

5-2020

**Restoring the Web: Personal and Communal Integration in N. Scott Momaday's House Made of Dawn and Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony**

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<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2020.ENGL.ST.01>

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Aminifard, Deborah, "Restoring the Web: Personal and Communal Integration in N. Scott Momaday's House Made of Dawn and Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony" (2020). *English Literature | Senior Theses*. 3.  
<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2020.ENGL.ST.01>

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# **Restoring the Web**

*Personal and Communal*

*Integration in N. Scott Momaday's House Made of Dawn and*

*Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony*

Deborah Aminifard

A culminating thesis submitted

to the faculty of Dominican University of California

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English

Dominican University of California

Sam Rafael, CA

May 2020



## Abstract

*Restoring the Web* asserts that N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* are novelized emergence myths, detailing the emergence of their respective protagonists' identities. Abel and Tayo's journey employ the framework of the "monomyth" of separation, initiation, and return. Explored by the essay are separation from self, family, and community. Community includes the earth and their relationship to the natural world that has left these men on the "edge of oblivion." Navajo healing ceremonies, invoking the supernatural, initiates their emergence journey, a journey of discovery, in which their identity is (re)constructed. As with all heroes who have suffered injury and overcome challenging circumstances, Abel and Tayo return to their communities with the ability to help others. Theirs is a story of hope, the antidote for what Silko calls "the disease of despair."

I would like  
to thank  
Carlos Rodriguez  
for helping me  
bring this project  
to fruition.

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## INTRODUCTION

On May 5, 1969, Scott Momaday, an unknown writer in his thirties, received a phone call from his editor at Harper and Row. She informs him that he has just won the Pulitzer Prize to which he replied, "Oh, sure I have." He thought she was joking. He didn't even know that his book was being considered for the award. He learned later that a receptionist on the sixth floor of Harper and Row had submitted the book for consideration. When Momaday went to thank her, he asked her how she picked his book. She said that she didn't pick it, that "they routinely send over about a half a dozen each year with no particular expectations. You just hit the jackpot!" Momaday refers to the event as an accident. Accident or not, the event opened a door for Native American writers, and within a short period of time, the canon of Native American Literature expanded significantly.

Momaday's award winning novel, *House Made of Dawn*, published in 1968, is attributed to igniting what Kenneth Lincoln calls the Native American Renaissance, a "period of rapid expansion of the Native American literary canon from 1968 to present" (Chavkin,3). It is important to note that this canon "had its origins in Indigenous oral storytelling traditions" (Lincoln). Rather than thinking of this time period as a "rebirth," it might be more accurate to think of it as a continuation of oral storytelling, a time when the ancient oral traditions began to be translated into Western literary forms, a point of contact in the evolution of Native

storytelling. This attests to the spirit of perseverance that characterizes Native American cultures.

Leslie Silko is among the writers to emerge during the flourishing of Native American literature. Silko's *Ceremony*, published in 1977, is praised by the *New York Book Review* for its "unique blending of the European Narrative tradition with American Indian Storytelling." Like Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, sacred myths are interwoven throughout the text. These myths parallel the protagonists' stories, suggesting that human narratives replicate the narratives of myth, adding a dimension of timelessness to the events in the novels, eliminating the boundary between past and present. There is a story of emergence, a story that has no beginning and no end, but continues forever cycling like rings of water spreading outward from the source assuming new names with each successive generation

According to the cosmology of tribes in the South West, humans emerged from the womb of the Sacred Earth, after emerging through many worlds, now resides in the present world. The Navajo, Dine, as they call themselves, say that the first beings emerged from a world of darkness in which there were four corners. Above each corner were four clouds: black, blue, yellow, and white. Within these clouds were "the elements of the First World" (Carey, [navajopeople.org](http://navajopeople.org)). First Man was created from the black and white cloud, and First Woman was created from the blue and yellow cloud; however, they were not in their present form; "They were thought of as Mist People" (Carey, [navajopeole.org](http://navajopeole.org)). Because of strife and fighting in the first world, the first beings emerged into the second world where again there was disharmony. Continuing their journey through four more worlds, they now reside in the fifth world. It is important to note that there are different versions of the emergence myth. In some



versions there are four worlds and in others, there are five; however, the literal story is not what is important, but the idea that emergence was a journey from “disharmony to harmony, from chaos to order” (Evers,1). The journey through different worlds was a journey in which identity found greater and greater definition. Just as the first beings emerged from disharmony to harmony, from chaos to order, Tayo and Abel emerge from the edge of oblivion and begin a journey in which their Native American identity is re-created.

N. Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* and Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* are novelized emergence myths, detailing the emergence of their respective protagonists’ identities. Abel and Tayo’s journey employs the framework of the “monomyth” of separation, initiation, and return. Explored by the essay are separation from self, family, and community. Community includes the earth and their relationship to the natural world that has left these men on the “edge of oblivion.” Navajo healing ceremonies, invoking the supernatural, initiates their emergence journey, a journey of discovery, in which their identity is (re)constructed. As with all heroes who have suffered injury and overcome challenging circumstances, Abel and Tayo return to their communities with the ability to help others. Theirs is a story of hope, the antidote for what Silko calls “the disease of despair.”

Tayo and Abel’s emergence journey, employing the pattern of Joseph Campbell’s monomyth of separation, initiation, and return, involves a hero or heroine who “gets into a series of predicaments or suffers injuries (usually transformations in mind and body) that require supernatural aid” (Bell, 23). Having been restored with the help of supernatural forces, the hero/heroine returns home with the power to help the community. Campbell describes this narrative pattern in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*: “A hero ventures forth from the world of

common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man." Like the heroes of myth, Tayo and Abel "suffer injuries, mental and physical transformations" that they must overcome in-order-to establish their true-identity and return to their communities with the ability to help others. Tayo and Abel are the questing heroes of myth, a quest for identity

Silko and Momaday's protagonists, Tayo and Abel, like the heroes of sacred myths, face multiple challenges, alienating them from themselves, families and communities which includes the earth. They are severed from their New Mexican Pueblos and subjected to the chaos and horror of WWII. After returning home mentally ill, suffering from PTSD, they attempt to re-integrate into their native communities but are unsuccessful. Suffering the pain of loss and tormented by images of death, they self-medicate with alcohol. To make matters worse, they are both of mixed blood and are viewed suspiciously by members of their communities. They are the "other," not only in the white man's world but also in their tribal communities. Consistent with what Silko experienced on the Laguna Pueblo where she grew up, the protagonists exist somewhere between two worlds. In Silko's words: "It was not so easy for me to learn where we Marmon's belonged, but gradually I understood that we of mixed ancestry, belonged on the outer edge of the circle between the world of the Pueblo and the outside world" (O'Brien, 116). Finally, they are alienated from the Sacred Earth, whom the Pueblo call the Sacred Mother, from whom they emerged and by whom they are sustained. For many Native Americans, especially during WWII era, hopelessness and despair is where the story ends, but not so for Tayo and Abel. Like the heroes of sacred creation myths, Tayo and Able are

guided home, back to belonging, back to wholeness. They are healed. Imbued with power and purpose, their journey of emergence continues as they become fully integrated into their native communities. The delicate strands of the web that were severed are restored, healing, not only Tayo and Abel, but the whole community.

## **Separation**

### **The Manipulation of Witchery**

#### **World War II**

“They will take this world from ocean to ocean/they will turn on each other/they will destroy each other/Up here/in these hills/ they will find rocks,/rocks with veins of green and yellow and black./They will lay the final pattern with these rocks/they will lay it across the world/and explode everything” (Ceremony, 127).

