CHAPTER IV

*Ceremony*

*Ceremony* is the quintessential American Indian text — the *ur*-text. It captures the soul of the tribe -- not only the Laguna Pueblo tribe, but all tribes combined. Silko seeks to revive the Pueblo storytelling practice of the oral tradition. Reading *Ceremony*, one finds himself/herself troubled by issues like genre, gender, ethnicity and above all, the question of identity and ideology. Since I intend to examine the mythic and ceremonial practices within the parameters of renewal through ritual, I shall explore how myths and ceremonies impinge upon such loaded concepts like genre, gender and ethnicity. A non-Indian reader is likely to be nonplussed by the way poetry/songs intersperse throughout the text, indeed they form the core of the formal rhetoric of the text. No other American Indian writer had dared to interweave such diverse forms into fiction. Such a pluriform discourse, which embraces a commingling of the different chords narrative voices that make for orality of American Indians. Silko's *Ceremony* combines, what Ong would call secondary orality but it is secondary orality with a difference. While Ong envisaged the dawn of secondary orality, he had in mind "the orality of telephones, radio, and television"(3) in electronic age. Silko performs this creative magic in this novel which has the resonance of secondary orality...
within the framework of a "choreographic (i.e. writing) culture" (2). In this framework past, present and the future illuminate each other.

Louis Owens says "Ceremony is a remembering, a putting together of past, present and future into a coherent fabric of timeless identity" (167). While Owen's observation fits into a critical framework that I seek to adopt, I will explore the areas that he has barely touched upon in his critical treatment of the novel. The Chapter will address many contentious issues: the identity of the "liminally displaced mixed bloods (166), the ideology of assimilation, and memory and the questions genre and gender. Silko's politics of representation conforms to the motif that recurs in the fictions of the other novelists I examine in my dissertation, but her poetics is uniquely her own.

Myths and ceremonies are central to Silko's poetics. In my earlier chapter, I have shown how in Welch's hands myths have undergone a semantic motion, While Welch adopts the diaphoric mode (which is very near to being metaphoric), Silko, as far as possible, avoids the metaphorical frame work. As Owens says "mythology in Ceremony insists upon its actual simultaneity with an interpretation into the events of everyday, mundane world. Holy
persons are not metaphors used to imply a holistic system of ecological values in this novel, they are simply part of the reality into which Tayo is subsumed" (168). Owen underscores the mythic consciousness in Silko's poetics. "Tayo's actions and experiences have 'socio/cultural' significance only within the context of his mythic role, while history is shown to be the product of mythic consciousness and have no meaning outside this consciousness" (168). Tayo's experiences are no dissimilar to the experiences of a culture hero. Perhaps the most striking feature of her poetics is Silko's skilful handling of non-linear and poly-vocal narration. To make it more complex, Silko experiments with the pluriform discourse in the novel.

Michael Hobbs looks upon Tayo as a "Radical Reader" in so far as he liberates himself from the "powerful dominance of various authoritative discourses" (302). I would like to argue that the pluriform discourse permits resistance from the readers. But it is a resistance in the positive sense, in the sense that it contributes to the formation of an interactive text. Ceremony, I hold is a classic case of interactive text in the whole gamut of Native American fiction.
Bakhtin, in his "Discourse in the Novel", expresses certain ideas that I think fits into this context:

The importance of struggling with another's discourse, its influence in the history of an individual coming to ideological consciousness, is enormous. One's own discourse and one's own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other's discourse. This process is made more complex by the fact that a variety of alien voices enter into the struggle for influence within an individual's consciousness (just as they struggle with one another in surrounding social reality). (348)

Storytelling in *Ceremony* is a ceremonial act. Bakhtin's idea of stimulation and resistance in discourse formation can be best illustrated from Silko's text. Inasmuch as it is a ceremonial act, the narration warrants participation of the narratees. Indeed, Silko, having had firsthand experience of such participation, dramatizes the experience in a book. Silko says:
The way I experienced storytelling as a young child, I sensed that people—the person you know or I loved, your grandma or uncle or neighbor—as they were telling you a story, you could watch them, and you could see that they were concentrating very intently on something. What I thought they were concentrating on was they were trying to put themselves in that place and dramatize it. So I guess as I wrote these words, Ts' its' tsi' natio, Thought-woman and the spider, I did not exactly mean in the serve of the Muse, at least as I understand the muse with a capital "M".

Telling stories, (there are so many stories within stories) in *Ceremony*, is a sacred act, a performance that emulates the curative function of chanting. The medicine men of yore performed such feats to cure people. Silko seeks to be a medicine woman in the guise of a storyteller. Thus, she achieves two daring acts--gendering the figure of the storyteller and the "medicine man". She acknowledged it in an interview given to Prof. Coltelli. She says:

[W]omen hold such an important position. [...]Women remembering, listening, hearing the things that are said and done. There is no prohibition against a woman repeating a
funny storm that's basically about the copulation of say, two Coyotes, any more than a man. (139)

A liminally displaced mixedblood herself, Silko assumes the role of a Shaman of sorts in *Ceremony*. This is in keeping with the traditional ceremonial mode of narration. But she is by no means embracing a feminist stance. All she does to make new spaces for cultural identity, which has hitherto been a male preserve.

Her politics of representation however, does not exclude men. In fact, in *Ceremony* men play a predominant role in the acts of representation. In Silko's narrative mode one does not notice the oppositional interplay between men and women. In her fiction, it must be admitted, women get their due importance. Silko's dynamics of narration emphasizes the native lore but it is not entirely opposed to accepting certain features of Anglo-American allegorical representations. Her textual politics aims at an overhaul of the narrative and ceremonial practices. Creative survival rather than technical innovation is her priority. But since his novel is a text of culture, Silko has to make certain innovations in the frames of narration. In the process, ceremony becomes "a hybrid literary form, a novel in which Pueblo oral traditions and western literary
forms and narratives are juxtaposed and intercut as part of a complex process of mutual transformation" (Jamir 397).

