“IT AIN’T REAL ESTATE:” LAND IN SELECTED WORKS BY LOUISE ERDRICH AND LESLIE MARMON SILKO

by

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CHAPTER I

Introduction: The Land's Place

According to Webster's Dictionary, land can be defined simply enough as "the solid part of the surface of the earth," (653) but any simplicity ends here. Land, and our relationship to it, is complex at every turn. Any and every piece of land has distinct characteristics; its own unique landscape made up of a combination of features like plants, animals, bodies of water, a lack of water, hills, mountains, deserts, forests, and even climate. The people living in these places adapt to what is around them in order to survive and even thrive. At some point, these adaptations become part of the culture of the community and of the people who live there. That culture, that place, becomes evident in everything the people do. These cultural characteristics then get transferred to others who combine them with their cultural characteristics to form yet another culture suited to a particular environment.

Culture, and the melding of cultures, is directly tied to the land and to one's relationship with the land. We each have our own ties to and unique views of the land we inhabit. Some see the land around them as nothing more than the setting for the story – the place where we build our homes and make our fortunes. Others, like Lipsha's skunk in *The Bingo Palace*, believe land "ain't real estate" (200). They view the land as something more; something we cannot own and which we must respect. Conditions change; urban sprawl, droughts, and depletion of natural resources alter the land, but cultures learn to adapt to the changes – each in their own individual ways. Without considering and understanding the land, with it hardships, its beauty, its particular

personality, a culture cannot fully develop or be sustained. How the land is viewed and understood is integral to the culture that develops.

According to ecocritic Lawrence Buell, "the physical environment is indispensable as a shaping force in human art and experience (9). Land is at the core of culture and is apparent in every aspect of culture. As an extension of culture, writing is certainly no exception. As Louise Erdrich writes in "Where I Ought to Be,"

> Through the close study of a place, its people and character, its crops, products, paranoias, dialects, and failures, we come closer to our own reality. It is difficult to impose a story on a place. But truly knowing a place provides the link between details and meaning. Location, whether it is to abandon it or draw it sharply, is where we start. (499)

Through their works, Louise Erdrich and Leslie Marmon Silko illustrate this point from unique perspectives. In an interview with Michael Huey, Michael Dorris, Erdrich's husband and also an anthropologist, remarked that" ït's hard to say what is a Native American perspective. But you can, I think get closer to something like a Chippewa perspective or a Pueblo or a Lakota perspective that combines the particular ingredients of a history and a contemporary reality in a way different than any other ethnic group in the United States might" (Huey 124). Erdrich and Silko do this quite well. Erdrich writes from her experiences as someone of Chippewa and German descent. Many of her works are based in and around North Dakota and Minnesota. Her unique ties to both her heritage and the places her heritage stems from are evident in her works. Silko writes from a Pueblo Indian perspective, and a majority of her works are anchored in the culture of the Southwest. Both write from cultural vantage points they are familiar with and

explore not only land's place in the lives of their Native American characters, but also in the lives of the European characters they create. No matter the story, land has its place in the narrative. In the end, land, location, and cultural perspectives as tied to their locations are paramount to the stories they tell.

In her essay "The Feminine Landscape of Leslie Marmon Silkos's *Ceremony*," Paula Gunn Allen asserts "we are the land. To the best of my understanding, that is the fundamental idea that permeates American Indian life; the land (Mother) and the people (mothers) are the same" (119). While many often wrongly assign Native Americans as the first ecologists, most tribal groups do have strong and specific ties to the land. These bonds are often reflected in their stories. Creation stories, Corn Woman stories, and even most contemporary tribal tales all are connected to the land in some way. According to Jane Hindman in "I Think of that Mountain as my Maternal Grandmother: Constructing Self and Other Through Landscape," for Native Americans these stories "make their land their ethical center, for the places themselves are seen as containing the "morals" of the stories" (65) and "landscape and language are inextricably connected, story and place are indistinguishable, morality and setting are interdependent" (64).

Silko remarks in her essay "Interior and Exterior Landscapes," that "often the crucial element in a narrative is the terrain - some specific detail of the setting" (YW 34). She goes on to tell the story of her relatives herding sheep 140 years ago. Because of a high mesa overlooking the valley, Apaches were able to spot Silko's family members. The men were killed and the sheep were stolen. Now, even all these years later, "the memory of them and their story resides in part with the high dark mesa. For as long as the mesa stands, people within the family and clan will be reminded of the story of that

afternoon long ago" (YW 35). Silko gives us this example to illustrate how directly our lives, like the lives of her ancestors, are tied to the land around us. There is history in our surroundings.

Both Erdrich and Silko use this land-centric approach as a basis for many of their works. In both *Four Souls* (2004) and *The Bingo Palace* (1994), Erdrich weaves stories tied to the land - its ownership, its value, its cultural significance, and its place in an ever-changing world. Everything in these stories, at their cores, revolves around land - losing it, regaining it, living with it, living despite it. Through the lives of characters such as Fleur, Nanapush, Margaret, Lipsha, and Lyman, Erdrich shows us that land is key to the stories. Through her characters, Erdrich illustrates connections to the land that provide strength and grounding for some characters and destruction and devastation for others. In *Ceremony* (1977) and *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999), Leslie Marmon Silko details the importance of the land through different perspectives as well - that of a Pueblo Indian man returning from World War II and as a young Native American girl at the turn of the twentieth century. While both are told from the point of view of Native Americans living in the Southwest, each story is from a different time period and each character faces different obstacles.

In each story, the land plays an integral part. For some of the characters, the land may be just real estate, but for others, it is far more. By reading and exploring multiple works by these authors, we see how important land and place really is to various cultures, and we begin to understand how complex our relationship with the land can be. Without the land and our intricately woven ties to it, there may be no stories to tell.

CHAPTER II

Louise Erdrich and Reclamation in *Four Souls*

The Ojibwe, also commonly referred to as Chippewa or Anishaanabeg, are tied to the land in inextricable ways - just as other Native American tribal groups have their own unique ties. Every aspect of Ojibwe culture is affected by the land around them in some way. Their history is one of living in the woodlands for centuries, later being forced onto the plains, and finally having their land divided up into reservations and allotments. Stories, beliefs, and ceremonies tied to their woodland homes were adapted and reconnected to the new locations and new situations they found themselves in. Summer Harrison asserts that "Ojibwe identity and knowledge are physically and metaphorically embodied in significant places" (47). A strong example of this is the Ojibwe belief in underwater manitous, or spirits. These spirits originated in the woodland culture of the Ojibwe who at the time lived among numerous bodies of water. As the bands moved onto the plains, they brought their belief in underwater manitous "who now reside in the waters of North Dakota" (Jacobs 72) with them. Fleur, the main character in *Four Souls* and *Tracks*, is tied to this water manitou, which is referred to in the novels as Misshepeshu, and seems to derive her power from it.

If writing is connected to place as Erdrich believes, then it follows that language must be as well. Erdrich discusses the Ojibwe language and its origins in her autobiographical account, *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country*. Erdrich writes,

> Ojibwemowin is one of the few surviving languages that evolved to the present here in North America. Its origins pertain to the animals and their particular habits, to the shades of meaning in the very placement of stones.

> Its philosophy is bound up in the northern earth, lakes, rivers, forests, and plains . . . it is a language that most directly reflects a human involvement with the spirit of the land itself. (85)

Even the basic building blocks of a culture, in this case language, are tied to the land in which the culture developed. This seems to be especially true for the Ojibwe in that their language has survived and even evolved to suit the changes they have faced.

Louise Erdrich's roots are based in this language - in this undeniable connection to the land. She was born to a German American father and a French-Turtle Mountain Chippewa mother in Minnesota. Both parents worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs at the Wahpeton Indian School and she was immersed in the culture growing up. She is an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa band of North Dakota. In an interview with Nora Frankeil in 1986, Erdrich remarks that "my clearest memory of growing up in North Dakota was the space and flatness. I remember the way things smelled and felt and tasted when I went back to Turtle Mountain. My grandfather was a great storyteller, a very colorful guy, and traditional Pow Wow dancer" (Frankeil 77). These ties and memories connected to this place are evident in much of her work. This is not to say that Erdrich does not feel connected to her German roots as well. Several of her works, both poetry and prose, have German American characters and themes.

This blending of cultures is undeniable in Erdrich's works, and as P. Jane Hafen writes in "Reading Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*," this inextricable connection between identity and place, in this case, the American west, permeates these novels in both the Native and non-Native characters. (13) While most of her characters, especially in *Four Souls* and *The Bingo Palace*, are written from a Chippewa perspective, the reader also

gets glimpses of other cultures' beliefs as well. In fact, in *Four Souls*, white businessman and Turcot Timber Company owner John James Mauser plays an integral part in the story, and we learn a little about his life and his home. However, everything about Mauser is based on the destruction and possession of Native American lands, and so inclusion only helps to solidify the position of the Chippewa characters in the novel, especially Fleur.

Many of Erdrich's novels such as *Four Souls*, *The Bingo Palace*, *Tracks* (1988), and *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* (2001) are set on and around the fictitious reservation of Little No Horse (although the reservation's name is never actually given until *The Last Report*). Much of the action in these novels centers on life on and around this reservation during and after land allotment and the Dawes Act, or General Allotment Act. Passed in 1887, this act was "purportedly for the purpose of promoting self-supporting farming and ranching among American Indian peoples. In actuality, the act provided no provisions for seeds or for farming and ranching equipment" (Shilaja and Samson 225). Some believed that by giving Indians their own plots of land, they would learn to farm and become more civilized, but it seems very little effort was actually made to help the Indians achieve anything like this. Indian land, never previously "owned' in the white settlers' sense, was taken under government control and then divided among the Indians in small, individual allotments that would be easily lost to white settlers when the Indians were not successful on the land.

These allotments worked to immediately reduce the number of lands owned by Indians and to increase the Indian lands that were now available to white settlers. Some allotments were not in the vicinity of the tribal lands, and many Native Americans felt

forced to take allotments further from their homes. Once all of the allotments were given to a particular band, the remaining "surplus" lands were opened up to purchase by white settlers (Vizenor 37). This dividing of the land and disbursing of its people had a profound effect on the cultures of those faced with allotment. Familial and tribal connections were lost, ways of providing for one's family were lost, and sacred tribal lands were now flooded with white settlers.

For those who survived the initial allotment period, things would not get better. After a certain number of years, or in some instances if the tribal members were mixed bloods, the federal government considered the lands to be owned by the individual families, and they could do what they wanted in regards to the property. Unfortunately, this new ownership came with new responsibilities as well. At this point, the allotted lands could be taxed and its Indian owners would need to pay these taxes. For many who had never made a successful living off of the allotted land, there was no other alternative than to let the lands go when they could not pay the taxes. In her piece "Contextualizing the Losses of Allotment through Literature," Kristen A. Carpenter notes "others sold their property outright to generate cash for food and necessary goods. Still others were unfamiliar with real estate transactions, pressured by federal agents and corporations, or eager to sell their only item of value and enter the market economy" (610). Some who sold their lands were not even paid in cash. As Gerald Vizenor wrote in the *American Indian Quarterly* in 1989, some "were traded old, worthless horses, wagons, buggies, harnesses, and other articles at excessive prices for their lands in lieu of cash" (38). Allotment worked to displace Native Americans and disrupt their vital ties to the land. In

fact, estimates are that Native Americans lost around two-thirds of their land across the United States to the allotment programs. (Harrison 64).

While some critics argue that it is not as complex as or as well-written as *Tracks*, *Four Souls* eloquently deals with the effects of allotment and tells the story of Fleur's quest to regain her land, and by association, her identity and her health. Douglas Barnim remarks that "*Four Souls* addresses the healing of the Ojibwe people through a repositioning of identity in terms of returning to the land and an embrace of change" (63). This connection to the land is demonstrated most directly through the character of Fleur. Fleur is tied to the land throughout the North Dakota series of books. She loses her land in *Tracks*, recovers it in *Four Souls*, and loses it again in *The Bingo Palace*; this time to another member of her tribe. As Karen Carpenter notes, "for Fleur, this land is the source of her subsistence lifestyle, the connection with her culture and medicine, the ground where her parents are buried, and the place where she relates to the supernatural being that resides in the lake" (613). Fleur's connection to her land is intense. When her land is taken from her by the lumber company, she takes the bones of her ancestors and sets out to find and destroy the man responsible.

