be equally constructive or destructive for them all. Ora Mae's belief that the curse is carried in the earrings, which she then hurls into a river gorge, brings an end to the curse. Granny's belief in her ability to heal others gets her out of bed, forestalling death until she has helped Almarine. Ludie's belief in the power of reciting the Lord's Prayer saves her from Red Emmy's spirit and the ghost-dog that consorts with her. By the same token, however, both Ludie and Granny go to bed, stricken by pain caused by unexpected encounters with Red Emmy. Ora Mae moves out of the homestead because, for her, it is and always will be haunted. Worst of all, Granny's belief — her unquestionable certainty — that Red Emmy is a witch destroys the life of an innocent woman. Red Emmy is the victim of a system of belief that is ennobling, empowering, but also endangering.

Granny Younger as Storyteller

By 1898, when Almarine Cantrell is looking for a wife, opinions about witchcraft among the inhabitants of the tiny Appalachian community of Tug and the three mountains encircling it — Hoot Owl, Hurricane, and Snowman — are mixed. Some believe while others scoff. Even the scoffers, however, find themselves reverting to belief when they experience some phenomenon they cannot explain in any other way. Among those who do not believe are the master storytellers who still delight, as does Parrot Blankenship, in

entertaining their neighbors with the witch stories they have created or have heard repeated by other storytellers over the years. Among those who do believe, however, believing with a deep and profound conviction born of years of personal experience, is Granny Younger, a storyteller in her own right.

Granny's power as a storyteller is so great that she succeeds in convincing those who know better, including both Almarine Cantrell and the reader, that Red Emmy is indeed a witch. Granny's power, and the respect and trust accorded to her by the reader, derive in part from her own conviction in her beliefs, a conviction born of years of experience validating her own perceptions of the world:

I been here a long time. Years. I know what I know. I know moren most folks and that's a fact, you can ask anybody. I know moren I want to tell you, and moren you want to know. . . .

. . .
I said I know moren you know and mought be I'll tell you moren you want to hear. I'll tell you a story that's truer than true, and nothing so true is so pretty. It's blood on the moon, as I said. The way I tell a story is the way I want to, and iffen you mislike it, you don't have to hear. (17, 28)

Right from the beginning, then, Granny Younger asserts that she knows what she tells is true, but the listener (or reader) has the freedom to believe or to disbelieve, to stay and listen to her story, told in her own mode and style of telling, or to go on along his or her way. The more Granny tells, the more the reader does begin to believe, partly because her years in the mountains and her close relationship with Almarine make her the most reliable source to impart this particular history and partly because she earns the respect of the reader just as she has earned the respect of the community.

Granny grew up on Hurricane Mountain long before most of the other members of the community were born or migrated to the area; she knows and is known by all, having served as midwife at the birth of most, having applied healing herbs, poultices, chants, and

charms to cure everything from childhood disease to broken limbs, and having laid out many of their dead. "I have seed folks come and I have seed them go," she says. "I have cotched more babies than I can name you; I have put the burying quilts around many a soul" (28). In times of crisis — birth, illness, and death — the community turns to Granny Younger, and they express their gratitude for her services throughout the year by dropping off gifts of whatever they have most recently harvested, canned, or butchered. The community's regard for Granny Younger is similar to that expressed by Miles in 1905:

I have learned to enjoy the company of these old prophetesses almost more than any other. The range of their experience is wonderful; they are, moreover, repositories of tribal lore — tradition and song, medical and religious learning. They are the nurses, the teachers of practical arts, the priestesses, and their wisdom commands the respect of all. . . . (37-38)

One indication of this regard is that nothing told by any other narrator raises any doubts about the veracity of Granny's story, which is unusual in this kaleidoscopic work in which each narration not only contributes to the whole but also colors and distorts the truth of the other speakers' perceptions and ordering of events.¹⁵

This community regard for Granny encourages the reader's trust in her as a reliable narrator. More important, however, is the strength of Granny's confidence in herself and her own sight and knowledge. As Frank Soos notes, "Granny is asking [the reader] to trust her version of events She is demanding belief, a belief that stands outside logic, language, or words" (21). In fact, the confidence Granny inspires in all those who listen to her, the confidence that what she knows and tells is unquestionably true, validates and makes real stories that would not normally be accepted from other speakers. Ultimately, Granny's

¹⁵The reader does learn near the end of Granny's own narration, however, that not all the men in Tug share her beliefs in witchcraft. Recognizing that Emmy is nothing more than "a crazy girl" (49), they laugh at those who believe in and fear Emmy's supernatural powers.

own self-confidence in what she knows misleads both Almarine and the reader. In telling what she knows of Red Emmy, both before and after Emmy first encounters Almarine, Granny invents for her readers the apparition of a witch where no witch exists. Although Granny herself does not tell Almarine the stories about Red Emmy that she relates to us, her responses to Almarine's questions about Emmy validate the stories he hears from the community. If Almarine had not trusted Granny as much as he did, he would not later have given credence to the gossip, thus opening the way to his interpreting certain events as signs of Red Emmy's witchery. When he does begin to suspect Emmy of being a witch, Granny's confirmation of his suspicions and her advice to drive Emmy away persuade him to banish Emmy, pregnant with his child, from his home.

One tends to forgive or perhaps even to overlook Granny's culpability because she is clearly motivated by a belief that is both ennobling and empowering. This belief empowers her to perceive and guard against dangers unrecognized by others. Granny Younger is, in Miles' terms, a repository of the tradition, medical knowledge, and religious learning of Southern Appalachia at the turn of the century. If she errs in her judgment of Red Emmy, she does so out of a sincere belief in her own perception of reality and her desire to protect Almarine from dangers he does not see. She stands apart, then, from Rose Hibbits, whose malicious storytelling about Red Emmy's curse is motivated by jealousy, repressed sexual desire, and revenge for Almarine's curt dismissal of her advances, and from Ludie Davenport, whose superstitious fancies are brought on, as the Rev. Aldous Rife suggests, by the unfortunate situation of being "a still-healthy woman saddled with a sick husband" who "needs some excitement" (186). Despite her good intentions and the sincerity of her belief, however, Granny Younger, respected by community and reader alike, is guilty

along with others in the community of inventing a witch out of a woman who is merely different. In warning Almarine to avoid Emmy and in advising him to drive her away, she creates a witch for him, and in presenting her oral history of their story — not her own story, she emphasizes, but "Almarine's, and Pricey Jane's, and Lord yes, it's that red-headed Emmy's. Mought be it's her story moren the rest" (27) — she creates a witch for the reader. This, then, is the power wielded by a master storyteller, the power not only to create reality but to demand that others accept, at least temporarily, that reality.

The Making of a Witch

Red Emmy's true history has always been a mystery to the community. They know that she lives among the caves high up on Snowman Mountain with old man Isom Charles. Isom, like Granny, grew up on Hurricane Mountain, where they were close friends — perhaps even lovers — many years earlier. Isom left home, however, after his mother died and after having killed a brother and beat the father who had beat him as a child. Although Granny claims to know Isom as well as anybody does, she says that

didn't nobody know how he got that gal. Some says he had him a wife and he kilt her, and others say he just drempt Emmy up outen the black air by the Raven Clifts. Others say he stole him a baby from West Virginia. (37-39)

Isolating himself and Emmy high on Snowman Mountain, Isom gathers ginseng, only occasionally descending into Tug to exchange his mountain bounty for food and supplies.

Granny believes, as do other members of the community, that "old Isom's red-headed Emmy . . . could never have a mortal man in all her days. She belonged to the devil is why. Her daddy had done pledged her years before. And all those years she had fucked with the devil and not give a fig for a regular man" (35). As consort to the devil, Emmy is naturally

believed to be a witch empowered through him to leave her own body at night, entering the bodies of other humans or of animals, to satisfy her own desires or those of the devil:

Witches'll leave their bodies in the night, you know, and slip into somebody else's. They'll do it while you're asleep and they'll drive you all night long with nary a speck of rest. They can take any form. Sometimes they'll go into a cat, or a cow, or a horse, or a rabbit, or a hoot owl out in the night. They leave their bodies in the bed and out they go. . . . (45)

Exactly how or why the story that Isom pledged Emmy to the devil originated is unclear, but the story had apparently been incorporated into the local mythology long before Almarine first saw and fell in love with Red Emmy. Granny tells of how a singing redbird enticed Almarine off the well-worn trace over Snowman Mountain into wild, unknown territory where he discovered Red Emmy bathing in a mountain pool. She tells of Almarine's instant longing and desire for Red Emmy, of the way in which Emmy suddenly disappeared without a sign, and of the way Almarine's dog responded first to the redbird and then to Emmy, growling, whimpering, the hair on his body standing on end. All these signs — gleaned from Almarine's account rather than witnessed first-hand — strengthen Granny Younger's conviction that Emmy is a witch and thus not a proper match for Almarine. Granny herself knows from her years of searching for healing herbs that "what you want the most, you find offen the beaten path. I never find nothing I need on the trace . . ." (28). Despite her knowledge that what one needs most is found only "offen the beaten path," Granny refuses to tell Almarine anything that will help him find Emmy, saying only, "You better go back over to Black Rock. . . . Find you a sweet God-fearing town girl, I say" (37).

Deaf to Granny's warning, Almarine continues to pursue Red Emmy and is finally rewarded soon after the inhabitants of Tug learn that Isom has died, having fallen off a cliff — or, some speculate, having been pushed off that cliff by Emmy. When Almarine awakens

one midnight to find Emmy standing by his bed, he is at first uncertain whether she is real or a dream. They spend two full days in bed before resuming some semblance of real life — tending the house and the fields — although Granny refuses to acknowledge the months that follow as real. She refers to this honeymoon period in which the two are totally immersed in each other, in their own sexual experimentation and fulfillment, as a period of "froze-time" in which Emmy, she says, is merely playing house, playing at being a good wife before her true nature emerges: "Now what was Emmy up to a-cooking beans? It was like she was a little child with a new play-pretty, and that play-pretty was Almarine. She was just a-playing house, is all, until her true nature come out" (40). According to Granny, this "froze-time" during which Almarine and Emmy were so happy "tweren't natural, no moren a snow in July" (41).

Why, one might ask, does Granny react so negatively to what are actually two very common aspects of the first six months spent together by many young couples? Why does she view two very natural responses — sexual indulgence and the "play-acting" aspect of assuming a new role — as so unnatural in this situation? In fact, Granny describes the initial enthusiasm for housekeeping displayed by Emmy, of whom she disapproves, and that of Almarine's subsequent wife Pricey Jane, of whom she approves, in much the same way. About Red Emmy she says:

And that Emmy? Lord, she was a-dusting, and a-sweeping, and a-cooking and milking the cow. As I said she was playing house. She looked real young and real pretty — her red hair just a-bouncing all down her back as she walked. . . . (41)

Similarly, she says about Pricey Jane:

Pricey Jane . . . was a girl like a summer day. And work! Lord, she turned that cabin upside down and sideways cleaning it, she was a-drying apples on the shed roof, she churned butter so light it'd melt in your mouth. . . . (56)

Whereas Pricey Jane is appropriately displaying her skill as a young housewife, according to Granny, Red Emmy is only "a-playing house." In reality, the only difference between the housekeeping displayed by the two women is the difference in Granny Younger's own expectations. Whereas she expects Pricey Jane to act like a new housewife, she expects Red Emmy to act like a witch. She is, in essence, waiting for Red Emmy to show her true nature; thus, this "froze time" is actually time frozen not for Emmy and Almarine but for Granny, who is herself entrapped in a period of waiting for her own expectations to be fulfilled. In fact, Granny is so certain that eventually Red Emmy's true nature will come out that she proves what she once said about Almarine: "Iffen a body searches for so long, he's bound to find something, that's a fact" (38). Thus, when Granny gets caught "spying on a witch and her business" (44), she succeeds in experiencing first-hand the power of Emmy's witchery; experience validates belief.

Granny is crossing the foot of Hoot Owl Holler on her way to care for a baby suffering from "thrash" when she decides to visit Almarine. When she first arrives at his cabin, she says,

It all seemed natural to me right then, I couldn't feel no witchery in the air, nor nothing wrong atall on the trace nor around that cabin when I got to it. Almarine's chickens come a-running and a-scratching, and that witch had her wash strung out on the line like anybody. Can you feature a witch a-washing? She must of wanted so bad to be natural, what I think. She must of tried hard for a while. . . . (42)

Granny's conviction, then, that Red Emmy is a witch is so great that she is unable to accept that what looks natural *is* natural. Although she gives Emmy credit for trying hard, what she means is that Emmy is trying hard to overcome her "true" identity — that of witch — rather than the truth of the matter, which is that Emmy is trying hard to construct a new identity

for herself — that of wifely companion to Almarine — an identity for which, living alone in the caves with Isom, she has had neither role model nor training.

When Granny finally locates Almarine plowing in the garden, with Emmy walking behind him, dropping corn in the furrows, she again admits: "I have to say that Almarine and Red Emmy looked like regular folks, going along down the side of the hill with their planting" (42). Despite the naturalness of the scene, however, Granny remains hidden, watching the couple from where she stands in a clump of cedars. Even when a thunderstorm that has quickly arisen breaks loose around her, Granny continues to watch from the cedars as, amid the lightning and thunder,

Almarine draps that plow, and turns, and looks at her [Emmy], and she moves toward him and him toward her and they go to kissing, right there in that half-plowed field in the wind and the rain. By then I knowed bettern to come out, I wouldn't of come out for the world. So there they are kissing, with Almarine's mule a-rearing and a-hollering, and ever time it lightnings, their faces comes plain in the sudden dark.

You never saw such kissing in all your life! Made me feel like I had not felt for years and if that surprises you, you ain't got no sense. Now a person mought get old, and their body mought go on them, but that thing does not wear out. No it don't. . . . (43)

As Granny continues to watch from the trees, reliving sexual sensations that have long lain dormant, the couple, "still holding on tight to each other," race to the house and to bed.¹⁶ As they pass, however, Emmy turns and looks straight at Granny where she hides in the trees, spitting once in her direction. The lightning flashes, and Granny sees Emmy's face

¹⁶Granny's fascination with Almarine and Emmy's lovemaking seems to suggest more than simple voyeurism. Does the sight of Almarine and Emmy's passion revive memories of her own passion for Isom, Emmy's "father"? Is her concern for Almarine based on her own experience of a misplaced passion for the wild Isom, who left her when he left his home? Is her labeling of Red Emmy as a witch subconsciously motivated by some jealous fear that Almarine and Emmy might actually achieve a satisfying relationship when her own relationship with Isom failed?

which is "old, old," Granny says, "oldern and meanern time" (44). Granny immediately feels a pain in her side which bends her double, she says, and keeps her in bed for seven days. Because she fails to recognize that guilt and dismay at being discovered as a sexual voyeur have caused her own psychosomatic pain, this experience confirms Granny's belief that Emmy is a witch and that "spying on a witch and her business" is dangerous. With this knowledge and the knowledge that "iffen a body don't want holp, I can't holp em" (44), she retreats to her own "holler," leaving Almarine and Emmy to continue in their "froze time" on Hoot Owl Holler.

In the same way that Granny distinguishes between Emmy's housekeeping and that of Pricey Jane's, she also distinguishes between the two women's relationships with Almarine. About Almarine and Pricey Jane she says:

it was a sight the way she follered Almarine around, and how she'd reach out and touch him whenever they passed in the house. Almarine was like a different man. Or I'll tell it — he was like he used to be. He was like the sweet boy he was before he run off and got tangled up in foolishness and darkness, before he got hisself bewitched. . . .

. . . He was not bewitched no more, it was a clear-eyed look, I'll tell you, the way a man don't often look nor often love. . . . (56-57)

However, about Almarine's passion for Emmy she says:

he moved like a man set under a spell, which is what he was. Almarine moved along so slow with a little grin on his face so constant it was like it was slapped there for good. He moved like a man in a dream. . . . (41)

Again, the difference is primarily one of expectations. Granny is looking for signs indicating that Emmy is a witch, and Almarine's walking around in a daze, followed by his loss of weight and energy, fall right in line with her expectations:

I knowed what was happening, of course. A witch will ride a man in the night while he sleeps, she'll ride him to death if she can. She can't holp it, it is her nature to do so. . . . All that being so nice in the daytime was moren Red Emmy could take, what I think. She had to go hell for leather all

night to make up for them long sweet days. Almarine was wore out all the time, of course. He laid in the bed and slept most of the time while she worked his farm and then she'd come in and get in the bed. He was servicing her, that's all, while she liked to rode him to death. Red Emmy, she worked all day and she rode all night and she never slept. But a witch don't need no sleep. (45)

Granny is once again misled by her expectations, seeing in Red Emmy and Almarine's relationship exactly what she expects of a witch.

Despite the misinterpretation caused by Granny's expectations, however, certain differences do distinguish Pricey Jane from Red Emmy in terms of their sexuality and of Almarine's response to that sexuality. Pricey Jane, sixteen years old, is clearly infatuated with Almarine: "Pricey Jane loves Almarine so much," says the omniscient third-person narrator of Pricey Jane's segment, "it's like she made him up out of her own head, the perfect only man for her to love" (61). She is still young enough to hold romantic illusions about love; "all the time mooning" about love as a child, "Pricey Jane's still mooning," says the narrator (61, 62). Furthermore, she is tiny and dainty and doll-like, eliciting in Almarine a desire to indulge her, bringing her gifts from town — "a string of rosy beads," newspapers, and a magazine (68) — and to protect her from harm. Pricey Jane seems to inspire love, indulgence, protection, feelings that are apparently less threatening to Almarine than the overwhelming sexual desire he felt for Emmy.

Emmy, on the other hand, is a red-haired, red-blooded woman of forty living with a big, blond twenty-two-year-old man.¹⁷ At the height of her own sexual desire, she may

¹⁷Smith has been criticized for her tendency to people her novels with beautiful women and handsome men. See, for example, Denise Giardina's review of *Oral History* in *Belles Lettres* 4.3 (Spr. 1989): 10. Although Smith's characters may not appear realistic and certainly do not meet modern standards for "feminist" literature, they are true to the oral tradition of Appalachia, particularly its ballads of romantic love and killing passion.

be experiencing sex for the first time in her life — and this with a young man near his own sexual peak. Alternatively, as Smith has herself suggested, Red Emmy may have been sexually abused as a young child.¹⁸ Whichever scenario fits, Emmy was raised in the wild by a man reputed to be both crazy and violent, without benefit of the nurture or socializing influence of a loving mother or father. What she knows about sex she has learned through observation of animals or, possibly, sexual abuse — neither of which would have offered any lessons about sexual modesty, coyness, or inhibition. However, as John C. Campbell and Cratis Dearl Williams report and as the experience of several characters in the novel who bear illegitimate children demonstrate, the girls and women of Appalachia often display an open, uninhibited sexuality. Although not encouraged, sexual intercourse and even pregnancy before marriage are rarely impugned to such a degree that a girl is cast out by either family or community (Campbell 32, Williams 130-31). This attitude of Appalachians toward sexual indiscretion is later demonstrated by the competition among Luther Wade and the other young men of Tug who court the pregnant Dory Cantrell, despite the general consensus that she has been "ruin" by Richard Burlage. One can conclude, then, that Emmy's sexuality in itself is not inappropriate but that it violates some unspoken codes defining acceptable sexual behavior. Possibly she is sexually aggressive, initiating sex herself

¹⁸Smith says that, on the advice of her editor at Putnam's, she omitted a section of the original manuscript that had been written from Emmy's point of view. "It was a very disjointed stream-of-consciousness thing," she says, "because she [Emmy] was crazy. My idea about Red Emmy was that she was a girl, an orphan, who had been sexually abused when she was a child, by a preacher, actually, and his wife . . . it showed that she wasn't a witch at all, that the way she was was probably understandable, given what all she had been through" (27). Smith does not say whether she saw Isom has having rescued Emmy from this abuse or having continued to abuse her himself. Since Smith chose not to reveal Emmy's true history, wrapping all but her few months with Almarine in mystery, the reader is left to create his or her own opinions about Emmy on the basis of the stories that are provided.

rather than waiting for Almarine to take the lead; possibly she has excessive desires that Almarine's own sexual energies cannot match. The excessiveness of Emmy's desire is suggested by Granny's belief that Emmy is riding Almarine to death, with no loss or depletion of her own energies, as if she were feeding off him. A third explanation, however, is suggested at various points in the novel and in varying contexts by Granny, Pricey Jane, and the men at the town store.

Granny tells the reader that when Almarine wakes up one midnight to find Red Emmy standing beside his bed, he takes her in immediately even though by then he has heard the stories about Emmy and "knowed better." He wants Emmy so much that his wanting has become a consuming fire:

He knowed he was playing with fire. . . . It's like you want something so bad, you're all et up with the wanting. It's like the ground opens up all of a sudden under your feet and there ain't no end to the falling. If you're bound and determined to play with fire, you'll do it whether or no — you'll play till it burns you up, or the other one up, or the both of you, or mought be till it burns out. (40)

Later Pricey Jane, sitting on her porch and musing about the past, thinks about the songs she has heard all her life, some describing love "as a game, with dose-y-do and curtsy and funny responses" but others describing it "like a sickness upon death" (61). Whereas the love between Almarine and Pricey Jane may be seen as a "game," that between Almarine and Emmy is more like a "sickness"; their love is based on a sexual passion that becomes a consuming fire, threatening to burn one or both up. The two are obsessed with each other, mutually possessed with a passion and desire that affects both equally; as Granny herself admits, Emmy is just as bewitched as Almarine is. In Almarine's case, however, the passion, "like a sickness upon death," seems to deplete him whereas Emmy seems to thrive, growing stronger.

Almarine's wasting away can perhaps be explained by his fear of and even embarrassment about what he perceives as Emmy's power over his body and, consequently, over his mind and will. Despite Appalachia's many ballads and stories about killing love, such a consuming love is not really deemed appropriate or manly by the people, particularly the men, of the mountains. A man marries, first and foremost, because he needs sons to help him farm his land and because he needs a woman to tend the house and work the garden. He does not marry for love or even for passion, although he does expect his wife to fulfill his sexual needs as they arise; most of all, as Horace Kephart reports in *Our Southern Highlanders*, published in 1913, the mountain male expects to be lord and master in his home:

It is a patriarchal existence. The man of the house is lord. He takes no orders from anybody at home or abroad. Whether he shall work or visit or roam the woods with dog and gun is nobody's affair but his own. About family matters he consults with his wife, but in the end his word is law. If Madame be a bit shrewish he is likely to tolerate it as natural to the weaker vessel; but if she should go too far he checks her with a curt "Shet up!" and the incident is closed.

. . .
The mountain farmer's wife is not only a household drudge, but a field-hand as well. She helps to plant, hoes corn, gathers fodder, sometimes even plows or splits rails. . . .

Outside the towns no hat is lifted to maid or wife. A swain would consider it belittled his dignity. At table, if women be seated at all, the dishes are passed first to the men; but generally the wife stands by and serves. There is no conscious discourtesy in such customs; but they betoken an indifference to women's weakness, a disregard for her finer nature, a denial of her proper rank, that are real and deep-seated in the mountaineer. To him she is little more than a sort of superior domestic animal. . . .

And yet it is seldom that a highland woman complains of her lot. She knows no other. . . . Indeed she would scarce respect her husband if he did not lord it over her and cast upon her the menial tasks. . . . (330-32)

In his relationship with Red Emmy, Almarine is clearly master of neither his home nor the situation. As he grows weaker, lying abed, Emmy grows stronger, continuing to work the

fields alone. Drained by his passion for Emmy, Almarine loses his will and, with it, his manliness (as Appalachians conceive of manliness).¹⁹

That this tendency to an excessive passion is a characteristic of Almarine's own nature, however, rather than proof of Emmy's supernatural powers is demonstrated by the passion he later feels for Pricey Jane, which is similar in intensity if not in kind. One night during his marriage to Pricey Jane, Almarine hesitates to stay from home an extra night to play poker with the guys. Harve Justice, noticing Almarine's hesitation, jeers, asking whether "his gypsy-girl [Pricey Jane] had put him on a leash or maybe under a spell, or maybe he was still under a spell from the first one" (67). To Harve Justice, unlike Granny, Almarine is equally bewitched, and equally unmanned, by both women. Thus, Almarine differs from the other men of Appalachia, just as he differed from other boys when he was, in Granny Younger's words, "a sweet moony child":

Almarine fell down between the cracks in the family like some children will.

In spite of him being so pretty, with all that pale-gold hair, in spite of him being no trouble to a living soul. Almarine was said to spend nights in the laurel slick over by Frenchman's Cave, nights by hisself out there when he was not but nine or ten. Now that's the wild side of Black Rock Mountain. And Almarine knowed where Grassy Creek starts, away up there where it comes a-bubbling and a-snorting like a regular fountain right out of the ferny ground. Almarine went beyond that spring, too, straight up the rocky clift where the trees won't grow and this little fine green grass grows all around in a perfect circle. A lot of folks won't go up there. But Almarine went and lived to tell it and went again . . . he could scream in the night like a painter until the painters all around were screaming back. . . . Almarine had the lightest, biggest eyes when he was a little child. It seemed like he never blinked. He liked to look out on some distance.

¹⁹Richard Burlage, whose obsession for Dory seems to mirror Almarine's for Red Emmy, gives a clue to the cause of Almarine's physical decline. Like Almarine, Richard also loses weight, a consequence, he says, of his emotional state: "I went always, in those days, in a state of grace, or dread perhaps, a state at any rate of a kind of emotional pointillism, with each nerve quite on edge" (158).

Almarine didn't need nobody, is what it was, and there's folks won't take to a child like that. Still and all, he was sweet when nobody else in that family was, so this was a part of it too. People don't like somebody to be so sweet it makes them look bad, that's a fact. Which he was. I mean he was that sweet. . . . (18)

The differences that set Almarine apart as a child are the same that distinguish him as a man. He loves the mountains, living close to nature and isolated from other humans, but is constantly dreaming, "mooning," about something beyond those mountains. As Granny explains, "Almarine allus wanted something — who knows what? — and that's why he kept staring out beyond them hills" (21). He is at once too independent and too sweet to get along well with the other mountain people, and he is a little too wild, a little too dark, as a result of his frequent visits to the perfect circle atop Hurricane Mountain and his many years growing up on Hoot Owl Mountain, a mountain Granny Younger describes as "dark" and worrisome: "They is something about Hoot Owl Mountain makes a body lose heart. If you laid down to sleep on that pretty moss, you mought never wake up again in this world. It's no telling where you'd wake up" (24). Whereas Pricey Jane elicits the full measure of Almarine's sweetness and perhaps that wanting that seems to draw him outside the mountains, Red Emmy draws out what seems to be a desire to merge with the wildness of the mountains, eliminating the difference that separates him from the screaming painters, from the bubbling, snorting mountain springs, from the rocky cliffs, and from herself — a woman whose childhood was darker and more wild than his own. Despite the differences between the two women and in the responses they elicit from Almarine, in both cases he responds with an intensity and excessiveness that sets him apart from the normal stolid, stoic men of the mountains. Only after Pricey Jane's death, when Almarine empties himself of

all feeling and desire, does he become a man like other men, taking his brother's widow Vashti as wife — without love or passion — to bear the sons he needs to work his land.

Thus, the tendency toward excessive passion is a characteristic of Almarine himself, which both Pricey Jane and Emmy draw forth in their different ways, one appropriately and one inappropriately in Granny's eyes. When, however, Almarine recognizes the degree to which his sexual passion for Emmy is depleting his will and his energy, he begins to fear her and what appears to be her power over his body. He remembers the witch stories he has heard all his life, the more recently told stories about Emmy's arrangement with the devil, and Granny's warnings about Emmy, and he begins to project on Emmy his own feelings of difference: it is Emmy rather than himself whom he perceives as different; it is Emmy's true nature rather than his own that emerges after a few months of marriage. Thus, Almarine makes the mistake, as so many of us do, of projecting onto another person the source of a disturbance within himself. Convinced that Emmy is indeed a witch, Almarine approaches Granny for help not only because he fears for his own life but also because he knows Emmy is pregnant. Granny tells Almarine that, to break the spell, "You've got to throw her out . . . You've got to make the mark of the cross on her breast and her forehead with ashes, and throw her out the door and say the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost as loud as ever you can" (46). His fear of Emmy overpowering his ability to reason, Almarine vows that he "won't have no witch-children in [his] holler" (47), and following Granny's advice, drives Emmy from his home despite his continuing passion for her.

Caught up by Granny's story, by her conviction that Emmy is truly a witch and Almarine a blameless victim of her bewitchment, the reader may overlook the cruelty with which Emmy is treated. Through no fault of her own, having committed no crime other than

indulging her sexual desires, she is victimized by beliefs passed down through generations. She is robbed of her one chance for a husband, a home, a family — for an existence that, hard though it may be, is normative for the time and environment in which she lives. Guided by Granny's timeless wisdom — a wisdom that includes an age-old belief that strange, single women tend to be consorts of the devil — Almarine drives the woman he loves, pregnant with their child, back to the rocky cliffs and caves of Snowman Mountain where he first discovered her.

An interesting side note about the tendency of a community to see witches where only strange and different women exist is that Granny Younger herself, whether she recognizes it or not, is highly vulnerable to the charge of witchcraft. Granny too is a single woman, never married, living alone in her home on Hurricane Mountain. She boasts at one point in her story, "Now, I've got my own holler, mind. Nobody ever lived in it but me and mama, and mama's dead. . . . I'd not put up with a regular man if you paid me" (25). Granny is old and eccentric and outspoken. Furthermore, she is known to have special powers, both of foresight and of healing, and most cultures that believe in the supernatural powers of gifted humans believe that the powers for good can be easily subverted to perform evil when the need or desire arises (Larner 151). Only one hint of Granny's own vulnerability appears in *Oral History*, and that occurs when she is laying out Almarine and Pricey Jane's son Eli for burial. The third-person omniscient narrator of this section remarks that, while Granny was out in the lean-to laying out Eli, some of the other neighbors who have come to help "heard her murmuring voice out there, and looked quickly away from each other's faces. Who knew what Granny was saying, or worse yet, what-all she did?" (73). Possessing the power of words, both to heal and to create fictions, Granny, rather than Emmy, is the one

who possesses potentially threatening powers. If the community had not had Red Emmy, Granny herself could quite possibly have come under suspicion for the many ensuing deaths and catastrophes in Hoot Owl Holler that are later attributed to Red Emmy and her curse on Almarine Cantrell.

The Making of a Curse

Although no one knows or at least no one tells how the story about old Isom pledging Red Emmy to the devil originated, we do learn how the story about Red Emmy's curse on Almarine Cantrell and Hoot Owl Holler begins. About two months after Almarine runs Red Emmy from home, he marries Pricey Jane. Within two years Pricey Jane bears first a son, Eli, and then a daughter, Dory. Only a few months after Dory is born, Almarine returns home after a trip of several days to discover that his son has died and his wife Pricey Jane is near death, both having drunk the fresh milk of their cow, which is also dying. Shocked and disbelieving, Almarine wonders aloud to Granny and the other neighbors who have come to help: "That cow has eat in the holler before Hit ain't never took sick" (74). Neither Granny nor the neighbors respond, but in the silence that follows his statement, Almarine begins to answer his own unvoiced question: "Now that's a pure fact. . . . Hit ain't never took sick before, and neither has none of youn, and every one of you-unses know it" (74). The reader can imagine the line of Almarine's silent reasoning as he begins to suspect that Red Emmy is responsible, perhaps having entered the cow's body to poison the milk that kills his wife and son. In actuality, death from drinking the milk of cows who have grazed in certain shady coves, as has Almarine's cow, is not uncommon in the mountains. According to the omniscient narrator of this segment, everyone knew "about dew

poison, and they all knew it had no cure. Either you lived through it or you died. . . . This was why you had to watch where a milk-cow grazed, keep her out of cow-stomps and shady coves and ferny places so she wouldn't get took milk-sick like this one did. Anybody who drank off a milk-sick cow, or ate her butter, would die too" (72).²⁰ Despite their knowledge of and experience with milk-sickness, however, Almarine and those gathered on his porch begin to speculate about Red Emmy's influence on the series of events that have just passed. As they stand together in a silence broken only by the cry of a hoot owl, watching as "a little sliver of moon skidded out from behind Snowman Mountain and hung there blood-red in the sky," Rose Hibbitts abruptly voices their unspoken thoughts — "Like a killing knife" (74). At this Almarine runs down the trace, and soon those on the porch hear Almarine shoot the cow and then run "through the night toward Snowman Mountain screaming out like a crazy man, or like a man bewitched" (75).

Rose Hibbitts takes up the story at this point. When Almarine, torn and bloody, returns home the next morning, she says, he tells Rose and her sister that his dog was killed in a fight. Rose, however, believes that Almarine has not told the full story: "We knewed the truth of course, that he had gone to that witch and kilt her" (77). By this time Pricey Jane has died, and the neighbors have begun to go home. Rose's mother, Rhoda Hibbitts, orders her daughter to stay at Almarine's cabin to tend to his needs and to care for his baby daughter Dory. Rose insists that she knew what her mother was trying to do — marry off

²⁰The omniscient narrator of this segment suggests that milk-sickness and dew poison are related illnesses. Kephart, however, whom Smith cites as a primary source, clearly distinguishes between the two diseases, both of which he describes in two succeeding paragraphs (303). Presumably, Smith confused the two diseases, possibly because Kephart cites the example of a woman who contracted dew poison while hunting cows in the morning dew.

an ugly daughter who was quickly passing the age of eligibility — and that she begged her mother not to make her stay. Despite her protest, however, Rose is clearly smitten by Almarine, feeling that she will die if he looks at her and die if he fails to (76). Denying or perhaps not even fully comprehending her own sexual desire, she becomes increasingly nervous. She often cries, she says, for no reason at all:

the whole time I was over there at Almarine's, I felt so funny and weak-like, I just couldn't do a thing. And cry! I never cried so many tears in all my days, and never a reason for it. . . . And it made me feel so funny in my stomach and around the tops of my legs, like I was coming down with ague. Lord! I never would have stayed there if it hadn't been my Christian duty, neither. If Mama hadn't said. I'm not one to throw myself on a man, I'd never of done it for sure. . . . (75-76)

One night Rose awakens in the one-room cabin she shares with Almarine and Dory, and believing she has heard him speak, she calls out "Almarine?" twice in the dark. From this time — these long, silent moments spent lying in the dark with her heart "a-beating, beating to beat the band" and the blood rushing to her head while Almarine "slept on and on" (76) — Rose begins to see Almarine as "hateful" and "awful." She believes that he is deliberately and callously rejecting her attempts to care for and to love him and his child.

As Almarine continues to ignore Rose, responding curtly and abruptly if at all, she becomes so obsessed with what she perceives as his rejection of her that she forgets that she is dealing with a man still grieving over the loss of wife and son. Rose is so focused on her desire for love, her need for sexual satisfaction, and her expectation of rejection that she is unable to allow for that grief. She remembers a moment long ago when as a child, already ugly, she stood in the first spring rain all day because Granny Younger had told her that it would make her beautiful:

I was naught but a girl and already I knowed, even then, how I looked and how boys turned away. Even if folks tries to hide it, you allus know. Well,

it was early spring right after the thaw and I woke up before light and I heard it raining and I slipped out. . . . So I was a-standing out there in the yard in the rain, when it got light at last and Mama opened the cabin door and said, "Oh Rose. Oh Rose, come back inside." I was soaked clear through to the skin. "Oh Rose," Mama said and she held me close and she cried. (78)

Rose's tragedy is that she is born into a society that defines and values its women in terms of physical beauty. One cannot help sympathizing with Rose, having internalized at so young an age an external definition and valuation of herself as "ugly," despite the airs she assumes to compensate for what she and those around her view as a serious handicap: "I have ever been," she says, "the sensitive one" (75), and "I take a cold really easy, allus have. I'm the delicate one" (81). She is also, as the omniscient third-person narrator of an earlier section tells us, "the fanciful one" (74). Rose's fancy proves to be particularly powerful, conceiving and nurturing the curse that follows Almarine and his descendants through the coming generations.

Rose invents the curse spontaneously, involuntarily, when she returns home to her mother after having been dismissed by Almarine when his brother's widow, the half-Indian Vashti, appears on his doorstep. Rose, realizing instantly that her mother is angry with her for having failed to catch Almarine, attempts to exonerate herself by insisting that Almarine asked her to stay, but she refused; she would not stay in that holler for anything because it and Almarine were both cursed:

"Hit ain't my fault," I said. "Hit ain't my fault atall. He ast me to stay but I won't," I said. "He ast me to get married and I turned him down. Hit's a curse on the whole holler," I said, "and I ain't having any part of it. Almarine has done tole me hisself. That witch, she put it on him before he kilt her, and I ain't staying there, Mama, you couldn't pay me to stay." . . . (81)

Rose is surprised, she says, at how easily the words slip out of her mouth, "smooth as glass," and she "liked to have died" when she heard them: "I have never knowed what I

would say till I opened my mouth" (81). Rose's mother, dumbfounded and dismayed, responds much as she did many years ago when she found her daughter in the icy spring rain; she puts her arm around Rose's waist, drawing her in once again out of the rain, this time a cold October rain, saying "Oh Rose" in the "funniest voice" so that Rose cannot tell, she says, "if she credited me or not" (82).

Soon Rose's tales of murder, curses, and the Cantrells' haunted "holler" begin to pop up throughout the region. Two years after Pricey Jane's death, the six-year-old Ora Mae recalls an encounter with Rose, whose emotional state has declined rapidly in the intervening period:

Hanted, Rose Hibbitts had said, her bleary eyes holding fast to Ora Mae's making her see her face. *You live over there in a hanted place, and all of ye've got a curse. . . .* (85)

With each passing year, Rose grows increasingly unstable, telling her stories to anyone who will listen — as well as those who will not — until many of the people in the community begin to attribute all the misfortunes that befall the Cantrells to Red Emmy's curse: Almarine is killed by his moonshining partner Paris Blankenship, who is killed in turn by Almarine's three oldest sons, who must then leave their home to escape capture; Almarine's daughter Dory is killed when she lies or falls down on the railroad tracks; Dory's half-sister Mary dies young from epilepsy; Dory's daughter Maggie contracts polio but, after passing the earrings on to her sister Pearl on what appears to be her deathbed, recovers; Pearl, seemingly successful in escaping the mountains, becomes sexually involved with a boy in the art class she teaches at the high school in Abingdon and later dies of complications after a difficult childbirth (the baby dies as well); and finally, Ora Mae's son Billy, also trying to succeed in the outside world, has a nervous breakdown and returns to sit on the porch of the

Cantrell homestead, rocking steadily and silently until Pearl's deranged high school lover suddenly appears after her death and shoots Billy point-blank in the face.

The list of violent and seemingly needless deaths is a formidable one and could easily suggest to those who hold such beliefs that Almarine Cantrell and his descendants are indeed cursed. However, as Rev. Aldous Rife suggests to Justine Poole during an afternoon tryst (one of many in what has been a long and companionable sexual relationship) at her boardinghouse,

Look, Justine. You could make up something about anybody up in those hollers, and you know it. Take the Skeens, and that fire they had last Christmas and three of the children burned up, or the way Mavis Rife had two babies to die in a row, just up and died in the cribs with no reason Doc Story could find to ascribe to it. Or take the Harmons — [...] (186)

The point Aldous wishes to make is that life in the mountains is extremely difficult for everyone, with sudden violence, inexplicable death, and undeserved misfortune the rule rather than the exception. To Justine, however, all the other occurrences cited by Aldous are natural whereas the afflictions of the Cantrells are unnatural. She believes in the curse and cannot understand why Aldous, who also believes in spirits, insists on denying the evidence of that curse. Surprised, Aldous asks, "What spirits?", and she responds, "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, I reckon. . . . The big three. I reckon they're spirits too" (186).

Although Justine's response silences Aldous momentarily, he soon bursts forth in somewhat of a tirade, insisting that Rose Hibbitts is solely responsible for starting the stories about the Cantrells, then expressing his disgust for the type of ignorance that breeds such belief in supernatural occurrences, a belief that he equates with the literal belief in the existence of heaven and hell held by the local Free Will Baptists:

somebody could have started up a tale about her [Rose] — this is the point — only she started up a tale about Almarine instead. And once it starts, it

just goes on by itself, it takes on a life of its own no matter who may be hurt in the process. It's ignorance, is what it is, and by God I see no end to it, to ignorance and darkness. I can't see that it does any good to preach false hope or promise some kind of golden hereafter, some happy heaven that people believe in only because the things of this world are so goddam bleak they can't stand it if they don't have that to fall back on, or that to look forward to, some spurious golden robe. (187)

Justine insists that people go to church because it makes them feel good. Finally, she insists, "You're just tormenting yourself. . . . If you didn't believe anything, you'd just shut up about it, don't you know that?" (187).

This exchange between Aldous Rife and Justine Poole is interesting for several reasons. First, Aldous' description of how Rose started the story about the curse on Almarine, when anybody could have started a similar story to explain any of the unfortunate events that occur in the mountains, provides a clue about the way in which the original story about Red Emmy being pledged to the devil was started and passed on over the years. Thirty or forty years after the fact, no one — at least none of the history's narrators — knows who told the first tale about Isom, Red Emmy, and the devil. What the reader does know, from having read *Oral History*, is that these people are born storytellers, and they love both telling and hearing a good story, whether it is Ludie Davenport's story about being chased off Hoot Owl Mountain by Red Emmy and Almarine's ghost-dog, presented "as the Gospel" (176), or whether it is Parrot Blankenship's elaborately developed and artfully refined story about the "widder lady reputed to be a witch" (205), also presented as a truthful account up until the point at which he delivers the killing punch line. "When Parrot tells a story," Jink Cantrell says, "you can't help believing it's every word true, like the way he'll throw off on hisself instead of building hisself bigger, and look you in the eye, and grin at how dumb he was" (205-06).

What disturbs Aldous Rife about the storytelling, however, is that so many listeners are unable to distinguish between fact and fiction. He sees the people's belief in Rose's story and their belief in the literal existence of heaven and hell as one and the same, as "ignorance and darkness." Similarly, but more positively, Justine sees her own belief in the powers wielded by the spirit of Red Emmy and Aldous' belief in the powers residing in the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost as one and the same thing, a comprehension of the formidable powers of the supernatural. Whereas Aldous believes in God (despite the doubts that have plagued him for some years) but not witches, Justine, like many of the people in the community, believes in both: if spirits exist in one context, why not in the other? Furthermore, people believe in the things they do, Justine suggests, because it makes them feel good to renew their hope for and belief in their personal salvation. The people born and raised in the mountains around Tug seek not truth, as Aldous does, but rather an escape from the hardships of this world, particularly the death and violence and loss they experience daily. Belief — in both God and witchcraft — empowers the people of Appalachia by providing them with both an explanation and a hope for eventual escape from a seemingly inescapable existence of hardship and misery.

Uncrossable Boundaries

Aldous, despite having spent most of his life in Appalachia, is an outsider; he settled in Tug after having been educated at the University of Virginia and having served as a Methodist circuit rider. Although he understands and accepts many of the Appalachians' peculiarities, he does not understand the benefits they receive from a style of worship that he dismisses, even condemns, as mere "carnival emotionalism" (120). The boundary

separating his own "dry and somber" ministry from the "revivals and snake-handling and foot-washing and speaking in tongues" is one that Aldous is unable to cross and, to his disappointment, one that the people of Tug show no desire to cross in the opposite direction. Nevertheless, Aldous "is clearly fascinated by these practices and by these mountain people," having amassed enough "notes" on them to fill "an entire desk" (120). Despite the difference in religious belief and practice that separates Aldous from the people of Appalachia, Aldous generally tolerates and is tolerated by the community.

Less successful in his attempt to cross the boundary separating Appalachia from "civilized" Virginia is Richard Burlage, the privileged son of a wealthy businessman in Richmond, who journeys to Appalachia in 1923 to serve as a schoolteacher. Uninspired by the sterility of his own Episcopalian upbringing and his "gentlemen's education" at Charlottesville, Richard is seeking a "system of belief" that is more vital, more emotionally powerful than his own, and he looks forward to his time in Appalachia as "a pilgrimage back through time, a pilgrimage to a simpler era, back . . . to the very roots of consciousness and belief" (93). What he discovers, deep in the mountains of Appalachia, is life being lived rather than cataloged and dissected; he finds the Free Will Baptists who handle snakes, speak in tongues, seek salvation, and immerse themselves in the icy mountain waters; he finds Almarine Cantrell and his sons, who will kill with no compunction any man who interferes in their lives and their business; he finds Dory, whose open sexuality is responsible for, as he says, bringing him to his senses (155); and as he falls victim to a passion that is a "sickness upon death," lapsing into fever and delirium, he even finds himself infected by old Rose Hibbitts' "nonsense," her mutterings "to the effect that Hoot Owl Holler is haunted, and

. . . that Dory, too, was cursed, and that a 'witch-woman' walks up and down Grassy Creek from Hoot Owl to Tug and over to Snowman Mountain" (160).

Ultimately, Richard rejects the life offered by Appalachia, a life that is more than he can stand, more than he can control. He returns home after only five months in the mountains to fall back into the type of life originally laid out for him, marrying the "wise and warm and intelligent" daughter of an Episcopalian bishop (226). His life with this woman is utterly controlled, a still life, similar to those he photographs, that is disturbed only when, ten years after his departure from the mountains, he makes a one-day visit back to Tug to capture on film the remnants of the only life he ever really experienced. He finds himself being shot at, not this time for ravaging one of their young girls but for epitomizing the external world of progress and development that, having recently discovered the value of Appalachia's coal and timber, has ravaged their mountains, their solitude, and their way of life. Richard, with his fancy car and photographer's distanced view of the world, is clearly recognized by the people of Appalachia as one of "them," as much an outsider in 1933 as he was in 1923. For the Appalachians, the boundary separating "us" from "them," insiders from outsiders, is real; it is clearly demarcated by an incongruence in attitude, deportment, and economic level, not to mention belief.

Although an outsider, Richard, in his inability to cross the boundary separating two worlds, experiences the same curse that has plagued many of the Cantrells, going back not only to Almarine but also to Red Emmy, the woman accused unjustly of perpetrating the curse. The curse of so many of the characters in *Oral History* is the curse of desiring an alternative way of life that, because of a failure on their own part or on that of the person they love, they are powerless to attain. Unfilled, the desire becomes destructive, a wasting

and consuming fire. As Sally says about her family, "People say they're haunted and they are — every one of them all eat up with wanting something they haven't got" (239).²¹ What each of Almarine's descendants seems to want, as Richard also wants, is an escape from his or her own circumscribed existence. Their sexual passion, like their religious passion, is not an end in itself but a means to an end, an escape from the violence, barrenness, and futility of life in Appalachia.

The first time Red Emmy saw Almarine, when he first came upon her bathing in the spring, "a shadow crossed her face. She looked sadder for a minute than a body has ever looked. . . . It was like she knowed for the first time what it was she couldn't have" (35). Nevertheless, Emmy does try to get what she wants, moving in with Almarine, a move that Granny Younger, of course, believes is doomed to failure because Emmy is a witch pledged to the devil. According to Granny, Red Emmy "wanted to be a witch and a regular gal both, is what she wanted. But mainly she wanted Almarine, and her powers were considerable" (39). Although Granny Younger sees the relationship between Almarine and Red Emmy as inappropriate, the two are actually well matched. Mirror images of each other, both display a dual nature: just as Red Emmy wants to be "a witch and a regular gal both," sexually uninhibited and properly domestic at one and the same time, so Almarine wants to be both wild, screaming with the painters in the night to elicit their response, and sweet, doting on the doll-like Pricey Jane. After Almarine has lost both Red Emmy and Pricey Jane, he loses all his sweetness and becomes a hard, ruthless man. "A man's nature is dual, you know," Aldous says about Almarine, "part angel and part devil, with the body as the battleground

²¹Sally's remark has been frequently quoted by reviewers and critics as summing up the curse of the Cantrells, but their interpretations of who wants what differ. See, for example, the analyses by Jones (16) and Reilly (91).

. . . part evil, part good. . . . We are created this way, and we engage ourselves in the struggle until we die" (132, Smith's ellipses). Both Emmy and Almarine are engaged in this struggle between ambivalent desires; Emmy tries to reconstruct her own identity, domesticating her wild ways to make herself an acceptable wife for Almarine, but her sexuality elicits from him a wildness that violates the sweetness that constitutes the other half of his nature. Almarine, like the community, fears Red Emmy's difference, her wildness, even though he shares it. In rejecting Emmy, he rejects half of his own identity.

Almarine is emotionally tied to the mountains and, as suggested by Granny's speculation about his five years living in the lowlands, is probably incapable of surviving outside the mountains for long. Nevertheless, he seems to need or want something that exists far beyond the mountains encircling Hoot Owl Holler. Even as a boy "Almarine allus wanted something — who knows what? — and that's why he kept staring out beyond those hills" (21). Although Granny, and perhaps Almarine himself, cannot name what he wants, the expressed desires of two of his children and one of his grandchildren provide a clue to Almarine's own desires. Both his daughter Dory and his youngest son Jink are strongly attracted to Richard Burlage, the schoolteacher from Richmond. To both, albeit in different ways, he offers the same hope — the hope of an escape from the mountains, their hardship, their isolation, their "ignorance and darkness" through travel, cultivation, and education. Like the Free Will Baptists, they seek salvation, but they want it now, not in some distant future. Dory is enchanted by Richard's tales of how it will be when they leave the mountains together. "Tell me about the train," she says, and Richard describes again the journey they will take:

I tell it again: how we will board the spur line at Claypool Hill, and how she will wear a hat, and how we shall disembark at Marion, and spend the night

in a fine hotel and eat in the dining room, and how, the next day, we will take a train for Richmond, and how we will rumble across the whole state, and I tell her the names of towns we'll pass through, Roanoke, Lynchburg *et al.*, and I tell her that there will be a rose in a silver bud vase on our linen-topped table in the dining car, and a little silver pitcher to hold the cream. (157)

Richard knows, of course, that none of this will ever happen. He has recognized from the beginning the reasons why he should not become involved with Dory, going so far as to prepare a list comparing the reasons for pursuing and for forgetting Miss Cantrell. Among the reasons for forgetting Dory are "She is not of the same social class" and "She is ignorant and largely uneducated; such a gap exists between us that it could never be truly bridged, not even by any attempt on my part to educate her" (134). Even as they spend Christmas together holed up in his makeshift room in the schoolhouse, he writes in his journal, "I know it cannot last. . . . A knowledge rendered more poignant still by her ignorance of it" (157). A few weeks later, dismissed from his teaching position and personally escorted to his train, Richard does abandon Dory, leaving her pregnant with twin daughters — Maggie and Pearl — and irremediably infected with his tales of the train and the towns along its route. Although Dory later marries Luther Wade, bearing two more children, Sally and Lewis Ray, Sally later recalls the way she "knew we had Mama on borrowed time, she was so clearly waiting — and patiently, too, not troubling us at all — but a place inside her was empty that we couldn't fill" (248). Sally tells how her mother would frequently stop what she was doing and quietly slip out of the house to walk for hours, usually along the railroad spur, and how one time she failed to come home from one of her walks and her body was soon found, decapitated, where she had either fallen or lain across the tracks.

Dory's younger brother Jink is also infatuated with Richard Burlage. He loves him for the stories he reads, the books he loans to him, the promise he seems to offer of a

different life outside the mountains. Jink is described as being very much like his father Almarine was as a boy. He keeps to himself, sometimes hiding out in a cave-like opening by the creek and other times sitting high in the sycamore tree dreaming about flying and just thinking:

I leaned my head back — I was leaning into that part where the branches come together and make like a kind of seat, I call it the mother-seat, don't ask me why — I was leaning way back looking straight up, and the thinking place was blowing, and it was like I was the one flying across that rosy sky while all the rest of the world stayed still. It was just like I was flying. And the way I was leaned back into the tree put me in mind of a picture in the poem-book he had, of Wyncken, Blynken, and Nod in that boat, sailing off through the stars. Of course they wasn't no — any — stars by that time, nothing but the moon like a ghost-moon, fading away in the full pink light which grewed ever minute I looked. Rosy-finger dawn, he said. He read it outen a book. It was eating up the moon and I was glad. (190)

Jink inherits both his father's dreaminess and his sweetness, tenderly caring for his epileptic sister Mary. Unlike his father, however, he can voice what he wants: "Sometimes I wished it was just Dory and Mary and me and him [Richard Burlage] off someplace, someplace pretty, and all the rest of them dead as the dead in the tales they tell . . ." (197). He also wants to fly — away from "all the rest of them"; away from all the ghost-tales, particularly those of Rose Hibbits, who, mistaking him for the young Almarine, breathes in his face, "It was a phone call from hell . . . from that red-headed Emmy, that witch you took such a shine to" (203); and away from the hog-killing that Vashti insists he participate in this year. He even knows that what he wants is related to the old dried-up orange he keeps "wrapped up in a old torn shirt stuck down in the tore-up bed tick," one of the oranges Richard Burlage distributed to his students at Christmas:

It was dried as hard as a rock but I could feel the little dents in it all over and I knowed — knew — it had come from Florida in the South, and in the dark I made like it was still bright orange, as orange as it was when he give them out, as orange as the sun when it come up that morning and as round as

Dory's belly used to be, as round as the whole big globe of the earth he had, and I thought to myself how I'd up and leave here after while, me and Mary we'd up and leave and strike out walking as far as we could get across the big round world. (212)

Thus, when Richard Burlage leaves on the train to Richmond after only five months in Tug, he leaves two of Almarine's children dreaming of a world beyond the mountains. Dory never succeeds in crossing into that world, but Jink, Ora Mae later reveals in her narrative, leaves Hoot Owl Holler soon after his sister Mary dies and never returns.

One of Dory's twin daughters, Pearl, also dreams of life beyond the mountains; in fact, she seems to receive a double dose of desire, inherited on one side from her father Richard Burlage and on the other from her mother Dory and her grandfather Almarine. Pearl, according to her sister Sally, wants so much she will never be fully satisfied:

If I think of Pearl even right today, with her now dead and gone, what I see in my mind is those thin pretty white hands of hers grabbing and grabbing out at the air. Pearl was the worst one for wanting, of all of us. And the biggest fool. . . . (246)

Pearl wants a lot of things, but primarily she wants things to be different. The year she graduates from the local high school, her sister Maggie — who seems to have inherited her grandfather's sweetness while Pearl inherited his wildness and wanting — is dying from polio. Furthermore, the forty-five-year-old Ora Mae disturbs Dory's daughters by becoming pregnant with Luther's child not much more than a year after Dory's death. When Pearl comes home from the senior Honors Banquet, where she has been honored as salutatorian and named Most Artistic, she bursts into sobs, telling Sally that she can no longer live at home and that she will leave for East Tennessee State University as soon as summer school starts. When Sally tries to comfort her, asking what she wants, Pearl responds: "I don't want anything to be like this. I want things to be *pretty*. . . . I want to be *in love*" (263).

Pearl does succeed in getting away, completing her college degree, getting a job teaching art at the high school in Abingdon, and marrying a wealthy upholsterer twice her age who adores her and builds her a mansion to show it. Things are never pretty for Pearl, however, and she never falls in love. In fact, she seems unable even to comprehend what love is, visiting Sally once to ask her what love is like, whether it is enough, whether love is what she is searching for. "What I keep thinking," Pearl says, "is that there's something else, you know, something that Mama knew about and never told us, something she was going to tell us when we got old enough, she said that one time, but then she died, and everything that comes up, I think well is this it? Is this it? but the thing is, you never know" (271). Pearl's sense that her mother had intended to tell her daughters something — something, she thinks, about love — recalls the time Pearl's grandmother Pricey Jane sat on her porch nursing Dory and thinking back about her own mother:

Mooning, her mama used to say, and send her out looking for eggs. *No point in all the time mooning*, her mama said. Her mama's face was white and thin and grainy, and she never said a word about love. She just wouldn't answer Pricey Jane. And then she was always so tired. If you asked her about love, her eyes would glaze over like she couldn't remember how it felt or what it meant or even recognize the word spoken right out loud like that, in air. Or she'd act like there was something shameful in it, something Pricey Jane ought not to know.

. . . In any case, Pricey Jane's mother had died before she ever gave any answer, if she had any answer to give. (61)

These memories recollected by Pricey Jane the afternoon before she dies suggest that the answer her mother would have given, had she ever decided to speak, is that love and passion, if they are felt at all, wear out after the almost yearly bearing of children, the toil of surviving in the mountains, and the frequent loss of those who are loved. What Dory would have told her daughters, surely, is that Luther is not Maggie and Pearl's father, that

their father is a schoolteacher from Richmond who spent only five months in the mountains.²² What else Dory might have told her daughters — about men and love and passion and wanting — one can only guess, just as one can only guess about what all the missing mothers might have told their daughters if they had lived to speak. What would Red Emmy's mother have told her about love and passion? What would Pricey Jane have told Dory? What would Pearl have told her daughter Jennifer? The deaths of the mothers assure that the curse will continue to be inflicted on the daughters because those deaths leave the daughters wanting, questing, struggling to forge a new way of living only to fail, dying young and unfulfilled just as their mothers did.

Harriette C. Buchanan, in discussing the passivity of Smith's characters, says that the women Smith writes about are

faced with a world for which they are unprepared. These women . . . have little idea of where to look for guidance, because their families and communities provide so little in the way of honest or genuinely nurturing support. The families are broken, with key members either physically or mentally absent. These characters are so frequently lost and spiritually impoverished that they see no solution to their problems. . . . (344)

Certainly, the women in *Oral History* appear powerless to get what they want. Both Emmy and Dory are rendered powerless by the actions of men who are overwhelmed and frightened by their own excessive — or what they believe to be excessive — desire and wildness. Pricey Jane dies because of a lack of medical knowledge. Rose slips into craziness because she accepts her "ugliness" as an insurmountable handicap. Ora Mae refuses to accept the risk of loving Parrot Blankenship, the storytelling travelling man, because she fears he will

²²Sally does not learn that Maggie and Pearl are not Luther's children until she asks Luther whether Pearl, thrown out by her husband, can come home to live. Luther answers, "She can come in here, I reckon, . . . but she's none of my get and she never was" (280).

eventually leave her.²³ Pearl allows herself to get caught up in someone else's wants, simply because she can never identify what it is that *she* wants. Of all the women of *Oral History*, only Granny Younger and Sally succeed in defining themselves, thus attaining power over their lives. Granny has the power of her age, her experience, her convictions, and her words, which have earned for her a sustaining system of belief, the regard of the community, and a captive audience. Sally too wields the power of words and the power of experience, having left Tug and suffered through two disastrous relationships before succeeding in the third, which is firmly founded on a mutual appreciation, she says, of sex and talking (238).

Power through self-definition, however, is the exception rather than the rule among the women of Appalachia. The passivity that characterizes so many of these women can be traced to the absence of guidance, as Buchanan suggests, the early deaths of the mothers, and the hesitancy of the mothers to speak while they are alive. The passivity can also be traced, however, to the women's acceptance of a way of life that they have never thought of as open to change. As Kephart says, "It is seldom that a highland woman complains of her lot" because "she knows no other." The passivity of the Appalachian woman can also be traced to the very belief that, according to Miles, gives her the strength to survive — the belief "that nothing can happen which has not happened before; that, whatever she may be called upon to endure, she will know that others have undergone its like over and over again."

The times, Smith seems to say in *Oral History*, are changing, and the beliefs that ennobled and empowered Granny Younger and sustained the mountain women in 1900 are no longer sufficient a hundred years later. *Oral History* does, as Reilly points out, signal

²³Although Ora Mae has access to power through her belief in and her ability to tap into supernatural forces around her, she refuses to apply that power to heal others or to improve her own life.

"the end of a great era of belief," but Smith would certainly say that such a loss, although regrettable, is inevitable. Furthermore, she seems to suggest in this novel that the loss of formerly held, but perhaps outdated, beliefs is a necessary step in the liberation of the women of Appalachia. The influx of "civilization" into Appalachia destroys a way of life and along with it a system of belief; at the same time, however, it brings changes — college education, hysterectomies and other results of modern medical knowledge, alternative sources of income, new ideas about relationships with men and children — that are necessary to save the women from a continuous cycle of physical hardship, endless child-bearing, and early death. For several hundred years the women of Appalachia have seen no escape from this cycle. Without new, successful, empowering examples that combine the best of the past with the best of the future, Smith seems to say, the daughters of Appalachia are destined to repeat the lives of their mothers, enduring but not truly living.

Connection and Difference

Perhaps the strongest image, the binding image, of *Oral History* is Sally's image of her mother Dory as the bright blue center of a kaleidoscope's pattern:

I remember looking in that kaleidoscope too, and how it had a bright blue spot in the middle of all the patterns, one spot that never moved no matter which way you turned it or how many bright patterns came and went all around. Our family was like that, with Mama at the center, not doing anything in particular, but not *having* to either, and all the rest of us falling in place around. . . . (243)

This kaleidoscopic image of connectedness captures both the theme and form of *Oral History*.

A composite of thirteen separate narrations, framed at beginning and end by the split fourteenth narration, the novel offers a continuously changing pattern of color, light, and angles as each person's story butts up against and glances off the other stories that make up

the whole. The novel's kaleidoscopic design, composed of vivid, fragmentary histories, has the power to transform the reader's perspective just as a shattered mirror transforms Richard Burlage's view of the familiar landscape of Lynchburg:

my splintered rearview mirror fractured the noonday sun and sent it out in a splatter of light: like a prism I felt as I had felt several years ago upon hearing the news that a ninth planet — Pluto — had been found revolving around the sun, a planet that of course *had been there* all along: oh, God! I thought. Nothing is ever over, nothing is ever ended, and worlds open up within the world we know. . . . (234)

With each reading of the novel the reader discovers new worlds, new revelations, new connections. What one discovers at the center of this kaleidoscopically patterned novel, intricate in its connections, is Dory — Almarine's daughter, Richard's lover, Pearl's mother — destroyed by an unattainable desire for an alternative way of life. That desire connects her to father, lover, daughter, but it also connects her to many of the other characters of the novel — Red Emmy, Rose Hibbitts, Jink, Ora Mae — all of whom suffer in their individual ways because of their desire for a liberating experience, an escape from the hardships and dreariness and narrowness of Appalachia.

While focusing on connections, however, the novel also emphasizes barriers — the cultural differences that separate one person or group from another. Set in the Appalachian Mountains during a hundred-year span extending from the 1870s to the 1970s, the novel depicts the gradual encroachment of "civilized" America into the deepest recesses of the mountains. To the inhabitants of Tug, Red Emmy and old Isom represent the depth of depravity, wildness, and primitive existence, and they are shunned as consorts of the devil because of their difference, their failure to conform to the codes of behavior set by the community. To Richard Burlage, however, the inhabitants of Tug appear just as depraved and primitive as Red Emmy appears to them. For Richard, who feels himself "a sojourner

. . . between places" (141), the gap between Tug and Richmond and thus between Dory and himself is unbridgeable. For Almarine the gap between Red Emmy and himself is equally unbridgeable.

Anne G. Jones argues that the difference between Almarine and Red Emmy and between Richard and Dory "fuels the desire for union" and that sexual union is satisfactory to both couples because it helps "overcome difference" (16). The difference that Almarine sees in Red Emmy, however, is actually a sameness; that is, he sees a reflection of one aspect of himself — his wildness. The same is true for the difference — that of uninhibited sexuality — Richard sees in Dory. In a similar way, Red Emmy and Dory also perceive in Almarine and Richard, respectively, a difference, an otherness, that reflects an aspect of themselves — a desire for "civilization," for an escape from mountain wildness and its accompanying hardship and emptiness. The "desire for union," then, is fueled by internal divisions in each of the characters, who seek to satisfy one aspect of that division through union with the other. Unfortunately, the satisfaction of one tendency threatens to negate its opposite, a possibility that obviously frightens both Almarine and Richard. Both men — who, unlike the women, hold the power to decide and to act — choose sweetness and control over wildness and passion. In so doing, they retain their freedom and power to define themselves, but they also deprive themselves of a life-giving passion, and, perhaps more important, they deprive the women — Emmy and Dory — of the opportunity to re-vision and redirect *their* lives through a redefinition of self.

Oral History demonstrates, on several levels, the consequences of being defined from without. Red Emmy is defined by Granny Younger, the community, and eventually Almarine as a witch; Rose Hibbitts is defined by the community and eventually herself as

"ugly"; Dory is defined by Richard Burlage as a "mountain girl"; the women of Appalachia are defined by the men as "household drudge[s]" and "fieldhand[s]." Entrapped in the definitions imposed, these women find personal growth, development, and modification impossible. Denied the opportunity for both change and escape, the women's lives are destroyed. Pregnant and alone, Emmy is driven back to the mountains; Rose descends into madness; Dory commits suicide; and the other women endure, stifling their passion, their desire, and their dreams for a different way of life. Entrapped, they derive what consolation they can from their belief in the supernatural: they explain inexplicable losses through witchcraft; they feel the presence of their mothers in the objects around them; they experience momentary escape in the "carnival emotionalism" of their religious sects; and they look toward death and the "golden hereafter" as a final, liberating escape. *Oral History* captures the double-edged nature of belief in a world controlled by supernatural forces: the strengthening, liberating sustenance it provides and the suffocating, binding oppressiveness it imposes.

CHAPTER 3

PREDATOR, SCAVENGER, AND TRICKSTER-TRANSFORMER: SURVIVAL AND THE VISIONARY EXPERIENCE IN LOUISE ERDRICH'S *TRACKS*

I pressed charcoal into her hand one day. "Go down to the shore," I told her. "Make your face black and cry out until your helpers listen."

But she would not. "I'm tired, old Uncle." The sound of her complaint was bright and hollow. She crept toward the bed and when she thought I was not looking, she eased herself under the blankets and lay with her face to the wall. I smoked a pipe, and I thought of what I'd say to her if only she would listen.

— Louise Erdrich, *Tracks* 177

Louise Erdrich's novel *Tracks* also tells the story of a witch. Unlike Red Emmy in Smith's *Oral History*, however, Fleur Pillager accepts, takes pride in, and works to enhance her identity as a witch. Where Emmy's development is stymied by her being labeled as a witch, Fleur's is enhanced; where Emmy is destroyed, Fleur is empowered. The experiences of the two women are similar, however, in that their sense of identity is radically altered by an intrusion by outside forces: in Emmy's case, Granny Younger and the community intrude, destroying her belief in her ability to construct a new identity for herself; in Fleur's case, the whites intrude, undermining her belief in her ability to draw on her existing identity to stop them. Although Fleur's life as a witch is as irremediably destroyed as is Emmy's short-term life as "housewife," Fleur survives because of her ability to change her identity, transforming a belief in self empowered by external forces to a belief in self empowered from within. She recognizes that even without the aid of her guardian spirits, she possesses an inner power forged from mental cunning and physical endurance.

The Chippewa believe that each individual gains personal identity through an adolescent visionary experience in which he or she is visited by a spirit -- usually an animal spirit -- who not only bestows an identity but also serves as a guardian, appearing and offering assistance in times of need, throughout the individual's life. To lose belief in the existence of such spirits would necessarily result in the loss of identity and of the source of one's power. Such a loss of belief, followed by the consequent loss of identity and power, occurs when the whites invade the Chippewa world, stealing the land, killing the game, destroying the trees, infecting the people with white diseases, and imposing their own language and religious beliefs. Whereas the boundary separating Appalachia from the rest of America appears impassable in Smith's *Oral History*, the boundary separating and once protecting the Chippewa from the whites appears, in Erdrich's *Tracks*, to be steadily eroding. A survivor, Fleur Pillager exhibits one response to the collapse of the boundary and the ensuing threat to Chippewa beliefs in supernatural beings and to the personal power springing from those beliefs; Pauline Puyat and Nanapush, who are also survivors, exhibit two alternative responses.

Survival and the Visionary Experience

For the Chippewa, or Ojibwa, success in hunting, and thus survival, has always depended on the hunter's ability to persuade a Manitou — that is, the spirit prototype of some animal, plant, or elemental force — to assist him in time of need.²⁴ "Ojibwa tradition

²⁴"Chippewa" and "Ojibwa" are alternate spellings for the name of a single tribe. Because Erdrich uses "Chippewa," I use that spelling except when quoting from the anthropological and religious scholars, most of whom tend to use "Ojibwa." Similarly, I use Erdrich's spelling of "Manitou" except when quoting from the scholars, who tend to use "manito."

created its intensest religious expression," anthropologist Ruth Landes writes, "through this pursuit of a guardian spirit who revealed (or yielded) himself in 'dreams' or visions to a boy or man undergoing ritual fasts and other privations, ritual or not" (8). In the era described by Erdrich in *Tracks* — 1912 to 1924 — "ritual" fasting is rarely necessary; the scarcity of game during the long, bitterly cold winters of northern North Dakota ensures "natural" fasting through starvation. Such is the case in the winter of 1917 when Nanapush hands nineteen-year-old Eli his gun, sends him north to find food, and then lies down on his bed to call on his "helpers" to guide Eli:

In my fist I had a lump of charcoal, with which I blackened my face. I placed my otter bag upon my chest, my rattle near. I began to sing slowly, calling on my helpers until the words came from my mouth but were not mine, until the rattle started, the song sang itself, and there, in the deep bright drifts, I saw the tracks of Eli's snowshoes clearly. (101)

In this trance-like state, Nanapush serves as a conduit through which the voices of his spiritual helpers guide and direct the young hunter. Eli, when Nanapush first sees him in his vision, is somewhat dazed; "wandering, weak from his empty stomach," Eli is so unattuned to his environment that he is uncertain about what type of game and thus what type of signs he should be looking for. As Nanapush's song reaches him, however, Eli becomes aware that "everything around him [is] perfect for killing moose" (101). From this point, Nanapush's song — which is actually no longer his song but that of his helpers — guides Eli in tracking, shooting, and butchering the moose. When Eli, having wrapped the flesh of the moose around his body, starts home, Nanapush steps up his assistance because he recognizes that the temptation "to quicken the pace to warm the blood" can be deadly:

Eli had become a thing of such cold by now, that, if he sweat, the film on his skin would freeze and draw from his blood all life, all warmth.