When readers are introduced to Leslie Silko’s protagonist, Tayo, he has just returned from WWII to his home on the New Laguna Pueblo in New Mexico. Having experienced the horrifying events of WWII where atomic bombs are used for the first time, Tayo finds it difficult to explain what he experienced to Ku’oosh, an old Laguna medicine man who has come to heal him from PTSD. Ku’oosh would not understand anything so destructive: “the white war-killing across great distances without knowing who or how many had died. It was all too alien to comprehend, the mortars and big guns; and even if he could have taken the old man to see the target areas, even if he could have led him through the fallen jungle trees and muddy craters of torn earth to show him the dead, the old man would not have believed anything so monstrous.

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 old-time witches killed like that" (Ceremony, 34). The horror of nuclear war, prophesized long ago in the *Story of the Shadow Witch*, has come to pass. From Laguna, Tayo has ventured into the "whirling darkness" of nuclear warfare, set in motion long ago by dark forces, and it has destroyed his mind. Images of death and dying, haunt him day and night making it impossible for him to eat or sleep. Images of his cousin, Rocky, who was like a brother to him, slowly dying after being hit with a grenade, blood oozing from the wounds and broken bones, as he carried him on a blanket through deep mud and torrential rain to the prison camp, replay in his mind over and over again. Tayo watched as Rocky's skull was crushed with the butt of a rifle by a Japanese soldier. These horrifying images haunt him day and night. Waking from sleep, shaking and violently ill, he tries to vomit the images from his memory, but the images remain, waiting "for his eyes to slip loose and spin his eyes to the interior of his skull where the scenes wait for him" ( Ceremony, 8). Tayo's mind has been stolen by the witchery, by the horrifying events of the "white man's war."

In-order-to stop the traumatic memories and eliminate his fear and anxiety, he has disconnected from his surroundings and from awareness of his own identity, common in PTSD. Tayo has no identity; he is invisible. A doctor at the hospital asks Tayo if he had ever been visible to which Tayo replies "sorry but nobody was allowed to speak to an invisible one" (Ceremony, 14). As the doctor persists in engaging Tayo, Tayo hears himself answering the doctor: "He can't talk to you. He is invisible. His words are formed with an invisible tongue, they have no sound. He reached into his mouth and felt his own tongue; it was dry and dead, the

carcass of a tiny rodent” (Ceremony, 14). Silko describes the ordeal in terms of a myth: “He inhabited a gray winter fog on a distant elk mountain where hunters are lost indefinitely and their own bones mark the boundaries” (Ceremony, 13). This passage echoes a Navajo emergence myth. In this myth, a hunter’s identity is stolen by Coyote, and the hunter is given Coyote’s identity. This is referred to as “struck with Coyote’s dry skin,” by the Navajo. With the help of a medicine man who invokes the holy people, the hunter’s identity is restored, and he returns to his home. Silko is making this connection here, suggesting that, like the hunter, Tayo’s identity has been stolen by Coyote, the manipulation of witchery, WWII. Tayo has become alienated from himself due to the severity of mental illness caused by trauma. He has been “struck with Coyotes dry skin.” Tayo’s healing journey is the re-enactment of this myth, a journey that will free him from “Coyotes dry skin” restoring his identity.

The images describing Tayo’s state of mind when he is in the Veteran’s Hospital prior to going home to Laguna, echo the first world of the Navajo story of emergence, suggesting that Tayo’s journey is an emergence journey: “The smoke had been dense; visions and memories of the past did not penetrate there, and he had drifted in **colors of smoke**, where there was no pain, only pale, pale gray of the **north wall** by his bed. Their medicine drained memory out of his thin arms and replaced it with a twilight cloud behind his eyes. It was not possible to cry on the remote and foggy mountain. If they had not dressed him and led him to the car, he would still be there, drifting along the **north wall**, invisible in the gray twilight” (Ceremony, 14). Tayo drifts in “**colored smoke**,” without definition, without identity along the “**north wall**.” This passage bears a striking similarity to the first world described in the Navajo Creation Story defined only by the four directions and different colored clouds: First Man was created from

the black and white cloud, and First Woman was created from the blue and yellow cloud; however, they were not in their present form; “They were thought of as Mist People.” Likewise, Tayo, defined only by direction and different colored clouds, begins his journey of emergence, a journey in which his Native American identity is restored.

Like Tayo, Momaday’s protagonist, Abel, has been “struck with Coyotes dry skin;” He has been transformed mentally and physically by the trauma of the “white man’s” war. When the reader is introduced to Abel, he is stumbling off the bus that has brought him home to the Jemez Pueblo from WWII, drunk: “He was drunk, and he fell against his grandfather and did not know him. His wet lips hung loose and his eyes were half closed” (House, 9). This passage bears a striking resemblance to an earlier passage in which Abel’s grandfather, Francisco, retrieves a dead bird from a trap: “A sparrow hung from the reed. It was upside down and its wings were partly open and the feathers at the back of head lay spread in a tiny ruff. The eyes were neither open nor closed” (House, 6). The description of the bird’s eyes being “neither open nor closed” like Abel’s, suggests that like the bird, Abel has been caught in a trap. The trap, of course, is being drafted, severed from his community and sent into an alien world of chaos and destruction that has left him mentally and physically ill. Like Tayo, he suffers from PTSD and memory loss: “Everything in advance of his going-he could remember whole and in detail. It was the recent past, the intervention of days and years without meaning of awful calm and collision, time always immediate and confused, that he could not put together in his mind” (House, 23). The only memory that he has is waking up on a wooded hill that is covered with “damp, matted leaves....there were men about, the bodies of men; he could barely see them strewn among the pits, their limbs sprawling away into the litter of leaves...” ( House, 23-24).

Like Tayo, Abel has protected himself from the anxiety and fear of traumatic memories by forgetting everything up to the point of waking up on the wooded hill.

Just as Tayo returns from WWII without a voice, Abel returns without a voice. The loss of his voice is tragic according to Momaday: "One of the tragic things about Abel, as I think of him, is his inability to express himself. He is in some ways a man without a voice, .... I think of him as having been removed from oral tradition" (Evers, 21). Abel's inability to re-integrate into his native community after returning from WWII is because he has no voice. "He had tried in the days that followed to speak to his grandfather, but he could not say the things he wanted; he had tried to pray, to sing, to enter into the old rhythm of the tongue, but he was no longer attuned to it...Had he been able to say anything of his own language-even the commonplace formula of greeting "Where are you going"- which had no being beyond sound, no visible substance, would once again have shown him whole to himself; but he was dumb. Not dumb-silence was the older and better part of custom still-but inarticulate" (House, 58). Abel wants to re-integrate, to become a part of the world that he left behind when he was drafted, but he is unable to because he cannot remember how to articulate the words of his people, the prayers that rise from and connect him to the Sacred landscape. He stood above the Valle Grande gazing at the valley below; he saw "a great pool of the sunlit sky, and red and purple hills... and he began to feel at peace. He wanted to make a song out of the colored canyon, the way the women of Torreon make songs upon their looms out of colored yarn, but he had not got the right words together. It would have been a creation song; he would have sung lowly of the first world, of fire and flood, and of the emergence of dawn from the hills" (House, 59). His desire to sing a creation song foreshadows Abel's emergence. The novel concludes with Abel running at



sunrise in the sacred landscape of Jemez and “under his breath he began to sing...House made of pollen, house made of dawn” (House, 212), a creation song. As he runs, the song rises within him, suggesting that as this song of emergence rises, connecting him to the Sacred Landscape, he is healed.