Operating between the polarities of red and white, Silko's fiction dramatizes the trauma and tension, the dialectical experience, the anxiety of mutual influence, and the confluence of cultures. Her fiction does not, however, engage any kind of racial conflict, rather here double vision offers a live possibility for a vibrant symbiotic cultural ambience where the mixedbloods like Tayo, the protagonist of Ceremony can live in America as if the whole nation were an extended family. Ceremony is a unique text in that it encompasses a whole range of issues, issues like cultural identity, gender, tradition and modernity, the poetics/politics of marginality, and above all, a text that resonates polyphonic discourse, the heteroglossia--so much prized by Bakhtin.

The text is built upon the myths and ceremonies that are central to native American life. Silko realizes that in the contemporary situation, artists, writers and the men who control the sacred life in a secular world cannot afford to be hidebound. The built-in orthodoxy needs to be broken in order to establish new alignments. This is nowhere more evident than in the text itself as when Betonie, who conducts the
radical transformations that take place in the psyche of the protagonist says:

You see, in many ways, the ceremonies have always been changing.[...] At one time, the ceremonies as they had been performed were enough for the way the world was then. But after the white people came, elements in this world began to shift, and it became necessary to create new ceremonies. I have made changes in the rituals. The people mistrust this greatly, but only this growth keeps the ceremonies strong. (132-133)

Rituals and the ceremonies narrated in the text sometimes conform to, at other times deviate from the original ceremonial practices. I shall examine how such changes help establish the cultural identity of the mixedboids like Tayo and Silko herself. In this context David L. Moore says, Silko's broadly popular novel, Ceremony treats the concern for cultural and subjective survival though a mythopoeic stream of consciousness, drawing on the tradition of Laguna storytelling to enter the experiences of both persons and mythic powers to make them mutual participants. (371)
Basing upon the postcolonial praxis, Moore points out two important elements in his analysis of myth and identity in *Ceremony*. These two key elements are subjectivity and agency. As he goes on to describe these two vital issues, he says:

Because the theoretical discussion of subjectivity, on the one hand, modernists, after Descartes and Kant have tended to respond to these two event issues with a claim to self-constructed identity and existential agency, in an isolated and heroic model of individuality, and Freud, on the other hand, have tended to respond to these questions with the claim of a socially constructed nexus of identification and extensions, in a model which may either frantically mourn or radically celebrate the end of individuality.

While modernists struggle for a resurrection of the authorial voice in the original text, postmodernists announce the death and burial of the author in the text of culture. (373)

Silko's handling of the survival strategy adopted by the mixedbloods in today's America. In this context, Foucault's idea of visibility, which suggests "cultural and institutional tunnel vision" (374),
offers insightful clues to the study of the dynamics of visibility in *Ceremony*. John Rajchman observes: "Foucault's hypothesis was that there exists a sort of 'positive unconscious' of vision which determines not what is seen, but what can be seen. [...] A period only lets some things be seen and not others" (374).

I would argue that Foucauldian art of "seeing" can have political and aesthetic ramifications. Politically speaking, it points towards the uneven power relations between the white and the red and aesthetically it points to what such seeing and re-seeing can do to the psyche of the person concerned.

The psyche of the protagonist in *Ceremony* seeks integration. Such integration is possible if he realigns himself with the cultural space of his community. He must build a new cultural imaginary. This he can do only by making visible which has hitherto remained invisible. As he participates in the ceremony he develops "new ways of seeing'. This is a moment when seeing becomes re-seeing. I call it re-seeing because it is merely an act of localizing his intimate nostalgia. This is possible through a re-orchestration and relocation of the cultural space.
Poetics and politics coalesce in the text when such a moment comes. The moment is a culmination of a grand strategy. As she fuses her politics of representation and the poetics of cultural memory, Silko takes care to show how Tayo's misremembering is corrected when the ceremony activates in him the process of re­remembering. Bella Brodzki's observations on cultural memory are somewhat similar to the process I have hinted at. She says:

[Cultural translation is an act of] the transferring of a text from one signifying form to another, the transporting of text from one historical context to another, and the tracking of the migration of meanings from one cultural space to another. [...] [This leans on] processes of intergenerational [...] transmission, conceived as acts of translation, on how the value of money or 'remembrance as an instrument of historical consciousness is inscribed in a culture as the conditions and modes of transmission are –inevitably altered. (208)

The brunt of my argument is that Silko, in *Ceremony* fashions a text that translates the native lore and contextualizes it to suit the needs of the culturally deracinated contemporaries. It must be stated that
much of the native lore is untranslatable. Hence, her translation is not so much a transcription as an interpretation of the oral tradition. Her text thus, embodies the inassimilable elements of the oral tradition. True, she may not be as effective a storyteller as her ancestral voices were, but her vision remains unmistakably Native American. I would argue that in years to come, *Ceremony* would perform the same curative function to its Native American readers as it does to the half-demented hero of the narrative. It would therefore, act as a palimpsest, a sacred icon, the locus of the mythic and ceremonial practices of the Native Indians.

In this daring feat of textualization of memory, Silko reconstructs certain rituals and ceremonies that are the warp and woof of her story-weaving. Indeed, sandpainting in *Ceremony*, the centerpiece of the novel is a remembrance, a recall of the Navajo ceremony. Valerie Harvey makes certain pertinent observations here:

A Navajo medicine man, after many years of apprenticeship and training from the elder medicine men of his tribe and his helpers, shared in the making of the sand painting. Since there was no written language down from
past generations in Navajo culture, the knowledge concerning the traditional rites, cures, symbols, and ceremony of sandpainting is handed down through oral tradition. The making of a sand painting, therefore, is done very carefully and precisely from the memory and knowledge of an experienced medicine man; and when completed, possesses its own language which can only be read, understood and interpreted by those versed in the various myths and symbols. There is also a traditional system and exact order followed in the preparation, performance, and disposal of materials of each sandpainting ritual. This ceremonial procedure is always done under the guidance of the medicine man. (256)

Before I relate the Foucauldian dynamics of visibility to the centerpiece of the narrative I would elaborate the art of sand painting further. Drawing on the study made by Miguel Covarrubias, Harold Driver offers certain essential details of sandpainting, which elucidates the art further:

Sand paintings were part of the sacred altars in the Kiowas, and were executed on the floor in front of the fetishes and
wall paintings associated with the altars. Sand or ochre of various colors, corn pollen, pulverized flower petals and pulverized green leaves were employed as dry pigments in "painting" the religious symbols. Handfuls of dry material were carefully sprinkled from between the thumb and forefinger to form the lined and solid figures of the painting. These figures were conventionalized representations of the sun, moon, stars, earth, mountain, lion, snake and kachina, or of something associated with spirits such as clouds, a cornfield, and the house of the sun or of a kachina. The purpose of these sand paintings was to influence the spirits to bring rain, plentiful crops, good health and other beneficial things to man. (Driver 185)

In the process of translating and contextualizing cultural memory, Silko emphasizes the importance of the ceremonial aspects of sand painting to the psyche of the protagonist. And in her story-weaving, it becomes the template of the storytelling mode.