Without opening my eyes on the world around me, I took the drum from beneath the bed and beat out footsteps for Eli to hear and follow. Each

time he speeded I slowed him. I strengthened the rhythm whenever he faltered beneath the weight he bore. In that way, he returned, and when I could hear the echo of his panting breath, I went outside to help him, still in my song. (104)

As a partial reward for his assistance, Nanapush receives a portion of the moose's liver, which Eli has carefully divided into three pieces: one piece goes to Nanapush, one is eaten by Eli, and the third is sprinkled with tobacco, wrapped in cloth, and buried in the snow where the moose was shot, thereby feeding and expressing gratitude to the spirit of the moose for having given his body to the hunter. In this instance, credit for the success of the hunting expedition was equally divided among hunter, Manitou, and shaman.

The shaman differs from the ordinary Chippewa hunter-visionary in that he or she develops the visionary experience to the level of art or profession. Whereas the hunter's vision is almost always intended to satisfy individual needs, a shaman's vision frequently affects other members of the community, either beneficially or adversely. Among the Chippewa, the shaman normally specializes in only one of three types of visions — hunting, curing, or warfare — but occasionally participates in all three. Nanapush's shamanistic powers are directed toward hunting and curing. Fleur Pillager, the other acknowledged shaman in *Tracks*, focuses her talents on warfare; her powers are almost always used to drive off or destroy those whites and Indians who are taking or collecting fee allotments for Chippewa — and particularly Pillager — land.²⁵ Because of the many deaths attributed to Fleur, she is both respected and feared by the community as an evil shaman or witch. The

²⁵Although Fleur does gather roots for curing, she does not perform that function for the community, limiting her efforts at curing to herself and her immediate family.

third person displaying extraordinary visionary powers in *Tracks* is Pauline Puyat.²⁶ Pauline, too, focuses her powers on matters of warfare; unlike Fleur, however, Pauline's battle is internal, pitting one half of her identity against the other. Although her visions do affect the external world, she is not viewed by the community as possessing any special power because no one other than she herself is ever aware of her visions. Although the reader may view Pauline's visions, which depict an ongoing battle between Christ and Misshepesu, as manifestations of madness, they are nevertheless just as self-empowering as those of Fleur and Nanapush.

In writing *Tracks*, Erdrich herself displays the art of a Chippewa hunter-visionary. Nanapush, in describing his success as a hunter, says, "I think like animals, have perfect understanding for where they hide, and in my time I have tracked a deer back through time and brush and cleared field to the place it was born" (40). Guided by stories told by her Chippewa relatives, her study of Native American history and culture, her own experiences as a woman of Chippewa-German heritage, and her tremendous powers of vision and imagination, Erdrich has honed her ability to think like a Chippewa, tracking her ancestors — or, perhaps more accurately, the characters of her first novel, *Love Medicine* — back through time and space to their birthplace. The novel that she creates in the process, *Tracks*, is an elegy for what has been lost — human life, land and game, a way of life originally founded on kinship and community, and, finally, religion. Survival, in the face of so many

²⁶Moses is also a visionary, so extreme, in fact, that he lives as a hermit; however, because he is not central to the novel or to my discussion, I do not include him here. Moses apparently conducts or assists in all types of sorcery, providing both "good medicine" and "bad medicine" on request, usually for a fee.

losses, often places a burden of responsibility on the survivor. Erdrich herself feels such a burden and attributes her impetus as a writer to her recognition of that burden:

One looks back and sees that of the 12 million to 20 million Native Americans who were here at one time there was a low point when there were only 250,000 left — now there's a little more than a million. And one wonders in looking down through one's own background and heritage, "Why me? Why am I one of the survivors?" And the role of the survivors is to tell the stories of those who haven't survived, and of those who can't tell them on their own, and of those who are still suffering the effects of that long and immensely arduous history. ("Louise Erdrich" 17)²⁷

Thus, Erdrich tells her story to those who will listen, as Nanapush tells his story to Lulu, to remember both those who have died and those who, in surviving, have injured themselves, their neighbors, or their loved ones.

Tracks dramatically portrays the costs and betrayals inherent in survival. All the Chippewa are survivors in the sense that they have survived the killing, dislocation, starvation, and disease that have decimated the Native American population since the arrival of Europeans in America. Unfortunately, the drive to survive sometimes leads to the desire to prosper at the expense of one's neighbors, thus dividing tribes among those who, like the Lazarres and Morrisseys, assist the colonizers to benefit themselves and those who, like the Kashpaws and Pillagers, attempt to hold on to a Chippewa way of life. The division among the two groups often leads to more violence and more "dead Indians." Against this backdrop of tribal conflict and rivalry among the surviving Chippewa living on the Turtle Mountain Reservation, Erdrich focuses on the lives of three special survivors.

Nanapush, Fleur, and Pauline are special in that they are the sole survivors of Chippewa families totally decimated by smallpox and consumption. They are also special

²⁷See Chapter 1, note 6, for variations in estimates of the population of pre-contact Native Americans.

in their possession of extraordinary visionary powers. Nanapush uses his powers to save the sick and starving, Fleur uses hers to drive off those who would take her land, and Pauline uses hers to rid herself of the conflicts of being a half-breed. Throughout the novel both Fleur and Pauline demonstrate their power to survive, one through predation and the other through scavenging. For both women, however, survival requires the severance of all ties with family and community. Only Nanapush succeeds in maintaining his connections, continuing his name, and saving other Chippewa while he saves himself. The difference, of course, lies in Nanapush's ability for protean transformation, his ability to change, as he has so many times before, in response to changes in his environment. Nanapush's power at the end of the novel stems not from his relationship with his spiritual helpers, which have been forced to retreat from the reservation, but from his ability to adapt with little or no loss of integrity.

In a recently published interview, Michael Dorris, Erdrich's husband-collaborator and scholar of Native American history and culture, says that although Native Americans are changing, they are not "vanishing." Contemporary Chippewa, such as those characterized in *Love Medicine*, he says, are still "very much unique, very much who they were" despite the adaptation that has been required:

they have the same kind of symbols that inspired Chippewas in the past, the water and the water god, and they have the kind of family connection which has always been the core of the tribe It is more subtle than when people dressed differently and when people spoke different languages . . . but not less real. (Erdrich and Dorris 45)

Thus, Dorris suggests that although change in response to colonization is inevitable, Native Americans can adapt — and in many cases have adapted — while remaining true to certain values and beliefs essential to a Native American identity. *Tracks* portrays the different

responses of the Chippewa to changes imposed on their way of life during the first quarter of the century. The Lazarres and Morrisseys are "mixed-bloods who profited from acquiring allotments that many old Chippewa did not know how to keep" (63). The Kashpaws and Pillagers are full-blooded, old-time Chippewa who believe, as Nanapush does, that "land is the only thing that lasts life to life" (32). The land is necessary for continuity and survival of the tribe, for the continued connection of one generation to the next. Fleur, so closely bound to Pillager land that she will destroy anyone who attempts to take it from her, stands for all those Chippewa who refuse to accept the inevitability of change, the superior and devastating power of the white world. Pauline, on the other hand, does recognize the superior power of the whites, and, in her desire to ally herself with that power, she destroys within herself all traces of Chippewa "blood." To attain her goals, Pauline "must dissolve," and she does so "eagerly" (140), becoming one of the Chippewa who do vanish as a result of colonization. Nanapush, accepting that the water monster, the Manitou, and the spirits of the dead have been forced to retreat, sees them as merely unavailable, not powerless or dead. He never exchanges his belief in the Manitou for a belief in Christ; he simply realizes that he must rely more heavily on his own powers — those of his mythical namesake, the protean trickster Nanabozho — to accomplish his goals. Learning to adapt the old-time Chippewa ways of entrapment, transformation, and storytelling to the modern white ways of negotiation, bureaucracy, and paperwork, Nanapush succeeds not only in saving himself but in maintaining "the kind of family connection which has always been the core of the tribe."

Fleur, Pauline, and Nanapush, then, each undergo a process of defining — and redefining — themselves in relation to the tribe, Chippewa beliefs in the supernatural, and

the power exhibited by the encroaching whites. All three survive, locating sources of personal power, but survival is not won without cost. Although Fleur and Pauline survive, for example, both must sacrifice that "family connection" that Nanapush succeeds in maintaining. Paradoxically, their respective daughters, Lulu Lamartine and Marie Kashpaw, both of whom are raised by other members of the tribe, not only become matriarchs of large families but also incorporate the unfulfilled visions of their respective mothers. Lulu wins the battle to hold on to a piece of reservation land, and Marie becomes a saint in the eyes of the community if not in the eyes of her mother, now known as Sister Leopolda. The lives of the daughters, however, belong to a different story; *Tracks* focuses on the lives of the mothers, demonstrating that the story of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa has "no beginning," just as *Love Medicine* demonstrates that it "has no ending" (31).

Fleur as Predator

In the winter of 1918, Father Damien visits Fleur's cabin at Lake Matchimanito, bringing a map distinguishing among those homesteads that have been paid up by their owners, those that have "gone out of the tribe," and those that are questionable (173). Confronted with the map, Margaret, Nanapush, and Fleur all react differently to what they see. Margaret is angry about the amount of land that has been taken over by such families as the Morrisseys and Lazarres, those Chippewa who have worked with the government Agent, the bankers, and the lumber companies, selling out their neighbors to pay for their own land. "It was like her," Nanapush says, "to notice only the enemies that she could fight, those that shared her blood however faintly" (173). Nanapush, on the other hand, is much more concerned about the land lost to the outsiders, "the land we would never walk or hunt,

from which our children would be barred" (174). Unlike both Margaret and Nanapush, however, Fleur regards the map with contempt, claiming that it has "no bearing or sense, as no one would be reckless enough to try collecting for land where Pillagers were buried" (174). Briefly closing his eyes, however, Nanapush glimpses the world to come: "I saw . . . leaves covering the place where I buried Pillagers, mosses softening the boards of their grave houses, once so gently weeded and tended by Fleur. I saw the clan markers she had oiled with the sweat of her hands, blown over by wind, curiosities now, a white child's toy" (174). Both Margaret and Nanapush, whose greater age and experience allow them to see more clearly than Fleur does the changes that threaten tribal life, no longer believe that either respect for or fear of the Pillagers can overcome the desire for money: "Dollar bills cause the memory to vanish, and even fear can be cushioned by the application of government cash" (174). Furthermore, although Nanapush knows that "Pillager land was not ordinary land to buy or sell," he recognizes that something, although he is unsure what, has weakened the Pillagers' power: "When that family came here, driven from the east, Misshepesu had appeared because of the Old Man's connection. But the water thing was not a dog to follow at our heels" (175). The Supernaturals come and go, bestowing and withdrawing power, according to their own plan or whim.

Perhaps the primary indication of the diminishment of the Pillagers' power is that they, like so many other Chippewa, have succumbed to the deadly diseases introduced by the whites. None of the Pillager magic, or "medicine," whether "good" or "bad," was sufficiently powerful to protect them from the consumption that swept through the Turtle Mountain Reservation during the winter of 1912. By the spring of 1913, all that remains of the once-formidable power of the Pillager clan resides in its sole survivor, the seventeen-

year-old Fleur.²⁸ The stories told by Nanapush and Pauline trace Fleur's efforts to assume the burden of being the family's only survivor, her rising reputation as a sorcerer, and, ultimately, the decline of her supernatural powers.

A Pillager by birth, Fleur naturally inherits a potential for power through her "bloodlines":

power travels in the bloodlines, handed out before birth. It comes down through the hands, which in the Pillagers are strong and knotted, big, spidery and rough, with sensitive fingertips good at dealing cards. It comes through the eyes, too, belligerent, darkest brown, the eyes of those in the bear clan, impolite as they gaze directly at a person. (31)

As a consequence of her birth, then, Fleur inherits "strong" hands, endowed with the sensitivity of the natural gambler, and the "belligerent" eyes of the bear clan. The bear is respected and feared by the Chippewa because, of all animals known to them, it is the most dangerous as well as the most difficult to kill (Barnouw 140). The Pillagers are also described in terms of a second animal, the wolf, as when Pauline refers to "the white wolf grin a Pillager turns on its victims" (19). Wolves are so successful as hunters that the Chippewa believe they possess "the ability to work magic in their hunting" (Vecsey 92). The Pillagers' association with both animals suggests that they are extremely skillful hunters, tracking, encircling, and dispatching their prey with a wolf's magical cunning, as well as being more than ordinarily resistant to efforts to kill them, growing quite dangerous if attacked.

²⁸Although Moses Pillager also survives, Nanapush clarifies that Moses is not descended from Old Man Pillager; Moses and Fleur, he says, are "far cousins, related not so much by blood as by name and chance survival" (33). A member of the Pillager clan rather than the Old Man's family, Moses's powers come from sources (or experiences) other than Pillager blood.

The Pillagers' association with the bear, however, also suggests another sort of power in addition to that routinely possessed or faced by a Chippewa hunter. The Chippewa associate the bear with sorcery, believing that "after a sorcerer had killed a man, he might turn into a bear" and then dig up the dead man's grave so that he could add the most recent victim's tongue to his "collection of trophies" (Barnouw 140). Similarly, Christopher Vecsey writes that the Chippewa were particularly afraid of "witches who posed as bears, either by wearing the skins of bears or by metamorphosing into bears. These bear-walkers owed their powers to their personal manito, the bear, and traveled in disguise at night, causing disease among their victims" (148). Thus, Nanapush says that, when he and Edgar Pukwan went out to the Pillager cabin during the winter of 1912, Pukwan was afraid to enter the woods around the cabin because they were "roamed by Pillagers, who knew the secret ways to cure or kill" (2). Those same woods were also "inhabited by ghosts" (2), and the nearby lake, of course, was inhabited by Misshepeshe, the water monster with whom Old Man Pillager had developed a special connection.²⁹

As a descendant of the Pillagers, then, Fleur possesses several potential sources of power — those of the gambler, the bear, the wolf, the sorcerer, the water monster, and the spirits of the Pillager dead. Despite these potentialities, the personal identity of a Chippewa is not determined, Vecsey says, until he or she undergoes an initial visionary experience: "A human did not begin life with power and full identity; those came . . . from the vision

²⁹The Pillagers are known not only for their success in hunting and sorcery but also for their rebellion against the whites. Vecsey notes that the Leech Lake (Minnesota) Pillagers, who "refused to abide by the laws" aimed at converting the Chippewa from hunters to farmers, "conducted the last Indian uprising in 1898 against the government policies" (18). The timing of this uprising suggests one reason for why Old Man Pillager was "driven from the east," eventually settling at Turtle Mountain.

acquired through the puberty fast when an Ojibwa gained the aid of a manito" (121). Only as a result of the puberty vision does a Chippewa come to understand his or her identity and powers:

The visionary underwent a transformation, from nobody to somebody.

The vision reaffirmed the individual's relative isolation from other human beings and oriented the visionary toward the helping manitos, particularly the guardian. A transition took place; "formerly the boy had been dependent upon older *human* beings, who, in addition to teaching him necessary skills, had trained him to rely upon himself to the extent of his capacity. Henceforth he was to rely upon *superhuman* beings." . . .³⁰

Other humans might not notice the visionary's new powers but those powers would become evident through hunting and other successes. . . . (138)

The nature of Fleur's puberty vision is never revealed to the reader; the Chippewa guard their visions with secrecy because "telling a vision could destroy its efficacy" (Vecsey 123). However, observers can usually guess at the visionary's guardian Manitou by observing the individual's exploits over time. Thus, Fleur's guardian spirits become apparent to her neighbors as they witness and experience the effects of her power.

Although Fleur's power seems to derive from several sources, the powers most frequently witnessed by her neighbors are those deriving from Old Man Pillager's connection with Misshepesu, the water monster living in Lake Matchimanito.³¹ In Chippewa myth, water monsters come in various forms — water lions, water serpents, water bears, mermaids,

³⁰Vecsey is quoting here from A. Irving Hallowell, *Culture and Experience* (1955; New York, 1971) 361; the emphases are Hallowell's.

³¹The name of Erdrich's water monster, Misshepesu, is adapted from the term by which the underwater panthers, lions, and lynxes were known — *micipijin*, or Missipeshu (Barnouw 133). The name of the lake Fleur lives on, Lake Matchimanito, is drawn from "Matchi Manito," the name given to an evil Manitou — sometimes associated with the water monster and sometimes with the cannibalistic ice skeleton, Windigo — that was their version of the Christian Devil (Vecsey 82).

mermen, and the Great Fish, a monstrous sturgeon sometimes referred to as a whale or shark (Landes 31). In Chippewa cosmography, Landes explains, "water monsters represented a sexually romantic obsession and turned their protégés into celibates, mated only to the manito. The Ojibwa man or woman received visions of the monster, who appeared as an alluring person of opposite sex" (31). Thus, Pauline's description of Misshepesu, although colored somewhat by an active imagination fed by her personal psychosexual obsession, seems to build on a view of the monster likely to have been shared by other members of the tribe:

He's a devil, that one, love hungry with desire and maddened for the touch of young girls, the strong and daring especially, the ones like Fleur.

Our mothers warn us that we'll think he's handsome, for he appears with green eyes, copper skin, a mouth tender as a child's. But if you fall into his arms, he sprouts horns, fangs, claws, fins. His feet are joined as one and his skin, brass scales, rings to the touch. You're fascinated, cannot move. He casts a shell necklace at your feet, weeps gleaming chips that harden into mica on your breasts. He holds you under. Then he takes the body of a lion, a fat brown worm, or a familiar man. He's made of gold. He's made of beach moss. He's a thing of dry foam, a thing of death by drowning, the death a Chippewa cannot survive.

Unless you are Fleur Pillager. . . . (11)

The water monster, Misshepesu, then, is feared as a sort of male siren who assumes a seductive form to lure young girls to their destruction. Transfixed by the monster's gleaming beauty and protean transformation from man to monster, horned, fanged, clawed, and finned, the young girl succumbs, drowning in sexual desire and fulfillment. Pauline imagines the god as metallic, made of copper, brass, mica, and gold.³² Ultimately, however, he is a

³²The water monster was believed to have given copper to the Indians (Vecsey 74). Barnouw includes among his collection of Chippewa animal tales the story of a woman who, when attacked by a water lion, cut off its tail with her paddle. When the tail fell into her boat, she discovered that it was made of copper; she took it home to her father, who became rich (132-33).

thing of water, of "beach moss," "dry foam," and "death by drowning." Dying in the arms of the water monster is particularly feared because, according to Chippewa belief, drowning and burning are the two types of death that cannot be "survived." Victims of all other types of death continue to live; that is, their spirits journey west to what Landes calls the "village of souls," where they continue to live a life similar to that of the living. Victims of burning continue burning, and the drowned remain drowned forever (Landes 195-98). Fleur Pillager, however, exhibits her special relationship with Misshepesu by surviving two near drownings by the age of fifteen.

While still a child, Fleur falls out of a boat, struggling with the waves before being rescued by Jean Hat and another man. Although she appears to be dead, the two men revive her; not many days pass, however, before Jean Hat is killed, run over by his own surveying cart, and the other man disappears. When at the age of fifteen Fleur again tumbles into the lake, no one tries to save her. After she washes ashore, however, George Many Women makes the mistake of checking to see whether she is breathing or not. Opening her eyes, Fleur hisses at him, "You take my place" (11). Terrified, Many Women never again leaves his home, refusing to "go near the water or guide the mappers back into the bush"; despite these precautions, he dies when he slips and drowns in a new tin bathtub given to him by his sons (11). Because of the two instances in which Fleur nearly drowns and the subsequent disappearance or death of those who intervened, the men on the reservation avoid her: "Even though she was good-looking, nobody dared to court her because it was clear that Misshepesu, the water man, the monster, wanted her for himself" (11). The people believe that Jean Hat and George Many Women die for having challenged Misshepesu's claim on Fleur. The two men die, however, not for having challenged Misshepesu but for having

participated in the surveying, measuring, mapping, and selling of tribal land. Before their deaths, both Hat and Many Women were "guides . . . who had taken the government pay" (8). They and the man who disappeared are the first of Fleur's victims drawn from among those who attempt to collect fees on or to buy Pillager land.

During the spring after her family dies, Fleur goes back to the cabin by the lake, living there alone despite Nanapush's request that she live with him. Nanapush worries because she is only seventeen: "She was too young and had no stories or depth of life to rely upon. All she had was raw power, and the names of the dead that filled her" (7). When Nanapush says that Fleur has only "raw power" and "the names of the dead that filled her" but "no stories or depth of life to rely upon," he is expressing his concern that Fleur's shamanistic powers, drawn from Pillager "bloodlines" and from her connection with the spirits of the Pillager dead, can become self-destructive without the experience of age to temper that power. Carried to an extreme, the visionary experience leads to madness and alienation from society.³³ For example, Moses, Fleur's cousin, who "took the charcoal from his mother's hand too often" (36), reached the point where "he didn't know where he was anymore, this place of reservation surveys or the other place, boundless, where the dead sit talking, see too much, and regard the living as fools" (8). During those first months following her family's death, however, Fleur's "raw power" and "the names of the dead"

³³Vecsey reports that "fasters were discouraged from fasting for excessive periods of time. . . . Oral traditions recounted how youths became so occupied with obtaining power that they lost their sense of obligation to humans and ended up as murderers and social outcasts . . ." (123). He also says that to prepare a child for the vision fast, parents would repeatedly test the child "by offering it a choice between charcoal (worn on the face while fasting) and food. Through rewards and punishments the child learned to choose the charcoal . . ." (126).

serve her well as she battles against those who work to take her land. Nanapush says that after Fleur returned to "the cabin that even fire did not want," he

heard that in those months she was asked for fee money on all four allotments, even the island where Moses hid. The Agent went out there, then got lost, spent a whole night following the moving lights and lamps of people who would not answer him, but talked and laughed among themselves. They only let him go at dawn because he was so stupid. Yet he asked Fleur again for money, and the next thing we heard he was living in the woods and eating roots, gambling with ghosts. (9)

Fleur not only survives the initial danger of being filled with "the names of the dead" — that is, the danger of being enticed by Pillager spirits into following them on their journey west — but also learns to use those spirits as accomplices. Instead of luring Fleur into madness and death, they direct their energies against Fleur's enemies, who gamble, trading their sanity or their lives in an attempt to take Pillager land.

During the spring after her family's death, as more and more trespassers on Pillager land disappear, lose their minds, or die in unusual circumstances, Fleur develops within the community the reputation of a sorcerer. Stories of her eccentricity, her nightly hunting, her transformation into other bodily forms abound. According to Pauline, Fleur, living "alone out there,"

went haywire, out of control. She messed with evil, laughed at the old women's advice and dressed like a man. She got herself into some half-forgotten medicine, studied ways we shouldn't talk about. Some say she kept the finger of a child in her pocket and a powder of unborn rabbits in a leather thong around her neck. She laid the heart of an owl on her tongue so she could see at night, went out, hunting, not even in her body. We know for sure because the next morning, in the snow or dust, we followed the tracks of her bare feet and saw where they changed, where the claws sprang out, the pad broadened and pressed into the dirt. By night we heard her chuffing cough, the bear cough. By day her silence and the wide grin she threw to bring down our guard made us frightened. Some thought that Fleur Pillager should be driven from the reservation, but not a single person who spoke like that had the nerve. (12)

Like many women designated as witches, Fleur disturbs the community by her refusal to conform to the unspoken codes of the community. She lives alone at the cabin, which even Nanapush notes as unusual behavior, saying that "a young girl had never done such a thing before" (8); she also dresses "like a man" and refuses to listen to "the old women's advice."³⁴ These eccentricities, added to her descendance from the "Pillagers, who knew the secret ways to cure or kill," her survival of two near drownings by the time she was fifteen, and the misfortunes befalling the men who had trespassed on Pillager land, encourage the people's belief in Fleur's supernatural powers. Clearly, the community sees Fleur as an "evil" shaman, dealing in "bad medicine," as opposed to a "good" shaman such as Nanapush, who deals only in the "good medicine" required for healing and hunting. According to Landes, any visionary, even a hunter, over time "introjected the qualities attributed to the manito guardian, who might be a super-deer, or super-moose, or super-bear, or some other. In this mystic identification with the guardian, . . . the visionary saw his winter solitude as the solitude of the manito animal. Nights he would leave his human shape on his bed to stalk the country in the guardian animal's shape" (10). As an extension of this normal type of transformation likely to be experienced by any hunter-visionary, however, an evil shaman often transformed himself into a death-foreboding form — a ball of fire, owl, bear, or dog. Appearing before an enemy in such a form, an evil shaman frequently drove his or her victim insane (Landes 43).

³⁴Nanapush's motive for instructing Eli in how to make Fleur love him is his recognition that "the whole tribe had got to thinking that she couldn't be left alone out there, a woman gone wild, striking down whatever got into her path. People said that she had to be harnessed. . ." (45).

Determining which signs are true indications of the sources of Fleur's power, gained through her puberty fast, and which are reflections of the community's fears is sometimes difficult. As Nanapush says about the stories concerning Fleur,

You know how old chickens scratch and gabble. That's how the tales started, all the gossip, the wondering, all the things people said without knowing and then believed, since they heard it with their own ears, from their own lips, each word. . . . (9)

People, Nanapush says, believe their own lies — or their own versions of truth — if they repeat them often enough. The distinction between the powers Fleur knows she possesses and those powers that others attribute to her is perhaps meaningless, however, because, in either case, her reputation increases; as her reputation increases, so do her powers, and vice versa. All deaths, insanities, illnesses, and disappearances in the community are attributed to Fleur; even when she is not responsible, as in the death of Napoleon Morrissey, she receives the blame. However, because Fleur knows that her continuing power — at least over the community — depends on the community's continuing belief in her, she is willing to accept responsibility for all the community's misfortunes. Jean Hat and George Many Women would not have died if they had not believed that Fleur derived special powers from her connection with Misshepesu; their belief, combined perhaps with guilt for having betrayed their neighbors, is sufficient to kill them. Similarly, the Agent who demands the payment of fees on Pillager land would not have gone insane had he not believed the stories about ghosts inhabiting the woods around Fleur's cabin. The Agent and the other whites who attempt to take Pillager land may not believe in Misshepesu or the Manitou, but they do believe in ghosts.

The clearest indication of Fleur's relationship with the bear Manitou, then, comes not from the stories of her bear-walking experiences, which were not actually witnessed but,

rather, from the story told by Nanapush about the appearance of what may have been a "spirit bear" at the time of Lulu's birth. The first day of Fleur's labor, Nanapush says, was marked by silence: "There was no sound from Fleur's cabin, just crushing silence like the inside of a drum before the stick drops" (58). On the afternoon of the second day, Nanapush says,

the stillness finally broke, and then, it was as if the Manitou all through the woods spoke through Fleur, loose, arguing. I recognized them. Turtle's quavering scratch, the Eagle's high shriek, Loon's crazy bitterness, Otter, the howl of Wolf, Bear's low rasp.

Perhaps the bear heard Fleur calling, and answered.

. . .

I am a man, so I don't know exactly what happened when the bear came into the birth house, but they talk among themselves, the women, and sometimes they forget I'm listening. So I know that when Fleur saw the bear in the house she raised herself on the mound of blankets and gave birth. Then Pauline took down the gun and shot point-blank, filling the bear's heart. . . . It barreled past me, crashed through the brush into the woods, and was not seen after. It left no trail either, so it could have been a spirit bear. I don't know. I was still on the woodpile. (60)

Because of the secrecy surrounding the details of a puberty vision, only a few visions have been described to anthropologists. Of those that have, however, one element stands out as common to almost all of them: the faster is told not to fear but to trust and to call on the Manitou whenever he or she requires assistance (Vecsey 127-32, 136). Fleur clearly calls on and receives the aid of the bear Manitou during the second day of her difficult labor.

Similarly, Fleur's inheritance of the Pillagers' gamblers' hands and their association with the wolf are revealed to Pauline in Argus. When Fleur gambles with the men at Argus, Pauline describes her as moving

deliberately, slowly in her work, held in and half-tamed. But only half. I could tell, but the others never noticed. They [the men] never looked into her sly brown eyes or noticed her teeth, strong and sharp and very white. . . . They were blinded, they were stupid, they only saw her in the flesh.

. . .

. . . She turned, looked straight at me, and grinned the white wolf grin a Pillager turns on its victims, except that she wasn't after me. (18, 19)

Blinded by Fleur's sexuality and ignorant of Chippewa ways or beliefs, the men fail to recognize the essence of Fleur's spirit — the spirit of the predator, patiently waiting to lure its prey into striking range.³⁵ The men are misled by what they believe is Fleur's inability to bluff and her nature as a cautious, "bit-time player," who will be scared off by higher stakes (21). Watching from her vantage of "invisibility," Pauline observes the way in which Fleur "hooked them" and then "reeled them in" (21, 23). Although Pauline offers no evidence, her description of the selectively destructive tornado, snuffling like the sow that had tried to protect Fleur from her rapists, suggests that the tornado has been conjured up by Fleur. Although the wind Manitou is too late to save Fleur, it does avenge her rape.

When Fleur returns to the reservation after the summer spent in Argus, she has the money needed to pay the fees on the Pillager land. Although less than a year has passed since her family died, she has already begun to supplement her "raw power" and "the names of the dead that filled her" with the experience — the "stories" and "depth of life" — that Nanapush had felt she lacked. The cost of winning the money necessary to prevent her land from being raped by the lumber company has been high, and the response of the land to her

³⁵The description of Fleur's relationship with the wolf seems to be more of the nature of a "totem" than a Manitou. A totem animal serves as a person's "family mark," providing a means for identifying one's social (as opposed to personal) identity. Travelers would seek members bearing the same family or clan totem, depending on them for hospitality (Vecsey 78). However, the Pillagers are identified as members of the "bear clan" (31) rather than the wolf clan. Nevertheless, there is never any real indication that Fleur calls on the aid or protection of the wolf Manitou; instead, she seems to incorporate the "essence" or "personality" of the wolf. In fact, one reason for Fleur's declining power over time may be that, although wolves normally hunt — and gain their power from — running in packs, she is forced to survive as a "lone wolf."

return suggests to the people that "terrible and strange things . . . had happened in that white town":

The dust on the reservation stirred. Things hidden were free to walk. The surprised young ghost of Jean Hat limped out of the bushes around the place his horse had spooked, and on the darkest nights his cart rumbled through our yards. A black dog, the form of the devil, stalked the turnoff to Matchimanito. . . . (34-35)

Despite this arousal of "hidden things," many people are glad that Fleur has returned because they believe that "she kept the lake thing controlled": with her return, "the lake man retreated to the deepest rocks. The fish struck hungrily dawn and dusk, and no boats were lost" (35).

Is Misshepesu's retreat in the fall of 1913, however, a sign of Fleur's control, or is it a sign of his withdrawal from the lake and from the people who live there or, perhaps, of his demise?³⁶ Pauline says that, in the spring of 1915, "Misshepesu went under and wasn't seen much in the waves of the lake anymore. He cracked no boats to splinters and drowned no more girls, but watched us, eyes hollow and gold" (69-70). Although Pauline continues to believe over the next six years that Misshepesu presents a threat to Christ, just as she imagines that Fleur poses some threat to her, both Misshepesu and Fleur appear to be losing power. Fleur's last successful act of sorcery, and it is only half-successful, occurs in the spring of 1918, when she avenges Margaret's shame for having her braids cut and her

³⁶The continued existence of the water Manitou, despite its reputation for drowning children and fishermen, is important to the survival of the Chippewa. As the spirit that controls the availability of land and water animals, he can withhold fish and game from enemies; alternatively, however, he can provide fish and game to friends or to those who placate him by offering tobacco and food. Also, as Vecsey notes, the water monster is credited with having given the Chippewa copper, offering medicinal powers to his protégés, and feeding and sheltering some who fall into the water (74). Thus, the retreat or death of Misshepesu, despite the fear he evokes, would be destructive to the tribe.

head shaved by Boy Lazarre and Clarence Morrissey. To show her sympathy and alliance with Margaret in what has developed into a war between the two groups of families, Fleur shaves her own head. "She turned to us," Nanapush says, "still beautiful as before, but now in a frightful way. Then she went out, hunting, didn't even bother to wait for night to cover her tracks" (117). In this instance, Fleur wants the community to *know* that she is responsible. Fleur goes first to town, displaying her bare head and walking "the four streets, once in each direction," before following Lazarre and Clarence to the Morrissey farm. Drawing "her razor-sharp knife," she collects clippings of hair, nails, and eyelashes from the two men (120). Two days after Nanapush ensnares Clarence, accomplishing his own revenge, Fleur encounters Lazarre in a reservation store. The meeting is witnessed by several people, who draw their own conclusions about the occurrence:

His [Lazarre's] eyes rolled to the skull when he saw Fleur. He stretched forth his arm and pointed along its deepest black vein and dropped his jaw wide. . . . All the whispers were true. She had scratched Lazarre's figure into a piece of birchbark, drawn his insides, and rubbed a bit of vermilion up his arm until the red stain reached his heart. There was no sound as he fell, no cry, no word, and the traps of all types that clattered down around his body jumped and met for a long time, snapping air. (124-25)

This is not the first time Fleur has successfully worked her medicine on Lazarre. Back when the people were gossiping about Fleur and Eli's ferocious lovemaking, conducted in the woods, on the shore of the lake, and against the outer wall of Fleur's cabin, Lazarre had returned from the woods one day "talking backwards, garbled, mixing his words. At first people thought the sights of passion had cleft his mind. Then they figured otherwise, imagined that Fleur had caught Lazarre watching and tied him up, cut his tongue out, then

sewn it in reversed" (49).³⁷ Lazarre had never recovered his power of speech or overcome his fear of Fleur.

Despite the success of Fleur's medicine on Lazarre, however, it has little effect on Clarence. Clarence does end up with a twisted mouth, a permanent reminder to the community "that he was the cause of the Pillager baldness" (123), but that deformity results from Nanapush's vengeance rather than Fleur's. Although Clarence recognizes that Fleur deals in "bad medicine" (119), he is not overwhelmed by fear as Lazarre is. Earlier, when Pauline confronted Fleur's anger over her part in Sophie and Eli's sexual encounter in the slough, Pauline says that

She smiled at me steady and hungry, teeth glinting, and I saw again the wolf those men met in Argus. . . .

I looked her in the eye. The weight of my danger gave me courage.

. . .

The smile on Fleur's face went so broad and dazzling I had to blink, even though I don't believe what the old men say. I don't believe the Pillagers could harm that easily. (88-89)

If Pauline had believed that "the Pillagers could harm that easily," as Lazarre obviously did, Pauline would certainly have died from the concentration of that "raw power" on her defenseless body. Instead, Pauline takes courage, as perhaps Clarence did, defusing and deflecting Fleur's power. Thus, the extent of Fleur's power over the community reflects the extent of their belief in her power. Pauline and Clarence still fear Fleur, but they do not necessarily believe she possesses the magnitude or variety of powers attributed to her.

³⁷Landes reports that a common injury inflicted by Chippewa sorcerers was the "twisted mouth," a paralysis of the facial nerves that "was visited upon women who gossiped unduly or who laughed too readily" (62). Boy Lazarre was responsible for having told Margaret about Eli and Fleur, thus provoking her efforts to break up the relationship. Clarence also ends up with a twisted mouth, a reminder to him and others that he had "laughed too readily."

Regardless of what the community believes, however, Fleur herself recognizes, by the winter of 1919, that her power has greatly dissipated. She is unable to save her second child, either by preparing her own curative teas or by journeying to the land of the dead to gamble for his life. In the months that follow the infant's death, Fleur exerts her powers to keep the family — Eli, Lulu, Nanapush, Margaret, and Nector — from starving. She dreams of deer tracks in the snow, but Eli, sent out with directions, returns empty-handed. She cuts a hole in the ice to fish, but Missshepeshu offers only one "weak runt perch" (171). She "sang words [Nanapush] hadn't heard before, chilling and cold as the dead, restless and sharp as the wind of the month when the trees crack" (171).³⁸ They are saved, ultimately, not by Fleur's dreams or her songs or her connection to Missshepeshu but by government supplies sent to the reservation from outside. Although the receipt of the supplies breaks the "back of the famine," Nanapush says, "there was something lost" (176):

Fleur had not saved us with her dream She had failed too many times, both to rescue us and save her youngest child, who now slept in the branches of bitter oaks. Her dreams lied, her vision was obscured, her helper slept deep in the lake Fleur was a different person than the young woman I had known. She was hesitant in speaking, false in her gestures, anxious to cover her fear. (176-77)

The loss of her child, followed by her inability to feed her family, destroys Fleur's belief in her own powers. Hoping to console her for her loss, Nanapush explains his own philosophy about the possession of power and tells her that she cannot blame herself if Missshepeshu and her other helpers have not responded to her requests for help:

Power dies out, power goes under and gutters out, ungraspable. It is momentary, quick of flight and liable to deceive. As soon as you rely on the

³⁸A visionary usually receives a song during the puberty vision; that Nanapush has never heard this song suggests that Fleur has undergone a recent visionary experience, possibly to attain a new guardian spirit or to renew her connection with one of her existing guardians.

possession it is gone. Forget that it ever existed, and it returns. I never made the mistake of thinking that I owned my own strength, that was my secret. And so I never was alone in my failures. I was never to blame entirely when all was lost, when my desperate cures had no effect on the suffering of those I loved. For who can blame a man for waiting, arms stretched wide? Who can blame him if the visitor does not arrive?

Nanapush has never made the mistake of viewing himself as a god or even a possessor of supernatural powers. He sees himself only as a conduit through which the Supernaturals work; thus, if they choose not to work through him, he cannot be held responsible for failure. To have believed otherwise, to have believed that the power lay only in his own hands, would have long since destroyed Nanapush, who has tried to save and has lost so many loved ones. Such understanding of the ways of power comes only with the collection of "stories" and a "depth of life." Fleur, whose power has never failed her until the recent death of her child, is still weak in her possession of "stories" and thus is unprepared to accept the possibility of her own powerlessness. Perhaps even more difficult is the transference of responsibility, and blame, from herself to the Manitous. Nanapush tells Lulu that

when I told her [Fleur] things she could not hear, there was no impatience in her manner and she thanked me for my advice. But in her bearing, as she rose and walked away from me, I saw the barrier of her obstinate pride had kept my words safely beyond belief. In her mind she was huge, she was endless. There was no room for the failures of anyone else. At the same time, she was the funnel of our history. As the lone survivor of the Pillagers, she staggered now beneath the burden of a life she was failing to deserve.

. . .

"You will not be to blame if the land is lost," I told her, "or if the oaks and the pines fall, the lake dries, and the lake man does not return. You could not have saved the child that came so early." (178)

In "her obstinate pride," Fleur makes the error of seeing herself as a sort of all-powerful god, "huge" and "endless." In her mind she is different from Nanapush or other lesser

shamans, who often succeed but sometimes fail. Such a belief in oneself, in one's powers, places a tremendous burden and responsibility on one who is, ultimately, only human, no matter how greatly empowered. Added to that responsibility is the knowledge that, "as the lone survivor of the Pillagers," she carries the burden of deserving the gift of life. The historical powers and deeds of the Pillagers, once mighty and prolific, have dwindled to those of a single surviving daughter. The continuity of the family and, by extension, the tribe depends on her ability to hold on to the land, to protect its trees, to keep the waters of the lake from receding, to maintain the connection with Misshepeshu, and, like any mother, to save and nurture the children of her womb.

Vecsey explains that a Chippewa hunter, whose survival depends on his ability to track and kill animals, is totally dependent on his relationship with his guardian spirit:

The hunter could take pride in his hunting achievements, but only as symbols of his relations with the manitos. He knew that he was powerless to find and kill animals unless the manitos granted him success. They allowed him to live; his existence depended on them. His continuation as a person relied on his continued relations with the manitos.

In the nineteenth century when game was scarce and many Ojibwas starved, belief in the manitos did not waver, but their own self-confidence did. . . . Traditionally, they had relied on their relations with the manitos for their identity; now these assumed relations were failing them. . . . (140-41)

When, a year after the death of her child, Fleur learns that Margaret and Nector have applied all the money they had earned to Kashpaw land, allowing the Pillager land to go to the lumber company, Fleur knows that her Manitous have deserted her. Filling her pockets with stones and clutching a boulder to her chest, Fleur walks into the lake, nearly drowning for the third time. Life without the aid of the Manitous seems impossible because, without their aid, she possesses neither power nor identity — an identity that, over the years, has become that not only of mother, hunter, and warrior but also of witch. Thus, Nanapush believes

that, with the lumber crews steadily eating into her land, "Fleur would fade," "her heart would empty," and she would be forced to move to Kashpaw land (217). "Instead," Nanapush says, "she took strength" (218). Fleur finds a new identity, one relying more on human than on superhuman powers.

Fleur's power, ultimately, is that of a woman who refuses to give in, to compromise, to allow the lumber crews to take the land with no fight, no loss of life, and no destruction of property. To accomplish her final act of sorcery, Fleur relies on her own muscle and wits, borrowing Nanapush's favorite hunting technique: "When I hunt," Nanapush says, "I prefer to let my game catch itself" (118). When the lumber crews surround her cabin, they find themselves entrapped in a truly haunted forest, one that is

suspended, lightly held. The fingered lobes of leaves floated on nothing. The powerful throats, the columns of trunks and splayed twigs, all substance with illusion. Nothing was solid. Each green crown was held in the air by no more than splinters of bark. (223)

All that remains is to call one last time on one of her helpers, the wind Manitou. Nanapush, who was standing beside Fleur, describes what he saw, felt, and heard:

She said nothing, just glanced into the sky and let her eyes drop shut.

It was then I felt the wind building on the earth. I heard the waves begin to slap with light insistence against the shore. I knew the shifting of breeze, the turn of weather, was at hand. I heard the low murmur of the voices of the gamblers in the woods. (222)

As the wind builds, the trees topple, crashing down on the loggers, their carts, and their horses. Once again, the men who have gambled their lives for a piece of Pillager land have lost.

In many ways, however, Fleur, too, is a loser. Despite her final, fierce, victorious display of power, the woods are destroyed, thus signalling the final departure of the spirits who have lingered there, the dispersal of the animals and the Manitous whose spirits they

represent, and the retreat of Misshepesu from the lake. Bereft of her helpers, the Supernaturals who have aided her in the past, Fleur is also separated from her land, her home, and her family. Despite all these losses, any one of which would threaten the survival of a Chippewa, whose strength derives from his or her connection to family, home, land, and spirits, the reader's final view of Fleur is of a woman who has regained confidence in her own inner power, the power that "travels in the bloodlines, handed out before birth." Furthermore, despite killing losses, she has held out against the pressure by the whites to submit, to vanish, to become white. Sustained by Pillager blood and by the "stories" and "depth of life" gained from her life to date, Fleur survives because, following in the tracks of Nanapush, who has served as father and as human guardian, she discovers the power of transformation. Readers of *Beet Queen*, Erdrich's second novel, know that, eight years later, Fleur, a traveling peddler, reshapes Karl Adare's crushed feet and cures him of pneumonia. Thus, trading superhuman powers for human powers, Fleur, over time, becomes nomadic rather than sedentary, peddler rather than predator, healer rather than witch.

Pauline as Scavenger

Had Fleur not left the reservation voluntarily, Pukwan's "investigation" of Napoleon Morrissey's death might have resulted in her forced ejection from the reservation or, possibly, death.³⁹ When Napoleon's body, transformed by decay into "threads, thin white blooms and blue moss" and "surrounded by acorn cups and bundles of twigs," is found in

³⁹When an evil shaman's crimes became excessive, the community often retaliated by killing the shaman, either calling on the powers of a rival shaman or attacking when the intended victim's powers -- physical or magical -- appeared to be weakening (Landes 48). Pukwan, conducting his investigation within the legal framework of the white world, can be seen as invoking a rival power to rid the community of Fleur and her sorcery.

the bushes near Lake Matchimanito, the community is quick to believe the "story rehearsed" by the Morrisseys and Lazarres (215):

Not two days and that story was on every tongue. Once out, as if repetition equaled truth, it strengthened until the inventions were known as fact, until it came back reshaped and enlarged by a hundred pairs of lips: Fleur had killed Napoleon by drowning, just another in her line of men. She had discarded him, stolen his tongue. Wrapped in a fishskin and worn in her belt, it enabled her to walk now without leaving tracks. No one else knew what else she did to him, or why, but the remains of her medicine were scattered everywhere — piled rocks, acorns, the screech owl's feathers. . . . (215)

The story, as created and refined by the community, makes sense to those who know both Fleur's history and the ways of sorcery. The Chippewa, Landes says, believed that "a death-dealing shaman gloatingly cut out the tongue of the corpse, to use in love and other bad medicine, and to keep a tally of victims" (43). Thus, the death by drowning, the missing tongue, and the scattered remains of the sorcerer's medicine all point to Fleur. After all, who else on the reservation possesses such power?

The death of Napoleon is the second instance in which deaths attributed to Fleur are actually the work of her "moving shadow," Pauline (22). The first instance — the death of the men at Argus — plunges Pauline into insanity, whereas the second — the death of Napoleon — makes her whole again, healing the cleft left by the "sin of those days in Argus" (195). Pauline suffers for years from her guilt and her fear of punishment for having locked the men in the freezer, reenacting the scene each night in her dreams:

I relived the whole thing over and over, that moment so clear before the storm. Every night when my arms lowered the beam, it was my will that bore the weight, let it drop into place — not Russell's and not Fleur's. For that reason at the Judgment, it would be my soul sacrificed, my poor body turned on the devil's wheel. . . . (66)

Pauline feels no guilt, however, for killing Napoleon: "There was no guilt in this matter, no fault. How could I have known what body the devil would assume? He had taunted me, lured me, shed blankets in a heap. He had appeared to me as the water thing, glass breastplate and burning iron rings" (203). Pauline feels no guilt partly because she has become adept by this time in transferring blame to others but also because she believes that, in killing Napoleon, she has served Christ: she has tamed Christ's rival, Misshepesu, the devil who lives in Lake Matchimanito. Standing exhausted and victorious over the dead body of Napoleon, preparatory to taking her vows as a nun, Pauline sees the end of several struggles. In taming Misshepesu, who manifests himself in the body of Napoleon, Pauline tames, controls, denies one half of her identity: celibacy wins out over sexuality; the family of the Church replaces the family of the tribe; the strictness of life wins over release through death. All of these struggles, however, can be seen as part of a much larger one: her struggle between Christian and Chippewa beliefs and, by extension, between her identity as a white versus that as an Indian.

Nanapush once says about Pauline, "Because she was unnoticeable, homely if it must be said, Pauline schemed to gain attention by telling odd tales that created damage. There was some question if she wasn't afflicted, touched in the mind. Her Aunt Regina . . . sent the girl back here [from Argus] when she got peculiar, blacked out and couldn't sleep, saw things that weren't in her room" (39). As the novel progresses, the reader becomes increasingly aware of the truth of this description. Pauline is, as Nanapush points out, "given to improving the truth" (39), and she frequently sees things — for example, Christ — that are not actually present. Both types of behavior, however, grow out of tendencies that are natural to and even encouraged among the Chippewa — storytelling and vision-

seeking. Because she separates herself spiritually, emotionally, and physically from the Chippewa, repressing her cultural heritage, Pauline denies herself the outlet that would likely have guided her to an identity as a Chippewa shaman similar to Nanapush or Fleur. Instead, as she attempts to gain acceptance within the white world, her natural inclination toward the visionary experience leads her to the outlet provided by Catholicism — the role of martyr and nun. As Catherine Rainwater, speaking of Pauline's confusion of two cosmologies, notes, "despite her scorn for Native American upbringing, Pauline . . . cannot quite escape her old ways of constructing experience" (409).

Pauline, despite her desire to deny her Chippewa heritage, demonstrates it dramatically when, after returning to the reservation after her time in Argus, she undergoes a puberty vision while attending the death of a schoolmate, Mary Pepewas. Sitting at Mary's bedside, Pauline watches as death fills Mary "like dark water" and as, like "a narrow-bottomed boat tied to shore, she began to pull away" (67). Seeing "very clearly that she wanted to be gone," Pauline delivers Mary into death by severing the rope that connects the boat to the shore. Pauline's response to this experience is extraordinary:

A cool blackness lifted me, out the room and through the door. I leapt, spun, landed along the edge of the clearing. My body rippled. I tore leaves off a branch and stuffed them into my mouth to smother laughter. The wind shook in the trees. The sky hardened to light. And that is when, twirling dizzily, my wings raked the air, and I rose in three powerful beats, and saw what lay below.

They were stupid and small, milling behind the lanterned windows. Even Bernadette, who would teach me what I needed to know, appeared simply tired, as though this were no joy. I alone, watching, filled with breath, knew death as a form of grace.

They say, or Bernadette does, that when they found me in the tree later that morning, everyone was shot with fear at the way I hung, precarious, above the ground. They were amazed I could climb there, as the trunk was smooth for seven feet and there were no hand- or footholds of any sort. But I remembered everything, and wasn't in the least surprised. I

knew that after I circled, studied, saw all, I touched down on my favorite branch and tucked my head beneath the shelter of my wing. . . . (68-69)

In this visionary experience Pauline discovers and experiences mystic identification with her guardian spirit, the crow Manitou. Like Fleur being transformed into a bear, Pauline is transformed into a crow.

A Chippewa's first vision is particularly important, Vecsey says, because it establishes his or her identity and sets "the pattern of future visions" (123). Although the identity that Pauline discovers would most likely be discarded as inappropriate by most Chippewa, whose goal in the vision quest is skill in *hunting*, not scavenging, Pauline is pleased, recognizing that her identity as crow clearly distinguishes her from the tribe:

After that, although I kept my knowledge close, I knew I was different. I had the merciful scavenger's heart. I became devious and holy, dangerously meek and mild. I wore the nuns' castoffs, followed in Bernadette's tracks, entered each house where death was about to come, and then made death welcome. . . . I handled the dead until the cold feel of their skin was a comfort, until I no longer bothered to bathe once I left the cabin but touched others with the same hands, passed death on.

. . . I accompanied Bernadette, waited for the moment that bought me peace. (69)

Pauline's satisfaction with her new identity as crow — and with the associated role she plays in the community — derives from her experience of death, in her initial vision, as a "joy," a release, "a form of grace." Pauline experiences pleasure — a mystical identification with another's death that temporarily fulfills her own death wish — each time she helps release another soul from its body. To experience this pleasure as often as possible, she "pass[es] death on."

Attracted as she is to death, however, Pauline soon discovers that "death would pass me over just as men did, and I would live a long, strict life" (75). Thus, Pauline is forced to feed on the death of others just as she feeds during this period on the sex of others; she

becomes a voyeur both of death and of sex. In fact, when Pauline goes out in Nanapush's boat to battle Misshepesu, she at one point almost succumbs to her desire for release through death. Sitting in the boat, "watching for a sign, a promise, some answer," she believes she has found it when she sees Fleur standing on shore, her back turned to Pauline:

Her heavy black clothes, her shawl, the way she held herself so rigid, suggested a door into blackness.

I stood before it and then she turned, so slowly I heard the hinges creak. A moment and I was inside where I could not breathe and water filled me, cold and black water of the drowned, a currentless blanket. I thought I would be shut there, but she turned again and off she walked, a black slot into the air, a passage into herself. A crushing sadness. . . . (200)

Standing in the boat in the middle of Lake Matchimanito, searching for "an answer," Pauline believes she has found it in Fleur. Fleur, she imagines, holds open the door, inviting her to find the ultimate release: union with Misshepesu, death by drowning, a death that is not survived. Fleur, however, turns away, rejecting her, passing her over, as death and men have always passed her over.

Whether Pauline undergoes a mystical transformation into a crow each time a neighbor dies is unknown; all future visions revealed to the reader center on Christ and his rivalry with Misshepesu. Pauline's visions of Christ are a natural extension of her first vision, in which she received her identity as crow. The first time that Pauline — prepared by the starvation and self-inflicted pain of the martyr — sees Christ, she says, "He . . . told me I was chosen to serve":

He had an important plan for me, for which I must prepare, that I should find out the habits and hiding places of His enemy. It was only very slowly that this idea was revealed. Over time, as winter cut down more people and I was called from the convent to house after house where I prepared the newly dead, the details of his great need were given. I should not turn my back on Indians. I should go out among them, be still, and listen. There was a devil in the land, a shadow in the water, an apparition that filled their sight. . . . (137)

Guided by a series of visions in which Christ appears to her, Pauline understands that as crow, attending at the deaths of her neighbors, her mission is to scavenge for Indian souls, delivering them to Christ, thereby helping to undermine the power of his rival, Misshepesu. In performing this mission for Christ, Pauline further removes herself from the Chippewa view of the world because her mission emphasizes a Christian yearning for death that is not shared by the Chippewa. "The Ojibwas did not yearn for death as the missionary did," Vecsey says. The missionary "sought unity with God in heaven; the Ojibwas sought unity with the living world and the manitos in this life" (68).⁴⁰ Thus, Pauline's identity of crow, gained through her initial vision and strengthened through subsequent visions of Christ, and her attraction to death are characteristics that emphasize her gradual move toward an identity that, in its attempt to repress her Chippewa identity and to acquire a white, Christian one, ultimately combines both Chippewa and Christian identities in a uniquely — and terrifyingly — destructive form. As Rainwater notes, Pauline's "notion[s] of evil and the supernatural," drawn from two opposing world views, merge to yield an aberrant form of Christianity: "Twisted and deformed away from their shamanic matrix, and grafted into a Christian cosmology, such notions mark her sadomasochistic Christianity as marginal and aberrant, even within the conventions of martyrology" (409).

⁴⁰Pauline's visions, depicting an ongoing battle between Christ and Misshepesu, merge two different myths — the Christian myth of the continuous battle between Christ and Satan and the Chippewa myth of the never-ending battle between the thunderbird Manitou and the water monster. The thunderbirds — the arctic owl, golden eagle, and baldheaded eagle — are the Supernaturals of the sky (Landes 22). Vecsey sees the thunderbirds, who control the game of the air (birds), as counteracting the power of the water Manitou, who controls the game of the land and water (mammals and fish) (75). Thus, in Pauline's visions, which merge the two myths, Christ can be seen as a sky Supernatural (characterized, however, as a crow rather than an eagle or owl) battling the water Manitou, Misshepesu, for control of the Chippewa.

Pauline's adoption of a pseudo-world view and identity arises, however, not so much from an attraction to the Christian world view as from a desire to deny her Chippewa blood. When Pauline, who is three-quarters Chippewa and one-quarter white, first goes to Argus, she goes because she wants to be white:

In the spring before the winter that took so many Chippewa, I bothered my father into sending me south, to the white town. I had decided to learn the lace-making trade from nuns.

"You'll fade out there," he said, reminding me that I was lighter than my sisters. "You won't be an Indian once you return."

"Then maybe I won't come back," I told him. I wanted to be like my mother, who showed her half-white. I wanted to be like my grandfather, pure Canadian. That was because even as a child I saw that to hang back was to perish. I saw through the eyes of the world outside of us. I would not speak our language. In English, I told my father we should build an outhouse with a door that swung open and shut. (14)

At the end of the summer, however, traumatized by Fleur's rape and by her own part in the death of the men at Argus, Pauline, admitting that "the blood draws us back, as if it runs through a vein of earth," returns to the reservation (31). After the birth of an illegitimate and unwanted child drives her into the convent, however, Pauline is visited by Christ, who, sitting on the stove, tells her that she is not Indian but white: "He said I was not whom I had supposed. I was an orphan and my parents had died in grace, and also, despite my deceptive features, I was not one speck of Indian but wholly white" (137). Soon after this visitation, Pauline begins referring to the Chippewa as "'them. Never *neenawind* or us," which is fortunate, she says, because she soon learns that "our order would admit no Indian girls" (138). To ensure that she is not rejected by the convent, she hastens to inform Superior of her "true background" as revealed by Christ (138).

The Pauline who goes to Argus has no vocation or desire to be a nun; she simply wants to be white, and acceptance within the world of the convent signifies for her

acceptance within the world of the whites. As the events of her life unfold, however, Pauline begins to see her world as divided between good and evil, with whites, Christianity, Christ, celibacy, pain, and death as "good" and Indians, Chippewa beliefs, Misshepesu, sexuality, pleasure, and life as "evil." As this faulty polarization and compartmentalization of the world intensify, she begins to see any temptation by or attraction to those aspects of the world that she has identified as "evil" as sinful; thus, a denial of those aspects of life appears to her to be the only avenue by which she can rid her life of sin.

Many of Pauline's problems arise from her confused sexuality. Warring against her natural feelings of desire are her conviction of her own undesirability, her witnessing at age fifteen of Fleur's rape, her Chippewa belief that sexuality is associated with Misshepesu and death by drowning, and her Catholic belief that feelings of lust are the work of the devil. The strength of Pauline's own sexual desire, however, is undeniable when she is around Fleur and Eli:

I could not pass between the two of them — the air was busy, filled with sparks and glowing needles, shimmering. Their bodies, like ore and lodestone, drew together and repelled me, or, if I stubbornly resisted, loomed close enough to crush. . . . In the morning . . . they smelled like animals, wild and heady, and sometimes in the dusk their fingers left tracks like snails, glistening and wet. They made my head hurt. A heaviness spread between my legs and ached. The tips of my breasts chafed and wore themselves to points and a yawning eagerness gripped me.

I thought I must get married, must find myself a husband. . . . (71-72)

Finding a husband is not easy, however, for Pauline. As Nanapush says, Pauline is "homely." She herself agrees with that assessment, saying that "I got my growth too fast, stretched long as a hayrake and acquired no softening features. . . . I was angles and sharp edges, a girl of bent tin" (71). In addition to her angular body structure, Pauline's facial features tend to reflect her inner turmoil: "My forehead wrinkled because I shut my eyes

hard against certain sights" (71). Her face is marked with the strain of attempting to blot out memory, not only the memory of her own hand lowering the lock on the freezer at Argus but also her memory of Fleur's rape. Each night in her dreams, Pauline says, "I was witness when the men slapped Fleur's mouth, beat her, entered and rode her. I felt all. My shrieks poured from her mouth and my blood from her wounds" (66). Not only does Pauline witness Fleur's rape; through an act of mystic identification she enters Fleur's body, becomes one with her, and experiences the rape. Fleur's pain, Fleur's humiliation, Fleur's mortification are her own. The horror of witnessing the rape, combined with her guilt for having failed to intervene, for having held back to watch from a safe distance, later emerges as a primary impetus for Pauline's self-inflicted punishment after she enters the convent.

Pauline experiences a similar identification when she spies on Sophie and Eli's lovemaking. This time, however, the experience is one of pleasure rather than pain:

as I crouched in the cove of leaves, I turned my thoughts on the girl and entered her and made her do what she could never have dreamed of herself. I stood in the broken straws and she stepped over Eli, one leg on either side of his chest. Standing there, she slowly hiked her skirt.

. . . He moved his hands up her thighs, beneath the tucked billow of her skirt. She shivered and I dug my fingers through the tough claws of sumac, through the wood-sod, clutched bark, shrank backward into her pleasure. (83)

Pauline's identification with Sophie, entering Sophie's body both to guide her and to experience her pleasure, is remarkably similar to her identification with Fleur when she is raped. Both recall the mystic identification of a visionary with his or her guardian spirit, the identification, for example, between Fleur and the bear Manitou or between Nanapush and his helpers. In this instance, Pauline enters Sophie's body to track, lure, overcome, and rape her prey, Eli. Manipulated by the love medicine and Pauline's own desire, Eli and Sophie

are merely "mechanical things, toys, dolls" (84); the only joy experienced in the act, which is extended by Pauline beyond the point of pleasure to that of pain, is Pauline's.⁴¹

Soon after this incident, Pauline begins sleeping with Napoleon to satisfy her sexual desire. When she discovers she is pregnant, she is overcome by the horror of her sin, and she sees Napoleon as Satan and the fetus growing in her womb as the offspring of Satan. When Bernadette suggests naming the child "Marie . . . for the Virgin," Pauline objects to the choice: "I knew different. Satan was the one who had pinned me with his horns" (133). Thus, when Marie is born, Pauline sees only a child of sin, child of the devil in herself that she has projected on Napoleon: "I looked upon her. She was soiled, formed by me, bearing every defilement I had known by Napoleon Morrissey" (136). Seeing the bruises left on Marie's temples by Bernadette's efforts to pull the baby from Pauline's womb, Pauline knows for certain that "she's marked by the devil's thumbs" (136).

At the moment of birth, Pauline tries to withhold Marie from life not only because she believes that there will be "no taint or original sin on her unless she breathed air" (135) but also because she fears that having a bastard child will make her more of an outcast from the human community of the reservation than she already is: "If I gave birth, I would be lonelier. I saw, and I saw too well. I would be an outcast, a thing set aside for God's use, a human who could be touched by no other" (135). No longer recognized as a Chippewa nor accepted as a white, Pauline is a lonely woman. Although she knows that she is not welcome, she continues to visit Fleur's cabin, seeking to find there a substitute for the family

⁴¹Landes says that "the Ojibwa horror of love medicine suggested to me a horror like that they attached to the tongue-abduction. Both were sneak assaults on human will. Love medicine was considered the ugliest sorcery and the explanation of rape; romantic sex was prized, seen as a "hunt" and a game . . ." (65). Thus, Pauline uses love medicine to possess Eli, through Sophie, against his will.

that, after she rejected them, abandoned her. As an adolescent, Pauline chooses to go to Argus to learn lace-making from the nuns because she wishes to separate herself from the "Indianness" of her family. When she hears, however, of the disease that is killing so many Turtle Mountain Chippewa, she dreams that her mother and sisters have died: "I had a dream I could not shake. I saw my sisters and my mother swaying in the branches, buried too high to reach, wrapped in lace I never hooked" (15). Already lonely in a town where the white girls ignore her, she says that "I tried to stop myself from remembering what it was like to have companions, to have my mother and sisters around me, but when Fleur came to see us that June, I remembered" (15). Although Pauline often works next to Fleur, both for companionship and for news about her family, she is both jealous and afraid of Fleur's power over men, a power that she recognizes as being both sexual and deadly. One night, however, after she and Russell fall asleep while Fleur plays cards with the men, she is awakened when Fleur moves their sleeping bodies: "I was lifted, soothed, cradled in a woman's arms and rocked so quiet that I kept my eyes shut while Fleur rolled first me, then Russell, into a closet . . ." (20). After that night Pauline becomes Fleur's "moving shadow that the men never noticed, the shadow that could have saved her" (22).

Although Pauline does not save Fleur, she continues to trail her like a shadow, even after they both return to Argus, where her fear and jealousy of Fleur are rekindled. Fleur is the closest thing Pauline has to a companion, mother, or sister. The only other companion and mother-figure in Pauline's life is Bernadette, who first introduces Pauline to the task of attending the dying and laying out the dead. Although this function is important in the community, Pauline's association with death tends to separate her even further from other people:

when people saw me walking down the road, they wondered who was being taken, man, woman, or child. I was a midwife that they hailed down with both interest and dread. I was their fate. Somewhere now, in the back of their minds, they knew that these bodies they tended and preened, got drunk, pleased and refused, fed as often as they could and relieved, these bodies to which they were devoted, all in good time came to me. . . . (75)

As a "midwife" who delivers her clients into death rather than life, Pauline is avoided as much as possible. As Nanapush says, "A man needs no reminding of his mortality;" Pauline "was the crow of the reservation, she lived off our scraps" (53, 54). Pauline's identity as crow and scavenger, feeding off the scraps of her dying neighbors, recalls Windigo, the giant, cannibalistic skeleton of ice. Although Pauline's guardian spirits are the crow Manitou and Christ, those Chippewa who attempt to guess the identity of her guardian by observing her actions might believe that she is actually guided by Windigo and is herself a windigo.

The windigos, Vecsey explains,

appeared as skeletons of ice, or as people whose insides were ice, and were naturally most common during the winter, when they searched for human flesh to eat. A human could become a windigo through possession by the Windigo, by the acquisition of the Windigo as a guardian, by witchcraft, or by winter starvation A windigo developed an insatiable craving for human flesh, sometimes eating family members. The community had the right to kill such dangerous psychotics, since once transformed, they ceased to be human. (77)

Nanapush describes the way in which, after the death of the Pillagers, he and Fleur, weakened by grief and starvation, felt "the names of their dead" swell inside them, filling them "with the water of the drowned, cold and black," which, in the freezing temperatures of a north Dakota winter, turns to ice:

Within us, like ice shards, their names bobbed and shifted. Then the slivers began to collect and cover us. We became so heavy, weighted down with the lead gray frost, that we could not move. . . . We had gone half windigo. . . . (6)

Although Nanapush uses the term "windigo" in its now common usage to indicate any psychic disorder, its derivation from Windigo, the skeleton of ice, is clear from his description of his and Fleur's condition. Unlike Windigo, however, Nanapush and Fleur feel no desire to eat humans because "the names of their dead anchored their tongues" (6). The windigo they experience manifests itself through a suicidal starvation inspired by grief rather than through cannibalism. Pauline's tendency to feed on "the scraps" of her dead neighbors clearly links her to Windigo, and the fact that she becomes increasingly unbalanced with time suggests that she has gone windigo. In fact, excessive fasts and visions — carried, for example, to the extent that Pauline carries them — are believed to lead to windigo disorders, which, Landes says, "involved projection of the sufferer's fears and vindictiveness . . ."

(13).

Thus, Pauline projects her own internal battle, incorporating all her sexual-spiritual "fears and vindictiveness," outward in such a way that she imagines herself and Fleur locked in battle, with herself serving as emissary of Christ and the white world and Fleur serving as emissary of Misshepesu and the Chippewa world. Guided by her visions of Christ, Pauline waits for "instruction by His lips, as to what I should do about Fleur":

She was the one who closed the door or swung it open. Between the people and the gold-eyed creature in the lake, the spirit which they said was neither good nor bad but simply had an appetite, Fleur was the hinge. It was like that with Him, too, Our Lord, who had obviously made the whites more shrewd, as they grew in number, all around, . . . while the Indians receded and coughed to death. It was clear that Indians were not protected by the thing in the lake or by the other Manitous who lived in trees, the bush, or spirits of animals that were hunted so scarce they became discouraged and did not mate. There would have to come a turning, a gathering, another door. And it would be Pauline who opened it, same as she closed the Argus locker. Not Fleur Pillager. (139)

Until this point Pauline has worked hard to deny her culpability for the death of the men at Argus by blacking out to avoid memory, telling Margaret that Fleur killed them, or believing that "a cry building in the wind, faint at first, a whistle and then a shrill scream that . . . at last spoke plain" (27) told her to drop the beam. In those instances in which she has admitted her culpability, she has expressed horror at her sin and terror of the punishment she will endure "at Judgment." Never before has Pauline viewed her act as one of power and self-assertion; now, however, she sees that past act as proof that, guided by Christ, she has the power to wrench from Fleur the privilege of opening and closing doors. Over time her sin has become her glory. In Christ's service, she will turn the Chippewa from Fleur, Misshepeshu, and the other Manitous, gather their souls, and lead them to and through "the great shining doors, beaten of air and gold, swung open on soundless oiled fretwork" (140). Closing the doors of what Landes calls the Chippewa "village of souls," she will open the doors of the Christian heaven. In the battle for the souls of the Chippewa, which Pauline sees as being waged between Christ and Pauline, on one hand, and Misshepeshu and Fleur, on the other, Pauline and Christ will be victorious.

Despite this enthusiasm, Pauline's climactic battle with Misshepeshu on the shore of Lake Matchimanito is the direct result of a crisis of doubt, brought on by her humiliating defeat in a contest with Nanapush, whom she sees as a "servant of the lake" (196). Whereas Nanapush is able to plunge his hands into a pot of boiling water with no visible pain or injury, Pauline, when she attempts to imitate him to "prove Christ's ways" (190), discovers that she is unable to do so. Suddenly, Pauline's view of the relative powers of Christ and Misshepeshu change:

Christ was weak, I saw now, a tame newcomer in this country that has its own devils in the waters of boiling-over kettles. I lifted my hands to my

face. Fat gauze clubs that smelled of roast meat I knew God had no foothold or sway in this land, or no mercy for the just, or that perhaps, for all my suffering and faith, I was still insignificant. Which seemed impossible. (192)

After a brief vision, in which she glimpses the scales and gleaming tips of Misshepesu's horns rising above the waves of lake Matchimanito, Pauline's faith in herself as not only Christ's "champion" but even his "savior" is renewed. She understands that

Christ had hidden out of frailty, overcome by the glitter of copper scales, appalled at the creature's unwinding length and luxury. New devils require new gods.

