

SOMEONE TALKING: THE THEME OF PLACE
IN CONTEMPORARY NATIVE AMERICAN
LITERATURE

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A discussion of the theme of place in contemporary Native American literature facilitates understanding of the genre as well as the culture of Indian authors. Louise Erdrich's Tracks, Mary Crow Dog's Lakota Woman, N. Scott Momaday's House Made of Dawn, and the poetry of Robert Davis and Ramona Wilson all center on issues of place. As both physical and psychological constructs, places are shaped by the cultural values, traditions, and histories of the people who relate to them. Through literature, Native American authors establish relationships to place; with words, the universe is rendered meaningful, comprehensible, and eternal. By studying interpretations of place distinct from Western perspectives, we recognize the importance of other cultural experiences and give voice to important ethnic as well as universal concerns. At a time when Western ideology has led the world to the brink of ecological crisis, there is much to learn from a Native American regard for place as it is presented in the works of these authors.

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INTRODUCTION

After centuries of mistreatment, misrepresentation, and misunderstanding, North American Indians are gaining increasing voice in a society which has historically attempted to stifle them. Of the many forms used for Native American expression, the literary medium has achieved considerable exposure over the last few decades. This sudden interest in Native American literature has surfaced in both popular and scholarly reading circles; the popularity of Indian writers suggests that in recent years, readers schooled in Western literary traditions have developed a heightened awareness of the validity and importance of other cultural experiences. Contemporary Native authors continue to carve a foothold for themselves in the world of American literature, calling on both personal and collective experiences to define for themselves a world of unique Native American identities. While cultural diversity among Indian authors produces divisions within the group itself, there is nevertheless a common thread of heritage linking Indians together as the only writers native to this land. Moreover, there are thematic similarities in their works which contribute to the cohesiveness of the literary movement; such thematic parallels, when explored in specific works, can be used to further understanding of the Native American genre.

To understand and critically interpret the art of different societies, it is necessary to discover the cultural values which inspire and shape an artist's vision of reality. Native American authors draw from traditions and belief

systems markedly different from those rooted in Western aesthetics; any interpretation of their works thus becomes a cultural as well as a literary study, for a recognition of differences in social perspectives is fundamental to understanding "ethnic" literature. One of the predominant themes which surfaces in Native American writing is the concept of "place." A central element in literature as well as in the traditional belief systems of Indian tribes, the theme of place is closely linked to issues of personal and tribal identity. The term "Native American" itself defines a group of people by the land they traditionally inhabit; Indians are the only people living in this country who are identified as "native" to the very landscape and geography of the place. An awareness of this fundamental connection to the land which names them manifests itself repeatedly in the works of Native American authors.

As a physical or psychological environment created in a particular work, place is used in various literary forms to illustrate and develop Native American value systems. Though issues of place surface in Western literature as well, Native works offer a unique perspective on the theme because of the cultural ethics, qualities, and characteristics associated with place from an Indian viewpoint. Concepts of personal identity, relation to the earth, social roles, and religious principles, for example, are all affected by a cultural interpretation of place. Writes essayist Lawrence Evers, "By imagining who and what they are in relation to particular landscapes, cultures and individual members of cultures form a close relation with those landscapes. A sense of place derives from the perception of a culturally imposed symbolic order on a particular physical topography" ("Words and Place," p.212). Literature itself becomes a vehicle for shaping the universe into a meaningful reality, for establishing personal relationships to places. Thus, an interpretation of the place theme raises questions of why place is important to Native Americans, what personal or

cultural functions it serves, and how place and identity are related. As novelists and poets, the authors chosen for this study are characterized by the consistency, style, depth, and intensity with which they develop the theme of place in their works. Louise Erdrich, Mary Crow Dog, N. Scott Momaday, Robert Davis, and Ramona Wilson all give voice to issues related to place in their writing.

From a Western literary perspective, place is often interpreted as the physical location or environment presented in a work. More than just a setting or scene for the development of a story, place becomes an active element in many Native American works. It influences characters, shapes beliefs, haunts the memory, constricts or liberates the spirit, takes on symbolic meaning, and forms an axis around which conflicts are developed. White culture tends to treat places as possessions to be bought or sold, conquered or destroyed. Real estate is a principle business in this country, houses are "assets," and property serves as symbol of wealth; while the wilderness, the deserts of Kuwait, the far corners of space are places to be "won" with progress, with war, with technology. Most Native Americans, on the other hand, do not approach the environment with such economic, political, or scientific goals. Following in the traditions of their people, Native authors give places values which supercede individual human existence. In literature as in life, places serve a variety of functions -- they exist as historical sites, burial grounds, or arenas of communal interaction, for example -- all of which reinforce cultural identities and relationships to the rest of the world.