Silko's politics of representation seeks to produce a coherent ideology that stands independent of political imperatives. This is an ideology that strikes a delicate balance between change and
impermanence, a symbiotic equation between the white and the native cultures. She favors change and adaptability to exclusionary stasis. Simon Ortiz makes certain pertinent observations in this regard. He says, "Ceremony is an exemplary text which incorporates 'foreign rituals, ideas and material in [...] Indian terms’" (qtd. in Owens 168).

Like Tayo, Silko possesses in the repertoire of unconscious the power of the spider woman, the storytelling grandma figure. As a writer, she assumes the responsibility of reconciling the claims of "white Science and Laguna tales" without privileging the one over the other. Michael Hobbs would attribute it to the creation of an "internally persuasive discourse". My contention, however, remains that such empowerment stems not form a persuasive discourse but a pluriform discourse which helps her successfully negotiate issues like identity, ideology and creative survival in the contemporary multicultural American.

In the following section, I seek to examine how Silko's narrative becomes the testing ground of the poetics and politics of her narration. The fulcrum of my argument, however, operates within the parameters of renewal through ritual in the mythic lore of the Native Americans.
The significance of *Ceremony* lies in the novelist’s conceptual organization and alternative visions. In this section I seek to offer a nuanced reading of the narrative -- the principal focus, however, will be on the mythic and ceremonial pattern, which is the mainstay of the text.

Silko's narrative technique is uniquely her own. If the novel reads like an experimental work, it is so not because of her deliberate intention to break the conventional narrative practices, but because of her felt need to make certain changes in the form of the narrative so that the genre could accommodate the richness and complexity of the mythic and ceremonial elements that are the essential components of native narration. In his study of the novel, Larsen locates the problem and attributes it to the attendant evils that followed world war-II, particularly in the lives of the Indians who were in the services. Larsen also points out how the novel falls in the line with of Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* and Welch's *Winter in the Blood*. My argument, however, would be that it is not so much the aftermath of war, not even the shell-shock as an overriding and pervasive malaise that defiled the sacred institutions,
particularly the ceremonial practices that have been perennially purifying. Hence, the text as the title suggests is about ritual cleaning.

There are flashbacks and flashforwards that intermittently punctuate the narration. Attempts to read the text as a post-modernist narrative, an ethno-centric treatise, a modern allegory of reservation life, only belittle the messianic spell of Silko's narration.

As we read the text, we are at once startled by Tayo's distorted vision but when we finish reading, we find that the distortion is corrected. He is prepared for a life full of sacred illuminations. We find Tayo tossing and turning in his old, iron bed, unable to sleep, he can only hallucinate, hallucinate so much that Japanese voices sound like Laguna voices culminating in a situation where he fails to make out the meaning of the words till "all the voices were drowned by the music -- loud music form a juke box, its flashing red and blue lights pull long the darkness closer" (6). Tayo's affliction is not as simple as war neurosis. There is a deep seated anguish, an anguish that is party physical, partly mental, partly metaphysical. But this is not entirely an existential despair, it
is more, of a spiritual stupor. Tayo, however, cannot break the stupor, nor does he have the capacity for metaphysical rebellion to overcome the anguish.

III

While myth and ceremony remain central to the narrative, they cannot be studied in isolation, for Silko's narrative strategy intertwines myth and ceremony with such significant issues like memory, identity and ideology. It is in this sense that myth and ceremony contribute to the formation of identity/ideology, memory being the palimpsest where the new cultural landscape is represented. As she sets out to narrate the new cultural landscape, she focuses on the chasm that divides antiquity and contemporaneity. As Castillo says:

This ontological disparity function in two ways; by highlighting the coalescence between the mythical and the profane worlds, it gives vividness and universality to the narrative, but at the same time it points out the gap between the extraordinary richness of Laguna mythology and the cultural impoverishment and alienation which characterize so much contemporary reservation life.

(292)
The impoverishment explains Tayo's distorted vision. He is unable to understand the happenings around him. For example his confusion and miscomprehension of the rains in the South Pacific Island can be attributed to his failure of alignment with his indigenous culture and the resultant collapse of indigenous cultural memory. Having forgotten all about his own powers as rainmaker, and also the red man's harmony with rain, he steadily curses rain and wishes it ceased for ever:

He damned the rain until the words were a chant, and he sang it while he crawled through the mud to find the corporal and get him up before the Japanese saw them. 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)

Tayo realizes the enormity of his crime only when the Laguna Pueblo is severely affected by drought. He even nurses a guilt complex. He remembers such drought-stricken days and the ceremonials associated with it. "The dry air shrank the wooden
staves of the barrels; they pulled loose and now the rusty steel hoops were scattered on the ground behind the corral in the crazy patterns of some flashy Kiowa hoop dancer at the Gallup Ceremonials" (10).

Hamilton Tyler's observations about hoop dancing describe the situation Tayo finds himself in. He says: "the place of the Pueblo in his cosmos might be compared to that of a hoop dancer in relation to his numerous hoops which he must keep circling around him" (Tyler qtd. in Owens 177).

Silko contextualizes it by bringing in the traditional myth of the disagreement between Reed Woman and Corn Woman. As the story goes finding Reed Woman bathing constantly, Corn Woman gets annoyed and drives her away. This leads to a terrible situation: there was no rain anymore. Interestingly, Silko presents the myth in the form of (for want of the right word I would call it) a myth poem. This is in keeping with the oral tradition:

It was summertime

and Iktoa'ak' 'o' ya- Reed Woman

was always taking a bath.

She spent all day long
Sitting in the river
splashing down
the summer rain.