. . . Because my own God was lamblike and meek and I had strengthened, daily, on His tests and privations, it was I who was armored and armed even though my hands were loosely bound. It was I with the cunning of serpents, I with skill to win forgiveness. I was cleft down the middle by my sin of those days in Argus, scored like a lightning-struck tree. Deep inside, that crooked black vein, charcoal sweet, was ready to dissolve. If I did not forsake Jesus in his extremity, then He would have no other choice but to make me whole. I would be His champion, His savior too. (195)

From an experience of extreme pain, humiliation, and doubt, Pauline rises to a position of self-exaltation, seeing herself no longer as the opponent of Fleur but as the opponent of Misshepesu. She sees herself as a new god, capable of defending the frail, lamblike Christ from a devil that, although not new, is new in Christ's experience since He has only recently entered the land of the Chippewa. In return for saving Christ from Misshepesu, Pauline will be made whole again; she will be forgiven, her "sin of those days in Argus" removed. At the same time, by destroying Misshepesu, she will destroy once and for all his continuous pull on her — a pull that combines the pull of the "blood," which "always draws us back," the pull of connection, both familial and sexual, and the pull of eternal release, offered through death by drowning. By killing Napoleon, in whose form Misshepesu has

chosen to appear, then, Pauline rids herself of all her personal demons and, at the same time, rids the tribe of the "demons" that have given it its power to withstand colonization:

I believe that the monster was tamed that night, sent to the bottom of the lake and chained there by my deed. For it is said that a surveyor's crew arrived at the turnoff to Matchimanito in a rattling truck, and set to measuring. Surely that was the work of Christ's hand. I see farther, anticipate more than I've heard. The land will be sold and divided. Fleur's cabin will tumble into the ground and be covered by leaves. The place will be haunted I suppose, but no one will have ears sharp enough to hear the Pillagers' low voices, or the vision clear to see their still shadows. The trembling old fools with their conjuring tricks will die off and the young, like Lulu and Nector, return from the government schools blinded and deafened. (204-05)

For Pauline, then, the arrival of the surveyors at Matchimanito confirms her belief that she has tamed Misshepesu. Having tamed Misshepesu, Pauline then predicts the decline of Fleur's power, the failure of the spirits to make themselves seen or heard, the death of the old conjurers, and, finally, the inability of the next generation of Indians to see or hear apparitions or voices once common on the reservation. Just as the arrival of the surveyors confirms her belief in herself as victor over Fleur and Misshepesu, her acceptance by the Church as a bride of Christ confirms her belief that her sins have been washed away. "Now sanctified" and "recovered," Pauline sheds her past — her sins, her identity, her name — like dead skin: "I asked for the grace . . . to leave Pauline behind, to remember that my name, any name, was no more than crumbling skin" (205).

No one can doubt that Pauline, despite her belief that she has "recovered," is mad. Nevertheless, within the world created by that madness, Pauline perceives — and thus experiences — herself as powerful and victorious. She has defeated and outlasted her enemies, both internal and external, and she has succeeded in extinguishing all consciousness of her past — or, that is, all conscious guilt for past sins and all conscious recognition of

herself as a Chippewa. She has truly transformed herself; no reality exists for her other than the present reality of herself as "sanctified," as a bride of Christ, and as a member of the great family of the Church. Pauline now belongs; she has a place in the world, a proven identity, a worthy mission. Although Pauline's denial of one half of her identity in order to achieve this position may disturb the reader, it does not disturb Pauline. She herself recognizes that, in accepting Christ's mission "to gather souls," she must renounce herself: "I must give myself away in return, I must dissolve. I did so eagerly. . ." (140). By selecting a white, Catholic identity — even though, as Rainwater suggests, that identity is an aberrant form of Catholicism — as her true identity, Pauline resolves the conflict that has disturbed her throughout the novel.

One problem with Pauline's new identity, however, is that she is required to work with the living rather than the dead. She is assigned the task of teaching arithmetic at St. Catherine's, and, as she explains, "I do not like children very well . . ." (205). Readers of *Love Medicine* know that about nine years later Pauline begins to see in children the devil she once saw in herself and that, where once she abused her own body, she then begins to abuse the bodies of the children under her care. The devil that Pauline/Sister Leopolda sees hovering in the vicinity of children is particularly fearsome in that it is a monster of her own creation. As Rainwater explains, "when Pauline becomes a nun, she still believes in the lake monster, but she calls him Satan. Pauline's distorted version of the Satanic lake monster is more horrible than either the Christian Satan, who is not appeasable but who cannot victimize the truly innocent, or the Chippewa monster, who can capture the innocent but who is appeasable" (409). Through her own transformation into a nun, Pauline sees herself as beyond the grasp of this Chippewa-Christian monster she calls Satan. Young girls, however,

particularly young Chippewa girls like Marie, her own daughter, are always easy prey, and her mission as nun is to stalk and kill Satan in all his hiding places. From a scavenger of Indian souls, then, Pauline/Sister Leopolda becomes a predator, hunting and destroying the devil as he manifests himself in young girls. Pauline/Sister Leopolda's actions in *Love Medicine* — using boiling water and a poker to drive out the devil in Marie — demonstrate the extent of her eventual madness. One power possessed by the mad, however, is that they believe that they are empowered — in Pauline's case by Christ — to commit such acts. Nevertheless, despite one's conviction of Pauline's madness at the close of *Tracks*, one must acknowledge that she, like Fleur, emerges from this period of her life with a keen sense of her own power. She is victorious, she is transformed, and she is a survivor.

Nanapush as Trickster-Transformer

After one of Pauline's visions about the decline of the Chippewa and the rise of the Christians, she repeats a story that Nanapush had once told about his experience as a guide for "a buffalo expedition for whites":

He said the animals understood what was happening, how they were dwindling. He said that when the smoke cleared and hulks lay scattered everywhere, a day's worth of shooting for only the tongues and hides, the beasts that survived grew strange and unusual. They lost their minds. They bucked, screamed and stamped, tossed the carcasses and grazed on flesh. They tried their best to cripple one another, to fall or die. They tried suicide. They tried to do away with their young. They knew they were going, saw their end. He said while the whites all slept through the night he kept watch, that the groaning never stopped, that the plains below him was alive, a sea turned against itself, and when the thunder came, then and only then, did the madness cease. He saw their spirits slip between the lightning sheets. (140)

Survivors of genocide, Nanapush suggests through this story, tend to go mad. Like sufferers of windigo, they may turn cannibalistic, feeding on the flesh of fallen brothers, or they may

cripple or kill the survivors, including their own offspring and themselves — all because they can see their own end in the end of those around them. The onus of survival is the plight shared by all surviving Chippewa, but particularly by Fleur, Pauline, and Nanapush, each the small end of the "funnel" of their families' histories. Fleur, the predator, directs her murderous instincts outward, attacking whites and those mixed-bloods who steal Chippewa land. Pauline, the scavenger, sustains herself by feeding on "the scraps" of her dead and dying neighbors. Nanapush, the trickster-transformer, outwits his opponents: "Though I could wound with pointed jokes," Nanapush says, "I had never wielded a blade against a human I was a talker and a hunter who used my brains as my weapon. . . ." (117-18).

As a hunter, Nanapush says, he prefers working with snares, allowing his game to catch itself. Snares, he says, "demand clever fingers and the ability to think exactly like your prey. That requires imagination . . ." (118). Thus, Nanapush uses his brain — his imagination and his ability to think like his prey — as his weapon. He uses this same technique when dealing with humans, attaining a desired end — revenge or some benefit for himself or others — through trickery. Nanapush has lived his whole life in accordance with the name bestowed on him by his father: "Nanapush," his father told him. "That's what you'll be called. Because it's got to do with trickery and living in the bush. . . ." (33).

Nanapush is named for Nanabozho,⁴² the trickster-transformer figure of the Chippewa creation myth. Although many variations of the myth exist, the basic cycle of

⁴²The spelling of the trickster-transformer's name is as varied as the versions of the stories relating his exploits. Landes, working with the Chippewa in Minnesota in the 1930s, uses "Nehnehbush"; Radin and Reagan, working with the Chippewa of Sarnia, Ontario, in the 1910s, use "Manabozho"; Barnouw, collecting tales in northern Wisconsin in the 1940s, uses "Wenebojo"; and Vecsey, after reviewing more than forty versions of the Chippewa creation myth, uses "Nanabozho."

stories includes eight episodes: Nanabozho is born, along with two nonhuman brothers, after his previously virgin mother is impregnated by the wind; Nanabozho steals fire from a neighboring tribe through trickery; Nanabozho kills his brothers for their part in the death of his mother; Nanabozho joins a pack of wolves to gain their assistance in hunting, is expelled after several misunderstandings, but is allowed to take the youngest wolf with him as hunting companion and "brother" or "nephew"; Nanabozho's dream that his "brother" will be killed crossing a body of water comes true; Nanabozho, after transforming himself into a stump at the water's edge to prevent his detection, shoots the water lion in revenge, but the wounded lion survives; Nanabozho then kills an old woman who has been curing the water lion and, wearing her skin, succeeds in killing the lion; when the other water lions flood the world in an attempt to drown Nanabozho, he recreates the world from a few particles of soil retrieved through the aid of four animals — beaver, loon, otter, and muskrat — that die in the attempt but are later revived by Nanapush (Vecsey 89-91). In analyzing the relationship of this myth to the Chippewa world view, Vecsey notes several lessons provided by the stories of Nanabozho's exploits. Because animals and humans perceive the world differently, humans often need the assistance of animals, birds, and trees to defeat their adversaries. A person's success derives, then, not from "individual prowess" but from the assistance he or she receives from friendly helpers. Metamorphosis, "the fluidity between animal and human forms," is essential to success in hunting and thus to survival. Success in hunting may also require that one disarm one's opponents by addressing them as friends or relatives before killing them. Revenge is often necessary and, in fact, may be "the only means of enforcing intracommunity and intercommunity order" (Vecsey 92, 94).

Vecsey's summary and analysis of the creation myth emphasize Nanabozho's role as a heroic figure whose aggression is aimed at establishing "societal balance" (94). Thus, his description of Nanabozho fits the first two of three types of trickster-transformers common to Native American literature, as identified and characterized by Paula Gunn Allen:

(1) Heroic Transformer: frequently portrayed as a monster-slayer, aggressive hero, or creator of order, who achieves power through action. (2) Cunning Transformer: frequently portrayed as a figure (human or animal) who tries to gain power by outwitting his opponents in gambling or games or through marriage or sexual encounters. The figure often changes form to take on another identity or sex or to become an animal or an inanimate object. (3) Overreacher: usually portrayed as a figure who attempts more than he can achieve and therefore suffers humiliation or injury. ("Teaching American Indian Oral Literature" 50)

Although Vecsey's summary and analysis minimize Nanabozho's character as an "overreacher," the cycle of Nanabozho stories collected by Paul Radin and A. B. Reagan from Sarnia, Ontario, between 1911 and 1914, include several stories presenting Nanabozho as a sort of buffoon, attempting unsuccessfully to imitate the magical feats of empowered figures or taking elaborately cunning steps to trick, ensnare, kill, and prepare game, only to be outwitted in return, losing his carefully prepared feast to other humans or animals.

Of the three types of trickster-transformer figure described by Allen, Erdrich's Nanapush seems to be primarily a "cunning transformer," one who outwits his opponents, sometimes by assuming a different character, that is, by thinking like his prey. One senses that, in his youth, Nanapush might have been more of a "heroic transformer" than he is now at the age of fifty, as he begins to experience a loss of his former powers. Concerned in 1919 about the growing feud among the reservation families over "the question of money settlement," Nanapush says, "I could do nothing. It is embarrassing for a man to admit his arms have thinned, his capacities diminished, and maybe worse than that, his influence over

the young of the tribe is gone for good" (109). Perhaps in compensation for the loss of his youthful strength, Nanapush also frequently plays the part of the "overreacher," particularly in his sexual parries with Margaret, setting himself up as the performer of tremendous sexual feats only to be knocked down by her belittling retorts. In most cases, however, particularly with Pauline, Nanapush is a "cunning transformer," presenting himself as a weak, guileless friend until, when she lowers her defenses, he cuts her with his "pointed jokes." Indeed, Nanapush tricks the gullible Pauline so often and with such painful consequences that Pauline sees herself as enduring a special sort of martyrdom: "Embarrassment. I counseled myself to suffer Nanapush. . . . To do this, it was necessary to accept his jabs and arrows" (152). Nanapush, then, gathers strength by following the example of his namesake and helper, the mythical Nanabozho, compensating for the weakness of age with cunning, trickery, and self-transformation.

In addition to providing the Chippewa with a role model for defeating one's adversary through trickery and transformation, Nanabozho also is credited with having created the *midéwiwin*, the Chippewa curing society and its rituals (Vecsey 99).⁴³ The *midé* shaman relied on four types of vision-inspired cures: subjecting the patient to the Sun Dance torture; divining the identity of the evil shaman who has caused the illness, summoning his/her soul, and admonishing or killing him/her; "sucking" the cause of the disease from the patient's body; or ritually assigning a new name bearing the power of a new mystical identity (Landes 47-49). As a shaman, Nanapush developed a personal technique for curing, which is a

⁴³Stories within the creation myth provided the basis for Chippewa "mourning customs, sweat bath ritual, puberty fast for a vision and other cultic actions . . ." (Vecsey 94).

variation of the last two techniques described by Landes, from information revealed in a dream:

There are two plants. One is yarrow and the other I will not name. These are the sources of my medicine, and I used them for the second time on Fleur, the third time on a Pillager. . . .

I mixed and crushed the ingredients. The paste must be rubbed on the hands a certain way, then up to the elbows, with exact words said. . . . the person who visited my dream told me what plants to spread so that I could plunge by arms into a boiling stew kettle, pull meat from the bottom, or reach into the body itself and remove, as I did so long ago with Moses, the name that burned, the sickness. (188)

To cure Moses, Nanapush removed the name of the child who was ill, gave him "a new name to fool death," and told his parents to pretend that their own son had died and that the child living with them "was someone else" (35-36). Chippewa are given several names, two of which — that received at the feast celebrating birth and that received through the puberty vision — are kept secret because they identify the "essential" person (Vecsey 61). The white name that Nanapush assigns to Moses is one he can use as a cover or protective device, concealing his true identity.

Nanapush himself has never revealed his own name to government officials, repeating "*No Name*" whenever he is asked. He refuses, he tells Lulu, because "Nanapush" — like any Chippewa name — "is a name that loses power every time that it is written and stored in a government file. That is why I only gave it out once in all those years" (32). Nanapush gave his name to Father Damien when, at Lulu's birth, the priest insisted on having the name of the child's father for his records: "The waters were so muddy," Nanapush says, "I thought I'd give them another stir" (61). Through this impulsive gesture, Nanapush succeeds in extending his name, even though none of his own wives and children have survived, and he also creates the "loophole" that he is later able to "reach through" to draw Lulu home

from the government school (225), just as he once reached into a kettle of boiling water and into the body of Moses to withdraw "the name that burned, the sickness."

In drawing Lulu home from school, Nanapush is attempting to save her from vanishing, as Pauline vanishes, within an alien world. Lulu has never forgiven her mother for having sent her away. Nanapush, in attempting to reconcile mother and daughter, tells Lulu:

She sent you to the government school, it is true, but you must understand there were reasons: there would be no place for you, no safety on this reservation, no hiding from government papers, or from Morrisseys who shaved heads or the Turcot Company, leveler of a whole forest. . . . (219)

Fleur sends Lulu away because she recognizes that she no longer has the weapons to defend her daughter against those who no longer fear or respect the Pillagers. Years later, when Lulu is threatening to marry one of those "Morrisseys who shaved heads," Nanapush tries once again to save her, using the technique he had used to save her the night her feet froze. Recognizing the power of communication and words, he saved Lulu that night by creating a "string" of words to hold her fast to him and to life:

I know certain cure songs, words that throw the sick one into a dream and cause a low dusk to fall across the mind.

. . .
Eventually my songs overcame the painful burning and you were suspended, eyes open, looking into mine. Once I had you I did not dare break the string between us and kept on moving my lips, holding you motionless with talking, just as at this moment. . . .

. . . I did not stop. I talked on and on until you lost yourself inside the flow of it, until you entered the swell and ebb and did not sink but were sustained. . . . (167)

Through this sustaining "string" of words, spun out through the night and into the next morning, Nanapush maintains Lulu's connection to this world, as he had once done for himself. "During the year of sickness," he says, "when I was the last one left, I saved

myself by starting a story. . . . I got well by talking. Death could not get a word in edgewise, grew discouraged, and traveled on" (46). Having proven the success of this curing technique on himself and on the frozen Lulu, he applies it once again in his attempt to save the adult Lulu from the dangers of marrying a Morrissey, a mixed-blood who has been afflicted by the "crippling poison" of white ways (184).

As "a holdout, like the Pillagers" (33), Nanapush recognizes that the continuing encroachment of the whites on the Chippewa way of life threatens them all: "I weakened into an old man," he says, "as one oak went down, another and another was lost, as a gap formed here, a clearing there, and plain daylight entered" (9). The extent of Nanapush's powerlessness is brought home to him when Boy Lazarre and Clarence Morrissey tie him up, leaving him to watch helplessly while they shave Margaret's head. Afterwards, he says, "I was damaged in spirit, more so than Margaret" (115). At the time Margaret is careful to save Nanapush's pride, but later that winter, angered in a fight, Margaret reminds him of his shame and goes back to her own cabin to live. Left alone, Nanapush loses the will to live; he stops eating, instead smoking red willow, and as he continues to weaken, dreams a dream he had had during the weakness that followed the death of his family:

I stood in a birch forest of tall straight trees. I was one among many in a shelter of strength and beauty. Suddenly, a loud report, thunder, and they toppled down like matchsticks, all flattened around me in an instant. I was the only one left standing. And now, as I weakened, I swayed and bent nearer to earth. (127)

Like the story of the buffalo, Nanapush's dream emphasizes the difficulty of living after the death of all one's companions; without one's family, relatives, and friends, one weakens, swaying and bending nearer to earth, longing to follow them on their journey to the west. Nanapush and Fleur were bonded as father and daughter when they together resisted the

urging of the Pillager spirits to accompany them on death's journey. Fleur and Nanapush both gained the strength to endure from their knowledge that the spirits of friends and relatives lingered in the woods around Lake Matchimanito, chattering, gambling, occasionally appearing among the living. The tragedy of the destruction of those woods, foreseen in Nanapush's twice-dreamt dream, is that now the survivors are separated from the spiritual as well as the physical presence of their loved ones. During Nanapush's last journey through the square mile of oaks encircling Fleur's cabin, he makes his final farewell:

The moment I entered, I heard the hum of a thousand conversations. Not only the birds and small animals, but the spirits in the western stands had been forced together. The shadows of the trees were crowded with their forms. The twigs spun independently of wind, vibrating like small voices. I stopped, stood among these trees whose flesh was so much older than ours, and it was then that my relatives and friends took final leave, abandoned me to the living. (220)

In this last journey through the woods, Nanapush sees his wives, his daughter and son, his friends, his father, his mother and sister. Lying Down Grass, the first woman with whom he slept, grasps his arm to show him "how simple it was to follow, how comforting to take the step" (220). Nanapush would have done so, he says, "had only the living called from that shade. But Fleur had resisted these ghosts, at least she was not among them. So I would remain with the living too" (220-21).

As often as Nanapush has been tempted, as seriously as he has been weakened over time by the loss of loved ones, he continues to survive, choosing to stay among the living. His love for, and perhaps responsibility to, the living becomes a source of strength in times of weakness. His love has focused on a few intimates — Fleur, Eli, Margaret, and Lulu in addition to his own family — but also extends outward to include all the surviving Chippewa. Motivated by his desire "to reach through the loophole" to draw Lulu home from the

government school, Nanapush transforms himself, becoming a tribal chairman. Nanapush has always fought the idea of becoming a government bureaucrat: "Unlike the Pukwans, who were government Indians, I saw the deadfall beneath my feet before I stepped. I would avoid the job. I knew what was attached" (185). Later, however, when Fleur's land is lost because of a ruling on late payment fines, Nanapush recognizes his error in not having heeded Father Damien's advice: "I now saw what Father Damien read, looking into a distance I could not have imagined. He was right in that I should have tried to grasp this new way of wielding influence, this method of leading others with a pen and piece of paper" (209). Acting ostensibly to save a specific person, Lulu, from the white world, Nanapush undergoes a transformation that will ultimately benefit the entire reservation. Replacing Pukwan Junior as tribal chairman, he will bring to governmental negotiation and policy-making a perspective that represents the old-time Chippewa: "We old-time Indians . . . were long-thinking but in the last, forgiving, as we must live close together, as one people, share what we have in common, take what we're owed . . ." (180). As a shaman, Nanapush often relied on his visionary powers and his helpers to cure the sick and feed the starving. Confronted with the withdrawal of Misshepeshu, the Manitous, and the spirits of the dead, Nanapush recognizes that the visionary powers of the past must be replaced with new powers, powers arising from his love to talk, his trickery, and his ability to think like his prey.

Before the coming of the whites, Nanapush, Fleur, and Pauline — like all Chippewa — live in a universe defined and controlled by the actions of a host of supernatural beings. Although powerful and sometimes evil beings such as Misshepeshu and Windigo periodically disrupted their lives, bringing loss and grief, the Chippewa understand that it is the nature

of these beings to behave in this way, and, furthermore, they know that they can appease the spirits and thus, to a certain extent, control their actions, particularly when a Pillager is present. Indeed, the tribe's acceptance of the Pillagers is based on the same principle as is their acceptance of the evil beings; they know that each plays a critical role in maintaining the balance and continuity of both the community and the universe. Furthermore, the Chippewa recognize that each individual is empowered by his or her relationship with a guardian spirit, who can be called upon in times of need.

The coming of the whites, however, with their greed for land, their ravaging of natural resources, their deadly diseases, and their imposition of an alien world view, overwhelms the power of the Chippewa world view not only to explain the nature of this massive destruction but also to protect and save the Chippewa from the onslaught. Surely, the Chippewa reason, the gods of the whites are more powerful than our own. Confronted with the loss of their gods — whether they have been subdued, driven out, or totally destroyed — the Chippewa are also confronted with the loss of both tribal and individual identity. Without such identity, dependent as it is on a continuing relationship with the spirit world, they are rendered powerless. In response to the intrusion of the whites into their geographical, spiritual, and cultural space, then, the Chippewa must forge a new identity if they are to survive. Fleur, Pauline, and Nanapush, as depicted in *Tracks*, demonstrate three alternative responses to the destruction of the boundaries separating the Chippewa and white worlds and the intrusion of the whites into Chippewa space.

CHAPTER 4

CALLING TAYO BACK, UNRAVELING COYOTE'S SKIN: INDIVIDUATION IN LESLIE MARMON SILKO'S *CEREMONY*

It was the story of the white shell beads all over again, the white shell beads, stolen from a grave and found by a man as he walked along a trail one day. He carried the beautiful white shell beads on the end of a stick because he suspected where they came from; he left them hanging in the branches of a piñon tree. And although he had never touched them, they haunted him; all he could think of, all he dreamed of, were these white shell beads hanging in that tree. He could not eat, and he could not work. He lost touch with the life he had lived before the day he found those beads; and the man he had been before that day was lost somewhere on that trail where he first saw the beads.

— Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* 169

Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* is similar to Erdrich's *Tracks* in that both novels describe the damage incurred when the Native American world view comes into conflict with the European American world view. For Erdrich this conflict occurs when the whites intrude on Native American space, violating and eroding the boundary separating the two cultures. As a result of this intrusion, she suggests, the Chippewa are confronted with a reality that forces them to sacrifice or radically change their own beliefs. Silko, on the other hand, seems to view the Pueblo as existing within an enclosing and sheltering — although not inviolable — space. Although the Pueblo are affected by the movement of white culture-bearers onto the reservation, the true danger to the individual arises, Silko suggests, when he or she crosses geocultural boundaries, wandering too far from the protective core of the home, family, and tribe. Movement across this boundary into the larger society often transforms a Pueblo into an alien creature. Both Erdrich and Silko describe characters — Pauline and Tayo, respectively — who are permanently or temporarily crazed by their

inability to successfully reconcile or mediate between two conflicting world views. Whereas Erdrich suggests that a healthy reconciliation of both world views is necessary for survival in the modern world, Silko argues that an individual can be cured of such psychological illness only within the framework of his or her own world view. She argues, furthermore, that an individual does not necessarily have to sacrifice his traditional beliefs but can choose to be guided and empowered by a return to or revitalization of those beliefs.

The strength of Silko's novel lies in her emphasis on one's ability, no matter what one's racial makeup, to define one's own identity. One is not essentially a Pueblo or a white or a half-breed; rather, one can choose and then forge one's own identity. Silko's depiction of the tension of being caught between two world views, a struggle manifested not only in Tayo but also in his mother, his aunt, and the other war veterans, is superb. The weakness of the novel, however, is that because Silko couches Tayo's dilemma in terms of choosing between the force of creation and the counter force of destruction, he is confronted with an "either/or" situation. He must choose between creation and destruction, Silko suggests, just as he must choose between Native American and European American beliefs, values, and lifestyles. He does not appear to have the option of imagining and constructing a totally individual identity that builds on and mediates between two opposing world views. Nevertheless, *Ceremony* makes a powerful statement about the personal power and well-being that accrues from defining oneself in relation to the differing belief systems espoused by one's family members, one's friends, and the external society. It makes an equally powerful statement about the spiritual beauty of the Pueblo world view, one in which all elements of the universe, both natural and supernatural, are connected, as are the nodes of a web, with threads that are as fragile as they are strong.

Connections, Boundaries, and Divisions

"The structure of Pueblo expression," Leslie Marmon Silko explained at the 1979 meeting of the English Institute, "resembles something like a spider's web — with many little threads radiating from a center, criss-crossing each other. As with the web, the structure will emerge as it is made and you must simply listen and trust, as the Pueblo people do, that meaning will be made" ("Language and Literature" 54). Silko also warned that the Pueblo perspective on language and storytelling, as on all subjects, is one of totality and wholeness: "We do not differentiate or fragment stories and experiences. In the beginning, Tséitsínako, Thought Woman, thought of all these things, and all of these things are held together as one holds many things together in a single thought" ("Language and Literature" 56). Just as one story cannot be separated from all the others, one word cannot be separated from all other words: "We don't think of words as being alone: words are always with other words, and the other words are almost always in a story of some sort" ("Language and Literature" 55). Each word, each story, each thematic strand of the novel *Ceremony* is part of the whole, linked by threads and filaments to every other word, story, and strand of the web. Isolating a single element of Silko's *Ceremony*, then, not only violates its web-like structure and intricately woven view of totality; it also distorts and diminishes the meaning of both the whole and the fragment. Recognizing the dangers of such an action, I nevertheless focus here on one thematic strand of *Ceremony*'s web: the process by which Tayo, as a direct result of his confrontation with, temporary transformation by, and recovery from witchery, proves himself as a "special breed" (75), capable of surviving the periods of "drought and hard weather" (187) that are a way of life for America's Laguna Pueblo population.

Located at the physical and thematic center of *Ceremony*'s web is the story of the "witches' conference" at which an unidentified Indian witch invents the white race as a tool to be manipulated by witchery.⁴⁴ Radiating out from this central position of power, witchery infiltrates the entire novel from beginning to end. As powerful as witchery is, however, the first story of the novel demonstrates that witchery is the invention of a more powerful creator; all things in the universe — and thus witchery — were created by Ts'its'tsi'nako, Thought-Woman, and her sisters. Similarly, the last story of the novel demonstrates that witchery can be manipulated and turned back on itself; manipulated by Tayo, witchery has "returned into its belly" and "is dead for now" (261). Like all things, however, witchery will return. Witchery's return is guaranteed not only by the law of the universal cycle — birth, death, rebirth — but also by the law of universal balance: witchery was created and continues to exist as the "counter force" to "vitality and birth." As Silko explains it,

I try . . . to see witchery as a sort of metaphor for the destroyers or the counter force, that force which counters vitality and birth. The counter force is destruction and death. . . . in recent years we've gotten into the habit of talking about black and white and good and bad. But back when, it was force or counter force. It may seem corny, but it is the idea of balance, an idea that the world was created that way. In the novel it's the struggle between the force and the counter force. ("A Conversation" 32)

Witchery, then, can be seen as cyclically bound to creativity such that the struggle between the two forces — vitality and birth versus destruction and death — will continue indefinitely. The novel itself suggests that this struggle continues not only on a global scale but also within each community, each family, each individual. One step in the individuation of each person

⁴⁴Linda Danielson, in "Storyteller: Grandmother's Spider Web," *Journal of the Southwest* 30.3 (1988): 325-55, notes that a section on witchcraft also falls at the physical center of the web-like structure of Silko's *Storyteller* (341).

is the determination of his or her position in relation to these two forces. According to Silko, neither force is good or bad in itself. Not to know one's position, however, is likely to cause trouble when one comes up against one force or the other.

Ceremony is the story of one man's struggle between the force of creativity and the counter force of witchery. Both Silko ("A Conversation" 32) and the novel itself insist that witchery and white people are not synonymous; white people are merely an invention of and tool manipulated by Indian witchery. Nevertheless, Tayo's struggle between the two forces manifests itself primarily as a struggle between Native American and European American beliefs and values. The son of a Laguna Pueblo mother, who dies while Tayo is a child, and an unknown white father, Tayo is raised in a household that exacerbates his sense of cultural division: his grandmother and uncle raise him as a Laguna, but his aunt confuses that identity by sending the message, on the one hand, that his white blood excludes him from the family and, on the other, that her own son Rocky is superior because of his ability to be "white."⁴⁵ Despite this internal division, Tayo chooses and adheres to a Laguna identity and belief system until, seduced by the power of the word "brother," he follows Rocky into the white man's war — which proves to be a world manipulated by witchery's destroyers.

⁴⁵Roberta Rubenstein suggests that Tayo's problem arises from being caught between two incompatible social structures, one based on the concept of "agency" and the other on the concept of "communion." Rubenstein quotes psychologist David Bakan, who, in *The Duality of Human Existence: Isolation and Communion in Western Man* (Boston: Beacon, 1966) 15, suggests the use of the term "agency for the existence of an organism as an individual, and communion for the participation of the individual in some larger organism of which the individual is a part. Agency manifests itself in self-protection, self-assertion, and self-expansion; communion manifests itself in the sense of being at one with other organisms. Agency manifests itself in the formation of separations; communion in the lack of separations" (191).

Permanently transformed by his experience in the Philippines, Tayo will never be the same person he was before he left Laguna.

Framing *Ceremony's* central story of Indian witchery are two stories that warn of the dangers inherent in wandering away from home and of the difficulty, after crossing certain boundaries, of finding one's way home again. The first story is about a boy who wandered away from his family in the mountains, ending up in bear country, where he loses his consciousness of himself as a human and assumes the consciousness of a bear. The boy's family calls on a medicine man who, by imitating the sounds and movements of the mother bear, succeeds in enticing the little boy from the bear's cave. Simply finding the boy is not enough, however, for

They couldn't just grab the child
They couldn't simply take him back
because he would be in between forever
and probably he would die.

They had to call him
step by step the medicine man
brought the child back.

So, long time ago
they got him back again
but he wasn't quite the same
after that
not like the other children. (130)

The similarity between Tayo's experience and that of the boy who wandered into bear country is obvious. Both have wandered away from home, slipping without realizing it over a line that, once crossed, cannot be easily regained. Tayo, like the young boy, must be called back slowly, "step by step"; otherwise, he will be caught forever between two worlds, and "probably he would die," just as so many Indians who crossed into the white world — Tayo's mother, Rocky, and the Indians in Gallup — died.

Betonie suggests, however, that despite these similarities, Tayo is not really one of the bear people, not in the way that Betonie's assistant Shush is. Tayo, when he meets Shush, sees "something strange about the boy, something remote in his eyes, as if he were on a distant mountaintop alone and the fire and hogan and the lights of the town below them did not exist" (128). Betonie explains that Shush's mental state, unlike Tayo's, is not a result of witchery but simply an accident, and that Shush's existence, unlike Tayo's, is a peaceful one: "It is very peaceful with the bears; the people say that's the reason human beings seldom return" (130). Shush's condition is incurable, whereas Tayo's can be cured. The true distinction between the two young men is clarified by the "Note on Bear People and Witches," which follows Betonie's discussion of Shush:

Human beings who live with the bears do not wear bear skins. They are naked and not conscious of being different from their bear relatives. Witches crawl into skins of dead animals, but they can do nothing but play around with objects and bodies. . . . (131)

Tayo, since his return from the war, has been cloaked in an alien skin, one that gives him the appearance and identity of a witch. Whereas Shush presumably wandered into bear country and assumed bear consciousness, Tayo wandered into witchery and crawled into the skin of a dead animal.

The second story warning about the dangers inherent in crossing certain boundaries, that of the hunter who was transformed into a coyote, begins immediately after the story of Indian witchery and continues at intervals throughout the remainder of the novel. One day while a man was out hunting, Coyote, who wanted to sleep with the man's wife, stole the

man's skin and donned it himself, cloaking the man in his own coyote skin.⁴⁶ Transformed into a creature that is now more coyote than human, the man crawls from a hard oak tree to a scrub oak to a piñon to a juniper and finally to a wild rose bush, sleeping for a while under each one. To bring the man back, restoring his mind and identity, the people lead him back through hoops made of hard oak, scrub oak, piñon, juniper, and wild rose twigs, after which he walks home following the footprints of a bear. When he gets home, however, he discovers that "it wasn't over. / All kinds of evil were still on him" (144) because "the dry skin / was still stuck / to his body" (153). Although "the effects / of the witchery / of the evil thing / began to leave / his body" as soon as he arrived home (153), the hunter is not completely restored until "the dead skin / Coyote threw / on him" is completely unraveled and "cut / to pieces" along with "every evil / which entangled him" (258). Because Betonie recognizes that Tayo's illness is the result of having been cloaked in Coyote's skin and thus tainted with witchery, he performs a version of the traditional Navajo coyote transformation ceremony to help restore him to his true identity (Bell 48).⁴⁷

As a man caught between two identities — Laguna and white — Tayo is a witch in the sense that he is a human disguised in and manipulated by the powers of a false skin.

⁴⁶These opening details of the story, which tell how Coyote switched skins with the hunter in order to trick the hunter's wife into sleeping with him, are not included in the version included by Silko in *Ceremony*. This summary is drawn from the version recorded by Father Bernard Haile, published in Leland C. Wyman's *The Red Antway of the Navajo* (Santa Fe, 1973) 65 and included in Bell (58-60). The story was told to Haile by "Son of the Late Tall Deshchini," whose name recalls that of Betonie's grandfather, Descheeny.

⁴⁷Robert C. Bell provides excellent background on the importance of ritual identification and recapitulation in Navajo curing ceremonies. Also see Edith Swan's discussion of the use of the Ghostway Ritual, a "generic ceremonial procedure used as an antidote in treating conditions resulting from witchcraft" (321), in "Healing via the Sunwise Cycle in Silko's *Ceremony*," *American Indian Quarterly* 12.4 (1988): 313-28.

According to Paula Gunn Allen, "the Hopi refer to a witch — a person who uses the power of the universe in a perverse or inharmonious way — as a two-hearts, one who is not whole but is split in two at the center of being" (*The Sacred Hoop* 61). Tayo's physical illness, after he returns from the war, is a manifestation of his psychic division; he suffers from a split of his being — a split between those beliefs and actions that contribute to vitality and birth and those that facilitate destruction and death. He suffers not from a loss of belief but from a confusion of belief systems. Tayo never loses the belief, inculcated by old Grandma's "time immemorial stories" (95) and his uncle Josiah's practical application of those stories to daily occurrences, that a single person or a single action has the power to destroy or heal the universe. However, influenced by his white teachers' and white doctors' dismissal of such beliefs as nonsense and superstition, Tayo begins to believe that he is crazy to hold such beliefs. One could say that Tayo's clinging to Laguna beliefs in the face of steady opposition from the white world is a cause of his illness not only because his beliefs make him feel crazy but because they make him feel shame for his errors in judgment. His belief that Josiah appeared in the jungle, where he was killed with the Japanese soldiers, and his belief that he himself caused the drought at Laguna by cursing the rain in the jungle are literally killing him. At the same time, however, the associated belief, instilled by the same "time immemorial stories," that he can make amends for his errors and bring himself back into harmony with the universe is responsible for saving him.

Tayo's doubts about the validity of the old stories are symptomatic of the change in identity incurred when Coyote's skin was thrown on him. Another sign of the false skin's power is that Tayo's sense of his relationship with the external world — the relationship among self, community, and universe — has been distorted. One process crucial to his cure

is the gradual realization that his personal illness is part of a larger illness, that is, the tribal loss and shame shared by all Indians. This tribal illness is, in turn, part of a still larger illness, the witchery infiltrating the entire world. His cure is not complete, and the coyote skin is not completely removed from his body, until he understands how his personal experience — his story or ceremony — is part of the larger experience.

Tayo's return is a long, painful struggle between two forces, one tending toward self-rejuvenation, the other toward self-destruction. Half Laguna and half white, half human and half coyote, Tayo wavers between believing in and doubting the traditional stories, ceremonies, and spiritual helpers. He experiences periods of hope and piercing insight followed by periods of despair and distorted thinking. This shifting back and forth is part of the process of becoming, of growing, of unraveling the false skin. "There were transitions," Betonie tells Tayo, "that had to be made in order to become whole again, in order to be the people our Mother would remember; transitions, like the boy walking in bear country being called back safely" (170). Although Betonie successfully calls Tayo back, "step by step," and although he performs the coyote transformation ceremony that helps Tayo to unravel and throw off the coyote skin, Tayo will never again be the same person he was before the war simply because his experience of and understanding of the world have changed. In this case, however, the change in Tayo is empowering because he recovers a self that is stronger for having been tested, having adapted and survived, and having established its place in the larger ceremony. As a result of his experiences, Tayo succeeds in becoming what Auntie had expected and wanted Rocky to be: "someone who could not only make sense of the outside world but become a part of it" (76).

My discussion of Tayo's individuation is presented in three sections. The first section focuses on Tayo's early years, a period during which the attitudes of Tayo's white teachers, Rocky, and Auntie threaten to subvert the Laguna beliefs instilled by Josiah and old Grandma. Despite this threat, however, Tayo emerges from this period with a belief that is strong enough to encourage him to pray for rain and with an incipient recognition, instilled by Night Swan, of himself as a "special breed." In essence, the beliefs instilled in the first eighteen years of Tayo's life prepare him for the events that follow — both those leading to his illness and those contributing to his cure. The second section focuses on the man cloaked in Coyote's skin — a man whose cursing of the rain is symptomatic of the witchery that is manipulating not only him but the other war veterans of Laguna. The third section focuses on the way in which the ceremony to unravel Coyote's skin strengthens Tayo by helping him to see patterns and relationships among things that he would not have been able to see without the help of Ku'oosh, Betonie, and Ts'eh and, more important, without his near-disastrous journey into and "safe return" (115, 116) from the white world. One of the few survivors of such a journey, Tayo is ultimately strengthened by the experience.

The Early Years: Poised Between Worlds

One morning during the drought-plagued summer before Tayo leaves for the war, he rises before dawn to pray for rain in a canyon where a spring drips into a pool, "flowing . . . drop by drop from the big crack in the side of the cliff" (94). This spring, rising from the center of the earth, is constant: "The people said that even in the driest years nobody could ever remember a time when the spring had dried up" (45). Although Tayo does not know what the holy men do to call the rain clouds during drought, he enacts a ritual of his

own imagining: "The things he did seemed right, as he imagined with his heart the rituals the cloud priests performed during a drought" (94). Although "Josiah never told him much about praying," he did tell him "it should be something he felt deep inside himself" (93). Following an inner voice, then, Tayo gathers "flowers with yellow long petals the color of the sunlight," sprinkles pollen from the flowers on the water, and sits beside the pool to wait. As he watches, a procession of animals — spider, frogs, dragonflies, hummingbird — approach the water in response to the rising sun. As each animal appears, Tayo remembers the stories that associate that animal with rain:

He turned. Everywhere he looked, he saw a world made of stories, the long ago, time immemorial stories, as old Grandma called them. It was a world alive, always changing and moving; and if you knew where to look, you could see it, sometimes almost imperceptible, like the motion of the stars across the sky. (95)

On this summer morning before the war Tayo fully experiences the universe in which he was raised — a universe that lives, "always changing and moving," and that is explained and ordered by the "time immemorial stories." Through these stories each creature within the universe has a relation to each other, to the earth, to the sky, to the rain clouds, and to the deities who govern the fifth world. Knowing the stories helps one remember one's place in that universe, which is an endlessly changing, endlessly unfolding ceremony.

On the first day after Tayo's prayer for rain, clouds begin to gather in the west; on the second morning the sky above Laguna is filled with "low dark rain clouds" (96). By noon the people of Laguna

could hear a low rumble of thunder in the distance, from the direction of Tse-pi'na, Mount Taylor. The wind came from the west, smelling cool like wet clay. Then he could see the rain. It was spinning out of the thunderclouds like gray spider webs and tangling against the foothills of the mountain. (96)

In response to Tayo's prayer, Spider Woman, "the rain's children" (95), the blue dragonflies, and Hummingbird join forces to bring the rain clouds back to Laguna. Tayo's early success in calling the rain clouds suggests that he possesses the powers that mark him as a candidate for membership in Laguna's Ka't'sina cult, which is responsible for controlling the weather, particularly the production of rain (Dozier 151).⁴⁸ The immediate conclusion drawn by Tayo, however, is that old Grandma's stories are true: certain people, usually the holy men, have the power to call the rain. The later belief that his cursing of the rain has caused the drought at Laguna follows naturally from his success in praying for rain.

Tayo's visit to the dripping spring south of Laguna to pray for rain indicates the depth of his belief in the "time immemorial stories" told by old Grandma. Although Tayo has heard the stories from old Grandma, Josiah is responsible for having shown Tayo how those stories apply to day-to-day life. Once when Josiah and Tayo went to the dripping spring to fill the water barrels, Josiah told Tayo,

"You see, . . . there are some things worth more than money." He pointed his chin at the springs and around at the narrow canyon. "This is where we come from, see. This sand, this stone, these trees, the vines, all the wildflowers. This earth keeps us going. . . . These dry years you hear some people complaining, you know, about the dust and the wind, and how dry it is. But the wind and the dust, they are part of life too, like the sun and the sky. You don't swear at them. It's people, see. They're the ones. The old people used to say that droughts happen when people forget, when people misbehave." (45-46)

In plain words, Josiah delivers the same message conveyed by old Grandma's story about the time the people "were / so busy / playing around with that / Ck'o'yo magic / they neglected the mother corn altar" (48): people are responsible for drought; people bring the droughts

⁴⁸The Ka't'sina are ancestral spirits who bring rain; the Laguna believe that the Ka't'sina visit each year during the winter, entering the village at dawn on a November morning.

on by misbehaving, by angering the mother of the people. Cursing the wind and the dust is wrong because they are just as much a part of life, of the cycle, as the sun and the sky. Furthermore, one must learn to expect drought periodically because people continue to make mistakes. Tayo himself makes a careless mistake, he learns from Josiah, when he kills a pile of flies for sport. When Tayo attempts to exonerate himself by explaining that his teacher said that flies "are bad and carry sickness," Josiah responds:

Well, I didn't go to school much, so I don't know about that but you see, long time ago, way back in the time immemorial, the mother of the people got angry at them for the way they were behaving. For all she cared, they could go to hell — starve to death. The animals disappeared, the plants disappeared, and no rain came for a long time. It was the greenbottle fly who went to her, asking forgiveness for the people. Since that time the people have been grateful for what the fly did for us. (101)

As soon as Josiah reminds Tayo of the story, Tayo knows that he is at fault and, furthermore, that he alone is responsible for whatever catastrophe falls on the people as a result of his act. It only takes one mistake by one person to anger the mother of the people, and he knows from the story that "it wasn't easy" (113) to work out all the details of forgiveness. Seeing that Tayo understands the severity and the consequences of his act, Josiah comforts him, saying, "People make mistakes. The flies know that. That's how the greenbottle fly first came around anyway. To help the people who had made some mistakes. . . . Next time, just remember the story" (101-02).

Josiah has lived long enough to know that people will always make mistakes and that, consequently, drought will always plague the people of Laguna. Rather than curse the wind and the dust, he determines to accept and accommodate these conditions by raising "a new breed of cattle that could live in spite of drought and hard weather" (187). Following the advice of Night Swan, a Mexican woman living in Cubero, Josiah buys a herd of Mexican

cattle that are "descendants of generations of desert cattle" (74). Unlike "the weak, soft Herefords that grew thin and died from eating thistle and burned-off cactus during the drought," the Mexican cattle were "born in dry sand and scrubby mesquite, where they hunted water the way desert antelope did" (74). The Mexican cattle, Josiah explains to Tayo, are a "special breed" (75). They are survivors; because of their breeding, they can survive under conditions that kill the Herefords, which have been separated too long from the land:

Cattle are like any living thing. If you separate them from the land for too long, keep them in barns and corrals, they lose something. Their stomachs get to where they can only eat rolled oats and dry alfalfa. When you turn them loose again, they go running all over. They are scared because the land is unfamiliar, and they are lost. They don't stop being scared either, even when they look quiet and they quit running. Scared animals die off easily. (74)

Josiah's message to Tayo is that to survive in a land noted for its "drought and hard weather," one must be a "special breed," one descended from generations of ancestors who have learned to live with the land and who combine the survival techniques of several species. Those breeds who have lost their connection with the land are lost, scared, and vulnerable to death and extinction. The adaptation and continuing survival of the spotted cattle demonstrate, as Peter G. Beidler notes, that today's Indians "must, if they are to survive, learn to know what to accept and what to resist" (18).

Josiah, more than anyone else, assumes the responsibility of raising Tayo after Tayo's mother leaves him with Auntie.⁴⁹ Years later the medicine man Ku'oosh suggests that

⁴⁹Josiah's assumption of this responsibility is not unusual since, among the Laguna, the mother's brother often acts as a "guardian" of his sister's children, even when their father lives with the family (Fred Eggan, *Social Organization of the Western Pueblos* [Chicago: U Chicago P, 1950] 264).

Josiah had not known enough about religious matters — about the fragility of the world and about the healing ceremonies — to educate Tayo sufficiently before Tayo went to the war (35). Although Josiah may not have educated Tayo formally in Laguna beliefs and ritual, he provided Tayo with a world view that would fully prepare him to understand and believe the later words and actions of not only Ku'oosh but also of Betonie and Ts'eh. Without the grounding in Laguna belief provided by Josiah, supplementing the "time immemorial stories" told by old Grandma, Betonie's ceremony would have had no meaning and thus no power to heal him. The problems that later arise for Tayo are caused not by a lack of education in Laguna beliefs but by the confusion arising from education in conflicting beliefs. Directly opposing and conflicting with the stories told by Josiah and old Grandma are the stories told by Tayo's science teachers, Rocky, and Auntie.

When Tayo goes to the dripping spring in the canyon to pray for rain, he is acting on his continued belief in the stories told by old Grandma, a belief nurtured and sustained despite the years he has spent at the Indian school:

He knew what white people thought about the stories. In school the science teacher had explained what superstition was, and then held the science textbook up for the class to see the true source of explanations. He had studied those books, and he had no reasons to believe the stories any more. The science books explained the causes and effects. But old Grandma always used to say, "Back in time immemorial, things were different, the animals could talk to human beings and many magical things still happened." He never lost the feeling he had in his chest when she spoke those words . . . ; and he still felt it was true, despite all they had taught him in school (94-95)

Holding on to his belief in old Grandma's stories had not been easy, however, under the pressure applied by the teachers "not to believe in that kind of 'nonsense'" (19). In his science class the Navajo students had left the room when the teachers brought in dead frogs to dissect. When a girl from Jemez explained that "the old people always told the kids not

to kill frogs, because the frogs would get angry and send so much rain there would be floods," the teacher roared with laughter. "Where are all the floods?" he asked them. "We dissect them in this class every year" (194-95).⁵⁰

Despite the teacher's yearly demonstration that killing frogs does not result in floods and that every event has a scientific explanation, Tayo continues to believe at some level in the old stories. He clings to his belief even though that belief widens the distance between himself and Rocky, the cousin he loves as a brother. When Rocky and Tayo go hunting together, Rocky refuses to participate in the "ritual of the deer" — sprinkling cornmeal on the deer's nose to feed its spirit, thus ensuring that it would "come to die for them the following year" (57). Each time Tayo, Josiah, Robert, and old Grandma perform the details of the ritual, Rocky is embarrassed by their superstition and "old-time ways" (51); during his first year at boarding school in Albuquerque, Rocky had chosen the white world over the world of the Laguna:

He was an A-student and all-state in football and track. He had to win; he said he was always going to win. So he listened to his teachers, and he listened to the coach. They were proud of him. They told him, "Nothing can stop you now except one thing: don't let the people at home hold you back." Rocky understood what he had to do to win in the white outside world. . . . (51)

Again and again Rocky turns to his textbooks to prove the fallacy of the "old-time ways." When Josiah complains that the books the extension agent gave him on cattle breeding do not allow for "drought or winter blizzards or dry thistles" and suggests that they will have to

⁵⁰Tayo, however, later experiences the devastation of flooding in the Philippine jungles; the frogs, he believes, simply wait for the proper time and way in which to express their anger.

write their own book to address these special issues, Rocky is irritated by his uncle's presumption:

"Those books are written by scientists. They know everything there is to know about beef cattle. That's the trouble with the way the people around here have always done things — they never knew what they were doing." . . . He did not hesitate to speak like that, to his father and his uncle, because the subject was books and scientific knowledge — those things that Rocky had learned to believe in. (76)

Rocky's only desire is to get away from the reservation, to separate himself from the family, the clan, and their beliefs and rituals. Enlisting in the Army provides him with a quick exit: "He was already thinking of the years ahead and the new places and people that were waiting for him in the future he had lived for since he first began to believe in the word 'someday' the way white people do" (73). Later when Tayo begins to fall apart under the strain of the war, Rocky smiles and says, "Hey, I know you're homesick. But, Tayo, we're *supposed* to be here. This is what we're supposed to do" (8). Rocky lives and dies believing in the American dream.

Unlike Rocky, Tayo had never wanted or planned to leave the reservation. He ends up in the war only because Rocky tells the recruiter that they are brothers: "It was the first time in all the years that Tayo had lived with him that Rocky ever called him 'brother'" (65). Overwhelmed by the thought of the two of them "traveling the world in the Army, together, as brothers" (72), Tayo forgets that he has promised Josiah that he will help him raise the Mexican cattle. When Tayo does remember the promise and tells Rocky that he cannot go,

Rocky walked on without him: Tayo stood there watching the darkness descend. He was familiar with that hollow feeling. He remembered it from the nights after they had buried his mother, when he stuffed the bed covers around his stomach and close to his heart, hugging the blankets into the empty space of loss, regret for things which could not be changed. (73)

Tayo, then, goes to the war with Rocky because he cannot accept the loss of both a mother and a brother. Eventually, however, he loses both to the white world.⁵¹

Auntie feels so disgraced by her sister's sleeping with white men and sending home a half-breed son to be raised that she makes certain that no one will mistake her son and her nephew as brothers. She is careful to "maintain a distance between Rocky, who was her pride, and this other, unwanted child" (65). Despite her efforts to distance Tayo from Rocky and herself, however, "she would not let Tayo go outside or play in another room alone. She wanted him close enough to feel excluded, to be aware of the distance between them" (67). In this way, Auntie never allows Tayo to forget that he is different, a half-breed, a disgrace, and a burden. Auntie's position in relation to the boundary separating Indians from whites seems very confused; she seems to want both to maintain and to destroy that boundary. For example, despite her very strong feelings that the family was disgraced by her sister's relations with white men, Auntie supports Rocky's efforts to move into the white world:

She wanted him to be a success. She could see what white people wanted in an Indian, and she believed this way was his only chance. She saw it as her only chance too, after all the village gossip about their family. (51)

Auntie is willing to sacrifice Pueblo ways and beliefs, then, to gain her son's success and the respect of her neighbors. She has already given up old Grandma's beliefs for those of Catholicism, "going to church by herself, where she could show the people that she was a devout Christian and not immoral or pagan like the rest of the family" (77).

⁵¹Rocky is destroyed by his desire to be accepted by the white world just as surely as Tayo's mother was. In fact, Betonie suggests that, had Rocky survived the war, he would most likely have ended up among the Indians dying in Gallup (131); thus, Auntie's son ends up — and would have ended up — similarly to Auntie's sister despite the distinction Auntie perceives in her son's and sister's relations with whites.

Too often Auntie's actions are motivated by her fear of the power of village gossip. When her sister sleeps with whites and when Josiah goes to visit Night Swan, Auntie is more concerned about the stories that will be told about the family than about any effect those actions may have on the family:

I've spent all my life defending this family, but nobody ever stops to think what the people will say or that Father Kenneth will call me outside after mass to speak with me. . . .

It doesn't bother me . . . but this hurts old Grandma so much. . . . Our family, old Grandma's family, was so highly regarded at one time. She is used to being respected by people. . . . (88)

Tayo knows, however, that Auntie is wrong about old Grandma. He knows that old Grandma "liked to sit by her stove and gossip about the people who were talking about their family" (89). Unlike Auntie, who allows herself to be defined by the villagers' stories, old Grandma recognizes that storytelling is a continuous, interactive process. No one storyteller can tell the whole story. A master storyteller can always defuse the power of a neighbor's story by telling one of her own: "The story was all that counted. If she had a better one about them, then it didn't matter what they said" (89).⁵²

Although Tayo knows that Auntie's stories about her disgrace, her burdens, and her sacrifices are only part of a larger story, he cannot help believing their underlying message. Indeed, his sense of identity necessarily derives, to a large extent, from the stories told about

⁵²Silko makes similar statements about the power of storytelling in her presentation at the meeting of the English Institute: "When a member of one's own family does something that cannot be excused, one always knows stories about similar things which happened in other families. And it is not done maliciously. . . . Keeping track of all the stories within the community gives . . . a useful perspective which brings incidents down to a level we can deal with. If others have done it before, it cannot be too terrible. If others have endured, so can we" ("Language and Literature" 59).

him and his mother. According to Silko, the stories, both positive and negative, about a person define his or her identity and his or her place in the community:

that's how you know you belong, if the stories incorporate you into them. . . . It's stories that make this a community. People tell those stories about you and your family or about others and they begin to create your identity. In a sense, you are told who you are, or you know who you are by the stories that are told about you. . . . ("A Conversation" 29-30)

This process of external identification is normally beneficial. The danger, Silko warns, lies in the possibility that an enemy may change the story, telling a version that gives a distorted and damaging view of one's identity. However, "if you have already heard the story, you know your family's version of what *really* happened . . . , so when somebody else is mentioning it, you will have a version of the story to counterbalance it" ("Language and Literature" 58). In Tayo's case, the stories told by his aunt confirm rather than counterbalance the stories he hears from the community. As a result, he believes that his "birth had betrayed his mother and brought shame to the family and to the people" (128). When Tayo meets Night Swan, however, she provides him with another version of his story, one to defuse the power of that told by his aunt. Night Swan, who has "hazel brown eyes" (82), tells Tayo, "I have been watching you for a long time I saw the color of your eyes" (99). He tells her that his friends used to tease him about his "Mexican eyes" and that he had always wished for "dark eyes like other people": "When they look at me they remember things that happened. My mother" (99). Night Swan tells him,

They are afraid, Tayo. They feel something happening, they can see something happening around them, and it scares them. Indians or Mexicans or whites — most people are afraid of change. They think that if their children have the same color of skin, the same color of eyes, that nothing is changing. . . . They are fools. They blame us, the ones who look different. That way they don't have to think about what has happened inside themselves.

. . .

You don't have to understand what is happening. But remember this day. You will recognize it later. You are part of it now. (99-100)

Tayo, of course, does remember the day, partly because Night Swan takes him to bed, initiating him into manhood, their lovemaking accompanied by the sounds of rain falling on Laguna in response to his prayer at the dripping spring. He also remembers the day because of her suggestion that being different — being a "special breed" in a world that fears change and difference and in a universe in which special people can control the weather — has marked him for a special role in an unfolding ceremony.

The first eighteen years of Tayo's life have subjected him to conflicting world views as well as conflicting attitudes about the status of a half-breed in the Indian, white, and Mexican worlds. Despite the pressure of his teachers to give up his belief in the "time immemorial stories," he clings to them, finding in them a relationship between past and present, natural and supernatural, human and animal worlds that is more satisfying than the cause and effect explanations provided by the science textbooks. He learns from old Grandma, Josiah, and Night Swan to choose the stories he wishes to live by, to create his own story, and to counterbalance the stories told by others with the stories of his own choice and creation. Belief in the "time immemorial stories" gives Tayo the power to call the rain clouds, to heal the drought-stricken land of his people. His agreement, however, to accompany Rocky off the reservation into the white world, into a world of war and destruction, strains his belief in the old stories. Even though the validity of his beliefs has been demonstrated by his success in praying for rain, he allows Rocky and the white doctors who treat him for "battle fatigue" to convince him that he is sick, crazy, his perceptions distorted by hallucination. The war is a devastating experience for Tayo, but as a result of

that experience he begins to perceive the relationship among his personal loss and shame, the loss and shame of all Indians, and the witchery and destruction that has overtaken the world.

The War and Its Aftermath: Cloaked in Coyote's Skin

When Tayo agrees to enlist with Rocky, forgetting and breaking his promise to help Josiah raise the new breed of spotted Mexican cattle, he enters the white world, a world in which humans are manipulated by destroyers and witchery. By choosing Rocky over Josiah, Tayo is choosing the whites, the destroyers, the Ck'o'yo magic over the "special breed," the healers, the mother of the people.⁵³ Tayo's choice is motivated by his desire to be called brother and his need to fill the hollow permanently carved in his stomach by the loss of his mother. Perhaps he believed that Josiah, the uncle who had assumed the role of father and teacher, would always be there.

Josiah dies, however, while Tayo is at war; presumably, Josiah's death is the result of his having been worn down by efforts first to keep up with the cattle, which had continued to run south toward Mexico, and then to recover them after they had disappeared for good. In addition to being physically weakened, however, Josiah was perhaps spiritually broken by the loss of his vision for raising a new breed. Although Tayo understands the facts of Josiah's death in Laguna, he experiences Josiah's death in a different way. In Tayo's story of Josiah's death, Josiah appears to Tayo in the Philippine jungle, where Tayo has been ordered to execute a group of Japanese soldiers. Recognizing Josiah among the prisoners,

⁵³Ma'see'wi and Ou'yu'ye'wi, the war twins charged with "caring for the / mother corn altar" (46), cause a drought when they desert the altar for Ck'o'yo magic. Rocky and Tayo can also be seen as war twins, lured from the force of vitality and birth by the counter force of witchery's Ck'o'yo magic — the destruction and death of the white man's war.

Tayo is unable to shoot, but the other American soldiers fulfill the order, killing Josiah along with the Japanese. Rocky, the corporal, and later the white doctors all try to convince Tayo that the slain soldier is not Josiah, that his vision of Josiah among the Japanese is symptomatic of battle fatigue or the type of hallucination caused by malarial fever. Tayo, however, is certain that "Josiah had been there, in the jungle; he had come. Tayo had watched him die, and he had done nothing to save him" (19). Ever since Tayo was a child, believing that he could stand on "the high sandstone cliff" of Bone Mesa and reach the moon, he had known that

Distance and days existed in themselves . . . ; they all had a story. They were not barriers. If a person wanted to get to the moon, there was a way; it all depended on whether you knew the directions — exactly which way to go and what to do to get there; it depended on whether you knew the story of how others before you had gone. . . . (19)

Tayo knows, then, that if Josiah had wanted to come to the jungle, to visit him, to deliver a message perhaps, at the moment of his death, he could have — simply by following the directions provided in stories of "how others before [him] had gone."⁵⁴

⁵⁴One symptom of Tayo's illness is his distorted thinking; he forgets, for example, that both Josiah and Rocky could always find their way home, crossing the barrier of death, because they would have known "exactly which way to go and what to do to get there." Directions based on actual geographical landmarks are extremely important in Pueblo stories. In "Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination," *Antaeus* 57 (1986): 83-94, Silko says that hunting stories

contained information of critical importance about behavior and migration patterns of mule deer. Hunting stories carefully described key landmarks and locations of fresh water. Thus a deer-hunt story might also serve as a "map." Lost travelers, and lost piñon-nut gatherers, have been saved by sighting a rock formation they recognize only because they once heard a hunting story describing this formation.

. . . Location, or "place," nearly always plays a central role in the Pueblo oral narratives. Indeed, stories are most frequently recalled as people are passing by a specific geographical feature or the exact place where a story takes place. . . . the places where the stories occur are precisely located, and prominent geographical details are recalled, even if the landscape is well-

The message that Josiah delivers, or that Tayo hears, is that Tayo is responsible for his death, that Josiah had "died because there was no one to help him search for the cattle after they were stolen" (124). After the war, Tayo's continuing belief in Josiah's appearance in the Philippine jungles is one of two primary symptoms of Tayo's continuing "battle fatigue." The effects of Tayo's memory of and belief in that appearance are twofold. On one level he knows that breaking his promise to Josiah caused Josiah's death, resulting in the loss of the man who had loved him, a loss that is compounded by shame: "He loved me. He loved me, and I didn't do anything to save him" (124). On another level, however, Tayo believes he is crazy for believing that Josiah was actually among the Japanese soldiers in the jungle. He later tells Betonie,

My uncle Josiah was there that day. Yet I know he couldn't have been there. He was thousands of miles away, at home in Laguna. We were in the Philippine jungles. I understand that. I know he couldn't have been there. But I've got this feeling and it won't go away even though I know he wasn't there. I feel like he was there. I feel like he was there with those Japanese soldiers who died. (124)

For Tayo the feeling that Josiah was there in the jungle overrides the reasoning that tells him that he could not have been there. Although Tayo fears that his continuing belief clearly indicates that he is crazy, Betonie assures him that seeing Josiah among the Japanese is both sane and natural: "It isn't surprising you saw him with them. You saw who they were. Thirty thousand years ago they were not strangers. You saw what the evil had done: you

known to listeners. Often . . . the turning point in the narrative involved a peculiarity or special quality of a rock or tree or plant found only at that place. (88)

The special significance of the many landmarks, places, and directions that are so carefully identified in *Ceremony* is discussed by Nelson (281-316), Swan (229-49), and Edith Swan, "Healing via the Sunwise Cycle in Silko's *Ceremony*, *American Indian Quarterly* 12.4 (1988): 313-28.

saw the witchery ranging as wide as this world" (124). Betonie, then, suggests that the true message conveyed by Josiah's appearance is that the Japanese are not the enemy; to kill a Japanese soldier, Josiah may have been trying to tell Tayo, is to kill a friend, a relative, a beloved uncle.⁵⁵ Although Tayo does not consciously hear this message, Josiah's appearance among the Japanese soldiers does prevent Tayo from killing them:

When the sergeant told them to kill all the Japanese soldiers lined up in front of the cave with their hands on their heads, Tayo could not pull the trigger. The fever made him shiver, and the sweat was stinging his eyes and he couldn't see clearly; in that instant he saw Josiah standing there; the face was dark from the sun, and the eyes were squinting as though he were about to smile at Tayo. So Tayo stood there, stiff with nausea, while they fired at the soldiers, and he watched his uncle fall . . . (7-8)

Josiah appears among the Japanese to prevent Tayo from committing a mistake he will later regret, thoughtlessly killing Japanese soldiers as he had once thoughtlessly killed a pile of flies.

Although Tayo later speaks to Betonie about his responsibility for Josiah's death, he is unable to tell either him or the medicine man Ku'oosh that he cursed the rain while he was in the jungle. Listening to Ku'oosh explain about the fragility of the world, Tayo knows that he is unable

to explain what had happened. He did not know how to tell him that he had not killed any enemy . . . 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. . . . (36)

⁵⁵Silko's suggestion here and elsewhere that the Japanese and the Native Americans are actually members of a divided family and that they are both equally misguided victims of witchery seems somewhat simplistic. Maxine Hong Kingston, for example, acquired a version of Asian history that differs significantly from that suggested by Silko: "I for one," says Kingston, "was raised with vivid stories about Japanese killing ten million Chinese, including my relatives, and was terrified of Japanese . . ." ("Cultural Mis-readings" 61). In Silko's scheme, the western powers who dropped the atomic bomb are clearly destroyers; less clear in her scheme, however, is the position of the Japanese.

Although Josiah's appearance prevents Tayo from killing any enemy, Tayo makes a mistake that is "far worse." In his desire to save Rocky, he abuses the power of words. To keep himself and the corporal walking, carrying Rocky on a blanket stretcher between them, Tayo creates a story, telling the corporal that "it wasn't much farther now, and all down hill from there":

He made a story for all of them, a story to give them strength. The words of the story poured out of his mouth as if they had substance, pebbles and stone extending to hold the corporal up, to keep his knees from buckling, to keep his hands from letting go of the blanket. (12)

Creating a story to guide their steps along the death march, Tayo hopes to save Rocky. Despite his efforts, however, the jungle rains increase, growing louder and stronger, flooding down the "green coastal mountains," knocking the corporal off his feet, tearing the stretcher from Tayo's grasp. Recognizing that the flooding rain is more powerful than the story he has created, he changes his story, using the power of words to damn the rain rather than to bolster the corporal. Struggling to lift the stretcher, Tayo

started repeating "Goddamn, goddamn!" He damned the rain until the words were a chant He wanted the words to make a cloudless blue sky, pale with a summer sun pressing across wide and empty horizons. The words gathered inside him and gave him strength. He pulled on the corporal's arm; he lifted him to his knees and all the time he could hear his own voice praying against the rain. (12)

Although Tayo occasionally doubts that he actually saw Josiah in the jungle, berating himself for the craziness of such a belief, he never doubts that his cursing of the rain brought drought to the people of Laguna: "He had prayed the rain away, and for the sixth year it was dry; the grass turned yellow and it did not grow. Wherever he looked, Tayo could see the consequences of his praying . . ." (14). All the "time immemorial stories" warn that one's actions, whether committed in haste, in anger, or in ignorance, have catastrophic

consequences not only for the person who committed the act but for all the people. The controlling deities are easily angered and easily offended, and their usual response, when angered or offended, is to abandon the fifth world entirely. Tayo knows, then, that his cursing of the rain in the jungle was a terrible mistake. Floods, like dust and wind, are as much a part of life as sun and sky. Disruptions in the balance of drought and flood do not just occur randomly; they are caused by people's mistakes. Furthermore, Tayo compounds his original mistake by also cursing and killing the flies crawling on Rocky's body (102). With no emissary to travel to the fourth world to ask the mother of the people for forgiveness, Tayo is left on his own to right the wrongs — the acts of destruction and death — he has committed.

Both of Tayo's mistakes — forgetting his promise to Josiah and cursing the rain — originate from his desire to hold on to Rocky in an attempt to heal the loss left by his mother. By the time he returns to Laguna, however, Tayo's loss has been quadrupled; in addition to his mother, he has now also lost Rocky, Josiah, and his connection to the land and to the mother of the people. Neither Tayo's loss, however, nor his shame for incurring those losses can be separated from a larger loss and shame shared by all Indians.

Even as a young boy, Tayo recognized that his personal loss of a mother to white men, who slept with and then beat her, was only part of a much greater loss. The people of Laguna experienced the loss of Tayo's mother, Little Sister, as the loss of a part of themselves:

When Little Sister had started drinking wine and riding in cars with white men and Mexicans, the people could not define their feelings at the drunkenness and lust, but the people felt something deeper: they were losing her, they were losing part of themselves. . . .

. . .

The people wanted her back. Her sister [Auntie] must bring her back. For the people, it was that simple, and when they failed, the humiliation fell on all of them; what happened to the girl did not happen to her alone, it happened to all of them. (68, 69)

When the Catholic priest considers Tayo's mother, he regrets the loss of another "individual soul" (68). When the people of Laguna consider her, however, they feel within themselves "an old sensitivity," the shared consciousness that bound them generation after generation as a single clan, a single entity sharing a single name. To lose Little Sister to the white men — or alternatively, to lose a Helen Jean to Gallup or to lose Tayo and the other war veterans to drunkenness and witchery — is to lose themselves. Thus, when a child wanders from home, the family must bring the child back, calling it back "step by step" to family and clan.

Auntie might have succeeded in bringing Tayo's mother back if Little Sister had not already been "ashamed of herself." First "shamed by what they taught her in school about the deplorable ways of the Indian people" and then encouraged by "holy missionary white people" to leave her home, Little Sister gradually succumbs to self-hatred: "She hated the people at home when white people talked about their peculiarities; but she always hated herself more because she still thought about them, because she knew their pain at what she was doing with her life" (69). Eventually, Little Sister becomes like all the other Indians in Gallup: "By the time they realized what had happened to them, they must have believed it was too late to go home" (115).