Yet Native definitions of place are not restricted simply to physical, tangible environments. A strong spiritual element in Native societies is coupled with artistic imagination to create metaphoric, abstract, or spiritual concepts of place which are equally central to Native American cultures. Often, it is this less

physical interpretation of place which lends depth and complexity to Native literature and particularly differentiates between Indian and Western uses of the theme. "White men need paper maps. We have maps in our minds," said Apache Nick Thompson (Basso, Text, Play, and Story, p.25). His statement suggests that a Native American would approach the physical world with an entirely different psychological outlook than a Westerner might; Indians like Thompson develop a spiritual, intuitive connection to nature which would distinctly shape their perceptions of places. It is crucial to recognize such differences of interpretation between Native and American value systems, for it is this kind of variance which characterizes literature as belonging to a distinct cultural tradition.

In Western literature, the theme of place has often been associated with highly respected authors. Writers such as Melville, Hawthorne, Hardy, Thoreau, Clemens, Faulkner, and O'Connor have used place, or nature, in their works to draw "the lesser scheme of lives" into "the vast, unexplored morality of life itself, what we call the immorality of nature, [which] surrounds us in its eternal incomprehensibility" (D.H. Lawrence, from Sanders, "Speaking a Word for Nature," p.648). Colored by religious, scientific, cultural, and traditional literary interpretations, the theme of place in Western literature reflects a different relation to the environment than a Native American author might express. The degree to which the environment interacts with a story, the kinds of symbolism or values associated with places, and variations in the use of place thus give the theme its cultural distinction.

In his essay "Speaking A Word For Nature" (Michigan Quarterly Review, Fall '87), Scott Sanders argues that a theme of place, a connection to nature and the world beyond individual existence, is lacking in much of contemporary American literature. "That a deep awareness of nature has been largely

excluded from 'mainstream' fiction is a measure of the narrowing and trivialization of that fashionable current. It is also, of course, and more dangerously, a measure of the shared blindness in the culture at large," writes Sanders (p.658). While the response to land as holy, as a source of meaning and energy, is an ancient view among Native Americans, Sanders notes that this perception of the earth is fairly recent among white authors: "The earliest responses to the wilderness were typically those of horror and revulsion" (p.650). Sanders' arguments suggest that, in a world of so many ecological threats and social ambivalence, there is much to be learned from a Native perspective of place. "If we are to survive, we must look outward from the charmed circle of our own works," concludes Sanders (p.661). Native American literature provides such an "outward look" by allowing us to interpret the world from a valuably different perspective.

The issue of place and identity are often closely connected in Native works. Recognizing how people perceive themselves in relation to their environments is fundamental to understanding personal and cultural values. Identity, as a concept of the self which springs from interaction with the "outside world," is shaped by beliefs about who we are, where we come from, what is important to us as human beings. Because a sense of place is so vital to many Native American cultures, it plays a major role in structuring Indian identities. Thus, analyzing how different authors combine the issues of place and identity provides one way to better understand Native American literature and cultures. Contemporary authors are concerned not only with the traditional values of place, but they also use literature to explore what happens when Native Americans lose the sense of place which is central to the formation of an Indian identity. As the original inhabitants of an invaded land, Native Americans are in

a unique position; they belong to this country, and yet they are also displaced in a land which has changed so much since the advent of the Europeans. It is this dichotomy which influences the search or affirmation of identity in many Native works; often, "to re-establish relationships with the land is the first and most important step toward the acquisition of a new [or renewed] identity" (Coltelli, Winged Words, p.4).

For the most part, the physical places reflected in Native American literature are drawn directly from the land which has become the United States of America. "America" itself is a word loaded with symbolism from a Western perspective; embedded in American culture are a number of values historically associated with the concept of a "New World." A reader schooled in Western tradition approaches literature with a host of preconceived notions about America, which make it necessary to distinguish between traditional Indian and Western beliefs still reflected in our perceptions of this country.

From the time the first European explorers started roving the coasts of North and South America, the New World became a legendary place full of treasure and plenty, a land inhabited by primitive Natives and ripe with unexplored wonders. For the Puritans who colonized the East Coast, America became "God's Country;" the settlers "personified the New World simultaneously as a nourishing mother and an undefiled virgin" (Bercovitch, The Puritan Origins of the American Self, p.135), for new-comers enjoyed an abundance of natural resources and moral purity "against a backdrop of Edenic lushness" (Bercovitch, p.135). Like the Puritans, those who came to America for political, economic, or personal freedom imbued the country with idealistic symbolism; the New World promised a utopian society in a free and unspoiled land. Out of the enthusiasm and confidence of the colonies grew the concept of an "Ideal Nation" which would epitomize "all that is most noble in the American

character" (Bercovitch, p.148-9). Free of the bonds of history, thousands of miles away from European control, those living in the New World believed they were beginning civilization anew when they created the United States of America.

As the East prospered, fascination with the mysterious interior led adventurers West. Heads filled with Manifest Destiny dreams of conquering the wilderness with bare hands, pioneers and fortune hunters were lured across the land in wave after endless wave. Promises of gold, silver, furs, farms drew people from the shores of New England to the coast of California. This was a land for the taking, a land for the blessed, a land of infinite potential. The concept of an American frontier has been a crucial factor in shaping not only the United States as a country, but the United States as a people. A continually advancing frontier line carried pioneers on the "outer edge of the wave" of progressive development to "the meeting point between savagery and civilization" (Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History, p.2). The land of the frontier became a symbol of American freedom, individualism, independence, and progress.