The reservation on which much of Erdrich's work centers is fictional, but Erdrich seems to base Fleur's need for revenge on actual events from the early twentieth century. While we know the forming of various reservations and the distribution of land allotments to different families created many fractures among the various bands of Chippewa, Erdrich seems to draw on an actual, specific occurrence from the time period as well. The White Earth timber scandal in the early 1900s provides the motivation for Fleur's story. Land allotments were already causing friction on the White Earth

Reservation in Minnesota. Tribal members were divided into factions along religious and even ethnic lines. Eventually, new government laws such as the Steenerson Act, Burke Act, and Clapp Rider ensured that more land was given to individual owners and not kept in trust. Determining who was eligible for this land brought further complications and more divisions among the tribal factions (Stirrup 54-55). Those considered to be of mixed blood, depicted by the Lazarres and Morrisseys in Erdrich's works, were considered more competent and were given ownership of the most valuable land with no restrictions as to what they could do with it. As it turns out, these mixed blood individuals were often eager to sell the land to the lumber companies (Vizenor 37).

The end result of these acts was that more land was put into the public sector and more previously protected timber was up for grabs. As David Stirrup writes in his essay "'To Become a Bureaucrat Myself:' History and Law in *Tracks*," "the inevitable catalog of abuses - from illiterate tribespeople being conned out of their parcels by unscrupulous lumber companies, to crooked representatives writing in their own claims - is considerable" (55). As individual owners found themselves unable to pay the taxes on the land or as they were tricked out of their land by timber companies, more and more of the land in the area was lost.

At the end of Erdrich's novel *Tracks*, Fleur loses her land to the timber company because the taxes were not paid. Because of illegal late fees added by the Indian agent, Margaret Kashpaw and the others only have enough money to save one piece of land. Forced to choose, Margaret pays the taxes on the Kashpaw land. As the weeks go by, the workers get closer to Fleur's home deep in the woods. Fleur will not leave without a fight, and it seems she will use her strong ties to nature to have the final say. As Nanapush

walks towards Fleur's cabin, he notices the changes in the natural elements around him. He notes that "no air stirred, no breeze foamed the lake," (T 219) and "nothing about this weather seemed proper" (BP 219). He says "the silence of the tree leaves and the long oppression of the weather frightened me. No bird clicked or whistled now. No animal rustled" (T 221). As the workers gather in front of Fleur's cabin, she glances towards the sky and the wind picks up. As the wind blows through the trees, they start to fall one by one. In preparation for the lumber company's arrival, she has cut all of her trees at the base. Now the wind, as if signaled by Fleur, brings the trees crashing down onto the men and their equipment. Having no other choice because of the policies of the time, Fleur has at least watched her trees fall on her own terms.

It is not hard to imagine how many people this same thing happened to during the White Earth events; in fact, the White Earth reservation was ninety percent smaller after these policies ran their course (Harrison 64). We know from historical records and first-hand accounts how devastating the loss of land and timber was to the Chippewa people and to other bands as well. Erdrich's use of specific events involving Chippewa lands illustrates the long-term importance of the land and the struggles it has produced. We see the long and painful history involving the land. Erdrich draws on these hardships to create complex characters who the reader understands are forever connected to the land they have fought for and often lost.

As *Four Souls* begins, Fleur is heading into the city to find the man who took her land and cut down her trees. She "took the small roads, the rutted paths through the woods traversing slough edge and heavy underbrush, trackless, unmapped, unknown and always bearing east" (FS 1). These descriptions immediately tie Fleur to the land. She

does not take the well- travelled roads that lead into the city, but instead sticks to the paths through the woods. Even if they have never read other Louise Erdrich books, the readers will instantly notice a few characteristics about Fleur. She is tough, determined, and obviously comfortable in the untamed woods. As the narrative continues, we see that she is not only comfortable in the untamed woods, but she is capable of surviving there as well. She lets nothing stand in the way of her goal, and the natural world around her does not provide impediments to her journey, but instead provides sustenance. It snows during her trip, but the ground does not freeze and Fleur is not deterred. After stealing some boots and killing a dog for food, she continues to use what she finds. "She dug cattails from the potholes and roasted the sweet root. She ate mud hens and snared muskrats, and still she traveled east" (FS 2). At this point in the story, the reader believes nothing will stop Fleur from avenging her trees, and she draws strength from the land as she travels.

The land's significance is also apparent in the first descriptions of John James Mauser's home. Nanapush, the old and traditional trickster figure of *Tracks*, narrates parts of *Four Souls* as well. As Summer Harrison points outs, the perspective "that Nanapush provides demonstrates how land is crucial to Native identity" (47). Nanpush provides a Native point of view for our first description of Mauser's house. Nanapush tells of "an Ojibwe woman who gave birth on the same ground, where much later, the house of John James Mauser, was raised" (FS 4). He goes on to describe the "network of lakes, flowing streams, rivers, and sloughs" (FS 4) that surrounded the land on which the house is built. Nanapush continues the story of the child who was born there and ties the land and its features to Ojibwe stories. By using Nanapush to describe the land, Erdrich shows the reader the importance of a place, and especially this place. The land Mauser chose to

build his house on is rich in Ojibwe history. It was a resting and hunting place when the Ojibwe travelled through their lands. It is not lost on the reader that from this vantage point, the Ojibwe "could spot weather coming or an enemy below," (FS 5) but now that enemy commands the vantage point.

Over the course of almost six pages, Nanapush describes Mauser's house and how it was built and furnished. We see everything that was involved in the creation of the home and just who and what was destroyed to build it. Nanapush describes the quarry dug into an island to get the limestone and the Italians who flee from the oppression of mining it, the destruction of Fleur's forest to get the lumber, and the decorative lace "produced by young women whose mothers once worked the quills of porcupines and dyed hairs of moose together . . . before they died of measles, cholera, smallpox, tuberculosis . . . " (FS 6). He talks of the bricks made with blood, the water taken from the river, and "the sweat from the bodies of men and women" (FS 7). Mauser's house and many more like it were not only made on Indian land, but they were made by Indians and by the natural elements of their world. Mauser's house is connected to the Ojibwe and other exploited cultures and stands as a monument to this exploitation. It speaks to the loss of land felt by not just the Ojibwe, but also by countless other tribal bands during this time period.

Once Fleur arrives at Mauser's house, she secures a job as the house laundress. She quickly establishes herself with Mauser and begins to heal him because as Nanapush reminds us "she wanted the man healthy so she could destroy him fresh" (FS 24). This sense of renewed empowerment in Fleur works to reinforce her ties to the land. The house is made from not only her trees, but the plants, earth, stone, blood and sweat of

many other places and people as well. The oak doors of Mauser's mansion, made from Fleur's trees, still "exude beads of thin sap - as though recalling growth and life on the land belonging to Fleur Pillager and the shores of Matchimanito, beyond" (FS 8). Fleur's land is still all around her, and it helps her push onward towards her revenge.

Over time, Fleur's traditional healing treatments begin to work on Mauser. She continues to massage his stiff muscles, she gives him strong swamp teas, and eventually she weans him off the medicines his doctor prescribed. Slowly Mauser regains his strength and some semblance of a regular life. He is now able to walk around and does not require a wheelchair. He is back to working in his study and begins to control the household affairs again. At this point, Fleur believes it is time to take her revenge. She learns every inch of the house, every sound, and every habit of its inhabitants. She listens, learns and waits for her opportunity.

Eventually, Fleur grows tired of waiting and decides it is time to kill Mauser so she can return to Nanapush and reunite with her daughter, LuLu. Mauser is awake and waiting for her as she comes into his room. He has stolen land from numerous women, marrying many of them in order to obtain their allotments, and he assumes Fleur must be one of their relatives. She coldly replies, "I am the sound that the wind used to make in a thousand needles of pine. I am the quiet at the root. When I walk through your hallway I walk through myself. When I touch the walls of your house I touch my own face" (FS 44-45). With these lines, Erdrich illustrates Fleur's deep connection to her land. We see that the land is not just a possession, but is a part of her very being. Her trees provided the lumber for Mauser's house, and so she is a part of the house as well. Fleur is set on revenge because Mauser has taken a part of herself.

Fleur does not end up killing Mauser, but instead becomes his wife after he pledges his devotion and she realizes she can still get her land. As his wife, she is now entitled to everything he owns if something should happen to him. Fleur still has every intention of killing him and going back to her land. But while waiting for the right opportunity, she gets taken in by the things Mauser offers her - expensive parties, trips, exotic foods. The reader wonders if Mauser is simply repeating the same sequence of events as with his other Indian brides: marrying these women to get what he wants, and in this case, to save his life. In her unending desire to get her land at any cost, Fleur loses sight of the bigger picture. She is unable to kill Mauser, and so she is away from her land and her family for longer and longer. It is apparent that the house at first provides some source of strength for Fleur, but her need to regain her lands seems to cloud her thinking and her judgment.

Eventually, Fleur becomes pregnant with Mauser's child. It is a hard pregnancy, and she is confined to her bed so that she does not go into premature labor. Also, on the orders of the doctor, who "does not treat servants or Indians," (FS 65) Fleur begins to consume whiskey in order to stay relaxed and fight off any early contractions. Fleur does succeed in carrying the child to term, but not without complications. Her son has obvious developmental difficulties, likely from the alcohol Fleur consumed while she was pregnant, and Fleur is addicted to alcohol "and would not be without a decanter of whiskey in any room, and she sipped it throughout the day" (FS 69).

Things begin to sour for Mauser as well. Some of his investments do not work out. He loses money on various ventures and is forced to sell off some of his properties. He grows aware of his son's disabilities and believes that his son's "backward traits are a

judgment on the man I was" (FS 90). He has tricked women out of their lands and left them pregnant and alone, he has worked with Indian agents to trick others out of their homes and property and then stripped those lands of their trees and their resources. He has displaced families and altered their way of life. John James Mauser is beginning to see the devastation he has caused, and he believes his son is paying the price. While Mauser's son is fully capably and even excels in certain areas, Mauser is only able to see the bad. This seems to hold true in every situation for him, and he realizes his life of privilege is coming to an end. Soon, as his finances crumble, Mauser flees and Fleur and her son return to the reservation to reclaim her land.

True to what Erdrich denotes as "abandonment and return. Pleasure and denial. Failure," (Chavkin and Chavkin 228) these themes continue in *Four Souls*. Fleur abandoned her homeland after it was taken from her by the lumber companies, but now she returns to this land with the deed. Unfortunately, she soon discovers that Mauser was unable to pay the taxes on it, and so the Indian agent Tatro now owns her land. Once again, Fleur must plot and use all her abilities to fight to regain her land. She is patient and calculating, living in the shadows and perhaps regaining strength from her manitou, and eventually, with the help of her son, she wins back her land in a poker game with Tatro.

Being displaced for so long has its effect on Fleur. After the poker game, Nanapush and Margaret notice her exhaustion, and Nanapush recognizes the signs of years of heavy drinking. Nanapush remarks that she has not given her son a spirit name, and Fleur replies it was impossible in the city. Again, we see how being away from her actual homeland has made Fleur disconnected and unable to abide by tribal traditions.

Erdrich wants us to reflect on one more effect of the allotments. Families are lost and traditions abandoned. At this point, Margaret dismisses Fleur's son and Nanapush and begins to speak to Fleur and guide her towards healing.

Margaret has a complicated history with the land and her family as well. According to Nanapush, "Margaret was also for the land, if nothing else" (FS 82). In *Tracks*, it is Margaret and her son who take Fleur's money and apply it to their own taxes so they will not lose their lands; but Nanapush believes it was in order to save some land instead of losing it all. But, in *Four Souls*, it is Margaret who sells off part of her son's land to buy new linoleum for her house. It is Margaret who wants Nanapush to attend church with her on Sundays, but it is also Margaret who decides to make a medicine dress and then later compels Fleur to wear the dress and begin a healing ceremony. Through the character of Margaret, first named Center of the Sky, then called Margaret at the Indian school, and finally known as Rushes Bear after she helped Fleur deliver Lulu, Erdrich works to illustrate the complexity of the situations that faced Native Americans dealing with new settlers, new religions, and land allotment.