The internalized shame that separates Little Sister from her home and that holds Helen Jean in Gallup is the same shame that drives the war veterans to try to recreate the feelings experienced during the war by drinking beer and reciting war stories. After Little Sister was first shamed by her teachers and urged to leave home, she was surprised and flattered to receive the attention of white men (68). In the same way, Emo, Leroy, and

Harley, taught to feel shame about "the deplorable ways of the Indian people," were gratified to be accepted by whites, both male and female, as soon as they stepped into their Army uniforms. Putting on the Army uniform was like putting on a new white skin; they believed their own skin was completely covered. As Tayo says, when forced by his drunken friends to tell a war story,

See these dumb Indians thought these good times would last. They didn't ever want to give up the cold beer and the blond cunt. Hell no! They were America the Beautiful too, this was the land of the free just like teachers said in school. They had the uniform and they didn't look different no more. They got respect. (42)

When the war ended, however, the uniforms were put away, and Indians, veterans or not, were treated as Indians again. Rather than attack whites for their hypocritical treatment of the Indians, for taking away the feeling they had temporarily bestowed on the Indians, the veterans blamed themselves:

They blamed themselves for losing the new feeling; they never talked about it, but they blamed themselves just like they blamed themselves for losing the land the white people took. They never thought to blame white people for any of it; they wanted white people for their friends. They never saw that it was the white people who took it away again when the war was over. (43)

For Emo and the other war veterans, life after the war becomes a continuous attempt to regain the feeling of acceptance experienced during the war, to deny that anything had been lost, and to bury the shame of having allowed the new feeling to be stolen from them just as they had allowed the land to be stolen. Sustaining the feeling of belonging and denying the loss and shame require the communal recitation of stories. Thus, the veterans gather frequently to repeat the stories of their conquests in San Diego and at Wake Island "like long medicine chants, the beer bottles pounding on the counter tops like drums" (43).

Few Indians who venture into the white world, Silko suggests, receive what Rocky had wished for the night before he and Tayo had shipped out and what Tayo later wishes for the night he visits Betonie in Gallup — "a safe return" (115, 116). Some die in foreign countries; some are buried alive in white hospitals; some are stranded in Gallup, Albuquerque, or Los Angeles. Others return home but are never the same again. Although the Scalp Ceremony conducted by Ku'oosh and other medicine men has the power to "lay to rest the Japanese souls in the green humid jungles" and to satisfy "the female giant who fed on the dreams of warriors," it is powerless to cure the veterans of the most devastating consequence of having left home (169). The war veterans never recover from having seen "what the white people had made from the stolen land" (169). Like the man who was forever haunted by the experience of having found a strand of white shell beads that had been stolen from a grave and dropped along the trail, the war veterans never recover from having experienced the excesses of modern white cities. The man who found the stolen beads "lost touch with the life he had lived before the day he found those beads; and the man he had been before that day was lost somewhere on that trail where he first saw the beads" (169). The idea that anyone would violate the graves of the dead is too horrific; but each day the war veterans experience a similar horror:

they had to look at the land, from horizon to horizon, and every day the loss was with them; it was the dead unburied, and the mourning of the lost going on forever. So they tried to sink the loss in booze, and silence their grief with war stories about their courage, defending the land they had already lost. (169)

Although Tayo suffers from a personal loss and a personal shame, he also shares the loss and shame of the other war veterans — the loss of the feeling that they were finally accepted and even liked by whites and the shame of losing that feeling, acceptance, and friendship. In the

same way, however, the collective loss of the war veterans is only a small part of the larger loss and shame experienced by all Indians — the loss of their land and the shame of their having allowed it to be not only stolen from them but destroyed.

The people of Laguna never really understood that Mount Taylor had been taken from them until they saw it being destroyed. They knew that the mountain had been taken by the National Forest and the State of New Mexico and then sold in the early 1900s to white ranchers from Texas. Because they continued to hunt on the mountain, however, ignoring deeds, titles, and fences, they could not see that the land was actually gone. After the logging companies moved in during the 1920s and 1930s, stripping the slopes and canyons, organizing full-time hunting to feed the loggers, and allowing the loggers to kill the bears and mountain lions for sport, the Laguna people finally "understood that the land had been taken, because they couldn't stop these white people from coming to destroy the animals and the land" (186). Watching the destruction of the land and recognizing their inability to save it, the people come to understand their loss. Like Tayo watching as Josiah is killed but unable to save him, the people suffer from both their loss of what they love and their shame over allowing the destruction to happen. Witnessing the destruction of Mount Taylor, the holy men warn the people of Laguna that "the balance of the world had been disturbed and the people could expect droughts and harder days to come" (186). Like Tayo, the priests recognize that the universe always responds to the mistakes of humans.

When Tayo tells Betonie that he too is angered by the realization that the whites "took almost everything," Betonie delivers two messages. The first is that the Indians can never recover the land by fighting the whites:

Indians wake up every morning of their lives to see the land which was stolen, still there, within reach, its theft being flaunted. And the desire is

strong to make things right, to take back what was stolen and to stop them from destroying what they have taken. But you see, Tayo, we have done as much fighting as we can with the destroyers and the thieves: as much as we could do and still survive. (128)

In a physical confrontation with the destroyers, the Indians would be easily overcome and annihilated. Also, to become a destroyer and thief in response to the destruction and thievery of others is to succumb to witchery, thus destroying in oneself those very beliefs and values that differentiate one from the destroyers. Betonie's second message is that the real battle is not between Indians and whites: "Nothing is that simple . . . you don't write off all the white people, just like you don't trust all the Indians" (128). The battle, rather, is against destroyers, humans of all ethnic origins who allow themselves to be manipulated by witchery to kill life because they fear it.

Emo, of course, is a prime example of an Indian, suffering from the loss and shame of being Indian, who has been transformed into a destroyer, a tool manipulated by witchery:

Then Emo took out the little bag again. . . . He poured the human teeth out on the table. . . . They were his war souvenirs, the teeth he had knocked out of the corpse of a Japanese soldier. . . .

"We were the best. U.S. Army. We butchered every Jap we found. No Jap bastard was fit to take prisoner. We had all kinds of ways to get information out of them before they died. Cut off this, cut off these." Emo was grinning and hunched over, staring at the teeth.

Tayo could hear it in his voice when he talked about the killing — how Emo grew from each killing. Emo fed off each man he killed, and the higher the rank of the dead man, the higher it made Emo.

"We blew them all to hell. We should've dropped bombs on all the rest and blown them off the face of the earth." (60-61)

Tayo, enraged by the sound of the teeth rattling as Emo plays with them and by the sound of Emo's words of destruction and death, lunges at Emo, thrusting a broken beer bottle into his belly. The witchery that manipulates Emo triggers Tayo's own, a core of violence that exists deep inside Tayo despite his conscious disdain for Emo's dependence on killing for

self-definition. Half human and half coyote, Tayo finds himself behaving like a witch, contributing to the counter force of destruction and death, when what he really wants is to renew his connection with the forces of vitality and birth.

To be successful, Tayo's cure must address all three levels of his illness — personal, tribal, and global. He must be called back slowly, through a series of transitions, dealing first with the loss and shame resulting from having forgotten his promise to Josiah and having cursed the rain. Then he must deal with the loss and shame shared by all Indians for having allowed the land to be stolen and destroyed. Finally, he must remove the false skin that has been thrown over him, threatening to transform him into a destroyer, a witch in animal skins playing around with "objects and bodies." Ku'oosh, Betonie, and Ts'eh work together to call Tayo back, providing him with the stories that tell him "exactly which way to go and what to do to get there." Tayo's belief in the "time immemorial stories," which teach that the actions of a single person can either destroy the universe or heal it, helps him to recognize that nothing is ever lost, to see his personal ceremony as part of a greater, all-inclusive one, and to "make sense of the outside world" and "become a part of it" once more.

Tayo's Cure: Unraveling Coyote's Skin

When old Grandma decides that Tayo needs the help of a medicine man, Auntie offers two complaints so different in content that they clearly reveal her own conflict in allegiance to both the Indian and white worlds. Her first complaint is that people will believe that a medicine man should not help a half-breed:

You know what people will say if we ask for a medicine man to help him. Someone will say it's not right. They'll say, "Don't do it. He's not full blood anyway." . . . (33)

Old Grandma responds to Auntie's complaint with a clear, simple statement: "He's my grandson" (33). Tayo's lineage is clear to old Grandma: in Laguna society, lineage is passed through the female, and Tayo is her daughter's son. Auntie's second response, delivered only half-heartedly since she already knows she has lost this battle, is that Tayo's white doctors will object: "You know what the Army doctor said: 'No Indian medicine.' Old Ku'oosh will bring his bag of weeds and dust. The doctor won't like it" (34).

Although Auntie's allegiance to white versus Indian ways is conflicted, old Grandma's is not. Even Tayo, despite being raised in the home of an aunt whose loyalties are so confused, understands that the white doctors will never be able to cure him. The white doctors had insisted that

he had to think only of himself, and not about the others, that he would never get well as long as he used words like "we" and "us." But he had known the answer all along, even while the white doctors were telling him he could get well and he was trying to believe them: medicine didn't work that way, because the world didn't work that way. His sickness was only part of something larger, and his cure would be found only in something great and inclusive of everything. (125-26)

Tayo knows, then, even before Ku'oosh and later Betonie remind him, that his illness is not an isolated event. His illness is both a consequence and a cause of the continuation and spread of a greater illness that is affecting the family, the tribe, the world. Thus, his cure must be "something great and inclusive of everything," attacking the total illness, not just an individual fragment.

Ku'oosh, when called on by old Grandma, is unable to cure Tayo. What he does do, however, is confirm the beliefs Tayo picked up from old Grandma's stories and Josiah's

explanations. He tells Tayo that the world is fragile, choosing a word to express "fragile" that is "filled with the intricacies of a continuing process, and with a strength inherent in spider webs woven across paths through sand hills where early in the morning the sun becomes entangled in each web" (35). He also reminds Tayo that his cure "is important to all of us. Not only for your sake, but for this fragile world" (36). He expresses his fear: "I'm afraid of what will happen to all of us if you and the others don't get well" (38). Finally, he admits his inability to help Tayo: "There are some things we can't cure like we used to," he said, "not since the white people came. The others who had the Scalp Ceremony, some of them are not better either" (38). Although Ku'oosh is unable to perform a ceremony that will cure Tayo, his visit is curative in that it forces Tayo to recognize the validity of his beliefs and to accept responsibility for his own illness, which is reflected in the illness of the land:

The old man only made 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, spilling the rays of the sun into the sand, and the fragile world would be injured. Once there had been a man who cursed the rain clouds, a man of monstrous dreams. Tayo screamed, and curled his body against the pain. (38-39)

Although Tayo refrains from confessing to Ku'oosh what he believes to be the true cause of his illness — his cursing of the rain — Ku'oosh's words are such that they force Tayo to accept responsibility not only for his past actions but also for his future cure. If Tayo does not do whatever is necessary to cure himself, he will end up destroying both the people and the fragile world. The story, or ceremony, that began encircling Tayo long before the war must be completed.

By confirming Tayo's beliefs and establishing his responsibility, Ku'oosh helps prepare Tayo for his visit to Betonie, which constitutes the next step, or transition, of his

cure. Betonie differs from Ku'oosh and is more powerful than him because of his transcultural knowledge and experience. Betonie is the grandson of Descheeny, a Navajo medicine man, and a Mexican woman, who convinced Descheeny that they must use all the powers available to them — Indian, Mexican, and white — to plot a ceremony that will eventually stop the witchery originally set in motion by Indian witches. Betonie's Mexican grandmother recognized that the knowledge and power of no single culture was great enough to combat witchery. Understanding the pervasive power of witchery, she forced Betonie out into the world, sending him to Sherman Institute in California, because as she said, "It is carried on in all languages now, so you have to know English too" (122). After school Betonie continued to travel, riding the train to cities throughout the country — Chicago, St. Louis, Seattle, New York, Oakland. Betonie's experience in the white world gives him knowledge that Ku'oosh does not share: he has seen and experienced what the war veterans experienced — "the cities, the tall buildings, the noise and the lights, the power of their weapons and machines" (167). Unlike Betonie, Ku'oosh's power is limited by his isolation within the Laguna reservation. He cannot cure Tayo because he "would not have believed anything so monstrous" as the destruction and death witnessed and participated in by Tayo and the other war veterans:

the old man would not have believed white warfare — killing across great distances without knowing who or how many had died. It was all too alien to comprehend, the mortars and big guns . . . Ku'oosh would have looked at the dismembered corpses and the atomic heat-flash outlines, where human bodies had evaporated, and the old man would have said something close and terrible had killed these people. Not even oldtime witches killed like that. (36-37)

Ku'oosh, confined to a single mode of living, "would not have believed"; Betonie, a mixed-blood Navajo who has traveled through the white cities of the country, does believe.

Betonie, changing and adapting along with the world around him, knows that the healing ceremonies must also change if they are going to cure Indians of what they experience in the outside world:

things which don't shift and change are dead things. They are things the witchery people want. Witchery works to scare people, to make them fear growth. But it has always been necessary, and more than ever now, it is. Otherwise we won't make it. We won't survive. . . . (126)

Survival in today's world depends on change and adaptation.⁵⁶

Betonie also warns that witchery's destroyers "want us to separate ourselves from white people, to be ignorant and helpless as we watch our own destruction" (132). Because Betonie has ventured into, seen, and experienced the white world, he knows that seclusion and separation of Indians from whites is not the answer. Only by adapting and changing in response to the changing environment, as both Betonie and the spotted cattle have, can the Indians survive. Betonie's power derives from his understanding of, and his alignment of self in respect to, the two worlds of which he is a part. The novel suggests that half-breeds, persons of mixed blood, are more effective at surviving in the modern universe of multiple worlds and divisive boundaries. In *Ceremony* those people marked with hazel, green, or

⁵⁶LaVonne Ruoff notes that Silko's emphasis on the need to add to or change ritual derives in part from Laguna's history of cultural change and syncretism:

The Laguna pueblo became a refuge at many different times for many different groups. The various versions of their emergence myth indicate that as they wandered about trying to find just the right place for their people to settle, they travelled through Sia, where the head of the Parrot Clan and his followers decided to accompany them. Consequently, some of the original clans which founded Laguna were not Laguna tribal clans but rather those from other pueblos.

There is a long tradition of incorporating into Laguna tradition what was brought in from other groups. . . . The continuing process of changing rituals is an adding to, rather than a taking away: it does not involve a sense of loss. (Sands and Ruoff 67-68)

yellow eyes — Night Swan, Betonie, Betonie's grandmother, Ts'eh, and finally Tayo — are representative of a "special breed," capable of surviving "drought and hard weather."⁵⁷ To remain separate and isolated from the white world, fixed to and bound by a single location, racial heritage, or ceremony, is, as Ku'oosh discovers, to limit one's powers during an age when more and more Indians must daily traverse previously uncrossed boundaries. Ku'oosh, however, must be credited for his wisdom in recognizing that, because the Pueblo Scalp Ceremony is powerless to cure the war veterans, Tayo must seek help from a Navajo medicine man who has adapted the ceremonies accordingly. The willingness on the part of Ku'oosh to suggest an alternative — and "alien" — cure marks a significant crossing of previously uncrossed boundaries.

Tayo spends two nights with Betonie. The first is a talking session, in which Betonie, like any psychotherapist, encourages Tayo to talk about himself and attempts to build a feeling of trust: "If you don't trust me, you better get going before dark Anyway, I couldn't help anyone who was afraid of me" (123). Tayo opens up gradually, revealing bits and pieces of his recent and more distant past, including the events linking Josiah, the spotted cattle, and Night Swan; Rocky's desire to leave the reservation; Emo's playing with the bag of human teeth, claiming the earth is dead, and blaming the whites for leaving the Indians with nothing; and his own fear that the Indian ceremonies will be powerless "against the sickness which comes from their wars, their bombs, their lies" (132). From this information Betonie will determine the nature of Tayo's illness and the most

⁵⁷Although a full-blood Navajo, Descheeny could be considered a precursor to this new breed since he recognized the need for change; he accepted the young Mexican woman as a partner in his bed, ultimately producing Betonie, and in his plotting of a ceremony to save the world from witchery.

appropriate ceremony for curing that illness. The second night is the night of the ceremony, and the ceremony Betonie chooses for Tayo, on the basis of Tayo's revelations, is the coyote transformation ceremony for restoring the mind of a man who has lost his identity.

At the end of the ceremony, Tayo falls asleep, dreaming of Josiah's speckled cattle. In the dream he sees the cattle, including several new calves, grazing "near the dripping spring" where he once prayed for rain and running southwest "toward the high, lone-standing mesa the people called Pa'to'ch" (145). As soon as Tayo wakes, he wants to leave immediately to search for the cattle because he knows "there would be no peace until he did" (145). The ceremony, followed by the dream of the cattle, helps Tayo understand the next step he must take to effect his cure. Despite Tayo's enthusiasm, Betonie warns him that "one night or nine nights won't do it any more . . . the ceremony isn't finished yet" (152). The ceremony will not be finished, and Tayo's identity not fully restored, until the dead skin that has been thrown on him has been completely unraveled and cut into pieces. Betonie's ceremony, then, is not a cure in itself but merely another step in the gradual process of calling Tayo back from witchery. To help Tayo recognize the next step of his cure, Betonie draws a pattern of stars in the dirt: "Remember these stars," he said. "I've seen them and I've seen the spotted cattle; I've seen a mountain and I've seen a woman" (152).

Tayo's experience on Mount Taylor is important for several reasons. One primary benefit of that experience is his recovery of Josiah's cattle, a critical step in easing that part of his illness that is caused by personal mistakes. At one point during his time on Mount Taylor, Tayo suddenly realizes how important finding the cattle is to his cure, helping him forget the terrors of his recent past: "He had been so intent on finding the cattle that he had forgotten all the events of the past days and the past years. Hunting the cattle was good for

that" (192). Finding the cattle also gives him a sense of accomplishment. One goal of all psychotherapeutic treatments is to instill in the patient the belief that he or she is gaining control over the problems presented by the surrounding physical and social environment. In Tayo's case, finding the cattle makes amends for the broken promise and Josiah's death: "He would take the cattle home again, and they would follow the plans Josiah had made and raise a new breed of cattle that could live in spite of drought and hard weather" (187). Having found the cattle, Tayo can feel himself getting well, being loosened from Coyote's skin:

He had proved something to himself; it wasn't as strong as it had once been. It was changing, unraveling like the yarn of a dark heavy blanket wrapped around a corpse, the dusty rotted strands of darkness unwinding, giving way to the air; its smothering pressure was lifting from the bones of his skull. (198)

Furthermore, in finding the cattle on Floyd Lee's land, Tayo is forced to acknowledge that they were stolen by a wealthy white man who had no economic reason for stealing: "The spotted cattle wouldn't be lost any more, scattered through his dreams, driven by his hesitation to admit they had been stolen, that the land — all of it — had been stolen from them. . . ." (192). Tayo is forced, then, to acknowledge once and for all that white people stole the land. In examining the lie that he and other Indians have believed — "Only brown-skinned people were thieves; white people didn't steal, because they always had the money to buy whatever they wanted" (191) — Tayo can begin to unravel the cloak of inherited tribal shame involved in the loss of the land.

Although Tayo cannot physically recover the stolen land in the way that he has recovered the cattle, he *can* recover and nurture his connection to that land. This new bonding with the land and, consequently, with the mother of the people is the second major

benefit of Tayo's experience on Mount Taylor. The days and nights on the mountain — during which Tayo experiences two visionary moments at sunrise, accepts the aid and guidance offered by the mountain lion, and experiences the magnetic pull of the earth's core — help restore the connection that was broken when Tayo cursed the rain in the Philippines. During the first sunrise, experienced outside Ts'eh's cabin before he climbs Mount Taylor, Tayo senses the approach of the Ka't'sina "gathering with the dawn"; he remembers and repeats the Laguna's "song for the sunrise"; and he experiences dawn as

an event which in a single moment gathered all things together — the last stars, the mountaintops, the clouds, and the winds — celebrating this coming. The power of each day spilled over the hills in great silence. Sunrise. (182)

This is one of the instants — which begin to occur more frequently as the cure takes effect — in which Tayo sees and feels the totality, the balance, and the all-inclusive pattern of the universe and, further, experiences the power that comes from that recognition of totality. The second sunrise is also important. Watching the sun rise, Tayo feels his inner self change, reflecting the streaks of sunlit color in the sky: "Inside him the muddy water turmoil was settling to the bottom, and streaks of clarity were slowly emerging. Gathering the spotted cattle was only one color of sand flowing from the fingertips; the design was still growing, but already long ago it had encircled him" (196). Feeling his body change in response to the dawn, Tayo merges with and becomes a part of that dawn — he is reconnected to land and to the mother — and experiences the soothing, calming effects of not resisting the land. He also recognizes that finding the cattle is only one step of the cure, of the continuous, ever-changing process toward health. A similar message is conveyed by the visit of the mountain lion: "Relentless motion was the lion's greatest beauty, moving like mountain clouds with the wind, changing substance and color in rhythm with the contours

of the mountain peaks: dark as lava rock, and suddenly as bright as a field of snow" (196). The lion, "becoming what [it is] with each breath, [its] substance changing with the earth and sky," shows Tayo that the process of becoming, of gaining wholeness and self-definition, involves a continuous shifting in relation to the environment.

Tayo's reunion with the land and the mother reaches its most complete moment when, trying to escape Floyd Lee's men, he falls from his horse, hits his head against the lava rock, and lies prone upon the ground:

He was aware of the center beneath him; it soaked into his body from the ground through the torn skin on his hands, covered with powdery black dirt. The magnetism of the center spread over him It was pulling him back, close to the earth, where the core was cool and silent as mountain stone, and even with the noise and pain in his head he knew how it would be: a returning rather than a separation. He was relieved because he feared leaving people he loved. But lying above the center that pulled him down closer felt more familiar to him than any embrace he could remember; and he was sinking into the elemental arms of mountain silence. Only his skull resisted He knew if he left his skull unguarded, if he let himself sleep, it would happen: the resistance would leak out and take with it all barriers, all boundaries; he would seep into the earth and rest with the center, where the voice of the silence was familiar and the density of the dark earth loved him. He could secure the thresholds with molten pain and remain; or he could let go and flow back. It was up to him. (201-02)

This is a critical moment for Tayo. On the one hand, this experience of returning to the earth and to the mother's embrace is the ultimate goal: such a return, signalling the absolute forgiveness and love of the mother he offended, would end his personal illness. Reunion with the mother of the people promises to fill the hollow in his stomach left by the loss of his birth mother and compounded by all his subsequent losses. Tayo's desire to overcome resistance, to become part of the earth, also recalls one of Josiah's early stories, one in which Josiah distinguishes between human and animal relationships with the earth:

Josiah said that only humans had to endure anything, because only humans resisted what they saw outside themselves. Animals did not resist. But they

persisted, because they became part of the wind. "Inside, Tayo, inside the belly of the wind." So they moved with the snow, became part of the snowstorm which drifted up against the trees and fences. And when they died, frozen solid against a fence, with the snow drifted over their heads? "Ah, Tayo," Josiah said, "the wind convinced them they were the ice." (27)

In Josiah's telling, animals in their persistence, becoming one with the wind and the ice and the universe around them, seem wiser than the resisting, enduring humans. The image is one of purity and an absolute peacefulness that recalls the peacefulness experienced by the bear people, those who have lost consciousness of themselves as humans. Tayo here experiences that peacefulness, the consciousness of himself as one with the universe, and his desire to let all resistance go is intense. Alternatively, he can accept himself as human, destined for the pain inherent in enduring; he can remain. The choice is Tayo's: "It was up to him" (202).⁵⁸ Josiah's story about the persistence of animals and Betonie's story about bear consciousness represent one option available to Tayo. To merge with and return to the earth — to die — would end Tayo's pain, his separation from the earth. However, taking that option would not save the people or the world. This is Tayo's story, and how that story ends — with personal or global salvation — depends on Tayo's choice.

Tayo's time on Mount Taylor is, in essence, a real-life recapitulation of the coyote transformation ceremony performed by Betonie. As Robert M. Nelson notes, Tayo follows the "map" provided by the ceremony as he finds his way home from Mount Taylor: "Tayo moves sequentially through the pattern of vegetation laid out in Betonie's ceremony, from the scrub oak trees (which provide shelter from the snowstorm) (203) down through piñon

⁵⁸Nelson suggests that on Mount Taylor Tayo becomes an "avatar" or "shadow" of the mountain itself and that his choice at this point is whether to remain in that shadow state or to re-enter the human world. The first choice would result in finality and certainty, whereas the second would result in one of possibilities and uncertainty. Tayo's choice to continue as a human, Nelson says, "sets the plot (and . . . the world) back into motion" (297-98).

trees (which provide food as well as trail markers) (205) back to the cabin, where the cattle are penned in an arroyo behind a barricade of 'unskinned juniper poles' (211)" (Nelson 299).⁵⁹ When Tayo comes off the mountain, returning first to Ts'eh's house and then to his own home in Laguna, he has reached the point at which Betonie's ceremony ended. Safely returned to his home, the effects of witchery have begun to fall away, but the dried coyote skin is still stuck to his body. Betonie had warned him that "there are balances and harmonies always shifting, always necessary to maintain. . . . It is a matter of transitions, you see; the changing, the becoming must be cared for closely" (130). Much work — a continuing process of transitions, shifting, becoming — remains before Tayo is free from the alien skin.

Tayo's safe return from Mount Taylor is made possible, in part, by the falling of the snow, which, by covering his tracks and the trail left by the cattle, signals the mother's forgiveness for Tayo's mistake in cursing the rain. The rain that continues to fall on Laguna throughout the winter and spring suggests that, after seven years of drought, the mother of the people has returned to Laguna. Tayo spends the months between the end of September

⁵⁹Nelson's (and Silko's) following of the ceremony's map on Mount Taylor omits two trail markers: the hard oak, which should have been the first marker, and the wild rose, which should have been the last marker. Nelson does not mention the omission of the hard oak, but he suggests that the wild rose is represented by Ts'eh, whom Tayo encounters at the foot of the mountain. Silko apparently intended the replay of events on Mount Taylor to be similar but not identical to events represented in the ceremony, perhaps to suggest the need to adapt the ceremony in relation to the environment. In addition to the omission of the first and last trail markers, Tayo is assisted on the mountain and accompanied down the mountain by the mountain lion (the hunter in the cap of mountain lion fur) rather than by a bear. This is appropriate since Mount Taylor is located in the north (within the geographical landscape of novel), and the mountain lion is the animal associated with the direction north in Laguna mythology (the bear is associated with the west and thus appears in Gallup) (Swan 237-38). Another element of the ceremony — the cutting of Tayo's head with a flint blade — is reenacted on Mount Taylor when Tayo falls from his horse, striking his head on the black lava rock.

and the end of May at his aunt's house in Laguna. The months are marked primarily by a continuing nurturance of Tayo's renewed connection with the land and the mother of the people. Each night Tayo dreams of Ts'eh, and each morning he rises to greet the sun; in this way Tayo feels that he is living with Ts'eh (216).

The question of Ts'eh's identity and the nature of the relationship between Ts'eh and Tayo have drawn much attention from the critics. Allen sees Ts'eh as "love, the mountain spirit . . . , the 'wonder' being, who was the manifestation of the creator of the waters of life that flow from a woman and bless the earth and the beloved with healing, with rain" (*The Sacred Hoop* 120). She suggests that "Tayo's illness is a result of the repression of his anima and that through his love of Ts'eh he becomes conscious of the female side of his own nature and accepts and integrates feminine behavior into his life" (123). Nelson takes a similar view, seeing Ts'eh as "a 'spirit of place,' a more-than-human being who knows how Things Work and who is willing to share this knowledge with the People" (285). Noting that the name "Ts'eh" can be short for either "Ts'its'tsi'nako" or "Tse-pi'na," Nelson suggests that Ts'eh is an "avatar" of "the regenerative force Tayo seeks to integrate into his own vision and experience" (292). The connection between Ts'eh and the land, Nelson says, is clarified by Tayo's experience of his sexual encounters with Ts'eh (Silko 180-81, 222) as a merger with the land (Nelson 292, 306). Kenneth Lincoln sees Ts'eh Montaña as the spirit-woman of Tse-pi'na (Mount Taylor): "'Ts'i-' is Keresan for water and 'montaña' Spanish for mountain, hence 'Water-Mountain' spirit-woman" (240). Like Carolyn Mitchell and Edith Swan, however, Lincoln also sees Ts'eh as "a spirit sister of Yellow Woman, . . . whom the Laguna call 'the mother of us all'" (234). According to Mitchell,

Ts'eh . . . is Yellow Woman, Ko'chinako. In the traditional legends of the Pueblo, Yellow Woman is the leader of the Corn Maidens and thus associated

with fertility, growth, and summer. One story about her is that she and her husband Winter, Shakak, lived in the North. One time she met Summer, Miochin, who lived in the South, and invited him home with her while her husband was gone deer hunting. That evening her husband returned home in a snow storm. Summer returned home to the South to rally his forces; later Winter and Summer fought for Yellow Woman, after it was decided that she would live with Winter for half the year and Summer for half the year. (33)

Thus, Mitchell sees the story of Tayo and Ts'eh as a "contemporary reenactment of the old myth" (33). Swan associates Tayo with another myth, the one in which Sun Man, assisted by Spider Woman, releases the rain clouds from the Gambler, Kaup'a'ta: "Tayo, like Sun Man, must free the rains" (238). She believes Ts'eh is a Ka't'sina because her face is described as being similar to the mask of an antelope dancer; as a consequence of this association, she also sees her as Yellow Woman: "Yellow Woman is the generic name for all female Katcinas" (242). Swan also associates Ts'eh with the spotted cattle, which are described as "desert antelope" (242).

The descriptions of Ts'eh and her relationship with Tayo support all these associations. As Allen comments, "If you try to define who Ts'eh is, you find that she is Reed Woman, Spider Woman, Yellow Woman, on and on. . . . She has many faces . . ." (Sands and Ruoff 67). Ts'eh, in fact, seems to reflect, incorporate, and *continue* the other females who have touched Tayo's life in passing: Tayo's mother, Night Swan, Betonie's grandmother. Thus, in addition to eliciting associations with spiritual helpers and deities, she elicits similar associations with ancestral spirits. She can also be associated with the spirits of the dead, the Ka't'sinas, who bring rain to the people as well as with Water-Mountain, the spirit of Tse-pi'na, who by unfolding and folding her storm blanket, can summon and dismiss the clouds. Obviously, Ts'eh is not intended as a single, clearly defined person but, rather, as a projection of ever-expanding, continuously resonating associations. Clearly, she

is a spiritual helper to Tayo, whether one views her as a supernatural presence cloaked in a human skin or as a human who — like Betonie, Descheeny, the Mexican woman, Night Swan — possesses special powers to know, to see, to guide, and to heal. Tayo himself, after spending the summer with Ts'eh, concludes that "like old Betonie, she could see reflections in sandrock pools of rainwater, images shifting in the flames of juniper fire; she heard voices, low and distant in the night" (232). Thus, Tayo views Ts'eh as a human endowed with special powers, and the story he later tells to Ku'oosh and the other men of the kiva would likely present her in such a light. Ku'oosh and the old men, however, listening to Tayo's words, hear a different story:

A'moo'ooh, you say you have seen her
Last winter
up north
with Mountain Lion
the hunter

All summer
she was south
near Acu

They started crying
the old men started crying
"A'moo'ooh! A'moo'ooh!"
You have seen her
We will be blessed
again. (257)

Silko's choice to resist the temptation of clearly defining Ts'eh is the mark of a storyteller who expects participation in the telling by the listener. According to Silko, Pueblo "storytelling always includes the audience and the listeners, and, in fact, a great deal of the story is believed to be inside the listener, and the storyteller's role is to draw the story out of the listeners" ("Language and Literature" 57).

Whether Ts'eh is viewed as a specially empowered root woman, an ancestral spirit, or a deity, she clearly serves as a spiritual helper for Tayo. "Instead of proving or disproving Ts'eh," Lincoln notes, "Tayo simply witnesses her presence" (245). Tayo's ability to feel throughout the months at Laguna that Ts'eh is living with him when she is not there at all is another step toward Tayo's cure. For the first time in his life Tayo has learned how to live with the loss of a loved one, feeling his or her continuing spiritual presence despite physical absence. One morning late in May, after Tayo has moved back to the ranch, he awakens to rain. He remembers the previous summer at the ranch, marked by the dryness and desiccation of the land and by his own illness, days torn by tears and nausea and nights shattered by a cacophony of voices and relentless dreams and memories:

The dreams had been terror at loss, at something lost forever; but nothing was lost; all was retained between the sky and the earth, within himself. He had lost nothing. The snow-covered mountain remained, without regard to titles of ownership or the white ranchers who thought they possessed it. They logged the trees, they killed the deer, bear, and mountain lions, they built their fences high; but the mountain was far greater than any or all of these things. The mountain outdistanced their destruction, just as love had outdistanced death. The mountain could not be lost to them, because it was in their bones; Josiah and Rocky were not far away. They were close; they had always been close. And he loved them then as he had always loved them, the feeling pulsing over him as strong as it had ever been. They loved him that way; he could still feel the love they had for him. The damage that had been done had never reached this feeling. This feeling was their life, vitality locked deep in blood memory, and the people were strong, and the fifth world endured, and nothing was ever lost as long as the love remained. (219-20)

Thus, after a winter and spring of dreaming of the absent Ts'eh, rising to greet the dawn, and feeling her presence despite absence, Tayo has learned that "nothing was lost." "The curative memory of love," writes Lincoln, "calms Tayo's nightmarish voices: his abandonment, dislocation, rejection, and battle fatigue. The orphan has come home" (245). The mountain, the land, the mother, Josiah, and Robert have always been there, and in that

recognition, Tayo has recovered all that had ever been lost to him — all, that is, except the original loss, the loss of the mother who abandoned him.

Only a few hours after his discovery of Josiah and Rocky's abiding presence and love, Tayo is reunited with Ts'eh; he finds her waiting for him near the dripping spring where long ago he had prayed for rain. The summer spent with Ts'eh near Pa'to'ch, Enchanted Mesa, is a period of rejuvenation, a necessary interlude for strengthening his connection with the land and for preparing for the final steps of the ceremony. In Ts'eh's company Tayo moves steadily toward health as she teaches him about her work with stones and roots, telling him how she will transplant a plant that has "the color of the sky after a summer rainstorm" to another spot in the canyon "where it hasn't rained for awhile" (224). While Ts'eh gathers plants, Tayo watches over the cattle: "They had stopped moving south. They had worked the direction out of their systems and had settled into place" (225). Ever since Josiah first bought the cattle, they had sought instinctively to return to their home in Mexico. It takes years for the cattle to overcome this instinct, to adapt to their new home in the north, but, a "special breed," they finally settle into place, just as Tayo himself is settling into place, "mak[ing] sense of the outside world" and recognizing his position in relation to the force of vitality and birth and the counter force of destruction and death.

Ts'eh, shortly before her departure in the fall, warns Tayo about the tactics of the destroyers:

Their highest ambition is to get human beings while they are still breathing, to hold the heart, still beating so the victim will never feel anything again. When they finish, you watch yourself from a distance and you can't even cry — not even for yourself. (229)

Immediately, Tayo recognizes himself in Ts'eh's description of the destroyers' victim, remembering the deadened feeling that had enveloped him for years after the war:

He recognized it then: the thick white skin that had enclosed him, silencing the sensations of living, the love as well as the grief, and he had been left with only the hum of the tissues that enclosed him. He never knew how long he had been lost there, in that hospital in Los Angeles. (229)

In the hospital, Tayo had felt as if he were invisible, cloaked in white smoke and inhabiting "a gray winter fog on a distant elk mountain where hunters are lost indefinitely" (15). Perceiving himself as one of the dead, an "invisible one," he was both deaf and mute, cut off from the living, from the force of vitality and birth. He had wanted to remain in that state of invisibility because it was peaceful, undemanding, devoid of memories and voices. The loss of human consciousness experienced by Tayo, however, was not the same as that experienced by the bear people; Tayo's deadened consciousness was assumed along with an alien skin, a skin thrown on him by witchery and the destroyers.

Tayo's final step in throwing off Coyote's skin is to understand how the two forces of creativity and witchery coexist in the world and to know where he exists in relation to them. Once again sunrise provides Tayo with an instant of vision and clarity. Tayo's ability to see things more clearly in the first light of sunrise is comparable to the ability of Ts'eh and Betonie to "see reflections" in pools of rainwater and in flames of fire. That Tayo's power is associated with sunrise suggests his affinity with the Ka't'sinas, who appear at dawn, and thus with the Ka't'sina cult, dedicated to both the production of rain and the promotion of general well-being within the community (Dozier 140). During the sunrise at Pa'to'ch, Tayo gains strength from witnessing a totality of existence that perfectly contains and balances the force and the counter force:

The cloudy yellow sandstone of Enchanted Mesa was still smoky blue before dawn, and only a faint hint of yellow light touched the highest point of the mesa. All things seemed to converge there: roads and wagon trails, canyons with springs, cliff paintings and shrines, the memory of Josiah with his cattle; but the other was distinct and strong like the violet-flowered weed that killed

the mule, and the black markings on the cliffs, deep caves along the valley the Spaniards followed to their attack on Acoma. Yet at that moment in the sunrise, it was all so beautiful, everything, from all directions, evenly, perfectly, balancing day with night, summer months with winter. The valley was enclosing this totality, like the mind holding all thoughts together in a single moment.

The strength came from here, from this feeling. It had always been there. He stood there with the sun on his face, and he thought maybe he might make it after all. (237)

For an instant Tayo glimpses the totality of the story, of the web woven by the ultimate storyteller, the Creator, who recognized from the beginning that every impulse must be balanced by an opposing impulse. As Silko explained at the meeting of the English Institute, "In the beginning, Tséitsínako, Thought Woman, thought of all these things, and all of these things are held together as one holds many things together in a single thought" (56). Tayo recognizes that the valley before him, illuminated by the rising sun, contains a multitude of stories from different points of time that together cohere in a single story existing in a single timeless moment and that this single story perfectly balances all opposing forces into a single, all-encompassing force that continuously shifts and changes in the process of becoming. This experience empowers Tayo, providing him with the strength necessary to complete the ceremony. Further, he recognizes that he has always had the power of the storyteller, the power to see the total pattern and to cup its totality in his mind.

The pattern that, when finally seen, releases Tayo from Coyote's skin is the pattern that emerges in the hills north of Cañoncito, where uranium ore for the atomic bombs dropped on Japan had been mined⁶⁰:

⁶⁰Actually, most of the uranium ore used to develop and produce the first atomic bombs came from the Belgian Congo rather than from domestic sources. Few U.S. sources had been located before the war because there had been, as yet, little industrial demand for uranium. By late 1944, two-thirds of the existing U.S. uranium supply had come from the Congo, about one-sixth had come from Canada, and about one-seventh had been extracted

There was no end to it; it knew no boundaries; and he had arrived at the point of convergence where the fate of all living things, and even the earth, had been laid. From the jungles of his dreaming he recognized why the Japanese voices had merged with Laguna voices, with Josiah's voice and Rocky's voice; 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. From that time on, human beings were one clan again, united by the fate the destroyers planned for all of them, for all living things. . . .

He cried the relief he felt at finally seeing the pattern, the way all the stories fit together — the old stories, the war stories, their stories — to become the story that was still being told. He was not crazy; he had never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time. (246)

At Cañoncito Tayo sees a pattern that clarifies what Betonie had tried to tell him about Josiah's appearance in the jungle. The Laguna and the Japanese are part of a single clan, linked by the production and detonation of the atomic bomb and "united by the fate the destroyers planned for all of them." For the first time Tayo sees how all the disparate voices of his dreams and all the previously entangled memories are delicately linked and interwoven in a single web. As Silko told her audience at the English Institute, "the structure will emerge as it is made and you must simply listen and trust . . . that meaning will be made."

After seeing the pattern and understanding it, Tayo need only determine his position in relation to it. Again the choice is Tayo's: whatever action he chooses will determine the ending of the story. The power to end his own illness as well as that affecting all Native

from carnatite ores mined in the Colorado Plateau (Richard G. Hewlett and Oscar E. Anderson, Jr., *The New World, 1939/1946* [University Park: U Pennsylvania P, 1962] 17, 26, 291-92). Only when the African source began to run out in the late 1940s did the search begin for U.S. sources. According to the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, *Sources of Nuclear Fuel* (Oak Ridge, Tennessee: Department of Energy, Office of Scientific and Technical Information, 1968) 11, uranium was first discovered near Grants, New Mexico — the area in which *Ceremony* is set — in 1949. Silko's description of the activity at the mine on the Cebolleta land grant (243-44) suggests that the site was abandoned fairly quickly — and perhaps never officially recognized as a uranium source — as a result of the difficulty of retrieving the ore.

Americans and the entire world lies within him. When Tayo does choose the force of vitality and birth over the counter force of destruction and death and — a more difficult task — understands how to act appropriately to fulfill that choice, he completes the story that had encircled and sometimes entangled him since his birth. Throwing off Coyote's skin, Tayo completes his journey home: "He dreamed with his eyes open . . . Josiah was driving the wagon, old Grandma was holding him, and Rocky whispered 'my brother.' They were taking him home" (254). Led home by his family, Tayo reaches the river that separates him from his aunt's house at sunrise:

the leaves of the big cottonwood tree had turned pale yellow; the first sunlight caught the tips of the leaves at the top of the old tree and made them bright gold. They had always been loved. He thought of her then; she had always loved him, she had never left him; she had always been there. He crossed the river at sunrise. (255)

Crossing the river at sunrise, as the Ka't'sinas do each November, Tayo overcomes the original loss that had hollowed his belly. His mother "had always loved him, she had never left him; she had always been there." Tayo's recovery of his connection to his birth mother is the clearest indication that he has finally located a coherent identity and his place in the universe. "Among the Keres," Allen says, "failure to know your mother, that is, your position and its attendant traditions, history, and place in the scheme of things, is failure to remember your significance, your reality, your right relationship to earth and society. It is the same as being lost — isolated, abandoned, self-estranged, and alienated from your own life" (*The Sacred Hoop* 209-10).⁶¹ Tayo's recovery of his mother has been a process of

⁶¹Laguna is an ancient Keres gynocratic society, in which an individual's place within the universe is determined by clan membership, which in turn is defined by matrilineal descent (Allen, *The Sacred Hoop* 209). Although Tayo grew up in his grandmother's home and thus was fully informed about his descent, his aunt's stories about his mother distorted his knowledge of her. Thus, Tayo does not really "know" his mother and his relationship with

transitions, in which he learned first to recognize Ts'eh's spiritual presence despite physical absence and then to recognize the continuing presence and abiding love of Rocky and Josiah. In Tayo's belly now, filling up the hollow carved by loss, grows the story that he will tell as he is initiated, by virtue of having been cured of a serious illness,⁶² into the Ka't'sina cult by Ku'oosh and the other old men. A "special breed," combining white and Laguna culture, he tells a personal story — the story of how he succeeded in unraveling Coyote's skin — which in the ears of his listeners becomes one more fragment added to the ever-unfolding mystery of Ts'its'tsi'nako's web.

By the end of *Ceremony*, then, Tayo, whose passage into an alien world left him hovering between two worlds, two identities, and two systems of belief, emerges with not only a coherent sense of self but also a coherent view of the universe and his place in that universe — a universe that today includes more than one world. Tayo's illness, after he returns from the war, reflects an internal division; he is unable to reconcile the reality of Laguna, which is founded on a belief in a universe invested with and ordered by the spiritual, with the reality of the world outside Laguna, which is founded on a belief in a universe devoid of or separated from spirit and ordered by science. Although Tayo wavers between these two belief systems, he ultimately chooses the Pueblo-Navajo world view, primarily because its reality, as related through old Grandma's stories and explained by Josiah, yields, for him, a coherent universe in which he recognizes his own place. By making a choice,

her until he rediscovers her abiding love and continuous presence. Also, as Rubenstein notes, Silko's use of the pronoun "she" rather than a single name leaves the identity of this figure open, incorporating Tayo's mother, Ts'eh, the mother of the people, the earth (202).

⁶²Recruitment into the Ka't'sina cult, as well as the medicine associations, "is by dedication, vow, or trespass. The first two means of entering a society both involve cure from a serious illness before joining" (Dozier 157).

privileging one system over the other, whether that choice is the "correct" one or not, Tayo eliminates confusion and division, achieving a whole, integrated, coherent identity. By selecting a reality that works for him, linking him with his mother, Josiah, and Rocky, he succeeds in locating his "right relationship to earth and society." Through choice and will, then, Tayo locates and assumes an identity capable of sustaining and empowering him.

CHAPTER 5

MODERN RATIONALITY AND THE SUPERNATURAL: BELIEF AS BRIDGE IN GLORIA NAYLOR'S *MAMA DAY*

Looking over here from beyond the bridge, you might believe some of the more far-fetched stories about Willow Springs: The island got spit out from the mouth of God, and when it fell to the earth it brought along an army of stars. He tried to reach down and scoop them back up, and found Himself shaking hands with the greatest conjure woman on earth. "Leave 'em here, Lord," she said. "I ain't got nothing but these poor hands to guide my people, but I can lead on with light." Nothing but a story, and if there's an ounce of truth in it, it can't weigh even that much. . . .

— Gloria Naylor, *Mama Day* 110

Like Silko's *Ceremony*, Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* describes the collision of two worlds, two systems of belief, and two approaches to survival and growth in today's universe. New York, characterized by an emphasis on culture, alienation, and scientific reality, is a world controlled and explained by modern rationality. In contrast, the island of Willow Springs, characterized by an emphasis on nature, community, and the art of illusion, is a world controlled and explained by supernatural forces. Whereas the inhabitants of New York tend to believe in themselves and their own power to make things happen, the inhabitants of Willow Springs tend to draw on supernatural forces and on those humans who can communicate with and channel those forces to help or harm others. Like both Pearl in *Oral History* and Tayo in *Ceremony*, Cocoa discovers the hazards of crossing the boundary that separates the world of home from the world of the dominant culture. Like Tayo, Cocoa is transformed by her experience in the external world and relies on home as a source of healing. Unlike Tayo, however, Cocoa ultimately chooses not to return home permanently but to create for herself a new world that mediates between the two worlds known to her —

New York and Willow Springs — by selectively retaining elements of belief, values, and lifestyle from both. Naylor, then, allows Cocoa an option Silko denies Tayo — the option of defining herself and her world in a totally new and individual way rather than appropriating some other person's definition of reality.

Alternative Realities: Willow Springs and New York

Patricia Olson, in her review of Naylor's *Mama Day*, suggests that the novel fails to live up to the mythic potential promised by its depiction of an "unreal" island world dominated and controlled by Miranda Day, the daughter of the seventh son of a seventh son (1047). Like Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, however, the precursor text that provides a framework for *Mama Day*, Naylor's novel suggests that the time for such myth — for Willow Springs — has passed: Willow Springs can no longer maintain its protected isolation from the surrounding world, and its children must leave its magical shores to confront the realities of life "beyond the bridge" (7). By the year 2000, Miranda Day will have died, and with her will die that strong voice that has led the community in saying "no" to the real estate developers who keep coming around offering "community uplift" and "better jobs" in exchange for their land: "If Mama Day say no, everybody say no" (6). The passing of Miranda, then, threatens to bring an end to Willow Springs — the island off the east coast of the South Carolina-Georgia state line, the island connected to the world beyond by only a wood bridge that is washed away by each big storm, the island that in 1823 was deeded by Bascombe Wade to the descendants of

one negress answering to the name of Sapphira. . . . Pure African stock. . . . Sapphira is half-prime, inflicted with sullenness and entertains a bilious nature, having resisted under reasonable chastisement the performance of field or domestic labour. Has served on occasion in the capacity of midwife and

nurse, not without extreme mischief and suspicions of delving in witchcraft.
(1)

Mama Day explores the necessity, as the year 2000 approaches, of bridging two worlds of belief. What happens when the children of Willow Springs move into the world "beyond the bridge"? What happens when Cocoa — directly descended from Sapphira Wade, "a true conjure woman" (3), and tutored daily in the power of belief and the imagination by her great-aunt Miranda — ties her flesh and mind to George, an engineer born and raised in New York who, with no family, no past, and no future, has survived totally on a belief in himself and in the present? The most that one can hope for, Naylor suggests, is that the children learn how to hear, listen to, and interpret the voices of the air, of the sea, of the spirits of those who have gone before.

In the prologue to the novel, the collective voice of Willow Springs — "we" — faults Reema's boy for his inability to ask, his inability to listen, and thus his inability to understand. The young man has returned home from college to document the "ethnography" and "unique speech patterns" of Willow Springs. Despite his "'extensive field work' (ain't never picked a boll of cotton or head of lettuce in his life — Reema spoiled him silly)," Reema's boy never understands what "18 & 23" means. Unable to ascertain its true meaning, the voice of Willow Springs says, Reema's boy concluded "that 18 & 23 wasn't 18 & 23 at all — was really 81 & 32, which just so happened to be the lines of longitude and latitude marking off where Willow Springs sits on the map. And we were just so damned dumb that we turned the whole thing around" (8). All that boy would have had to do to obtain the answers and understanding he needed, the voice continues, was to visit Miss Abigail Day, who would have shared her family history and sent him on over to talk to her sister Miranda. Miranda, in turn, would have taken him to the family graveyard where, after

placing a bit of moss in his shoes, he could have heard the voices of Cocoa and George as they retell their story again and again, revising and reshaping it to get it right. If Reema's boy had known how to ask and how to listen, the voice of Willow Springs says,

he coulda listened to them the way you [the reader] been listening to us right now. Think about it: ain't nobody really talking to you. We're here sitting in Willow Springs, and you're God-knows-where. . . . Uh, huh, listen. Really listen this time: the only voice is your own. But you done just heard the legend of Sapphira Wade, though nobody here breathes her name. You done heard it the way we know it, sitting on our porches and shelling June peas, quieting the midnight cough of a baby, taking apart the engine of a car — you done heard it without a single living soul really saying a word. . . .
(10)

The ability to hear and to listen to the story of a place is not magical, nor is it limited to Miranda Day or the inhabitants of Willow Springs. Every person, even Reema's boy, possesses the ability to hear unspoken words just as every reader has the ability to read and give life to the words printed on a page. The reader hears the voice speaking those words even though the speaker is not present, not visible, not heard, not "living." Furthermore, the voice that each reader hears is not the writer's voice but his or her own voice. The reader is able to hear the teller's story, then, because in some inner region of the self, he/she knows it already.

The reader of *Mama Day* hears three voices: those of George, Cocoa, and the collective narrator of Willow Springs. George and Cocoa speak directly to each other rather than to the reader. Their voices are so similar in their direct, rational, controlled, grammatically "correct" diction that the reader may confuse the speakers until the content of a section and the speaker's opinions are revealed. Only when Cocoa gets angry or excited does her speech reflect its origins in the African American South and its similarity to that of the collective voice of Willow Springs. Despite their similarity of diction, George and Cocoa

rarely share similar opinions. Together, they demonstrate that every difference that threatens their relationship has "four sides: his side, her side, an outside, and an inside. All of it is the truth" (230). Cocoa and George are both strong-willed, stubborn individuals who believe in themselves, the "rightness" of their views, and their rights as individuals. At the same time, they love and respect each other, and they desire to build a relationship that allows the other freedom without compromising his or her own. They both seem to want to build a relationship based on the principle that "without a slave, there could be no master" (225). The result is an uneasy alliance, frequently interrupted by battles — new and old — through which they seek, paradoxically, both to maintain and to resolve their differences.

There is nothing mythic about the contest of wills between George and Cocoa; it is, rather, excruciatingly human. Reading the sections spoken by George and Cocoa is often so painful that one is relieved to be reabsorbed into the mythic world of Willow Springs, where the dominant figure of Miranda — Mama Day — provides the community with a sense of safety, stability, cohesion, and control. Although periodically challenged by Dr. Buzzard, Ruby, Cocoa, and even Abigail, Miranda — despite certain limitations of her power — dominates, controls, and thus stabilizes the community of Willow Springs. One also welcomes the warm, rich, relaxed voice that narrates these sections. The voice of "we" and "us," it presents various versions of the legend of Sapphira Wade, "depending upon which of us takes a mind to her" (3), although the name itself is never spoken and, indeed, is unknown by the living, even by Miranda. Only after death do the people of Willow Springs discover what they were "knowing all along" (151). Although the voice of Willow Springs occasionally reveals bits of information unknown to Miranda, it limits itself primarily to a presentation of Miranda's actions, thoughts, memories, sorrows, and beliefs.

As the sections spoken by George and Cocoa focus on their own contest of wills, the novel as a whole focuses on a struggle between two worlds and the beliefs that sustain the inhabitants of those worlds. The inhabitants of Willow Springs recognize and revere the forces of God, nature, conjuration, and the spirits of the deceased, whereas the inhabitants of the world "beyond the bridge" — epitomized by New York — recognize and revere the powers of the self, the present, science, and the knowledge found in books. Borrowing the simplistic dichotomy often used to discuss the two worlds depicted in *The Tempest*, one can characterize Willow Springs as the world of nature, community, and the art of illusion and New York as the world of culture, alienation, and the science of reality. Caught between the two worlds is Cocoa, a child of Willow Springs who has been dehumanized by her dislocation in New York. For Cocoa neither world provides a sustaining environment — one in which she can grow without the fear of one day "waking up to a total stranger" (49). Her childhood friend Bernice, still living in Willow Springs, and her husband George represent opposite poles of belief systems available to Cocoa: whereas Bernice relies on a belief in external powers, George denies the existence of any powers other than the power of the self. Mediating between the two extremes and thus more powerful than either is Miranda, who believes in reliance on the self up to the point that one must accept one's limitations and look outward to external forces for assistance. This chapter examines the sources of Miranda Day's power, Bernice's reliance on external powers, George's reliance on the self, and Cocoa's attempt to build a new world that mediates between the worlds of New York — culture, alienation, science, and an excessive reliance on self — and Willow Springs — nature, community, illusion, and an excessive reliance on external powers.

Mama Day: Listening, Observing, and Believing as Ways to Power

Miranda's power derives in part from her recognition that the disembodied voices that speak just beneath the wind (118) and in "the rustling of the trees" (312) possess the power to save. For ninety years Miranda has sharpened and honed her ability to hear, listen to, and interpret the voices around her. So strong is her belief in the ability of those voices to aid her in healing others that she acts without hesitation to follow the messages they deliver. The voices she hears are those of ancestral spirits — speaking out of memory or dream — and of nonhuman presences. She often remembers, for example, words spoken by her father: "*Little Mama, these woods been here before you and me, so why should they get out of your way — learn to move around 'em*" (79). She dreams the words spoken by Sapphira: "*Look past the pain*" (284). She also hears unidentified voices that seem to speak from the air (91), from a ticking clock (138), or from some inner center of knowing (262). In fact, one could argue that all the voices Miranda hears derive from an inner voice that echoes the voices of her ancestors.

The voice of Willow Springs suggests this possibility when it tells the reader, "Really listen this time: the only voice is your own" (10), and again when it says that the people of Willow Springs possess a knowledge that "don't live in the part of our memory we can use to form words" (151). When people inherit the blood of their ancestors, they also inherit their lives, their histories, their memories. This is why Miranda goes to "the other place" (9) — the family's old abandoned homestead — when Cocoa falls ill: "All that Baby Girl is was made by the people who walked these oak floors, sat and dreamed out on that balcony" (278). She knows that Cocoa is suffering not only from her present conflict with George but also from the conflicts of her ancestors. "It's more than my blood flows in her,"

Miranda tells George, "and more hands that can lay claim to her than these" (294). Cocoa is a composite self built from the blood and memories of her ancestors as well as from those who touch her daily. This inheritance of a collective memory works in two ways: Cocoa can never fully know herself until she knows all of those who went before her; and if she listens to those voices that speak from the past carried deep within her, she can know more than she is conscious of knowing. Cocoa's mother Grace, speaking from her grave, suggests that she discovered the existence of such knowledge only after death: "If I had known then what I was knowing all along . . ." (151).

The difference between Miranda and Grace, between Miranda and most people, is that Miranda actively listens for the voices, recognizing that they offer a source of knowing that, although it circumvents the usual process of rational thought and inference, is not only valid but empowering. Most people deny such voices, either dismissing them as unimportant or changing their meanings to make them more acceptable. George admits that, when he first saw Cocoa's bent neck in the coffee shop, he "quickly exchanged" his initial feeling — "*I will see that neck again*" — with a more acceptable one — "*I've seen this woman before*" (27). Cocoa does not allow herself to believe the whispers at the family plot that warn her that she will break George's heart (223). Both George and Cocoa ignore the messages in their dreams, messages that would have helped them in the crisis of Cocoa's illness. Worst of all are those people who, like Reema's boy, are so closed to the possible validity of voices other than their own that they never hear any voices at all — either those of the living or those of the dead.

In addition to hearing voices that help her use the past to understand the present, Miranda also sees the future, applying that foresight to prepare for — but never to *change*

— the future. Much of what Miranda reads about the future is based on an acute observation of nature: "Now, sea life, birds, and wood creatures, they got ways just like people. 'Cepting they live in the sky, the earth, the tides. So who better to ask about their home? You just gotta watch 'em long enough to find out what's going on" (207). Because she is so familiar with the natural rhythms of the sky, earth, and tides, Miranda is usually quick to notice and understand the implications of abnormal or exaggerated behavior. She is somewhat slow, however, in recognizing the approach of the hurricane that hits Willow Springs during George and Cocoa's visit. She blames her failure to note the obvious signs, seen but not *seen* when she took George fishing off the east bluff, on her efforts to prevent George from hearing voices from Bascombe Wade's grave.⁶³ A few days after the fishing trip Miranda notices that water is dripping from her fingers when normally it sprinkles freely and that the salt is clumping up in its shaker. Only then does she *see* the signs from the east bluff:

From the dripping water to the clumped-up salt to the white foam washing up on shore at the east side of the island. And so much in between. Them waves had been coming in — just a bit too fast. After ninety years the natural motion shoulda been in her blood, but she had been talking, hadn't she? . . . She walks back over it all now: them high high hills the crawfish built up around the mouths of their burrows; the kingfishers and bank swallows nesting way way up from the water; bush rabbits — she walks past a dozen of them hollows if she walks past one, and all of them is deep deep into the ground. And right there at Chevy's Pass, Buzzard's bees are clustered close close to the doors of their hives. Yes, it was high high, way way, and deep deep. This was gonna be a big storm. . . . (227)

Because animals are so acutely attuned to change in their habitat and environment, they "know" and prepare for change long before humans, even when aided with "all them meters

⁶³Miranda also refers frequently throughout the novel to a fading or diminishment of her powers to hear, see, and remember as a result of her increasing age.

and graphs" (243), become aware of it. By observing the behavior of the natural world around her, Miranda is able to predict change and, where she has sufficient experience, to identify the form that change will take.

Related to Miranda's ability to predict change through her observation of the natural world is her ability to read human nature. Miranda can identify the cause of a person's illness by paying close attention to the "laughter before or after a mouth opens to speak, the number of times a throat swallows, the curve of the lips, the thrust of the neck, the slump of the shoulders. And always, always the eyes" (38). Thus, she knows immediately that a woman glimpsed on the Phil Donahue show cannot sleep because she fears being awakened once again by her husband's fists just as surely as she knows that Bernice cannot conceive because of an excess of nervous energy and the self-directed negativity resulting from her mother-in-law's criticism.

Not all of Miranda's foresight can be explained by her ability to observe the behavior of animals and humans, however. Much of her interpretation of signs seems to be purely intuitive. As a five-year-old child, she knew that "there is more to be known behind what the eyes can see" (36). As an old woman, she suddenly "knows," as she stands watching a drop of moisture bead up and drip from an apricot leaf on a kitchen cabinet carved by her father, that Cocoa is arriving a day earlier than expected, that she will arrive by plane rather than by train as planned, and that the plane will land at the Charleston airport at three o'clock that afternoon. Several years later she is surprised to see her hands seemingly merge with the ridged trunk of a tree at "the other place"; in that moment she can "see" Bernice "driving steady and heading north" with her dead son in the seat beside her (255). In other instances, Miranda divines the future by observing an object that represents the object or event of

concern. To ascertain when Bernice will get pregnant, she studies the yolks of three eggs she adds to her cake batter:

Real careful, she breaks a fresh egg so that the yolk stays whole. Cupping the shell in her hand, she watches for a while as the bloated yellow swims in the thick mucous — not this month. She breaks another egg — nor the next. The third yolk is slipped into the sugar and butter — nor the next. . . . (44)

She understands from her scrutiny of the egg yolks that Bernice will not conceive within the next three months.

Miranda's power derives to a great extent, then, from her sharpened sense of sight and hearing, her belief in what she sees and hears, and her ability to use her interpretations of natural and supernatural signs and sounds to guide and heal others. Perhaps her greatest power lies in her ability to understand and manipulate a person's belief to advance her own goals — which are usually but not always shared by the other person. Miranda understands and respects the sources, extent, and limitations of her own powers. She believes in her ability to see, to hear, and to accomplish with her hands what most people cannot: "I can do more things with these hands than most folks dream of — no less believe" (294). At the same time, however, she believes in and reveres forces outside, above, beyond her own. She believes, for example, that a perfect sunset is a demonstration of God's inimitable art:

It seems like God reached way down into his box of paints, found the purest reds, the deepest purples, and a dab of midnight blue, then just kinda trailed His fingers along the curve of the horizon and let 'em all bleed down. And when them streaks of color hit the hush-a-by green of the marsh grass with the blue of The Sound behind 'em, you ain't never had to set foot in a church to know you looking at a living prayer. (78)

She believes in the existence of some external force — "whatever Your name is" — that can help George in his attempt to save Cocoa (299). She sees nature as an external force that she can "get under, around, and beside . . . to give it a slight push" but one that she would

never try to "get over" (262). She believes in ancestral spirits and their power to guide and aid her.

Despite her own belief in external forces, however, Miranda often scoffs at the beliefs of her neighbors. She cannot understand their notions about "the other place," which she knows is just an old, abandoned house with a large, overgrown garden. She is particularly dismayed by their belief in Dr. Buzzard's mojo hands and hoodoo bags. Miranda's battle with Buzzard is long-standing. She gets indignant when George innocently suggests that she and Buzzard are in the same business. Miranda works with roots for one reason — to experience "the joy she got from any kind of life" (262); she mixes roots with wisdom and love to heal and to make things grow. Miranda sees Buzzard's use of hoodoo as a desecration of her own healing arts because Buzzard mixes roots with moonshine and chicanery for the sole purpose of making money. Despite the differences in style and motivation, however, Miranda and Buzzard are more similar than Miranda would ever admit.

When George plays cards with Buzzard and his friends, he discovers that although Buzzard routinely robs his friends by cheating, he gives them something of value in return. Even though the men consistently lose money, they look forward to the games because each time that they succeed in cutting their losses, they feel as if they are winning. Buzzard has created a small universe in which all players win. On the night George plays, Rickshaw buys a mojo hand from Buzzard to help him win. When he then loses only a dollar and a half during the evening's play, he is elated because the mojo hand has worked, helping him to cut his losses. Rickshaw never realizes that Buzzard, by controlling the game through his cheating, controls the amount that each player wins or loses. Thus, Buzzard can assure that buying a mojo hand always works. The players feel so secure and confident in this

microcosm controlled by Buzzard that, when George, applying mathematics and the laws of probability, upsets Buzzard's game, they are frightened by his disturbance of a controlled environment. Buzzard, however, recognizes that George has outwitted him, and he is man enough to acknowledge and show his appreciation of George's mastery, encouraging his friends to share in his appreciation. A few days later, when Buzzard is desperate to win George's belief in the power of Ruby's hex, he is also man enough — and serious enough in his desire to help Miranda save Cocoa — to admit to George, "I've always been an old fraud" (292). He tells George how he used to mix up a "miracle elixir" — grated ginger, honey, and "a splash of whiskey" — which he sold as a cure for impotence:

Yeah, out about every ten, nine would come back and say it done 'em good.
And that nine would spread the news about me, which brought in nine more.
So I never thought about that other one — the single one it ain't worked for
— till I got older. Really, not till I talked to you yesterday.

. . .
Ya see, I had given him something that he just couldn't believe in —
and him disbelieving, whether I'd offered him a miracle or not, guaranteed
it to fail. (292)

Buzzard has always made money off the beliefs of those around him, and nine out of ten times the "cure" he sold was successful. Pleased with his odds and his profits, Buzzard never had to worry about the small percentage of clients lost through disbelief.

Like Buzzard, Miranda recognizes the power of belief and of the human mind. Like Buzzard, she uses the beliefs of the people of Willow Springs to achieve certain objectives even though she knows those beliefs are erroneous. For example, she often uses her neighbors' belief in her own powers to keep them in line. After Miranda suggests to Buzzard that his life might be shortened if he sells Bernice some of his hoodoo medicine to help her conceive, he refrains from "helping" Bernice. Ruby, too, backs down when Miranda confronts her with the hoodoo bag that Miranda's chicken scratched out from under

her trailer.⁶⁴ When Sue Henry, "the runt of Reema's litter" who now works "beyond the bridge" as Dr. Smithfield's receptionist, acts uppity when Ambush calls for help for Bernice, Miranda gets on the phone to remind her of what will happen to her if the doctor does not show up that night:

Sue Henry? Sue Henry, this is Miranda Day. I'm fine, thank you, and you? That's good, glad to hear it. Now, I got somebody here *I'm* nursing who ain't doing so good. And I want you to get on that little beeper you got, call Brian Smithfield, and tell him I need him out at the Duvalls . . . and I need him tonight. Not tomorrow, tonight. You been knowing me a long time, ain't you, sugar? So if you don't do that, you know I ain't phoning back to find out why. You know I'm coming over the bridge tomorrow to stand in front of your face to ask you. Why, of course, there won't be no call for that. We'll see him here soon as he can make it. You take care now. And my best to your mama. (77)

By lacing a specific demand with pleasantries and only a hint of a threat, Miranda assures that her demand will be met.

Paradoxically, Miranda's reputation for punishing offenders derives almost entirely from her reputation for healing. Having witnessed Miranda's power to heal for so many years, the people of Willow Springs suspect the presence of an equal power to do harm, whether or not that power is ever directly exhibited. Knowing, in addition, that Miranda is directly descended from Sapphira Wade, that she is the daughter of the seventh son of a seventh son,⁶⁵ and that a long history of grief and death has been played out at "the other

⁶⁴When Ruby later places another curse on Cocoa, Miranda is surprised that she has ignored her threat and can only conclude that Ruby is "crazy" (271) or that "Ruby don't know me . . . she *can't* know me or she wouldna done this" (265).

⁶⁵Albert J. Raboteau, in *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford UP, 1978), notes the belief among slaves that being born the seventh son of a seventh son was one source of a conjurer's power (276-77). Although John-Paul himself neither inherited nor developed powers of conjuration, he recognized his eldest daughter's "gift" to heal when she was still quite young (88-89).

place," the people of Willow Springs have developed a healthy respect for what Miranda *could* do if she set her mind to it. In this way, Miranda helps maintain a social order, controlling the actions of the island inhabitants and limiting the powers of those, like Buzzard and Ruby, whose actions are motivated by greed or jealousy rather than a love for life. Willow Springs requires no external policing: "The folks here take care of their own, if there is a rare crime, there's a speedy judgment" (79).

Miranda recognizes, as does Buzzard, that belief is critical to the success of any cure. Roots, leaves, and bark can heal physical ailments, but many physical ailments are tied to mental or emotional strain. Miranda operates on the belief that the mental or emotional obstacles blocking physical healing can be removed only through a mutual exertion of belief by both the patient and the healer. Furthermore, she recognizes the importance of ritual in heightening both participants' hope and expectation of success. Miranda's ability to arouse and sustain Bernice's belief, as well as her own, results in the conception of Bernice's child. Later, when working with George to save Cocoa, Miranda succeeds in arousing in George a belief born of desperation. However, because he is unable to sustain that belief, falling back instead on his belief in his own powers, he loses the supplementary powers offered by Miranda's ancestors. Although George does succeed in his objective, which is to save Cocoa, he must sacrifice his own life to do so; adhering to Miranda's plan for attaining his objective would, Miranda believes, have saved them both. Miranda's strength derives from her ability to believe in and use both her own powers and those of external forces. In contrast, both Bernice and George are flawed, the former by her excessive reliance on external forces rather than herself and the latter by his refusal to recognize and believe in powers outside himself.