As the boundaries of the frontier rippled outward, those on the cutting edge were constantly challenged by the raw power of the wilderness. In Peck's New Guide to the West, published in Boston in 1837, the rugged pioneer is described: "He is the occupant [of the soil] for the time being, pays no rent, and feels as independent as the 'lord of the manor.' With a horse, cow, and one or two breeders of swine, he strikes into the woods with his family, and becomes the founder of a new county, or perhaps a state" (Turner, p.15). This successive pattern of exploring, "taming," and developing the land created an American sense of place which focused on the horizon, on the ever advancing movement of civilization across the landscape. The frontier was equated with freedom,

with opportunity, with a struggle for control over the dominion of nature itself. Of this free land came a democracy "strong in selfishness and individualism, intolerant of administrative experience and education, and pressing individual liberty beyond its proper bounds" (Turner, p.24). As a demand for land and a desire for freedom drew thousands to the frontier, advancement would not stop until the Pacific Ocean loomed into view. Even now, this concept of the frontier has instilled itself in the "expansive character" of American life which "continually demands a wider field for its exercise" (Turner, p.29). The desire for movement continues to shape an American sense of place as people search the corners of world, the depths of the ocean, and the vastness of the heavens for a glimpse of yet another frontier.

"Since the days when the fleet of Columbus sailed into the waters of the New World, America has been another name for opportunity, and the people of the United States have taken their tone from excessive expansion" (Turner, p.28). The symbolism surrounding this "land of opportunity" has been incorporated into the American value system; a respect for financial success, for individualism, for the "self-made man" has fed the competitive spirit of our capitalistic society. As a symbol of democracy, wealth, freedom, and hope, the United States continues to appeal to people around the world who believe in the American Dream. "The fundamental temper of America tends toward an existential ideal that can probably never be reached but can never be discarded: equal rights to variety, to construct your life as you see fit, to choose your traveling companions," writes essayist Robert Hughes (Time, Feb. 3, 1992, p.44). Moreover, Hughes contests that "America is a construction of mind, not of race or inherited class or ancestral territory" (p.44). Like the Western world, Native American groups have ideological connections to the land; yet their perceptions of this country are arguably as much "constructions of ancestral

territory" as they are "constructions of mind." Native Americans associate different values, different histories, different religions, and different ideals with this country because they were not immigrants who came to the New World five hundred years ago with that "existential ideal" in mind.

Thus, the Native Americans who watched the steady invasion of their traditional lands did not share the Europeans' enthusiastic ideals for the New World. The history of America did not begin in 1492, nor did civilization first carve its way into the American frontier when the Mayflower landed on Plymouth Rock a hundred and twenty years later. Indian societies had existed on the North American continent for thousands of years before European explorers arrived. With highly organized political, religious, and social structures, by 1000 B.C. many tribes were experimenting with horticulture and lived in bustling, efficient communities (Creamer and Haas, "Pueblo", p.88). Hardly the "savages" and "infidels" they were made out to be by European invaders, fifteenth century Native Americans understood the concept of the New World as poorly as the Europeans understood traditional Indian values of place. Wrote Sioux Chief Luther Standing Bear in his 1933 autobiography, "The white man does not understand the Indian for the reason that he does not understand America. He is too far removed from its formative process. The roots of the tree of his life have not yet grasped the rock and soil" (McLuhan, p.107). Approaching one another from ideologically incompatible perspective, Europeans and Indians alike found little common ground on which to base their foreign relations.

For Native Americans, there is no such thing as "owning" land. No one has a right to take land, to misuse it, to buy or sell the spirit of the earth. Though Indian tribes associate themselves with particular regions, their traditional relationship to the land was always one of respect and appreciation. Explaining

this crucial difference between white and Native concepts of place, the Nez Perce leader Chief Joseph (Thunder Travelling to Loftier Mountain Heights) once said:

Do not misunderstand me, but understand me fully with reference to my affection for the land. I never said the land was mine to do with it as I chose. The one who has the right to dispose of it is the one who has created it. I claim a right to live on my land, and accord you the privilege to live on yours.

McLuhan, Touch the Earth, p.54.

In acts which completely violated Native belief systems, white settlers parcelled and packaged the land into privately owned plots, forcing the Indians into unfamiliar and barren regions and ignoring their "right to live on their land." A Blackfoot chief, refusing to sign one of the first land treaties in the Northwest Territories region, said, "Our land is more valuable than your money. It will last forever" (McLuhan, p.53). Yet white settlers were insistent; lured with broken promises, money, alcohol, and forced at gunpoint, Indians lost their land and their faith in the white man's word after years of fruitless struggle to keep their homes. The question of ownership is a fundamental difference between Indian and Western interpretations of the land; it cannot be overemphasized in a study exploring Native values of place which are largely unfamiliar to white American readers.