But her sister
Corn Woman
worked hard all day
sweating in the sun
getting sore hands
in the corn field.
Corn Woman got tired of that
She got angry
she scolded
her sister
for bathing all day long.

Iktoa 'ak' 'o' ya-Reed Woman
went away then
she went back
to the original place
down below.

And there was no more rain then.
Everything dried up

corn

beans

they all dried up

and started blowing away

in the wind.

people and the animals

were thirsty

They were starving. (13-14)

Tayo's crime is a contemporary event, but Silko interfaces it with mythical time, thereby suggesting that the myth is significant even today. Tayo's crime is analogous to the Corn Woman's. His distorted vision is attributed to his failure of understanding the indigenous lore.
His present predicament is fallout of his gross indifference to native culture. This explains his mental state. As I have suggested earlier, there is a collapse of memory in this narrative. In Tayo's case the memory flimmers, flickers and fades like smoke: "It faded into the white world of their bed-sheets and walls, it was sucked away by the words of doctors who tried to talk to the invisible scattered smoke.[...] Their medicine drained memory out of his thin arms and replaced it with a twilight cloud behind his eyes"(14,15).

Critics have been quick to point out that Tayo's sickness is a neurotic disorder bordering on amnesia. I hold the view that his is a case of spiritual and cultural isolation and if he fails to connect things properly it is not due to amnesia -- It is an act of misremembering. On the surface of it, Tayo's malaise bears symptoms of "sickness unto death". But a close scrutiny would reveal that it is a case of metastasis of suffering. The suffering originates from his sense of dislocation, which remains unfocussed till Tayo is cured. I will now examine how this sense of dislocation affects him physically. Tayo has become "the carcass of a tiny rodent (15). When he gets desperate, he is advised to cry his suffering away.
He wanted to scream at the doctor then, but the words choked him and he coughed up his own tears and tasted their salt in his mouth. He smelled the disinfectant then, the urine and the vomit, and he gagged. He raised his head from the sink in the corner of the room; he gripped both sides and he looked up at the doctor.

(16)

His dislocation can be traced back to his childhood days when the teachers had taught him not to believe in the native cosmology, "but they had been wrong" (19). Anyone familiar with the cultural landscape and the cosmology of the Indians knows how it contributes to their mental makeup. Towards the end of the narrative, Tayo realizes that "his protection was there in the sky, in the position of the sun, in the pattern of the stars" (259). But this realization comes to him very late.

As I have stated earlier, Silko assumes the role of a medicine woman and thereby seeks to bring back native cosmology to the
Laguna Pueblo cultural landscape. Her cultural politics is geared towards presenting the past while it is unmistakably related to the present.

Tayo's present condition, his death-like pallid existence springs from a "lack", a gap that appears to be untraversable, he finds himself in a state of perpetual "deferral"-- his failure to apprehend the Pueblo's understanding of life-death fusion. Lincoln says that the Pueblo's regard " life and death interfused". By way of explication of this interfusion, he says, "Laguna Pueblos tie cotton over the head of the deceased so the spirit will return as a rain cloud".

Hamilton Tyler elaborates the idea when he says that in ceremonies "a perfect cycle is maintained, working back and forth between the two worlds, between the living and the dead. So that no one may be lost, and so that the dead will be remembered, the road must be kept open for them each year in this ceremony". (Tyler qtd. in Lincoln 235).
Thus in order to relate the past practices to the present situation, Silko subjects Tayo to a process of cultural re-creation. Tayo becomes the culture hero of the modern times. He is not a schizophrenic, as Lincoln would believe it, but he is one whose cultural consciousness is fractured. As I have been arguing throughout the chapter memory, ceremony, identity and ideology are inter-involved in this narrative. I would now proceed to show how memory—the collapse of it—necessitates a series of ceremonies that leads to Tayo's identity formation and consequently the formation of an ideology that gives a sense of substance and stability and helps him survive the ethnic tension inherent in a multicultural society like the U.S.

Alan R. Velie analyzes Tayo's ethnic tension as catatonic schizophrenia. Velie also complains that although Silko is familiar with the symptomatology of white medicine, she does not attribute Tayo's mental illness to any kind of psychiatric ailment. Both Velie's and Lincoln's observations lead us nowhere near the actual problem faced by the protagonist. His problem can be better understood if we analyze Tayo's hurtful feeling of displacement.
caused by the profound severing of his self from the cultural landscape. In this connection, I would like to bring in certain ideas of the neo-Lacanian, Slovak Zizek and twist them somewhat, to interpret the situation faced by Tayo. In his analysis of the fully acculturated subject, Zizek points out how he faces his "phantasmatic or spectral projection,...[a] Shadowy alienation" (Jarraway 252). Zizek would consider it to be the subject's double.

He is the subject's double who accompanies him like a shadow and gives body to a certain surplus, to what is "in the subject more than the subject himself"; this surplus represents what the subject must renounce, sacrifice even, the part in himself that the subject must murder in order to start to live as a "normal" member of the community.

\[ \text{(Zizek, Symptom 125)} \]

I hold that Tayo is possessed by a "spectral subject" and he can become normal only when he is exorcised. White medical practitioners who try to cure him fail to do so because they fail to diagnose the malady. Velie views it to be an illness, the cause of which is "witchery". In the text there are two persons who effect a cure-- Betonie with his ceremonial cure and Ts'eh with her sexual
healing. And there is a third person who helps Tayo re-educate himself. It is Josiah, his uncle who exhorts: ‘There are somethings worth more than money.[...] This is where we come from, see. This sand, this stone, these trees, these vines, all the wild flowers. The earth keeps us going’ (45). By way of explication he says: ‘The old people used to say that droughts happen when people forget, when people misbehave’ (46). I have already argued Tayo does not so much forget as he misremembers. And he misremembers because he suffers a psychic breakdown resulting from the break in the cultural continuum. In such a crucial moment, traditional myths and ceremonies offer the means of restoration and purification—nothing else does.