While choking in a noose Nanapush set in the woods for his rival, Margaret has a vision of "a communion dress worn by my mother, who tried to live white and then abandoned her attempt. I saw a dress made of bear's breath. A dress of lake weed and fury. A dress of whiskey. A dress of loss" (FS 175). After she is saved from the noose, Margaret knows she must make this medicine dress, although she does not know why at the time. She begins to make the dress - careful to follow the Native traditions exactly as "the power of the dress lay in the strict rules of its making" (FS 176). Erdrich gives an in-depth description of the process. She writes of killing the moose, preparing the hide,

talking to the dress, and gathering bird bones to decorate it. We see the way the dress is tied to the culture and how the culture is tied to the world around it.

It is not long before we are made aware of the dress's power. After getting drunk on sacramental wine, Nanapush ends up wearing the dress in his attempt to show Margaret the proper way to dance. He later finds himself in front of the people of the reservation where he was scheduled to speak about the allotments. Rather than face ridicule, Nanapush uses the dress to his advantage and talks of its ties to the land. He tells the crowd he worries he is "unworthy to wear the dress of a woman" (FS 155) and explains that "we call the earth Grandmother. We ask her for help when times are difficult. When we are lonely, or harrowed by death, we throw ourselves upon her and weep onto her breast" (FS 155). He uses the dress to reinforce the assembly's ties to the land, and because of his speech, the group votes against a land settlement. Summer Harrison asserts that wearing the dress not only "makes the speech more persuasive but actually makes him more cognizant of multiple perspectives about the land" (54).

Ultimately, it is Margaret and Fleur who work together and use the dress to bring some balance back to Fleur. Douglas Barnim notes that "the making of the medicine dress, which enables Fleur to reintegrate in Ojibwe society, is both a process of healing and a communal act, one that resides fully in Native traditions" (64). They will use the land to heal Fleur and to return her to her rightful place among her people. There is hope that healing her will also help "heal her bitterness - the combined result of displacement from her land, estrangement from her daughter Lulu, and general isolation - forcing her to look within in order to reorient herself to the land and her community" (Barnim 58). The medicine dress holds the key to this re-integration into the community and reconnection

to the land. Margaret recognizes how sick Fleur is and begins to prepare her for the healing ritual. She asks Nanapush to bring water for a bath for Fleur, and then sends Nanapush and Fleur's son away to fish. After the bath, she purifies both Fleur and the dress with sweet grass smoke. She puts Fleur in the dress and tells her she must go to the rock by Matchimanito to begin her ritual. The power of the earth is in her blood and she must fast and beg for the mercy of her spirits.

Four Souls ends with Fleur being sent to fast and heal for eight days. The loss of her land, and her subsequent pursuit of the man who took it, has exacted a heavy toll on her. She is disconnected from her family and from her traditions. The medicine dress, carefully made from the elements and tied to the earth, offers a chance for Fleur to heal and return to her land. Land figures into every aspect of *Four Souls*. Its presence permeates all aspects of the story, sometimes in ways that may not be readily apparent. By telling the story of Fleur and her pursuit to regain her land, Erdrich shows us the importance of the land not just as a place to live, but as a connection to our culture and ultimately our well-being.

CHAPTER III

Loss, Love, and Land in *The Bingo Palace*

According to Gerald Vizenor in his article on the Minnesota Chippewa, in 1989 there were "close to a hundred bingo operations on reservations in the nation; these games generate an estimated three-hundred million a year" (42). This number has increased dramatically, and the types of gambling allowed on the reservations has expanded as well. A 2011 study from the National Indian Gaming Commission reported there were 421 gambling centers, including both gambling halls and casinos, which generated an estimated yearly revenue of over twenty seven billion dollars (nigc.gov). Gambling is a contentious issue on reservations across the country. Some tribal members see gambling as a much-needed source of income for the tribes, but others view it as a misuse of tribal lands and worry about the long-term effects of gambling on the tribal members and on tribal sovereignty (Vizenor 42). Other issues stem from the role of the federal government in regulating the gambling on the reservations. Underneath it all, lies the land - who controls the land, who is displaced in order to build the gaming centers, what are the long term effects on tribal members, who is entitled to its use and its revenue, and who should be in charge of its regulation? Through the trials and tribulations of Lyman Lamartine, Lipsha Morrissey, Gerry Nanapush, Shawnee Ray Toose, and Fleur Pillager in *The Bingo Palace*, Louise Erdrich looks at these questions and shows the intricacies of trying to live in the modern world while remaining connected to traditional roots.

Connie Jacobs argues *The Bingo Palace* is the

> most hopeful novel in the reservation series, for it depicts a tribe making a successful transition to a new way of life. The other novels show the struggles for tribal sovereignty and Indian pride; and these ground building efforts result in a tribe entering the twenty-first century blending the old ways with the new. (97)

But, Robert Morace offers a slightly different interpretation of the novel. He believes *The Bingo Palace* is not as light-hearted and positive as Jacob argues, but instead is "far more firmly rooted in the ongoing debate between Native Americans and state governments on the one hand and progressives and traditionals within individual tribes on the other" (56). This second conclusion seems more likely when the elements of the story are closely reviewed. The characters are learning to blend the old ways with the new, but the story centers on Lipsha's return and embrace of the old ways. The novel ends as Lulu takes up the traditional role and is arrested by the police. Lyman's desire to build a casino involves displacing Fleur from the land she has lost and regained several times before. Lyman's urge to build a bingo palace in order to make more money "allows Lyman to contemplate an unthinkable act of injustice, directed at someone of his own people, of his own family" (Peterson 168). While there are hopeful elements to the novel, the theme seems to be closer to those in *Tracks* and *Four Souls*. The characters in *The Bingo Palace* are still fighting for the same things – land, love, and life.

The Bingo Palace takes place in the 1980s over the course of one year -from winter to winter. While on the surface this cycle of the seasons may not seem to be important, its use actually ties directly into the beliefs of Erdrich's Chippewa ancestry. For the Chippewa, winter was the time of year when many of the chores of the summer

and fall months came to an end. As the weather grew colder, families would move to their winter hunting lodges. The long winter nights provided perfect opportunities for storytelling (Jacobs 22). Since tribal knowledge is often passed down through the oral tradition, these winter months were a key time of year. Jacobs also notes that "winter nights are the most common time for storytelling, and there are specific natural events which mark the beginning and the end of the storytelling season, such as first frost to first flower, first snowfall to first thunder or from the cessation of thunder to its resumption in the spring" (22). The cold winter climate of Erdrich's Chippewa landscapes provides the opportunity to obtain knowledge and maintain traditions through storytelling.

Knowing the importance of the seasons and in this case of winter in particular, it is no accident that Erdrich sets the beginning and the dramatic ending of *The Bingo Palace* during these crucial months. P. Jane Hafen points out, "oral in nature, each tribe has a sophisticated system of creation stories and records of history. Inevitably these literatures connect Indian peoples to their particular tribal places" (7). Storytelling ties the land, the culture, and the characters of *The Bingo Palace* together. Erdrich places the story during the storytelling season, further tying the story to the culture and the land that dictates that culture.

According to Margaret Huetll,

> over the course of the twentieth century, reservations became homelands in a very real and concrete sense for Indian nations like the Anishinaabeg, places that inspired bitter and determined fights to protect their land and their political and cultural sovereignty. Thus, Erdrich's constant theme of

> returning home is more than an abstract longing. It is a historically based cultural imperative. (32-33)

The Bingo Palace centers on Lipsha Morrissey and his return to the reservation. While he has been in the city for a long time, he is tied to the reservation, and realizes early on that "I will never get away from here" (BP 21). He knows he is forever linked to this place, to his home. This theme of returning home is integral to the story. Lipsha is connected to the reservation in numerous ways. Not only is it his home and his family is there, but the source of his healing powers seem to lie there as well. His mother June, who later died in a snow storm, threw him in the lake when was a baby, but he managed to survive until he was pulled from the water. According to Zelda he was "in the slough a long time," (BP 51) and he should have drowned. It seems something was watching over him, and his powers are derived from this source. Later he dreams of the Manitou in the lake and realizes it was this entity that kept him from drowning. Lipsha is directly tied to the reservation and to the water on the reservation. He is alive because its spirit saved him.

P. Jane Hafen writes that "the Ojibwe are a woodland culture whose materiality is located in the northern plains and Great Lakes. Traditional beliefs, deities, and stories also reflect watery origins" (20). Erdrich uses these beliefs to construct a sense of identity for Fleur, as discussed in Chapter I, and now also for Lipsha. Water is tied to the land and the culture of Erdrich's characters, just as we will later see the desert climate and terrain tied to Silko's characters. Unfortunately for Lipsha, he has been away from the reservation, and "going back and forth to the city weakened him" (BP 7). He lost his powers because he lost his connection to the land and his home. The community "tells him that he should ground himself, sit on the earth and bury his hands in the dirt and beg

the Manitous" (BP 7). Erdrich tells the reader that Lipsha is into drugs and far removed from his healing gifts and his family, but once Lulu sends him a wanted poster of his father, Gerry Nanapush, he drops everything to return home.

Lipsha arrives home on the night of the winter powwow, and "there is no place the boy could fit. He was not a tribal council honcho, not a powwow organizer, not a medic in the cop's car in the parking lot, no one we would trust with our life" (BP 9). He has been living in Fargo, North Dakota and has lost his connections to his home and his family. However, coming home does not immediately solve all of his problems. It is not long before he is in love with Shawnee Ray Toose, who has a child with Lipsha's uncle, Lyman Lamartine. Shortly after that, Lyman has to rescue Lipsha and Shawnee Ray from the border patrol station because the officers have confiscated Nector Kasphaw's pipe and mistaken an old fruitcake for hash.

While it may not be obvious at first, Nector's pipe plays an important role in the story. Lipsha's grandmother gives it to him when he returns to the reservation, and it serves as his inheritance from his grandfather, Nector. Since Lipsha has nowhere to live, he stores the ceremonial pipe in the trunk of his car. This pipe has seen a great deal of history. It is

> the very same one smoked when the treaty was drawn with the U.S. government . . . This is the same pipe refused by the Pillagers who would not give away our land, the same one that solemnized the naming ceremony of a visiting United States president's wife, but is also the pipe that started the ten-summer sundance. (BP 39)

This pipe's history is tied directly to the land and the traditions of the Chippewa on this reservation. It was present when the land was lost, and it has been present as things changed, for good and bad, throughout the years. The pipe's story will continue in this same manner. Because they get stopped at the border crossing and the pipe gets confiscated, Lipsha and Shawnee Ray are not able to go on their date. Because Lyman has to come smooth things over and get the pipe back for Lipsha, Lyman ends up offering Lipsha a job. Later, when Lyman is on a gambling binge, he pawns the pipe. Erdrich uses Nector's pipe to comment on the different effects land has on those around it. Another element is added to the pipe's story when we realize that its former owner, Nector Kashpaw, was one of the ones responsible for some of the reservation's land loss in the first place. Just as the land provided for those who cared for it, so has it been the source of weakness and defeat. This pipe is no different, and it sets multiple events into motion throughout the story.

Lipsha works for Lyman at the bingo palace, and it is here that he learns the true story of his abandonment by his mother, June. As he secretly gives alcohol to his aunt, Zelda, she tells him the actual story. His grandmother always told him his mother dropped him off with her because she could not take care of him. Zelda lets him know this was not the case. Zelda saw June throw a gunny sack into the slough. Once June left, Zelda went down to the water to try to fish out the sack. It took her a long time to finally find the sack, and she then began to drag it home. Along the way, she opened the sack and realized there was a baby inside. Lipsha was that baby, and his ability to survive so long in the water is how everyone knew he had a special gift. Life has taken away those

gifts along the way, and he now has to contend with new information about his mother as well.

At Lyman's request, Lipsha and Lyman decide to see Xavier Toose so he can help them go on vision fasts on the land close to Matchimanito Lake. Lipsha goes to try to get his mind off of Shawnee Ray, and he believes Lyman goes to think more clearly on his plans to build a casino near this location. At first nothing much happens, and Lipsha is scared to be out in the elements. He worries he will be attacked by a bear, or stepped on by a dear, or eaten by a pack of wolves, but he remains out in the elements. Again we see how the natural world is important to the story. Being out in the elements for an extended period of time is necessary in order to complete the ceremony. If ties to the land were not essential, this part of the process would not be necessary. Erdrich includes this ceremony because it is an integral part of the story and allows Lipsha and Lyman to experience important visions.