Since the invasion of Western culture, a number of traditional Native places have been lost or destroyed. Tribal lands have been taken, sacred sites desecrated, burial grounds unearthed, personal places within families or communities have been lost. Often Native American authors respond to these losses by confronting them in literature, as they struggle to regain or recreate cultural places. The nomadic wanderings of many contemporary Indians differs

from the seasonally directed migration of traditional hunting and gathering tribes. Now, the nomads are journeying not as communities but as individuals, physically or spiritually in search of a symbolic place where they can re-discover that "Indian-ness" that has been lost somewhere along the road of persecution, acculturation, and assimilation. Ramona Wilson's poem "Passing Battlefields," to be discussed in the final chapter of this study, deals explicitly with the difficulty of finding a place of belonging. Without traditional places from which to draw an identity, the "wanderers" travel across the familiar yet foreign terrain of the contemporary westernized world. Rayna Green writes in her introduction to the anthology That's What She Said, "For people out on the edge, out on the road, identity is a matter of will, a matter of choice, a face to be shaped in a ceremonial act" (p.7). For the Native writer a poem or story itself becomes a place where identity is formed, re-affirmed, re-established. Writing creates a place, defines a world where characters and author alike identify for themselves what it means to be a Native American and a human being.

An exploration of place in Native literature necessitates the recognition of other values closely connected to this theme in Indian cultures. As a people who have been collectively scattered and uprooted throughout U.S. history, many Native Americans have struggled to retain their cultural heritage through the telling and re-telling of stories. "The meaning of their life was identified through their relationships with each other and their homelands - all of which [were] given depth and resonance by memory," writes T.C. McLuhan (p.1). Oral narrative, as a kind of "memory," has traditionally been a fundamental element of Native societies; history, custom, and culture are created during the act of storytelling. It is with words that people express a relationship to the environment and define a place for themselves within a larger universal context. Listening and responding to those words thus validates a vision of reality

unique from western perspectives while giving "depth and resonance" to different cultural experiences.

For Native American societies, places become symbols. They hold history in their names, tell stories, reinforce appropriate moral, spiritual, and physical behavior for members of a community. Tribes are named according to places; for example, the Makah tribe of the Olympic Peninsula in Washington was originally known as the Qwidicca-atx, or "people who live on the cape by the rocks and seagulls" (Pascua, "A Makah Village," National Geographic, p.40). Similarly, places themselves are named to reflect the stories or values related to them. The state of Alabama, for instance, still retains its Indian name; the place was ironically called "'Here we may rest'" by a tribe which, as legend has it, traveled through the land and "crossed a great river" to find a place where the Indian could "plant his feet and sigh 'A-la-ba-ma'" (McLuhan, p.156). Unmarked and unrecognizable to those who are unversed in tribal stories, places remind Natives of where they come from, where they belong in relation to the earth and other people. "Stories go to work on you like arrows. Stories make you live right. Stories make you replace yourself," said Apache Benson Lewis in an interview in 1979 (Basso, p.21). Similarly, his fellow tribe member Mrs. Annie Peaches commented, "The land is always stalking people. The land makes people live right. The land looks after us," (Basso, p.21). It is the connection between the psychological realm of storytelling and the physical landscape which is central to a Native American interpretation of place. Even for those who no longer live in the places they have heard about, the stories linger, memories inextricably linked to landscapes which teach Natives how to live in harmony with tribal values. In Louise Erdrich's Tracks, to be discussed in the following chapter, the power of the land over human life is clearly established. Those who "live right" are those who respect and remember their

kinship to the land, while those who forget their Chippewa stories and places lose the traditional "Indian-ness" represented by the character of Fleur.

The traditional use of stories connected to places has evolved in the writing of contemporary authors. Oral traditions have been transposed to the printed word, yet Native storytellers continue to emphasize a spiritual connection to the landscape through the use of language. "I have an idea that American literature really begins with the first expression of man in the American landscape, and who knows how far back that goes," says author N. Scott Momaday (Coltelli, p. 95). In his novel House Made of Dawn, Momaday captures the moral essence of an oral narrative in literary form. Drawing on the landscape of the Southwest, he narrates a story about the healing powers of place through the character of Abel, who finds spiritual rejuvenation in the land. As oral narrative and Momaday's novel suggest, place is an integral part of Indian cultures and plays a central role in contemporary literature as well.

As language and landscapes are often interwoven in Native writing, there are other characteristics commonly associated with place by Indian authors. The body is a central image related to place in all of the literature to be explored in this study. In Native societies, the body takes shape from the land itself; Mother Earth gives life, and to the earth all living things must eventually return. The spirit interacts with the physical world through sensual exploration; the body itself belongs to the perpetual cycles of nature. "Kinship with all creatures of the earth, sky and water was a real and active principle," said Lakota Sioux Chief Luther Standing Bear in describing his people (McLuhan, p.6). By living both physically and spiritually close to the earth, an Indian learns respect for nature and recognizes the human being's place within a larger cosmology. "The earth and myself are of one mind. The measure of the land and the measure of our bodies are one and the same," explained the

Nez Perce leader, Hin-mah-too-yah-lat-kekht, or "Thunder Travelling to Loftier Mountain Heights" [again, a name associated with place] (McLuhan, p.54). From the land comes food, water, air, plants, animals, people, spirits, divinities; all are bound together in a perpetual cycle of existence. The body itself becomes a place in which this cycle is sustained; the act of living is a physical and spiritual affirmation of a person's connection to the earth.