That Tayo curses the jungle rain is a mark of alienation, which engenders a strange self within himself. Distanced from his own self it is not until a ceremony is performed that he is able to relocate himself. The ceremony would correct the imbalance and thereby assimilate him to the cultural landscape. It would be a kind of rebirth for him. In this context I would bring in the observations of Zizek and Lacan and bring about an analogy to prove my point that Tayo is caught in a situation of tension between the self and the other. According to Zizek:
The integration of the subject's position into the field of the big other, the narrativization of his fate, becomes possible only when the subject is in a sense already dead, although still alive, when "the game is already over", in short: when the subject finds himself at the place baptized by Lacan "the in between-two-death". (Zizek 151; Lacan, *Ethics* 272)

While I subscribe to Lacan's idea of baptism, I qualify it by adding that such a baptism takes place in the narrative in the native American mythic mode.

Alongside the grand design of renewal through ritual, as it manifests itself in Tayo's baptism in his participation in the ceremony, Silko also offers Laguna myths of Arrowboy and the gambler as well as the Navajo myths of Coyote transformation and Cub boy, the myth of Earth Woman's flight and Humming birds quest to bring her back.

In the narrative, the myths punctuate at different crisis points. They are drawn on different sources but then they all contribute to the process of rebuilding the protagonist's shattered mythic consciousness. This is achieved as each myth triggers the memory of the central character. Even the anti-myths, those that relate the
witchery have a definite function in Silko's storytelling. Storytelling in her hands becomes a partial magic as it blurs the genre distinctions between performative orality and narrative literacy.

I now turn to the ceremonial aspects of the narrative. As I focus on the practices associated with different ceremonies, I emphasize that myth and ceremony are hardly distinguishable from each other. As I proceed with my argument, I would bring in the Foucauldian idea of "positive unconscious of vision"—how what is seeing points towards what can be seen. In my discussion of the ceremonial mode, especially when the protagonist experiences the effects of the ceremony, I would explore how the experiences can be explicated in Foucauldian terms.

Basic to the understanding of a Native American ceremony remains the question of land-person harmony. In this narrative, Silko reiterates the native American belief that land and woman are inseparably intertwined. In the narrative, as I have argued before, Silko is engaged in gendering certain ceremonial habits that have hitherto been analyzed in terms of the male principle. Here, she offers another alternative, a practice central to our understanding of
the native American cultural mode. Paula Gunn Allen, herself of Laguna descent, in her reading of the text says:

While *Ceremony* is ostensibly a tale about a man, Tayo, it is as much and more a tale of two forces. The feminine life force of the universe and the mechanistic death force of the witchery. And Ts'eh is the central character of the drama of this ancient battle as it is played out in contemporary times:

We are the land, and the land is mother to us all. There is not a symbol in the tale that is not in some way connected with woman-ness, that does not in some way relate back to Ts'eh and through her to the universal feminine principle of creation: Ts'its'tsi'nako, Thought Woman, Grandmother Spider, Old Spider Woman. All tales are born in the mind of Spider Woman, and all creation exists as a result of her naming. (233)

Tayo's healing is a process of his re-education of this land-person harmony. As Paula Gunn Allen believes his understanding of the harmony takes place in two ways. " in magical (mystical) and loving ways, that his being is within and outside him, that it includes his mother, Night Swan, Ts'eh, Josiah, the spotted cattle, winter, hope, love and the starry universe of Betonie's ceremony" (234).
Blurring the distinction between prayer and ceremony, woman and mountain spirit, Silko narrates Tayo's pledge and progress of love. As if to expiate for the sin committed, Tayo prays for rain:

He knew the holy men had their ways during the dry spells. People said they climbed the trails to the mountaintops to look west and southwest and to call the clouds and thunder. They studied night skies from the mountaintops and listened to the winds at dawn. When they come back down they would tell the people it was time to dance for rain. Josiah never told him much about praying, except that it should be something he felt inside himself. So that last summer, before the war, he got up before dawn and rode the bay mare south to the spring in the narrow canyon. The water oozed out from the dark orange sandstone at the base of the long mesa. He waited for the sun to come over the hills. He tied the mare to a juniper tree at the mouth of the canyon, and walked up the narrow trail, with the cliffs closer on both sides as he walked further into the canyon. The canyon was full of shadows when he reached the pool. He had picked flowers along the path, flowers with yellow long petals the color of the sunlight. He shook the pollen gently and sprinkled it over the water; he laid to blossoms beside the pool and waited. He
heard the water, flowing into the pool, drop by drop from the big crack in the side of the cliff. The things he did seemed right, as he imagined with his heart the rituals the cloud priests performed during a drought. Here the dust and heat began to recede, the short grass and stunted corn seemed distant. (94)

Forty-eight hours after the prayer the rain comes from the west. Now Tayo is ready to encounter Night Swan, a "mysterious and powerful woman who is also associated with Ts'eh the mountain spirit. Josiah sends him with a message "blue lined paper"(96). As he meets Night Swan, he finds the place she is living in exudes the aura of a ceremony:

The room smelled like the white clay the people used for whitewash. It was cool. The curtain at the back of the room drifted in a cool stream of oar form the window or door behind it. The music came from behind the curtain too; the songs were soft and slow, without voices. Outside the thunder sounded like giant boulders cracking loose from the high cliffs and crashing into narrow canyons. [...] He could feel something back there, something of her life, which he could not explain. The room pulsed with feeling, the feeling flowing with music and the breeze from
the curtains, feeling colored by the blue flowers painted in a border around the walls. He could feel it everywhere, even in the blue sheets that were stretched tightly across the bed.[...] She did not look old or young to him then; she was like the rain and the wind; age had no relation to her.

Here is the moment when Tayo realizes the essential harmony, the intimate relationship, the ineffable feeling of oneness between woman and nature—the oneness that activates in Foucauldian terms "positive unconscious of vision". But so far, the vision has been only partial, he hasn't yet seen what can be seen. In order that Tayo may experience what it feels to be having an intimate communication with nature/land /woman, Silko leads Tayo to a moment of self-actualization which comes through a sexual encounter with an extraordinary woman like Night Swan:

She whispered in Spanish and touched him gently, rubbing his back and neck first, then brushing his ear and neck with her lips. She pressed against his chest and belly, and he clenched himself tight until he felt warmth and softness of her legs and belly. Her sounds were gentle and the storm outside was loud. He could hear the rain rattling the roof and the sound of the old cottonwood tree
straining in the wind. He moved his mouth over her face and slowly opened his eyes; she was smiling. He felt her shiver, and when he held her closer, he realized he was shaking too. Something was coiling tight. She breathed harder and he breathed with the same rhythm. She slid beneath him then, like a cat squeezing under a gate. She moved under him, her rhythm merging into the sound of the wind shaking the rafters and the sound of the rain in the tree. And he was lost somewhere, deep beneath the surface of his own body and consciousness, swimming away from all his life before that hour.