As Lipsha continues to wait for his vision, he grows bored and starts talking to himself. He wonders what it would matter if Lipsha built his casino on this part of the lake. It "is a spot like none other: lake view, perfect for a large-scale resort"(BP 199). Lipsha begins to think Lyman's plan is right and that by the lake, on Fleur Pillager's property, is the perfect place for the new bingo palace. The next morning, Lipsha interacts with a skunk, and he is not sure if it counts as an actual vision or not. As he wakes up, he finds a skunk sleeping in his sleeping bag with him. As he works to gently move the skunk, he hears a voice in his head say "this ain't real estate" (BP 200). At these words, he panics and drops the skunk which then sprays him.

Whether vision or not, these words seem to be the answer to Lipsha's questions about whether Lyman should build the casino on Fleur's land. Lipsha backs the traditional ways and realizes using the land for a casino might not be the right thing to do. This land, the place that saved his life and has sustained the lives of the Chippewa people for generations is more than just a plot of land for a casino. While there is the hope that the casino will be profitable for the community, there is no guarantee. The Chippewa did not profit from the sale of their land when it was wanted for lumber, and there is a good chance most will not profit from taking Fleur's land for a casino. Of course, Lipsha is not in a position to stop Lyman from doing what he wants with the land.

While Lyman seems to embrace parts of tradition, in the long run, money is far more important to him than culture or familial ties. When he gambles away the government loan money, he pawns Nector's ceremonial pipe for more money. He represents this new modern approach which seems to shun the old ways if something new is more beneficial. He is interested in moving forward and does not seem to care if it is at the expense of tradition. He was "a dark-minded schemer, a bitter and yet shaman-pleasant entrepeneur who skipped money from behind the ears of Uncle Sam, who joked to pull the wool down, who carved up this reservation the way his blood father Nector Kashpaw did" (BP 5). Lipsha, while he considers Lyman to be a "big, bland Velveeta" is impressed by Lyman and considers him the reservation's "biggest cheese" (BP 15).

Although he seems on the surface to only be interested in making money, which he does off of the people in the community, Lyman has some ties to the more traditional side of things as well. Like his brother Henry Jr., who committed suicide after returning from the war, Lyman is a traditional grass dancer. Lyman remarks to Lipsha that Henry

was the better dancer, but he was not interested in the prizes. He "danced to move within his own thoughts" (BP 162). On the other hand Lyman only danced for the possible prize money. Through this exchange, we see that tradition has always taken a backseat to Lyman's other goal of achieving success and getting rich. His dance shirt is "old, frail, of a Kleenex softness faded; all through it the threads look ready to part" (BP 163). William Scheik asserts that "the condition of Lyman's time-worn dance shirt represents the state of Native American tradition and culture in the late twentieth century," (370) but Erdrich's message may be more specific than that. The worn dance shirt shows how thin Lyman's ties and loyalty to his tribe have become. Eventually he throws out his old grass dancing outfit and moves forward with his plan to take Fleur's land and build a casino.

Fleur, the star of *Tracks* and *Four Souls*, again makes an appearance in *The Bingo Palace*. While Fleur does not appear often in the novel, her presence is again essential to the plot. Throughout the story of the blossoming romance between Shawnee and Lipsha, the dancing, the gambling, Gerry's escape, and Lyman's hidden gambling problem, one theme runs through all of them. All of the action of the novel is played out on a background of Lyman's wish to build a casino on the shores of Matchimanitou Lake - on Fleur Pillager's land.

Fleur, the one connected to the creature in Matchimanitou Lake, rumored to take the shape of a bear as she roams her land, and whose land is ultimately lost at the end of *Tracks*, has a complex history with gambling as well. Erdrich gives the reader this complexity to help show the multiple layers of the issue and to remind us just how interconnected all the pieces can be. Fleur first used gambling to win money from the men in Argus. This resulted in her eventual rape by the men when they became angry at

losing their money. Later, she ventures to the land of the dead to play cards to win back her dead baby. She is unsuccessful in this endeavor as well. Gambling finally pays off for her when she wins her land back from the Indian agent Tatro. While Fleur used gambling to her advantage over the years, and even used it at one point to regain her land, her story will ultimately end as she loses her land again, by no fault of her own, to gambling.

Not long after Lyman and Lipsha's vision fasts, in which Lyman dances with Henry Jr. one last time, Fleur comes to Lyman in a dream. She tells him "land is the only thing that lasts life to life. Money burns like tinder, flows off like water, and as for the government's promises, the wind is steadier" (BP 148). Fleur seems to warn Lyman money will come and go, but the land will remain. Instead of trying so hard to acquire more money and power, Fleur suggests for Lyman to hold on to the land and try to get more. Fleur continues, "this time, don't sell out for a barrel of weevil-shot flour and a mossy pork" (148). In other words, if you are going to take the land, make sure you get something valuable for it this time. Be smart and do not be fooled like we were before. Nancy J. Peterson believes that "Fleur shapes Lyman's vision of the importance of bingo money: it ought not to be used to create red versions of white capitalists, but should buy back the land - acres and acres of it" (169). It seems Fleur faces the fact that her land will be lost again, and she hopes that some gains can be made from its loss. Lipsha reminds the reader that Fleur "wants a bigger catch, a fish that knows how to steal the bait, a clever operator who can use the luck that temporary loopholes in the law bring to Indians for higher causes, steady advances" (BP 221). Fleur pins her hope on the idea that by sacrificing her land now, more land can be purchased for the tribe in the future.

Lyman decides to "use a patch of federal trust land somewhere, anywhere near his employee base. Add to it, diversify, recycle what money came in immediately into land-based operations" (BP 149). But, according to Victoria Brehm, "Erdrich portrays Lyman as just as dangerous to American Indian values in the late twentieth century as Pauline or corrupt priests were earlier" (697). Lyman will take the land and use it to his advantage. He has no real interest in protecting it, but he is able to interpret the dream in a way that justifies his methods. He may end up buying more land with his bingo profits, but there is not any indication that he will actually spread the wealth to the rest of the tribe, even though he may claim otherwise. Brehm goes on to say that "if Fleur and the land she reclaimed twice before are the symbols of Chippewa survival, Erdrich forecasts a clouded future, since once again a federally sanctioned program - this time gambling- is primed to separate the tribe from the values that sustain it" (Brehm 697).

Later, when the skunk appears to Lipsha again, he sees the true effects of the bingo palace:

> Where Fleur's cabin stands, a parking lot will be rolled out of asphalt. Over Pillager grave markers, sawed by wind and softened, black jack tables. Where the trees that shelter brown birds rise, bright banks of slot machines. Out upon the lake that the lion man inhabits, where Pillagers drowned and lived, where black stones still roll round to the surface, the great game room will face with picture windows. (BP 219)

The old, the traditional, the sacred, the natural will be replaced with a new, modern way of life. Once again, the land will be taken and changed. Erdrich demonstrates that even in

the modern age, land is of the utmost importance, and the fight continues over how best to use it.

As the story draws to a close, Lipsha agrees to help his father, Gerry Nanapush, escape once again. Like Nanapush in *Tracks*, Gerry Nanapush is a trickster character. He is resilient and always manages to escape captivity - usually in ways that seem humanly impossible. As Erdrich writes, "he's not made of human stuff. Rain melts him. Snow turns him to clay. The sun revives him. He's a Chippewa" (BP 235). By tying this character to the land, Erdrich once again reinforces the importance of land in the stories she tells, and to the Chippewa as well. Not only are the Chippewa tied to the land, but Erdrich shows that according to their belief system, they *are* the land.

As wintertime approaches once again, Gerry survives the plane crash that kills the guards who were transporting him to a new prison, and he is now in hiding. In an effort to bond with his father, and possibly to impress Shawnee Ray as well, Lipsha agrees to help him. As we have figured out by this point in the story, things do not always go smoothly for Lipsha, and his father's escape is no exception. First, Gerry gives Lipsha directions to his location in the Chippewa language. Lipsha does not know much of the language, after having lost his ties to his community for so long, and so he is only able to narrow down Gerry's location to three possibilities. Lipsha spends all day in an arcade, hoping it is the correct location to meet up with his father. The elements seem to be working against Lipsha at this point, and as he tries to start his van, he is met with "a twanging click, this time. The worst sound in dead of winter" (BP 236). Lipsha's car battery is dead, and he has not found his father yet. Once he does locate Gerry, they are forced to find another way to leave town. They decide to steal a car at the Amtrak station. In another effort to

impress Shawnee Ray, Lipsha steals a giant stuffed toucan from a store, and is immediately spotted.

Gerry and Lipsha rush to find a car to steal, and after a large commotion and the owner hanging on to the back of the car, they head out into the snow on their way to the reservation. Erdrich gives vivid depictions of the natural elements they face. As Lipsha describes it, "snow whites out the windshield and I can't see the road in front of us. I watch the margin, try to follow the white border before it is obscured by a twisting cyclone of snow" (BP 255). Through this description and others like it, the reader sees how the natural elements are a factor in every endeavor. As Lipsha and Gerry fall in behind a snowplow, and Lipsha takes care of the baby they find in the car, June appears in her blue Firebird. Gerry is mesmerized by her appearance and takes the car off the road in an effort to follow her. Eventually, the stolen car gets stuck and Gerry leaves Lipsha and goes with June. Lipsha is left with the baby as "the heater snaps off" and "the motor dies down" (BP 259).

As Lipsha and the baby begin to freeze, Fleur is once again removed from her land. She decides to take Lipsha's place. She will be the one to die instead of him, and she begins the journey to the island in the middle of Matchimanito Lake to join the spirits of the Pillagers who have gone before her. Her spirit will remain a part of her land, no matter what the future holds for it. Her tracks still appear "on clear and brilliant days and nights of black stars they are sometimes again left among us" (BP 273).

In her essay on *Love Medicine*, P. Jane Hafen commends "Erdrich's imperatives of survival and celebration, of connection to Ojibwe-specific culture and place on the northern plains" (5) It is apparent those imperatives are also present in *The Bingo Palace*.

Once again, Erdrich shows just how important land is to her stories. The place and the culture are intricately woven together. Without place and the culture that springs from it, there would be no stories to tell. Her North Dakota series novels span a century and while the conditions change, the importance of the land does not. Land is the theater where the other action occurs, and in many cases, land is *why* the action occurs. Life will continue and Fleur's spirit will be watching as we "deal the cards on green baize, as we drown our past in love of chance, as our money collects, as we set fires and make personal wars over what to do with its weight, as we go forward into our own steady hopes" (BP 274).

CHAPTER IV

Reconnecting to Land and Self in Silko's *Ceremony*

As she writes in *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* (1996), Leslie Marmon Silko believes that "often the crucial element in a narrative is the terrain - some specific detail of the setting" (34). This importance placed on the landscape is reflected in much of Silko's work and definitely in *Ceremony* (1977) and *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999). In both of these works, the physical environment not only provides the background for the stories, but is an actual part of the plot. Holly Martin elaborates on this quite well. She states that

> although in literature landscapes often function as holders of tradition, either as designated sacred spaces or simply as reminders of the histories that have been enacted in them, in *Ceremony* the landscape actually acts as a catalyst that jolts the character into a heightened state of awareness of his own cultural hybridity. (131)

Ceremony concentrates on a young mixed-blood Laguna pueblo man when he returns to the reservation after World War II. His reconnection to the land and his recognition of his mixed heritage is crucial to his reintegration with society. *Gardens in the Dunes* focuses on a mixed-blood Sand Lizard girl who travels the world with her caretakers. Through her family's garden and the other gardens she sees in both America and Europe, the young girl begins to understand the ties between all cultures while also learning to better sustain her own culture through new plants and flowers. Silko makes abundant use of the landscape, the terrain, to tell her stories.