Just as Silko’s opening scene echoes the Navajo story of emergence, the opening scene in *House Made of Dawn* suggests that Abel’s journey is one of emergence. The reed trap that Tayo’s grandfather, Francisco, inspects on his way to pick up Tayo from the bus that is bringing him home from the war, echoes the Navajo emergence journey. The Reed plays an important role in the Navajo creation story. Male Reed enables the first beings to ascend from the third world into the fourth world. As the third world is flooding because of something that Coyote has done, the first beings try to escape to the fourth world by climbing a tree. The tree cannot reach that far, so they blow on Male Reed and He grows to reach the sky. Woodpecker drills out the hard heart and they climb through Him to the fourth world, escaping the great flood. Abel’s journey, like their journey through Male Reed, “is a journey from chaos to order, from disharmony to harmony” (Evers,1). Moreover, Momaday’s title *House Made of Dawn*, is the first line of the prayer that is used to heal Abel. This prayer originated in the Navajo story of emergence.

## **Alienation from Family and Community**

Though Tayo is alienated from himself because of PTSD, his feelings of alienation, of not belonging anywhere, have deeper roots, roots that go back to his childhood. When Tayo was a little boy, his mother, abandoned him, leaving him with her sister, whom Tayo calls Auntie, and Josiah, Auntie's brother. Tayo remembers the night his mother took him to Aunties: "He was wrapped in a man's coat-it smelled like a man-and there were men in the car with them: and she held him all the way, kept him bundled tight and close to her, and he had dozed and listened, half dreaming to their laughter and the sound of a cork squeaking in and out of a bottle. He could not remember if she had fed him, but when they got to Laguna that night, he wasn't hungry and he refused the bread Uncle Josiah offered him. He clung to her because when she left him, he knew she would be gone for a long time. She kissed him on the forehead with whisky breath, and then pushed him gently into Josiah's arms as she backed out the door" (Ceremony, 61). Tayo's mother was a casualty of the witchery's manipulation, lost and confused, finally dying of alcoholism, the disease of despair, a fate that Tayo could easily have succumbed to had he not sought the help of medicine men. That night was the last time Tayo saw his mother. Tayo longed for his mother, longed to know her and be loved by her. He longed to belong somewhere.

His feelings of not belonging anywhere are intensified by Auntie who rejects him because he is a half-breed. Tayo does not know his father who is white or maybe Mexican; his mother went with many men. Auntie does not want him because in her eyes, he brings shame

to the family. Her rejection is rooted in racial bias. Many members of Tayo's community view those who are not full-blooded Puebloans suspiciously, through a lens of racial discrimination in a futile attempt to maintain racial purity out of fear that cultural practices will be lost if they don't. Tayo is the "other," existing on the edge between two worlds, never fully belonging to his Pueblo community nor the white man's world. His Auntie, swayed by racial bias and concern for her family's reputation, goes out of her way to maintain distance between her son, Rocky, a pure-breed, and Tayo: "When she was alone with the boys, she kept Rocky close to her; while she kneaded the bread, she gave Rocky little pieces of dough to play with; while careful that Rocky did not share these things with Tayo, that they kept a distance between themselves and him. But 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 (Ceremony, 61-62). Auntie's negative perception of Tayo because he is a half-breed and her deliberate actions to make him feel excluded intensify Tayo's feelings of abandonment, of "not belonging." Overcoming the lie that he does "not belong" to the Pueblo community because he is a half-breed is a huge hurdle that Tayo must overcome. Like the hunter, whose true-identity is stolen by the witchery of Coyote, Auntie has stolen Tayo's identity and "struck him with Coyote's dry skin," giving him a false identity, that of a "half-breed" of being an outsider who does not belong in the Pueblo world.

It is not just his Auntie who rejects him because he is of mixed blood, he also is rejected by members of his community. While he is at a bar drinking with other WWII vets, one of them, Emo, a man that Tayo has grown up with, begins picking on him because he is of mixed-blood: "There he is. He thinks he's something all right. Because he's part white. Don't you, half-breed?"

Tayo knew Emo meant what he said: Emo had hated him since the time they had been in grade school together, and the only reason for this hate was that Tayo was part white. But Tayo was used to it by now. Since he could remember, he had known Auntie's shame for what his mother had done, and Auntie's shame for him" (Ceremony, 52-53). Tayo has grown up feeling alienated from the community. PTSD is just another layer of alienation; he has always been an outsider. This begs the question that Silko asked herself as a half-breed growing up in Laguna: "Where do those who are racially mixed belong?" How is identity created when you are "the other" and feel as if you belong nowhere? When you are rejected by the dominant culture, the whites, and your own Pueblo community, how is your identity created? This is Tayo's quest. Like the hunter in the myth whose identity was stolen by Coyote, Tayo's identity was not only stolen by mental illness, by PTSD, but also by those who view him through a racist lens, casting the racially charged identity of "half-breed" upon him which, like the dry skin of Coyote, has concealed his true identity. Tayo's emergence ceremony involves unraveling this negative identity created by racial bias, set in motion by the manipulation of witchery that seeks to divide and destroy.

Like Tayo, Abel's feelings of loss and alienation began when he was a young boy. Abel's mother and brother died when he was a very young boy and, like Tayo, Abel did not know who his father was: "His father was a Navajo, they said, or a Sia, or and Isleta, an outsider anyway, which made him and his mother and Vidal, his brother, somehow foreign and strange" (House, 11). On the Jemez Pueblo, like Laguna, mixed breeds are viewed through the lens of racial discrimination, perpetuating the myth that culture is preserved by maintaining racial purity. So, from a very young age, Abel felt like an outsider, as if he did not fully belong to his

community. Ironically, Abel is the descendent of outsiders, the Bahkyush people, who long ago, having been nearly exterminated by the encroachment of white men, wandered on the “edge of oblivion” (House,16). These people, homeless, infected with small-pox and given to despair were accepted into the Jemez community. The Eagle Watchers Society, an important society on the Jemez Pueblo, are the descendants of these people. “In their uttermost peril long ago, the Bahkyush had been fashioned into seers and soothsayers. They had acquired a tragic sense, which gave to them as a race so much dignity and bearing. They were medicine men; they were rainmakers and eagle hunters” (House, 16). There are striking similarities between these people and Abel, for like his ancestors, he wonders along the “edge of oblivion” seeking to belong somewhere and like the Bahkyush, the conclusion of Abel’s journey suggests that he finds his way back to belonging.

Unlike Tayo, who returns to Laguna after the war and remains there, Abel gets in trouble and is sent to prison and then to Los Angeles by the Relocation Program where he experiences rejection by the dominant white culture, intensifying his feelings of alienation. The relocation people find him a job at a factory and on his first day, he is assigned to work on the assembly line with a Navajo, Benally. At lunch time, Benally is careful to steer clear of the other workers because he wants to protect Abel from their racist comments: “They’re always calling you chief and talking about firewater and everything. I don’t mind, but I didn’t know how he would take it. I was afraid it might hurt his feelings or something. He was used to it, though, because he had been in the army, and in prison, too, but I didn’t know that then.” (House, 152)

In the years after WWII, racial bias towards Native Americans was prevalent in the white community despite-the-fact that Native Americans fought in WWII and were an asset to the

war effort. Though Abel is a good worker, the foreman is unable to see that Abel is an asset to the assembly line. Viewing him through a racist lens, he sees only an “Indian” and he rides him hard. Abel, unable to take the constant harassment, finally quits. As he walks out the door, the foreman says: “those damned no good greasers” (House, 162). This marks the beginning of Abel’s downward spiral. After this, he stays drunk all the time and can’t hold a job. As his friend, Benally says: “If they had just left him alone” (House, 161).