(99)

The strange luminosity of the lines emphasize how the act sparked spiritual exhalations and thereby "sacrilizing", purifying and preparing him for the renewal through the ritual to be performed under the guidance of the Shaman figure, Betonie. Having been blessed with the love of Ts’eh through the body of Night Swan, he is inducted into the native cultural ethos.

Paula Gunn Allen analyses the encounter in Jungian light, She says:

Psychoanalytically, we might say 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. This Jungian interpretation of the process of Tayo's healing is accurate enough, through it misses an essential part of the story. Tayo's illness is connected to the larger world. The drought-stricken land is also ill, perhaps because the land has also repressed its anima. (Allen 236)

Allen's interpretation can be further buttressed through Lacan's reading of feminine sexuality. Lacan says' "woman is a symptom" of man (Lacan qtd. in Mellard 397). A neo-Lacanian, Zizek says, “man himself exists only through woman qua is symptom [...] his entire being lies 'out there', in woman” (qtd. in Mellard 397). Tayo's encounter with Night Swan “might be called a Harlequin moment, the moment [...] when lovers perceive each other, when each is ceased in the mirror of the other’s eyes” (Mellard 397-398). The reader finds such a moment in the text:

She sat with the sheets pulled around her and watched him get dressed ‘I have been watching you for a long time’, she said, ‘I saw the color of your eyes’.
Tayo did not look at her 'Mexican eyes', he said, 'the other kids used to tease me'. [...] 'I always wished I had dark eyes like other people'. [...] She was looking at him intently, and he felt uncomfortable. [...] 'You don't have to understand what is happening. But remember his day. You will recognize it later. You are part of it now'.

The peak experience described here suggests that Tayo is partially, if not fully integrated into the native American mode of life. This integration in so far as it is incomplete, Tayo's "desire/drive" for harmony in the communal life remains tauntingly unfulfilled.

My analysis of Tayo's congress with Night Swan needs to be qualified. A woman through whom man realizes himself and identity in the Lacanian/neo-Lacanian framework is often a femme fatale. I have given a sharp twist by ascribing genuinely womanly qualities to the figure of Night Swan who as we have seen is only a medium through which the spiritual aspects of a woman are transferred. Thus, I differ from the views of the Lacanians and the neo-Lacanians by not treating her as a femme fatale. Through the extraordinary experience, Tayo embraces an identity, which has so
far eluded his grasp. Significantly, the event also prepares him to unwind the entanglement to the source. This is evident in the following description in the text:

He sat down on the upstairs porch with his back against the adobe wall and closed his eyes. In a world of crickets and wind and cottonwood tress he was almost alive again, he was visible. The queen waves of dead faces and the screams of the dying that had echoed in his head were buried. The sickness had raced into a shadow behind him, something he saw only out of the corners of his eyes, over his shoulders.

The place felt good; he leaned back against the wall until its surface pushed against his backbone solidly. He picked up a fragment of fallen plaster and drew dusty white stripes across the backs of his hands, the way ceremonial dancers sometimes did, except they used white clay, and not old plaster. It was soothing to rub the dust over his hands, he rubbed it carefully across his light brown skin, the stark white gypsum dust making a spotted pattern, and then he knew why it was done by the dancers; it connected then to the earth. (104)
The passage also emphasizes Tayo's restoration of memory. But the cycle of restoration will not be complete till he participates in the ceremony with Betonie's guidance. When Tayo asks Betonie if there are Indian ceremonies that can act as a safe buffer against the sense of insecurity coming out of war, bombs and the attendant evils in the white man's world, Betonie offers him a simple but meaningful piece of advice. Betonie's utterances touch upon the practice of witchcraft. The practitioners lead the American Indians to believe that "all evil resides within the white people" (132). In what I would term as a paradigm shift in the American Indian ideology, Betonie impresses upon Tayo that it is dangerous to isolate themselves from the whites, for that would mean their own destruction. Tayo says: "[White] people are only tools that the witchery manipulates, and I tell you, we can deal with white people, with their machines and their beliefs. We can because we invented white people; it was Indian witchery that made white people in the first place" (132).

Silko's stance has been that of an interpreter who mediates between two cultures. As I suggested early in the chapter, she seeks to bridge the gap between orality and literacy, between American Indian worldview and the Anglo-American worldview. It's true that she is more inclined towards the native belief as when she privileges
mythic over the historical consciousness, ritual and cyclic interpretation of reality over the linear view, communication between man and the world over conversation between man and man, but she knows it only too well that the Native Americans cannot live in isolation. Thus, her cultural politics favours confluence of cultures and not their conflict; and she fashions her texts accordingly. Her text permits change as she says, ‘There are balances and harmonies always shifting, always necessary to maintain. [...] It is a matter of transition, you see; the changing, the becoming must be cared for closely. He would do as much for the seedlings as they become plants’” (130). This is further illustrated in perhaps the lengthiest of the poems in the text, which may be taken as Silko’s reconstruction of the Origin Myth:

Long time ago

in the beginning

there were no white people in this world

there was nothing European.

And this world might have gone on like that

except for one thing:
witchery.

This world was already complete

even without white people.

There was everything

including witchery.

Then it happened.

These witch people got together.

Some came from far far away

cross oceans

cross mountains.

Some had slanty eyes

others had black skin.

They all got together for a contest

the way people have baseball tournaments nowadays

except this was a contest
in dark things. [...]

They fear

They fear the world.

They destroy what they fear.

They fear themselves. (133-35)

Silko feels that real witchery is the racial conflict and she also believes that the whites too have much to learn from the Natives. But she knows that it will take "a long time and many more stories like this" (150), before the whites and the natives establish harmony between them. Here, Silko acquaints the readers with the witchery of creature who can be called a trickster figure -- a figure who is neither male nor female:

Finally there was only one

who hadn't shown off charms or powers.