"The Other Place": Bernice's Belief in External Forces

Bernice possesses a tremendous capacity to believe in external forces. When after several years of marriage she has still not conceived, she turns first to Miranda who, as midwife and nurse, is committed to "bringing on life" (262). Like the other inhabitants of Willow Springs, Bernice places great faith in Miranda's healing arts. Bernice also believes, however, in supernatural powers, and when Miranda's teas do not work quickly enough for her, she asks Miranda to take her to "the other place." Miranda refuses, insisting on the use of natural measures — the passage of time and the ingestion of womb-strengthening teas of stargrass and ground raspberry. Impatient, Bernice asks Dr. Buzzard for some of his hoodoo potions and charms but, as a result of Miranda's intervention, never receives them. Bernice also believes in science and modern medical knowledge; thus, frustrated by her continuing infertility, she experiments with a new fertility drug that is "supposed to work miracles" even though Miranda has told her that "the only miracle is life itself. And when it comes, it comes" (43). Even Dr. Smithfield, the doctor from "beyond the bridge," has refused to prescribe fertility pills for her because, as Bernice admits to Miranda, "he said he don't believe in them things" (43). The only thing Bernice does not believe in, apparently, is herself.

Miranda is able to protect Bernice from Buzzard's "hoodoo bits of rags and sticks" and the "watered-down moonshine" he sells as medicine by threatening him with her own superior powers. "The way I see it," Miranda says,

you been walking round on this earth a long time and got just as much a right as the next fella to keep walking around, healthy and all — living out your natural life.

I believe you're threatening me, Mama Day.

Now, how could I do something like that? What could a tired old woman like me do to a powerful hoodoo doctor? Why, that little mess I got out at the other place wouldn't hold a candle to —

Ain't nobody talking about the other place. Ain't nobody mentioned

—

That's right, we ain't said a word about nothing — but Bernice. (52)

Despite her ability to control Buzzard's activities, however, Miranda underestimates the extent of Bernice's desperation. All she can do, after that desperation drives Bernice to take a fertility drug stolen from the pharmacy where she works "beyond the bridge," is to try to save the young woman's reproductive system from the ensuing infection. While nursing Bernice, Miranda discovers the nursery, stocked with "hand-stitched jumpers, crocheted blankets, sweaters, and booties," and she realizes that she had not listened carefully enough to Bernice's voice: "If I had really listened to that child, I woulda known this day was coming" (83, 84). With this new understanding, Miranda agrees to what she had earlier refused:

Folks say I can do things most can't do. Whether that's true or not, I can help you if you willing to work with me as hard as you worked on that room.

. . .

Anything, Mama Day, any —

Hush, now, and let me finish. The hard work is just the beginning. And I ain't sure yet exactly how it will all end. But if it turns out that we gotta go to the other place together in the end, what happens there we gotta keep secret. Not a secret for now or a secret for then — but a secret forever. Even from Ambush. You understand that, Bernice? You were willing to give up your life to have a baby, but strange as it seems, it might be harder for you to keep your silence. (87)

When Miranda agrees to help Bernice conceive, she commits herself to going to "the other place" if necessary — a step she would rather not take. Miranda would always prefer to work with natural processes and powers. She knows that to go to "the other place" is to tangle with powerful external forces that can quickly turn against those who attempt to manipulate them.

One requirement for going to "the other place" is that Bernice keep the visit "a secret forever." One reason for requiring secrecy is that Miranda recognizes that the community's suspicions that she can call on external powers can backfire. Up to this point, she has allowed their suspicion to go unchecked because that suspicion has helped her to maintain a gentle control over them — a control that is intended to help and protect them. *Knowing* that Miranda works with external powers, however, is far different from *suspecting* it. Knowledge about her activities with Bernice at "the other place" would change the community's perception of Miranda, replacing their trust and respect for a "healer" with dread and fear of a "conjurer." A second reason for requiring secrecy is that secrecy enhances belief. The secrecy surrounding Bernice and Miranda's intended visit to "the other place" will encourage Bernice's belief that something special will indeed occur, thus increasing the level of her hope, her faith, and her expectation of success. Such expectation will go a long way toward promoting Bernice's belief in herself — the ability of her body to conceive, carry, and bear a child — the lack of which has been a crucial factor in her continuing infertility. The secrecy is also important because it will protect both Bernice and Miranda's belief from the doubt that might be cast by others. Miranda does not even tell her sister Abigail about her plan for Bernice because not only Bernice but Miranda, too, must believe in both Miranda's powers and the powers to be called on at "the other place."

Miranda spends the months between autumn and spring preparing Bernice for the visit to "the other place." The preparation is both physical and psychological. The first objective is to redirect Bernice's nervous energy, showing her how to expend that energy each day through work and exercise so that by nighttime she is tired enough to get a good night's sleep and to stop worrying about whether and when she will conceive. Miranda's plan includes

teaching Bernice how to make foods, as she and her sister Abigail did in the old days, rather than opening up ready-made, store-bought products. As she explains to Abigail,

We're giving her *time*, Abigail. . . . Remember how much it took just to get a pint of butter? The milking of the cow, the hauling, the churning down of the cream — the washing, the salting, the pressing And don't talk about it going into cornbread — the grinding of the corn, gathering of the eggs, chopping the wood, firing up the stove. Took half a day for a pan of bread, not to mention the other things you needed to put on the table. . . . (95-96)

In addition to filling Bernice's days with work and exercise to give her time, Miranda also develops a magical ritual to give Bernice hope:

And she'd keep Pearl [Bernice's critical mother-in-law] off her back, giving her them seeds and saying, Every time she comes to visit you plant a black one to carry everything negative she says to you into the ground. And she could even give her hope, saying, Every time you get your monthly, plant a gold one — let the life blood flow out of you into this seed. And come spring, she could tell Bernice, When you take the vines from them gold seeds out into the garden, you're really taking the life line between you and the baby. And the way you watch that grow — round and full — the life will sure to be growing inside of you. Yeah, she could disguise a little dose of nothing but mother-wit with a lot of hocus-pocus. But it was all leading up to the other place. Nothing would be real until the end. And in the end, Bernice would have to step over the last line all by herself. (97)

Abigail, who thinks that Bernice is too smart for Miranda's "hocus-pocus," says, "Bernice gonna know they're nothing but pumpkin seeds" (96). Miranda, however, who recognizes the power of the mind in witnessing and experiencing miracles, tells her sister: "The mind is a funny thing, Abigail — and a powerful thing at that. Bernice is gonna believe they are what I tell her they are — magic seeds. And the only magic is that what she believes they are, they're gonna become" (96). The ultimate test of Bernice's belief will come at "the other place," when Bernice will have "to step over the last line" on her own.

By the night of Candle Walk on December twenty-second, Miranda knows that Bernice's belief is secure. When Bernice gives Abigail the gift she has made for her, a dress

covered with lace "tatted fine as spider webs" (114), she tells Miranda: "My seeds are doing well, Mama Day. They already starting to make vines in the kitchen window. And I knew Miss Abigail would like my dress, 'cause when Miss Pearl said she wouldn't, I stuck a black seed right in the dirt" (115). The best thing that Miranda has done for Bernice is to help her believe in herself, discovering in her hands and her body the power to work and to produce. Proud of her own accomplishments, Bernice has also drawn the praise of the community: "Ain't tasted gingerbread like that since Mama used to churn butter. . . . Coulda sworn there was fresh ground nutmeg in it, and real blackstrap molasses" (112). Looking at Bernice's "eager and hopeful eyes" on Candle Walk night, Miranda wonders:

What kinda destiny is happening here, between you and me? I asked you to churn butter and you did it. Walk two miles a day, you walked four. . . . Now, I'm not so sure about myself, but I ain't gotta worry about you. You're gonna make it over that line. And maybe, you'll just have to drag this tired old lady with you. (116)

Miranda's problem is that, as artist and magician, she knows that she is playing with Bernice's mind, with Bernice's beliefs in magic and in supernatural forces. Miranda is fully aware of her own limitations: a human, she possesses no supernatural forces or magic seeds or potions for performing miracles. Her sole power lies in her ability to prepare Bernice so that the young woman is both physically and psychologically ready to conceive. She recognizes that, like any artist, she has limited control over her creation, the being she has helped form. At some point Bernice must take control, as an artist's creation does, leading her creator where *she* must go rather than waiting to be led.⁶⁶

⁶⁶Miranda's thoughts about the extent and limitations of her control over Bernice seem to reflect Naylor's feelings about her control, as a writer, over the characters she creates. In a conversation with Toni Morrison, published in *Southern Review* 21.3 (1985): 567-93, Naylor talks about her relationship with Willa Prescott Nedeed in *Linden Hills*:

Nevertheless, Miranda recognizes that the success of her plan for Bernice depends on the extent of her own belief on the night that Bernice comes to "the other place." Miranda, however, has always scoffed at the foolish notions of her neighbors about "the other place":

Where do folks get things in their head? It's an old house with a big garden, that's all. . . . But then again there *was* the other place, where she was gonna bring Bernice in the spring. Will she see just an old house with a big garden? She remembers the hope shining in Bernice's eyes. No, she won't. But the important thing is, will I? . . . (117-18)

Miranda's own belief is crucial, then, for any hesitation or pretense on her part will threaten Bernice's belief. The ritual she has planned for Bernice will be powerless unless both participants share a belief in Miranda's powers and in the powers active at "the other place." At the same time, however, Miranda knows that she risks her own salvation by tampering with powers that rightly belong only to God:

would God forgive her for Bernice? But she wasn't changing the natural course of nothing, she couldn't if she tried. Just using what's there. And couldn't be nothing wrong in helping Bernice to believe that there's something more than there is. It's an old house with a big garden, and it done seen its share of pain. And I'm just an old woman who'll be waiting in a rocking chair. . . . (139)

I can remember with *Linden Hills* the woman who was imprisoned in that basement. . . . I created a way for her to see her own reflection in a pan of water because she had no self up until that moment. . . . I had *my* ending all set. But when this character who had lived with me now for two years finally discovered her face in that pan of water, she decided that she liked being what she was. . . . And I said, "Oh, Lord, woman, don't you know what the end of this book got to be?" . . . I was angry with her for a good week — I just stopped writing and ran around the house cursing her. But then again that was *her* life and her decision. . . ." (587)

Miranda's belief in her own powers is a dangerous thing: she must strike a careful balance between too little and too great a belief. All along she has known that success at the other place would be "tricky, real tricky" (91).

The ritual devised by Miranda is based on sympathetic magic. It takes place on the night of "the first new moon come spring" (139), and it requires the ingestion into Bernice's body of two freshly laid hen's eggs — the first by mouth and the second by womb. Miranda has not told Bernice what to expect, only to come. She must bring fear and enough hope to overcome that fear; she must find within herself a knowing that overcomes confusion. "Humming a music born before words," Miranda sits on the porch of the other place, waiting for Bernice. All that is visible in the dark is starlight glinting off two pairs of eyes, one belonging to Miranda, the other to the hen in her lap:

Two pairs of eyes breathing as one when hope rounds that bend. She [Miranda] can taste the fear that hesitates on the edge of the garden walk . . . Fear trembling at the bottom of the porch steps, watching the gleaming of two pair of eyes, hearing the creak of wood against wood under the soft rumbling from feathers, the humming begun in eternity. But it's hope that finds a voice: Mama — Mama Day?

The right hand strokes, the left hand reaches out, the palm wet from the cradled egg, gray and warm. Confusion waits a bit too long. The shell dries and grows cold under the hidden moon. One pair of eyes unblinking, one pair frowns and smashes the egg into the porch steps. Silent, she pleads for another chance. But she must wait — and listen. Not to the humming, not to creak of wood against wood. Naw: the moon inching toward the horizon, the tiny hole sucking itself open and closed, open and closed. The left hand reaches back out. Knowing takes the egg while the shell's still pulsing and wet, breaks it, and eats. (139)

Confused about what is expected of her, Bernice waits too long to take the first egg offered. Together, Miranda and Bernice wait, and when the second egg, "still pulsing and wet," is offered, Bernice knows intuitively to take it and eat. After Bernice eats the hen's egg, both women move inside the old house. Bernice "strips down naked" and lies on the dining room

table, which has been covered with a sheet, and closes her eyes as Miranda's hands begin to stroke her body. "In the morning," Bernice thinks, "she can tell herself it was all a dream. And it can't be human hands no way, making her body feel like this" (140). As Miranda strokes her body, Bernice becomes increasingly aware of that body's openings — not only its nine obvious openings but all the pores of her skin — until, experiencing her entire body as one opening, a receptacle, she is ready to receive the second hen's egg:

She ain't flesh, she's a center between the thighs spreading wide to take in . . . the touch of feathers. Space to space. Ancient fingers keeping each in line. The uncountable, the unthinkable, is one opening. Pulsing and alive — wet — the egg moves from one space to the other. A rhythm older than woman draws it in and holds it tight. (140)

Nine months later, Bernice bears a son, and no mention is ever made about the night spent at "the other place."

In fact, after that night, Bernice avoids Miranda. As soon as she knows she is pregnant, she begins going to Dr. Smithfield, who later delivers the baby in a hospital "beyond the bridge." She stops preparing foods by hand and stops walking. Miranda believes that Bernice's behavior suggests ingratitude (145); it also, however, demonstrates the extent to which Bernice relies on external powers — *any* external powers available — as well as the depth of her desire to bury forever all memories of her experience at "the other place." She prefers, one would suppose, to remember it as a "dream." However, when the baby is born, the neighbors call him Chick because

That's what he looked like, toddling around: little pecan head sitting on a scrawny neck, two bright buttons for eyes, and a feathery mess of hair she couldn't keep slicked down for nothing. He's gonna have Ambush's coloring but her build, kinda narrow and bony. Folks had to stop calling him Chick 'cause Bernice would pitch herself a fit whenever she heard it. . . . (161)

To have a baby that looks like a chicken and that is called Chick is more than Bernice, wanting only to forget the events surrounding his conception, can bear. Later, when George meets Bernice and Ambush for the first time, he is struck by Bernice's nervousness: "She was a nice enough woman, but nervous, nervous, nervous" (197). By contrast, her one moment of stillness is especially pronounced:

There was only one time when she became still — totally still. I asked Ambush if Miss Miranda had delivered his son. He said no, but he had wanted her to. Mama Day had been very helpful to them when they were trying to have a baby. Obviously, Bernice had not wanted Miss Miranda as midwife, but there was no spoken reply from her, and I couldn't read her stillness. The strangest thing of all was that Ambush couldn't read it either. The confusion was there in the glance he gave her — a little hurt, perhaps — that however adamant that past refusal, it was built on something she'd never shared with him. (198)

Bernice has kept her vow of secrecy, never having shared with her husband the events of that spring night. Her secrecy, like the transfer of her loyalties to Dr. Smithfield, appears to be motivated by her new perception of Miranda as a conjuror rather than as a healer and the fear that naturally springs from that perception. Not until four years after her son's birth, at the party Abigail gives for George and Cocoa, does Bernice acknowledge Miranda's assistance in the boy's conception: "I never thanked you for my son." Miranda is quick to tell her that she was right not to have thanked her: "I ain't in the business of miracles, so I wasn't the one to thank" (239).

Two days later Bernice's son — named Charlie but called Little Caesar — is dead. Broken by her loss, Bernice turns to Miranda; despite Miranda's recent words, Bernice still believes that "Mama Day" can work miracles. Once again, Miranda is waiting for Bernice at the other place, this time at the garden gate:

[Bernice] comes through the woods. Her flesh in her arms. Climbing over fallen trees that ain't there. Wading through mud holes that ain't there.

Slipping and cutting her knee on rocks that ain't there. She's holding the only thing that is. The sun keeps moving up to another branch of the pines. The rains come down. (258)

Through the afternoon and the evening and the night the two women stand where they are, oblivious to the falling rain and the passage of time. At sunrise, "with the red rays filtering again through the bottom of the pines, [Miranda] finally stretches out her hand to touch the broken face of the other woman. Go home, Bernice. Go home and bury your child" (259).

Bernice carries her dead child to Miranda because she believes that if the old woman has the power of conception, she must also have the power of resurrection. Miranda, however, recognizes the limitations of her powers and of her belief. Bernice's belief alone is not enough, and Miranda's own belief can never extend that far. Miranda is crushed by grief, both for Bernice's loss and for her belief: "More crushing, just a bit more crushing than that baby's death, is the belief that his mama came to her with" (261). Directly behind that grief is guilt. There will be "no redemption," Miranda knows, for her having inspired such belief in Bernice, for her having played the part of God: "You play with people's lives and it backfires on you" (261).

Bernice never apologizes for her belief in Miranda's powers, but she does recognize that taking her son's body to Miranda was wrong for other reasons. At the "standing forth" for Little Caesar, the neighbors who knew him stand up one at a time to commemorate the first time each saw him and to express their belief that, when they see him again, he will be engaged in a similar, although more advanced, activity:

The minister calling out, Who is ready to stand forth? Someone had seen him in a stroller and would see him again in his own car. If they first saw him walking, they would see him running. Dr. Buzzard got up and had first seen him sucking away on a pacifier, and when he saw him again he'd be more than ready for a handful of his special ginger candy. . . . (268)

When it is Bernice's turn to stand forth, she apologizes for her temporary belief that her son was lost to her: "When I first saw you, you were so very glad to be alive — new and declaring it to everyone. And when I see you again, you'll be forgiving of your old mama, who didn't remember for a moment that you were still here" (269). Bernice recognizes that resurrection of her son by Miranda is unnecessary because he is not really gone; he is "still here," continuing to exist and grow, changing and aging at the same rate as she and the neighbors are.

Cocoa's Illness: George's Belief in Self

If Bernice's belief in external powers occasionally extends beyond what even the greatest belief can achieve, George's belief in himself to the exclusion of external forces can be equally excessive. When George sees Bernice carry her dead child into the woods, heading for Miranda and "the other place," his whole concept of reality is threatened:

It was one of those moments when your mind simply freezes to protect itself from the devastation of a thousand contradictions, which freezes your body as well. If this was reality, it meant I was insane, and I couldn't be — and she couldn't be, because I had met that woman. . . . No, this was the stuff of dreams. (257-58)

A belief such as Bernice's is inconceivable to George, a modern, rational man who does not believe in God; does not believe in luck, superstition, or fate; and does not believe in Ruby's hoodoo or in Miranda's power to counteract that hoodoo. George believes only in himself: "I've always made my own luck. . . . Always" (204).

Miranda believes that George's belief in himself can be used to save Cocoa. She knows that because Cocoa "done tied up her mind and her flesh with George" (265), she cannot save Cocoa from Ruby's hoodoo without George's help. "He's a part of *her*,

Abigail," she tells her sister. "And that's the part that Ruby done fixed to take it out of our hands" (267). Miranda recognizes that hoodoo is powerless unless the mind is engaged. When Frances, for example, asks her to give her something to help win Junior Lee back from Ruby, Miranda tries to explain to her that it is not the hoodoo but the mind that is important. Frances, however, is never able to understand that

The mind is everything. She can dig all the holes she wanted around Ruby's door. Put in all the bits of glass and black pepper, every silvery pin and lodestone she'll find some fool to sell her. Make as many trips to the graveyard she wants with his hair, her hair, his pee, her pee. Walk naked in the moonlight stinking with Van-Van oil — and it won't do a bit of good. 'Cause the mind is everything. (90)

All the trappings of hoodoo — ground glass and pepper, pins and needles, graveyard dust, hair and pee, Van-Van oil — are powerless, Miranda knows, unless the body or the mind is already poisoned. Thus, more powerful than the physical poisoning of the nightshade rubbed into Cocoa's scalp is Ruby's exploitation of the division between Cocoa and George that she witnessed at their party. Cleansing Cocoa's body of the physical poison — the nightshade — presents little difficulty, but cleansing her mind of the mental poison requires understanding that mind and all that makes up that mind.

The form that Cocoa's hallucination takes is directly influenced by the quarrel she and George had on the night of their party. The quarrel arose, in part, from Cocoa's anxiety about her appearance, which in turn reflects years of feeling shame and inferiority because of the light color of her skin, which she believes indicates the presence of white blood.⁶⁷

⁶⁷The fight also reflects Cocoa's concern about George's suggestion that they stay in Willow Springs. She knows that, if he insisted, she would stay with him, but not without resentment: "We'd be trampling on dangerous ground: to be unable to live without someone is one thing, to be forced to prove it continually is something else again" (223). During the fight George expresses a similar concern when he implies that Cocoa is "a bitch . . . to keep reminding him" that she, unlike his previous lover, is "woman enough to hold" him (235).

Miranda remembers a time when Cocoa came home from school and sliced her finger to see whether her blood was really white. She laughs, remembering the incident, particularly in light of her certainty that Cocoa is "pure black":

The lean thighs, tight hips, the long strides flashing light between the blur of strong legs — pure black. Me and Abigail, we take after the sons, Miranda thinks. The earth men who formed the line of Days, hard and dark brown. But *the* Baby Girl brings back the great, grand Mother. We ain't seen 18 & 23 black from that time till now. The black that can soak up all the light in the universe, can even swallow the sun. Them silly children didn't know it's the white in us that reflects all these shades of brown running around Willow Springs. But pure black woulda sucked it all in — and it's only an ancient mother of pure black that one day spits out this kinda gold. (47-48)

George makes a similar statement, knowing that no matter what mix of white and black blood Cocoa may have, her temperament, action, and behavior are those of a *black* woman:

We only had to get into an argument for me to be reminded — your fists balled up on your hips, you drawing blood with your never-ending mouth — you were, in spirit at least, as black as they come. No, you could have easily descended from that slave woman who talked a man out of a whole island. But you hated to think about the fact that you might also be carrying a bit of him. What difference did it make? (219)

Despite the perceptions of others, however, Cocoa has never believed in her blackness. All she can see is the difference between her skin color and that of other blacks; all she can remember is the years of being ostracized, teased, called a leper by her classmates. On the night of the party, George is angered by Cocoa's continuing insecurity, which seems irrational to him, and at one point in their fight he calls her a "living nightmare" (235). During her illness, brought on initially by the nightshade, Cocoa actually perceives herself

This strain in Cocoa and George's relationship repeats the strain in the past relationships between Ophelia and John-Paul and between Sapphira and Bascombe Wade: do not force me to prove continually that I cannot live without you (223); "Let me go with peace. . . . Let me go with Peace" (284); having a claim to a person's body does not give one a claim to his or her mind (225).

as a living nightmare, seeing in her mirror "the flesh from both cheeks . . . hanging in strings under [her] ears" so that moving her head "caused them to wiggle like hooked worms" (276). As the illness progresses, the red welts caused by the nightshade take on a life of their own, becoming worms burrowing beneath her skin. Cocoa is thus literally being devoured from within by her own self-doubt. Although much of what Cocoa sees and experiences — such as worms cascading from the shower nozzle — continues to be hallucination, there comes a point when she stops recognizing that her perceptions are false (i.e., hallucinations) and begins to believe they are real:

It was no illusion that the welts had left the surface of the skin — it was smooth. And . . . it was no illusion that they had begun to crawl within my body. I didn't need a mirror to feel the slight itching as they curled and stretched themselves, multiplying as they burrowed deeper into my flesh.
(287)

As soon as Cocoa begins to believe that the worms are real, they become real, and as George soon discovers, her body is truly infested by worms.

Miranda can see, when she cuts off Cocoa's braids, the form that Cocoa's illness will take. The white string cut loose with the braids looks like worms and maggots.⁶⁸ The sight is so real to Miranda that her stomach heaves, and she has to force herself to continue. She also knows from the tightly woven braids that Ruby has successfully "tied up" Cocoa's mind. Unfortunately, the mind that has been tied up is not a simple thing. It involves *all* of Cocoa — that is, all of those who went before, the individual histories that constitute her past, as

⁶⁸The growth, multiplication, and movement of lizards, snakes, scorpions, and toads inside the body was commonly believed to be one form of hoodoo death. See, for example, Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men* (1935; New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969) 232; Robert Tallant, *Voodoo in New Orleans* (1946; New York: Collier, 1962) 195-202; and Newbell Niles Puckett, *Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro* (1926; Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1968) 249-55.

well as George, who is now a part of Cocoa. Miranda then retreats to "the other place" to communicate with her ancestral spirits to seek assistance in saving Cocoa. She has to learn from them how the current struggle between Cocoa and George relates to the earlier struggles between Ophelia and John-Paul and between Sapphira and Bascombe Wade.⁶⁹ Miranda recognizes, however, that anything she discovers will prove insufficient without George's assistance.

George's assistance, however, as both Miranda and Abigail know, will be difficult to attain. The sisters have no doubt that George will do anything in his power to save Cocoa. The problem, they fear, is that he will never believe in their way of saving Cocoa — that, indeed, such belief may not lie within his power. George is now in a world different from his own, one in which his power, springing from his unwavering belief in self, is not enough. When George crossed over the bridge into Willow Springs, Cocoa tells him later, "you were entering a part of my existence that you were powerless in. Your maps were no good here" (176). George is powerless because the world of Willow Springs requires a different kind of knowing, one for which Miranda and Abigail "ain't even got his kind of words" with which to explain Cocoa's illness to him (267).

Faced with this dilemma, Miranda knows she has two choices. As she says to George, when he asks why she cut Cocoa's hair, "You have a choice I can tell you the truth, which you won't believe, or I can invent a lie, which you would. Which would you rather have?" (266). Miranda chooses to work with the truth even though she knows he will not believe it because she thinks it important that he at least "know what he ain't believing" (271). When Buzzard, at Miranda's request, explains to George that Cocoa's

⁶⁹See note 67 above.

illness is the result of Ruby's hoodoo, George's response is exactly what Miranda, Abigail, and Buzzard all expected it to be:

What do you do when someone starts telling you something that you just cannot believe? You can walk away. You can stand there and challenge him. Or in my case, you can fight the urge to laugh if it wasn't so pathetic: the grizzled old man with his hat of rooster feathers and his necklace of bones, shifting his feet and clearing his throat as he struggled to provide me with the minute details. I had stopped listening . . . Snakeroot. Powdered ashes. Loose hair. Chicken blood. I would work until I dropped to get you out of there. . . . (286-87)

George's ideas about hoodoo are not that different from those frequently expressed by Miranda: he refers to the belief in "snakeroot," "powdered ashes," "loose hair," and "chicken blood" as "madness," whereas Miranda has always called it foolishness. Miranda does, however, recognize and respect the power of hate and the power of the mind — two powers associated with hoodoo that George, born and raised in New York, does not know enough to allow for. He does not believe that any force originating outside the self can wield such power.

The belief in a power outside himself is the "missing piece" (285) that Miranda needs and that George, ultimately, cannot give. What Miranda learns from the message she receives from "the great, grand Mother," whose name she never learns, is that what links Cocoa to Ophelia and to Sapphira is that all three are tied up with the same kind of men: men who believe that they possess in their hands the power to hold on to the women they love despite the desire of those women to go with peace/Peace. Standing beside the well where peace was lost three times, looking past the pain, and listening through the "circles and circles of screaming," Miranda

opens her eyes on her own hands. Hands that look like John-Paul's. Hands that would not let the woman in gingham go with Peace. Before him, other hands that would not let the woman in apricot homespun go with peace. No,

could not let her go. . . . looking past the losing was to feel for the man who built this house and the one who nailed this well shut. It was to feel the hope in them that the work of their hands could wipe away all that had gone before. Those men *believed* — in the power of themselves, in what they were feeling. (285)

George is another in this line of men who believe in themselves, and his belief, if handed over to Miranda so that she can connect it with the belief of John-Paul and Bascombe Wade, can save Cocoa:

Miranda looks down at her hands again. In all her years she could count on half of her fingers folks she'd met with a will like his. He believes in himself — deep within himself — 'cause he ain't never had a choice. And he keeps it protected down in his center, but she needs that belief buried in George. Of his own accord he has to *hand* it over to her. She needs his hand in hers — his very hand — so she can connect it up with all the believing that had gone before. . . . So together they could be the bridge for Baby Girl to walk over. Yes, in his very hands he already holds the missing piece she'd come looking for. (285)

To give Miranda his hand is to give Miranda his belief; thus, all she needs from George is "his hand in hers."

In her attempt to obtain George's hand joined with hers in belief, Miranda creates a ritual as she did for Bernice. George must walk to "the other place," accept from her John-Paul's cane and Bascombe Wade's black ledger, carry them back to the chicken coop at her trailer, look in the nest of "an old red hen that's setting her last batch of eggs" in the northwest corner of the coop, and bring back to her what he finds there (295). The first time George goes to Miranda, she knows that he has come without belief, but she explains the ritual anyway. Angered by her "mumbo-jumbo," George accuses her of not caring that her niece is sick; she corrects him, telling him that her niece is dying (296). When he gets back to Cocoa, he discovers that Miranda is right; Cocoa, infested with worms, is being devoured from within, and George recognizes that Miranda offers the only hope left to him on this

isolated island. Cocoa will be dead before the bridge is built, and there is no other way to get medical assistance from the mainland.

Thus, when George returns to Miranda the second time, she sees that he has not come willingly, that "he'd been beaten down to believe," and that to try to save Cocoa Miranda's way has required that he sacrifice all pride (299). In his pride of superior scientific knowledge, George is unable to believe that the people of Willow Springs may understand some things more fully than he does. When lightning strikes Ruby's house twice, for example, George knows that the electric field necessary to cause such a phenomenon can be manufactured artificially. That someone in Willow Springs could have manufactured such an electric field, however, is inconceivable to him: "No one was running around with that kind of knowledge in Willow Springs" (274). Proud of his own knowledge and capabilities as an engineer, George consistently underestimates the knowledge and capabilities of what he perceives as a backward community.

However, having been stripped of his pride and "beaten down to believe," George performs Miranda's ritual. The enactment of the ritual, combined with his fear for Cocoa, inspires in him some degree of hope and belief — enough, at least, that he confronts the setting hen. Although the hen is not, of course, a life-threatening opponent, Miranda knows that George, a city boy, feels wary and anxious in the presence of her chickens and that he would never initiate a confrontation with one unless he believed that its outcome would help save Cocoa. The confrontation with the old red hen, then, becomes a test of George's belief. Like Bernice at "the other place," George finds sufficient belief and hope to overcome fear, and he struggles with the hen to find what is hidden in its nest. Unlike Bernice's belief, however, George's is insufficient to provide him with the knowing necessary to overcome

confusion. When he realizes that the only thing in the hen's nest is his own hands and that his hands are what Miranda wanted, George's belief in Miranda evaporates while that in himself reasserts itself. As he later tells Cocoa,

There was nothing that old woman could do with a pair of empty hands. . .
. I brought both palms up, the bruised fingers clenched inward. All of this
wasted effort when these were *my* hands, and there was no way I was going
to let you go. (301)

They are *his* hands, and he will use those hands to hold on to Cocoa. The exertion of the past few days, however, combined with his final rage, is more than George's weak heart can take. He does make it to Cocoa, grasping her shoulder in his hand just before his heart bursts. George, like Ophelia and Sapphira before him, discovers peace in death, leaving Cocoa to recover from her loss, just as John-Paul and Bascombe Wade had tried to do. Although George succeeds in saving Cocoa and finding peace for himself, he fails in the more difficult goal of working with her to create a life in which they can experience peace together rather than separately.

George fails because he is just a boy rather than a man. "It's gonna take a man to bring her peace," Miranda tells her sister, but both know that "all they had was that boy" (263). George would probably have been surprised to learn that Miranda and Abigail view him as a boy. In their eyes, however, his knowledge and understanding are still those of a boy rather than those of a man. Buzzard also calls him "boy," telling him that "a man would have grown enough to know that really believing in himself means that he ain't gotta be afraid to admit there's some things he just can't do alone" (292). For George, however, to believe in some power greater than himself threatens his own sense of control: "When things were under control — and I lived my life so that was usually the case — there was no need to think about having to deal with some presence that might be governing what was beyond

my own abilities" (251). He has always controlled events in his own life; thus, when given a choice between acting on his own or giving himself up to the power of another being, he will always rely on himself. Nevertheless, for a moment in the chicken coop, George almost yields to belief in a greater power. A week earlier, he experienced a similar desire to yield during the hurricane:

the winds coming around the corner of that tiny house on that tiny island was God.

And I was even smaller than them. Trivial. Every thought, ambition, or worry diminished as it became my being against the being on the other side of two inches of wood. Fear never entered the picture: at first an exhilaration of the possibility of having the barrier broken and, for one brief moment, to be taken over by raw power. Pure power. What a magnificent ending to an insignificant existence. (252)

Overwhelmed by the force of the hurricane, then, George momentarily experienced "an exhilaration of the possibility of having the barrier broken," of giving himself over to "pure power," an external power so great that it made him feel small, trivial, insignificant. Nevertheless, the recognition of and desire to submit to a greater power, both during the hurricane and later in the chicken coop, are fleeting, and belief in the other is quickly replaced by belief in the self.

In Miranda's view, a belief in the self such as George possesses is a rare and extremely valuable commodity. Such belief is a true source of strength, one that is effective in almost any situation a person can normally expect to face. When such a belief in self is insufficient, however, or when it is lacking, as in the case of Bernice, a belief in external powers provides an alternative source of strength. Although Bernice's belief in Miranda's ability to resurrect her son is so radically misplaced as to be ineffective, her belief in the continued existence of her son's spirit is empowering. To combine both sources of strength — George's belief in the self and Bernice's belief in external powers — is to become nearly

invincible. Miranda is such a person, and her great niece Cocoa has the potential to become one.

Cocoa as the Future: Bridging Two Worlds

By alternating between the Willow Springs and New York segments of the novel, Naylor keeps the story firmly planted in "the now" (23) of the twentieth-century everyday world. Although Naylor's depiction of Willow Springs and of Miranda Day may make one long to return to such an existence, the novel ultimately suggests that the twenty-first century, which looms at the novel's end, belongs to some world other than that of either Willow Springs or New York. George's death seems to suggest that the inability of the world of science — New York — to accommodate the world of illusion — Willow Springs — signals the defeat of both world views. The power of Miranda's magic depends on the power of belief; the mind, and only the mind, can transform a handful of black and gold pumpkin seeds into magic seeds. When belief is lacking, as in George's case, Miranda is rendered powerless. Fortunately, belief, like Candle Walk, will never completely die; but the form and practice of belief, as well as the power derived from it, must necessarily change with time and the increasing contact between alternative world views.

The increasing contact with the culture, alienation, and science "beyond the bridge," for example, inevitably transforms the children of Willow Springs. Their beliefs waver, falter, and become ever more distorted until, like Reema's boy, they become strangers to home, no longer able to hear its voices or understand its ways. Even the strongest believers, who like Bernice have always relied on the external powers alive in Willow Springs, are swayed by contact with life "beyond the bridge," placing their faith in science — in degreed

doctors, modern hospitals, and miracle drugs — rather than in magic. To counteract the sense of impending loss suggested by the passing of Miranda Day and the passing of the century and the world in which her powers reign, Naylor offers Cocoa. Cocoa discovers, after her loss of the world she shared with George, the power to construct a new world -- one that is fixed in neither Willow Springs nor in New York but that is founded on beliefs drawn from both worlds, softening scientific reality with the art of illusion and supplementing the belief in self with belief in external powers. The hope for the future lies, Naylor suggests, in the new world and new world view developed by Cocoa, who — through struggle, illness, and loss — has learned "the meaning of peace" (312).

Cocoa is directly descended from the seventh son of the seventh son of Sapphira Wade, who was

A true conjure woman: satin black, biscuit cream, red as Georgia clay: depending upon which of us takes a mind to her. She could walk through a lightning storm without being touched; grab a bolt of lightning in the palm of her hand; use the heat of lightning to start the kindling going under her medicine pot: depending upon which of us takes a mind to her. She turned the moon into salve, the stars into a swaddling cloth, and healed the wounds of every creature walking up on two or down on four. (1)

From this conjure woman — "the great, great, grand Mother" (218) — Cocoa has inherited the blood flowing in her veins, the golden color of her skin, and the strength of her will. Although her mother died soon after she was born, she was fortunate enough to be lavishly loved and nurtured by her grandmother Abigail and tutored daily in the powers of belief and the imagination by her great-aunt Miranda. Years later, while visiting "the other place" with George, Cocoa remembers that

when a child I was delighted with the game of following Mama Day around her garden . . . her trees sang and her flowers took flight.

Wonderful stories that fed a child's imagination through her eyes and ears. I saw those same flying petals now as our legs brushed a patch of zinnias and startled a group of scarlet butterflies. (224)

As a child, Cocoa believed without doubt the wonders that her eyes perceived: when Miranda waved her cane "over a patch of zinnias," she saw "the scarlet petals take flight" (152). Only as an adult does she perceive that the flying petals are actually startled butterflies. Also as an adult, Cocoa discovers that she must leave Willow Springs and enter that other world "beyond the bridge." When she does, she finds that neither her genetic heritage nor her training in belief and the imagination are sufficiently strong to sustain her in New York.

In fact, life in New York transforms Cocoa into "a total stranger" (49). Dehumanized by her fear of "change and difference" (63) and by the daily competition for work, housing, and love, Cocoa becomes harsh, abrasive, manipulative, and bigoted. By the time she meets George, seven years after her arrival in the city, she has resorted to referring to members of different ethnic groups as food — as "fudge sticks, kumquats, bagels, zucchinis," and "tacos" (62). Cocoa is temporarily shocked out of her inhuman categorization of people when George asks, "Ophelia, why are people food to you?" (62). She forgoes her usual flippant response to answer him as honestly as she can:

You know, I was scared when I came to this city. Really scared. There were more people living on my one block than on the whole island where I grew up. And instead of getting better in seven years, it's gotten worse. . . . A whole kaleidoscope of people — nothing's just black and white here like in Willow Springs. Nothing stays put. So I guess the way I talk is my way of coming to terms with never knowing what to expect from anything or anybody. I'm not a bigot, but if I sound like one, I guess it's because deep down I'm as frightened of change and difference as they are. (63)

In Willow Springs, where everyone is descended from the slaves of Bascombe Wade, things are simple: despite varying shades of skin color, all the people are "black"; that is, they share a similar reality — similar beliefs, values, and responses to the world around them. For them, all life "beyond the bridge" is suspect. Under George's tutelage during the summer that he introduces her to "his" New York, Cocoa rediscovers herself, relaxing once again into the loving, friendly woman she must have been in Willow Springs. As George tells her in one of the conversations after his death: "You weren't becoming different, you were going back to the way you were" (100).

Years of living as a single woman in New York had nearly destroyed Cocoa's belief that a man like George, a relationship like the one that seems to be developing between them, could be possible. Knowing that none of her friends would be able to believe in George or in the developing relationship and fearing, perhaps, that their doubt might destroy her own awakening belief, she keeps his existence to herself:

from a little girl I had been taught that you don't waste your time telling people things you know they won't believe. I had seen Mama Day do a lot of things out at the other place, and when I told the kids at school they called me a liar. . . . But if I could just bring them here and let them *see*, I'd say. Folks see what they want to see, she told me. And for them to see what's really happening here, they gotta be ready to believe. So it's not that I was hiding you from them. None of my crowd was ready to believe. . . . (97)

Not only are Cocoa's friends not "ready to believe" in George; Cocoa herself is not ready either. Belief in magic, in miracles, in the impossible — belief that came so easily to Cocoa as a child guided by Miranda's "eyes and ears" — has been destroyed by the reality of New York. Believing that George is what he appears to be — "an ordinary man" who wants to help Cocoa enjoy herself — is more than Cocoa is prepared to do:

George, it's not that it was hard to believe, I wasn't ready to believe. Nothing I had met in that world had prepared me for your possibility. So it only stands to reason that I felt what I saw was impossible. . . . (99)

Much of Cocoa's problem with George, even after their marriage, arises from her fear that his love is not real, that he will suddenly reveal that he is not who he appears to be, that he will leave her. She can never quite believe, even on the night of their party in Willow Springs, that this man she loves is authentic. Only after George's death, when questioned by the son she named after him, does she realize that George was love (310).

The sections spoken by George and Cocoa emphasize the difficulty they have in learning to accept, adapt to, and live with each other. Living together brings no peace to George and Cocoa; it is a constant struggle. The juxtaposition of those sections, however, with the sections taking place in and narrated by the voice of Willow Springs emphasizes a second struggle within Cocoa: how does she reconcile the world of her birth, childhood, adolescence — Willow Springs — with the world of her adulthood — New York? How does she reconcile a world in which Miranda can, with a wave of her cane, cause zinnias to take flight (152) with a world in which her friend Selma would consider having a sex-change operation in order to marry a "Park Avenue neurosurgeon" who "was waiting for the right woman . . . to get one along with him . . ." (17)? How does she reconcile a world in which Miranda would define Cocoa's ability to "know" which people have jobs as "second sight" with a world in which she herself would define the same ability as "a science" learned from too many days, weeks, and months searching for a job (14)?

When the two worlds — Willow Springs and New York — collide, no one can deny that Willow Springs, circumscribed by its nineteenth-century world view, must give way to the twentieth-century modernity of New York. Willow Springs is the past; New York is the

present. Miranda's magic would appear as foolish to the inhabitants of New York as Buzzard's hoodoo "mess" appears to Miranda. Miranda, with her roots, teas, mother-wit, and second sight, would be perceived — both by Cocoa's disillusioned friends and George's technically oriented work associates — as eccentric, old-fashioned, ridiculous. In fact, Naylor gives a clue about the way in which Miranda would be received in New York in an earlier novel, *Linden Hills*. In that novel, Cocoa's cousin, Willa Prescott Nedeed,

remembered being so ashamed of her great-aunt, Miranda Day, when she pulled up in that cab each summer, calling from the curb at the top of her voice, "Y'all better be home. Mama Day done come to visit a spell with her Northern folks." Coming with her cardboard suitcases, loose-fitting shoes, and sticky jars of canned whatever. Toothless but ready with a broad grin; almost illiterate but determined to give her very loud opinion regardless of the subject or the company. "Child, y'all sittin' there complainin' 'bout them wayward boys. Ain't never seen an onery man yet who didn't come round if you get yo'self a little shame-weed and bake it up in somethin' sweet."
. . . (*Linden Hills* 148)

Although Cocoa never feels shame for Miranda, she does doubt Miranda's powers in New York. When Cocoa discovers that she did not get the job with George's company, despite having sent the note Miranda had suggested she write, her belief that Miranda does not understand "big cities" is confirmed:

I wanted to let Mama Day know how wrong she was about my sending you the note — they did give the position to someone else. I know these big cities, while her whole impression of what's happening up here comes from the Phil Donahue show. (57)

Although Cocoa does receive an unexpected job offer as soon as she returns from that trip home, she is still convinced that Miranda cannot understand the ways of New York, much less work her magic there. Cocoa's belief in Miranda is suspended in New York.⁷⁰

⁷⁰The irony, of course, is that Miranda's idea for the note, accompanied by the lavender-scented powder she secretly added to it, is successful; but Cocoa cannot *believe* that Miranda is in any way responsible.

When the children of Willow Springs move to the northern cities, as Willa and Cocoa did, they lose a part of themselves. When Cocoa talks about going to college "to 'find herself,'" Miranda thinks, "You only go looking for things that've been lost. Baby Girl did have something lost to her, but she wasn't gonna find it in school" (150). Transplanted from Willow Springs to New York, Willa and Cocoa lose their belief both in themselves and in external powers. Cocoa retains her belief to a greater extent than Willa did, partly because she is stronger by nature but also because she still makes a trip home each August. Cocoa, unlike Willa, continues to recognize the power of home:

Home. Folks call it different things, think of it in different ways. For Cocoa it's being around living mirrors with the power to show a woman that she's still carrying scarred knees, a runny nose, and socks that get walked down into the heels of her shoes.

Home. It's being new and old all rolled into one. Measuring yourself against old friends, old ways, old places. Knowing that as long as the old survives, you can keep changing as much as you want without the nightmare of waking up to a total stranger.

Home. You can move away from it, but you never leave it. Not as long as it holds something to be missed. (48, 49, 50)

Despite her move to New York, Cocoa can never entirely leave Willow Springs. Each visit home assures her that she will not wake up to "a total stranger" and reminds her that she will always be a child — "Baby Girl" — as long as Abigail and Miranda are still waiting for her there. Cocoa's connection to home, however, becomes increasingly strained by her years in New York and by her experience of the city as a world distinctly different from Willow Springs, one in which her belief in Miranda's power and wisdom dissolves. With time Cocoa's visits home become more disruptive than healing as she struggles to prevent Miranda and Abigail from dominating and manipulating her life. As comforting as it is to return home and reexperience herself as a child, protected and coddled by great-aunt and

grandmother, Cocoa must continually assert herself as an adult against an overprotectiveness that threatens to reduce her to the powerlessness of a "Baby Girl."

Not surprisingly, then, Cocoa is dismayed by George's suggestion that they stay in Willow Springs. Staying in Willow Springs would be dangerous: to fall under Miranda's control is to risk losing one's belief in one's own powers. Cocoa has watched the way in which Miranda and Abigail have manipulated George, not only getting him to work for them but doing it in such a way that he believes he has volunteered his services:

They had you under their heels and you were purring. . . . But like I said, they were artists. And they wove the illusion that you were doing more than helping, you were in charge. . . . The *fact* that you weren't in charge had absolutely nothing to do with the results: Grandma's roof got painted, the garden got weeded, Mama Day's rugs were spotless. And you were too tired to go anywhere. If only you knew, I thought And maybe you did know, but it was what you believed that counted. (217)

In Cocoa's view, George, the man who believes in controlling all events in his life, has fallen under the control of two master "artists." Can *believing* that one is in charge, Cocoa asks, counteract the *knowledge* that it is all illusion? Cocoa herself once exerted a similar power over George to win him from his previous lover:

While you were still stunned . . . , I went in for the kill — planted both feet on the ground, a hand to your shoulder to steady the target before focusing my baby browns and aiming right between your eyes — "I don't have to see you again. You've already turned me into a better woman." No, I hadn't misfired, your mind was blown so far up in the air, it was going to take a while for the dust to settle. . . . (104)

Despite this early demonstration that she had been "brought up by some very shrewd old women" (103), Cocoa prefers to treat George as an adult rather than a child. Disgusted with George's ready submission to Miranda and Abigail's manipulative ploy, Cocoa says,

I found treating a grown man like a five-year-old a little nauseating. If they had just come out and said, We want you to help around the house, you

would have. . . . That was more my style: Hey, look, keep your tail here and help me. . . . (217)

Living in Willow Springs, one risks falling under Miranda's spell, becoming overly dependent on her powers, as Bernice does, and thereby losing the belief in self and the strength of will that are necessary to survive as an adult in the "real" world of New York. Living in New York is equally dangerous, however, because its dehumanizing crowds and competition continually test one's belief in self. George, having grown up an orphan in New York, has gained a belief in self strong enough to sustain him in that environment. Cocoa, on the other hand, still suffers from periods of self-doubt; and that persistent doubt about her own self-worth tends to dehumanize her, pushing her to make excessive demands, to manipulate work associates and lovers, to think of people as food. Cocoa is never able to experience New York in the same way that George does.⁷¹

Had George lived, Cocoa would have been faced with the possibility of either continuing to live in New York or returning to Willow Springs. Both worlds are dangerous for Cocoa — one because it threatens her with "the nightmare of waking up to a total stranger" and the other because it has the power to keep her a child forever, to show her "she's still carrying scarred knees, a runny nose, and socks that get walked down into the heels of her shoes." In both worlds, Cocoa would have had to struggle to find peace.

⁷¹One of Miranda's powers is her ability to "see" New York in the same way that George does. When she accompanies Cocoa to New York after George's death, she quickly discovers the same kinds of people living there that he had found and, having met some of these people, believes that she has "seen" New York: "Any city is the people, isn't it?" (305). If New York were really only a congregation of the types of people George and Miranda discover, Miranda would have the same power there as she does in Willow Springs; such people, still tied to family, community, and the "old" ways of doing things, would most likely be "believers." However, despite George and Miranda's perceptions, Cocoa is also right: New York in 1985 involves more than the warm, interesting individuals George and Miranda meet.

George's death, then, when it comes, brings the loss of love, but it also offers an opportunity for Cocoa to create a new world in which to live.

Unlike her forefathers — Bascombe Wade and John-Paul — who allowed their lives to be destroyed by the women who left them, Cocoa learns that after one world collapses, you use what you learned from it to build a new one. Later, settled in her new world, she remembers her feelings at the time of George's death: "Being so young," she says, "I didn't understand that every hour we keep living is building material for a new world, of some sort. I wasn't ready to believe that a further existence would be worth anything without you" (302). For Cocoa a requirement for building a new world is to avoid both the pull of New York, exemplified by George's excessive belief in self, and the pull of Willow Springs, exemplified by Bernice's excessive belief in external forces. Her new world must reflect a relationship with Miranda in which she neither denies Miranda's powers nor falls under her control. Like Miranda, she must seek to find some balance of internal and external powers, but rather than patterning herself after Miranda, she must develop a system of belief that works for her in the time and place in which she lives. Each century since Sapphira's short reign over the world of Willow Springs has exhibited a change in power: the exhibition and expression of power that was appropriate to Sapphira in Willow Springs in 1823 would not have been appropriate or viable for Miranda in 1985; by the same token, what was appropriate for Miranda in Willow Springs in 1985 would not have been appropriate in New York in 1985, nor will it be appropriate for Cocoa in any city "beyond the bridge" after the year 2000.

As a first step toward building a new world after George's death, Cocoa chooses to live in Charleston, a location that combines the practicality of New York with a closeness, both geographical and emotional, to Willow Springs:

I couldn't hide in Willow Springs forever. But I knew New York was out of the question. It was easier in Charleston: we'd never been there together, and I drew strength from moving in the midst of familiar ground. Enough strength to build around — and on — that vacant center in me. . . .
(309)

Naylor suggests that if Willow Springs is the past and New York is the present, then Charleston may be the future. Living in Charleston allows Cocoa to reclaim her belief in herself — she finds a new job, marries another good man, and raises two sons — while simultaneously allowing her to supplement that belief with beliefs in external powers retained from her childhood and still shared by the people of Willow Springs. Thus, her new world becomes possible, in part, because she eventually comes to the same realization that Bernice did after the death of her son: George never left her; although he gave up his corporeal life to save her, he is "still here." She continues to visit the family graveyard at Willow Springs, looking out over The Sound where George's ashes were scattered: "I felt if we kept retracing our steps, we'd find out exactly what brought us to this slope But when I see you again, our versions will be different still" (310-11). After George's death, Cocoa is strengthened by her belief that the spirits of the deceased are "still here," ready to help, guide, and sustain those who know to hear their voices and to seek their help.

Although Cocoa retains Miranda's belief in the power of communicating with the deceased, there is no indication that she retains any belief in hoodoo or even, for that matter, a preference for Miranda's methods of healing over advanced medical technology. There is no mention, for example, of how or where her sons were delivered. The beliefs Cocoa

retains are those that are helpful to her — a belief in herself and a belief in George's continuing presence, his voice, his desire to help her revise and understand their history. Miranda believes that, with George's help in retracing the steps of their lives, Cocoa will succeed in walking through doors of the past that "never opened" for her: "There'll be another time — that I won't be here for — when she'll learn about the beginning of the Days" (308). Despite Miranda's hope for Cocoa, however, the conclusion of the novel offers no actual evidence that Cocoa's exploration of the past will take her beyond the immediate past: her life before, with, and after George. One does sense, however, that she *has* discovered the "meaning of peace" (312). Peace, which is found only in death, is the absence of struggle. Now that George is dead, experiencing peace himself, he can share that peace with Cocoa. What Cocoa learns from her continuing communication with George can be used to minimize the struggle — and thus increase the possibility for peace — within her own life. Despite his lack of cooperation with Miranda in life, George has now connected his hand with hers so that "together they [can] be the bridge for Baby Girl to walk over" in her quest for the peace that brings physical and psychological health.

Mama Day is, first and foremost, an examination of the nature and limits of belief. Belief, Naylor suggests, is an extremely powerful tool. Belief in supernatural forces and belief in the self are both powerful, but at the same time, both types of belief are necessarily limited in their ability to perform "miracles." Belief in supernatural forces can help one conceive a child, just as it can convince one that the spirit of a dead child lives on, but it cannot restore the spirit of life to a dead body. Similarly, belief in one's own powers can enable one to define oneself, freeing one from the definitions — and thus shackles — imposed by others, but it cannot free a loved one from a destructive self-definition or identity. The

ideal, Naylor suggests, is to recognize the powers and limitations of both types of belief, striving to reconcile and mediate between them, allowing one to take over where the other fails. To insist on only one type of belief, on only one type of reality, is not only limiting but potentially destructive.

CHAPTER 6

THE GHOST AS DEMON AND SAVIOR: CONFRONTATION WITH THE PAST IN TONI MORRISON'S *BELOVED*

Paul D . . . followed her through the door straight into a pool of red and undulating light that locked him where he stood.

"You got company?" he whispered, frowning.

"It's not evil, just sad. Come on. Just step through."

She was right. It was sad. Walking through it, a wave of grief soaked him so thoroughly he wanted to cry. It seemed a long way to the normal light surrounding the table, but he made it — dry-eyed and lucky.

— Toni Morrison, *Beloved* 8-9

All the novels discussed to this point suggest the double-edged nature of belief in the supernatural: although such belief often sustains, it can also weaken or kill. In Smith's *Oral History*, for example, Granny Younger's belief in the supernatural allows her to define herself in self-empowering ways, but it also leads her to mistakenly — and destructively — define an innocent woman as a witch. In Erdrich's *Tracks*, Pauline, constructing a personal world inhabited by demanding gods and vindictive devils, locates a place, identity, and mission that empower her while simultaneously driving her to physically and emotionally abuse herself and others. In Silko's *Ceremony*, Tayo's belief in the ability of an individual either to destroy or to save the universe triggers his illness but also enables his consequent healing. Finally, Naylor's *Mama Day* demonstrates that the same belief that can help Bernice, a seemingly barren woman, conceive a child can also drive Frances, a woman who believes she has been hexed, mad.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* delivers a similar message about the positive and negative consequences of belief in the supernatural. Belief in the life of the human spirit after death sustains and consoles the ex-slaves living in and around 124 Bluestone by providing them with a sense of connectedness with those loved ones who have passed on. Such belief, however, when distorted by guilt, jealousy, or excessive love or need, can transform the spirit of a loved one from a benign presence into a vindictive, possessive, threatening, consuming monster — a projection, that is, of one's own internal conflicts. Such is the case with *Beloved*; with no identity of her own, she tends to reflect the conflicted identity of the person who perceives her. Thus, Sethe, Denver, and Paul D all define *Beloved* in relation to their own needs and fears to the point that they endow her with the power to destroy, erase, or move them against their will. The community also defines *Beloved*, seeing in her a vindictive devil who has returned to torment Sethe. When the women of the community intervene to save Sethe, they destroy the boundary that has excluded Sethe and her family from their midst, thus saving themselves as well as Sethe. *Beloved*, too, then, like the previously discussed novels, not only reveals the double-edged nature of belief but also emphasizes the need for self-definition and warns of the danger imposed by a divisive boundary — not, in this case, a boundary separating two cultures but one separating an individual from the community.

Separation and Connection

Beloved, Morrison's fifth novel, continues to explore the central question introduced and expanded upon in her previous works: how does the self assert and claim autonomy while maintaining essential ties to the other — that is, to parent, child, lover, friend, or

community? Both separation and connection are essential to healthy growth and development, but for many people one response tends to preclude the other. In its exploration of the consequences of separation and connection, *Beloved* focuses on many of the same issues examined in Morrison's earlier novels: the killing power of mother love, the struggle to form mutually liberating relationships between male and female, the acts and beliefs that isolate an individual from a community, the importance of rootedness in the past through ties to an ancestral figure, and the strength imparted through female friendships and membership in communities of women. Furthermore, *Beloved* exhibits once again Morrison's proven mastery in blending an "acceptance of the supernatural" with "a profound rootedness in the real world" in such a way that neither dominates the other (Morrison, "Rootedness" 342). Surpassing the earlier works in its ability "to reflect the imaginative combination of the real world, the very practical, shrewd, day to day functioning that black people must do while at the same time . . . encompass[ing] some great supernatural element" (Morrison, "Interview with Toni Morrison" 428), *Beloved* haunts the reader long after it has been set aside. Despite such similarities, however, *Beloved* is distinguished from Morrison's previous novels by its emphasis on slavery.

The idea for *Beloved* grew out of a slave story Morrison discovered while helping prepare *The Black Book*, a collection of articles, photographs, advertisements, and other memorabilia documenting the African American experience. An article published in *American Baptist* in 1856 tells of a young woman who attempted to kill her children, killing one and injuring two, rather than allow them to be returned to slavery. When asked if she had taken this action in a moment of "madness," the woman replied: "I was as cool as I now am; and would much rather kill them at once, and thus end their sufferings, than have them

taken back to slavery, and be murdered by piece-meal" (Harris 10). In *Beloved* Morrison recreates the "interior life" of this woman in order to examine questions about her act: "She claimed the lives of these children . . . serenely. The story has lots of questions in it for me. The novel is an attempt to deal with those questions" ("It's OK to Say OK" 45). Writing *Beloved* also provided Morrison with an opportunity to relate the stories that the writers of the slave narratives were unable to tell. These writers, Morrison explains, suppressed details about the horrors of slavery because the purpose of the narratives — "to persuade the [white] reader of the evil of slavery" ("Site of Memory" 106-07) — prohibited the use of language or detail that might anger or offend the intended audience:

Whenever there was an unnecessarily violent incident, or a scatological one, or something "excessive," one finds the writer taking refuge in the literary conventions of the day. . . .

Over and over, the writers pull the narrative up short with a phrase such as, "But let us drop a veil over these proceedings too difficult to relate." In shaping the experience to make it palatable to those who were in a position to alleviate it, they were silent about many things, and they "forgot" many other things. ("Site of Memory" 109-10)

The narrator of *Beloved* suggests another reason why the stories were suppressed. For Sethe, the narrator says, "every mention of her past life hurt. Everything in it was painful or lost. She and Baby Suggs had agreed without saying so that it was unspeakable . . ." (58). For Sethe and Baby Suggs, then, as for all slaves and ex-slaves, the past was "unspeakable"; their stories were not stories "to pass on" (275). In *Beloved* Morrison seeks to rectify that error. The past may indeed be "unspeakable," she argues, but the stories must be passed on; they are part of a collective past that must be acknowledged, confronted, and only then laid down.

Beloved tells the story of Sethe, a slave who takes flight, safely transporting her four children to the home of her mother-in-law, who had been bought out of slavery by her son Halle. After twenty-eight days of freedom, Sethe's master, accompanied by his nephew, a

slave tracker, and the local sheriff, enters the yard of 124 Bluestone to reclaim his property. Sethe, however, claims herself and her children as her own possessions to care for as she deems fit. She attempts to kill them all, believing that in this way she can escort them all to safety on "the other side," thus preventing them from ever experiencing the degradation of slavery. She succeeds in killing only one child, her two-year-old daughter. This daughter returns first as a ghost, taking possession of 124 Bluestone for eighteen years before returning in the flesh as a twenty-year-old woman named Beloved.

Beloved's own feelings of abandonment and her desire to rejoin her mother, compounded by Sethe and Denver's refusal to let her go, to let her rest on "the other side," are sufficiently powerful to give life to first the baby ghost and then the fully fleshed embodiment of the dead baby's spirit.⁷² As a result of her death at the age of two and her experience of death, an experience not shared by her mother and sister, Beloved is not exactly what Sethe and Denver believe her to be. Beloved is the embodiment of Sethe's dead daughter's spirit and of Denver's dead sister's spirit, but neither Sethe nor Denver recognizes who or what that spirit — Beloved — really is. Sethe believes that, as her resurrected daughter returned to her at the age of twenty, Beloved shares with her a history, a past, and a connection (mother-daughter) that enables Beloved to understand her in a way no one else can. Similarly, Denver believes that Beloved, as her resurrected sister, shares with her a history, a past, and a connection (sister-sister) that yield desires, needs, and objectives that are identical to her own. Both Sethe and Denver see Beloved, then, only in a direct relation

⁷²"In many traditions," writes Margaret Atwood, "the dead cannot return from the grave unless called, and it's the passions of the living that keep them alive" ("Haunted by Their Nightmares," rev. of *Beloved*, *New York Times Book Review* 13 Sept. 1987: 50).

to themselves — as daughter and as sister — that does not allow for Beloved's consciousness of herself.

Having been cut off from her mother at the age of two, before development of an ego, and having experienced death, the spirit of Beloved is no longer just the spirit of Sethe's daughter and of Denver's sister. According to Baby Suggs, "death [is] anything but forgetfulness" (4), and Beloved's own thoughts (210-14) suggest that with death she was plunged into the collective memory of the African American experience. Egoless at the time of her death, her identity as Sethe's daughter has apparently merged with that of other dispossessed spirits of the African American past: "Beloved is not only Sethe's dead daughter returned," writes Karla F. C. Holloway, "but the return of all the faces, all the drowned, but remembered, faces of mothers and their children who have lost their being because of the force of EuroAmerican slave-history" (522). Possessing an amorphous, all-encompassing identity rather than a discretely defined self, Beloved is easily transformed in the minds of others into a reflection of their own desires, fears, and needs. Not only Sethe and Denver but also Paul D and the community define Beloved in terms of their own experience and their own past rather than on her own terms.⁷³ As a reflection of the other, Beloved is paradoxically both powerless and empowered: although powerless to be herself and to make herself known to others, she is tremendously empowered to affect the lives of those who believe, mistakenly, that they know who and what she is. As the ghost of herself — a two-year-old girl — Beloved is benign; but when endowed with the powers attributed

⁷³Karen E. Fields, in "To Embrace Dead Strangers: Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," *Mother Puzzles*, ed. Mickey Pearlman (New York: Greenwood, 1989) 159-69, comments: "In the way of ghosts, Beloved manifests herself differently to the different people who experience her. In that, of course, she is not different from an ordinary human being" (160).

to her, both consciously and unconsciously by others, she can become a formidable adversary, or alternatively, she can become a supernatural agent of liberation and rebirth. This chapter examines Beloved, her relationships with and impact on the lives of Sethe, Denver, Paul D, and the community, and the way in which, through Beloved's return, the inhabitants of 124 and their neighbors save themselves through resolution of their past and through reconnection with the ancestral figure of Baby Suggs.

Beloved as Mirror of the Other

Baby Suggs finds nothing unusual about a two-year-old baby ghost taking up residence at 124 Bluestone: "Not a house in the country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead Negro's grief" (5). The emotions of the dead, she suggests, outlive corporeality.⁷⁴ The neighbors, too, show no surprise when they hear about the ghost's existence, but they avoid 124, reluctant to tangle with the ghost of one who has "die[d] bad." As Ella tells Stamp Paid, "You know as well as I do that people who die bad don't stay in the ground" (188). Recognizing that "Jesus Christ Himself didn't," Stamp is unable to deny the truth of Ella's statement even though he believes her mind is perhaps excessively "loaded with spirits" (188). The neighbors' ready acceptance of the presence of Beloved, both as a ghost and in her corporeal form, accords with their world view, one that blends Christian belief in the resurrection of the dead with African religious belief in the behavior of the living-

⁷⁴As the street number 124 suggests, the presence of Sethe's third child is most powerfully felt because of her glaring absence from the house on Bluestone Road.

dead.⁷⁵ According to African belief, the living-dead — the spirits of the recently deceased, those who are still remembered by surviving family members and friends — are still part of their families, continue to live close to their homes, and frequently visit their surviving relatives. A living-dead, explains John Mbiti, author of *African Religions and Philosophy*, "retains features which describe him in physical terms" and "his personal name, so that when he appears to . . . his family, they recognize him as so-and-so" (162).

Despite the community's acceptance of and even expectation of a close interaction between the living and the deceased, however, Sethe's neighbors do not tolerate excess in any form; certain limits must not be breached. Thus, when Ella learns that Beloved is

⁷⁵Melville Herskovits, in *The Myth of the Negro Past* (1941; Boston: Beacon, 1958), argues that certain elements of African American religious belief and practice are African in origin. In 1963, however, E. Franklin Frazier took exception to Herskovits' claims, arguing in *The Negro Church in America* (1963; New York: Schocken, 1974) that few, if any, elements of African culture survived slavery. According to Frazier, the lack of a single language among Africans, the prohibition against speaking one's native language and gathering in groups, the tendency to split up family and tribal members, and the predominance of small farms rather than large plantations in the United States all tended to destroy any social cohesion among the slaves (10-13). Although Frazier successfully refutes many of Herskovits' conclusions, other scholars have continued to study Africanisms in African American culture. In 1990, for example, Joseph E. Holloway published *Africanisms in American Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana UP), a collection of essays describing the retention of African cultural elements within the United States.

Essays by Morrison in which she discusses Africanisms in modern American language suggest that she adheres, at least to some extent, to the belief that certain Africanisms survived slavery. Whatever her personal belief may be, Morrison provides histories for several characters in *Beloved* that allow for the retention of African religious beliefs. For example, Sixo remembers the country he came from, still speaks only a broken English, and continues to slip away at night to dance his native dances. Sethe, whose mother and wet nurse came over on a slave ship, remembers the slaves at the plantation where she lived before Sweet Home dancing the antelope and speaking another language. She believes that plantation was in Louisiana or Carolina; the first location suggests extremely large plantations, and the second suggests the Gullah settlements of the Sea Islands. Both are sites at which, even Frazier admits, Africanisms could have survived (10, 20). Thus, although I cannot say to what extent Morrison wished to suggest that the ex-slaves of *Beloved* retained African religious beliefs, she does create a fictional history that would allow for such retention.

plaguing Sethe, she decides to act, believing that ghosts should remain ghosts, not take on flesh and move into the real world:

As long as the ghost showed out from its ghostly place — shaking stuff, crying, smashing and such — Ella respected it. But if it took flesh and came in her world, well, the shoe was on the other foot. She didn't mind a little communication between the two worlds, but this was an invasion. (257)

Led by Ella, the women of the community gather outside the yard of 124 Bluestone to drive Beloved away. Beloved disappears, first from the daily consciousness and then from the memory of those whose lives she has touched. Although no longer remembered, her spirit continues to exist, hovering around 124, leaving footprints that, if noticed, would be found to accommodate anyone, child or adult, who attempted to "place his feet in them" (275). In this unremembered, undefined, substanceless existence, Beloved can be anyone and everyone. Eventually, "all trace" of Beloved disappears, and those breaths, whispers, and accidents that continue to stir the visible world of 124 Bluestone are dismissed as oddities of the weather. Without memory, the narrator says, "the rest is weather. Not the breath of the disremembered and unaccounted for, but wind in the eaves, or spring ice thawing too quickly. Just weather. Certainly no clamor for a kiss" (275). According to African religious belief, when no longer remembered, a living-dead

is entirely removed from the state of personal immortality, and he sinks beyond the horizon of the Sasa [human] period. He is now dead, as far as human beings are concerned, and the process of dying is now completed. The living-dead is now a spirit, which enters the state of collective immortality. It has 'lost' its personal name, . . . and with it goes also the human personality. It is now an 'it' and no longer a 'he' or 'she'; it is now one of myriads of spirits who have lost their humanness. . . . (Mbiti 163; single quotes appear in original)

The spirits of the unremembered dead continue to live near their original homes, residing in the surrounding forests, rivers, and mountains, but they are no longer distinguished as

individual spirits of humans as the living-dead are. The existence of the living-dead, then, is a continuous struggle between two phases of existence — Sasa (human) and Zamani (spirit). "Everyone wants to 'be remembered,' even if the body and spirit have been separated," writes Mbiti. Thus, "it is the sacred duty of the family . . . to keep the living-dead within temporal sight of the Sasa period" (162).

The strength of *Beloved*'s ties with the living, then, reflects the extent to which she is remembered. The stronger the memories of those who loved her and the stronger their need to keep her alive, the stronger she herself is. Those who remember *Beloved* — primarily Sethe and Denver — not only keep her alive but also invest her with power. Because *Beloved* will never truly die until she is entirely forgotten, she embodies and keeps alive the past of those who remember her. *Beloved*, Morrison suggests, is the past incarnate, a past that continues to haunt, that refuses to disappear, until it is experienced and confronted. Speaking of *Beloved*, Morrison says:

I wanted it to be our past which is haunting, and her past, which is haunting — the way memory never really leaves you unless you have gone through it and confronted it head on. But I wanted that haunting not to be really a suggestion of being bedeviled by the past, but to have it be incarnate, to have it actually happen that a person enters your world who is in fact — you believe it, at any rate — the dead returned. . . . ("Toni Morrison Defends Women" C17)

The past embodied by *Beloved*, Morrison suggests, is not just "her past," an individual past, but "our past," the collective past of all African Americans.