By “they” Benally is referring not only to the white people, but to members of the Native American community, those, who like Tayo’s Auntie, believe that success is measured by one’s ability to become like the dominant white culture. One night when Abel was not around, Tohsamah, the Road Man for the Native American Church that Abel attends, tries to persuade Benally not to associate with Abel. Tosamah says to Benally: “They gave him every advantage. They gave him a pair of shoes and told him to go to school. They deloused him and gave him a lot of free haircuts and let him fight on their side. But was he grateful? Hell, no, man. He was too damn dumb to be civilized” (House, 148). Civilized? Tosamah, who is not from the reservation and has been educated in the white man’s schools, who is fully immersed in the dominant cultures’ values, does not understand what Abel is going through, what it is like to have spent the better part of your life on a Pueblo, a world that moves at a slower pace in rhythm with nature, whose calendar is the position of the sun and whose people live in close connection with the Earth Mother. In LA, Abel is lost, alienated from the dominant culture and from the Native American community, those who have assimilated. Benally explains how it is to be from the reservation, transplanted in LA: “Everything is different, and you don’t know how to get used to it. You see the way it is, how everything is going on without you, and you

start to worry about it. You wonder how you can get yourself into the swing of it, you know? And you don't know how; but you've got to do it, because you can see how good it is. It's better than anything you've ever had; it's money and clothes and having plans and going some place fast. You can see what it's like, but you don't know how to get into it' there's too much of it an it's all around you and you can't get hold of it because it's going on too fast"(House, 158). It is a world so foreign to Abel that he is not able to survive in it. The alienation that he experiences from the dominant culture as well as from the Native American community intensifies his feelings helplessness.

There is a scene which expresses Abel's feelings of helplessness: Abel has been severely beaten by a corrupt cop, and is lying on a beach, where small fish have hurled themselves upon the shore to spawn: "They are the most helpless creatures on the face of the earth. Fishermen, lovers, passers-by catch them up in their bare hands" (House 89). Like the fish lying on the beach, out of their element, helpless and vulnerable, Abel is out of his element, helpless and vulnerable, far from his Pueblo home: "He had lost his place. He had been long ago been at the center, had known where he was, had lost his way, had wandered to the end of the earth, was even now reeling on the edge of the void. The sea reached and leaned, licked after him and withdrew, falling off forever in the abyss... (House, 104). Like his ancestors, the Bahkyush, "who long ago made that journey along the edge of oblivion," (House, 16) Abel has journeyed to the "edge of oblivion." Lying by the sea, Abel is falling into "the abyss."

## Separation from the Sacred Earth

“They will grow away from the earth/then they grow away from the sun/ then they grow away from the plants and animals. / They see no life/ when they look/ they see only objects. / The world is a dead thing for them/ the trees and rivers are not alive/ the mountains and stones are not alive. / The deer and bear are objects/ they see not life” (Ceremony, 125).

Alienation from themselves and from their communities has left Tayo and Abel “wondering on the edge of oblivion,” but the human community is only part of the community from which they have become alienated. Tayo and Abel have become alienated from the Sacred Earth. Reconnecting with community which includes the Sacred Earth and Her regenerative power is a crucial aspect of their healing and the re-creation of their identity. Silko says that “race does not determine identity; it is determined by one’s connection to community (Weaver, 215). Weaver writes: “Community is central to Silko’s vision. Tayo must reconnect to community in order to survive...Yet this community, includes not simply human beings, or even the wider community, but the earth itself” (Weaver, 217). Silko writes: “The ancient Pueblo people called the Earth the Mother Creator of all things in this world (Weaver 218). Seen through the Pueblo lens, the Earth is perceived as a “being” as opposed to a “non-being” When Tayo and Abel experience the regenerative power of the Sacred Mother, the emptiness of loss is replaced with belonging, healing them and restoring their identity.



Tayo's Uncle, Josiah, shares a story with Tayo when he is young, explaining the intimate relationship between the people and the land. They are at a spring in a canyon getting water, and Josiah tells Tayo: "This is where we come from, see. This sand, this stone, these trees, the vines, all the wildflowers. This earth keeps us going" (Ceremony, 42). This passage conveys the maternal, life-giving characteristics of the Earth which gives birth to all living things and continues to care for Her children. There is a beautiful passage in the Navajo story of emergence which expresses the Earth's maternal nature. When the Earth, referred to as Changing Woman (because Her seasons change) gave birth to the elk and buffalo: "Her hips widened, and her breasts grew large. The elk and buffalo multiplied..." Though Tayo is not separated from his home and made to live elsewhere as Abel is, Tayo experiences alienation from the Mother Creator, having been influenced by the schools he went to that were run by white people, schools that planted seeds of doubt in the truth of his culture's stories. Tayo was taught that the stories are fiction. He knows the stories describing the intimate connection between the Sacred Earth and his people, however, knowing and experiencing are two different things. Tayo's healing quest takes him on a journey in which he experiences the love of the Sacred Spirit, the Spirit emanating from the landscape of the southwest. He enters a relationship with Her. His Uncle Josiah planted the seeds of knowledge about the Pueblo people's relationship with the Earth when Tayo was young, and luckily, Tayo remembers the stories. Now, those seeds will grow into the fullness of understanding as he embarks upon his healing quest, a journey that leads him into the loving arms of "Changing Woman," the Sacred Earth, a relationship that heals him and enables him to re-construct his identity.

Abel has also become alienated from the Sacred Earth. In Los Angeles “He had lost his sense of place. He had been long ago been at the center, had known where he was, had lost his way, had wandered to the end of the earth, was even now reeling on the edge of the void. The sea reached and leaned, licked after him and withdrew, falling off forever in the abyss...” (House, 104). He has lost his “sense of place” and it is “place” the sacred landscape of his home on the Jemez Pueblo and the cultural practices associated with it where Abel knew where and who he was. It is on the Jemez Pueblo where “people have little need and do not hanker after progress, continuing to live the way they have for thousands of years,” (House, 197-198) where Abel knew a “sense of place.” There, people live in harmony with the Sacred Earth; they move slowly in rhythm with the seasons, telling time by the movement of the sun across the black mesa. Each day the sun rises from a different point on the mesa, “standing still for the solstice, then moving slowly southward across the rim of the mesa to the lee and back again, marking the days and years and events of the town”(House, 197). Abel’s grandfather told him that he must know the long journey of the sun and live according to its’ movement along the black mesa “for only then could he reckon where he was, where all things were in time. There, at the rounder knoll, it was time to plant corn: and there, where the highest plane fell away, that was the day of the rooster race...and there, and there, and there, the secret dances, every four days of fasting in the kiva, the moon good for hoeing and the time for harvest...and all the proper days of the clans and societies; and just there at the saddle, where the sky was lower and brighter than elsewhere on the high black land, the clearing of the ditches in advance of the spring rains and the long race of the black men at dawn” (House, 198). On the pueblo, one’s life is aligned with the movement of the sun; it is lived in harmony with the natural rhythm of

the seasons. It is a gentle life, a life intimately connected to the Mother Creator, of receiving Her gifts and in turn, respecting and caring for Her. The Sacred Mother is a vital and honored elder of the community. When Francisco finished teaching Tayo and his brother about the journey of the sun, “he took them to the fields and they cut open the earth and touched the corn and ate sweet melons in the sun” (House, 198).