The witch stood in the shadows beyond the fire

and no one ever knew where this witch came from
which tribe

or if it was a woman or a man.

But the important thing was

this witch did not show off any dark thunder charcoals

or red ant-hill beads.

This one just told them to listen:

"What I have is a story".

At first they all laughed

but this witch said

Okay

go ahead

laugh if you want to

but as I tell the story

it will begin to happen. (134-35)

While the trickster does not reveal itself in any gendered form, Silko's narrative is built upon the female principle -- the creative principle. The three
figures who recurringly appear at crucial moments in the novel are Ts'eh, the Spider Woman and the Thought Woman. It is quite possible that the three indeed are one. When Tayo wins the love of Ts'eh, he is re-born, re-located and restored to his own self. Through an intense physical encounter with Ts'eh, he feels a sense of release. As Silko would say it: “Being alive was alright then: he had not breathed like that for a long time” (181).

Ceremonies in American Indian sense are meant to have a sacred function. If Ts'eh is regarded as the Mountain Spirit, his ceremonial/sexual interaction with her has a sacred function, and the act should be viewed as a ceremonial act. True, there is no discernible moment of epiphany but the experience induces him into the prayer of sunrise. The prayer is central to the novel, central to the psychic ordering of Tayo and central to the sacred life of the Native American community. I would, therefore, call it a moment of self-realization. The words which come to him now, can be regarded as a act of re-remembering:

Sunrise!

We come at sunrise
to greet you.
We call you

at sunrise.

Father of the clouds

you are beautiful

at sunrise.

Sunrise!

The prayer has two functions: personally it is a moment of attainment, attainment of his selfhood: socially it is a moment of recognition when he integrates himself with the community at large.

It also makes him feel a part of the cosmic whole: as if she were an interpreter of the ceremony, Silko, in this multi-form discourse makes the authorial presence felt when she comments in the following manner:

He repeated the words as he remembered them, not sure if they were the right ones, but feeling they were right, feeling the instant
of the dawn was an event which in a single moment gathered all the winds -- celebrating this coming. The power of each day spilled over the hills in great silence. Sunrise. He ended the prayer with "sunrise" because he knew the Dawn people began and ended all their words with "sunrise".

Paula Gunn Allen believes that "locating events within the ritual context that supports them, [Silko] relies on accretive structuring to build toward comprehensive significance in her novel, as do traditional storytellers" (Sacred Hoop 95). The songs, stories within stories, speeches, prayers all contribute to the "accretive structuring" and thereby, creating a sense of polyphony and making the discourse pluriform. Silko's aim obviously is to create a culturally inflected heteroglossia, the ceremonies in Ceremony are a "telling", meant to be consumed not only by the Native Americans but by all. It can be said that the text promotes inter-cultural communication, which is one of the key elements of her politics of representation. Every reader-- native or white becomes a co-participant in this interactive text.

A mixed-blood herself, Silko in her narrative engages the White - Indian anti-nominian position and seeks to resolve it through the
constructions of a new belief system. While she aims at fostering inter-ethnic amity, she does not hesitate to construct a myth of witchery to "dramatize the colonial antinomies of North American history and culture, in which power driven witches feed on and manipulate the destructive oppositions between Indian and white" (Moore 376).

In the climactic scene of *Ceremony*, perhaps the bloodiest of all, which takes place in a disused uranium mine where Harley is tortured by Emo, Leroy, and Pinkie, Tayo passes through an illuminating moment -- he understands everything including the bane of witchery and the resultant confusion including his own experiences in the war. It is all presented in the context of the apocalypse of the atomic explosion:

He had been so close to it, caught up in it for so long that its simplicity struck him deep inside his chest: Trinity Site, where they exploded the first atomic bomb, was only three hundred miles to the southeast, at White Sands. And the top-secret laboratories where had been created were deep in the Jemez Mountains, on land the Government took from Cochiti Pueblo: Los Alamos, only a hundred miles northeast of him now, still surrounded by high electric fences and the ponderosa pine tawny
sandroek of the Jemez Mountain canyon where the shrine of the
twin mountain lions had always been. 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; united by a circle of
death that devoured people in cities twelve thousand miles away,
victims who had never known these mesas, who had never seen the
delicate colors of the rocks which boiled up their slaughter.

(245-246)

Having explained the destructive power of atom bomb, Silko presents Tayo
going deep into the mountains along with Betonie and his helper. Quite in
keeping with the spirit of her framed narration, Silko introduces yet another
story of how a man turned a coyote and again was brought back to the would
of his own people. At the end of this story, Tayo is shown as a participant in
the sand painting ceremony:
He sat in the corner of the white corn sand painting. The rainbows crossed were in the painting behind him. Betonie's helper scrapped the sand away and buried the bottoms of the hoops in little trenches so that they were standing up and spaced apart,... The old man painted a dark mountain range beside the farthest hoop,... he painted blue, and moving toward him and he knelt and made the yellow mountains, and in front of him Betonie painted the white mountain range. [...] Betonie gave him a basket with prayer sticks to hold. [...] He stood up and walked the Tayo; he reached down for the prayer sticks and spoke the words distinctly, pressing the sticks close to his heart. The old man came forward then and cut Tayo across the top of his head; it happened suddenly. He hadn't expected it, but the dark flint was sharp and the cut was short. [...] Betonie prayed him through each of the five hoops. [...] Tayo could feel the blood ooze along his scalp, he could feel rivulets in his hair. [...] Behind him he heard the sound of wood and brush being broken into kindling. He smelt a fire. They gave him Indian tea to drink and old Betonie told him to sleep. He dreamed about the speckled cattle. [...] [Betonie] motioned for Tayo to sit down. He sat down next to him and reached into his shirt pocket for the tobacco and the wheat papers. He rolled a thin cigarette looking
down at his hands, still gazing up at the east sky. He lit it and took little puffs without inhaling the smoke. (141-145)

The ritual of sand painting is of great significance. The protagonist achieves self-renewal through the ritual. He dreams of a spotted cattle and later it is realized when he actually finds them. Tayo's search for the spotted cattle is also psychologically significant. The myth behind the cattle is the ancient belief that they [the cattle] would help people survive during the period of drought. Thus, the dream and its realization later also contributes to his self-renewal.