With death, which is "anything but forgetfulness," *Beloved* sinks into the collective memory of all the beloved African American daughters abandoned by their mothers as a result of slavery. In death, *Beloved* "remembers" a female who collected flowers, placing them in a round basket, in the place where the tall grass parts, where they lived before they

were separated by the clouds. As Deborah Horvitz explains, Beloved is remembering a daughter's separation from her mother during a slave raid in Africa, when clouds of gunsmoke prevent her from rejoining her mother (159, 164).⁷⁶ In death, Beloved also remembers crouching in the dark with other bodies, some dead already and others trembling in their attempt to release spirit from body. She remembers watching the "men without skin" push a pile of bodies into the sea and then being separated from a beloved female who, with others, jumps voluntarily into the sea. Beloved is remembering the Middle Passage, the experience of a young African girl being transported by slave ship to America. Morrison, explaining that more than sixty million Africans "never even made it into slavery," dying "either as captives in Africa or on slave ships" ("The Ghosts" 75), says that she often thinks "about the Black women who never landed who are still swimming open-eyed in the sea" ("A Knowing So Deep" 230). Submerged in death, Beloved compounds the personal experience of her own separation from and abandonment by Sethe with the collective experience of all the abandoned daughters of the "60 million or more" to whom Morrison dedicates the novel. In fact, Beloved appears to have no recollection at all of her own death at Sethe's hands. She has repressed that specific experience, remembering only Sethe's name and face and the experience of fear, loss, and anger at being abandoned, an experience vastly magnified by

⁷⁶My reading of Beloved as a supernatural being who has absorbed a collective memory of life in Africa and the Middle Passage owes much to Horvitz's analysis of *Beloved*, particularly that of the two segments presenting Beloved's "unspoken thoughts." Horvitz sees Beloved as "both an individual and a collective being," arguing further, however, that Sethe's mother and Sethe's dead daughter "are a conflated or combined identity represented by the ghost-child Beloved" (158). I do not find this latter thrust of Horvitz's reading entirely convincing because I can find no evidence in the novel that the child on the slave ship is, as Horvitz argues, Sethe's mother. One distinction between my own reading and Horvitz's is that I see Beloved not as an individual/collective *being* but as an individual spirit (that of Sethe's daughter) who has absorbed a collective *memory* that supplements, and in some cases supplants, her own individual memory.

her absorption of the similar experiences of others. When Beloved later reproaches Sethe, she accuses her not for having sliced her throat with a handsaw but for having severed the connection between mother and child, for having left her.

In returning to 124, Beloved is not interested in explanations of how and why she died; her only objective is to renew the bond between self and mother. Beloved is not, as Paul D and the neighbors believe, evil. Poised between life and death, Beloved clings to life, and life as she remembers it depends on reconnection with Sethe, the mother. Cut off from her mother at the age of two, Beloved developed no ego, no sense of self separate from the other and in relation to the external world. At the time that Beloved was killed, Wilfred D. Samuels and Clenora Hudson-Weems write, she

had not developed adaptive ego capabilities that would have made her more independent of her mother. . . . [Nancy] Chodorow explains that during infancy the child's mother "acts as external ego, provides holding and nourishment, and is in fact not experienced by the infant as a separate person at all."⁷⁷

With the murder, Beloved never has the opportunity to come into her own, to find a central self by moving beyond the stage of infantile ego . . . Still mired in the world of primary identification — her mother — Beloved does not differentiate herself from Sethe when she reemerges eighteen years after her death For Beloved, to see Sethe's face is, in fact, to see her own face. . . . (104)

Thus, Beloved's only desire — in fact, the driving force of her continued existence — is reconnection with the mother; life for her depends on "the join" (213), on reclaiming Sethe's face, body, and life as her own. When Sethe is not available or sufficiently responsive, Beloved satisfies her appetite with mother-substitutes, connecting with Denver as sister and with Paul D as lover. As her body fattens on the sweets Denver feeds her and grows

⁷⁷Samuels and Hudson-Weems are quoting from Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering, Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: U California P, 1978) 59.

pregnant with Paul D's child, Beloved's spirit feeds off the stories told by and about Sethe because these stories define her own individual rather than collective identity.⁷⁸ Sethe's stories are Beloved's stories. Sethe's past is Beloved's past. Without the past and the identity provided by Sethe, Beloved is any motherless child, any African American female — she is nobody and everybody, nothing and all.

Because Beloved is not self-defined, she takes on a chameleon-like identity, becoming what others believe her to be. Egoless and undefined, Beloved is a blank slate, a mirror reflecting the feelings, fears, or unresolved conflicts of others.⁷⁹ For example, as a baby ghost haunting 124, Beloved is perceived by the narrator as "spiteful" (1), by Sethe as full of "rage" (5) and as "sad" (8), by Paul D first as "evil" and then as full of grief (8-9), and by Denver as "lonely and rebuked" (13). Except for the narrator's perception (which is presumably unbiased) and Paul D's initial perception, formed before actual contact with the ghost, all the feelings attributed to the ghost reflect those experienced by the person doing the naming. Sethe is full of suppressed rage; both she and Paul D are sad and full of grief; and Denver is lonely and feels rebuked.

⁷⁸Beloved's loss of a personal identity may also be connected to the loss of her name. The name by which she was known for the first two years of her life is never used and is thus lost to her. Only "Beloved" is engraved on the dead daughter's gravestone, a name that calls up not only the spirit of Sethe's beloved daughter but also the spirits of *all* the beloved, abandoned daughters. It also calls up the spirits of those African American females who were called "beloved in the dark and bitch in the light" by white men (241).

⁷⁹In a 1985 conversation with Gloria Naylor, Morrison comments that Beloved, a character in her current writing project, is a "dead girl" who "will be the mirror, so to speak" of certain women she encounters. She also speaks of the "dead girl" as a displaced "self," as "a *twin* or a thirst or a friend or something that sits right next to you and watches you . . ." ("A Conversation, Gloria Naylor and Toni Morrison," *Southern Review* 21 [1985]: 585).

When Beloved appears as a fully fleshed woman, she inspires equally varied interpretations. For Sethe Beloved is at first only another motherless child, orphaned by slavery and post-slavery violence, and a welcome companion for Denver. Only after Paul D abandons Sethe because of his inability to accept her explanation of her crime does Sethe perceive Beloved as her dead daughter returned to her in the flesh, offering understanding and an opportunity to stop remembering the past. Unlike Sethe, who is slow in recognizing Beloved's identity, Denver recognizes her sister immediately. She believes that Beloved has come, as companion and ally, to wait for their father Halle and to drive off the false father Paul D. For Paul D Beloved is not the resurrected daughter/sister that Sethe and Denver believe her to be, nor is she just another motherless child. She is, he believes, "a lowdown something" who has "fixed" him, exerting supernatural powers to move him against his will, separating him from Sethe, and forcing him, also against his will, to have sex with her (127). Because Paul D has no other way to explain why he is doing things that he believes he does not want to do, he convinces himself that Beloved has bewitched him.

The community, although presented as a single character, holds different views about Beloved. Miss Lady Jones refuses to believe that Beloved is Sethe's resurrected daughter and "hate[s] the ignorance of those who [do]" (257). Others do believe that Beloved is Sethe's resurrected daughter, seeing her as a manifestation of God's punishment. When Janey learns that Beloved has appeared at 124, she is gratified that Sethe is being punished for her crime: "Well," she says, "I guess there's a God after all" (254). Other neighbors agree, saying "Guess she had it coming" (256). Ella, however, whose view of Beloved is most clearly expressed, suspects that Beloved may "very well be the devil himself," and

when she convinces the others that Beloved may be "evil" incarnate (257) and that "Nobody got that coming" (258), the women gather their forces to drive this evil from the community.

Clearly, then, Beloved is not a single, clearly defined self, but the projection of others' greatest fears and desires. After the community drives Beloved away,

those who had spoken to her, lived with her, fallen in love with her . . . realized they couldn't remember or repeat a single thing she said, and began to believe that, other than what they themselves were thinking, she hadn't said anything at all. . . . (274)

Although Beloved exists, she has no true self, no voice of her own; she simply reflects what others are thinking. Beloved is unable to cross to "the other side," then, not only because she "die[d] bad" but also because others will not let her go. Their needs demand that she continue to exist on this side until they are able to confront and then release the past she embodies. The power that Beloved appears to hold over others is a power bestowed by them as a consequence of their own needs, desires, fears. Thus, to understand Beloved's relationship with Sethe, Denver, Paul D, and the community, one must understand exactly what she represents for each.

Sethe: Protecting Mother and Abandoned Daughter

Sethe's flaw is that she loves her children too much. Although such excessive mother love can be empowering, it can also be destructive. Empowered by her love for her children, Sethe accomplishes the near-impossible: unlike her own mother, who abandoned Sethe and lost her own life when she tried to run, Sethe escapes slavery with all her children intact. She is tremendously proud of her act, of her courage to attempt an escape and her ability to accomplish it without the assistance of her husband Halle and the other Sweet Home men:

I did it. I got us all out. Without Halle too. Up till then it was the only thing I ever did on my own. And it came off right, like it was supposed to. We was here. Each and every one of my babies and me too. I birthed them and I got them out and it wasn't no accident. I did that. . . . it was me doing it; me saying, *Go on*, and *Now*. Me having to look out. Me using my own head. But it was more than that. It was a kind of selfishness I never knew nothing about before. It felt good. Good and right. I was big, Paul D, and deep and wide and when I stretched out my arms all my children could get between them. I was *that* wide. . . . (162)

Sethe's pride is justified because the accomplishment of this feat enables her to know and define herself — a self that combines the masculine tendency to fly, to leap, to dare with the feminine instinct to feed, nurture, and protect.⁸⁰ Freed from her definition of self as slave by her discovery of self as mother and savior, Sethe invests all her energies into developing this self to the point of excluding all other potentialities of self.

Eventually, Sethe sacrifices everything — both self and children — in the name of mother love. After she makes her second attempt to save her children, this time to keep them from being returned to slavery, Sethe again believes and takes pride in her success in accomplishing her goal: "I stopped him [Schoolteacher]," she tells Paul D. "I took and put my babies where they'd be safe" (164). She believes that her attempt to save her children "worked" (164) because in her view nothing can be worse for her children than slavery, and

⁸⁰Morrison sees flight — "the sense of going out too far where you're not supposed to go and running toward confrontations rather than away from them" and "taking risks" — as a "masculine" tendency ("Intimate Things in Their Place": A Conversation with Toni Morrison," *Chant of Saints*, ed. Robert Stepto and Michael Harper [Urbana: U Illinois P, 1979] 221; also in *Massachusetts Review* 18 [1977]: 473-84). Many of her most memorable female characters incorporate and act on this tendency, becoming pariahs, such as Sula, or sustaining ancestral figures, such as Pilate. One difference is that an ancestral figure successfully balances the best of both male and female tendencies whereas the pariah tends to lose her sense of balance, allowing one aspect of self to dominate and negate the other ("Rootedness" 344). Morrison believes that, by combining both tendencies, black women "can combine the nest and the adventure"; they can be "both safe harbor and ship," capable of holding together and nurturing a family *and* venturing out into the world to take risks ("Toni Morrison" 122).

her impulsive but determined action did prevent their enslavement. As she herself recognizes, however, the cost of running from slavery is too high (15): she loses her husband, who was left behind on her first flight; she loses her two-year-old daughter, who dies in her arms during the second flight; she loses her sons, who leave home to escape the spite of the baby ghost; she loses Baby Suggs, who gives up her faith in the human heart after Sethe's act; and she loses the community, who, while understanding her rage, cannot accept her claim to the right to kill her children. Sethe's initial flight liberates her; her second flight grounds her, imprisoning her in 124, where her energies are consumed in "keeping the past at bay" and in protecting Denver from "the past that [is] still waiting for her" (42) and where the spite of the baby ghost is welcomed as the solitary manifestation of life.

When Paul D arrives at 124, the "spite of the house" had grown so strong that Sethe "was oblivious to the loss of anything at all. . . . There was no room for any other thing or body until Paul D arrived and broke up the place, making room, shifting it, moving it over to someplace else, then standing in the place he had made" (39). Driving out the baby ghost, Paul D restructures life at 124, not only reviving Sethe's "bed life" but also introducing the possibility of making plans for a future: "The notion of a future with him, or for that matter without him, was beginning to stroke her mind" (42). In addition to awakening the future, however, Paul D also awakens Sethe's past. Together they begin to explore, to piece together, their shared history at Sweet Home and what they know of the attempted escape. Sethe recognizes that

Her story was bearable because it was his as well — to tell, to refine and tell again. The things neither knew about the other — the things neither had word-shapes for — well, it would come in time: where they led him off sucking iron; the perfect death of her crawling-already? baby. (99)

The time to tell Paul D about "the perfect death of her crawling-already? baby" comes too soon for Sethe. Sethe has never felt the need to explain her action to others, to seek understanding or approval from the external world, but when Paul D asks, she tries to tell the story behind the newspaper article he holds in his hands:

Perhaps it was the smile, or maybe the ever-ready love she saw in his eyes — easy and upfront, the way colts, evangelists and children look at you: with love you don't have to deserve — that made her go ahead and tell him what she had not told Baby Suggs, the only person she felt obliged to explain anything to. Otherwise she would have said what the newspaper said she said and no more. . . . It was the smile and upfront love that made her try. (161)

Sethe has never sought external understanding or forgiveness for her act because she has always felt secure in her own assessment of what is right and what her rights and responsibilities as a mother are. She knows, furthermore, that explanation is futile:

she could never close in, pin it down for anybody who had to ask. If they didn't get it right off — she could never explain. Because the truth was simple Simple. She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them. Over there. Outside this place, where they would be safe. . . . (163).

For Sethe her action and her reasons for taking that action are simple: "It's my job . . . to keep them [my children] away from what I know is terrible. I did that" (165). Paul D is so shocked to learn what Sethe already knows — that "unless carefree, motherlove [is] a killer" (131) — that he does not stay to hear all of Sethe's reasons for trying to kill her children. Four days after his leaving, Sethe realizes with a "click" — "the settling of pieces into places designed and made especially for them" (175) — that Beloved is her resurrected daughter. With that knowledge she dismisses, once and for all, any need for Paul D, a

future, or the external world: "Whatever is going on outside my door ain't for me. The world is in this room. This here's all there is and all there needs to be" (183).

To Sethe Beloved's return means not only that she can now safely shut out the rest of the world but that she can also shut out the past. She is "excited to giddiness by the things she no longer had to remember" (183). Remembering is unnecessary because what she lost has been restored. She does not "even have to explain" because Beloved already "understands it all" (183). The knowledge that Beloved has returned and the belief, mistaken though it is, that Beloved "understands it all" free Sethe to release all the memories she has suppressed, both the causes and consequences of her act. In an internal monologue addressed in her imagination to Beloved, Sethe reveals for the first time the memory that justifies her killing her children. After she overheard Schoolteacher telling his nephew to take more care in delineating Sethe's characteristics, putting "her human characteristics on the left" and "her animal ones on the right," Sethe backed away, bumping her head into a tree: "My head itched like the devil. Like somebody was sticking fine needles in my scalp" (193). When only about a month later she saw Schoolteacher entering the yard of 124, "she heard wings. Little hummingbirds stuck their needle beaks right through her headcloth into her hair and beat their wings. And if she thought anything it was No. No. Nono. Nonono. . ." (163). To Sethe the explanation for her action eighteen years earlier is simple: no one will ever list her children's animal characteristics on the right side of a page. She will do whatever is necessary to save her children from

what Baby Suggs died of, what Ella knew, what Stamp saw and what made Paul D tremble. That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up. And though she and others lived through and got over it, she could never let it happen to her own. The best

thing she was, was her children. Whites might dirty *her* all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical, best thing — the part of her that was clean. (251)

For Sethe a choice between allowing schoolteacher to reclaim her children and taking flight with them to "the other side" presents no conflict at all.⁸¹

Locked inside 124 with Beloved and Denver, Sethe does begin to voice these thoughts, reliving aloud all the events that led up to Beloved's death. Beloved, however, is not even listening. She is too busy reliving and voicing her own past pain, her separation from her mother. Neither can hear or understand the other:

Sethe began to talk, explain, describe how much she had suffered, been through, for her children None of which made the impression it was supposed to. Beloved accused her of leaving her behind. . . . She said they were the same, had the same face, how could she have left her? And Sethe cried, saying she never did, or meant to — that she had to get them out, away Beloved wasn't interested. She said when she cried there was no one. That dead men lay on top of her. . . . Ghosts without skin stuck their fingers in her and called her beloved in the dark and bitch in the light. Sethe pleaded for forgiveness, counting, listing again and again her reasons (241-42)

Communication between the two is impossible. Sethe is unable to understand that Beloved truly has no interest in any events leading up to her death or in any reasons justifying that death. All Beloved wants is "the join," to be assured that she will never again be separated from Sethe. Nor can Sethe understand that Beloved's memory encompasses far more pain and experience than that caused by Sethe alone; as a result of Beloved's absorption of a collective African American memory in death, most of what Beloved says is incomprehensible to Sethe. Sethe cannot understand Beloved's need — reconnection and

⁸¹Part of Sethe's willingness to kill her children and herself, of course, is that she believes in continuing life on "the other side." Beloved's experience in death seems to suggest that life may not be exactly what Sethe expects it to be, although it is possible that Beloved's experience of death as "anything but forgetfulness" is actually a stage of limbo that must be experienced before one can reach "the other side."

merger — any more than Beloved can understand Sethe's — understanding and forgiveness. Confronted with the daughter that she believes is refusing understanding and forgiveness, Sethe begins to see Beloved as her accuser and judge.

Sethe sees Beloved as her accuser because although she does not understand Beloved on a conscious level, she does understand her on a subconscious one. Beloved's accusations reflect Sethe's unspoken, unconscious accusations against her own mother. In an unspoken monologue directed at Beloved, Sethe says:

You came right back like a good girl, like a daughter which is what I wanted to be and would have been if my ma'am had been able to get out of the rice long enough before they hanged her and let me be one I wonder what they was doing when they was caught. Running, you think? No. Not that. Because she was my ma'am and nobody's ma'am would run off and leave her daughter, would she? Would she, now? . . . (203)

The accusatory, unforgiving, forever unsatisfied Beloved is a reflection of Sethe, the daughter, whose mother abandoned her when she tried to escape. The possibility that her mother might have "run off and [left] her daughter" is so unacceptable to Sethe that she has always denied it. Sethe's memories of her mother are vague, Horvitz writes, not only because their contact was severely limited, but also because those memories "are inextricably linked with feelings of painful abandonment" (159). Those pictures and words that do occasionally creep into Sethe's conscious memory "come from that place inside her that stores, but can never lose, forgotten memories" (Horvitz 159). Sethe's struggle with Beloved is, then, an external enactment of a struggle within: Sethe the mother knows that she made the right, the only, choice; Sethe the daughter knows that no explanation justifies the severance of the tie between mother and child. As mother, she knows she would make the same choice again; as daughter, she will never forgive her own mother for having abandoned her.

Caught in this endless struggle, Sethe loses her spirit and begins to waste away, a process that is exacerbated by physical starvation as she gives her portion of whatever food remains in the house to her daughters. Denver, believing that Beloved is killing Sethe — eating up Sethe's life, swelling and growing taller on it (250) — intervenes to save Sethe. When the community gathers outside 124 to rescue Sethe from Beloved,

it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash. (261)

Sethe is saved by the community, immersed in their sound, a sound of voices that recalls the communal response to Baby Suggs' call in the Clearing, where "the shouts . . . ripped pods off the limbs of the chestnuts" (94). She is saved in spite of herself, for she would not have acknowledged the need for help herself. The trauma of remembering, reliving, and explaining her past to an unforgiving accuser — that child in her that can never forgive her mother, and thus herself, for abandoning a daughter — has completely broken and diminished her. She is so weak that she misunderstands why the community has come — to drive Beloved away — and, through misunderstanding, does not spurn them. As a result, she loses Beloved again and regains a chance, under Denver and Paul D's care, for a resurrected life of her own.

Denver: Separation and Responsibility for Self

Beloved is not the only child to suffer from Sethe's excessive mother love. Although a "charmed" survivor (209) who never experiences separation from her mother, as Beloved does, Denver also suffers. As a consequence of her mother's desire to save her children

from slavery, Denver grows up in a state of unbearable loneliness, of paralyzing fear of both her mother and the world outside the yard of 124, and of endless stasis as she waits to be rescued by her father. Because Sethe's act has alienated her from the community, Denver's only companions for the first six years of her life are her brothers. At the age of seven, Denver does venture out on her own, discovering and being invited into Miss Lady Jones' school for black children. After a year, however, another student, Nelson Lord, asks her, out of curiosity rather than meanness, "Didn't your mother get locked away for murder? Wasn't you in there with her when she went?" (104). As soon as the question is asked, some "thing that had been lying there all along" leaps up in Denver, inhibiting her from repeating the questions to Sethe (102). When she does ask, she withdraws into two years of silence, going "deaf rather than hear the answer" to her questions (105).

Denver's two-year silence provides a hiatus in the child's growth and development during which she might process the information that her mother once attempted to kill her children and that some unknown thing that exists outside the yard at 124 might cause her mother to try again:

All the time, I'm afraid the thing that happened that made it all right for my mother to kill my sister could happen again. I don't know what it is, I don't know who it is, but maybe there is something else terrible enough to make her do it again. I need to know what that thing might be, but I don't want to. Whatever it is, it comes from outside this house, outside the yard, and it can come right on in the yard if it wants to. So I never leave this house and I watch over the yard, so it can't happen again and my mother won't have to kill me too. Not since Miss Lady Jones' house have I left 124 by myself. Never. . . . (205)

Now for the first time she understands why her brothers always held hands and why they told her "die-witch! stories with proven ways of killing" (19). Having gained this new knowledge, Denver's feelings for her mother become terribly mixed, combining both fear

and love: "I love my mother but I know she killed one of her daughters, and tender as she is with me, I'm scared of her because of it" (205).

Denver's solution to this dilemma is threefold: she spends "all of [her] outside self" loving Sethe so that Sethe will not kill her; she refuses to leave 124; and she waits for her father Halle to come rescue her. "The quiet," Denver says, "let me dream my daddy better. I always knew he was coming. Something was holding him up" (207). From the age of seven until the moment twelve years later when she gathers the courage to leave 124 by herself, Denver believes that her father will eventually find her, rescuing her from her mother. Until that time, she remains imprisoned within the boundaries of the yard at 124 Bluestone, as if awaiting delivery from the womb or resurrection from the grave. Sethe contributes to Denver's paralyzed womb/tomb-like existence because of her desire to protect Denver from the past that exists as "rememory" outside the yard. As Judith Thurman explains, despite Denver's miraculous delivery in a rowboat, "Sethe has, in fact, never fully 'delivered' Denver. Fat, dreamy, submissive, fearful of the world, . . . Denver will be forced to complete the labor by herself" (178). Sethe's protectiveness, combined with Denver's mechanisms to defend herself from Sethe, the past, and the external world, becomes as imprisoning as slavery itself.⁸²

The answers to Nelson Lord's questions, in addition to locking Denver inside 124, change her perception of and relationship with the baby ghost:

⁸²The fact that the eighteen-year-old Denver appears to be only twelve years old when she approaches Lady Jones to ask for help is one of several clues suggesting Denver's arrested emotional development. Until the age of twelve a child is still considered to be developing within the "womb" of her mother's love and care; by eighteen, however, Denver should be a fully functioning adult, which, of course, she is not.

the monstrous and unmanageable dreams about Sethe found release in the concentration Denver began to fix on the baby ghost. Before Nelson Lord, she had been barely interested in its antics. The patience of her mother and grandmother in its presence made her indifferent to it. Then it began to irritate her, wear her out with its mischief. That was when she walked off to follow the children to Lady Jones' house-school. Now it held for her all the anger, love and fear she didn't know what to do with. (103)

After Nelson's questions, then, Denver's response to the baby ghost changes. The ghost now embodies Denver's own confused "anger, love, and fear" for her mother. During her two-year silence Denver has transformed her perception of the baby ghost from that of a separate, irritating, and wearying presence to a reflection of herself — the emanation, as it were, of Denver's feelings toward Sethe that, out of fear for her life, she cannot express. Thus, as soon as Denver begins to hear again, the baby ghost has a new character. From the moment that Denver hears the baby climbing the stairs — the first sound she hears in two years — "the presence was full of spite. Instead of sighs and accidents there was pointed and deliberate abuse" (104). Thus, the change in the baby ghost appears to be a change motivated by Denver herself: Denver's own feelings toward Sethe are being expressed through the baby ghost as spite. Denver's spite, reflected and expressed by the baby ghost, drives off everyone but Sethe: Howard and Buglar run off to the War, and Baby Suggs dies soon after. Thus, Sethe, Denver, and the baby ghost become locked in a passive triadic relationship in which the only life in 124 is Denver's spite, expressed through the baby ghost.

Over the next nine years, life at 124 becomes increasingly colorless and barren. Denver's only "escape" from this lifeless existence is a further retreat into a small boxwood grove, "a round, empty room seven feet high," ringed by five boxwood bushes, where Denver is bathed in "emerald light":

It began as a little girl's houseplay, but as her desires changed so did the play. Quiet, private, and completely secret First a playroom

(where the silence was softer), then a refuge (from her brothers' fright), soon the place became the point. In that bower, closed off from the hurt of the hurt world, Denver's imagination produced its own hunger and its own food, which she badly needed because loneliness wore her out. *Wore her out.* Veiled and protected by the live green walls, she felt ripe and clear, and salvation was as easy as a wish. (28-29)

Like a life-giving womb within the imprisoning womb/tomb of 124 and its yard, the boxwood grove envelops and sustains Denver, changing what it gives in response to what she needs — play, refuge, and eventually life itself. In this "giant temple of boxwood" (50), Denver seems to have discovered or created a personal version of her grandmother's religion. In addition to telling the ex-slaves that they must love themselves since there is no guarantee and little likelihood that they will ever receive love from the external world, Baby Suggs had told them "that the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine. That if they could not see it, they would not have it" (88). Denver's boxwood grove, then, appears to be a miniature replica of Baby Suggs' Clearing, a spot in which Denver ministers to herself, imagining love, grace, and salvation.⁸³ Only through imagination can Denver, in her awful isolation, experience life at all. In producing "its own hunger and its own food" (28), Denver's imagination sustains her until Beloved appears, after which looking at Beloved becomes "food enough" for Denver, "but to be looked at in turn was beyond appetite; it was breaking through her skin to a place where hunger hadn't been discovered" (118). Once Beloved arrives, Denver has no further need for her boxwood temple and never returns.

Before Beloved's arrival, Denver had always relied on being the object of her mother's gaze. On the first night that Paul D appears at 124, Denver is rocked by the

⁸³Some Africans believe that certain groves and trees are sacred; associated with God and other spiritual beings, such spots are often used for religious purposes (Mbiti 51). Both the Clearing and Denver's boxwood grove are similar sacred spots.

knowledge that this man has the power to draw Sethe's gaze from Denver to himself. For the first time in Denver's experience her mother is

looking away from her own daughter's body. . . . Hot, shy, now Denver was lonely. All that leaving: first her brothers, then her grandmother — serious losses since there were no children willing to circle her in a game or hang by their knees from her porch railing. None of that had mattered as long as her mother did not look away as she was doing now, making Denver long, downright long, for a sign of spite from the baby ghost. (12)

Threatened for the first time in her life by separation from her mother, Denver longs for a sign of the baby ghost's spite and exhibits her own. By announcing the presence of the baby ghost in 124, Denver invokes her sister's spirit to help her break the intimacy growing between her mother and Paul D: "'We have a ghost in here,' she said, and it worked. They were not a twosome anymore" (13). The ghost, Denver explains, is neither sad nor evil but "lonely and rebuked" (13); it is, in essence, a reflection of herself. Denver, who drank her sister's blood along with her mother's milk, discerns no separation between self and sister, and thus she assumes that they share the same feelings and desires. When Beloved appears on the stump outside 124, Denver believes that Beloved shares her desire to keep each other company and to hold onto their mother until their father arrives. Because Denver has no concept of Beloved as separate from herself, she is unable to comprehend — despite the power of her imagination — that Beloved is driven by desires different from her own. Beloved is driven solely by the need to merge with her mother. She does not remember her father at all, and her interest in both Denver and Paul D is minimal; they exist only as they help or hinder her efforts to regain her identity, her life, through merger with Sethe.

With Beloved's arrival, Denver transfers her former desire for her mother's attentive gaze to Beloved. In fact, Beloved's gaze becomes much more powerful and satisfying than her mother's ever was. Whereas Sethe has always seen Denver as an extension of her own

being, Beloved sees her as a separate entity, giving Denver for the first time (outside the boxwood grove at least) a sense of self.⁸⁴ Denver does not often arrest Beloved's gaze, "but sometimes . . . Beloved rested cheek on knuckles and looked at Denver with attention":

It was lovely. Not to be stared at, not seen, but being pulled into view by the interested, uncritical eyes of the other. . . . Denver's skin dissolved under that gaze and became soft and bright She floated near but outside her own body, feeling vague and intense at the same time. Needing nothing. Being what there was. (118)

The sense of self as separate and worthy of "the interested, uncritical" gaze of the other becomes so important to Denver that she recognizes that she must protect Beloved from her mother, should something cause her mother to try to kill her daughters again, at all cost. Should Sethe and Beloved become engaged in some life-threatening conflict, as they did at the Clearing, Denver knows that "the choice between Sethe and Beloved [is] without conflict" (104). Although Denver still depends on her mother for physical sustenance, she now depends on Beloved for psychological sustenance, for her sense of self as separate.

⁸⁴Cynthia A. Davis, in "Self, Society, and Myth in Toni Morrison's Fiction," *Contemporary Literature* 23 (1982): 323-42, discusses characters in Morrison's first three novels in terms of Sartrean ideas about "the Look" and "Bad Faith": "Human relations," Davis writes, "revolve around the experience of 'the Look,' for being 'seen' by another confirms one's reality and threatens one's sense of freedom. . . . the Other's look makes me see myself as an object in another's perception" (324-25). Davis' analysis focuses on those characters who exhibit Bad Faith by "trying to define themselves through the eyes of others," either through dependence on each other or through internalization of the Look of the dominant culture. Denver's dependence on Beloved's gaze is not so much an instance of Bad Faith as it is a necessary step in separating from Sethe's gaze, which never distinguished child as separate from mother. Unlike Sethe, Beloved does not love or need Denver; as a result, she does see Denver as separate, as an object, and under that impersonal, objective gaze Denver experiences herself as separate. (Sethe describes Halle looking at her in a similar way and recalls that his care for her was devoid of "a man's laying claim" [25]). Eventually, however, Beloved must break her dependence on Beloved for this sense of self as separate, which she does when she moves from 124 into the community.

Denver's dependence on Beloved's gaze for a sense of self is both destructive and constructive. Her dependence is destructive because the belief that she exists only when perceived by the other continually threatens Denver with loss of self through loss of that other. One day while they are playing in the cold house, Beloved disappears. Believing Beloved has abandoned her to return to "the other side," Denver begins to cry and, deprived of Beloved's gaze, to experience her own dissolution:

she is crying because she has no self. . . . She can feel her thickness thinning, dissolving into nothing. She grabs the hair at her temples to get enough to uproot it and halt the melting for a while. Teeth clamped shut, Denver brakes her sobs. She doesn't move to open the door because there is no world out there. She decides to stay in the cold house and let the dark swallow her like the minnows of light above. . . . (123)

Separated from the gaze of the loved one, Denver begins to experience the dissolution into nothingness, the sense of being swallowed by the dark, that will be Beloved's eventual fate. Dropped from the sight and memory of one's loved ones, one simply fades away, no longer existing as a clearly defined individual spirit but as an amorphous spiritual presence, invisible, voiceless, and indistinguishable from the weather.

On the other hand, Denver's dependence on Beloved inspires the desire to care for and protect another — to nurse Beloved to full health, bringing her water, cleaning up after her initial incontinence, and feeding her endless sweets, and to protect her from Sethe. Thus, Denver's relationship with Beloved is constructive in that it begins to give her a sense of self, transforms her fear into a desire to protect, allays her paralyzing loneliness, introduces to her the power of creating stories, and prepares her to give rather than receive care, nurture, protection. Although Beloved has no real interest in Denver, she tolerates her company when Sethe is not available, and Denver gradually assumes the role of mother-substitute. Having already assumed this role in her relationship with Beloved, Denver is prepared, then,

to assume a similar role in her relationship with Sethe, a step that becomes necessary when Denver, recognizing that Sethe's efforts to meet Beloved's excessive demands for love and attention threaten to kill Sethe, decides that she must intervene to save her mother.

In saving Sethe, Denver saves herself. Watching her mother struggle with the past, believing that she must now protect her mother from Beloved rather than vice versa, and recognizing that the relationship is viable only if all three are alive, Denver exerts "an effort of the will" necessary to move from the house and the yard into the world.⁸⁵ Motivated by an urge to life that is stronger than her fear of the external world, Denver delivers herself into that world, giving herself over to the mercy of the community. The community responds, offering food, membership in the community of women, and the opportunity to work to feed herself and her mother. In making this step, Denver delivers herself from the encircling womb created by her mother's desire to protect her from the past that is waiting for her, releases herself from the dream that her father will rescue her, and relieves herself of her reliance on her dead sister as her only source of companionship. She no longer depends solely on the gaze of her sister to make her self visible to herself. Nelson Lord, whose casual questions once locked up Denver's mind, now unlocks it by casually commenting, "Take care of yourself, Denver." The idea of "having a self to look out for and preserve" is so novel that Denver hears Nelson's words as if they "were what language was made for" (252). This new recognition of self and of her ability and responsibility to care for that self enables Denver to separate from her mother — both from her fear of her

⁸⁵The truly free characters in Morrison's novels are, she says, those who "express either an effort of the will or a freedom of the will. It's all about choosing. . . . If you own yourself, you can make some types of choices, take certain kinds of risks. . ." ("Toni Morrison" 125).

mother and from her dependence on her; she can now share with Paul D the responsibility of protecting and caring for her mother.

For Denver, Beloved exists only as her sister, as an extension and reflection of her own fears and desires. Denver, like Sethe, never really knows or understands Beloved because she never sees her as a separate entity; she is unable to do for Beloved what Beloved does for her — accept her sister as an independent, self-defined individual. Denver's love for Beloved, then, is a sort of self-love, and her desire to protect and nurture Beloved becomes a desire to protect and nurture herself. Before Beloved returns in the flesh, Denver escapes to the boxwood grove to imagine salvation through self-love. Denver's "need to love another" is "so unrestricted" (104), however, that Beloved's presence encourages her to experiment with and acquire new roles, roles which eventually release her from the imprisoning womb/tomb she and her mother have created for her. Out of the ability to love and protect the self comes the ability to love and protect the other.

Paul D: Freedom, Desire, and Manhood

When Paul D arrives at 124 Bluestone, after eighteen years of attempting to free himself from white men, he finds Sethe, Denver, and a ghost. The ghost manifests itself first as "a pool of pulsing red light" that soaks him "so thoroughly" in "a wave of grief" that he wants to cry (9) and then as a powerful, house-shaking force which makes his legs tremble and throws Sethe "down on all fours" on the kitchen floor (18). The triadic relationship that he encounters at 124 has existed in an established, if not particularly harmonious, order for the nine years since Denver began to hear again, Sethe's sons left 124, and Baby Suggs died. His arrival threatens to disturb this order, displacing the ghost of

Sethe's past with his own desires for a future.⁸⁶ Although Paul D succeeds in driving off the ghost, his desire to build a life with Sethe and Denver is thwarted by Beloved's arrival at 124. Paul D is perplexed by Beloved — her sudden appearance, her new shoes, her vagueness when questioned about her past — and wants her to leave so that he can regain the sense of being a family that he had felt the day of the carnival:

She had appeared and been taken in on the very day Sethe and he had patched up their quarrel, gone out in public and had a right good time — like a family. Denver had come around, so to speak; Sethe was laughing; he had a promise of steady work, 124 was cleared up from spirits. It had begun to look like a life. And damn! a water-drinking woman fell sick, got took in, healed, and hadn't moved a peg since.

He wanted her out, but Sethe had let her in and he couldn't put her out of a house that wasn't his. . . . (66)

Paul D believes that Beloved is the only obstacle to attaining what he most desires — a life, a family, a chance for a future. An obstacle, Beloved must be removed, and he determines to "consult with the Negroes in town and find her her own place" (67).

Not long after having had these thoughts, however, Paul D begins to notice that he rather than Beloved is the one moving out of 124. At first he believes that he is suffering from "house-fits, the glassy anger men sometimes feel when a woman's house begins to bind

⁸⁶Morrison's triadic relationships among women have been commented on by several critics. Susan Willis, for example, in "Eruptions of Funk: Historicizing Toni Morrison," *Specifying: Black Women Writing the American Experience* (Madison: U Wisconsin P, 1987) 83-109, suggests that Morrison's three-women households are social utopias in that they "do not permit heterosexuality as it articulates male domination to be the determining principle for the living and working relationships of the group" (106). Morrison, however, does not believe that three-women households are sufficiently "nourishing." In *Song of Solomon*, she says, Pilate's daughter Reba and granddaughter Hagar suffer "because of the absence of men in a nourishing way. . . . That is the disability we must be on guard against for the future — the female who reproduces the female who reproduces the female" ("Rootedness" 344). Thus, Paul D's attempt to displace the ghost and then Beloved in order to insert himself is a positive move; however, he, Sethe, and Denver must all reevaluate themselves in light of the past before the new relationship can become viable.

them, when they want to yell and break something or at least run off" (115). House-fits, however, are usually associated with the woman herself, and in this case he knows that he is not running away from Sethe because he loves her more each day (115). Perplexed, Paul D moves from Sethe's bed to a rocker in the kitchen to the keeping room and finally to the cold house. Not until he ends up in the cold house does Paul D realize that "the moving was involuntary," that "he was being prevented" from remaining in the house (116). With this realization comes a sense of waiting; soon Beloved comes to the cold house, forcing him — against his will, he believes — to have sex with her. The belief that Beloved is forcing him to act against his will both shames and angers Paul D:

What? A grown man fixed by a girl? But what if the girl was not a girl, but something in disguise? A lowdown something that looked like a sweet young girl and fucking her or not was not the point, it was not being able to stay or go where he wished in 124, and the danger was in losing Sethe because he was not man enough to break out, so he needed her, Sethe, to help him, to know about it, and it shamed him to have to ask the woman he wanted to protect to help him do it, God damn it to hell. (127)

Unable to understand how he, a grown man, "had come to be a rag doll — picked up and put back down anywhere any time by a girl young enough to be his daughter" (126), Paul D assumes that Beloved has bewitched him. Shamed by Beloved's hold over him, Paul D recognizes that only Sethe can break that hold, but the thought of having "to ask the woman he wanted to protect to help him" shames him even more.

Although Beloved is a supernatural being, she is no witch; her true power over Paul D lies in her ability to arouse in him long-buried desires, fears, and conflicts that must be acknowledged and resolved before he can progress to a new life, liberated from the past. Although Beloved clearly resents Paul D's ability to distract Sethe's attention from her, the omniscient narrator gives no indication that Beloved is actually using supernatural powers to

move Paul D out of 124. Paul D believes that Beloved is moving him because *he* wishes to move *her* out, and he projects his own desires onto her. What is moving him is not Beloved but his own unresolved past, which continues to haunt him, plaguing him with doubts about whether he is indeed a free man.

For Paul D freedom is defined as the ability to move and to love as one chooses (40, 162). As a slave Paul D was denied these two freedoms, with the result that, even though he wants to build a life with Sethe, he fears he will not be able to stay with her:

He didn't believe he could live with a woman — any woman — for over two out of three months. That was about as long as he could abide one place. . . . walking off when he got ready was the only way he could convince himself that he would no longer have to sleep, pee, eat or swing a sledge hammer in chains. . . . (40)

Paul D equates movement with liberation, with escape from the threat of enslavement, whether by a white man or by a woman. In sharp contrast, Sethe sees moving not as liberation but as running away. When Paul D suggests that she leave 124 to escape the wearying spite of the baby ghost, she replies angrily, "No moving. No leaving":

No more running — from nothing. I will never run from another thing on this earth! I took one journey and I paid the ticket, but let me tell you something, Paul D Garner: it cost too much! Do you hear me? It cost too much. . . . (15)

Sethe has learned the hard way that movement is, ultimately, ineffective: whatever you leave will eventually catch up with you. Beloved becomes, in essence, the past that catches up with Paul D. When he moves from Sethe's house, he is running not from Sethe but from Beloved, from a past that will continue to haunt him, driving him away from every place he hopes to settle in until he stops long enough to turn and confront it.

When Paul D moves from 124, he is moving away from Beloved's shining; her sexual arousal confuses him because it is not directed at him, the only man in the house.

Beloved's shining is the two-year-old's desire for Sethe manifested as the sexual desire of a twenty-year-old woman. However, it is also a reflection of Paul D's own desire. Although Paul D consciously loves and desires Sethe, the woman, Beloved arouses Paul D's long-submerged and never-to-be-fulfilled desire for the teen-aged Sethe of his dreams. Beloved, Paul D tells Stamp Paid, "reminds me of something. Something, looks like, I'm supposed to remember" (234). Beloved, unknown to Paul D, is Sethe's daughter and at twenty years old is about the same age Sethe was the last time Paul D saw her before she escaped from Sweet Home. Reliving that last meeting, when he had worn "a three-spoke collar," Paul D re-experiences the embarrassment and shame he had felt before her:

It is hard to move about with shackled ankles and the neck jewelry embarrasses him. In his shame he avoids her eyes She says she is going, and he thinks she will never make it to the gate, but he doesn't dissuade her. He knows he will never see her again, and right then and there his heart stopped. (228)

Believing at that moment in 1856 that he would never see Sethe again, Paul D felt a part of his life shut down.

When, in 1873, Paul D follows Sethe up the stairs on his first night at 124, he drops "twenty-five years from his recent memory. A stair step before him [is] Baby Suggs' replacement, the new girl they dreamed of at night and fucked cows for at dawn while waiting for her to choose" (20). The sexual union he had anticipated for so many years is, of course, bitterly disappointing: "His dreaming of her had been too long and too long ago" (20), and Sethe is no longer the young girl of his dreams but an aging, scarred woman:

Paul D saw the float of her breasts and disliked it, the spread-away, flat roundness of them that he could definitely live without And the wrought-iron maze [on her back] . . . was in fact a revolting clump of scars. . . . (21)

Paul D quickly overcomes this disappointment, however, recognizing almost immediately that "nothing could be as good as the sex with her Paul D had been imagining off and on for twenty-five years" (25). By the next day, he realizes that simply seeing Sethe again — "alive, barefoot with uncovered hair" — has opened, "like a greased lock," the portion of his head that "he had shut down" after Alfred, Georgia (41).

Although Sethe unlocks his head, it takes Beloved, the twenty-year-old girl who reminds him of "something" he is "supposed to remember," to resurrect the heart that stopped when he last saw Sethe. When Beloved approaches Paul D in the cold house, "hoist[ing] her skirts and turn[ing] her head over her shoulder," Paul D finds himself unable to resist her plea for connection: "I want you to touch me on the inside part and call me my name" (116). He succumbs as if in a dream, awaking only when, having "reached the inside part," he heard himself saying "'Red heart. Red heart,' over and over again" (117). In having sex with Beloved, Paul D relives the act he imagined and dreamed but never consummated. Subconsciously perceiving Beloved as the young Sethe, Paul D releases twenty-five years of unconsummated desire as he finally has sex with the person he had chosen to love but had been prevented from having.

Having sex with Beloved, whom he subconsciously associates with the young Sethe, releases far more than pent-up desire. It also releases long-buried memories of life at Sweet Home and serious questions about how his experiences there affected his sense of himself as a man. Although angered because he is "fucking [Beloved] when he was convinced he didn't want to," Paul D understands the cause of his weakness: "Whenever she turned her behind up, the calves of his youth . . . cracked his resolve" (126). Fucking Beloved reminds him of the manly restraint he and the other four slaves were forced to practice at Sweet Home:

the five Sweet Home men looked at the new girl and decided to let her be. They were young and so sick with the absence of women they had taken to calves. Yet they let the iron-eyed girl be, so she could choose in spite of the fact that each would have beaten the other to mush to have her. It took her a year to choose — a long, tough year of thrashing on pallets eaten up with dreams of her. A year of yearning, when rape seemed the solitary gift of life. The restraint they had exercised possible only because they were Sweet Home men — the ones Mr. Garner bragged about. . . . (10)

Paul D and the other Sweet Home men, "all in their twenties" (11), allowed Sethe the time and freedom to choose one of them as a husband. Determined to treat her as a human rather than as an animal or a slave, they denied themselves the luxury of rape, which seemed to them "the solitary gift of life," taking the edge off their appetite by fucking calves instead.

One of the things that Baby Suggs had liked about Sweet Home was that Mr. Garner

didn't stud his boys. Never brought them to her cabin with directions to "lay down with her," . . . or rented their sex out on other farms. It surprised and pleased her, but worried her too. Would he pick women for them or what did he think was going to happen when those boys ran smack into their nature? . . . (140)

Although Baby Suggs is grateful and pleased that Mr. Garner does not "stud his boys," she recognizes that to allow them no avenue of sexual release is unnatural, damaging, and potentially dangerous.

Paul D believes that the restraint exercised by the Sweet Home slaves was made possible only by their perception of themselves as men rather than boys. Trusting Mr. Garner's definition, Paul D "grew up thinking that, of all the Blacks in Kentucky, only the five of them were men" (125), and he has always believed that his restraint in allowing Sethe the freedom of choice was the ultimate proof of his manliness. Twenty-five years later, however, living in the cellar of the Church of the Holy Redeemer, he begins to realize that the restraint itself was unnatural, that it was necessitated by his enslavement to the very

person who had labeled him a man. He begins to recognize that his own self-definition as a man has depended too heavily on Mr. Garner's labeling him and the other slaves as men:

Garner called and announced them men — but only on Sweet Home, and by his leave. Was he naming what he saw or creating what he did not? . . . It troubled him that, concerning his own manhood, he could not satisfy himself on that point. Oh, he did manly things, but was that Garner's gift or his own will? What would he have been anyway — before Sweet Home — without Garner? In Sixo's country, or his mother's? Or, God help him, on the boat? Did a whiteman saying it make it so? Suppose Garner woke up one morning and changed his mind. Took the word away. . . . (220)

He realizes that during those years at Sweet Home under Mr. Garner he had lived in a "cradle" (219), "isolated in a wonderful lie" (221); he had been called a man but never allowed the freedom to test and discover the truth about himself on his own terms.

Later, when Schoolteacher replaced Mr. Garner, he deprived the Sweet Home slaves of their status as men, redefining them as boys, which was such a drastic change that it forced them to try to escape. When Paul D was caught, his ankles were chained and a three-spoke collar was placed on his neck. Soon after, when an iron bit was placed in his mouth, Paul D was forced to recognize that the rooster Mister

was allowed to be and stay what he was. But I wasn't allowed to be and stay what I was. . . . wasn't no way I'd ever be Paul D again, living or dead. Schoolteacher changed me. I was something else and that something was less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub. (72)

Too late Paul D recognizes the danger of believing in an assessment, a definition of self, that is imposed from without:

they were only Sweet Home men at Sweet Home. One step off that ground and they were trespassers among the human race. Watchdogs without teeth; steer bulls without horns; gelded workhorses whose neigh and whinny could not be translated into a language responsible humans spoke. . . . (126)

Deprived of the word bestowed by Mr. Garner and cast out of Mr. Garner's Eden, the Sweet Home men were magically transformed, through redefinition by a different authority, into animals — domesticated, impotent, and unintelligible.⁸⁷

Paul D makes his final, most distancing move from Sethe when, in response to her attempt to explain that she killed her children out of love, he says, "You got two feet, Sethe, not four" (165):

Later he would wonder what made him say it. The calves of his youth? or the conviction that he was being observed through the ceiling? How fast he had moved from his shame to hers. From his cold-house secret to her too-thick love. (165)

In suggesting that Sethe's act was that of a beast rather than that of a human, Paul D is projecting his own shame, his own fear that he is more beast than man. Sethe has not told him that by attempting to kill her children, she was guaranteeing that no white man would do to her children what Schoolteacher had done to Paul D — "dirty" them, convincing them that they were not fully human but creatures embodying both human and animal characteristics. Eventually, Paul D recognizes that Sethe's life has been dedicated to preventing those she loves from perceiving themselves as less than human. He remembers "her tenderness about his neck jewelry How she never mentioned or looked at it, so he did not have to feel the shame of being collared like a beast. Only this woman Sethe

⁸⁷Through her work on *The Black Book*, Morrison encountered William G. Schell's *Is the Negro a Beast?* (1901); *The Funny Little Darkies*, a children's book portraying blacks as animals; and a letter to DuBois from a white professor asking, for purposes of a study on crying, "whether the Negro sheds tears" (Harris 74, 89, 82). To counteract these white views of blacks, Morrison says, the preparers of *The Black Book* included examples of "the routine bestiality of those [whites] who founded and settled this country" ("Rediscovering Black History," *New York Times Magazine* 11 Aug. 1974: 18). The point they hoped to make by including these examples was the same as that made by Stamp Paid when he says that the jungle that grows inside of Negroes is not a jungle they brought with them from Africa but "the jungle whitefolks planted in them" (199).

could have left him his manhood like that" (273). She returns to him the favor he once gave her — the perception and treatment of the other as a human rather than as a beast or a slave.

Paul D's perception of Beloved as "a low-down something" and a "bitch" (235) never changes, however, because he never recognizes her as the agent of his own change.⁸⁸ His experiences with Beloved, painful as they are, force him to relive experiences that contributed to his feelings of impotence and beastliness. Beloved frees Paul D by allowing him "to get to a place where [he] could love anything [he] chose — not to need permission for desire" (162). The act of sex with Beloved, however, is more than just the liberation of desire. When she first comes to him in the cold house,

he trembled like Lot's wife and felt some womanish need to see the nature of the sin behind him; feel a sympathy, perhaps, for the cursing cursed, or want to hold it in his arms out of respect for the connection between them.
... (117)

He fears that if he has sex with Beloved, "he too would be lost" (117). The opposite is true; penetration into, sympathy with, and connection with the collective memory Beloved represents is what saves him.⁸⁹ Later, after Beloved has been driven from the community and Paul D is returning, step by step, to 124 and Sethe's bed, he can no longer imagine

the desire that drowned him there and forced him to struggle up, up into that girl like she was the clear air at the top of the sea. Coupling with her wasn't even fun. It was more like a brainless urge to stay alive. Each time she came, pulled up her skirts, a life hunger overwhelmed him and he had no more control over it than over his lungs. And afterward, beached and gobbling air, in the midst of repulsion and personal shame, he was thankful too for having been escorted to some ocean-deep place he once belonged to.
(264)

⁸⁸Paul D, like the unknown white men, is guilty of having called Beloved "beloved in the dark and bitch in the light" (241).

⁸⁹To separate oneself from the ancestor, the past, the tribe, Morrison believes, is to be lost.

While at Alfred, Georgia, Paul D beat life to a pulp in order to survive: "Life was dead. Paul D beat her butt all day every day till there was not a whimper in her. . . . Life rolled over dead" (109). When the rains came, however, threatening to bury him and the other prisoners living in boxes below ground, the desire for life became so strong that "they just plunged, simply ducked down and pushed out, fighting up, reaching for air" (100). His delivery from the mud at Alfred was a physical rebirth: he rediscovered the desire to live, to survive, to escape. What Beloved offers is a spiritual rebirth, guiding him down into, reconnecting him with, and delivering him from the womb/tomb of three hundred years of shared African American misery, abandonment, and grief. As a result of his immersion in the past embodied in Beloved, Paul D discovers the strength not only to return to 124 but also to fulfill a new role, that of healer and nurturer.

Community: Accusations, Sins, and Atonement

When Janey spreads the news that Beloved has returned in the flesh to whip her mother, the community's first and immediate reaction is gratification. The story that is created by Janey and reshaped and passed on by the women — "Sethe was worn down, speckled, dying, spinning, changing shapes and generally bedeviled" (225) — is readily believed because it fulfills their own expectations: no one can commit such a crime without eventually receiving the just punishment of God. The only means to avoid such punishment, within their Christian world view, is to ask pardon, beg forgiveness, seek atonement from God and from the universe (the community) that has been disturbed by the crime. Sethe, however, believing that she was both right and had the right to kill her children to prevent

their return to slavery, has taken none of these steps.⁹⁰ Outraged by Sethe's claims as a mother, by the pride that keeps her from asking for help, and, perhaps worst of all, by the self-sufficiency that enables her to survive without their help, the community believes that Sethe's punishment is long overdue. Thus, Beloved's bedevilment of Sethe reflects their own desire to punish Sethe: "Just about everybody in town was longing for Sethe to come on difficult times. Her outrageous claims, her self-sufficiency seemed to demand it . . ." (171).⁹¹

Guided by Ella, however, community opinion changes. Soon Beloved is no longer seen as a God-sent punishment; she becomes, as defined by Ella and the community, "sin moving on in the house" (256), "a grown-up evil sitting at the table with a grudge" (257), a cleverly disguised "devil-child" (261). In addition, she seems to signify the potential threat of "past errors taking possession of the present" (256). Thus, Beloved can be seen as the past errors, the sin, and the evil committed by the community itself, both individually and collectively. "The past," Ella believes, "is something to leave behind. And if it didn't stay behind, well, you might have to stomp it out" (256). Led by Ella, the women gather at 124 to stomp out Beloved and, in so doing, stomp out their own past and their own sin,

⁹⁰"It was absolutely the right thing to do," Morrison says of Sethe's act, "but she had no right to do it" ("Toni Morrison Defends Women" C17). Sethe, of course, disagrees.

⁹¹Sethe's self-sufficiency also causes problems for Paul D. His reaction to Sethe's success in escaping Sweet Home without the help of Halle and the other slaves combines pride with annoyance: "He was proud of her and annoyed by her. Proud she had done it; annoyed that she had not needed Halle or him in the doing" (8). The annoyance reflects Paul D's misconceptions about what it means to be a "man" or to be a "woman." One of the things he learns is that, to save and be saved, a "person" must combine both masculine and feminine tendencies, to be both the ship and the safe harbor.

exorcising the collective spirit of "meanness" that has encouraged them to punish Sethe for her crime and her subsequent pride and self-sufficiency.

For eighteen years the community has continued to punish and exclude Sethe for having killed her daughter. When Stamp Paid, deciding that the punishment has gone on for too long, reminds Ella that she and Sethe had once been friends, Ella replies, "I ain't got no friends take a handsaw to their own children" (187). Although Ella understands "Sethe's rage in the shed twenty years ago," she cannot understand "her reaction" to that rage. As the community says, "You can't just up and kill your children" (256). Mothers, they seem to imply, cannot treat their children as possessions, choosing when and when not to kill them. Despite their collective agreement that "you can't just up and kill your children," however, many of them have done just that. Ella, like Sethe's mother, refused to raise any child conceived in rape: Ella "had delivered, but would not nurse, a hairy white thing, fathered by 'the lowest yet.' It lived five days never making a sound" (259). According to the collective view, then, killing the child of a rape is permissible, whereas killing a child of love, as Sethe did, is not.⁹² One is an unavoidable consequence of existence in a white man's world, whereas the other is a crime deserving community censure and the punishment of God. As the narrator notes, there is "something very personal in [Ella's] fury" as she thinks about "past errors taking possession of the present" (256). Although she may not equate her own crime with Sethe's, "the idea of that pup [her own dead child] coming back to whip her too set her jaw working . . ." (257). In exorcising Beloved from 124, Ella is exorcising the demons of her own past.

⁹²This view recalls the argument that abortion is permissible in instances of rape but should be outlawed in all other cases.

The community shuns Sethe not only for her crime and her claims as a mother but also for her pride and her self-sufficiency. Ella believes that Sethe's act was "prideful, misdirected, and Sethe herself too complicated. When she got out of jail and made no gesture toward anybody, and lived as though she were alone, Ella junked her and wouldn't give her the time of day" (256). In fact, immediately after Sethe kills her daughter, the community gathers outside 124 to offer consolation but then withholds it because she does not appear to need that consolation:

Holding the living child, Sethe walked past them in their silence and hers. She climbed into the cart, her profile knife-clean against a cheery blue sky. A profile that shocked them with its clarity. Was her head a bit too high? Her back a little too straight? Probably. Otherwise the singing would have begun at once Some cape of sound would have quickly been wrapped around her, like arms to hold and steady her on the way. . . . (152)

The interdependence between asking for, giving, and receiving help forms one of the unspoken codes that bind the community. Not to ask for help when it is needed, no matter what one's motive, is seen as prideful. When Stamp Paid discovers that Paul D is living in the church cellar, he is shocked and asks Ella why this has happened:

"He's a touch proud, seem like."

"He don't have to do that! Any number'll take him in."

Ella turned around to look at Stamp Paid. "Can't nobody read minds long distance. All he have to do is ask somebody."

"Why? Why he have to ask? Can't nobody offer? What's going on? Since when a blackman come to town have to sleep in a cellar like a dog?" (187)

Eventually, Stamp Paid draws from Ella her admission that Paul D's association with Sethe has tainted him in the eyes of the community. Until the women learn that Paul D has left Sethe because Stamp Paid told him about the killing, they refuse to offer help unless he asks for it.

In the same way, Denver must leave 124 and move into the community to ask for help. When she does ask for help, the community responds, giving freely whatever they have to spare from their own limited supplies:

Denver stood on the porch and noticed something lying on the tree stump at the edge of the yard. She went to look and found a sack of white beans. Another time a plate of cold rabbit meat. One morning a basket of eggs sat there. As she lifted it, a slip of paper fluttered down. She picked it up and looked at it. "M. Lucille Williams" was written in big crooked letters. . . . So Denver paid a second visit to the world outside the porch, although all she said when she returned the basket was "Thank you." (248-49)

This is community at its best, as it should be. Denver asks for help, the women respond, Denver visits to thank them, and then the conversations, laden with memories, begin:

All of them knew her grandmother and some had even danced with her in the Clearing. Others remembered the days when 124 was a way station One remembered the tonic mixed there that cured a relative. One showed her the border of a pillowslip, the stamens of its pale blue flowers French-knotted in Baby Suggs' kitchen They remembered the party with twelve turkeys and tubs of strawberry smash. One said she wrapped Denver when she was a single day old and cut shoes to fit her mother's blasted feet. . . . (249)

Remembering Baby Suggs, the Clearing, the way station at 124, and the celebration party, the women reach out to Denver, wrapping her in the embrace they had denied Sethe.

The response of the community to Denver's request for help is motivated by more, however, than a simple sense of duty:

Maybe they were sorry for her. Or for Sethe. Maybe they were sorry for the years of their own disdain. Maybe they were simply nice people who could hold meanness toward each other for just so long and when trouble rode bareback among them, quickly, easily they did what they could to trip him up. . . . (249)

The community is thus atoning for its own sin, its own unpardonable meanness, committed eighteen years earlier. When the four strange white men rode into town in 1856, "nobody sent a fleet-footed son to cut 'cross the field Not Ella, not John, not anybody ran

down or to Bluestone Road, to say some new whitefolks with the Look just rode in. . ."

(157). After the long day of feasting in Baby Suggs' yard to celebrate the safe arrival of her daughter-in-law and four grandchildren, no one warned Baby Suggs and her new family. That warning, had it been given, might have allowed Sethe the time to come up with a solution other than the one she chose. By acting, the community could possibly have saved Sethe's children or, if not, at least have had the satisfaction of knowing they had tried to help. Instead, they waited passively to see what events would unfold. Stamp Paid knows that

it wasn't the exhaustion from a long day's gorging that dulled them, but some other thing — like, well, like meanness — that let them stand aside, or not pay attention, or tell themselves somebody else was probably bearing the news already to the house on Bluestone Road Maybe they just wanted to know if Baby really was special, blessed in some way they were not. . .

(157)

The community did not warn Baby Suggs because when they woke up the morning after the celebration, they discovered they were angered by her "reckless generosity" (137). The community was unable to accept Baby Suggs' generosity, unable to receive graciously what she wished to share in her thanksgiving for the safe delivery of four grandchildren. They misinterpreted the generosity as "uncalled-for pride" because they were suddenly jealous of Baby's good fortune:

124, rocking with laughter, goodwill and food for ninety, made them angry. Too much, they thought. Where does she get it all, Baby Suggs, holy? Why is she and hers always the center of things? How come she always knows exactly what to do and when? Giving advice; passing messages; healing the sick, hiding fugitives, loving, cooking, cooking, loving, preaching, singing, dancing and loving everybody like it was her job and hers alone. (137)

And from their envy of Baby Suggs' "bounty" they created a new fiction, that although Baby Suggs was an ex-slave, she had never really suffered — at least not to the degree that they

had. Jealous of the easy life they imagined for Baby Suggs, in comparison with their own histories of hardship and abuse, they decided to let her fend for herself against the "new whitefolks with the Look."

When the women gather outside 124 to drive off Beloved, they come up against their past. They see themselves as they were eighteen years earlier at Baby Suggs' celebration:

Younger, stronger, even as little girls lying in the grass asleep. Catfish was popping grease in the pan Cobbler oozing purple syrup colored their teeth. . . . Baby Suggs laughed and skipped amongst them, urging more. Mothers, dead now, moved their shoulders to mouth harps. . . . (258)

Banded together to save Sethe from her "past errors," the women save themselves from their own. Michael Awkward, in his discussion of the "phenomenon of scapegoating" in *The Bluest Eye*, suggests that a community may rid itself of its own feelings of guilt by projecting the negative aspect, or "shadow," of its behavior onto an external, "alien" personality. "In combatting the shadow that has been externalized and can, thus, be perceived as Other," Awkward explains, "the group is able to rid itself ceremonially of the evil that exists within both the individual members and the community at large" (74-75). In perceiving Sethe as a monster for having killed her child, the community projected their own guilt at their complicity in that act. Now by perceiving Beloved as a demon whipping Sethe, the community projects their guilt for having whipped her themselves for eighteen years. Furthermore, by setting up Beloved as the ultimate scapegoat for both sources of communal guilt, the community is able to re-vision Sethe as victim, leading to reincorporation of Sethe into the community, an action that, by removing the cause of their guilt, heals the

community.⁹³ By exorcising Beloved, the community exorcises the past, opening the way for the old harmony, inspired and nurtured by Baby Suggs, before it "was buried amid a regular dance of pride, fear, condemnation and spite" (171).

The Spirit of Baby Suggs

Beloved is not the only spirit to speak from "the other side." In the time between her mother-in-law's death and the arrival of Paul D, Sethe holds herself together not by praying to God but by communicating with Baby Suggs in the keeping room: "Words whispered in the keeping room had kept her going" (86). Whenever some new misery seems impossible to bear, such as the image of Halle's "butter-smear'd face," she goes to the keeping room where she wishes for Baby Suggs, her

fingers molding her nape, reshaping it, saying, "Lay em down, Sethe. Sword and shield. Down. Both of em down. Down by the riverside. . . ." And under the pressing fingers and the quiet instructive voice she would. Her heavy knives of defense against misery, regret, gall and hurt, she placed one by one on a bank where clear water rushed on below. (86)

⁹³The black communities characterized in Morrison's novels are noted for their tolerance of evil. In response to a question by Claudia Tate concerning her feelings about the pariahs in her first three novels, Morrison says:

black people at one time . . . thought evil had a natural place in the universe; they did not wish to eradicate it. They just wished to protect themselves from it, maybe even to manipulate it, but they never wanted to kill it. They thought evil was just another aspect of life. . . . ("Toni Morrison" 129)

The decision of the community to drive out Beloved is apparently based, then, on a belief that she is harmful, that eradication is necessary "to protect themselves." According to Mbiti, "when spirits 'endanger' a village, there are usually formal ceremonies to drive away the notorious spirits" (82). To drive off Beloved, the women arm themselves not only with Christian belief but also with magic charms and potions: they "brought what they believed would work. Stuffed in apron pockets, strung around their necks, lying in the space between their breasts" (257). Thus, the community action suggests a healing ceremony to combat spirit possession.

In the keeping room Sethe reconnects with Baby Suggs despite separation from her by death.⁹⁴ As a living-dead, Baby Suggs is a prime candidate for an intermediary between humans and God. According to Mbiti, the living-dead

know the needs of men, they have 'recently' been here with men, and at the same time they have full access to the channels of communicating with God directly or . . . indirectly through their own forefathers. Therefore men approach them more often for minor needs of life than they approach God. . . . men experience a sense of psychological relief when they pour out their hearts' troubles before their seniors who have a foot in both worlds. (83-84; single quotes appear in original)

As a living-dead, Baby Suggs continues to take an interest in her family, offering advice and strength from "the other side."

In death, then, Baby Suggs continues to play a role similar to the one she played in life. Like Pilate in *Song of Solomon* and Thérèse and the women of Eloë in *Tar Baby*, Baby Suggs is an ancestral figure who, embodying "the best of that which is female and the best of that which is male" ("Rootedness" 344), has the power to sustain others. Morrison has said that one of the "distinctive elements of Afro-American writing" is "the presence of an ancestor":

There is always an elder there. And these ancestors are not just parents, they are sort of timeless people whose relationships to the characters are benevolent, instructive, and protective, and they provide a certain kind of wisdom. ("Rootedness" 343)

Such figures have what Morrison calls the "tar quality, the ability to hold something together that otherwise would fall apart — which is what I mean by the nurturing ability" ("A

⁹⁴Sethe's continuing relationship with Baby Suggs proves that physical separation by death does not have to mean spiritual abandonment. In an open letter written to "us, women and girls," Morrison writes, "Leaving you was never a real separation because nobody needed your face to remember you by" ("A Knowing So Deep" 230). For Sethe, as for Morrison, physical separation does not preclude spiritual connection.

Conversation" 86). Before Sethe killed her daughter, Baby Suggs exerted all her energies in trying to hold together the community of ex-slaves around Bluestone Road and, later, the family bequeathed to her by her son Halle: "124 had been a cheerful, buzzing house where Baby Suggs, holy, loved, cautioned, fed, chastised and soothed" (87). In both the storefront churches and in the Clearing, Baby Suggs delivered "her powerful Call . . . she *called* and the hearing heard" (177). She called the children to laugh, the men to dance, the women to cry, and as she watched, "it got mixed up. Women stopped crying and danced; men sat down and cried; children danced, women laughed, children cried until, exhausted and riven, all and each lay about the Clearing damp and gasping for breath" (88). Under Baby Suggs' guidance, the community of ex-slaves gathered to cry, dance, and laugh away the "misery, regret, gall and hurt" — to release and exorcise the past, laying it all down so that they could go on about the process of living in the present world. Baby Suggs refused "to tell them to clean up their lives or to go and sin no more"; nor did she tell them that they were "the blessed of the earth, its inheriting meek or its glorybound pure." Instead, she told them the truth, "that the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine" (88). Finally, she told them to love themselves — their flesh, eyes, hands, mouth, neck, "dark, dark liver," lungs, "life-holding womb" and "life-giving private parts," and most of all, heart (88-89).

Baby Suggs bound the ex-slaves together as a community, giving them hope, feeding them, and healing those who were sick or broken. When Sethe arrived at 124, beaten, numb, exhausted, Baby Suggs

bathed her in sections, wrapped her womb, combed her hair, oiled her nipples, cleaned her feet, greased her back and . . . massage[d] Sethe's nape when . . . her spirits fell down under the weight of the things she remembered and the things she did not (98)

Healing Sethe both physically and spiritually, Baby Suggs oversaw Sethe's purification and rebirth into a new life as a free woman. Twenty-eight days later, however, when four white men rode into her yard, she discovered that

the heart that pumped out love, the mouth that spoke the Word, didn't count. They came in her yard anyway and she could not approve or condemn Sethe's rough choice. One or the other might have saved her, but beaten up by the claims of both, she went to bed. . . . (180)

Worn out and broken by "those white things" (89), by the "rough choice" she could neither approve nor condemn, and by "no more . . . neighbors dropping by" (89), Baby Suggs went to bed, believing that "she had lied. There was no grace — imaginary or real — and no sunlit dance in a Clearing could change that" (89).

Despite the fact that Baby Suggs died believing that she had lied, the memory of both her and her message is kept alive by those who knew and loved her. Further, Baby Suggs continues to make her own presence known, speaking to Denver at the critical moment when she must step off the porch to save her mother. Standing on the porch, gathering courage to step into the world, Denver is temporarily paralyzed by her memory of the stories told by her mother and grandmother about the dangers of a world "where there were places in which things so bad had happened that when you went near them it would happen again" (243-44).

Remembering such stories and conversations,

Denver stood on the porch in the sun and couldn't leave it. Her throat itched; her heart kicked — and then Baby Suggs laughed, clear as anything. "You mean I never told you nothing about Carolina? About your daddy? You don't remember nothing about how I walk the way I do and about your mother's feet, not to speak of her back? I never told you all that? Is that why you can't walk down the steps? My Jesus my."

But you said there was no defense.

"There ain't."

Then what do I do?

"Know it, and go on out the yard. Go on." (244)

Strengthened by Baby Suggs, her laughter and her words, Denver steps off the porch and into the world.

Although Paul D never heard Baby Suggs deliver "her powerful Call" and never hears her voice after her death, he possesses many of the same traits that made her an ancestral figure for the community. For one thing he is blessed with the ability to make women weep and to tell him things "they only told each other":

Not even trying, he had become the kind of man who could walk into a house and make the women cry. Because with him, in his presence, they could. There was something blessed in his manner. Women saw him and wanted to weep — to tell them that their chest hurt and their knees did too. Strong women and wise saw him and told him things they only told each other (17)

Without "even trying," Paul D, like Baby Suggs in the Clearing, helps women release some of their pain. Also like Baby Suggs, he strives to build a future and hold a family together. Recognizing the importance of traveling backward and inward before moving forward, he tells Sethe:

Sethe, if I'm here with you, with Denver, you can go anywhere you want. Jump, if you want to, 'cause I'll catch you, girl. I'll catch you 'fore you fall. Go as far inside as you need to, I'll hold your ankles. Make sure you get back out. . . . We can make a life, girl. A life. (46)

To be strong enough to hold on to Sethe, protecting her from what awaits her "inside," however, Paul D must make the same journey himself. Only after he resurfaces at the end of the journey inward that is facilitated by Beloved does he release in himself the potential to be, as Baby Suggs was, an ancestral figure, combining "the best of that which is female and the best of that which is male." After completing the journey, Paul D knows to repeat Baby Suggs' message of self-love, telling Sethe, "You your best thing, Sethe. You are" (273). He also knows to imitate Baby Suggs' healing and purifying ritual, offering to wash

Sethe and to rub her feet (272), overseeing, as Baby Suggs did earlier, Sethe's rebirth to a new life freed from a mother love that had become possessive, enslaving, and life-denying.