This connection to the land is deeply personal for Silko. While she is of mixed blood Laguna, Mexican, and European descent, she grew up at Old Laguna pueblo, immersed in the traditions, cultures, and landscapes of the Laguna people. Silko attended school at the Laguna Bureau of Indian Affairs school, and her great grandmother taught her about Laguna culture (Chavkin 4).With the help of her great grandmother as well as other relatives and members of the community, Silko learned many of the stories and traditions of the Pueblo Indians and developed her strong connection to the natural world. In *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit,* she tells the reader that at a young age, she preferred to "spend hours and hours alone in the hills southeast of Laguna" (16) exploring the natural world around her. She feels a deep connection to the land, a connection built by her family. Silko continues,

> I trust the land - the rocks, the shrubs, the cactus, the rattlesnakes, and mountain lions - far more than I trust human beings. I never feel lonely when I walk alone in the hills: I am surrounded with living beings, with these sandstone ridges and lava rock hills full of life. Luckily, I enjoy danger, so I find human beings irresistible; humans are natural forces, just like floods or blizzards. (YW 18)

Silkos views reflect the views of the Laguna Pueblo people. In her article "The 'Lie' of the Land: Native Sovereignty, Indian Literary Nationalism, and Early Indigenism in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, Sharon Holm notes this shared view is "due in part to a particularly intense relationship with the land that stems from her growing up in and around Laguna as well as the exceptional historical circumstances that spared the Laguna people's removal from their homelands under colonial occupation" (244).

While the Chippewa have strong ties to the land as well, which Louise Erdrich draws on in her works, the Pueblos' bonds are unique in that they were not displaced from their land. They have remained, for the most part, in the same areas throughout their history. As Silko notes "our stories cannot be separated from their geographical locations, from actual physical places on the land" (YW 58). Over centuries, the Pueblos have learned to thrive in a harsh environment. Silko writes,

> the unpredictability of the weather, the aridity and harshness of much of the terrain in the high plateau country explain in large part the relentless attention the ancient Pueblo people gave to the sky and earth around them. Survival depended upon harmony and cooperation not only among human beings, but also among all things - the animate and the less animate. (YW 29)

Everything they do is in some way tied to surviving and even thriving in these particular elements. While Erdrich's Chippewas were first found in the woodlands and later were forced onto the plains, the different bands of Pueblo Indians have stayed relatively in the same locations. While both the Chippewa and the Pueblos had to deal with white encroachment and settlement, the Pueblo culture has not had to adapt to a changing landscape. They have faced the same hardships and struggles with the same geographic features and climate since time immemorial. Because of this, Silko's novels often have themes concerning living *with* the land while many of Erdrich's novels focus on fights *for* the land.

In another essay from *Yellow Woman*, Silko talks of the migration stories and other narratives shared by the Laguna people. These stories were always tied to the land

in some way, and she remarks that these narratives "delineate the complexities of the relationship that human beings must maintain with the surrounding natural world if they hope to survive in this place" (YW 37). Nowhere in her work is this theme more evident than in *Ceremony*. Through Tayo, returning to the reservation after serving in the Pacific in World War II, Silko demonstrates the importance of ties to the land. While being away at war, Tayo witnessed the destruction the world is capable of, and he lost his ties to his homeland. Suffering from what we now know as PTSD, Tayo must come to terms with what he has seen and what he has done and finally reintegrate with the land. Once he reestablishes his connection to the land and to home, he can finally put the past behind him and move forward.

Ceremony opens after Tayo returns from his stay at a military hospital after being stationed in the Philippines. He wakes at home, only to be surrounded again by the memories of his time in the jungle and by the reality that the pueblo area has not received rain in the six years Tayo has been gone. Because of his deep ties to the land and to a culture that depends on rain to live and to eat, Tayo believes the drought is his fault. While being marched through the Philippine jungle with his injured cousin Rocky, Tayo "prays for dry air, dry as a hundred years squeezed out of yellow sand, air to dry out the oozing wounds of Rocky's leg, to let the torn flesh and broken bones breathe, to clear the sweat that filled Rocky's eyes" (C 10). He wanted the rain to end so that Rocky could live, but he may have inadvertently stopped the rain at home as well. Now back at home, he sees what he believes are the results of his wishes. Tayo "had prayed the rain away, and for the sixth year it was dry; the grass turned yellow and it did not grow. Wherever he looked, Tayo could see the consequences of his praying" (C 13). Being away in

another country, Tayo saw another power of rain. He realized, for probably the first time, that the rain can bring destruction and death just as easily as it can bring food and life.

Back in Laguna, the rain was only associated with good. It came from the spirit of Mount Taylor, "called Tse-pi'na in Laguna (Woman Veiled in Clouds)" (Allen 1210). The summer before Tayo and Rocky leave for the war, the land is beginning to experience the first signs of drought. Tayo, not completely sure how to pray for rain, goes out into the canyon. He picks flowers and shakes the pollen into the water as an offering. Alone in nature, he remembers the stories and the Laguna connections to the land and its creatures. He sees a spider and thinks of Spider Woman who "had told Sun Man how to win the storm clouds back from the Gambler so they would be free again to bring rain and snow to the people" (C 87). Not long after, the rain returns to Laguna, and the thunder comes "from the direction of Tse-pi'na, Mount Taylor" (C 88). The land, tied to the feminine in Laguna culture, is watched over and provided for by the feminine spirit of the mountain.

As the rain comes down, Tayo also has his first encounter with the mountain spirit in the form of Night Swan. Josiah is unable to go meet Night Swan because now that it is raining, he needs to stay and work in the fields. He asks Tayo to deliver a note to her. Blue, the color of the sky and of water, is linked to her throughout Silko's descriptions of her. The walls of her house are blue, and she wears blue clothing. Tayo thinks the room smells "like the white clay the people use for white wash" (C 90), again associating Night Swan with the land and natural elements. Silko tells us "she did not look old or young to him then; she was like the rain and the wind" (C 91). Although Tayo does not realize it at the time, his meeting with Night Swan will be significant to his story later.

In *The Turqoise Ledge*, Silko talks about another significance of the rain to the people in the Southwest. Living in a desert climate, any amount of rain received is obviously important. She tells the story of spotting some rain clouds near her home in Tucson and how happy she was to see them. At one point, one of the small clouds broke away from the group and rained directly over her. She notes the Pueblo belief that "beloved family members and the ancestors show their love for us when they return as clouds that bring precious precipitation" (TL 13). This quotation adds extra significance to Tayo cursing the rain in the Philippines. Tayo cursed not only the source of life for his people but his ancestors as well. It is no wonder that when he returns to Laguna he feels responsible for the drought and for his Uncle Josiah's death.

The drought is not the only thing that changed the land around Laguna while Tayo was gone. Like the Chippewa's trees, the Pueblo's natural resources were of great interest to the government and others as well. During the drought, the government began testing the land in and around the pueblo. Eventually, they began mining uranium. In *Ceremony*, this loss of some of their land for mining uranium did not have a major effect on the people of the pueblo at first because "there was nothing there the people could use anyway, no silver or gold. The drought had killed off most of the cattle by then, so it really didn't matter if a square mile around the mine area was off limits" (C 226). This uranium was used in testing to construct the nuclear bombs later dropped on Japan. This land, so important to the people who inhabit it, also had a role in the destruction of two cities and the deaths of thousands of people. The land is dying, being destroyed by a lack of rain and its role in the destruction of other lands. The land and Tayo are connected, and both are sick and need to be healed.

It seems no surprise that Silko would use the uranium mine in the novel. As Connie Jacobs notes in her essay "A Toxic Legacy, Stories of Jackpile Mine," "Silko was only twenty-three when she began writing the book, but part of the power of *Ceremony* comes from her knowing the community stories, as she lived in close proximity to Jackpile Mine" (41). This mine, and uranium mining in particular, has a deep connection to the Pueblo people of New Mexico and Arizona. The effects of these mines on the people and the land cannot be underestimated.

While the story is set immediately after World War II, Silko's *Ceremony* was published in 1977 at a time when the effects of uranium mining on the people and the land were becoming painfully apparent. According to Alice Segal, "in the beginning of the uranium boom, uranium was discovered in the Midwest, with the greatest amount coming from the four corners area of New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, and Utah" (356). A large portion of these deposits were on reservation lands. Most of the actual mining on these reservations was done by the people of the reservations. These Native American workers were paid minimum wage or less and few if any were aware of any safety risks associated with uranium (Brugg and Goble 1411). Firsthand reports collected by Connie Jacobs in her article "A Toxic Legacy: Stories of Jackpile Mine" detail how few safety precautions were taken. Jacobs mentions numerous former employees who ate on the piles of radioactive tailings or took breaks in the equipment that was covered in radioactive dust from the mine (43). The earliest mining was done by pick ax and shovel and many of the other procedures were performed by hand as well. By the 1960s, former workers in these mines were reporting the first cases of lung cancer (Brugg and Goble 1415), and birth defects on the reservations had increased as well (Jacobs 43).

The people were not alone in their suffering. Uranium mining took its toll on the land around the mines as well. Radiation was spread throughout the communities. Many of the mines used the process of "dewatering" to expose the uranium. This process produced an abundance of water contaminated with radioactive and other harmful chemicals. This water eventually made its way into the ground and surface water of the pueblos. Jacobs notes in her article that according to Manuel Pino, an Acoma tribal member and sociology professor, “two tributaries that flow directly through the mine into the Rio San Jose and eventually into the Rio Grande River have been found to have radioactive contaminants . . . they could have only come from the Jackpile Mine” (Jacobs 44). On top of this, mining companies often left used up mines without taking the proper procedures to ensure they were safe. The natural landscape around these sites was also changed, polluted and destroyed in the mining process, and little vegetation would grow. As Silko alludes to in *Ceremony*, the land was actually sick.

Even after his time in the veteran's hospital, Tayo remains shaken by what he has seen and his failure to save Rocky. He begins to think being at the veteran's hospital was better because he could just blend in there and not be reminded of the things he lost. At home, the light makes him nauseated and he prefers to be alone and in the dark. In the dark "he could cry for all the dreams Rocky had as he stared out of his graduation picture; he could cry for Josiah and the spotted cattle, all scattered now, all lost, sucked away in the dissolution that had taken everything from him." (C 28). Tayo does not improve with time, and his grandmother insists that he needs a healing ceremony. Once again, we see the feminine connected between the land and Tayo. Tayo's grandmother, who Paula Gunn Allen contends is one of the characters who "belongs to the earth spirit and lives in

harmony with her" (118), is the first to take a step towards healing Tayo, and therefore, healing the land. Tayo's Auntie does not believe it will work because Tayo is not full blood, and she worries that people will think it is inappropriate for him. Old Grandma wins out, and the medicine man, Old Ku'oosh, comes to visit with Tayo.

Tayo does not think that he killed anyone during the war, so he cannot tell his story to Old Ku'oosh. He knows that Ku'oosh would not understand the way the war was fought because 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 . . . the old man would not have believed anything so monstrous" (C 33). The fact that uranium from their own land was the "something close and terrible" (C 34) that killed so many further complicates things. In the end, Ku'oosh is unsuccessful in helping Tayo because his stories and healing rituals are not equipped to deal with the new destruction the returning soldiers have seen. Ku'oosh remarks that "there are some things we can't cure like we used to, not since the white people came. The others who had the Scalp Ceremony, some of them are not better either" (C 34). The war has destroyed ties to cultures and traditions and used the land as a weapon against its enemies, and Tayo and the others are not recovering.

For awhile Tayo continues on as before. He and the other men who have returned from the war, Emo, Harley, Leroy, and Pinkie, spend their time drinking in the bars on the edge of the reservation. It is apparent that none of the men are healed from their time in the Army or from the effects of once again being invisible to the rest of the world. Tayo talks of how "these Indians got treated the same as anyone: Wake Island, Iwo Jima. They got the same medals for bravery, the same flag over their coffin" (C 38), but now things have changed. Now they struggle to "bring back that old feeling, that feeling they

belonged to America the way they felt during the war" (C 39). Silko reminds us that things are not the same for these men. They have returned to their reservations to the same conditions they left before. Emo remarks "look what is here for us. Look. Here's the Indians' mother earth! Old dried-up thing!" (C 23). Again Silko ties the sickness of the men to the dying earth around them.

Things do not get better for Tayo, and he agrees to go see another medicine man. Immediately Tayo is struck by the location of Betonie's hogan. He lives in the foothills above the ceremonial grounds. He says he can keep an eye on everyone from there. He says the townspeople keep the Indians in the part of town they do not want - near the dump, but the Indians do not care. He remarks "we know these hills and we are comfortable here" (C 108). Tayo is taken by his use of the word "comfortable" saying "it had a different meaning - not the comfort of big houses or rich food or even clean streets, but the comfort of belonging with the land, and the peace of being with these hills" (C 108). Using this phrase indicates Silko's intention. Betonie is connected to the land, and this connection is what helps him heal others. In order for Tayo to heal, he will need to reestablish his own connection to the land.