By equating the "measure of the body" to the "measure of the land," Native Americans thus endow the human form with spatial properties. The body is a place which retains earthly qualities; time and again, people are described in terms of landscape imagery. For example, in Lakota Woman (to be discussed in Chapter 2), Mary Crow Dog remembers her great-aunt: "She had a voice like water bubbling" (p.24). Of another old woman, she says, "I have never forgotten her face -- nothing but deep cracks and gullies, but beautiful in its own way" (p.6). Not only does the body adopt outward characteristics of the natural world, but it also represents a place which can be visited, inhabited, and even destroyed by the spirit. People are able to leave their bodies, travel into other spiritual realms, mentally control other peoples' bodies. The ghosts of the dead and the spirits of the living can communicate, see one another, feel one another's presence on earth and in other worlds. The body is not a shell for the spirit; rather, it is the form which ultimately connects the spirit to the earth. Attachment of the body to the soil itself reinforces the kinship of all living things, drawing the soul "close to a mothering power" (Standing Bear, McLuhan, p.6). Thus, the Native American finds spirituality not above the earth, but through the intimate relationship of the body to the land. Mary Crow Dog deals extensively with this spiritual interpretation of place in Lakota Woman as she describes her own return to the religion and lifestyle of her people. By immersing herself in

the Sioux belief system, Mary is able to find an internal place where she can become a Lakota woman.

Such Native American belief systems are markedly different from the Judeo-Christian concept of body and place. The very idea of original sin taints the body from birth; all people are products of the sinful repetition of Adam and Eve's loss of innocence in the Garden of Eden. The body is not a holy, interconnected element of the universe, respected for both its physical and spiritual properties; but rather, the human form is the temporary vestment of a soul struggling to resist the temptations of the flesh. Salvation and redemption are found in heaven, far above the earthly sphere; after death, people are at last released from the burden of physical form and live in a world void of corporal distractions. For Catholics, a spiritual hierarchy is established with the levels of hell, earth, purgatory, and heaven; this Christian perspective contrasts with the Native image of the universe as circular, a "sacred hoop" which includes all living and dead in the cyclical pattern of existence. "It is the general belief of the Indians that after a man dies his spirit is somewhere on the earth or in the sky, we do not know exactly where but we are sure that his spirit still lives," said the Sioux Mato Kuwapi ("Chased-By-Bears") in 1915 (McLuhan, p.39). Chief Seattle, a Salish Indian of the Pacific Northwest, believed, "There is no death, only a change of worlds" (McLuhan, p.30).

The Indian spirit still retains a body, a form, the ability to speak and see and eat and play games and argue and laugh and cry. The Christian soul rises out of the body after death and hovers far above the living; through the gates of heaven, devout souls enter Christ's ephemeral Kingdom and leave forever the realm of earthly trials and tribulations. "Your dead cease to love you and the land of their nativity as soon as they pass the portals of the tomb and wander away beyond the stars. They are soon forgotten and never return. Our dead

never forget the beautiful world that gave them being," Chief Seattle told Washington governor Isaac Stevens in 1855 (McLuhan, p.30). Both Christian and Indian views of death, the soul, and religion surface in contemporary literature. Louise Erdrich's Tracks and N. Scott Momaday's House Made of Dawn, for example, involve both Native American and Catholic belief systems. The poems of Robert Davis, to be discussed in the final chapter, also deal with Indian concepts of the "after-life," or other world, and the continuation of physical existence after death. It is crucial to note the different interpretations of body and place between Christian and Native American religions in order to fully understand how they are used to develop or destroy a sense of place in these works.

It is also important to recognize that for many Native American tribes, "place" does not imply stationary location. Many Indian groups, particularly those dwelling on the Plains, were seasonally nomadic, following food supplies and better weather as the year progressed. Placing Indians on reservations altered the traditional means of hunting and gathering, transportation, building homes, economic exchange, and tribal relations which had once sustained Native cultures across the country; by confining Native Americans to a single stationary location, the U.S. government made it impossible for traditional cultural patterns to persist. In effect, the Native sense of place was inverted; people were told that they owned plots of land, that they must stay on that land, that they could no longer enjoy the well-seasoned lifestyle of their ancestors. Suddenly tied to the land instead of free to roam in harmony with nature's changing seasons and moods, many Native Americans found their fundamental values of place undermined. "A man when he goes forth stops when he wills," said an old Dakota wiseman in 1890 (McLuhan, p.37). To stop for a reason, he says -- for prayer, for food, for friendship, for beauty -- is a reverent and

purposeful act. But to be confined to the space of a reservation, to stop for no reason and to live with no spiritual investment in an unfamiliar place -- this is a threat to the intrinsic Native sense of place. Thus, in discovering the kinds of places depicted in Native literature, it is critical to remember that Place does not necessarily imply a permanent, intransitory physical location; for many Indians, being confined to one place actually contradicted the traditional lifestyles of their people, particularly if the reservation was distant and unfamiliar to those forced into relocation. In Lakota Woman, for example, Mary Crow Dog discusses the difficulties encountered by Sioux tribes when they had to make a transition from nomadic to stationary lifestyles; this altered relation to place changes the underlying social structure of the communities themselves.