Paul D possesses one other characteristic that suggests that he can revive and sustain the spirit of Baby Suggs. Without even trying, he draws out the kindness of the community. On the day of the carnival Denver notices that

there was something about him . . . that made the stares of other Negroes kind, gentle . . . Several even nodded and smiled at her mother, no one, apparently, able to withstand sharing the pleasure Paul D was having. . . .
(49)

In addition to healing Sethe, then, Paul D can help rebuild her tie to the community, an act that is as essential to the community's well-being as it is to Sethe's. The breach between Sethe and the women must be healed before the women can renew their connection with Baby Suggs. This healing begins when Denver's visits inspire them to share their memories of Baby Suggs. It continues when, gathered outside 124 to deliver Sethe from Beloved's greedy, consuming love, they see themselves as happy, well-fed girls in Baby Suggs' yard. By strengthening the tie between Sethe and the community, Paul D can also help strengthen the community's ties with Baby Suggs. Reconnection with the ancestral figure of Baby Suggs is essential if they are not to be lost: "When you kill the ancestor," Morrison says, "you kill yourself" ("Rootedness" 344).

In fact, there is some suggestion that Baby Suggs is again helping things along from "the other side." Beloved says that a woman on the bridge, the bridge connecting the human and spirit phases of life, directed her to 124 Bluestone (65). Sethe, too, thinks that Baby Suggs helped Beloved come back to her in the flesh (200). If so, then it appears that Baby Suggs recognized that Beloved must return, touching and releasing those whose lives had been paralyzed by the past. Beloved acts as a supernatural agent — experienced as daughter,

sister, witch, or demon-child — who engages others in a seemingly external but actually an internal struggle resulting in rebirth, renewal, resurrection. Representing the living past, both individual and collective, with which the modern African American must engage in order to experience selfhood and build a future, *Beloved* is sacrificed so that others may live and grow.

The Power of Storytelling

Beloved is a story about enslavement, the search for selfhood, and confrontation with the past, but it also demonstrates the healing potential of storytelling. At the conclusion of the novel, Paul D knows that "he wants to put his story next to" Sethe's (273). By telling and listening to each other's stories, Sethe and Paul D recreate and solidify a shared past on which they might base a future life together, release and share long-buried secrets, and discover new aspects of themselves and each other. Sharing their stories, they begin to heal themselves and each other. The healing benefits of storytelling are not limited to Sethe and Paul D. The conversations between Denver and the community allow the women to rediscover the spirit of Baby Suggs and to rebuild the connection with her nurturing "tar quality." *Beloved* grows fat on stories of the past because they give her life and identity. In her desire to satisfy *Beloved*'s endless appetite for stories, Denver discovers the power of storytelling, the power of invention, the power of giving life to scraps of memory as she attempts to recreate the story of Sethe's escape from Sweet Home:

Denver was seeing it now and feeling it — through *Beloved*. Feeling how it must have felt for her mother. Seeing how it must have looked. And the more fine points she made, the more detail she provided, the more *Beloved* liked it. So she anticipated the questions by giving blood to the scraps her mother and grandmother had told her — and a heartbeat. The monologue became, in fact, a duet as they lay down together, Denver nursing *Beloved*'s

interest like a lover whose pleasure was to overfeed the loved. . . . Denver spoke, Beloved listened, and the two did the best they could to create what really happened, how it really was (78)

This passage describes Morrison's own process of writing as "literary archeology" whereby she combines recollection and imagination "to yield up a kind of truth" ("Site of Memory" 111-12). It also expresses her ideas about the participation of the reader in the creative process.

According to Morrison, a novel should not be complete in itself but should encourage a dialogue or "duet" with the reader in which the reader helps create the story by contributing personal experiences, perspectives, and emotions:

My writing expects, demands participatory reading, and that I think is what literature is supposed to do. It's not just about telling the story; it's about involving the reader. The reader supplies the emotions. The reader supplies even some of the color, some of the sound. My language has to have holes and spaces so the reader can come into it. He or she can feel something visceral, see something striking. Then we [you, the reader, and I, the author] come together to make this book, to feel this experience. . . . ("Toni Morrison" 125; bracketed text appears in original)

Morrison compares the interaction between novelist and reader to that between preacher and congregation: "A Black preacher requires his congregation to speak, to join him in the sermon, to behave in a certain way, to stand up and to weep and to cry and to accede or to change and to modify — to expand on the sermon that is being delivered" ("Rootedness" 341). While encouraging individual response and personal expression, however, the preacher, through his sermon, carefully guides his audience toward a communal experience dictated by a shared world view.

As storyteller, then, Morrison, like the preacher, guides rather than dictates. She does not believe in didactic art, but she does believe that a novel

should have something in it that enlightens; something in it that opens the door and points the way. Something in it that suggests what the conflicts are, what the problems are. ("Rootedness" 341)

In *Beloved* Morrison enlightens her readers by providing a complex problem — Sethe's claims as a mother — set within a shared situation — slavery — and then lets loose a cluster of complicated characters, who are allowed to respond individually to the problem. The views expressed by the various characters are contradictory, sometimes supporting and at other times conflicting with views expressed by others. The opinions expressed by a single character are equally contradictory; a character may express one view in one situation and a slightly, or even radically, different one in another. Morrison says that she lets her characters talk to "see what they see, not what I see" ("An Interview" 424).⁹⁵ Readers must, like Morrison, practice seeing the world through the characters' eyes without, however, accepting only one character's vision of truth:

it is the combinations in characters that are the best part of writing novels — the combinations of virtue and flaw, of good intentions gone awry, of wickedness cleansed and people made whole again. If you judge them all by the best they have done, they are wonderful. If you judge them all by the worst they have done, they are terrible. . . . ("Toni Morrison" 423)

By allowing multiple characters to present their individual responses to a shared problem, Morrison makes the telling of *Beloved* a group process: Sethe, Paul D, Denver, Beloved,

⁹⁵Furthermore, when Morrison lets her characters talk, "they are not always talking to each other. Each has something else on her mind" ("An Interview" 424). This tendency is especially noticeable in *Beloved* in the unspoken "conversation" between Sethe, Denver, and Beloved (215-17) that follows the four brief first-person, stream-of-consciousness segments that present the "unspoken thoughts" of the three women. Although the women seem to be responding to each others' questions and comments, each is actually talking about a different experience, one that is unknown and unshared by the others. This short three-person "conversation" in which each woman is really speaking only to herself reveals the futility of any true communication and understanding among them. Each is sunk in a personal trauma that, "unspoken" and "unspeakable," totally absorbs the self while remaining impenetrable to the other.

Baby Suggs, Stamp Paid, and Ella all contribute their individual stories, also commenting on each other's stories, to create a whole. As Sethe knows, "her story" is Paul D's "as well . . . to tell, to refine and tell again" (99). Together, these multiple speakers do "the best they [can] to create what really happened, how it really was," and to pass on their story to the reader.

At the conclusion of *Beloved*, the narrator repeats, "It was not a story to pass on. . . . It was not a story to pass on. . . . This is not a story to pass on" (274-75). Yet, clearly, the story has been passed on and will continue to pass on. Like the novel as a whole and like all Morrison's novels, the statement is ambiguous. On first reading, the statement suggests that the story should be silenced and repressed: the experience of slavery should be laid down, put to rest, buried, forgotten. However, the novel by its very existence belies this interpretation, and Sethe's explanation of time as she perceives it suggests a second interpretation of the phrase "pass on":

I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place — the picture of it — stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened. (35-36)

In Sethe's experience of time, "some things," some occurrences, "pass on" — disappear, fade, die — while others remain. The experience of Sweet Home, Sethe says, will always remain; it will never die, never "pass on." The experience of Sweet Home is not just a rememory, Sethe says; it continues to exist, and anyone who approaches the physical site of Sweet Home is likely to bump into, re-experience, fall back into that occurrence.

The same phenomenon is true for 124 Bluestone. The intrusion of outsiders into the yard in 1856 is repeated in 1873. When Sethe sees Mr. Bodkins' hat approaching the yard of 124, she experiences once again the sensation of hummingbird beaks pricking her scalp, which is the signal to act to save her children. Just as Sethe has always feared, Denver in 1873 becomes caught up in a recurrence of the scene of 1856. By exerting "an effort of the will," however, Denver intervenes to redirect the outcome of Sethe's action from one of self-sabotage to one of potential salvation and rebirth. The concluding message of *Beloved*, "This is not a story to pass on," then, suggests that this is not a story, an occurrence, that will disappear, fade, die. It will continue to live, to exist, to be bumped up against, requiring a decision, an act, an effort of the will to redirect the ending of the story. The reader of *Beloved* must accept the responsibility of bumping up against, participating in, contributing to, and even redirecting a story — a history, a past, a heritage — that will never pass on, never die.

For Morrison, then, the past, as incarnated in the ghost of the beloved or as embedded in the geography of a place, lives on in the present. One must neither ignore the past nor allow it to dominate one's life but, rather, confront it, examine it, and understand how it has shaped one's own identity. Furthermore, one's individual past cannot be separated from the collective past of the group; African Americans, *Beloved* suggests, share a common heritage — captivity in Africa, the Middle Passage, and three hundred years of slavery in America. By confronting that shared past and then exorcising it, African Americans can liberate themselves from enslavement to a past that, when repressed or left unspoken, possesses all the more power to destroy. To know oneself, to claim or to

construct an identity, Morrison suggests, one must know the past, both individual and collective.

CHAPTER 7

WARRING WITH GHOSTS: POWER THROUGH INDIVIDUATION IN MAXINE HONG KINGSTON'S *THE WOMAN WARRIOR*

Medical science does not seal the earth, whose nether creatures seep out, hair by hair, disguised like the smoke that dispels them. She had apparently won against the one ghost, but ghost forms are various and many. Some can occupy the same space at the same moment. They permeate the grain in wood, metal, and stone. Animalcules somersault about our faces when we breathe. We have to build horns on our roofs so that the nagging once-people can slide up them and perhaps ascend to the stars, the source of pardon and love.

— Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior* 83-84

Maxine Hong Kingston's autobiography, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*, traces the process by which she defined herself in relation to her parents, the Chinese emigrants living in Oakland, the Chinese — both living and dead — in China, and the non-Chinese Americans. Like Morrison's *Beloved*, *The Woman Warrior* argues that one cannot know or define oneself until one confronts the ghosts of one's past. Kingston recognizes, as does Morrison, that to believe in ghosts is to give them the power both to destroy and to heal. Thus, although haunted by ghosts, Kingston refuses to be dominated by them; neither, however, does she exorcise them. Instead, by imagining the lives of her ghosts, she gives them substance, solidity, and permanence. By reconstructing the lives of the ghosts who haunt her, Kingston also constructs an identity for herself — one that is neither Chinese nor American but Chinese American. Because her girlhood in Oakland, California, demanded a daily crossing and recrossing of the boundary separating the world of the emigrant villagers from the world of the English-speaking Americans, she refuses as an adult to allow that boundary either to entrap her in one world or to exclude her

from the other. By locating a voice and an identity that transcends the potential barrier, a common language that speaks to the inhabitants of both worlds, Kingston overcomes the power of boundaries — or of ghosts — to circumscribe or control her development as an individual.

Living Among Ghosts

As the subtitle of her autobiography suggests, Kingston experienced childhood as a continuous struggle among and against a multiplicity of "spirits, ghosts, [and] vampires."

"When I was growing up," Kingston explained in a 1989 interview with Angeles Carabi,

people around me saw spirits and creatures It wasn't just that they brought ghost stories from China, but that they saw spirits and magic people in the world around them, and that they tried to use the magic for or against themselves.

For a few years I was terrified all the time. I was always afraid of forces I couldn't control. I thought the world was made of spirits, ghosts, vampires. I was so terribly frightened that later I wanted to be a scientist, an engineer, to have a very rational life. I thought I had achieved this goal, that I had controlled and destroyed the supernatural world. ("Special Eyes" 10)

To overcome her terror of the spirits, ghosts, and vampires that peopled her childhood world, Kingston attempted to control and destroy the supernatural world by leading a "very rational life." Instead of becoming a scientist or engineer, however, Kingston became a teacher and writer, learning, as those around her had, how "to use the magic" of the supernatural world for herself. In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston examines the ghosts that haunted her as a girl — as "Maxine."⁹⁶ "Those of us in the first American generations,"

⁹⁶In this chapter I distinguish between Kingston the author and Maxine the narrator, who are not necessarily the same even though *The Woman Warrior* is an autobiography. Although many events and feelings described in the book are undoubtedly factual, others are imaginative recreations of the actual events and feelings. It is virtually impossible for the reader to distinguish between an actual event, Brave Orchid's imaginative recreation of an

says Maxine, "have had to figure out how the invisible world the emigrants built around our childhoods fit in solid America" (5). Born in America of Chinese emigrants — that is, a man and woman who, after more than thirty-five years living in America, still view China as "home"⁹⁷ — the young Maxine is not only surrounded by ghosts of both American and Chinese origin but is herself viewed as a "half ghost" (183). To know herself, to liberate herself from a ghostly existence, Maxine is forced to confront those ghosts who threaten to mislead her by silencing her, enslaving her, or driving her crazy — thus enticing her to live the non-life of a ghost rather than the life of a human being. Her intent is not to destroy those ghosts but to control their power *over* her, thereby gaining power *from* them.

From her earliest days Maxine experiences the world as thoroughly infiltrated by ghosts. One type of ghost that she interacts with daily is the white ghost that dominates life outside the small area inhabited by the emigrants from her parents' village in China:

event, Kingston's imaginative recreation of an actual event, or Kingston's imaginative recreation of one of Brave Orchid's imaginative recreations. (In this way the book demonstrates the process of "talking-story," the cumulative and individual recreations of a story over time.) The reader who is unfamiliar with Chinese mythology and with the Chinese experience in America suffers the additional handicap of not recognizing when Kingston is intentionally modifying and transforming the myths or the experiences to achieve subtleties of irony and theme. The reader is also unable to distinguish between what "Maxine" felt, believed, or understood at the time an event occurred and what Kingston felt, believed, or understood at the time she wrote about the event. Obviously, the thematic connections among events and the continuous play on words that make the book such an artistic achievement are the work of Kingston the author rather than Maxine the narrator. In fact, one senses that "Maxine" is a character developed and filled in during the process of writing and thus is, like the other women described by Kingston in the book, a ghost that is given substance and materiality as the work progresses.

⁹⁷Vivian Hsu, in "Maxine Hong Kingston as Psycho-Autobiographer and Ethnographer," *International Journal of Women's Studies* 6.5 (1983): 429-42, notes that "Kingston's use of the term 'emigrant' is very apt. The first generation of Chinese in America emigrated out of China, but have not spiritually immigrated to America. They wander in a ghostlike existence, hanging on to a former reality" (437).

"America," she says, "has been full of . . . ghosts — Taxi Ghosts, Bus Ghosts, Police Ghosts, Fire Ghosts, Meter Reader Ghosts, Tree Trimming Ghosts, Five-and-Dime Ghosts. Once upon a time the world was so thick with ghosts I could hardly breathe . . ." (96-97). The Chinese use the term "ghost" to distinguish all non-Chinese individuals from Chinese people: "The Japanese," Maxine says, are "the only foreigners considered not ghosts by the Chinese" (93). The tendency to identify one's own race or tribe as "human" and all other races and tribes as "nonhuman" or "the enemy" is a form of ethnocentrism inherent to most, if not all, cultures. As George Murdock points out, "a people usually calls itself by a flattering name or by a term signifying simply 'men,' 'men of men,' 'first men,' or 'people.' Aliens, on the other hand, are regarded as something less than men; they are styled 'barbarians' or are known by some derogatory term . . ." (613).⁹⁸ Taught by her parents to view all non-Chinese as ghosts, Maxine experiences her immediate world — the city of Stockton, California — as "so thick with ghosts" that she can "hardly breathe." Her difficulty in breathing arises not only from the feeling that she is being suffocated by the vast

⁹⁸Werner Sollors gives examples of such naming used by Native Americans: "The name Kiowa means 'real or principal people' . . . ; Lenno-Lanapes are 'original men' . . . and Algonquians 'people of the other side.' The name Apache means 'enemy' in Züñi. . . . the Algonquian meaning of other names is striking: Iroquois 'real adders,' Mingo 'treacherous,' Mohawk 'cannibals or cowards,' and Pequot 'destroyers' Many names are frozen curses" (27). David Leiwei Li explains that

The usage of "ghost" for foreigners became a common practice probably in the late nineteenth century when Western imperial powers invaded the Chin Empire of China with guns and opium. For the first time in history the citizens of the "Central Kingdom" [literal translation of Zhong Guo (China)] were decentered and they strove to retain their centrality by defining their oppressor as the other, the "ghost," the "Kuei" which takes on the meaning of "devil" and "demon." Such negative connotations associated in the English language with Satanic forces are more or less dropped as Kingston opts for the word "ghost" which accentuates the insubstantiality and neutrality of a specter. . . . (508)

numbers of non-Chinese in California⁹⁹ but also from fears arising from the belief that "ghosts" are haunting, demonic, nightmarish spirit beings. "What frightened me most," Maxine says, "was the Newsboy Ghost . . .":

He shouted ghost words to the empty streets. His voice reached children inside the houses, reached inside children's chests. They would come running out of their yards with their dimes. They would follow him just a corner too far. And when they went to the nearest house to ask directions home, the Gypsy Ghosts would lure them inside with gold rings and then boil them alive and bottle them. The ointment thus made was good for rubbing on children's bruises. (97)

Thus, through a powerful act of an imagination fueled by fear, Maxine transforms an innocuous newspaper boy into a ghostly figure who lures children away from their homes, leading them "just a corner too far" into a land inhabited by "Gypsy Ghosts." If caught by a Gypsy Ghost, one could expect to be boiled alive, bottled, and used as an ointment to soothe other children's bruises. This imagined fate of the captive children is not as outlandish as it might at first seem. Maxine's own mother, Brave Orchid, keeps "in a glass on a shelf . . . a big brown hand with pointed claws stewing in alcohol and herbs. . . . She said it was a bear's claw My mother used the tobacco, leeks, and grasses swimming about the hand to rub our sprains and bruises" (91).

Many children fear ghosts. Maxine, however, thanks to her possession of an extremely powerful imaginative faculty, her confused interpretation of scattered bits of "knowledge" gained from her mother's stories, and her own experiences of bicultural life in America, is particularly adept at creating ghosts — ghosts that haunt her, challenging her to

⁹⁹Shih-Shan Henry Tsai, in *The Chinese Experience in America* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986), cites the Chinese population in Stockton in 1940 as 1,052 compared to a native population of 54,714 (107).

pattern her life on theirs. Thus, despite her fear of the Newsboy Ghost, Maxine is also fascinated by him, imagining herself as taking his place:

We used to pretend we were Newsboy Ghosts. We collected old Chinese newspapers . . . and trekked about the house and yard. We waved them over our heads, chanting a chant: "Newspapers for sale. Buy a newspaper." But those who could hear the insides of words heard that we were selling a miracle salve made from boiled children. The newspapers covered up green medicine bottles. . . . (97)

Maxine's ability to "hear the insides of words" makes her particularly susceptible to the powers of ghosts, one of which is to entice her to imitate their own mode of existence. To overcome the power of external ghosts, Maxine must discover and strengthen the ghost, or spirit, of herself.

The individual spirit possessed by each person — the spirit that bestows breath, life, and personality and that is itself, according to one definition of "ghost" given by *The Oxford English Dictionary*, "the seat of feeling, thought, and moral action" — is another type of ghost that haunts Maxine. She is surrounded by emigrants whose true spirit, the spirit that guided their feelings, thoughts, and actions in China, has been subdued or driven away by life in America. Some emigrants, Maxine says, gain strength from living among other emigrant villagers, who remember their exploits in China:

Living among one's own emigrant villagers can give a good Chinese far from China glory and a place. "That old busboy is really a swordsman," we whisper when he goes by, "He's a swordsman who's killed fifty. He has a tong ax in his closet." . . . (52)

Despite appearances, then, the "old busboy is really a swordsman," and the busboy's knowledge of his true spirit, shared by his neighbors, helps sustain him in a country whose inhabitants insist on defining and treating him as a busboy rather than a swordsman. To lose one's spirit, Maxine knows, is to experience insanity; a person goes crazy and may

eventually die when his or her spirit wanders or is driven away from the body, gets lost, and cannot find its way back home. Brave Orchid tells her children that after she fought the Sitting Ghost while a medical student in China, she told her friends, "Take my earlobes please . . . and pull them back and forth. In case I lost any of my self, I want you to call me back. I was afraid, and fear may have driven me out of body and mind" (71).

To restore a spirit that has been driven out of the body by fear, one pulls on the victim's earlobes, chanting his or her descent line to guide the missing spirit back home.

Maxine explains that, when Brave Orchid

got scared as a child, one of my mother's three mothers had held her and chanted their descent line, reeling the frightened spirit back from the farthest deserts. A relative would know personal names and secrets about husbands, babies, renegades and decide which ones were lucky in a chant (75)

Maxine says that when she was a child, she "felt loved" when her mother "led [her] out of nightmares and horror movies" that had frightened her: "I felt safe hearing my names sung with hers and my father's, my brothers' and sisters' . . ." (76). Thus, Maxine can easily imagine her mother's feelings after the other students at To Keung School of Midwifery had called her spirit back:

Abundant comfort in long restoring waves warmed my mother. Her soul returned fully to her and nestled happily inside her skin, for this moment not travelling in the past where her [dead] children were nor to America to be with my father. She was back among many people. She rested after battle. She let friends watch out for her. (72)

No matter what fears, what terrors, what ghosts one confronts and battles, one's own spirit can be called safely home to rest as long as one has family and friends. The chanting of one's descent line provides the directions necessary to lead a spirit through generations and

across geographical boundaries to one's true home.¹⁰⁰ Because Brave Orchid was living away from her family home, however, her friends had to chant their own names along with directions to To Keung School, "build[ing] a path from scraps," to guide Brave Orchid's spirit back to the body that had taken up residence in a new home: "They pieced together new directions, and my mother's spirit followed them instead of the old footprints" (75, 76).

The emigration of the Chinese to a new "home" in America tended to confuse the emigrants' spirits; when frightened by events in the new country, an emigrant's spirit might very well return to the village of its origin in China, which most emigrants continued to recognize as "home," rather than to the newly established village in California. The loss or displacement of self in relation to home explains Moon Orchid's insanity as well as Brave Orchid's inability to chant her spirit back to its body:

Brave Orchid tweaked her sister's ears for hours, chanting her new address, telling her how much she loved her and how much her daughter and nephews and nieces loved her, and her brother-in-law loved her. "I won't let anything happen to you. I won't let you travel again. You're home. Stay home. Don't be afraid." Tears fell from Brave Orchid's eyes. She had whisked her sister across the ocean by jet and made her scurry up and down the Pacific coast, back and forth across Los Angeles. Moon Orchid had misplaced herself, her spirit (her attention, Brave Orchid called it) scattered all over the world. . . . (156-57)

Brave Orchid's cure for fear and for the insanity that often follows from fear is founded on the principle that health, strength, and well-being derive from the recognition of one's connection to family, home, and village and from the feeling of love, security, and protection that this recognition instills.

¹⁰⁰Hsu describes the "traditionally strong sense of origin" shared by the Chinese: "Even in China, after a family has migrated to a different province, for several generations they continue to identify themselves with the province of their ancestors. They have a desire to be buried in their 'native' place, even if they cannot die there" (437).

To break that connection, to remove one's name, to destroy one's descent line, then, is to relegate a spirit, whether that of the living or the dead, to endless wandering. The endlessly wandering spirit of Maxine's nameless aunt, denied by her family because of her impregnation by an unknown lover, is one of the personal ghosts that haunt Maxine. After the villagers raided and destroyed the home of the aunt's family, "the family broke their silence and cursed her. 'Aiaa Look what you've done. . . . Ghost! Dead ghost! Ghost! You've never been born'" (13-14). "The real punishment" suffered by her nameless aunt, Maxine explains,

was not the raid swiftly inflicted by the villagers, but the family's deliberately forgetting her. Her betrayal so maddened them, they saw to it that she would suffer forever, even after death. Always hungry, always needing, she would have to beg food from other ghosts, snatch and steal it from those whose living descendants give them gifts. She would have to fight the ghosts massed at crossroads for the buns a few thoughtful citizens leave to decoy her away from the village and home so that the ancestral spirits could feast unharassed. At peace, they could act like gods, not ghosts, their descent lines providing them with paper suits and dresses, spirit money, paper houses, paper automobiles, chicken, meat, and rice into eternity My aunt remains forever hungry. . . . (16)

Having been denied her descent line, Maxine's aunt "remains forever hungry," forever suffering, "even after death." In trying to understand the reason for such harsh punishment, Maxine reasons that her aunt was punished for having violated "the law" that sustains family, village, and race: "A family must be whole, faithfully keeping the descent line by having sons to feed the old and the dead, who in turn look after the family" (13). The continuity of family, village, and race is sustained by this relationship between the living and the dead: the living feed the ancestral spirits so that those spirits will, in turn, bless the living.

Maxine is haunted by the memory of her two aunts, each of whom suffered from having lost her family, her home, and thus her spirit. They haunt her, in part, because she

sees them as her "forerunner[s]" (8), who seem at times to entice her, as the Newsboy Ghost did, to follow in their "footprints." At times Maxine fears the spiteful power of her nameless aunt:

I do not always think she means me well. . . . she was a spite suicide, drowning herself in the drinking water. The Chinese are always very frightened of the drowned one, whose weeping ghost, wet hair hanging and skin bloated, waits silently by the water to pull down a substitute. (16)

Maxine fears the power of both aunts to pull her into a way of life that imitates their own lives, ghostly lives spent in fulfilling the traditional role of the female in China followed by a ghostly afterlife spent wandering alone, "forever hungry" and forever separated from home and family.¹⁰¹ To counteract her visions of the "Chinese-feminine" (11) role personified by her aunts, Maxine has the examples of two Chinese women warriors: her mother, a doctor and exorcist of ghosts, and Fa Mu Lan, swordswoman and "female avenger" (43). She also reminds herself that her own descent line includes eighty pole fighters: "Surely, the eighty pole fighters, though unseen, would follow me and lead me and protect me, as is the wont of ancestors" (49). Maxine's confidence in the "ancestral help" (8) she will receive from the eighty pole fighters, however, tends to waver: "It may well be," she recognizes, "that they're resting happily in China, their spirits dispersed among the real Chinese, and not nudging me at all with their poles" (49). Spirits and ghosts, Maxine discovers, are difficult to pin down, difficult to characterize, define, and conceptualize in such a way that they provide "ancestral help." Although she sees Fa Mu Lan as "the swordswoman who drives

¹⁰¹Maxine may also be suggesting that her nameless aunt tempts her to follow her example in committing suicide. According to N. B. Dennys, *The Folk-Lore of China* (London: Trübner, 1876), "the ghosts of suicides . . . haunt the places in which they committed the fatal deed and endeavor to persuade others to follow their example; at times, it is believed, even attempting to play executioner by strangling those who reject their advances" (75).

me" (48), portions of her story, in its retelling over time and its transportation to another country, have not "translated well" (209). The same is true of Brave Orchid's story; a heroic exorcist in China, Maxine's mother is a tyrannical and suffocating nightmare in America. Maxine must examine and reconceptualize the role of the woman warrior in twentieth-century America in such a way that she can experience both Fa Mu Lan's and Brave Orchid's lives, like the life of her nameless aunt, as "branching into mine" (8).

"Memory," Kingston commented in an interview with Paula Rabinowitz, is "insignificant, except when it haunts you and it is a foundation for the rest of the personality" ("Eccentric Memories" 178). This chapter examines the ways in which Maxine's memories and imaginative recreations of her forerunners' lives haunt her and, through that haunting, drive her to discover and create her own spiritual essence — one that refuses the role of wife, slave, and victim and reconceptualizes the role of the female as warrior to fit the needs of a twentieth-century, Chinese American female. The following sections focus on the ways in which the ghosts of five Chinese females — Maxine's nameless aunt, Moon Orchid, Fa Mu Lan, Brave Orchid, and Ts'ai Yen — shape, guide, and strengthen Maxine's own spirit. In writing about the ghosts who haunted her girlhood, Kingston told Rabinowitz, she was not attempting to exorcise them but rather to give them "substance" and "solidity":

I have learned that writing does not make ghosts go away. I wanted to record, to find the words for, the "ghosts," which are only visions. They are not concrete; they are beautiful, and powerful. But they don't have a solidity that we can pass around from one to another. I wanted to give them a substance that goes beyond me. ("Eccentric Memories" 178)

The Woman Warrior demonstrates the process by which Maxine, through a creative act of the imagination, gives life, "substance," and "solidity" to the ghosts of her childhood and,

in so doing, comes to know them and, through her knowledge of them, to discover the power to create — to give life, "substance," and "solidity" to — herself.

"No Name Woman": Ghost of Silence

At the time of Maxine's first menstrual flow, Brave Orchid tells her the story of Maxine's father's sister, who violated "the law" of family and village by committing adultery and bearing an illegitimate child. The aunt was cursed and disowned by the family for her act, and she killed herself and her baby the night it was born. "Don't humiliate us," Maxine's mother warns. "You wouldn't like to be forgotten as if you had never been born. The villagers are watchful" (5). "A story to grow up on," this story is one of many Brave Orchid told her children, Maxine says, "to warn us about life" (5). Although the stated reason for telling the story is to warn Maxine that sexual indiscretion can lead to the loss of one's family and thus one's descent line, a second warning lies in the secrecy with which the story is imparted. Told only once for the purpose of delivering a warning to Maxine as she crosses the boundary separating womanhood from girlhood, the story is then to be returned to its silent entombment in a "forgotten" past:

"Don't tell anyone you had an aunt. Your father does not want to hear her name. She has never been born." I have believed that sex was unspeakable and words so strong and fathers so frail that "aunt" would do my father mysterious harm. I have thought that my family, having settled among immigrants who had also been in the ancestral land, needed to clean their name, and a wrong word would incite the kinspeople even here. But there is more to this silence: they want me to participate in the punishment. And I have. (15)

For twenty years Maxine remains silent, participating in the denial of her aunt's existence. Although Maxine feels guilty as an adult for having participated in the family silence, her silence throughout childhood is motivated by fear. Maxine heard a second warning in her

mother's story, more powerful than the stated warning: telling her aunt's story would surely damage her father and would perhaps harm the entire family. To protect her father and her family, Maxine remains silent even though her curiosity demands that gaps in her mother's story be filled: "In the twenty years since I heard this story I have not asked for details nor said my aunt's name; I do not know it" (16). Asking her mother for details or for her aunt's name would have been useless: "My mother has told me once and for all the useful parts. She will add nothing unless powered by Necessity" (6).

Given only "the useful parts" of her aunt's story, Maxine is haunted by its missing details: "My aunt haunts me — her ghost drawn to me because now, after fifty years of neglect, I alone devote pages of paper to her . . ." (16). Driven by curiosity, sympathy, and guilt, Maxine restores her dead aunt, denied and neglected for fifty years, to life. As the only family member who still remembers her, Maxine attracts her aunt's wandering spirit and attempts, as that spirit hovers and haunts, to give it "substance" and "solidity." She feeds the spirit in hopes that it will give her, in return, "ancestral help." Attempting to understand her aunt's story and what it means to her own life, Maxine imagines the details withheld by her mother. She imagines her aunt first as a typical Chinese female, commanded by men to obey: "Women in the old China did not choose. Some man had commanded her to lie with him and be his secret evil" (6). This story line is particularly offensive to Maxine because she reasons, first, that the guilty man "was not a stranger because the village housed no stranger" and, second, that because the man was not a stranger, he must also have "masked himself" and "joined the raid on her family" (6). She then imagines her aunt as "a wild woman" who "kept rollicking company" but dismisses this image because "imagining her free with sex doesn't fit . . . I don't know any women like that, or men either" (8). She can,

however, imagine her aunt as an eccentric woman, one who might have tended toward western ideas of individuality:

On a farm near a sea, a woman who tended her appearance reaped a reputation for eccentricity. . . .

At the mirror my aunt combed individuality into her bob. . . . (9)

This view of her aunt seems to fit: "a woman combing her hair hexes beginnings She plied her secret comb. And sure enough she cursed the year, the family, the village, and herself" (10). "My aunt," Maxine concludes, "used a secret vice, a separate attentiveness" (11). The villagers, when they raid her aunt's home, are punishing her "for acting as if she could have a private life, secret and apart from them" (13).

Her aunt, then, Maxine believes, was the victim of an eastern way of thinking that values social order and cohesion over individuality and selfhood. Furthermore, she was the victim of a worldwide process of socialization that allows men to wander, even to err, while expecting women to maintain both the home and tradition:

She was the only daughter; her four brothers went with her father, husband, and uncles "out on the road" and for some years became western men. . . . They expected her alone to keep the traditional ways, which her brothers, now among the barbarians, could fumble without detection. The heavy, deep-rooted women were to maintain the past against the flood, safe for returning. But the rare urge west had fixed upon our family, and so my aunt crossed boundaries not delineated in space.

The work of preservation demands that the feelings playing about in one's guts not be turned into action. Just watch their passing like cherry blossoms. But perhaps my aunt, my forerunner, caught in a slow life, let dreams grow and fade and after some months or years went toward what persisted. Fear at the enormities of the forbidden kept her desires delicate, wire and bone. . . . (8)

Her aunt, Maxine imagines, was part of a family that tended toward the west, toward the expression of individuality, toward the crossing of oceans and boundaries. Expected to stay at home, "to keep the traditional ways" and "to maintain the past against the flood,"

Maxine's aunt rebelled, daring to cross "boundaries not delineated in space," violating the social mores and codes that keep the home and the village "safe for returning."

This vision of her aunt as rebel against the "traditional ways" that bind the women of China to husbands and husbands' families, both of whom value women only insofar as they fulfill the role of "perfect filiality" (45), haunts Maxine who, the child of traditional Chinese but growing up in America, finds the fulfillment of such "perfect filiality" impossible. Maxine knows that she, too, must at some point act on "the feelings playing about in [her] guts" even though such action will, she believes, set her adrift like her aunt, separating her from a family that denies her. Despite the courage displayed by Maxine's aunt in acting on her feelings, however, she later betrays that act by acquiescing to her fate in silence: "She kept the man's name to herself throughout her labor and dying; she did not accuse him that he be punished with her. To save her inseminator's name she gave silent birth" (11). Perhaps she believed that silence would ensure her protection.

At about the time that Maxine's mother tells her the story of her aunt, Maxine is struggling to overcome her own fear of talking, a fear that originated in kindergarten when she realized that she must speak English. "The other Chinese girls did not talk either," she says, "so I knew the silence had to do with being a Chinese girl" (166). She describes the difficulty with which she and her sister recited lessons that they had memorized perfectly. Her sister, who was called on first, Maxine says, "sounded as if she were trying to sing though weeping and strangling. . . . When it was my turn, the same voice came out, a crippled animal running on broken legs. You could hear splinters in my voice, bones rubbing jagged against one another" (169). By the sixth grade, however, Maxine has overcome this difficulty, at least temporarily: "That year I was arrogant with talk, not

knowing there were going to be high school dances and college seminars to set me back" (173-74). Experiencing the powers of her own newly found speech, Maxine torments a classmate, another Chinese girl who can read aloud but who cannot, or will not, talk in any other situation. Beginning as adolescent nastiness, the tormenting escalates into a scene of torture that eventually drives both girls to tears:

"Why won't you talk? . . . You don't see I'm trying to help you out, do you? Do you want to be like this, dumb . . . , your whole life? Don't you ever want to be a cheerleader? Or a pompon girl? What are you going to do for a living? . . . you are a plant. . . . That's all you are if you don't talk. If you don't talk, you can't have a personality. . . . You've got to let people know you have a personality and a brain. You think somebody's going to take care of you all your stupid life? You think you'll always have your big sister? You think somebody's going to marry you, is that it? Well, you're not the type that gets dates, let alone gets married. Nobody's going to notice you. And you have to talk for interviews, speak right up in front of the boss. Don't you know that? You're so dumb. Why do I waste my time on you?" Sniffling and snorting, I couldn't stop crying and talking at the same time. . . . (180-81)

Maxine's attack on her classmate is not, of course, motivated by concern for the other girl's welfare; it is motivated by Maxine's own self-hatred, which she projects outward on the girl who disgusts her because she is, like Maxine herself, such a "Chinese-feminine" person rather than the "American-feminine" ideal (11) to which Maxine aspires: "I hated her when she was the last chosen for her team and I, the last chosen for mine. I hated her for her China doll haircut. I hated her at music time for the wheezes that came out of her plastic flute" (175). Maxine hates the girl's fragility, her timidity, her helplessness. Her verbal and physical abuse of the girl, Joanne S. Frye writes, "is clearly an effort to expunge those parts of her Chinese-female identity which she abhors and to mark out her own possibilities for strength in resisting that identity" (295). When Maxine harangues the girl about the necessities for talking, however, she clearly reveals, in addition to her self-hatred, her fears

about the bad things that happen to those who cannot speak up, who cannot find "some voice, however faltering" (172). For one thing, without a voice, one can never be "American-feminine." Maxine wants more than anything to be accepted by Americans as an American; she wants to be an integral member of the team or, failing that, a "cheerleader" or "pompon girl." She wants her life to be "American-normal" (87). At the same time, she fears that she, like her classmate, is not "the type that gets dates, let alone gets married," primarily because she will never succeed, she believes, in becoming "American-feminine." If she does not marry, she reasons, she will have to support herself, which will require that she "talk for interviews, speak right up in front of the boss." In confronting her classmate's silence, Maxine is confronting her own fear of a future that will continuously require a facility in speaking as well as her own desire, in the face of that fear, to retreat into silence. Brave Orchid's story about Maxine's nameless aunt confirms two ideas that had already begun to form in Maxine's mind about the nature of speech and silence: words, possessing the potential to destroy, are powerful, whereas silence offers neither safety nor comfort.

Maxine's aunt's rebellion, followed by both her own silence and that of her family, haunts Maxine for twenty years before she finds the courage to resurrect her aunt, capturing, solidifying, and fixing her wandering spirit through the power of the written word. Maxine feels guilty for the years of silence, but as she herself knows, the silence before speech is a necessary and powerful interlude, a moment of infinite potentiality:

My silence was thickest — total — during the three years that I covered my school paintings with black paint. I painted layers of black over houses and flowers and suns, and when I drew on the blackboard, I put a layer of chalk on top. I was making a stage curtain, and it was the moment before the curtain parted or rose. . . . My parents took the pictures home. I spread them out (so black and full of possibilities) and pretended the curtains were swinging open, flying up, one after another, sunlight underneath, mighty operas. (165)

Maxine's teachers, not too surprisingly, fear that Maxine's blacked-out pictures, combined with a silence so thick it is total, suggest emotional problems. The silence, however, is a result of her inability to understand and speak English while the blacked-out pictures are the expression of a personal vision, unknown by and unshared with the teachers. Maxine is entranced by that moment of potentiality before the stage curtain rises, before the word is uttered. Just as Maxine's later silence about her fear of marriage and slavery is eventually shattered in one tremendously liberating outburst, in which "she shouts [her] grievances" to her parents (37), so her silence about her aunt's life and death is similarly shattered once she finally finds the voice, the courage, and the vocabulary with which to speak.¹⁰² In fact, as she grows older, Maxine begins to understand that "talking and not talking made the difference between sanity and insanity. Insane people were the ones who couldn't explain themselves" (186). If Maxine had been unable to find "a voice, however faltering," and the words with which to explain herself, the curtains would have remained drawn, the stories entombed in silence, and the teller forever lost and wandering in a private, interior world.

Moon Orchid: Ghost of Crazyness

One of Maxine's greatest fears as she moves through adolescence is that she will prove to be the "crazy one" in her family (190). From her observation that "within a few blocks of our house were half a dozen crazy women and girls, all belonging to village

¹⁰²In "The Coming Book," *The Writer on Her Work*, ed. Janet Sternburg (New York: Norton, 1980) 181-85, Kingston writes that she could not continue with her current story until she had finished "the stories I couldn't write during childhood because of the years it took to acquire vocabulary" (182). The childhood stories waiting behind the stage curtains remained blacked out and unvoiced until the author could find the words in which to tell them.

families" (186), Maxine deduces that "every house had to have its crazy woman or crazy girl, every village its idiot. Who would be It," she wonders, "at our house?" (189). She and her brothers and sisters had gained personal experience with the behavior and fate of crazy women through their association with

the woman next door who was chatty one moment . . . and shut up the next. Then we would see silver heat rise from her body; it solidified before our eyes. She made us afraid, though we said nothing, did nothing. . . . She sat like stone The next day, she disappeared, and people would say she had been taken to Napa or Agnew. When a woman disappeared or reappeared after an absence, people whispered, "Napa." "Agnew." . . . (186)

The children had also spent a good deal of time with Crazy Mary. Crazy Mary "was almost twenty and crazy" by the time her emigrant parents, who had left her in China when she was still a "toddler," had accumulated enough money to pay for her emigration (186). Although Crazy Mary "seemed cheerful," Maxine says, she

pointed at things that were not there. I disliked looking at her; you never knew what you were going to see, what rictus would shape her face. Or what you would hear — growls, laughs. . . . She often had rice on her face and in her hair. . . . When you went to her house, you had to keep alert because you didn't want her to come at you from around a corner, her hands loose. She would lurch out of dark corners; houses with crazy girls have locked rooms and drawn curtains. . . . Crazy Mary did not improve, and so she too was locked up in the crazyhouse. . . . (186-87)

The children also had to deal with Pee-a-nah, "the one who was the village idiot, the public one" (188). Because Pee-a-nah chases the children when they go to the slough to play or "to harvest the useful herbs and berries," they believe she is a witch:

Kids said she was a witch capable of witch deeds, unspeakable boilings and tearings apart and transformations if she caught us. "She'll touch you on the shoulder, and you'll not be you anymore. You'd be a piece of glass winking and blinking to people on the sidewalk." She came riding to the slough with a broom between her legs, and she had powdered one cheek red and one white. Her hair stood up and out to the sides in dry masses, black even though she was old. . . . She was an angry witch, not a happy one. She was

fierce; not a fairy after all, but a demon. She did run fast, as fast as a child, . . . an outburst that jumped at us from bushes, between cars, between buildings. . . . One day we realized that we had not seen her for a while. We forgot her, never seeing her again. She had probably been locked up in the crazyhouse too. (188-89)

The one commonality among these diverse manifestations of female craziness is that all the women eventually disappear. Having lost their wandering spirits somewhere along the journey between the old world and the new, the "crazy women and girls" are eventually separated from family and village — from "home" — and are incarcerated in the local crazyhouse.

Incarceration in an American asylum is preferable, however, to the treatment of crazy women in China. The children's belief that Pee-a-nah will transform them into "a piece of glass winking and blinking . . . on the sidewalk" recalls Brave Orchid's description of the crazy woman, the village idiot, who was stoned by villagers who had come to believe, after months of bombing by the Japanese, that she was a spy:

The village crazy lady put on her headdress with the small mirrors, some of them waving quickly on red stalks. In her crazy lady clothes of reds and greens, she greeted the animals and the moving branches as she carried her porcelain cup to the river. . . . She began to move in fanning circles, now flying the sleeves in the air, now trailing them on the grass, dancing in the middle of light. The little mirrors in her headdress shot rainbows into the green, glinted off the water cup, caught water drops. . . .

One villager whispered away the spell, "She's signalling the planes. . . . Stop her. Stop her."

"No, she's only crazy," said my mother. "She's a harmless crazy lady."

"She's a spy. A spy for the Japanese."

Villagers picked up rocks and moved down the hill.

. . .

A large stone rammed her head, and she fell in a flutter of sleeves, the ornaments jumping about her broken head. The villagers closed in. Somebody held a fragment of glass under her nostrils. When it clouded, they pounded her temples with the rocks in their fists until she was dead. Some villagers remained at the body beating her head and face, smashing the little mirrors into silver splinters. (95-96)

The belief that Pee-a-nah, the "village idiot" in California, has the ability to transform children into pieces of glass suggests that Maxine, remembering her mother's stories of the "village crazy lady" in China, who wore a headdress of mirrors, has in her imagination merged the two women. One had once danced amidst a shimmering shower of glinting mirrors, only to be transformed by the villagers into a heap of "silver splinters"; the other possessed the power to avenge her "sister" by transforming the villagers' children into fragments of "winking and blinking" glass. Maxine reasons that certain similarities must link all the crazy Chinese women and girls — both in America and in China — one to the other. One similarity among the "crazy women and girls" is their eccentricity in behavior and appearance; their response to the external environment, like that of Maxine's nameless aunt, is individual and thus abnormal. Furthermore, the eccentricity, individuality, and abnormality of such females disturbs the social order, inspiring fear among the villagers, which in turn drives them to separate the individual from the group.

Having heard — and imagined — what happened to both the "village crazy lady" and her own aunt in China and having observed what happened to "the woman next door," Crazy Mary, and Pee-a-nah in America, Maxine begins to fear that her own abnormality — an exceptionally active imagination — marks her as the "crazy one" of the family:

There were adventurous people inside my head to whom I talked. With them I was frivolous and violent, orphaned. I was white and had red hair, and I rode a white horse. Once when I realized how often I went away to see these free movies, I asked my sister, just checking to see if hearing voices in motors and seeing cowboy movies on blank walls was normal, I asked, "Uh," trying to be casual, "do you talk to people that aren't real inside your mind?"

"Do I *what?*" she said.

"Never mind," I said fast. "Never mind. Nothing."

My sister, my almost-twin, the person most like me in all the world, had said, "*What?*" (189-90)

Terrified of the abnormal, eccentric, and individual imagination that dominates her life, transforming her from a black-haired Chinese girl to a red-haired Caucasian, Maxine maintains her silence. Afraid to be different, to be abnormal, to be crazy, she keeps her secret life to herself and, in so doing, unwittingly submits to a potentially crazy-making silence: "Insane people were the ones who couldn't explain themselves."

Maxine's fears about the fate of crazy Chinese women and girls are exacerbated by the example of Moon Orchid, who misplaces her spirit when, late in life, she crosses geographical boundaries as well as "boundaries not delineated in space." Thirty years after her husband left China to make his fortune in America, Moon Orchid arrives, her emigration arranged and paid for by her sister Brave Orchid. Against her better judgment, Moon Orchid allows Brave Orchid, who insists that her sister speak up and demand her rights as "First Wife" (127), to pressure her into confronting her husband. As soon as he understands who Moon Orchid is, he tells her,

You weren't supposed to come here It's a mistake for you to be here.
You can't belong. You don't have the hardness for this country. . . . (152-53)

Brave Orchid herself has already recognized the truth of this statement but knows also that, because her sister cannot be sent back to China, she must "toughen up" and adjust to her new life. Having suggested that Moon Orchid could support herself as "a maid in a hotel," from which she would be allowed "to bring home all the leftover soap and the clothes people leave behind," she at once recognizes the inappropriateness of this plan:

Brave Orchid looked at this delicate sister. She was such a little old lady. She had long fingers and thin, soft hands. And she had a high-class city accent from living in Hong Kong. Not a trace of village accent remained But Brave Orchid would not relent; her dainty sister would just have to toughen up. (127)

Moon Orchid, however, is unable to "toughen up." From the moment that she first sees her husband, who appears so young with his still-black hair and so "authoritative in his dark western suit" (152), she understands that she is hopelessly out of place: "Her husband looked like one of the ghosts passing the car windows, and she must look like a ghost from China. They had entered the land of ghosts, and they had become ghosts" (153). Her husband is "American-normal" while she, forever "Chinese-feminine," is a ghost from the past; he tells her that she and her daughter "became people in a book I had read a long time ago" (154).

Soon after the meeting with her husband, Moon Orchid, having "misplaced herself, her spirit . . . scattered all over the world," slips into what others view as a totally insane paranoia:

Moon Orchid had become afraid. Moon Orchid said that she had overheard Mexican ghosts plotting on her life. . . . Then she had asked her daughter to help her find an apartment at the other end of Los Angeles, where she was now hiding. Her daughter visited her every day, but Moon Orchid kept telling her, "Don't come see me because the Mexican ghosts will follow you to my new hiding place. They're watching your house." (155)

When Moon Orchid, after agreeing to live with her sister in Stockton, insists that the drapes and blinds be drawn and begs that no one leave the house for fear they will not return, first Maxine's father and then her mother conclude that Moon Orchid is truly and irretrievably mad. Although Moon Orchid's behavior is abnormal and eccentric, her perception of the world is not as "mad" as it seems. During the years after her husband and her sister left China, Moon Orchid continued to live in a country gone mad: in this "new" China, Maxine's own "uncles were made to kneel on broken glass during their trials and had confessed to being landowners. They were all executed, and the aunt whose thumbs were twisted off drowned herself. Other aunts, mothers-in-law, and cousins disappeared . . ."

(50). Although Moon Orchid, with her "high-class accent from living in Hong Kong," seems to have fared fairly well in Communist China, the ghosts of the family and friends who died or disappeared arise to haunt her once she is spirited to an alien country populated by ghosts and barbarians. Moon Orchid transfers what was a legitimate fear in China to America, where the fear is no longer legitimate or "rational." The fear is the same, but the environment has changed. Unable to explain to the "overseas Chinese" (136) why her fear is valid, Moon Orchid slips ever more deeply into insanity. Her paranoia arises from her inability to communicate with those around her; unable to understand the language spoken by the ghosts, she believes that they are talking about her, "plotting on her life."¹⁰³ At the same time she finds that even among those who do speak Chinese, she is unable to explain herself. Like the other "overseas Chinese," Maxine's parents, not having experienced the Communist takeover of China and thus unable to understand Moon Orchid's "Chinese" experience, are more "American" than they realize. Because Moon Orchid cannot make herself understood, she eventually becomes, in Maxine's view, one more in a continuous line of insane Chinese women and girls who disappear into the crazyhouse.

Moon Orchid and Maxine are similar in that neither can explain herself — her uniquely "Chinese" or "American" experience of reality, respectively — to Maxine's parents, who represent the norm of the emigrant villagers and "overseas Chinese." Similarly, neither Moon Orchid nor Maxine can understand Maxine's parents, who seem very foreign and

¹⁰³In an interview with Arturo Islas, printed in *Women Writers of the West Coast*, ed. Marilyn Yalom (Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1983) 11-19, Kingston says, "Part of sanity is to be able to understand the language of other people, and . . . even when people aren't mad, sometimes when you hear two people speaking in another language, you get a little bit of paranoia. 'Are they saying something about me?' . . . So, when Moon Orchid goes over the edge, . . . I am hinting that perhaps if she spoke the language, it might have saved her" (17).

"American" to Moon Orchid and very foreign and "Chinese" to Maxine. Thus, both Moon Orchid and Maxine suffer from the same crazy-making experience — the inability to know and to make themselves known to Maxine's parents, who offer to both of them their only tie to family, village, home. Thus, the experience of being separated both from the family and from the world at large by cultural differences and misunderstandings is a primary cause of Moon Orchid's craziness and Maxine's crazy-making confusion.

Much of Maxine's confusion arises from her inability to understand who she is in relation to, on one hand, her parents and the emigrant villagers and, on the other, the world at large. Her parents do not always share information with their children, distrusting them because, Maxine says, "we had been born among ghosts, were taught by ghosts, and were ourselves half ghosts" (183). Maxine understands that her parents use the word "ghost," as they use the word "barbarian," in a derogatory way to distinguish the nonhuman and barbaric Americans from the human and civilized Chinese. At times, however, she is confused about the use of these words and the distinctions they make between racial groups. If Americans are nonhuman and barbaric while Chinese are human and civilized, as the epithets imply, how then does one explain the seemingly barbaric actions and beliefs of the Chinese, the villagers, her family, and her parents? She is terrified by the stories of torture and execution in China, related in letters that transform her parents before her eyes: "I was nine years old when the letters made my parents, who are rocks, cry. My father screamed in his sleep" (50). She is sickened by the stories about the villagers' raid on her aunt's home, the villagers' stoning of the village idiot, and the Chinese enjoyment of a "monkey feast":

"Do you know what people in China eat when they have the money?" my mother began. "They buy into a monkey feast. The eaters sit around a thick wood table with a hole in the middle. Boys bring in the monkey at the end of a pole. Its neck is in a collar at the end of the pole, and it is

screaming. Its hands are tied behind it. They clamp the monkey into the table; the whole table fits like another collar around its neck. Using a surgeon's saw, the cooks cut a clean line in a circle at the top of its head. To loosen the cone, they tap with a tiny hammer and wedge here and there with a silver pick. Then an old woman reaches out her hand to the monkey's face and up to its scalp, where she tufts some hairs and lifts off the lid of the skull. The eaters spoon out the brains."

Did she say, "You should have seen the faces the monkey made"?
Did she say, "The people laughed at the monkey screaming"? It was alive?
The curtain flaps closed like merciful black wings. (91-92)

She is disgusted by her second cousins' great-grandfather, who, surrounded by six girls, shouts at them, "Maggots! Where are my grandsons? I want grandsons! Give me grandsons! Maggots!" (191), just as she is by her own great-uncle, who takes only boys — "No girls!" — when he goes shopping (47). She is angered when, at a Chinese opera, the "crowd laughed until the tears rolled down their cheeks" each time the woman "playing the part of a new daughter-in-law" sang, "Beat me, then, beat me" (193). Her father informs her that "Chinese smeared bad daughters-in-law with honey and tied them naked on top of ant nests" and further explains that "a husband may kill a wife who disobeys him. Confucius said that" (193).¹⁰⁴ Looking at the world through "Chinese" eyes, as her parents do, Maxine knows that the American racists and tyrants are barbaric and inhuman; but when looking at the same world through "American" eyes, Maxine cannot help seeing the Chinese as equally barbaric and inhuman.

¹⁰⁴Tsai explains that "to keep women in shackles, Confucian doctrine created what was known as the three obediences and the four virtues. The three obediences were 'obedience to the father when yet unmarried, obedience to the husband when married, and obedience to the sons when widowed.' . . . The four virtues were: (1) 'woman's ethics,' meaning a woman must know her place and act in every way in compliance with the old ethical code; (2) 'woman's speech,' meaning a woman must not talk too much, taking care not to bore people; (3) 'woman's appearance,' meaning a woman must pay attention to adorning herself with a view to pleasing the opposite sex; and (4) 'woman's chore,' meaning a woman must willingly do all the chores in the home" (157-58).

Perhaps most disturbing to Maxine is her confusion about what exactly her parents believe about the value of females. Can she believe that when her parents say, "When fishing for treasures in the flood, be careful not to pull in girls," they are only saying "what one says about daughters" (152)? If so, how can she explain the existence of "their ink drawing of poor people snagging their neighbors' flotage with long flood hooks and pushing the girl babies on down the river" (52)? As a midwife in China, did her mother ever "take the back of a girl baby's head in her hand and turn her face into the ashes" (87)? When her family finally returned "home" to China, would her parents sell her as a slave or, virtually the same thing, force her to marry, becoming a daughter-in-law to be beaten by her husband and his family? Stories Maxine hears about the treatment of girls and rebellious women in China, as well as her hatred of those physical features that mark her as "Chinese-feminine" rather than "American-feminine," contribute to a sort of craziness in which Maxine imagines herself as "white" with "red hair." More serious than her imagined crossing of racial boundaries, however, is her imagined crossing of the boundary that separates the human from the nonhuman:

I had vampire nightmares; every night the fangs grew longer, and my angel wings turned pointed and black. I hunted humans down in the long woods and shadowed them with my blackness. Tears dripped from my eyes, but blood dripped from my fangs, blood of the people I was supposed to love.

I did not want to be the crazy one. . . . (190)

Believing herself to be monstrous — barbaric, ghostly, nightmarish — because of the depth of her anger, fear, and resentment toward those she "was supposed to love," Maxine is convinced of her own craziness and inevitable disappearance.

Because keeping her fears inside becomes intolerable and because she recognizes that "talking and not talking made the difference between sanity and insanity," Maxine attempts

to tell her mother a "list of two hundred things" about herself "so that she would know the true things about me and to stop the pain in my throat" (197). Maxine is driven by the need to explain herself, to make herself known to another person: "If only I could let my mother know the list, she — and the world — would become more like me, and I would never be alone again" (198). By explaining herself to and thus making herself understood by others, Maxine believes that she can eliminate the difference — the abnormality — that separates her from the rest of the world. Unfortunately, Maxine's attempt to save herself by revealing herself to her mother fails:

I had talked, and she acted as if she hadn't heard.

"Mother," I whispered and quacked.

"I can't stand this whispering," she said looking right at me
"Senseless gabblings every night. I wish you would stop. . . . Whispering, whispering, making no sense. Madness. I don't feel like hearing your craziness."

So I had to stop, relieved in some ways. I shut my mouth, but I felt something alive tearing at my throat, bite by bite, from inside. . . .

I had probably interrupted her in the middle of her own quiet time Starching the shirts for the next day's pressing was probably my mother's time to ride off with the people in her own mind. That would explain why she was so far away and did not want to listen to me. "Leave me alone," she said. (199-200)

Years later Maxine understands that her mother's rejection of her was founded on her own need "to ride off with the people in her own mind." What Maxine believes is a clear indication of her own craziness — her imaginative recreation of the world — is actually the strongest tie linking her to her mother. At the time, however, Brave Orchid's response simply confirms Maxine's belief in her own "craziness," which is exacerbated by her mother's refusal to listen to her attempts to explain herself. "Maxine is afraid," King-Kok Cheung writes, "of losing her identity, of being erased or unhinged — as her two aunts have been respectively erased and unhinged — through silence" (164).

Having been denied this rather sane attempt to explain herself to another person, Maxine, her "throat hurt[ing] constantly, vocal cords taut to snapping," eventually unleashes all her thoughts and feelings in a volcanic eruption of threats and accusations: "One night," she says, "my throat burst open. I stood up, talking and burbling. I looked directly at my mother and father and screamed . . ." (201). Shouting her grievances, Maxine insists, "I am not going to be a slave or a wife. Even if I am stupid and talk funny and get sick, I won't let you turn me into a slave or a wife. I'm getting out of here. . . . Ha! You can't stop me from talking. . ." (201-02). This outburst, this act of talking so long silenced and suppressed, saves Maxine from the fate of so many Chinese females living in America. She refuses to be one of those women and girls crazed, as Moon Orchid is, by a misplacement of their spirits or, as she herself almost is, by the experience of living in a society that, through its own comparatively liberating treatment of women, glaringly reveals the barbaric treatment of women by the Chinese.¹⁰⁵ At the time, however, Maxine's outburst is rewarded with the punishment she has always dreaded, the fear of which has for so long ensured her silence. Brave Orchid, "champion talker," not to be outdone by her daughter, shouts back at her, "Leave then. Get out, you Ho Chi Kuei. Get out. I knew you were going to turn out bad. Ho Chi Kuei" (204). Although Maxine does not understand the words "Ho Chi," she does know that "Kuei" means "ghost." Her mother's words, as she

¹⁰⁵Tsai, describing the reactions of Chinese females emigrating to America after 1965, says that "they discovered a society that seemed to them more of a matriarchy than a patriarchy . . . they envied the freedom and property rights enjoyed by their American counterparts. In particular, they liked the American concept of love and marriage. Acculturated Chinese women began to insist on the right to fall in love and to be married without parental arrangement" (158). Maxine's spiritual well-being depends, in part, on her ability to stretch her mind sufficiently to allow for the paradox that the "barbaric" Americans treat women more humanely than do the "civilized" Chinese.

tells her to leave their home, recalls the epithet shouted at Maxine's aunt fifty years earlier in China: "Look what you've done. . . . Ghost! Dead ghost! Ghost! You've never been born." The words spoken by herself and by her mother, Maxine knows, mark a significant break in her connection with the family, the village, the Chinese — a connection that, although eventually restored, will never be the same as when, still a child, she had agreed to be a participant in and slave to silence.

Fa Mu Lan: Spirit of Rebellion

When Maxine, no longer able to maintain her silence, speaks out against her parents, she discovers the power of speech to liberate herself. Like Fa Mu Lan, Maxine brandishes her sword to cut down the tyrants who would sentence her to a ghostly, silent existence as wife or slave. That the tyrants she opposes are her parents, however, rather than her parents' enemies confuses Maxine. Although, as she says, "the swordswoman drives me," she also admits, "I dislike armies" (49). Furthermore, her verbal battle with her parents, in which she refuses to submit to their wishes that she become a wife or a slave, demonstrates that she, unlike Fa Mu Lan, will never kneel before her parents-in-law's feet to say, "Now my public duties are finished . . . I will stay with you, doing farmwork and housework, and giving you more sons" (45). Maxine's villagers, unlike Fa Mu Lan's, will never "make a legend about [her] perfect filiality" (45).

The story of Fa Mu Lan lies submerged for much of Maxine's life. Not until she is an adult, when she hears again "the chant of Fa Mu Lan," does she remember that

as a child I had followed my mother about the house, the two of us singing about how Fa Mu Lan fought gloriously and returned alive from war to settle in the village. I had forgotten this chant that was once mine, given me by my mother, who may have known its power to remind. She said I would grow

up a wife and slave, but she taught me the song of the woman warrior, Fa Mu Lan. I would have to grow up a woman warrior. (20)

Brave Orchid tells stories "to grow up on," to warn her children about life. The Fa Mu Lan chant she gives Maxine is "a true story about a girl who saved her village" before settling down to a life of "perfect filiality." In Brave Orchid's view, a female can be both a swordswoman and an obedient daughter/daughter-in-law. For Maxine, however, the story presents two irreconcilable options: "When we Chinese girls listened to the adults talking-story, we learned that we failed if we grew up to be but wives or slaves. We could be heroines, swordswomen" (19). The lesson Maxine carries away from her mother's chanting is that she "would have to grow up a woman warrior"; anything else would be a failure. Fa Mu Lan becomes a ghost driving Maxine to choose the role of the woman warrior, the swordswoman, over that of slave or wife.

The ghost of Fa Mu Lan inspires Maxine, but it also disturbs her, primarily because she knows that she herself does not possess the temperament of a warrior; she does not like armies, nor does she care for bloodshed. When Maxine imagines herself as performing the exploits of Fa Mu Lan, an imaginative act that personalizes and fills in the gaps of the existing Fa Mu Lan chant,¹⁰⁶ she alternates between experiencing warfare as glorious and

¹⁰⁶"The Ballad of Mulan," written in the fifth century when the Wei Tartars dominated China and collected and translated by Arthur Waley in *The Temple and Other Poems* (New York: Knopf, 1923), is a 62-line poem telling the story of a daughter who, dressing in men's clothing, takes her father's place in a ten-year war to save China from foreign domination. In the original poem, then, Mulan is neither a rebel nor a leader of armies. She is merely one of many warriors who "in ten years had won their rest" and who, in reward for their service and loyalty, "saw the Emperor's face" and received "lordships," "lands," and "prize money." (Mulan asks only for a camel to carry her home.) Mulan's fame, then, is founded on the exemplary filiality displayed by a female rather than on exceptional military exploits and victories; in fact, the poem's description of the ten years of battle, limited to less than ten lines, is sparse and bare. All the rich detail of Fa Mu Lan's battles is a product of Maxine's own imagination, which merges other stories of battle with Sunday-afternoon

experiencing it as horrendous. When Maxine, masquerading as Fa Mu Lan, reaches Peiping, she fully experiences the glory of "the People of One Hundred Surnames" united and victorious in their rebellion against tyranny:

I stood on top of the last hill before Peiping . . . the land was peopled — the Han people, the People of One Hundred Surnames, marching with one heart, our tatters flying. The depth and width of Joy were exactly known to me: the Chinese population . . . We faced our emperor personally. We beheaded him, cleaned out the palace, and inaugurated the peasant who would begin the new order. . . . (42)

Caught up in her imagination, Maxine experiences the joy of being one among many heroic peasants, who together put down their hoes, picked up their swords, and discovered the power of a united voice as they rebelled against and dethroned the emperors who had erred by allowing them to go hungry for so long: "The last emperors of dynasties must not have been facing in the right direction, for they would have seen us and not let us get this hungry. We would not have had to shout our grievances" (37). Shouting their grievances and wielding their swords, the peasants liberate themselves from tyranny.

By imagining herself as Fa Mu Lan and telling her story "in the first person indicative," Joanne S. Frye says, "Maxine claims for herself all the mythical power of Fa Mu Lan" (295). Similarly, Roberta Rubenstein sees "the invention of a potent magical self [as] a kind of defensive fantasy that imaginatively counteracts the experience of insignificance and the generalized contempt for females in Chinese culture" (171). No one can deny the sense of empowerment Maxine receives from her imaginary identification with Fa Mu Lan. Nevertheless, Maxine is all too aware of flaws in Fa Mu Lan's story as well as the

movies seen at the Confucius Church (19) to create her own individual "mind-movies" (203). Just as Maxine transforms her nameless aunt into an individual with "solidity" and "substance," so does she transform Fa Mu Lan. In both cases, the resulting figure reflects ambivalent aspects of Maxine's own spirit and personality.

discrepancies between her own character and that of Fa Mu Lan. Thus, in mentally reenacting Fa Mu Lan's exploits and reexperiencing her feelings of glory, Maxine also introjects feelings of horror and grief. When she imagines Fa Mu Lan's killing of the giant Chen Luan-feng, for example, she cannot help imagining and seeing "on a green ledge above the battlefield . . . the giant's wives crying. They . . . were holding each other weeping. They were two sisters, two tiny fairies against the sky, widows from now on. Their long undersleeves, which they had pulled out to wipe their tears, flew white mourning in the mountain wind" (38). As much as Maxine might like to isolate the glory of battle, she recognizes that warfare can never be separated from bloodshed and mourning.

The story of Fa Mu Lan confuses Maxine, then, because she does not know how to reconcile the heroism of a just revenge with the bloodshed and mourning that necessarily accompany acts of vengeance. She is also confused about how to translate the story of Fa Mu Lan in such a way that it will effectively guide her own life in modern America. The problem, Maxine says, is not in identifying the enemy but in identifying a proper mode of attack:

From the fairy tales, I've learned exactly who the enemy are. I easily recognize them — business-suited in their modern America executive disguise, each boss two feet taller than I am and impossible to meet eye to eye.

. . . "Order more of that nigger yellow, willya?" the boss told me. "Bright, isn't it? Nigger yellow."

. . .

If I took the sword, which my hate must surely have forged out of the air, and gutted him, I would put color and wrinkles into his shirt. (48-49)

When Maxine imagines doing battle with her personal enemy — the racist for whom she has to work — she sees two alternative means for avenging her family and her people; she can gut him with a sword forged by hate, or she can "shout [their] grievances." As much as she

would like to follow in the footsteps of Fa Mu Lan and the eighty pole fighters from whom she is descended, Maxine recognizes that gutting her boss would be neither glorious nor appropriate for one whose battles end in tears: "What fighting and killing I have seen have not been glorious but slum grubby. I fought the most during junior high school and always cried. Fights are confusing as to who has won" (51). All three statements are true for Maxine's sixth-grade fight with her silent classmate: her tormenting of a helpless victim is in no way glorious, she and her victim both cry, and the incident ends with defeat for both girls. Although the silent classmate might be seen as winning the battle because she never yields to her tormenter's demands, one cannot help seeing her, despite the familial protection her silence earns, as ultimately defeated by her unyielding silence.