Early in the chapter, I have argued that Tayo's confusion of Japanese voices with the Laguna voices is not hallucinatory in nature. The paragraph quoted above proves my point. It is therefore, the collapse of memory and not any psychic/mental disorder that leads to the confusion. It is only after his participation in the ritual that Tayo is able to see things in the proper perspective.

_Ceremony_ is perhaps the supreme example of Silko's craftsmanship, it is the quintessential American Indian text built upon the central myth of the Thought Woman. She uses a number of myths and ceremonies -- they appear at different points of narration, sometimes as flashbacks sometimes as flash forwards, but there is a
unifying principle throughout. The agency that shapes this unity and gives a neat coherence to the text is none other than the Thought Woman, Silko's Muse.

Such coherence is also reflected in the protagonist's attainment of harmony which affects the text's terminal configuration:

The moon was lost in cloud bank. [...] The witchery had almost ended the story accordingly to its plan; Tayo had almost jammed the screwdriver into Emo's skull the way the witchery had wanted, savoring the yielding bone and membrane as the steel ruptured the brain. Their deadly ritual for the autumn solstice world have been completed by him. [...] The white people would shake their heads more proud than sad that it took a white man to survive in their world and that these Indians could not seen to make it. [...] [But the impact of the ceremony particularly, the sandpainting ceremony triggers how patterns in him]. He had arrived at a convergence of patterns; he could see them clearly now. The stars had always been with them, existing beyond memory, and they were all held together there [Having been educated to lead a communal life, he realizes
the relevance of storytelling even today]. [...] The ear for the story and the eye for the pattern were theirs: the feeling was theirs we came out of this land and we are hers. (253-255)

One of the principal objectives of the text is to make the contemporary Native Americans aware of the myth implicit in every story and the aura of ceremony associated with the story, and the power of the story to ward off evil. In this context, the myth of the Arrowboy and the idea of the sacred hoop substantiate the argument:

Arrowboy got up after she left.

He followed her into the hills up where the caves were.

The others were waiting.

They held the hoop and danced around the fire four times. (247)
Thus the Arrowboy comes to the rescue of the tribes whenever something is wrong. This gives moral and psychological power to the American Indians. Silko makes them conscious of the power of myth however hazy and however insubstantial they may appear to be. One of such myths is the myth of the hummingbird. This myth is pervasive in its influence over the lives of American Indians, particularly the Lagunas. I will only touch upon the broader significance of this remarkable myth. Hummingbird, if I should treat it in the essentialist view is believed to be a restorer— it restores what is lost, it brings back the lost object in the original form:

Hummingbird and Fly thanked him.

They took the tobacco to old Buzzard.

"here it is, we finally got it but it
sure wasn't very easy".

"Okay," Buzzard said

"Go back and tell them
I'll purify the town."
And he did--

first to the east

then to the south

then to the west

and finally to the north.

Everything was set straight again after all that CK'o'yo' magic.

The storm clouds returned

the grass and plants started growing again.

There was food

and the people were happy again.

So she told them

"Stay out of trouble from now on."
It isn't very easy
to fix up thing again.

Remember that
next time
some Ck'o'yo' magician
comes to town". (255-256)

Silko thus, presents myths sometimes as songs, sometimes as stories
and sometimes as prayers. But always it is presented as if it were a
performance, and sometimes narration and performance go together
as when she integrates "bear cure" into the sandpainting ceremony.
The myth is presented as a story, but it assumes the form of a
poem/song. The narration itself becomes a part of the performance
leading to what is known as "bear cure".

The myth relates the cure of a man who is bewitched by coyote.
The man is led to the summit of Dark Mountain to see Four Old
Bear People who have the power to cure him:

The rainbows were crossed
They had been his former means of travel.

Their purpose was
to restore this to him.

They made Pollen Boy right in the center of

the white corn painting

His eyes were blue pollen

his mouth was blue pollen

his neck was too

There were pinches of blue pollen

at his joints. (141)

Valerie Harvey offers a traditional reading of the "bear cure" which is an integral part of the sand painting ceremony. Harvey explains the whole process in terms of its symbolic import; white corn symbolizing life and fertility, rainbow as a "shroud of protection, a gateway to heaven, lasting happiness abundance and perfection of the light. Gods, often stand on rainbows as a means of travel to the spirit world." The summit of the Dark Mountain symbolizes " the
home of the Gods”. Tobacco used in the ceremony is an offering to bring "the Holy Ones to the ceremony". Betonie’s cutting of Tayo’s forehead is interpreted as “release of the evil, the fear and troubles from the mind of Tayo”. And finally the Hoops used in the ceremony help Tayo take "a symbolic step forward in his spiritual return to balance and harmony"(258).

To supplement what Valerie Harvey has explained, I would bring in the Foucauldian idea of visibility, Foucault uses the concept in the context of intercultural confrontation. It must be stated that the "bear cure" is an ancient practice. But Silko experiments with the idea of its contemporary relevance. Tayo is a mixed-blood, he is an inheritor of two cultures -- the American Indian and the European/White cultures. Caught in a situation of "betwixt and between", Tayo is in quest of a stable identity. The ceremony provides the aura proper to "what can be seen". Indeed, the whole process can be seen as Tayo’s process can be seen as Tayo’s progress from blindness to insight. He is cured and "Every evil/ which entangled him/ was cut / to pieces"(258).

Reading Ceremony is an experience of intense participation and intimate encounter with such powerful figures as Tayo, Betonie,
Ts'eh, and indeed the whole cluster of myths and ceremonial personages. What is remarkable about the narrative is its uncanny power and penetration, its accessibility to the realms unknown and unseen. In this novel, myth and ceremonies trigger a myriad of experiences -- mostly spiritual; but it also affects the "people" (in E.M. Forster's sense) materially. Memory, history, identity and ideology intersect in such an intricate and intimate manner that one can say they are only imbrications in the textual configuration. The text blurs genre distinctions as it emerges as a pluriform discourse. It reads like a heteroglossic text. But everything is geared to promote a sense of renewal through ritual. This sense is produced when the protagonist's lost memory is restored. Consequently, Silko fosters an ideology, which permits inter-ethnic amity and inter-cultural communication.