From the peaceful world of the Jemez Pueblo, Abel is transplanted into a world of chaos and destruction on a scale never-before-seen, where nuclear weapons are used for the first time. As the bus left to take him away to the war, “he felt the surge of motion and the violent shudder of the whole machine on the gravel road. The motion and the sound seized upon him. Then, suddenly he was overcome with a desperate loneliness, and he wanted to cry out. He looked toward the fields, but a low rise of the land lay before them. The town had settled away into the earth” (House, 105). The imagery used to describe the movement of the bus is disturbing imagery, a contrast to the tranquility of life lived in harmony with the Earth. It is symbolic of an industrialized society, a world “growing away from the Earth” (Ceremony, 125), driven by a desire for possessions and power “It’s money and clothes and having plans and going someplace fast” (House, 158). It is a world out-of-balance, a world of killing and destruction. Contrary to how Abel was raised, the Earth is seen as an object, a commodity to be exploited for material gain, from which to extract uranium to create atomic bombs, poisoning rivers and creating drought. When Abel looks back, it is too late. He is caught like the bird in his grandfather’s trap. He is severed from the Mother Creator and transplanted into hell.

## Initiation

“It was almost nothing in itself, the smallest seed of sound-but it took hold of the darkness and there was light; it took hold of the stillness and there was motion forever; it took hold of the silence and there was sound. It was almost nothing-in-itself, a single sound, a word-a word broken off at the darkest center of the night and let go in the awful void, forever and forever. And it was almost nothing-in-itself. It scarcely was; but it was, and everything began” (House,91).

Just as the world was spoken into being by the power of the word, Tayo and Abel are spoken into being by words chanted in Navajo healing ceremonies, words “broken off at the darkest center of the night and let go in the awful void...and everything began” (House, 91). Sacred chants initiate Tayo and Abel’s emergence, setting in motion a journey in which their identity is reconstructed. The words of the chants tell the mythological story of emergence. The myth that is chanted and the accompanying ritual enacts mythology as if for the first time” (Bell, 24). Tayo and Abel, having become fully identified with the protagonists of the myth, like the protagonists, are brought back from the “edge of oblivion.” Their quest to re-create their identity is initiated.

The four Sacred Mountains that mark the boundaries of the Navajo world tell the story of emergence, of the long journey through many worlds to at last become the Sacred Mountains of this world. After almost being destroyed in the third world by a great flood, they were re-created with the help of the Holy People with soil retrieved from the third world. Eventually the Holy People went to live in the mountains, where they reside today. Just as the Sacred Mountains' were re-created after the destruction of the third world by the great flood, Tayo and Abel's identities are re-created with the help of the Holy People who are invoked during healing ceremonies.

Seeking healing, Tayo goes to a medicine man, Betonie, who reveals the cause of Tayo's illness – the manipulation of witchery that seeks to divide and destroy. Tayo's alienation from himself, his family and community which includes the Sacred Earth are all manifestations of "witchery." When Tayo was in the Philippine jungle, he was ordered to execute a line of Japanese soldiers, but he could not because when he looked at them, he saw his uncle Josiah. His cousin Rocky tried to convince him that it was not Josiah, attributing his vision to jungle fever; however, Betonie explains that it was Josiah. Betonie tells Tayo that "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 saw the witchery raging as wide as this world" (Ceremony, 114-115). Long ago humankind was one. Now, after thirty thousand years of change, humankind is still one community, but humankind is not perceived that way by most people. The "witchery" has sought to divide humankind into opposing binaries: white man verses Native American verses Japanese and so on, setting in motion racial biases that promote division. Tayo's exclusion from his community and Auntie's rejection is all the work of

“witchery.” Moreover, the “witchery” has alienated man from the Mother Creator by creating the illusion that the Sacred Earth is a “non-being” an object to be exploited for material gain. And it is witchery that has created the atomic bomb, threatening humankind with total-destruction. It is witchery that has stolen Tayo’s identity and rendered him helpless, mentally ill, haunted by memories of the dead in the Philippine jungle. The ceremony that Betonie performs seeks to remove the evil from Tayo, the mental illness caused by witchery.

The ceremony that Betonie performs, the Coyote Transformation Prototype Ceremony from “The Myth of Red Antway, Male Evilway,” re-enacts the mythological story of the hunter whose identity is stolen by Coyote. The chant that is sung and the objects used in the ritual, replicate the ritual that was performed in the original ceremony of the emergence myth. The participants in the ceremony represent the mythological victims, heroes, and healers of the prototype ceremony: “Time, the strictly linear progress of history, dissolves; the line between the present world and a supernatural world of the past narrows...Tayo, Betonie, and Shush (Betonie’s assistant) are supernatural actors in a mythological drama. ...Tayo’s role is symbolized by the young hunter in the Coyote Transformation Myth, and old Betonie becomes one of the ‘elders who belong to the Bear People at the summit of a place called Dark Mountain’” (Bell, 30-31). According to the myth, when the missing hunter, whose identity has been stolen by Cayote, is found, Bear Elders belonging to the Bear People, living in Dark Mountain, are summoned to come and perform a ceremony to return the hunter to his former identity. Reenacting the ceremony exactly as it was performed in the prototype ceremony, Betonie and Shush place hoops in the ground, spacing them apart. Shush paints black bear paw prints which will lead Tayo through the hoops as Betonie sings the chant telling the story of the

hunter's return: "Following my footprints/ walk home /following/my footprints /Come home, happily /return belonging to your home /return to long /life and happiness again return to long life and happiness" (Ceremony,133). As Tayo passes through the hoops, evil, the skin that Coyote has cast onto Tayo, is removed. Tayo walks home, back to harmony, back to his former identity.

Silko has faithfully replicated the healing ceremony as told by the Son of the Late Tall Deshchini, recorded and Translated by Father Berare Haile (1933-1934): "The hoops were then lined up at a distance from the Hogan and the end farthest from the hoops, a dark mountain range was placed. The next range this side of it was blue, the next range this way was yellow, and the next range white. Beyond the dark mountain range, coming from its rear, bear tracks were set in black, resting their feet side by side, because he was to stand on these. On this side of them their paws were placed in blue. Next their footprints again were placed in yellow, and next to these paws again in white." Tayo's journey through the hoops, replicates the Navajo emergence journey, a journey that begins in the black world, and continues through the blue, yellow, and white worlds respectively, into the fifth world, this world.

Tayo is brought back because "Singing it, saying so, according to Native American ways of perceiving time and space, often makes it so: "saying a thing was true made it true." (Bell, 31). Words have the power to bring into manifestation that which is spoken. Tayo's emergence journey is initiated by the power of words sung in the ceremonial chant, words invoking the Holy People who help Tayo just as they helped the hunter in the prototype ceremony, just as

they helped to recreate the Sacred Mountains: “A word let go in the awful void...and everything began” (House, 91).