Betonie begins by telling Tayo that the ceremonies have to be changed in order for them to work. While some believe the ceremonies have to be performed exactly the same way each time, Betonie insists they have always been changing, even if it was as simple as the "different voices from generation to generation, singing the chants" (C 116). Betonie believes that in order to keep up with the changes in the world brought on by the whites, he had to change some of the rituals and perform new ceremonies in order for them to be effective. He tells Tayo "that things which don't shift and grow are dead

things" (C 116) and "that's what the witchery is counting on: that we will cling to the ceremonies the way they were, and then their power will triumph, and the people will be no more" (C 116-117). The Pueblo people must grow and adapt or they will perish.

Betonie understands that Tayo's problems are not caused by the usual things. The world has changed, and only a ceremony reflecting these changes will help Tayo heal. After completing the sand painting ceremony, Tayo believes it has had an effect "like the rawhide thongs of the medicine pouch, straining to hold back the voices, the dreams, faces in the jungle in the L.A. depot, the smoky silence of solid white walls" (C 141). Betonie remarks that the ceremony is not finished yet, and he tells him what is next in the process. Tayo's journey back to health will include the stars, his Uncle Josiah's spotted cattle, a mountain, and a woman. In other words, as Michelle Satterlee notes, Betonie points out to Tayo that he can only "come to terms with his trauma through direct contact with the natural world that helps unify his memories and post-war life" (74-75). Tayo's healing ceremony will take him to actual, physical locations, and the locations appear to be just as important as any psychological or spiritual aspects of the ceremony. Silko places importance on the geography because it is important to her culture and to the story.

The ceremony will help him integrate all aspects of his personality. As Chavkin and Chavkin assert in “The Origins of Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*,” "the novel implies that Rocky, a Native American with contempt for his heritage, is doomed because of his complete acculturation and reveals that only by reestablishing a firm connection to his heritage can Tayo be saved" (28). Through his ceremony, Tayo will become closer to the land that is at the core of his Laguna Pueblo heritage. By re-establishing his ability to live and function in the natural world, Tayo will then be better able to cope with the white

man's war and his place in it physically as a soldier and culturally as mixed race. Tayo will not be doomed if he can learn to embrace all aspects of his heritage - both white and Laguna, and he can use both to finally heal.

The loss of the cattle is part of Tayo's sickness because of their tie to his Uncle Josiah. Tayo's first goal is to get back his uncle's cattle. Before Tayo left for the war, his uncle Josiah bought some Mexican cattle, at Night Swan's suggestion, to start their own herd. The Hereford cattle most people have cannot survive the drought. They cannot eat the thistle and burned cactus that is meant to sustain them through droughts. Josiah remarks "cattle are like any living thing. If you separate them from the land for too long, keep them in barns and corrals, they lose something" (C 68). The Herefords can no longer survive on the land because they have been away from it for too long.

We can easily see Silko's intent. She wants the reader to understand that losing one's connection to the land can have devastating consequences. On the other hand, Josiah's Mexican cattle were used to dry conditions, familiar with living in the desert, and able to survive harsh winters and times of little food and water. Josiah believes by breeding these cows to Hereford bulls, he can produce stock than can survive the elements but also produce lots of meat. Cattle prices are down because of the drought, and Josiah feels this is an excellent opportunity that he cannot miss. He sees populating the land with his hybrid cows. Tayo is in on every part of the transaction to get these cows, and he knows the importance Josiah places on them. He promised to help his uncle with the cows, but instead he enlists in order to be with Rocky and keep him safe. The herd of cattle is Tayo's only link to his Uncle Josiah, and they represent more potential

wasted because of the war. If Tayo can get the cows back, he can honor his uncle and break the cycle of waste generated by the war.

Josiah's cattle are not familiar with the land and they feel a constant pull to go home. They are always travelling south, fighting to get back to their homeland. Josiah remarks that they "are scared because the land is unfamiliar, and they are lost" (C 68). The same can be said for Tayo. He has been away from the land for six years, and when he returns much has changed. He feels lost as well. Through the ceremony, Tayo is fighting to get back. That Silko includes this shows again how she feels about ties to home and ties to the land. Even cattle feel this pull and try to go back. They are restless just like Tayo. As Tayo begins to heal, so do the cows. Eventually, after Tayo recovers them, the cows seem to relax a little and they wander less. Some of their restlessness has been removed.

While the cows have always gone south, Tayo feels compelled to search for them in the north this time. Betonie's ceremony is leading him this way. It is not long before he meets up with a woman "wearing a man's shirt tucked into a yellow skirt" (C 164) and the blanket she wears over her shoulders contains "patterns of storm clouds in white and gray; black lightning scattered through brown wind" (165). Immediately, by connecting this new character, Ts'eh, to the natural elements of storms, Silko gives the reader a clue to the identity of this woman and why she is here. As Paula Gunn Allen points out,

> 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 witchery. And Ts'eh is the central character of

the drama of the ancient battle as it is played out in contemporary times. (119)

Silko gives more hints to Ts'eh's true identity as the story continues, at one point contributing the amount of snow to her open blanket and at another showing her walking through sunflowers -- tied to the natural world and responsible for its healing. This character eventually tells Tayo her name is Ts'eh Montaño, which can only refer to Tse-pi'na/Mount Taylor. Ts'eh, the spirit of the mountain so important to Laguna culture, appeared to help Tayo with his journey back to the land. Earlier in the novel, Silko tells the reader that in the direction of Mount Taylor is where the rain comes from. Making Ts'eh such an integral figure in Tayo's quest for healing again shows the importance Silko places on the land. Ts'eh, like other feminine Laguna figures such as Spider Woman, Thought Woman, and Yellow Woman, is tied directly to the land, and she is here to help Tayo regain his connection to the land and to his people.

As Tayo walks outside on his first night with Ts'eh, he looks up and "Old Betonie's stars were there" (C 167). At this point, he knows he is on the right path to finding Josiah's cattle. The next morning, as he prepares to leave, he can smell the snow and pine in the air and thinks "being alive was alright then: he had not breathed like that for a long time" (C 168). The reader sees that the ceremony and Ts'eh are already having dramatic effects on Tayo. He began his journey not thinking he would find much, but as he moves up the mountain in search of the cows, "suddenly Betonie's vision was a story he could feel happening -- from the stars and the woman, the mountain and the cattle would come" (C 173).

Eventually, Tayo spots the cows behind a rancher's fence. He knows he has to work quickly to avoid being caught by the men who patrol the area to keep people out of what was once their own land. He begins to work quickly to cut the wires on the fence so that he can eventually drive the cows out and back down the mountain. It is long and tedious work, and as he finishes, he realizes that

> he had been so intent on finding the cattle that he had forgotten about the events of the past days and past years. Old Betonie was right, it was a cure for that, and maybe for other things too. The spotted cattle wouldn't be lost any more, scattered through his dreams, driven by his hesitation to admit they had been stolen, that the land -- all of it -- had been stolen from them. (178)

The ceremony is working, and Tayo is beginning to see all of the connections that have played a part in his sickness. After he finds the cattle and starts back towards the fence line with them, he realizes "the tension in the muscles of his neck and shoulders unwound with each breath he took" (C 183). Tayo is reestablishing his connection to the land and to his people, and because he is able to reconnect, he begins to heal. After a run-in with the rancher's men, Tayo heads back down the mountain as an early snowstorm approaches.

By May, the drought is over and the "valley was green, from the yellow sandstone mesas in the northwest to the black lava hills to the south. But it was not the green color of the jungles, suffocating and strangling the earth" (C 203). Tayo's ceremony is working and he is able to separate his good memories from the bad ones. He has reconciled his past and he no longer damns the rain. The rain has returned because Tayo is healed.

Ts'eh, the spirit of the mountain, has helped her people once again. Through his time in nature, reconnecting with the land and his own feelings, Tayo has learned to manage his own world. He understands now that "the dreams had been terror at loss, at something lost forever; but nothing was lost; all was retained between the sky and the earth, and within himself. He had lost nothing" (204).

Tayo comes to realize who Ts'eh really is as, "he could feel where she had come from, and he understood where she would always be" (C 214). He realizes Ts'eh's connection to the land, to the rain, and to the ceremony, and so he believes his journey is complete. Unfortunately, Ts’eh knows the ceremony is not complete. Ts'eh tells him that there is one more step in his journey. His past in the Army must be reconciled with his connection to the land now. The destroyers do not want his story to end happily "because the violence of the struggle excites them" (C 215). Doctors from the hospital, men from the government, and even some of the elders in the tribe are looking for Tayo. The tribal elders go along partly because the government men ask them to come, but also because, as Ts'eh tells Tayo, "they are trying to decide who you are" (C 216). They do not know for sure that the ceremony is complete and that Tayo is healed. Emo has told the men from the government that Tayo is not well, and they will hunt him down any way necessary. They think Tayo will probably resist and be killed. Ts'eh believes that the elements will take care of the government people, but Tayo will have to deal with Emo and the others on his own.

As he attempts to hide, Tayo finds himself at the old uranium mine and realizes "he had arrived at the point of convergence where the fate of all living things, and even the earth had been laid" (C 228). It was the "fate the destroyers planned for all of them"

(C 228). The uranium and its use connects the whole world. A simple rock from his own homeland ties the destruction of the whole world together. At realizing this, Tayo

> cried the relief he felt at finally seeing the pattern, the way all the stories fit together - the old stories, the war stories, their stories - to become the story that was still being told. He was not crazy; he had never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time. (C 229)

He can see the connections between everything now, and although he is aware of the destruction the destroyers seek, it is easier for him to put things into perspective now. He fights the urge to jump from the shadows and attack Emo. Once he resists this evil, the ceremony is complete. Tayo has won because he did not let the destroyers win. He did not kill Emo as they had wished. Shortly after, Harley and Leroy die when they crash their pickup truck, and Emo shoots Pinkie and then is banned from the reservation by the elders. Every piece falls into place.

Ultimately, as Paula Gunn Allen asserts, "Tayo's illness is a result of separation from the ancient unity of person, ceremony, and land, and his healing is a result of his recognition of this unity" (119). Through his geographical and spiritual journey, Tayo has learned to come to terms with his past and his mixed heritage, and he now understands the importance of each element around him. The novel ends as Tayo tells the tribal elders his story. He has been brought back into the community, and they hope to learn from what has happened to him. Through *Ceremony*, Silko speaks of the importance of the land to the Pueblo people. This is not just a story where certain geographical features act as the scene of the action, but a story in which the land plays an active role. The land is

present on every page and in every character we meet throughout the book. Through Tayo's journey, Silko shows we are all connected to the land in some way, and we should all work to embrace these connections.

CHAPTER V

Seeds of Change in *Gardens in the Dunes*

For thousands of years, civilizations have lived and died by the effects of the land they inhabit and what they could grow. Just as we saw in *Ceremony*, the weather can have lasting effects on the land and its people. Climate dictates what we grow and when, and it also determines if those things will survive long enough to nourish the people. This bond between the land and its inhabitants is not unique to America, to the Southwest, to the northern plains, or to shores of the East Coast. This connection is apparent all over the world and in all cultures. Even as the colonizers come in to destroy cultures or change them to better fit their own image, something of the original culture and the original connection to the land remains. In her novel *Gardens in the Dunes*, Leslie Marmon Silko illustrates this brilliantly through a young, mixed race Sand Lizard girl as she travels the world collecting seeds and thus, knowledge of other cultures. It is through this young girl, Indigo, and the other women of the novel as well, that the reader learns about the connectedness of cultures, the importance of the land, and the speed at which man races to control both.

While the Sand Lizard people of *Gardens* are a fictitious band, it is obvious they are patterned after the Pueblo peoples who inhabit parts of New Mexico, California, and Arizona. As mentioned previously, Silko is part Laguna and grew up at Laguna Pueblo. The culture of the Pueblo Indians, and by extension the Sand Lizard people as well, is Silko's culture. Their connection to the land is her connection to the land. She is also "acutely aware of the inherent conflicts between Indian and white, old-time beliefs and

Christianity" (YW 17), and these conflicts appear frequently in her work. *Gardens in the Dunes* is no exception.