Identifying the victor in battle is also hampered by the difficulty of identifying the enemy. Maxine says that she has "learned exactly who the enemy are." Her battle, she says, is primarily against America's racist bosses. At the same time, however, she admits that she is confused about exactly who the enemy are in China. The "fairy tales" of Fa Mu Lan, as imagined and recreated by Maxine, clearly identify the emperor and his barons as tyrants and the rebellious peasants as heroes.¹⁰⁷ When her parents begin to receive letters telling of the torture and execution of their relatives in China by the Communists, by the people, Maxine's black-and-white definitions of the enemy and the hero no longer hold: "It

¹⁰⁷In "The Ballad of Mulan," Mulan fights for her emperor rather than against him. The history of China, however, is a continuing series of peasant rebellions against the emperor and the ruling class. Each new leader placed on the throne soon reverts to the tyranny, confiscation of property, and corruption of his predecessors, resulting in a new peasant uprising. The question of whether Kingston was actually confused when she was a child, seeing Fa Mu Lan as a rebel because other stories and the movies emphasized the heroism of rebellion, or whether Kingston later makes a conscious decision to rewrite the myth only for thematic purposes — and not because she had mistranslated it as a child — is one example of the many "mysteries" and ambiguities *The Woman Warrior* holds for its readers.

is confusing," she says, "that my family was not the poor to be championed. They were executed like the barons in the stories when they were not barons" (51). If Maxine views her role to be, as Fa Mu Lan's was, to avenge her family, then she must fight not only "the stupid racists" of America but also the Communists of China:

To avenge my family, I'd have to storm across China to take back our farm from the Communists; I'd have to rage across the United States to take back the laundry in New York and the one in California. Nobody in history has conquered and united both North America and Asia. . . . (49)

If Maxine defines the enemy, then, as anyone "who for whatever reason can deny my family food and work," she discovers that the enemy cannot be contained within well-defined geographical, racial, social, or even sexual boundaries. Encompassing both the racists of North America and the Communists of Asia, the enemy is virtually unconquerable by a single swordswoman alone, even if she has been carefully trained by supernatural mentors for fourteen years as Fa Mu Lan was. Are, however, the Communists — the people of China who in Fa Mu Lan's time were heroic — the enemy, or are they heroic rebels? After Maxine is grown, she learns that the letters her family received from China describing Communist atrocities did not tell the whole story:

Nobody wrote us to tell us that Mao himself had been matched to an older girl when he was a child and that he was freeing women from prisons where they had been put for refusing the businessmen their parents had picked as husbands. Nobody told us that the Revolution (Liberation) was against girl slavery and girl infanticide (a village-wide party if it's a boy). Girls would no longer have to kill themselves rather than get married. May the Communists light up the house on a girl's birthday. (190-91)

The tyrant, then, who is responsible for having executed Maxine's relatives in China as if they were barons is also the hero who has liberated the women of China. Mao is simultaneously a tyrant, enemy of Maxine's family, and a hero, liberator of the Chinese

female. Is Maxine's role, like that of Fa Mu Lan's, to avenge her family or to avenge herself and the women of China?

As Maxine matures, she begins to see flaws in Fa Mu Lan as heroine; the flaws lie both in the original story and in Maxine's imaginative recreation of the swordswoman and her military exploits. To fulfill her objective of avenging her family, Fa Mu Lan puts on "men's clothes and armor" and ties her hair in "a man's fashion" (36). The soldiers of her army, when they tell of their victories, refer to themselves as being "on *his* side" of the battle. "I never told them the truth," Fa Mu Lan says, because "Chinese executed women who disguised themselves as soldiers or students, no matter how bravely they fought or how high they scored on the examinations" (39). Ultimately, Fa Mu Lan, who disguises herself in battle as a man and who returns, after fulfilling the objective of avenging her family, to the traditional role of a daughter-in-law serving her husband and his family, does little to avenge or liberate the women of China.¹⁰⁸ When Fa Mu Lan confronts the baron who sent her brother to fight, she announces herself as a "female avenger," meaning that she is a female come to avenge her family. Because she is disguised as a man, however, the baron misunderstands, believing that she is a male come to avenge the enslavement and forced prostitution of the villagers' daughters. Fa Mu Lan's actions, however courageous, glorious, and victorious they may be, ultimately focus on the preservation and continuity of males: she goes to battle in her father's place, she leads an army of men, she kills the baron to

¹⁰⁸Kingston's description of Fa Mu Lan seems to parody two early types of the modern "feminist" that emerged during the 1960s and 1970s: (1) the woman who succeeds in a man's world by transforming herself into a "man," imitating male behavior, values, and appearance, and (2) the "superwoman," who is a "man" in the office and a perfect wife and mother in the home. Thus, Kingston calls into question the whole concept of a "successful female" in a world dominated by male standards of success.

avenge the conscription of her brother and the villagers' sons, and she bears one son during battle and promises her parents-in-law to bear more sons — not daughters — in the future. Compare Fa Mu Lan's motivations for fighting with those of the women who are released from a locked room in the baron's palace. "When I broke down the door," says Fa Mu Lan,

I found women, cowering, whimpering women. I heard shrill insect noises and scurrying. They blinked weakly at me like pheasants that have been raised in the dark for soft meat. The servants who walked the ladies had abandoned them, and they could not escape on their little bound feet. Some crawled away from me, using their elbows to pull themselves along. These women would not be good for anything. . . . I gave each woman a bag of rice, which they sat on. They rolled the bags to the road. They wandered away like ghosts. Later, it would be said, they turned into the band of swordswomen who were a mercenary army. They did not wear men's clothes like me, but rode as women in black and red dresses. They bought up girl babies so that many poor families welcomed their visitations. When slave girls and daughters-in-law ran away, people would say they joined with these witch amazons. They killed men and boys. I myself never encountered such women and could not vouch for their reality. (44-45)

Although Fa Mu Lan, having killed the baron, can be credited with liberating these women, their liberation was not a primary objective but merely one side effect of her family- and male-oriented exploits. Believing that "these women would not be good for anything," she abandons them to their own fates. The women, like so many Chinese women in both China and America, disappear, "wander[ing] away like ghosts." The women — or their spirits — do not die, however, but return to avenge themselves and all the women of China. Transforming themselves into true female avengers — females avenging male tyranny over females — and eschewing "men's clothes" to ride as "women in black and red dresses," they welcome and swell their ranks with runaway "slave girls and daughters-in-law." For these

"witch amazons," these ghostly female avengers, the enemy — "men and boys" — is clearly defined.¹⁰⁹

Maxine is both haunted and driven by the figure of the swordswoman Fa Mu Lan. To receive "ancestral help" from this ghost, however, Maxine must "see her life branching into [hers]"; she must be able to translate Fa Mu Lan's story in such a way that it becomes "a story to grow up on," and her translation will not necessarily coincide with Brave Orchid's. In Maxine's eyes, her parents and the emigrant villagers often appear to be the enemy; thus, the objective of her battle is frequently to overpower rather than to avenge her family and village. Because she fears that her parents will sell her as a slave or force her to marry into a family that will treat her as a slave, she begins to see her role as that of a female avenging females rather than that of a female avenging family and village. She also sees herself as an ineffective fighter: "When urban renewal tore down my parents' laundry and paved our slum for a parking lot, I only made up knife and gun fantasies and did nothing useful" (48). Over time, however, Maxine sifts through the details of Fa Mu Lan's story, identifying and retaining the "useful parts." Some of the most "useful parts" come from Maxine's imaginative recreation of Fa Mu Lan's training on the mountain.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹The "witch amazons," despite their celebration of women rather than men, still do not offer a perfect solution since they continue to rely on killing to resolve conflict. The "witch amazons" may be a parody of those radical feminists who see the elimination of males as the only way to construct a world acceptable to women. Kingston, then, apparently sees problems with both of the first two phases of feminism, as does Julia Kristeva in her essay "Women's Time," first published in 1979.

¹¹⁰The training on the mountain is not a part of "The Ballad of Mulan." This portion of Kingston's treatment of the Fa Mu Lan legend presumably derives from the movies she watched as a child. Speaking of the entire "White Tigers" chapter, Kingston says that it "is not a Chinese myth but one transformed by America, a sort of kung fu movie parody." American readers' preference for this chapter, she says, demonstrates the stubbornness with which they cling to their beliefs in what is actually "oriental fantasy" and that her placement

Fa Mu Lan's training on the mountain consists of two primary segments. The first period of six years is devoted to learning "to be quiet," observing and learning from the animals around her: "Every creature has a hiding skill and a fighting skill a warrior can use" (23-24). At the completion of this time, she travels alone among "the mountains of the white tigers" (27) to test her ability to survive alone. While alone in the mountains she experiences two moments of insight, the first "about self-immolation and how to speed up transmigration: one does not have to become worms first but can change directly into a human being" (28). Both Fa Mu Lan and Maxine might translate this insight as meaning that women, through an act of will, "can change directly into a human being" rather than accepting the degradation of this life as a necessary incarnation on the journey to becoming a male. The second insight, gained during a visionary experience resulting from excessive hunger, provides Fa Mu Lan with the ability, continuously renewed during periods of fasting, to "stare at ordinary people and see their light and gold" (27). "I could see their dance," Fa Mu Lan says. "When I get hungry enough, then killing and falling are dancing too" (27). What at first seems to be a mystical vision of life — the ability to see the "light and gold," the "dance," the spirit that informs and unites all humans despite differences in external form and appearance — eventually becomes the means by which Fa Mu Lan distances herself from the

of the chapter early in the text was intended "to show that the childish myth is past, not the climax we wish for" ("Cultural Mis-readings" 57). Nevertheless, several lessons Fa Mu Lan learns on the mountain, even though the sequence does mock American "oriental fantasy," guide Maxine's journey from girlhood to womanhood and are clearly important enough to Kingston that she develops them thematically throughout the text.

For a discussion of the ways in which Kingston rewrites Chinese myth in *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*, see Cheung (162-74); Li (497-515); Li, "China Men: Maxine Hong Kingston and the American Canon," *American Literary History* 2.3 (1990): 482-502; and Leslie W. Rabine, "No Lost Paradise: Social Gender and Symbolic Gender in the Writings of Maxine Hong Kingston," *Signs* 12.3 (1987): 471-92.

reality of warfare. "Falling and killing," however, are not a "dance"; to see them as such is to separate oneself from the consequences of one's actions.¹¹¹ Maxine herself is never able to separate the bloodshed of warfare from its glory, and later in life she totally rejects this mystical endowment of the universe with a spirit of "light and gold." As an adult who determines to rid her world of ghosts and spirits, she says, "Now when I peek in the basement window where the villagers say they see a girl dancing like a bottle imp, I can no longer see a spirit in a skirt made of light, but a voiceless girl dancing when she thought no one was looking" (205). Thus, Maxine rejects her childish inclination to transform the villagers' sayings and similes into ghosts as well as Fa Mu Lan's tendency to transform an ordinary person into a spirit of "gold and light." To see "a voiceless girl dancing when she thought no one was looking" as "a spirit in a skirt made of light" not only peoples the earth with ghosts that do not really exist; it also ignores the reality of "a voiceless girl." By destroying the ghost, one can see the girl, giving her "substance," "solidity," and a voice so that she may be known.

The first part of Fa Mu Lan's training, culminating in the survival test, is directed at developing her physical strength and endurance. The second part, the training in "dragon ways," is directed at developing mental prowess and control. During battle Fa Mu Lan will rely primarily on physical warfare, guiding her white horse with her knees so that she can free "both hands for swordwork, spinning green and silver circles all around" (37).

¹¹¹Kingston, in "Imagined Life," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 22.4 (1983): 561-70, writes, "To live a true human life today, we have to imagine what goes on when we turn on the machines. 'The Brother in Vietnam' [in *China Men*] warns about how easy it is to operate an instrument panel and not see the people far away dying horribly. . . . The yearning for beauty can prettify reality, and sometimes imagination has to restore us to terror" (566). Whereas Fa Mu Lan "prettif[ies] reality," Maxine imagines so much terror around her that she must learn to apply logic to rid her world of ghosts.

Nevertheless, more than half of Fa Mu Lan's training is dedicated to developing mental control, and her mentors will not allow her to leave until she can "point at the sky and make a sword appear, a silver bolt in the sunlight, and control its slashing with [her] mind" (33). Maxine imagines Fa Mu Lan drawing on this strength only once when, having wandered away from her army's camp, she is surprised by the enemy:

they pinned me to the earth while their leader drew his sword. My fear shot forth — a quick, jabbing sword that slashed fiercely, silver flashes, quick cuts wherever my attention drove it. The leader stared at the palpable sword swishing unclutched at his men, then laughed aloud. As if signaled by his laughter, two more swords appeared in midair. They clanged against mine, and I felt metal vibrate inside my brain. I willed my sword to hit back and to go after the head that controlled the other swords. But the man fought well, hurting my brain. . . . (41)

In this ability of Fa Mu Lan, when physically overcome, to engage the enemy in mental battle, matching her brain against that of her opponent, Maxine finds a strategy for attacking and overpowering her own opponents. Maxine knows that she can easily be physically overcome by her enemy, the bosses who tower two feet above her. She also knows that beheading or gutting the enemy is no longer an effective means of swordsmanship. Thus, to avenge herself, her family, and the women of China, Maxine develops mental prowess and control, learning to engage the enemy in verbal combat. She gets "straight A's" in school (45), wins a scholarship to college, and dares to break the code of silence universally imposed by tyrants, both in North America and in Asia: "The swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar," Maxine says. "What we have in common are the words at our backs. . . . The reporting is the vengeance — not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words" (53). Just as Maxine realizes that "the real punishment" imposed on her aunt "was not the raid swiftly inflicted by the villagers, but the family's deliberately forgetting her," she also realizes that the true "vengeance" against silence, against tyranny, against racism and sexism

— and a form of battle at which she is highly skilled — is found not in a bloody, "slum grubby" beheading or gutting but in the words that report, that reenact, the crime.

An equally important lesson gained from Fa Mu Lan's training in "dragon ways" but perhaps more difficult to incorporate in her own life is that true wisdom, true mental strength, comes from "learning to make [one's] mind large . . . so that there is room for paradoxes." Learning to stretch her mind to encompass paradox is the most difficult lesson for Maxine to learn as it was for Fa Mu Lan. "I needed adult wisdom to know dragons," Fa Mu Lan says. Her mentors teach her that "you have to infer the whole dragon from the parts you can see and touch":

dragons are so immense, I would never see one in its entirety. But I could explore the mountains, which are the top of its head. . . . When climbing the slopes, I could understand that I was a bug riding on a dragon's forehead as it roams through space, its speed so different from my speed that I feel the dragon solid and immobile. . . .

The closest I came to seeing a dragon whole was when the old people cut away a small strip of bark on a pine that was over three thousand years old. The resin underneath flows in the swirling shapes of dragons. . . .

I learned to make my mind large, as the universe is large, so that there is room for paradoxes. . . . The dragon lives in the sky, ocean, marshes, and mountains; and the mountains are also its cranium. Its voice thunders and jingles like copper pans. It breathes fire and water; and sometimes the dragon is one, sometimes many. (28-29)

With time Maxine becomes adept at stretching her mind, at understanding that the Chinese people are both tyrannical and heroic, that the villagers can both sustain and stone their neighbors, and, most difficult paradox of all, that her mother is both an exorcist of ghosts and a nightmare that threatens to suffocate her. Maxine learns that she can infer the whole woman who is Brave Orchid, as one "infer[s] the whole dragon," only by studying "the parts you can see and touch."

Brave Orchid: Exorcist and Nightmare

If Maxine is haunted and driven by the ghost of Fa Mu Lan, she is equally driven by the woman who first, through her chanting and singing, brought the swordswoman to life for her. Whereas Fa Mu Lan was a woman warrior fighting and overpowering tyrants, Brave Orchid was a woman doctor struggling against and overpowering ghosts. For Maxine, however, Brave Orchid's exploits as doctor, shaman, and exorcist in China seem as mythical, legendary, and ghostly as Fa Mu Lan's exploits as swordswoman. "Once in a long while," Maxine says, "my mother brings out the metal tube that holds her medical diploma. . . . When I open it, the smell of China flies out, a thousand-year-old bat flying heavy-headed out of the Chinese caverns where bats are as white as dust, a smell that comes from long ago, far back in the brain" (57). Opening the diploma tube resurrects and releases a spirit that, although long entombed in a distant, foreign land, is somehow known to Maxine "far back in the brain": The spirit released is both the ghost of China and the ghost of her mother as she was in China.¹¹² From the spirit released from the tube, which manifests itself as a smell, from the photographs of her mother at age thirty-seven, and from her mother's ghost stories, Maxine attempts to reconstruct a portrait of Brave Orchid that captures her spirit and its paradoxes.¹¹³

¹¹²Suzanne Juhasz, in "Towards a Theory of Form in Feminist Autobiography: Kate Millet's *Fear of Flying* and *Sita*; Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*," *International Journal of Women's Studies* 2.1 (1979): 62-75, notes that "for the child of Chinese parents born in America, the Chinese, and China, are equally ghost-like: both a dead presence yet alive and a heritage from the dead" (71).

¹¹³As Li notes, "'Brave Orchid' can hardly be a Chinese name given its inherent contradiction in terms. 'Bravery' is a masculine quality 'Orchid,' with its tender floweriness, however, is a conventional equivalent of femininity Nevertheless, the name becomes fictionally viable and even convincing because Brave Orchid turns out to be a living exemplifier of the paradoxical appellation. She is at once a female vanguard of the

Peering at the pictures of her mother, posing among the graduates of To Keung School of Midwifery, Maxine tries to determine "whether she was afraid. Year after year my father did not come home or send for her. Their two children had been dead for ten years. . . . ('They were three and two years old, a boy and a girl. They could talk already.')" (60). The stories that Brave Orchid tells her children about her battles with ghosts, from which she consistently emerges victorious, suggest that she, like Fa Mu Lan, was always courageous and unafraid. Maxine believes, however, that, if her mother *had* ever experienced fear, she would have felt challenged to destroy it:

My mother may have been afraid, but she would be a dragoness ("Your totem, my totem"). She could make herself not weak. During danger she fanned out her dragon claws and riffled her red sequin scales and unfolded the coiling green stripes. Danger was a good time for showing off. Like the dragons living in temple eaves, my mother looked down on plain people who were lonely and afraid. (67)

Like Fa Mu Lan, Brave Orchid, when she experiences fear, forges swords out of the air. She does not deny the existence of fear-evoking entities and events, but she believes that, in their presence, one must not submit but "toughen up." One must "make herself not weak." "Plain people who were lonely and afraid," people like Maxine herself, earn her contempt.

Thus, when the other female scholars at To Keung School express their fear of a ghost that haunts one of the dormitory rooms, Brave Orchid tells them with authority that "most ghosts are only nightmares" (65). A modern post-Freudian would interpret Brave Orchid's statement as meaning that ghosts are projections of one's inner conflicts while in a dream state. Long before Freud, however, people believed that a nightmare was not just a dream but, as defined by *The Oxford English Dictionary*, "a female spirit or monster

self-reliant rugged individual and a version of traditional motherhood" (502).

supposed to beset people and animals by night, settling upon them when they are asleep and producing a feeling of suffocation by its weight." The Sitting Ghost that Brave Orchid encounters, when she tests her theory about ghosts by spending the night in the haunted room, possesses all the characteristics of a classic, pre-Freudian nightmare:

She did not know whether she had fallen asleep or not when she heard a rushing coming out from under the bed. Cringes of fear seized her soles as something alive, rumbling, climbed the foot of her bed. It rolled over her and landed bodily on her chest. There it sat. It breathed airlessly, pressing her, sapping her. "Oh, no. A Sitting Ghost," she thought. She pushed against the creature to lever herself out from underneath it, but it absorbed this energy and got heavier. Her fingers and palms became damp, shrinking at the ghost's thick short hair like an animal's coat, which slides against warm solidity as human flesh slides against muscles and bones. . . . She lifted her head to bite but fell back exhausted. The mass thickened.

She could see the knife Her arm had become an immensity, though, too burdensome to lift. . . . As if feeding on her very thoughts, the ghost spread itself over her arm. (68-69)

This ghost is no shadowy, substanceless spirit; it has mass and weight and "solidity," and it sits on Brave Orchid, pinning her on the bed, sapping her energy, and gaining size and strength as it feeds on her thoughts. Recognizing that the nightmare-ghost's strength lies in its superior physical size, which increases in relation to the increasing flow of her own thoughts, Brave Orchid fights the Sitting Ghost by controlling those thoughts. Like Fa Mu Lan, Brave Orchid recognizes that this battle is a test between her brain and that of her opponent, and she releases a stream of words aimed at belittling and demeaning the enemy while asserting her own superior strength¹¹⁴:

¹¹⁴Maxine's description of Brave Orchid's battle with the Boulder Ghost emphasizes her association of her mother with Fa Mu Lan: both women warriors can engage their opponents in a shamanistic struggle, overwhelming them through the use of mental control rather than physical prowess. In fact, in her description of Brave Orchid's preparation for battle, she momentarily conflates the two women, presenting them as a single, merged identity: "She [Brave Orchid] became sharply herself — bone, wire, antenna — but she was not afraid. She had been pared down like this before, when she had travelled up the mountains into rare

"You will not win, Boulder," she spoke to the ghost. You do not belong here. And I will see to it that you leave. When morning comes, only one of us will control this room, Ghost, and that one will be me. I will be marching its length and width; I will be dancing, not sliding and creeping like you. . . .

"I do not give in," she said. "There is no pain you can inflict that I cannot endure. You're wrong if you think I'm afraid of you. You're no mystery to me. I've heard of you Sitting Ghosts before. . . . You kill babies, you coward. You have no power over a strong woman. You are no more dangerous than a resting cat. . . . Are these all the tricks you have, Ghost? . . . You cannot even assume an interesting shape. A boulder. A hairy butt boulder. You must not be a ghost at all. Of course. There are no such things as ghosts." (70)

Brave Orchid controls and subdues the Sitting Ghost by reassuring herself — as she talks to the ghost — of her own superior strength, her certain victory, her refusal to submit no matter what pain it inflicts, and her knowledge that "there are no such things as ghosts." The ghost is real, however, inasmuch as some previously unacknowledged, long-submerged fear of Brave Orchid's has materialized in the form of a nightmare, making its existence and strength known in graphically and suffocatingly clear terms. Brave Orchid is haunted by her own loneliness and fear, originating in the death of her children and the ten-year absence of her husband.¹¹⁵ She has attacked that loneliness and fear, however, by crossing geographical boundaries as well as "boundaries not delineated in space" to train as a doctor, thus ensuring

snow — alone in white not unlike being alone in black" (68). For Maxine, Brave Orchid, battling the Boulder Ghost and attending the To Keung School of Midwifery, is a "modern," twentieth-century reincarnation of Fa Mu Lan.

¹¹⁵Because Brave Orchid believes the nightmare will increase in size as it feeds on her thoughts, eventually becoming so large and so strong that it will overpower her, she refuses to think about what the nightmare's presence means — the fear and loneliness and grief of having lost two children and, possibly, a husband. (She does, however, associate the Sitting Ghost with the death of babies and may suspect that this is the same ghost that killed her own children.) Western psychologists might view such refusal to deal with the issues behind the nightmare as denial. A shaman, however, understands that health comes from his or her ability to confront, overpower, and exorcise the evil spirit that is making a person ill.

that she will no longer be a slave — either to her husband's family or to her own loneliness and fear. Thus, when that loneliness and fear arise out of the dark as a nightmare-ghost threatening to suffocate her, sapping her energy, strength, and resolve, she fights and subdues it through the power of words and rationalism. Confronted with the apparent reality of the ghost, Brave Orchid paradoxically draws on her modern skepticism — her belief that "there are no such things as ghosts" — as a weapon in her struggle.

The Sitting Ghost encountered by Brave Orchid is a personal ghost; her struggle with it is a personal battle, and her success in subduing it is a personal victory. She recognizes, however, that the ghost that haunts the dormitory room is also a communal ghost. She knows that, when her classmates learn that she has, indeed, encountered a ghost in that room, they will continue to fear it unless they too participate in its exorcism. In telling the story to her friends, then, Brave Orchid does not belittle the ghost as she did when she was speaking directly to it. Instead she exaggerates its size, its strength, and the danger it poses, presenting it as a communal rather than a universal threat:

It knocked me down and began to strangle me. It was bigger than a wolf, bigger than an ape, and growing. I would have stabbed it . . . but — a Sitting Ghost mutation — it had an extra arm that wrested my arm away from the knife.

. . .

You cannot hit the ghost if you sweep under the beds. The ghost fattens at night, its dark empty sacs empty by daylight. It's a good thing I stopped it feeding on me; blood and meat would have given it strength to feed on you. . . .

The danger is not over. The ghost is listening to us right now, and tonight it will walk again but stronger. We may not be able to control it if you do not help me to finish it off before sundown. The Sitting Ghost has many mouths. It is dangerous. It is real. Most ghosts make such brief and gauzy appearances that eyewitnesses doubt their own sightings. This one can conjure up enough substance to sit solidly throughout a night. It is a serious ghost, not at all playful. . . . It wants lives. I am sure it is surfeited with babies and is now coming after adults. . . . (72-74)

Whereas Brave Orchid once argued that her friends need not fear because ghosts did not exist except as nightmares, she now attempts to confirm their belief in ghosts. Their belief in both the reality and the danger of the Sitting Ghost is necessary to ensure their belief in their power to destroy it. Brave Orchid, having encountered a personal ghost, having experienced fear in her confrontation with that ghost, and having gained the power that comes from subduing it, has decided that she must teach her friends how to exorcise ghosts. This ability is important to them not only as women subject to ghostly visitations but also as future doctors "who would have to back up their science with magic spells should their patients be disappointed and not get well" (74). For some of their patients, the women will have to serve as both traditional shaman and modern doctor.¹¹⁶

That evening the female scholars of To Keung School, led by Brave Orchid, gather to exorcise the Sitting Ghost once and for all from the haunted room of the dormitory:

My mother swung a big bucket overhead. The smoke curled in black boas around the women in their scholars' black gowns. They walked the ghost room, this circle of little black women, lifting smoke and fire up to the ceiling corners, down to the floor corners, moving clouds across the walls and floor, under the bed, around one another. (75)

¹¹⁶Maxine depicts Brave Orchid, as well as the other students at To Keung School, as being poised between the modern and the traditional. The women are modern in their desire to break out of the traditional roles for Chinese women as well as in their goal of learning and applying modern medicine to heal their patients. The fact that many of their future patients will retain traditional views — both of the roles of women and of the most effective methods of healing — means that Brave Orchid and the other students will discover, as Maxine does several years later, that their feet are still wrapped in "double binds" (48). Brave Orchid's dual world view, blending the modern with the traditional, confuses and frustrates Maxine. Nevertheless, this dual view ultimately proves beneficial because, while Brave Orchid's traditional views threaten to entrap Maxine, her modern views enable Maxine to fight against entrapment. Thus, Maxine, when she "modernizes" traditional Chinese myths to aid her in her individuation as a Chinese American female, is merely moving another step forward in the direction — from traditional to modern to, perhaps, postmodern — already established by her mother.

United against the dangers posed by fear and loneliness, these women, courageous in their resolve to carve an alternative way of life for themselves as they refuse the traditional role of wife or slave, purify the room with clouds of smoke boiling from buckets of burning alcohol and tar. Perhaps Brave Orchid's desire for the women to participate in a formal, communal exorcism is based on her own need to ensure that a ghost that she has only subdued is completely destroyed. Perhaps she is afraid that, without this communal destruction, the ghost will return to haunt her, growing larger and more difficult to control with each encounter. Her action is surely motivated as well, however, by her desire to recruit others in her battle against ghosts and to instruct them about proven techniques for fighting ghosts. She tells her friends, as she later tells her children,

You have to help me rid the world of this disease, as invisible and deadly as bacteria. . . . Act unafraid. Ghost chasers have to be brave. If the ghost comes after you, . . . spit at it. Scorn it. The hero in a ghost story laughs a nimble laugh, his life so full it splatters red and gold on all the creatures around him. (74)

Brave Orchid, as Maxine knows, tells "stories to grow up on." Her ghost stories, whether about Maxine's nameless aunt, Fa Mu Lan, crazy females, or her own battles with ghosts, are intended to teach her children how to respond to the dangers of life. Through her story of her exorcism of the Sitting Ghost, Brave Orchid hopes to teach Maxine to confront fear as a dragoness would: "act unafraid," "spit at it," "scorn it," and laugh.

The image of Brave Orchid, both as a female doctor in China and as an exorcist of ghosts, inspires Maxine as much as the image of Fa Mu Lan as swordswoman. Maxine sees Brave Orchid as a woman warrior who succeeded in translating the story of Fa Mu Lan to meet her own needs as a woman who, living in China in the 1930s, had been abandoned for years by a husband who had gone to America to make his fortune. Unfortunately, Brave

Orchid, transported from China to America in 1939, has not "translated well": "In America," says Maxine, "my mother has eyes as strong as boulders, never once skittering off a face, but she has not learned how to place decorations or phonograph needles . . ." (59). Brave Orchid still has the strength, courage, and endurance of a woman warrior, but in Maxine's view these qualities have become misdirected in America. For Maxine, Rubenstein notes, Brave Orchid is "ambivalently both a woman of exceptional power within the female world of her culture and a powerless female in the larger bicultural situation" (174). "Because the training [in America] was so different and because she could never learn English," Maxine says, Brave Orchid can no longer practice medicine (149). Her inability to speak the language not only means that she is unable to practice medicine; it also means that she must bully her children to speak for her: "You can't entrust your voice to the Chinese, either," says Maxine. "They want to capture your voice for their own use. They want to fix up your tongue to speak for them. 'How much less can you sell it for?' we have to say. Talk the Sales Ghost down. Make them take a loss" (169). Maxine is repeatedly humiliated by having to speak for a mother who does not understand that Chinese ways are inappropriate in America. Rendered powerless by her voicelessness in an English-speaking world, Brave Orchid becomes dependent on the voices of her children. Fearful perhaps of that dependency, Brave Orchid becomes tyrannical, demanding silence of her children unless they speak as she commands them to speak.

Maxine is, understandably then, confused about her mother's true identity and spirit. Is she a hero — a warrior among ghosts — or a tyrant? Does she see her daughters as swordswomen in the making or as future slaves to be sold when they return to China? She fears that her mother values the slave girl who served as her nurse in China above her own

daughter, particularly since that daughter is neither as willing nor as adept at pleasing Brave Orchid as the slave girl was: "My mother's enthusiasm for me is duller than for the slave girl At department stores I angered my mother when I could not bargain without shame, poor people's shame. She stood in back of me and prodded and pinched, forcing me to translate her bargaining word for word" (82). As closely as Maxine examines the photographs of her mother, as attentively as she listens to the stories of her exploits, and as critically as she attempts to understand her words and actions in America, Maxine can never quite stretch her mind large enough to "infer the whole dragon" that is her mother. As a midwife, did her mother ever turn a female baby's face into the ashes? Did her mother laugh at the faces the monkey, served up at a "monkey feast," made? When is her mother telling the truth, and when is she lying? When Brave Orchid chanted the song of Fa Mu Lan, was the purpose of her chant to teach Maxine about alternative roles for women or only about "perfect filiality"? Why did she cut Maxine's frenum — to loosen her tongue, as she says, or to render her voiceless and thus powerless?¹¹⁷

Eventually, fearing that her mother is more loyal to traditional than mythical ideas of womanhood, Maxine sees her as a tyrant and a nightmare. Like Fa Mu Lan, Maxine engages in mental combat, wielding a sword forged by fear from the air, her brain and her words clanging against those of her mother. Like Brave Orchid battling the Sitting Ghost, Maxine confronts her own personal nightmare — the fear of being forced by her parents into a life as wife or slave — with a steady stream of words, asserting her refusal to submit, her

¹¹⁷Amy Ling, in *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry* (New York: Pergamon, 1990), suggests that Maxine's "cut tongue becomes the symbol of the mother's overwhelming power over the daughter, in a sense, a castrating power" (127). Maxine herself is uncertain whether her mother's act has castrated or empowered her.

superior mental powers, her ability to fend for herself, her freedom and power of speech. Although Maxine's ability to find "a voice, however faltering," succeeds in subduing the ghost-nightmare, Maxine never truly overcomes its power to return, to haunt, and to weaken her. Years later when her mother asks her to return to Stockton to live, Maxine explains that the nightmare who continues to haunt her lives in Stockton:

When I'm away from here, . . . I don't get sick. I don't go to the hospitals every holiday. I don't get pneumonia, no dark spots on my x-rays. My chest doesn't hurt when I breathe. I can breathe. And I don't get headaches at 3:00. I don't have to take medicines or go to doctors. Elsewhere I don't have to lock my doors and keep checking the locks. I don't stand at the windows and watch for movements and see them in the dark.

. . . I don't hear ghost sounds. I don't stay awake listening to walking in the kitchen. I don't hear the doors and windows unhinging.

. . . I've found some places in this country that are ghost-free. And I think I belong there (108)

For Maxine, confronting the nightmare-ghost that dominated her girlhood — Brave Orchid — through speech is only a first step toward controlling its power over her. To free herself, to regain the power to breathe, she must distance herself from her mother, her family, the emigrant villagers. Brave Orchid, after listening to her daughter, agrees that Maxine must "stay away," suggesting that "the weather in California must not agree with you." Whether or not Brave Orchid can "hear the insides of words," thus understanding that it is she as much as the California weather that does "not agree" with her daughter, Maxine is relieved by what appears to be her mother's blessing: "A weight lifted from me," she says (108). A dragon, as her mother is a dragon, Maxine has learned to use words to confront and subdue and even to ask for the blessing of the nightmare-ghost who, weighing on her chest, sapping her energy, and feeding on her thoughts, has made breathing so difficult at home.

In making a break with her family, Maxine asserts her right to forge her own role in life rather than to submit to one dictated by Chinese tradition or tyrannical parents. In gaining autonomy, however, she also must sacrifice the protective, encircling cocoon offered by the traditional Chinese family. Having grown up on the legend of Fa Mu Lan, Maxine insists that "no husband of mine will say 'I could have been a drummer but I had to think about the wife and kids' Nobody supports me at the expense of his own adventures" (48). This drive toward independence and self-sufficiency reflects only one half of Maxine's nature, however. As she admits, "Then I get bitter: no one supports me; I am not loved enough to be supported. That I am not a burden has to compensate for the sad envy when I look at women loved enough to be supported. Even now China wraps double binds around my feet" (48). The desire for protection, proving the existence and depth of love, battles with Maxine's need to refuse the tyranny and silence that accompany such protection. When Maxine torments her silent classmate in the sixth grade, she is battling her own desire for just such a withdrawal into silence and the protection of others. Maxine says that immediately after tormenting the girl, she

spent the next eighteen months in bed with a mysterious illness. There was no pain and no symptoms. . . . Instead of starting junior high school, I lived like the Victorian recluses I read about. . . . I saw no one but my family, who took good care of me. I could have no visitors, no other relatives, no villagers. My bed was against the west window, and I watched the seasons change the peach tree. I had a bell to ring for help. I used a bedpan. It was the best year and a half of my life. Nothing happened. (181-82)

For eighteen months, Maxine withdraws from the dangers and demands of life, existing like a Victorian recluse — like a ghost — as she watches the passage of the seasons from her bed. Her family, she says, "took good care of me." After a specified amount of time, however, Brave Orchid determines that Maxine's retreat has lasted long enough: "You're ready to get

up today. It's time to get up and go to school" (182). Trusting her mother's medical opinion, Maxine leaves her bed and reenters the world. This period of withdrawal, she says, "was the best year and a half of my life" because "nothing happened"; no fights, no conflicts, no confusion marred her days. For eighteen months Maxine experiences life as it would be if she were totally buffered and protected from the world by those who love her. Years later she discovers that the classmate she had tormented succeeded in living her whole life in such loving, protective seclusion:

I was wrong about nobody taking care of her. Her sister became a clerk-typist and stayed unmarried. They lived with their mother and father. She did not have to leave the house except to go to the movies. She was supported. She was protected by her family, as they would normally have done in China if they could have afforded it, not sent off to school with strangers, ghosts, boys. (182)

The specter of her old classmate, living a perfect life of silence and seclusion within the protective circle of her family, is one of the ghosts that will always haunt Maxine. In some deep interior part of her being, Maxine would like to take her old classmate's place, to imitate her way of being. Such an option, however, is not really viable for Maxine, who is also driven by such powerfully haunting female ghosts as her nameless aunt, Moon Orchid, Fa Mu Lan, and Brave Orchid, all of whom deliver, whether explicitly or implicitly, whether through examples of success or of failure, the same message: to liberate yourself, you must find "a voice, however faltering."

Ts'ai Yen: A Voice Transcending Difference

When Ts'ai Yen, the daughter of a "scholar famous for his library" (207), is captured by the Southern Hsiung-nu, she is abruptly and forcibly transplanted from a "civilized" world to a "barbaric" one. As a captive, she becomes, against her wishes, a woman warrior as

well as the wife of the captain who captured her and the mother of two children born in the sand between battles. With her captivity, Ts'ai Yen learns the meaning not only of enslavement but also of voicelessness.

For Ts'ai Yen, brought up to believe that any people living outside the Han dynasty are "barbarians" and "primitives" (208), life among the Southern Hsiung-nu means total alienation, separation not only from home but also from civilization. Her alienation is compounded by her inability to communicate with those around her.¹¹⁸ Not even her own

¹¹⁸Ts'ai Yen's fourth lament, as translated by Rewi Alley in *The Eighteen Laments by Tsai Wen-chi* (Peking: New World, 1963), reads, in part:

Never a single day, never a night
that I do not think of home; . . .
I just forced to be
a prisoner amongst Huns; Han
customs, Han thought so different from
all I find here, making it hard
for me to go along with them all;
Han food, Han drink, again not the same;
but to whom can I talk about this? (n.p.)

Thus, Kingston's depiction of the suffering caused by separation from home, family, and civilization (Han customs, thought, food, and drink) — a suffering that is compounded by her lack of someone to talk to — is true to Ts'ai Yen's original poem. What Kingston omits from her summary of the poet's experience, however, is the terrible separation and grief Ts'ai Yen later experiences when, having been ransomed by her family after twelve years of captivity, she is forced to abandon the two children she bore to her "barbarian" husband. As a result, she finds herself torn by conflicting desires — the desire to go home and the desire to stay with her children. In the twelfth lament Ts'ai Yen says, "to go back home, / to stay on here, those two opposites / I cannot hold together in my heart." By the fifteenth lament, her confusion is replaced with anger and bitterness:

. . . hate fills my heart
and who knows of my sadness? . . .
Children and mother parted, now this thing
I find unable to bear! Living apart
yet under the same sky;
we are like the morning star and then
the evening one, ever unable to meet! . . . (n.p.)

Thus, the portion of Ts'ai Yen's story omitted by Kingston, yet known to Chinese readers, tells of mothers and children forever separated, as Brave Orchid and Maxine are separated, by both geographical boundaries and "boundaries not delineated in space."

children speak Chinese: "She spoke it to them when their father was out of the tent, but they imitated her with senseless singsong words and laughed" (208). Ts'ai Yen believes that the Hsiung-nu have no art form — no literature, no architecture, no sculpture or etchings, no music. Their only music, she believes, is the terrifying, whistling "death sounds" of their arrows, made from reeds carved into whistles, hurtling through space during battle (208). One night, however, Ts'ai Yen hears "music tremble and rise like desert wind" (208). Leaving her tent to investigate this source of music, she discovers

hundreds of barbarians sitting upon the sand, the sand gold under the moon. Their elbows were raised, and they were blowing on flutes. They reached again and again for a high note, yearning toward a high note, which they found at last and held — an icicle in the desert. The music disturbed Ts'ai Yen; its sharpness and its cold made her ache. It disturbed her so that she could not concentrate on her own thoughts. . . . (208)

Ts'ai Yen is disturbed by the paradox that the barbarians' music forces her to grasp: these primitive and barbaric people have produced a music that, in "its sharpness and its cold," is so powerful and so penetrating that it makes Ts'ai Yen "ache." Ts'ai Yen must stretch her mind to understand and believe that an icicle has materialized, assuming form and clarity, in the heat and aridity of a barren desert. The music of the barbarians' flutes, transcending barriers separating one culture from another, penetrates Ts'ai Yen's being, piercing the silence surrounding her, and disturbing her to the point that she must speak up, joining her song with theirs:

out of Ts'ai Yen's tent, . . . the barbarians heard a woman's voice singing, as if to her babies, a song so high and clear, it matched the flutes. Ts'ai Yen sang about China and her family there. Her words seemed to be Chinese, but the barbarians understood their sadness and anger. Sometimes they thought they could catch barbarian phrases about forever wandering. Her children did not laugh, but eventually sang along when she left her tent to sit by the campfires, ringed by barbarians. (209)

By adding her own voice to the music of the barbarians' flutes, Ts'ai Yen creates a song, a form of communication, that for brief moments unites the two cultures. Although she sings in Chinese, the barbarians understand the "sadness and anger" of her song. The feelings behind the words — "the insides of words" — translate well even though the words themselves are indecipherable. Furthermore, by sprinkling her song with "barbarian phrases about forever wandering," Ts'ai Yen demonstrates that some of the "barbarian phrases" have also "translated well"; she has not only been able to understand the meaning of those phrases that express the "sadness and anger" of "forever wandering" but has also chosen to incorporate those phrases into her own song because they express far better than any Chinese words the essence of her own bicultural experience among the barbarians. The nomadic Hsiung-nu know more about the loneliness and fear of "forever wandering" than do the Chinese, who have led a sedentary, village-based existence since 2500 B.C. Separated from family, home, and village, Ts'ai Yen merges her own "sadness and anger" at her captivity, enslavement, and separation from home with the "sadness and anger" she shares with the barbarians — that of "forever wandering."

Ts'ai Yen discovers that despite the barrier she herself has constructed by labeling the Hsiung-nu as "barbarians," "primitives," and aliens — a barrier that is made even more formidable by the differences in their behavior and the unintelligibility of their language — she and the barbarians can find a common voice, one that transcends the barrier. Similarly, Moon Orchid, rendered speechless by her life among the barbarians in America and separated from her family by her inability to explain her experience, also finds a voice that transcends seemingly insurmountable barriers. When Brave Orchid visits Moon Orchid in

the asylum, she is surprised to find that Moon Orchid had "made up a new story." "Oh, Sister," Moon Orchid says,

"I am so happy here. No one ever leaves. Isn't that wonderful? We are all women here. Come. I want you to meet my daughters. . . . And you know, . . . we understand one another here. We speak the same language, the very same. They understand me, and I understand them." Sure enough, the women smiled back at her and reached out to touch her as she went by. . . . (160)

Moon Orchid, of course, is still unable to speak English. She cannot converse with the other "crazy women and girls" in the asylum any better than she was able to converse with the Mexican ghosts she believed were "plotting on [her] life." Despite the inability to express themselves through words and despite the fact that each woman is submerged deep within her own private, interior, and individually constructed world, the women "understand one another." They "speak the same language, the very same," a language conveyed through smiles and by touch, a communication made possible perhaps because, in Moon Orchid's words, "we are all women here," and because the asylum is just that — a haven that protects the women, isolating them from the confusion and fear that separate spirit from body.

Maxine too, of course, finds a voice that translates well, transcending cultural boundaries, a voice that is especially powerful among women. The finding of her voice, however, has less to do with creating a common language among women than with overcoming the power of female ghosts to haunt. Maxine discovers that she can transform the ghosts that haunt her by giving them a voice. What may appear to be a ghost, "a spirit in a skirt made of light," is actually just another "voiceless girl dancing when she thought no one was looking." To rid the world of ghosts, Maxine does not exorcise them, as her mother did. Instead, she gives them a voice with which to speak, one which she then translates and captures on paper, thus giving them solidity and permanence, releasing them

from a ghostly, voiceless existence as "forever wandering," "forever hungry," forever sad and angry spirits. To make her world "ghost-free," Maxine must stretch her mind wide enough to accept several paradoxes, the ultimate paradox being that to rid the world of ghosts, she must not destroy them but instead give them life and permanence. Only by giving her ghosts "substance" and "solidity" can Maxine control their power over her so that she can gain power from them.

CHAPTER 8

VOICES TRANSCENDING BARRIERS: SPIRITS, STORYTELLING, AND SURVIVAL

Dennis Brutus talked about the "yet unborn" as well as "those from the past," and how we are still all in this place, and language — the storytelling — is our entryway of passing or being with them, of being together again. When Aunt Suzie told her stories, she would tell a younger child to go open the door so that our esteemed predecessors may bring in their gifts to us. "They are out there," Aunt Suzie would say. "Let them come in. They're here, they're here with us within the stories."

— Leslie Marmon Silko, "Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective" 71

The desire of Ts'ai Yen, Moon Orchid, and Maxine both to speak with and to hear voices that transcend the barriers that separate one individual from another, one culture from another, and one world from another is a desire shared by both other characters and the authors of the works discussed in this dissertation. In *Beloved*, for example, the women of the community "step back to the beginning" to locate and reconstruct a united voice — a "sound" — that carries the power to destroy the barrier that has isolated Sethe from the community for eighteen years. After gathering outside 124 Bluestone to save Sethe from the "demon" that threatens to kill her, some of the women drop to their knees to pray while others remain standing and watching:

and then Ellen hollered.

Instantly, the kneelers and the standers joined her. They stopped praying and took a step back to the beginning. In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like. (259)

When "the sound" reaches Sethe, she hears it as a sound from her past, the sound elicited in the Clearing eighteen years earlier when Baby Suggs "called and the hearing heard" (177):

For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash. (261)

"The sound that broke the back of words," like Ts'ai Yen's "icicle in the desert" (208), is so powerful and so penetrating that it shatters the wall that has encircled and entrapped Sethe since Baby Suggs' death. This sound, sought after and located by the women of the community, goes "back to the beginning" to bring the past, both ancient and recent, into the present, thereby resurrecting, at least momentarily, the voice and the spirit of Baby Suggs. Paradoxically, this sound, while originating in and resurrecting the past, saves Sethe from that past, releasing her both physically and spiritually from its enervating hold over her. Not only *Beloved* and *The Woman Warrior* but all the works discussed in this dissertation, despite their many and obvious differences, convey a strikingly similar message: if only one will listen, one can hear, gain strength from, and be saved by the voices that transcend those artificially constructed barriers that separate supernatural from natural, past from present, and speaker from listener. Further, the recurrence of this message among writers of different ethnic backgrounds demonstrates that, despite the persistence of cultural differences and barriers in today's universe, one culture *can* speak to and be understood by another.

Both Miranda Day and Nanapush, for example, despite their distinctly different ethnic backgrounds, are similar in that they recognize the ways in which nature speaks to those who listen: changes in the weather and in the behavior of animals foretell changes that will affect, and likely harm, humans. Thus, a week before a hurricane hits the island of Willow Springs, Miranda senses from the changes she observes in the world around her that something is

"funny," although at that point she is still mystified about what message those changes might convey:

it's the heavy air in the woods that finally makes Miranda turn around. It's like the air ain't willing to be breathed: the birds are motionless in the pine branches, the katydids can hardly be heard, and there ain't a butterfly in view. The sound of twigs breaking under her feet is hollow and the echo can't move up through the haze. Miranda stands still and listens. Funny. There's something funny going on. . . . (174)

Over the next few days the feeling of change, of a disturbance in the world, of a voice trying to make itself heard, becomes ever stronger until suddenly, in an instant, "it all falls into place":

She was feeling change. . . . Her bones are talking today. But something else was telling her something and if it just got a little louder, she was willing to listen. . . . Like them forgotten nickelodeons, the pictures move backward and it all falls into place.

. . . Them waves had been coming in — just a bit too fast. . . . them high high hills the crawfish built up around the mouths of their burrows; the kingfishers and bank swallows nesting way way up from the water; bush rabbits — she walks past a dozen of them hollows if she walks past one, and all of them is deep deep into the ground. . . . This was gonna be a big storm. (226-27)

When Miranda finally understands that a hurricane is coming, she feels foolish for not having read the signs earlier, particularly since she has just been lecturing the city-bred George about the ways in which nature speaks to humans: "You just gotta watch all these creatures long enough to find out what's going on in the elements where they live. Well, she had looked without seeing, listened without hearing" (227). Miranda's failure to see and to hear can be attributed, in part, to her unwillingness to know about, to comprehend, a message she has no desire to receive. Her initial response to the "funny" weather was, "I ain't up to all this, Lord. I'm an old woman. And I'm tired, tired of knowing things I can't do nothing about. Whatever is waiting in here today, I just ain't ready to face" (174). The desire not

to know — a desire born of one's powerlessness to divert the changes foretold by nature — is the greatest inhibitor of one's ability to hear and to see.

A feeling of powerlessness similar to that experienced by Miranda also interferes with Nanapush's sight and hearing. Just as Miranda does not want to recognize the signs of a storm "born in hell" (227) that she "can't do nothing about," Nanapush does not want to acknowledge the signs of the loggers' encroachment, as the men move ever closer to Pillager land, because he knows that he and Fleur are unable to stop them. The sounds and signs of the coming devastation are, nevertheless, apparent:

It began as a far-off murmur, a disturbance in the wind. We noticed an unusual number of birds and other animals that nested or burrowed in trees. Thrashers and grouse settled in the wild grass around Fleur's cabin. Kokoko silently appeared in broad daylight and walked the roof at dusk, uttering one note. Rabbits came to the edge of the clearing, squirrels bounded through the leaves, fighting pitched battles over territory. The murmur grew more distinct.

Then one day we could hear them clearly. Ringing over the water and to our shore came the shouts of men, faint thump of axes. The saws were rasping whispers, the turn of wooden wheels on ungreaed axles was shrill as a far-off flock of gulls. (206)

Just as the animals around Willow Springs change their behavior patterns in response to the coming destruction of their habitat by natural forces, the animals around Fleur's cabin change theirs in response to the coming destruction of their habitat by human forces. The animals, driven by the sounds of the encroaching loggers, draw closer together, crowding into "the square mile of towering oaks, a circle around Fleur's cabin," so that when Nanapush passes through that circle of oaks, he both sees and hears the response of a doomed world:

The moment I entered I heard the hum of a thousand conversations. Not only the birds and small animals but the spirits in the western stands had been forced together. The shadows of the trees were crowded with their forms. The twigs spun independently of wind, vibrating like small voices. I stopped, stood among these trees whose flesh was so much older than ours,

and it was then my relatives and friends took final leave, abandoning me to the living. (220)

The last stand of oaks is alive with voices, both those of the birds and animals and those of the spirits of the dead, crowded into a gradually diminishing space. The crush of spirits disturbs the twigs, which spin "independently of wind, vibrating like small voices" as they take "final leave," bidding Nanapush farewell. The spirits of the dead find voice, then, by speaking through the vibration of twigs, through a sound that could be given a natural explanation, except for the absence of wind. As Nanapush passes through the circle of oaks for the last time, he experiences a world in which barriers dissolve, the supernatural and natural merging to become a single phenomenon: the supernatural is natural, just as the natural is supernatural.

The tendency to merge the natural with the supernatural, to hear the voices of the dead speaking in the wind and in the rustle of leaves, is one shared by many of the characters in these books. "Fleur," Nanapush says, "heard her vanished child in every breath of wind, every tick of dried leaves, every scratch of blowing snow" (170). Miranda, after her sister's death, feels Abigail's continued presence in the world each time "she turns her face up into the warm air — You there, Sister? — to listen for the rustling of the trees. There's never a day so still that at least one leaf ain't moving" (312). As long as "at least one leaf" continues to stir, Abigail continues to exist and to speak. Paul D, too, says that each day as he passes through a burial ground for the "Miami dead" on his way to work at the slaughterhouse, "they growled on the banks of Licking River, sighed in the trees on Catherine Street and rode the wind above the pig yards" (155). Ora Mae and Jennifer also hear voices speaking in "a little wind" that precedes an approaching storm:

a little wind comes up from the creek and ruffles the hem of Ora Mae's dress. It ruffles the leaves of the shade trees, sighing, rising stronger now up from the creek and blowing across the year, it's sighing up the holler toward Hoot Owl Mountain, moaning around the house. It has voices in it, and thunder coming, and Jennifer on the steps and Ora Mae in the yard incline their heads in the wind like they're listening. (13)

The voices in the wind swirling through Ora Mae's yard are the voices of the dead — of Granny Younger, Rose Hibbitts, Richard Burlage — telling and retelling the stories of the past. Thus, Smith, Morrison, Naylor, and Erdrich suggest that when the wind blows in a certain way, it carries with it the voices of the spirits and their stories of past lives. For those who listen, the voices that transcend the barriers separating the natural and supernatural, bearing the past into the present, can evoke varying emotions — terror, grief, or love and consolation.

Richard Burlage, for example, writing about his experiences in the Appalachian Mountains, remembers that when "the cool wind . . . began in earnest, moaning through the trees," he "grew conscious of a certain hostility in the environment" (124). When Ludie Davenport experiences a similar cold and moaning wind, however, she senses the presence not of a general hostility but of a specific evil:

I'm no fool, I'll tell you. . . . I felt that cold air rise and then directly I heard that laugh which there wasn't no mistaking even if I hadn't heard it for twenty-five years. I was over the creek by then, and let me tell you I took off as fast as these old legs would carry me. And still I heard that laughing, it was like it come down out of the trees, and then it was right on my heels, or it'll move up ahead on the path, and me just a-freezing to death and moving as fast as I'm able. . . . All of a sudden there starts up this barking at my heels. But of course there wasn't no dog! No, it was Almarine's ghost-dog, the one that never come back after he kilt that witch, and this ghost-dog consorts with her now and follows wherever she'll go. . . . (179)

Ludie, chased off the mountain by a cold, moaning wind that her fear has transformed into a laughing ghost-witch and her "ghost-dog," is, despite her beliefs to the contrary, a

superstitious old "fool." Similar in derivation to Ludie's fear, although more deadly, is the fear experienced by Edgar Pukwan when he accompanies Nanapush to the cabin near Lake Matchimanito where the Pillagers have died of consumption. Nanapush says that when they reached the Pillager cabin, "Pukwan did not want to enter, fearing the unburied Pillager spirits might seize him by the throat and turn him windigo" (3). Thus, Nanapush is not surprised when he later learns from Pukwan's son that "his father came home, crawled into bed, and took no food from that moment until his last breath passed" (4). The Chippewa, Nanapush explains, fear the spirits of the dead because they know that the spirits linger near home, threatening to take the survivors with them on their journey west to the land of the dead. Sometimes, as in the case of Pukwan, the spirits' actions appear to be motivated by vengeance; at other times, however, they are clearly motivated by an understanding of the love, loneliness, and fear of separation experienced by the survivors. Nanapush and Fleur, grieving for the Pillagers, are careful not to speak the names of their dead friends and relatives because, he says,

We feared that they would hear us and never rest, come back out of pity for the loneliness we felt. They would sit in the snow outside the door, waiting until from longing we joined them. (5)

Nanapush first tries to reason with the spirits, asking them to leave him and Fleur alone, but when this fails, the spirits' presence continuing to surround them, he and Fleur stop talking entirely. "This made it worse," he says, because "their names grew within us" until they too, like Pukwan, refused food, almost starving, "let[ting] their blood stop," and taking "the road west after all" (6).

Whereas Nanapush and Fleur feel threatened by the presence of spirits, Tayo feels threatened by their absence. After waking from a dream in which "Josiah had been hugging

him close the way he had when Tayo was a child," Tayo cries because of the never-ending necessity of "wak[ing] up to what was left for him; he would find no peace in that house where the silence and the emptiness echoed the loss" (32). For Tayo, the separation and loss caused by death is so unbearable that he wants to return to the hospital, where he would be able to separate himself from the living as well as the dead: "he could merge with the walls and the ceiling, shimmering white, remote from everything" (32). Spiritual and physical health begins to return to Tayo only when, on Mount Taylor, he begins to recover a sense of the permanence of things. When he realizes that "the mountain could not be lost to them [the Pueblo] because it was in their bones," he also recognizes that

Josiah and Rocky were not far away. They were close; they had always been close. And he loved them as he had always loved them, the feeling pulsing through him as strong as it had ever been. They loved him that way; he could still feel the love they had for him. The damage that had been done had never reached this feeling. This feeling was their life, vitality locked deep in blood memory, and the people were strong, and the fifth world endured, and nothing was ever lost as long as the love remained. (219-20)

As a result of this experience on Mount Taylor, Tayo learns that the feeling of love that continues to connect him with Josiah and Rocky transcends death; Josiah and Rocky continue to live in him, "locked deep in blood memory" just as the mountain continues to live in his "bones."

For Tayo, then, health comes from the ability to perceive a universe in which natural and supernatural, past and present, merge perfectly and seamlessly. His recovery of Josiah and Rocky on Mount Taylor reflects such a merger, as does a November sunrise, one "which in a single moment gathered all things together":

He squatted down by the pool and watched the dawn spreading across the sky like yellow wings. The mare jingled the steel shanks of the bit with her grazing, and he remembered the sound of the bells in late November, when the air carried the jingling like snowflakes in the wind. Before dawn,

southeast of the village, the bells would announce their approach, the sound shimmering across the sand hills, followed by the clacking of turtle-shell rattles — all these sounds gathering with the dawn. Coming closer to the river, faintly at first, faint as the pale yellow light emerging from the swelling colors of dawn. And at the moment the sun came over the edge of the horizon, they suddenly appeared on the river bank, the Ka't'sina approaching the river crossing. (181-82)

The sound of the mare's jingling bit becomes for Tayo "the key, the code, the sound" that echoes and resurrects, as the women's united voice does for Sethe, similar sounds from the past. When Tayo hears the sound of the jingling bit, associating it with the sound of the bells of the returning Ka't'sina, he experiences the merger of three periods of time "in a single moment": the present November sunrise, the November sunrises of his youth when the Ka't'sina crossed the river at Laguna, and all the November sunrises reaching back to "time immemorial" that the Ka't'sina have returned to Laguna. For Tayo, then, health is synonymous with the ability to demolish barriers, to experience instead the merger of the natural and the supernatural "in a single moment" that encompasses all time — the present, the recent individual past, and the ancient and continuous tribal past.

Tayo does not come to this moment of comprehension, this moment of gathering "all things together," without pain or resistance. The intrusion of the past into the present, like the intrusion of the supernatural into the natural, frequently evokes both grief and fear in those who experience such an intrusion. When the past intrudes on the present, speaking through the jingling of bells, the rustling of leaves, or the whispering of the visible or invisible dead, most people resist the intrusion, attempting to silence the voices and the stories they tell. When, for example, Jennifer tries to record the sounds of the past on tape, Ora Mae warns her not to "ever come back here no more with no tape recorder because if you set it going up there, you'll likely hear what you don't want to hear" (288). Similarly,

when Miranda takes George to Chevy's Pass, where "when the wind is right in the trees, you can hear [Bascombe Wade] calling and calling the name nobody knows," she is afraid George can be harmed by the voices:

She fights back the urge that comes up in her to snatch him away from there. But it's harder to fight not seeing the way them heart-shaped ginger leaves twine around his knuckles, as if they were pulling him in closer to listen, willing to hold him there until he does. Ain't *nothing* he needs to hear around here. (206-07)

Both Ora Mae and Miranda fear the power of the past to curse certain vulnerable individuals, entrapping them in a recurring cycle of past errors and misfortunes. Sethe, too, who believes that "keeping [Denver] from the past that was still waiting for her was all that mattered" (42), shares Ora Mae and Miranda's fear; she is terrified that Denver will bump up against and reexperience her own past of slavery at Sweet Home. As she explains to Denver,

Some day you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it's you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else. Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It's never going away. Even if the whole farm — every tree and grass blade dies. The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there — you who never was there — if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there, waiting for you. So, Denver, you can't never go there. Never. Because even though it's all over — over and done with — it's going to always be there waiting for you. . . . (36)

This fear that the past lives on in the present, threatening to repeat itself in the lives of the survivors, the offspring, also drives Maxine: "My aunt haunts me," she says. "I do not always think she means me well" (16). She is particularly wary, she says, because her aunt drowned herself, and she has inherited the Chinese fear "of the drowned one, whose weeping ghost, wet hair hanging and skin bloated, waits silently by the water to pull down a substitute" (16). Maxine fears being sucked into the past, drowning in a way of life that drowned her aunt. For Maxine, Sethe, Miranda, and Ora Mae, then, the past is full of pain

and the threat of death. Despite the pain and the threat, however, one must, as Miranda discovers when she attempts to save Cocoa, "look past the pain" to see how knowledge and understanding of the past can strengthen and heal (283). The trick, as Maxine discovers, is to transform the voices and stories of the past into a voice and a story of one's own.

Releasing and transforming the voices and stories of the past, however, is not easy. Sethe, for one, attempts to repress the voices and stories because, she says, "every mention of her past life hurt. Everything in it was painful or lost. She and Baby Suggs had agreed without saying so that it was unspeakable" (58). When Stamp Paid, wanting to help Sethe, tries to penetrate the barrier isolating her from the community, he comes up against "a conflagration of hasty voices — loud, urgent, all speaking at once" (172), which he believes to be "the mumbling of the black and angry dead" (198). The voices Stamp Paid hears, however, are not only the voices of the dead: "Mixed in with the voices surrounding the house, recognizable but undecipherable to Stamp Paid, were the thoughts of the women of 124, unspeakable thoughts, unspoken" (199). "The thoughts of the women of 124" are released only when the past, incarnate in Beloved, moves into and takes over the household. Possessing the power to unleash "unspeakable thoughts, unspoken," Beloved — the past — leads the women, although not without pain and the threat of death, to a new understanding of themselves. In a similar way, Maxine, too, discovers that, to save herself from the ghosts who haunt her, she must try "to name the unspeakable" (5); she must unveil and write about the lives of the ghosts so that she can understand their relation to her own life. Only then will the past loosen its hold over her future.

The past, then, has not only a life of its own but also a voice with which to speak and a story to be told. The longer the past is denied a voice, the louder and more insistent it

becomes, growing ever more powerful until it threatens to take full control, stifling a person's efforts to create a future. Thus, Sethe, who attempts to silence the "unspeakable" past, discovers that "her brain was not interested in the future. Loaded with the past and hungry for more, it left her no room to imagine, let alone plan for, the next day" (71). The past will make itself known, whether it speaks through the wind and the rustling leaves, through the spirits of the dead, or through the storytellers who seek to save themselves or others through the power of speech. For example, when Eli asks Nanapush to tell him about "the old-time way to make a woman love him" (45), Nanapush succumbs not only to Eli's request but also to his own memories of the women he has loved and lost to death. Resurrecting his love for his wives through the power of speech, he plunges into the past:

talk is an old man's vice. I opened my mouth and wore out the boy's ears, but that is not my fault. I shouldn't have been caused to live so long, shown so much of death, had to squeeze so many stories in the corners of my brain. They're all attached, and once I start there is no end to telling because they're hooked from one side to the other, mouth to tail. (46)

The longer one lives, Nanapush says, the more stories — the more past — one accumulates, and releasing one story necessarily releases all those to which it is connected so that eventually an old man's talk can become endless. Nevertheless, although talking may indeed be "an old man's vice," Nanapush also knows that by resurrecting the past, such storytelling can save both a speaker and a listener. He once saved himself, for example, from the consumption that killed his family "by starting a story," talking so much and so long that "death could not get a word in edgewise, grew discouraged and traveled on" (46). In another instance, he used his storytelling as a sedative, talking all night to distance Lulu from her pain after her feet had been frozen by walking in the snow: "I did not stop," he reminds Lulu many years later. "I talked on and on until you lost yourself inside the flow of it, until

you entered the swell and ebb and did not sink but were sustained" (167). In fact, all the stories Nanapush relates in *Tracks* are directed at sustaining and saving Lulu, not only by explaining why marrying a Morrissey will harm her but also by encouraging her to help him bring their family — Fleur, Eli, Nanapush, and herself — together again. Nanapush believes that by recreating the past through stories, he can work a cure: "If you wanted to make an old man's last days happy, Lulu, you would convince your mother and your father to visit me. I'd bring old times back, force them to reckon, make them look into one another's eyes again. I'd work a medicine" (210). Stories that recreate the past, Nanapush believes, can heal those who will listen.

Tayo also learns, as Nanapush already knows, the true value of stories: "They aren't just entertainment. / Don't be fooled. / They are all we have, you see, / all we have to fight off / illness and death" (2). Tayo's cure, in fact, depends on his recognition that all the disparate stories of the individual, tribal, and global past fit together to make a single story that continues into the present and the future: "He cried the relief he felt at finally seeing the pattern, the way all the stories fit together — the old stories, the war stories, their stories — to become the story that was still being told. He was not crazy; he had never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time" (246). This ability to see that all stories are part of a single story just as all worlds and all times are part of a single world and single time, rather than fragments separated by boundaries and barriers, is necessary so that one might overcome the sense of division and fragmentation both within oneself and between oneself and others. For Tayo, the task is to find a story that heals internal division; for Sethe and Paul D and for

George and Cocoa, the task is to find a story that bridges the gulf separating one individual from another.

When Paul D walks out of the past and into Sethe's life, they begin to reconstruct the story of their past, both that shared at Sweet Home and that experienced independently from the time they each left Sweet Home. Sethe, who has always found the past "unspeakable," discovers that, with Paul D there, she can begin to tell her story: "Her story was bearable because it was his as well — to tell, to refine and tell again" (99). Through a mutual process of telling, refining, and reconstructing the story of their past, Sethe and Paul D begin to construct the basis for something they have never yet experienced: "We can make a life, girl," Paul D says. "A life" (46). Paul D, however, allows himself to be distanced from Sethe when he hears a version of her story before she herself is able, or ready, to tell her own version. The telling of Sethe's story, before its time and by the wrong teller, creates a barrier, a "forest [that] was locking the distance between them, giving it shape and heft" (165). This forest continues to separate Paul D from Sethe until he recognizes that the only possibility either of them has for making "a life" is to merge their two stories into one: "He wants," he finally realizes, "to put his story next to hers" (273).

A similar barrier — an inability to understand each other's past, and thus present, actions — separates Cocoa from George. Unlike Sethe and Paul D, however, Cocoa and George do not share a similar past; in fact, the stories of Cocoa's past are so different from those of George's that wife and husband sometimes seem to live in separate worlds. After a week in Willow Springs, Cocoa is forced to admit the lack of connection and communication between their two worlds, two pasts, two stories:

Yes, George, you tried hard. But it would have been too much to ask for you to understand those whispers as we passed through my family plot. As

soon as I put the moss in my shoes, I could hear them all in the wind as it moved through the trees and stirred up dust along the ground. . . .

No, you didn't know this place. And you didn't know my people. I was sorry I had brought you (223)

Cocoa believes that George's inability to hear the voices in the wind creates an insurmountable barrier between them; if he is unable to hear the voices, to acknowledge their existence, how can he ever enter into and share her world, her past, or her story? Paradoxically, however, after George dies, he himself becomes one of the voices of the dead, of the past, so that the barrier that separated them when he was alive no longer exists; in fact, George becomes the bridge that connects Cocoa to the past (285). Because neither of them now recognizes the existence of a barrier between past and present, supernatural and natural, they can finally communicate freely, fully, and calmly. Like Sethe and Paul D, then, Cocoa and George discover the value of talking, of placing their stories next to each other as they tell, refine, and tell them again. "Each time I go back over what happened," Cocoa tells George one afternoon fourteen years after his death,

there's some new development, some forgotten corner that puts you in a slightly different light. I guess one of the reasons I've been here so much is that I felt if we kept retracing our steps, we'd find out exactly what brought us to this slope near The Sound. But when I see you again, our versions will be different still. . . . What really happened to us, George? You see, that's what I mean — there are just too many sides to the whole story. (310-11)

For fourteen years Cocoa and George have been retelling, refining, reconstructing their story; unable to come up with a single true story, they create multiple versions told from different angles, highlighted and shadowed by different slants of light. Thus, Cocoa discovers the nature of storytelling, of history making, as Nanapush describes it: "It comes up different every time, and has no ending, no beginning. They get the middle wrong too. They only know that they don't know anything" (31). For Cocoa, however, the telling itself

and perhaps even the knowledge that they will never get it right, requiring that the telling continue endlessly through time, are both consoling and healing.

Cocoa and George's continuing communication, bridging past and present, supernatural and natural, is not private. Their voices echo in the waves of The Sound, audible to anyone who passes by with the desire to listen, the ability to hear. "Reema's boy," for example, had he listened for Cocoa and George's voices, "coulda heard from them everything there was to tell about 18 & 23":

But on second thought, someone who didn't know how to ask wouldn't know how to listen. And he coulda listened to them the way you been listening to us right now. Think about it: ain't nobody really talking to you. We're sitting here in Willow Springs, and you're God-knows-where. It's August 1999 — ain't but a slim chance it's the same season where you are. Uh, huh, listen. Really listen this time: the only voice is your own. But you done just heard about the legend of Sapphira Wade, though nobody here breathes her name. You done heard it the way we know it, sitting on our porches and shelling June peas, quieting the midnight cough of a baby, taking apart the engine of a car — you done heard it without a single living soul really saying a word. Pity, though, Reema's boy couldn't listen, like you, to Cocoa and George down by them oaks — or he woulda left here with quite a story. (10)

The voices of the past, then, moaning in the cold mountain wind, whispering in the leaves, and chattering in the slap of water against the shore, are as audible and as intelligible to those who know how to listen as a storyteller's voice is. As readers of the works discussed in this dissertation, we enjoy the privilege of overhearing the voices of the storytellers, as they "tell, . . . refine, and tell again" the stories of themselves and others. The voices emanate from shadowy figures who have no more substance or materiality than the ghosts and spirits of which they tell. As readers, suspended by the storyteller's art, we never pause to question the existence of these substanceless figures or their ability to speak. Instead, only vaguely aware that their voices are transcending barriers imposed by space, time, and text, we simply

listen to the tellers, hoping to receive some gift from their stories, their lives, their worlds that is of value in our own. The gift we receive may be as tenuous as an hour's entertainment and escape or as momentous as the discovery of a new identity, a new reality, a new world. The voices of these ghostly storytellers — the narrators and characters created by Smith, Erdrich, Silko, Naylor, Morrison, and Kingston — lift from the written page, rise on a whisper of wind, and, riding across the boundaries separating one culture from another, speak to all those who are willing and able to listen.

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