The ceremonies that have been used to heal since the Dine first emerged continue to heal, but as Betonie tells Tayo when he completes *The Coyote Transformation Ritual*: “One night or nine nights won’t do it any more...the ceremony isn’t finished yet. Betonie’s ritual heals Tayo of PTSD, “The Scalp Ceremony lay to rest the Japanese souls in the green humid jungles, and it satisfied the female giant who fed on the dreams of warriors, but there was something else now” (Ceremony, 156); however, Tayo’s ceremony was not finished: “When he passed through the last hoop/ It wasn’t finished/ ....The rainbows returned him to his/ Home, but it wasn’t over/ All kinds of evil were still on him” (Ceremony, 136). The ceremony had cured him of PTSD, but in-order-for him to be completely healed, he needed to become re-integrated with the Sacred Earth. Betonie draws in the dirt and says to Tayo “Remember these stars...I’ve seen them and I’ve seen the spotted cattle; I’ve seen a mountain and I’ve seen a woman” (Ceremony, 141) Betonie is describing the completion of Tayo’s ceremony, the quest that Tayo is about to embark upon to recover the stolen cattle that will lead him to Mount Tse-pi’na, a Sacred Mountain, where he will experience an intimate encounter with the regenerative spirit of the Sacred Earth, Ts’eh, with whom he establishes an intimate relationship, a relationship that is instrumental in his healing.



Just as Tayo's emergence journey is set in motion by the words of a Navajo healing ceremony, Abel is brought back from the "edge of oblivion" and restored to wholeness by words sung in a Navajo healing ceremony. Though Momaday does not include the details of the healing ceremony as Silko does, he does incorporate a powerful ceremonial prayer into his novel *The Night Chant* that is sung in healing ceremonies by Navajo medicine men to restore inner harmony and harmony between the patient and the community which includes the Sacred Earth.

This prayer, which Benally sings over Abel on his last night in LA, initiates Abel's emergence journey. Though done informally, without the objects of ritual, the powerful words of this prayer set Abel's emergence journey in motion, his journey home. He is brought back from the edge of the void, where like the spawning fish, helpless and vulnerable in a foreign world he wondered, lost and confused. He is restored by the power of sacred words that bring into manifestation that which is spoken, and Tayo, like the characters of myth by whom these words were first spoken, crosses into a realm of timelessness, in which the illusion that separates past and present dissolves, and the words are spoken as if for the first time, restoring balance and harmony to Tayo. His story does not end as just another drunk Indian living in poverty on the streets of LA. No, his story does not end there. The sacred stories, the sacred prayers remain and have the power to restore the lost, the hurting, the broken, those almost lost forever by witchery. He is sung back into being by the sacred words of the Nightway Chant, back to the path of pollen, the path of peace, back to connection with the power of the Mother

Creator, whose regenerative power restores Abel, mentally, physically, and spiritually, enabling him to re-construct his Native American identity. Abel is sung back to the path of beauty: “As it used to be long ago, may I walk./ May it be beautiful before me, /May it be beautiful behind me,/ May it be beautiful below me, / May it be beautiful above me./ In beauty it is finished” (House, 147).

## Re-integration

### Re-connecting to the Sacred Earth

“Within and around the earth, within and around the hills, within and around the mountains, your authority returns to you.”

For the Pueblo people, one’s identity arises from “place,” from the Sacred Landscape, a world woven by stories, stories that inform identity. These stories cannot be separated from the landscape. “There is a story connected with every place and every object in the landscape” (Silko, *From a Pueblo Indian Perspective*). The Sacred Landscape tells the story of emergence. This story informs every aspect of life, and most importantly, it informs identity. Silko writes: “The origin story constructs our identity-within this story, we know who we are. We are the Lagunas. This is where we come from. We came this way. We came by this place...When one asks who we are, or where we are from, we immediately know: ... We are the people of these stories” (Silko, *From a Pueblo Perspective*). When Tayo returns from the war, he goes to the spring in the Canyon where his Uncle Josiah had taken him when he was a young boy and where his uncle had told him the stories of their people: “Everywhere Tayo looked, he saw a world made of stories, the long ago, time immemorial stories, as old Grandma called them” (Ceremony, 88). Knowing the stories of the oral tradition enables Abel and Tayo to heal and reconstruct their identity.

Tayo and Abel's emergence journey can be thought of as a "remembering, a putting together of past, present, and future into a coherent fabric of timeless identity" (Owens, 91). "Remembering" the sacred life-giving stories passed down orally guides the protagonists back from the "edge of oblivion" and enables them re-construct their Native American identity. Leslie Silko recalls what the old people say about stories in her essay, *Language and literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective*: "If you can remember the stories, you will be all right, just remember the stories." Silko begins *Ceremony* with these words:

"I will tell you something about stories,

[he said]

They aren't just entertainment.

Don't be fooled.

They are all we have, you see,

All we have to fight off illness and death."

When Tayo returns from the war, he goes to the spring in the Canyon where his Uncle Josiah had taken him when he was a young boy, where his uncle had told him the stories of their people: "Everywhere Tayo looked, he saw a world made of stories, the long ago, time immemorial stories, as old Grandma called them" (*Ceremony*, 88). Among the stories that he recalls is the story of how his people are intimately connected to the Sacred Earth. Now, as his healing ceremony continues toward completion, he will experience the intimate connection with the Sacred Earth, and it will change his life.

The night after Betonie's ritual was completed, Tayo sleeps and dreams of the quest that he is about to embark upon. It is a quest to recover the spotted cattle that were stolen from his Uncle Josiah by white ranchers. These cattle, like Tayo, are mixed breeds. Tayo's quest to recover them is symbolic of his quest to recover his Native American Identity which has also been stolen. In his dream, he runs towards Pa'to'ch Butte, one of the many physical manifestations of Ts'eh, the Sacred Spirit of the southwestern landscape, the woman whom Betonie saw in his vision. The woman to whom Tayo is running in his dream, Ts'eh, the Spirit of the Sacred Earth, foreshadows his re-integration with the Sacred Spirit of the southwestern landscape, the Spirit that heals Tayo.

Ts' eh has captured the imagination of literary critics and much has been written about her, detailing her identity. The character, Ts' eh, embodies the characteristics of the Sacred Earth; She is the manifestation of the Sacred Spirit of the Southwestern landscape. Tayo meets her at the base of the Sacred Mountain, Tsepina, a mountain bordering the northern region of Tayo's world. Tsepina is associated with the- color- blue and rain: "There were blue-bellied clouds hanging low over the mountain peaks, and he could hear thunder faintly in the distance" (Ceremony, 204). When he meets Ts'eh, she is wrapped in a blanket with which associates her with the mountain: "a design woven across the blanket in four colors: patterns of storm clouds in white and gray; black lightning scattered through brown wind" (Ceremony, 165). Sitting in Her Hogan, Tayo, watches her arrange blue, gray, and yellow stones, colors associated with Sacred Landmarks in the southwestern landscape. Mount Tsepina is associated with the color blue, and Pa'to'ch Butte, where he will meet Ts'eh again is associated with (yellow and gray): "Pa'to'ch was standing high and clear; mothers and years had no relation to the colors of gray

slate and yellow sandstone circling it”(Ceremony,214). Ts’eh’s Hogan resonates with the Sacred Landscape: “Along the south wall, tall orange sunflowers were still blooming among dry corn stalks: the wind of the night before has twisted the sunflowers around the brittle corn stalks, so that in the early morning light the dried-up corn plants were bearing big orange sunflowers that dusted the hard-packed earth beneath them with orange pollen” (Ceremony, 170). Here again, the imagery echoes the sacred landscape, the orange sandstone of Pa’to’ch Butte in the South. Also, the pollen is symbolic of fertility, another characteristic of the Sacred Spirit of the Earth, Ts’eh. Finally, Ts’eh says her name is a nick name for her real name, which is hard to pronounce, suggesting that her real name is Ts’its’ nako, Thought-Women, Spider Woman, the Sacred Spirit who is believed by the Pueblo to have thought the world into existence. Ts’eh is present throughout the novel, in different geographical locations, assuming various manifestations, which lends itself to the idea that she is not the spirit of a specific landmark in the landscape, but the spirit that encompasses all of the southwestern landscape, the spirit of the Sacred Earth.