In the introduction to her book of essays, *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit*, Silko remarks of the Pueblo people: "The Pueblo people have always connected certain stories with certain locations; it is these places that give the narratives such resonance over the centuries. The Pueblo people and the land and the stories are inseparable." (14) Silko carries this sense of connectedness, this love of the land to her work, and most especially to *Gardens in the Dunes*. Almost immediately, Silko establishes how important nature and the land will be in this work. The novel opens in the desert as the main character, Indigo, and her sister run through the datura blossoms and dance in the rain.

In this story, we learn the true results of man's constant need to control his surroundings, and we see how a few people along the way try to pick up the pieces. From the travels of a young Native American girl, Indigo, and her travelling companion and guardian Hattie, we get a first-hand look at what happens over the years when cultures intersect. Usually this collision is the result of one of the cultures looking for power or fortune or for general submission to their ideals. History has proven that these dominant, colonizing cultures will stop at nothing to get what they want. This theme is obvious in *Gardens in the Dunes* where we see the first-hand effects of colonization through the colonized characters of Sister Salt, Indigo, Grandma Fleet, and the Chemehuevi sisters and the colonizers, Edward, Dr. Gates, and the others like them.

On the most basic level, this is a story of colonialism through the eyes of Indigo and her family. Silko writes of the hardships inflicted on Native Americans by white

settlers. They have been displaced from their way of life and are losing their connection to the land. Robert F. Gish writes in his article, "'Voice from Bear County' Leslie Silko's Allegories of Creation" that while the story has some magical realism elements, the novel is made believable by the facts that are included." (52) Silko includes

> historical markers of by now notorious Federal Indian policies of religious intolerance directed here toward Wovoka and the Ghost Dance; of repressive schooling and economic deprivation, especially of young Indian women cast into prostitution and roles as 'squaws' by westering adventurers and entrepreneurs. (Gish 53)

Indigo and her family live in the dunes because Grandma Fleet believes they are safe there. Children are being kidnapped from their families and forced into the Indian boarding schools. The Ghost Dance is broken up by the police, many of whom are Indians who have assimilated to the white beliefs in order to survive. But the dunes cannot protect them forever, and the women in the story are thrown further into poverty, forced off their lands, placed into Indian Schools, separated from their families, and removed from their cultures. But they survive, and in their survival they help to preserve a culture that is being lost.

The effects of colonization often, if not always, have an impact on the land and the cultures of those on the land. Louise Erdrich shows us this repeatedly in her North Dakota series as well as some of her other works. The lives of every character in these novels are affected by those who seek to take the land for their own and remake its inhabitants in their own images. The same can be said for Silko's novels, although she often goes about it in a less apparent way. In *Ceremony*, Silko concentrates on Tayo's

reintegration into society through his ties to the land, although he only needs to reconnect because of his exposure to the outside world of the oppressors. In *Gardens in the Dunes*, gardens in their various forms take center stage, but still work to show us the bigger picture. It is also through these various gardens and the natural world that we learn the true substance of the characters in the novel. According to Stephanie Li, in the novel, "gardening reflects social values and the complex ways that humans relate to and conceive of the natural world" (19). Knowing what we know about Silko's deep connection to the land, it becomes apparent *Gardens in the Dunes* is a commentary on not only colonization but how the different people involved treat the land around them. As Angelica Kohler notes in her essay "the Indian respect for the land and all its life forms is sharply contrasted with modern turn-of-the-century American society's ambitions to conquer nature for purposes of urbanization" (239). Just as in *Ceremony*, we see that everything and everyone is connected through a common denominator -- the land.

After escaping from the Indian boarding school, Indigo takes refuge in Edward's garden where she is surrounded by every imaginable type of vegetation. This garden space is in stark contrast to life at the boarding school. It is lush and cool compared to the cold, oppressiveness of the school. It is not long before Indigo is discovered by Hattie and brought into the house. Immediately, Hattie is nurturing and protective of Indigo, not wishing to return her to the school until absolutely necessary. Edward on the other hand, sees things in a different manner and believes there is no question but to return Indigo to the school. The personalities of Hattie and Edward and their approaches to Indigo mirror their views on the natural world. Hattie wishes to protect it while Edward sees nothing wrong with using it to his advantage.

While Indigo is momentarily free from hunger and struggles because she is taken in by Hattie and Edward, Sister Salt and the twins are in the heart of it. Sister Salt ends up in another "board school" which is in reality a work camp. Eventually, she figures out a side business washing clothes for the new laborers moving in to build the dam. She gets caught, but Big Candy pays her fine, and Sister Salt, Martha and Vedna move their washing business to the vicinity of the construction that will produce the first dam across the Colorado River. The girls adapt as best they can and make money by washing for the workers and by prostituting themselves as well. At one point, Sister Salt finds herself looking down on the construction site, and she "was shocked at the destruction she saw below: the earth was blasted open, the soil moist and red as flesh . . . the river had been forced from her bed into deep diversion ditches where her water ran angry red" (GD 211). Because of the need to provide water for prosperous cities such as Los Angeles, the natural resources are being used with little regard for the side effects (Kohler 239). Silko makes it clear that this disruption of the natural order of things is destructive and a cause for anger.

When they later move to their own land, Sister Salt and the others are shunned by the other members of their community because they sell beer and have been prostitutes. They are disliked and mistrusted because the others have assimilated and are now Christians while Sister Salt and the twins are not. The bigger picture though is that it does not matter. They have bought and paid for their land, but when the white settlers are ready for it, they will come and take it. There is no certainty for these women or for the countless other people who were in this same situation during the late nineteenth century. All they can do is hope to preserve what aspects of their culture that they can. Silko uses

the building of the dam and the digging of the water canal to Los Angeles as a way to show how the colonizers use the land as they want; not taking into consideration the effect it may have on others.

Through it all, Indigo collects her seeds. As she hides in Edward's garden, she remembers the importance of seeds. "Grandma Fleet always advised the girls to collect as many new seeds as they could carry home. The more strange and unknown the plant, the more interested Grandma Fleet was" (GD 83-84). On the surface, it seems like a simple, nostalgic act in remembrance of her grandmother, but it is much more than that as "Grandma said they never found a plant they couldn't use for some purpose" (GD 84). Indigo recognizes the importance of the natural elements around her. She respects those elements, and she believes that collecting the seeds is a way of surviving. She also comes to understand that saving the seeds is a manner of preserving her culture and understanding and helping to preserve other cultures as well. Indigo collects the seeds along her travels, but she is not using them for the same reasons as the men in the story.

While for the men like Edward collecting seeds and plants is a part of colonization, for Indigo collecting seeds is a response to colonization. The food grown in the gardens in the dunes sustained life for centuries, and by collecting seeds Indigo hopes to continue to sustain life, and ways of life, as well. She uses the seeds for growth, knowledge, preservation, and protection but not for personal monetary gain. As Stephanie Li notes, "as a traveler, Indigo comes to appreciate those aspects of nature that, like her, are mobile and possess meaning that can be transplanted across geographic spaces" (29). Indigo realizes that by taking the seeds back to her own garden, she will be connecting cultures across space and time. In this way, cultures can work together to form something

new instead of one culture destroying another. This collecting of the seeds is the ultimate act of preservation in that it allows certain aspects of one culture to be shared with other cultures.

By preserving and planting the seeds she collects, she is taking charge of her life and the lives of others. She is protecting the very things the colonizers wish to exploit and destroy, and she is preserving her way of life. Most of the women of the novel do the same thing: Aunt Bronwyn and her rocks, Hattie's artifacts, Laura's sculptures, Indigo's seeds. By including these women, Silko shows this is a tale of colonization of Native Americans, but that is not the only story. Silko introduces us to the bigger picture. For centuries, other places and other cultures have been colonized and exploited as well. Silko uses a natural world lens to give us the story of the men who do the destroying and the women who try to preserve these cultures.

The men of this story are the embodiment of what the women in the gardens, perhaps Susan included, are working so hard against. They are the oppressors, the colonizers. They are out to make money at any cost, burn the forests, disregard the feelings and safety of others, and look past the cultures they are destroying. Big Candy, blinded by money and success until it is too late, loses his money and his wife and child. Edward's encounters with the land are destructive or for monetary gain only. He is not trying to preserve anything; he only wants to try to make money off of it. Dr. Gates, out for monetary gain through his meteorite mine, also destroys Edward in the process.

Of all the male characters, Edward is by far the worst offender. He "thinks primarily of his own pockets" (Ryan 130). As a botanist, he would seem to have a connection to the natural world, but this is not the case. As Angelica Kohler points out

"Palmer has sold his knowledge to colonizing imperialist enterprises; these try to make money by breaking down other countries' dominance in raising exotic plants whose possession has just become popular" (238) during this time in American history. His only goal is to gain notoriety or make money. He thinks nothing of the people who are displaced, enslaved, or killed in his hunt for orchids or of the forests that were burned to insure one group could corner the market on a specific orchid variety. As Ryan notes, "in *Gardens* violence is a manifestation of the imperialistic greed of white men," (129) and Edward provides the perfect example of this greed.

Edward sees the women of the story as ridiculous, hysterical, and unaware of the value of the artifacts they possess. He views things only in terms of their monetary value and thinks nothing of the item's cultural value. Edward laments of Laura's garden, "Was the whole collection displayed out of doors? Personally he found the Old European artifacts crude and unappealing; still, he was amazed their hostess, who called herself a scholar, risked rare archaeological artifacts simply to decorate a garden." (GD 293) He is unwilling or unable to understand the deeper connections. He only sees what is on the surface, and he does not believe women are capable of understanding the true value around them. Later, after being detained with his citron cuttings, Edward

> talked about the beastly customs men - common thieves who pillaged private property -and about travel arrangements, but still Edward made no mention of her and Indigo's detention. He expressed no regret, nor did he express any gratitude for the sizable bond which Laura pledged on his behalf. (GD 329)

The irony in this statement is obvious. Edward considers the customs men to be "common thieves who pillage private property" yet he, and others like him, do the same thing. As Angelika Kohler notes, "he deliberately pursues his scientific and mercenary ambitions at the cost of subordinating the 'Other' -- not just the non-American competition but also his wife" (238).

Edward gives no thought to the effects his decisions have on others. He makes his living by pillaging the rainforests and gaining advantages when other societies are colonized. He has used his wife, and Indigo, as a way of reaching his goals. Edward should be aware of the irony of his statement, but it does not appear that he is. Wasn't he left for dead after he pillaged the rain forest for orchids while others sought to burn down the forest to corner the rubber market? Even after he is detained, he does not stop. He is immediately on to his next scheme -- making money from the *Brassavola* plants he manages to buy. The juxtaposition of the two sides - Edward versus Indigo and the other women is obvious as they wait to leave New Orleans. Hattie and Indigo read a book about "the first time a European saw the thousands and thousands of violet-and-white flower spikes of the wild gladiolus flourishing in the coastal desert of North Africa" (GD 371) while Edward daydreams of how "he would create his own fragrant orchid hybrids to sell to florists from Los Angeles to San Francisco" (GD 372). The women see the beauty of the land before it was colonized while Edward only sees what he can accomplish from the colonization. The men of the story, most notably Edward, are the ones doing the destroying while the women of the novel, associated with the land and its preservation, work to save the cultures in the wake of the destruction.

According to Robert Gish,

> early, middle, and late Silko is fascinated, perhaps obsessed with the myths and imagery of the garden and the wasteland. Creation and destruction, procreation and sterility are recurrent and abiding themes in Silko's writing, giving both form and substance to her poetry, fiction, and essays. (54)

This is certainly the case with *Gardens in the Dunes*. Gardens figure prominently into every aspect of the story. In fact, they are the very basis of the story. In her essay "The Feminine Landscape of Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*," Paula Gunn Allen writes that "we are land, and the land is mother to us all" (119). According to many Native American traditions, Silko's Laguna Pueblo tradition included, the land is associated with the feminine, and the women are inherently tied to the land. This is apparent in Silko"s *Gardens*. The significant women of the story are each tied to a garden. They are put in the story to protect these gardens and keep them from becoming the wasteland that is the fate of so many colonized cultures.