Finally, any study of Native American literature must also make reference to the multi-ethnic dimension among Indian tribes themselves. Because Native American authors come from so many different historical and geographic origins, their works reflect both cultural and personal variations in themes, characterization, style, etc. There is no accepted canon for the study of Native literature, and because authors have so many different tribal affiliations it is difficult to develop a consistent method for scholarly interpretation. However, there is a Pan-Indian movement among many contemporary authors which stresses that, though there are differences between tribes, there are also many common interests, goals, and values among them which stem from their Native American heritage and thus contribute to the interpretation of Native literature as a cohesive, unique genre. Approaching the diversity and complexity of Indian writing from a thematic perspective thus anticipates and welcomes the tribally unique interpretations of different authors; at the same time, the prevailing theme of Place establishes a connection between authors and provides a common ground for discussion of individual works.

As we look back on history from the 1990's, there is a growing trend in this country to acknowledge the myths of racial superiority and Manifest Destiny which became a justification for plunder, murder, and enslavement of the Native population. However, there is a danger of creating the opposite myth by labeling all Europeans as villains and oppressors who "landed like a virus among the innocent people of the New World" (Hughes, p.48). Insisting on labeling culture groups as absolutely good or bad "drags history into propaganda and denies the humanity of the dead: their sins, their virtues, their failures" (Hughes, p.48). Rather, by looking for Native American narratives and histories which have been largely distorted or ignored, we can refresh both the vitality and the accuracy of American history while simultaneously appreciating other cultural voices.

The authors chosen for this study reflect that ethnic expression which allows us "to see a part of the world break its own silence: a silence not of its own choosing but imposed on it" (Hughes, p.48) by imperialist America. Each writer comes from a different geographic and tribal origin, yet all are related by the use of place and other similar themes in their work. Part Chippewa, the novelist Louise Erdrich writes of the experiences of her tribe on the Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota. In Tracks, she deals specifically with the theme of dislocation and loss of land as a place. Mary Crow Dog, a Lakota Sioux, tells of her own experiences on the plains of South Dakota. Her autobiography delivers a contemporary response to a loss of place from a "mixed blood" perspective; while land is once again the center of life in Mary's story, the formation of personal identity comes largely through a connection to traditional, communal, and spiritual places. N. Scott Momaday's House Made of Dawn is a novel set primarily in the Southwest region of New Mexico and

deals with place as a healing power; while the poet Robert Davis writes of the Tlingit Alaskan coast and uses poetry to explore the rituals, histories, and destruction connected to Indian places. Finally, Ramona Wilson, a member of the Colville Confederated Tribes, comes from the Northwest region of Washington. Her poems leave the question of displacement unresolved, yet an attachment to land is omnipresent in her work, whether the ties be painfully difficult or fundamental to the lives of her speakers. Thus, drawing from the places of their origins, these authors explore both traditional and contemporary meanings of place as they give voice to the stories of their people; their words are a constant recognition of place as it is created and affirmed through language.

CHAPTER 1

Following Tracks

*My heart is a stone: heavy with
sadness for my people; cold with
the knowledge that no treaty will
keep the whites out of our lands;
hard with the determination to
resist as long as I live and breathe.*

Tecumseh, Shawnee Chief, 1795
McLuhan, Touch the Earth, p.116

Born in Minnesota in 1954, Louise Erdrich grew up in North Dakota. A "mixed-blood," she is part Chippewa, and her writing reflects both past and present issues encountered by Native Americans. Erdrich writes in collaboration with her husband, Michael Dorris, who has Modoc ancestry and is a novelist himself. Tracks is chronologically the first in a series of three novels; the award-winning Love Medicine and The Beet Queen are set in more contemporary times, while Tracks takes place in the early 1900's. The three books chronicle the experiences of several families in North Dakota as they grow, change, prosper, suffer, love, hate, live, and die. "Almost all American Indian writers speak English as their main language, but they all come out of a different heritage, background, a different world view, a different mythology,"

says Erdrich (Coltelli, p.47). In Tracks, she approaches the theme of Place from her own tribal perspective and creates a powerful tale rooted in fundamental Chippewa values.

The Turtle Mountain Reservation of North Dakota is the setting for Erdrich's novel. Once living in the eastern regions of the country, the Chippewa (or Ojibway) Indian bands were pushed into the Great Lakes region by expanding Iroquois tribes. Woodland Indians, the Chippewa traditionally lived by hunting, fishing, and gathering fruits and wild rice. Though the Chippewa were friendly with the French, their northern location allowed them some isolation from the Anglo frontier until 1815, when many were placed on the Turtle Mountain Reservation. Close to the Canadian border, the Chippewa occasionally mixed with the French and Scottish settlers, producing a new racial group known as "metis" (Wilkins, North Dakota, p.31). This European influence manifests itself in Erdrich's novel; her main character in Tracks has the French name "Fleur," and other characters are noted as having Canadian heritage.