When Tayo meets her in the south, he meets her by a spring, again associating Her with water and with emergence; a spring is water emerging from the Earth. It was by a spring where Tayo’s Uncle Josiah told him the stories of the Sacred Mother and how his people came from her and are sustained by her. Those seeds which were planted long ago are now blossoming into the fullness of understanding as Tayo initiates an intimate relationship with Her. Their love making paints a picture of the natural landscape: “He eased himself deeper within her and felt the warmth close around him like river sand, softly giving way under foot, then closing firmly around the ankle in cloudy warm water” (Ceremony, 168). Silko has created a character that is

the manifestation of the Sacred Earth. By doing this, the reader is able to grasp the intimacy of the connection that is being created between Tayo and the Sacred Landscape reinforcing the idea that the Sacred Earth is a “being” as opposed to a “nonbeing.” Tayo has moved from knowing the stories about Her to experiencing Her, deeply, and this intimate connection is restoring him.

The morning after making love to Her, he is a different person: the regenerative power of the Sacred Earth is healing him, enabling him to complete his ceremony. Tayo awakens at dawn and as he exits Ts’eh’s Hogan, he is smiling for the time in the novel and feeling good about being alive, a dramatic contrast from the Tayo that we were introduced to at the onset of the novel: “He smiled. Being alive was all right then: he had not breathed like that for a long time” (Ceremony, 168) “He watched the dawn spreading across the sky like yellow wings. The mare jingles 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 across the southeast horizon, the sound gathered intensity from the swelling colors of dawn. And at- the- moment the sun came over the edge of the horizon, they suddenly appeared on the riverbank, the Ka’t’sina (a deified ancestral spirit in the mythology of Pueblo Indians) approaching the river crossing” (Ceremony, 169). This passage paints a picture of emergence, the birth of a new day, echoing Tayo’s emergence. He prays for the first time in the novel: “Sunrise! / We come at sunrise/ to greet you/ at sunrise. / Father of the clouds/ you are

beautiful/ at sunrise. /Sunrise" (Ceremony, 168,169)! Tayo remembers the stories and prayers of his culture, prayers that are inseparable from the landscape, stories that inform Tayo's identity. Tayo is emerging from the manipulation of the witchery that had seized him and held him captive. Restored by Ts'eh's regenerative power, now Tayo is ready to venture up into Mount Tsepina to recover the stolen cattle.

Just prior to meeting Ts'eh and ascending Mount Tsepina in search of the stolen cattle, Silko inserts the mythological story of Sun Man's quest to find storm clouds stolen by the Gambler. For three years, the storm clouds were missing. One day, Sun Man went to search for them. With the supernatural help of Spiderwoman, Sun Man was able to retrieve them. He cut out the Gambler's eyes and threw them into the south sky, and they became the horizon stars of autumn. He opened the doors of the four rooms where the clouds were held captive and called to them: 'My children...Come home again. Your mother, the earth is crying for you. Come home, children, come home" (Ceremony 157-163). This story resonates with Tayo's quest. With the help of Ts'eh, the manifestation of Spider Woman, Tayo is embarking on a quest to recover what has been stolen, the cattle which is symbolic of recovering his identity. The cattle and Tayo are going home. The spirit of the Sacred Spirit is calling her children to come home. She is calling Tayo to come home, back into Her loving arms. When Tayo meets Ts'eh, the autumn stars that Betonie foresaw are scattered upon the horizon, echoing this myth, the myth that he is living and the completion of his ceremony: the re-integration with the Sacred Mother by whose power he is restored.



On Mount Tsepina, Tayo finds the cattle confined within an elaborate fence on land that white ranchers own, a fence to keep the “Mexicans and Indians out; a thousand dollars a mile to lock the mountain in steel wire, to make the land theirs” (Ceremony, 174) and to keep the stolen cattle in, to keep the cattle from wondering, from trying to run away and return to their home in the south. The fence is symbolic of division, the work of witchery that seeks to divide and destroy. Cutting through the fence proves to be quite challenging; it is a fence made of “heavy-gauge steel mesh with three strands of barbed wire across the top...Tayo has to stop and shake the muscle cramps from his hands” (Ceremony 176,177) as he cuts. The difficulty that he has cutting through this fence is symbolic of the difficult challenge that Tayo has faced in overcoming the manipulation of witchery which seeks to divide by creating boundaries, the boundaries that have separated him from his community which includes the earth. As he cuts, it’s as if he is “cutting away at the lie inside himself, the lie that Tayo entertained for a moment, that white people didn’t take the cattle, it must have been a mistake, only Mexicans and Indians steal” (Ceremony, 177). He is cutting away at the lie that perpetuates the myth that humanity is not one family, the lie that divides humankind by the color of their skin, creating racial bias that sets the “starving against the fat, the white against the black... The destroyers had only to set it into motion, and sit back to count the casualties” (Ceremony, 178), the lie that Tayo is not part of the Pueblo community because he is of mixed blood, the lie that his Sacred Mother is an object to be exploited for material gain and to harvest uranium to make the atomic bomb. Tayo’s cutting of the fence is symbolic of the gradual removal of the “coyote skin that has been cast upon him.” Continuing his ceremony, he works on the fence beneath the Autumn stars, the stars of the Gambler’s eyes symbolic of Sun Man’s victory and Abel’s victory.

At last, he finds the cattle, and follows them on his horse as they run southeast in the direction of their home in Mexico, in the direction of the opening in the fence. As Tayo watches them run towards their freedom, he feels his own freedom emerging, freedom from the coyote skin, “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” (Ceremony, 184). The destructive power of the witchery is unraveling; Tayo is emerging. Tayo, like the cattle, is going home.

The Sacred Mother is calling to Tayo, calling him to come home, back into her loving arms. As the cattle are running through the opening in the fence, Tayo falls from his horse into his Sacred Mother’s arms. “He was aware of the center beneath him...The magnetism of the center spread over him smoothly like rainwater down his neck and shoulder...It was pulling him back, close to the earth...a returning rather than a separation...Lying above the center that pulled him down closer felt more familiar to him than any embrace he could remember...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 (Ceremony, 187). Here again, we see Tayo reconnecting to the Earth, experiencing Her embrace as he lay upon Her. He is returning, the strands of the web, torn apart by witchery are being re-connected. The boundaries created by evil are dissolving: the clouds are going home, the cattle are going home, and Tayo is going home, back into the loving arms of the Sacred Earth, back to belonging. Tayo is being healed.

Just as Tayo returns to the Sacred Mother, Abel returns to the Jemez Pueblo, to the Sacred Landscape from which he had been severed; he returns to where he last felt a sense of place, of belonging. As he sits in the small, dark room of the pueblo, listening to his grandfather's dying words, it's as if he had never left, as if all of the intervening days between his going and the present did not exist: "The room enclosed him, as it always had, as if the small dark interior, in which this voice and other voices rose and remained forever at the walls, were all of infinity that he had ever known. It was the room in which he was born, in which his mother and his brother died. Just then, and for moments and hours and days, he had no memory of being outside of it" (House,196). The stories of his people resonate within these walls, stories that that remain forever, ancient voices that rise in memory like the dawn. Abel has come home.