Indigo displays a deep love for her family, her home, and the animals she meets along the way. This love of the land and family is passed down from her grandmother. Stephanie Li writes that "Grandma Fleet honors Indigenous values by recognizing the old gardens as a source of food, shelter, and identity, and she passes this respect for the earth on to her grandchildren" (19). Grandmother Fleet, Sister Salt, and Indigo are strong and survive on their own - raising their own food while looking to their remote desert location to also keep them safe. Throughout the novel, Indigo's one desire is to get back to her family. Everything she sees and does is tempered by this desire. Hattie realizes Indigo's strong need for home, and risks her life and her reputation to see that Indigo is returned to

her family. The women of the novel are the righters of the wrongs. They are the ones who fight back against the oppressors. Preserving the land is a way to fight, and it is an effort to recover lost cultures. The women of the story show their love of their land and their deep desire to preserve the cultures it is tied to.

They are two very distinct green worlds in *Gardens in the Dunes.* We have the native land of Indigo and her family, and we are also shown the rich, luxurious gardens of the other characters in the story. While the desert gardens are very different from the others, all of these spaces share one similar characteristic. All of the gardens, with the exception of Hattie's father's garden, are associated with women. But, because of Hattie's association with the place, it is easy to attach this garden to the feminine presence as well. Further, Hattie loves spending time in the gardens at their home in Riverside, and it seems only obvious that she would have grown into this love by spending time in the garden at her family home in Oyster Bay. All of the other gardens mentioned are decidedly feminine spaces. Susan is obsessed, for reasons we will learn, with her garden in Oyster Bay, Grandma Fleet, Sister Salt, and Indigo cherish and respect their dune gardens, Aunt Bronwyn protects stones in her garden, and Laura displays ancient artifacts in natural elements in hers. The women possess the gardens of the story, and with the exception of Susan, the women protect these gardens and the cultures associated with them.

In her article "The Nineteenth-Century Garden: Imperialism, Subsistence, and Subversion in Leslie Marmon Silkos's *Gardens in the Dunes*," Terre Ryan writes that Silko "pointedly contrasts nineteenth-century American gardening aesthetics and ideologies with the Sand Lizards' subsistence farming" (116). The gardens in the work -

Hattie's, Susan's, the Sand Lizards', Aunt Bronwyn's, and Laura's, are all different, but that does not mean they do not share similarities or that they are not used for the same purpose in the novel. In fact, Ryan goes on to say that "by conjoining the stories of Hattie and Indigo, Silko describes the ways in which both Native and white women survived by circumventing a system designed to subjugate or destroy them" (116). I would argue they do not merely survive, but they also thrive in their own ways and help preserve the cultures men (the colonizers) have tried so hard to destroy.

Each garden plays a specific role in the novel. First we will look at the desert gardens. Grandma Fleet's, and in turn Sister Salt and Indigo's garden, has provided nourishment for the Sand Lizard people for generations. Through careful planning, the garden's plants would come back year after year and sustain those who lived there. Terre Ryan writes

> Grandma Fleet's practices look simple compared to the botanical theatrics that Indigo later encounters in the Northeast, but her efforts demonstrate a highly sophisticated understanding of desert agriculture and the continuation of agricultural traditions that had been in practice for thousands of years. (118)

A deep respect for the land and an understanding of what it is capable of have helped to keep the Sand Lizard people alive. Even in times of drought, careful management ensured there was always something to eat.

Only when colonization arrives in full strength does the garden fail to feed all the people. When orders are given that all Indians have to go to the reservation, many flee to the gardens, with Indigo's mother among them. The garden cannot sustain the constant

flow of people. "Before the summer rains ever came, the people were starving. They ate the dried-up seed pumpkins and squash left in the garden the year before as first harvest offerings; they consumed seeds set aside for planting next season. They ate everything they could find" (GD 18). The people have been forced out of their traditions and out of their way of life. The changes brought on by the American government, and the settlers who want their land, have disrupted the gentle balance between the land and its people. Eventually, Sister Salt and Indigo will return to the garden and make it plentiful again, but they are only able to do so because they fully understand and respect what is necessary for it to thrive.

Aunt Bronwyn's garden also offers a lesson in preservation and a lesson in the historical cruelty of colonizers as well. Her garden is the home of rocks - ancient artifacts from civilizations long suppressed. Aunt Bronwyn makes it her mission to collect pieces of these ancient cultures whenever she can. She knows the stories, and she knows the histories of the objects that occupy her garden. She tells Indigo and the others that

> King Cormac the Magnificent cruelly suppressed the druid religion. The Council of Tours decreed excommunication for those who persisted in worshipping trees; the council of Nantes instructed bishops and their servants to dig up and hide the stones in remote woody places upon which vows were still made. Yet the wisest Christians were respectful to the pagan spirits. (GD 261)

Silko is trying to make a point here. We would all be wise to respect other traditions instead of destroying them. Bronwyn continues:

> Yet despite the persecution, the old customs persisted - dairy keepers spilled a bit of milk for the fairies, morning and night; on the first night of August, a few people (Aunt Bronwyn was one of them) still gathered around fires on nearby hilltops before dawn, though the church tried to outlaw such practices centuries before. (GD 261)

Aunt Bronwyn, who was not even born in England, fights to keep this culture from being lost. She has dedicated her garden and her surrounding to keeping this distant, colonized culture alive. She collects pieces of the old stones in an effort to respect the old religions. Indigo collects seeds -- pieces of other cultures as well -- to take home to preserve her own culture. As Hattie continues to search for her true place in the world, she will eventually return to Aunt Bronwyn's garden, comforted by the mystic elements present there (Cummings 84).

Laura's gardens are an exercise in preservation as well. In her garden, we find hidden grottos and statues from as far back as the fourth millennium -- a Minotaur, Medusa, fertility figures. Laura leaves them displayed in the natural environment, and only brings them out of the elements during the cold of winter. Edward, acting in his capacity as one of the colonizers of the story, is stunned. "Edward nodded, though he did not approve of such a careless attitude towards rare artifacts" (GD 291). Edward can only see the momentary value of the figurines; he is unable to see their cultural significance as well.

The gardens Laura possesses also contain rain figurines. Indigo instantly understands the significance of the pieces. While she was unfamiliar with this lost culture until this moment, she understands the importance of rain, and so she gets a glimpse of

the lives of these forgotten people. She is able to tie the significance of the rain in this lost culture to the importance of it in her own culture. Hattie instantly recognizes the significance as well. Susanne Ferguson notes "through contact with the pagan and Christian past, Indigo and her American guardian, Hattie, both come to understand an interrelatedness of people across cultures and time in their shared respect for the earth and its creatures" (36). Laura's statues have helped to preserve these lost cultures and keep their memories alive for future generations.

Only Susan's garden is in contrast to the gardens of the other women. She seems to have the very opposite values of the other women. Her garden speaks to the spirit of imperialism and a need for power and control. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Susan's transplanting of the giant beech trees. Susan has taken an old and established garden and is remaking it to suit her tastes. This is a basic element of colonialism. According to Terre Ryan, "the tree scene also conjures images of the forced relocation of America's indigenous peoples from their native lands and of Indigo's displacement" (124). What is happening to the trees is happening to people and cultures everywhere. The natural world is being destroyed along with the cultures that inhabit these spaces.

Susan is an interesting character, and her garden can provide a different perspective. It is easy to lump Susan into the category of the colonizers, but this might be a rush to judgment. It is true that Susan destroys the old garden to create the new, but she is also very involved in the selection and growth of the flowers for her gala. She is in control of all aspects of the garden and the ball. Susan's garden also provides an opportunity for an affair. Is she unhappy with her husband? Maybe she is more like the other women than we first realize. The effects of the colonization (the men) are being felt

by everyone, Susan included. She seems to lean towards the greed of the men, but maybe that is only on the surface. As Terre Ryan notes "Susan's baroque theatrics are a grotesque example of Victorian extravagance, yet they indicate that what she wants is power . . . if she cannot control her own life, she can still make the earth move" (125). Maybe her garden is a way to take control in a world where she is often not allowed that privilege.

In *Gardens in the Dunes* Silko makes her point abundantly clear. The work speaks volumes on the effects of not only the colonization of the Unites States, but of the world as well. Through Edward and the other men of the story, we see the motives and views of the colonizers. Everything can be used for momentary gain, and no culture or location is safe from the destruction. However, Silko gives the reader strong women characters who find strength in the land and work tirelessly to preserve it through their garden spaces. As the story ends, Indigo and the others in the gardens in the dunes eat the gladiolus spuds in their stew and admire the beauty of their flowers outside their shelter. Unlike the men of the story, these women have learned to balance the beauty of nature with its ability to provide sustenance and other benefits as well. Through a respect for the natural world, the women are sustained, each in their own way. Unlike the men in the story, these women are able to keep their garden spaces while still making important gains for themselves and those that depend on them.

As Denise Cummings points out "it is not coincidental that *Gardens* ends where it began, back in the old gardens; there, an image of growing life emerges out of old scars and wounds" (86). Indigo has seen the world and the effects of not just local but global colonization. She now understands the connections between all cultures. By bringing

what she learned back to the dune gardens, there is hope that the problems of the past might be replaced with life and abundance, even if for only a short time. By preserving the lands and relics of the cultures before them, Hattie and the other women of *Gardens in the Dunes* have ensured that while colonization and destruction will continue, those colonized cultures, and their own as well, will all live on in some form.

CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

In *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit*, Silko tells us that the word "landscape" as most people use it is inaccurate. She writes,

> "a portion of territory the eye can comprehend in a single view" does not correctly describe the relationship between the human being and his or her surroundings. This assumes the viewer is somehow outside or separate from the territory she or he surveys. Viewers are as much a part of the landscape as the boulders they stand on. (27)

Both Louise Erdrich and Leslie Marmon Silko illustrate this point beautifully in their works.

Every action of Erdrich's *Four Souls* and *The Bingo Palace* is tied to the land in some way. Her characters have struggled for generations to hold on to their land, to redefine their ties to the land, to adapt to new land, to fight for their land, and to find new ways to put their land to use. In *Four Souls* Fleur's life is filled with the constant struggle to hold on to her land. She risks everything for the chance to regain it. Nanapush is an advocate for the traditional ways, but he realizes changes have to be made to keep the land that belongs to his people. John James Mauser wants nothing more than to own all the land around him and to use up every available resource for his own gain. In *The Bingo Palace* a new generation realizes its own struggles and connections to the land. Lipsha returns to his home having lost his healing powers because of his absence and his loss of connection to the land. His father Gerry escapes from prison once again and seems to be aided in his escape by the weather. Lyman struggles with his traditional ties to the

land versus his need for money, power, and prestige. For Lyman to obtain his goal of building a bingo palace, Fleur will once again be displaced. Everyone has their own agenda, but each action is connected to the land; in each case, the story is driven by the land.

Through *Ceremony* and *Gardens in the Dunes* Silko demonstrates the importance of a strong connection to the land. In *Ceremony*, Tayo returns from the war suffering the effects of PTSD. Through his healing ceremony, he reestablishes his connection to the land which allows him to work through his pain and guilt. In *Gardens in the Dunes*, Silko introduces us to Indigo, a young Sand Lizard girl with a strong understanding and love of the natural world. Eventually, through her travels, Indigo learns the connections between all cultures and she works to keep those connections alive in her desert garden. Just as Edrich gave us John Mauser to illustrate the ways in which the natural world can be destroyed, Silko gives us the men of *Gardens*. Each shuns any natural connection to the world around them, preferring instead to focus only on the profits that can be made. Both Edrich and Silko develop characters who illustrate our strong, yet sometimes misunderstood or unrealized, ties to the land around us.

We are inextricably tied to the land around us, each connected to our own cultures formed by forging relationships with the land. While the Native American characters in Erdrich's and Silko's novels may share a more sacred or communal view of land, we each have our own individual connections that we may not realize. As Erdrich and Silko repeatedly show, land plays an integral part in telling stories - all stories. No matter what vantage point we might originally view land from, Erdrich and Silko demonstrate to us that land really is so much more than mere real estate. Often times we do not stop to think

about the land’s pivotal role in our lives. We mistakenly think because the world is settled and we have modern technology that land is of little significance anymore. Erdrich and Silko show us this is not the case and give us constant reminders through the characters they create. These characters, whether Native American or other, are tied in a specific way to the land; just as we all are. Without the land around us, at best our stories, all stories, are incomplete. More likely, there are no stories at all.

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