Erdrich's novel takes place at a time when the U. S. government's movement to "civilize" the Indians of America was a relatively new and experimental concept. George Bird Grinnell wrote a report of reservation life called The Indians of Today in 1911; discussing the effectiveness of government efforts, he wrote,

The confinement, the monotony, the sickness,
the insufficient food, the general hopelessness
of it all make life on the reservation dreary
enough, for in most cases the people have not
yet reached a point where they have anything
to look forward to. p.359

It is this period of transition from freedom to confinement, from traditional values to imposed white systems which Erdrich vividly recreates in Tracks.

Attracted by wide endless skies and fertile lowland prairies, the first European settlers arrived in North Dakota in the early 1700's. While the plains offered white explorers an openness they had never encountered in the wooded regions of the east, the Chippewa clung to the northern Turtle Mountains where trees and wildlife still afforded a traditional semi-stationary lifestyle. The climate of North Dakota is as extreme as it is unpredictable; "such natural phenomena as aurora borealis, parhelia (sundogs), tornadoes, drought, annual floods, hail, blizzards, and the ever-blowing wind both amazed and terrified early explorers and continue to demand respect from their descendants today" (Wilkins, p.8). In this world nature is infinitely powerful, and long before the settlers arrived, the Indians worshipped and respected its strength. Characterized by blood-red sunsets, magenta and sulfur-yellow rocks, bare brown hills, and deep black soil, the land of North Dakota endures drastic diurnal temperatures ranging from 121 degrees F to -60 degrees. The Turtle Mountains were still quite heavily forested at the time when Tracks begins; with beautiful lakes, plentiful game, and abundant vegetation the woods sustained the lifestyle of the Chippewa, despite the harsh demands of climate.

"The wind in North Dakota is an almost living presence," writes Wilkins (p.10). Erdrich incorporates this concept into her story; from a Native American perspective, all objects and forms are endowed with life, and in life they are thus related to human beings. Fleur can call on the wind, can stir the elements to her aid as kindred injured spirits; nature actively participates in the lives of the Indians who belong to the land. The physical characteristics of North Dakota contribute to a Chippewa sense of place by defining a sensual environment recognizable to the Indians; attuned to their surroundings, the Chippewa belong to the sounds, smells, sites, textures, flavors of the North Dakota landscape. It is

in this world of dramatic natural phenomena, enduring austere beauty, unspoiled woodlands, and fertile flatlands that Erdrich places her story.

In Louise Erdrich's Tracks, place emerges as the center around which the story is developed. Set on the Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota, the story chronicles the lives of several Chippewa Indians from 1912 to 1924. The destruction and appropriation of Native land was a recent and ongoing event for the Chippewa at this time, and Erdrich's novel elaborates the personal and collective struggles of a displaced people. Conflicts with white culture as well as among the Indians themselves are propelled by the clashing of value systems. Though the issue of land control becomes a central focus in the novel, the theme of place also surfaces in other dimensions of the work. In fact, the value of place is intertwined with the lives of some characters to such an extent that it acts as both a spiritual and a physical element of their existence. Through the course of the novel, Erdrich develops several narrative voices which explore, with alternative view points, whether the destruction of native lands has the power to destroy the "Indian-ness" of the Chippewa people. A struggle for survival hovers at the core of the novel, and it is the affirmation of the value of place which ultimately saves Erdrich's characters from annihilation.

Told through two alternating narrative voices, Tracks centers around the story of Fleur, the lone survivor of the Pillager clan. Rescued from near death by Nanapush, an old Indian who still remembers the days before reservation life, Fleur finds a kindred spirit in the wizened, lonely man. It is Nanapush, then, who tells Fleur's story from the traditional Native viewpoint. He is her surrogate father, a clansman who still believes in the old customs and respects Fleur's

wild nature. As Nanapush's counterpoint, Pauline tells Fleur's story from a more critical perspective. Dissatisfied with her life, Pauline deserts her family and struggles throughout the story to escape the bonds of her past. As the novel progresses, she becomes obsessed with Christianity as well as with Fleur Pillager. With a vindictive spirit, an abrasive personality, and a warped sense of spiritual superiority, Pauline becomes Fleur's foil; she both admires and abhors Fleur's Indian values. As a woman without a home, Pauline symbolizes the Native who has lost her traditional identity and wallows in a purgatory of violent self-denial.