In the darkness of the small room of his grandfather's pueblo, Abel listens to his grandfather's words but can not make sense of what is he is saying for Abel is ill, suffering from the disease of despair: "His mind was borne upon the dying words, but they carried him nowhere. His own sickness had settled into despair" (House, 195). As he tends his grandfather and the fire that is going out, the stories that his grandfather had told him long ago emerge, stories about the movement of the sun across the black mesa and how he must know the sun's journey in order to know his place in the world: "He must know the long journey of the sun on the black mesa, how it rode in the seasons and the years, and he must live according to the sun appearing , for only then could he reckon where he was, where all things were, in time...and just there at the saddle, where the sky was lower and brighter than elsewhere on the high black land...the long race of the black men at dawn"(House,197). Abel remembers the stories,

stories that connect him to the Sacred Landscape, stories that inform his identity and affirm his place in the world.

He remembers watching and listening to runners at sunrise: “a hundred men running, two hundred, three, not fast, but running easily and forever, the one sound of a hundred men running... as the sun took hold of the valley, and a breeze rose out of the shadows and the long black line of the eastern mesa backed away” (House, 206). This race, the Race of the Dead, takes place in February and is the first race of the year. It is the race that Abel runs at the conclusion of the novel. Momaday explains the significance of the race in his essay *The Art of Indian Hating*: “It is a long race, and it is neither won nor lost. It is an expression of the soul in the ancient terms of sheer physical exertion. To watch those runners is to know that they draw with every step some elementary power which resides at the core of earth and which, for all our civilized way, is lost upon us who have lost the art of going in the flow of things” (Evers, 12). This race is not a race that one wins or loses, that is not its’ purpose. It is a race in which one becomes part of the natural rhythm of the Sacred Earth and draws strength from that intimate connection. The race is symbolic of life lived in harmony with the Earth and the Sun. It is not the race of the dominant culture that races to win, to succeed, to accumulate material possessions... This race is a race to become one with the natural world; it encapsulates the manner- in- which life is lived on the Jemez Pueblo. When Abel takes part in the race, he is stepping back into the rhythm of his culture; He is returning to the Sacred Earth.

Before dawn, on the morning of his grandfather’s death, Abel prepares his grandfather for his journey according to Pueblo custom; this is the first time in the novel that he participates

in his cultures' customs. He dresses his grandfather in ceremonial colors, places corn and meal beside his body, sprinkles pollen in the four directions, and wraps the body in a blanket. After delivering the body to the town's priest for burial, he walks southward, along the edge of the town, covers his body with ashes from an outdoor oven, and proceeds far out on the road, where he awaits the dawn. It is February 28, the day of the Race of the Dead, and Abel waits with all the other runners for the sun, waits for the sun to rise in the saddle of the black mesa: "the void began to deepen and to change: pumice, and pearl, and mother-pearl-, and the pale and brilliant blush of orange and of rose. And then the deep hanging rim ran with fire, and the sudden cold flare of the dawn struck upon the arc, and the runners sprang away" (House, 211). This is a scene of emergence. As the sun rises and Abel runs, the "elemental power emanating from the Earth's core" begins to restore him. He runs beyond his pain, "He was running and there was no reason to run but the running itself and the land and the dawn appearing...All of his being was concentrated in the sheer motion of running on, and he was past caring about the pain. Pure exhaustion laid hold of his mind, and he could see at last without having the think. He could see the canyon and the mountains and the sky. He could see the rain and the river and the fields beyond. He could see the dark hill at dawn" (House, 211, 212). Abel stopped thinking. No longer lost in tangled thoughts, he could see the Sacred Landscape, he could feel the restorative power of the Earth rising within him: "He was running, and under his breath he began to sing. There was no sound, and he had no voice; he had only the words of a song. And he went running on the rise of the song. House made of pollen, house make of dawn" (House, 212). Like the sun, the words of the prayer that Benally sang over Abel, a creation song, echoed by the Sacred Landscape are rising within Abel's spirit, restoring him. Abel's voice is

emerging; Abel's identity is emerging. Abel is emerging from the illness of despair. He is returning to the path of beauty. In beauty, it will be finished.

Abel's successful reintegration into his native community which includes the Earth is implied by the final scene; however, in Ceremony, there is no question about Tayo's reintegration into the Laguna community. Tayo, is restored by the love of the Sacred Mother with whom he has become intimately connected: "Their days together had a gravity emanating from the mesas and arroyos, and it replaced the rhythm that had been interrupted so long ago; now, the old memories were less than the constriction of a single throat muscle. She was with him again, a heartbeat unbroken where time subsided into dawn, and the sunset gave way to the stars, wheeling across the night. The breaking and crushing were gone, and the love pushed inside his chest, and when he cried now, it was because she loved him so much (Ceremony, 211). Tayo has been healed by the power of the Sacred Mother, the spirit of creation which emanates from the Sacred Landscape, from the "mesas and arroyos," and from the mountains and springs, from all the natural world. Once again Tayo's heart beats with that of the Sacred Mother, "one heartbeat" that encompasses all of creation. The fragile strands of the web are restored. From this relationship, Tayo's identity emerges. He knows where comes from and by whom he is sustained. Tayo has come home.

Tayo's Identity is not formed in a vacuum but emerges from his relationship not only with the Earth but to the people in his community. Now, Tayo, the questing hero of myth, has something to share with others. He is invited into the Kiva, the sacred center of Pueblo culture, to share his story of renewal, of restoration, a story of hope. Once on the margins of his

community, lost and confused, now he steps into his role as storyteller, teacher. His story is added to the story that began when the world was thought into being and will continue to end of the age and into the next. The skin of coyote has been removed and Tayo has emerged: "They unraveled/the dead skin/Coyote threw/on him. /They cut it up/bundle by bundle. Every evil/which entangled him/Was cut/To pieces ... The witchery is dead for now." (Ceremony, 240-243). Tayo has come home.

## Conclusion

Just as the Sacred Mountains were re-created with soil taken from the third world, Tayo and Abel's identities have emerged from the rich soil of remembered stories, stories of a Sacred Mother's love for her children, stories that inform identity. After almost being destroyed by the spirit of division and destruction: WWII, racial bias alienating them from their communities and separation from their Sacred Mother, the boundaries that created separation are dissolving. Coyotes' skin is removed; Tayo and Abel's identities are emerging. The delicate strands of the web are being mended, healing not only Tayo and Abel, but the communities in which they serve a vital role. Their story of emergence has now become part of a larger story, a story that began when the world was created. It is a story of destruction and emergence that continues forever cycling like rings of water spreading outward from the source assuming new names with each successive generation, a story that will continue to be told for ages to come. It is a story of hope, the antidote for the "disease of despair."



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## **Navajo Night Chant**

## The Night Chant

House made of pollen,

House made of grasshoppers,

Dark cloud is at the door.

The trail out of it is dark cloud.

The zigzag lightning stands high upon it.

Male deity!

Your offering I make.

I have prepared a smoke for you.

Restore my feet for me,

Restore my legs for me,

Restore my body for me,

Restore my mind for me.

This very day take out your spell for me.

Your spell remove for me.

You have taken it away from me;

Far off it has gone.

Happily I recover.

Happily my interior becomes cool.

Happily I go forth.

My interior feeling cool, may I walk.

No longer sore, may I walk.

Impervious to pain, may I walk.

With lively feelings, may I walk  
As it used to be long age, may I walk.

Happily may I walk.