It is the interweaving of Pauline and Nanapush's stories which creates a richly textured piece of literature for interpretation. With dichotomous voices narrating the sequence of events, Erdrich in essence establishes a contradiction of value systems. Those who cling to tradition are juxtaposed with those who try to break away; and though the novel's heroes are those who do not abandon their heritage, nevertheless it would be an injustice to Erdrich's characters to split them into simple "good" and "bad" factions. All of the people in the novel are struggling to adapt to a changing world; there is no simple solution to the preservation of identity. The value of place is fundamentally connected to the traditional ideals rejected or upheld by Erdrich's characters. Thus, interpreting how specific characters relate to the physical and psychological environment allows a greater understanding of the work as a whole.

The physical settings in Tracks not only frame the action of the story, but they also actively participate in the formation of characters, conflicts, and themes. The story is broken into chronological sections. Nanapush opens the novel by telling his "granddaughter," Fleur's child, how he rescued the young

woman from death in the winter of 1912. From the first page, the importance of place in the lives of these Indians is introduced when Nanapush speaks of the flight of his people from their traditional homeland to the Nadouissieux land of North Dakota, where they signed a treaty with the U.S. government and resigned themselves to reservation life. The fact that the old man is verbally telling his story is also important, for he practices the oral tradition which further connects him to the values of his ancestors; he is telling the young woman a story connected to place in order to teach her a moral, in order to try to reconcile the estranged relations between Fleur and her daughter in the present.

Speaking wistfully of the old days, Nanapush tells his granddaughter,

I saw the last bear shot. I trapped the last
beaver with a pelt of more than two years'
growth. I spoke aloud the words of the
government treaty, and refused to sign the
settlement papers that would take away
our woods and lake. And I saved the last
Pillager. p.2

Referring to Fleur in such a context, Nanapush immediately establishes her relationship to the land, to her history, to the threatening outsiders who would destroy her as they do the bears and the beavers and lakes. As her rescuer, Nanapush is similarly joined to an old world of wilderness and plenty, a world which nurtures them both -- and a world which is rapidly disappearing. "The Western viewpoint has always been one of the land as wilderness, something to be afraid of, and conquered because of the fear. For some, the city is a wilderness of concrete and steel made within a labyrinth of mind," says poet Joy Harjo (Coltelli, p.64). For Fleur, the wilderness is a familiar home, while the streets and buildings of the "civilized" white world are places of danger, confusion, and fear; yet she does not seek to "conquer" that wilderness, but only to live in the security and beauty of her own land.

It is significant that Nanapush finds Fleur in the woods, surrounded by the bodies of her dead family, herself on the verge of death from the "spotted sickness" brought by the whites to plague her people. As a symbol of survival, Fleur is at once miraculous and human, mystical and vulnerable. Her life is a continual struggle against sickness, injustice, invasion, deception. Yet Fleur is different from the other characters in the novel in that she so completely belongs to the woods she calls her home, the woods which were once "inhabited by ghosts and roamed by Pillagers, who knew their secret ways to cure or kill, until their art deserted them" (p.2). Even her name, taken from the French word for "flower," invokes imagery which further connects her to the beauty of these woods.

As Nanapush nurses Fleur back to health, outsiders continue to filter onto reservation land: "They walked upon the fresh graves of Pillagers, crossed death roads to plot out the deepest water where the lake monster, Misshepeshe, hid himself and waited," Nanapush remembers (p.8). The intruders, without recognition or respect for the places of the dead, injure not only the Pillager spirits but also Fleur herself. When Nanapush begs Fleur to stay on with him after her recovery, he tells her, "The land will go. The land will be sold and measured" (p.8). As an old man, Nanapush speaks with the wisdom of one who has suffered many injustices and anticipates defeat. But Fleur is young, strong, vibrant, the proud and angry daughter of a wronged people; she will not give in. She returns to her cabin at Machimanito, alone and at home in a wilderness which even frightens her fellow Indians. In essence, Fleur is defined by her environment; she herself becomes a "woman gone wild: (p.45), a solitary spirit dwelling with the ghosts of her dead family who "flicker just beyond the edges of sight, thin as needles, shadows piercing shadows"

(p.6). It is to this world of blurred forms and indefinite realities that Fleur belongs.

Plagued by rumors about her "messaging with evil," Fleur rises to almost mystical proportions among the clan. Members of the tribe believe that she possesses a power as frightening as it is captivating: "Some thought that Fleur Pillager should be driven from the reservation, but not a single person who spoke like that had the nerve," says Pauline (p.12). The fact that Fleur herself does not narrate her own story adds to the mysticism surrounding her character; all of her actions are interpreted by either Nanapush or Pauline, whose own personalities taint their impressions of her. As the tribe's opinions of Fleur are formed, so are the reader's impressions of characters shaped, on a more subtextual level, by the physical and metaphysical places in which the story unfolds.

Having established Fleur as a spirit of nature and a symbol of the old ways, Erdrich introduces Pauline in the second chapter. With Pauline's narrative, the action of the story is shifted to the town of Argus, where Fleur must find work in order to make payments for her reservation land. Pauline becomes a foil for Fleur's character; she is the willingly displaced Indian who rejects her Native heritage. A mixed-blood, Pauline significantly belongs to a clan "for which the name was lost" (p.14); because Native tribal and personal names are so often derived from the physical environment, Pauline's lack of a specific name further suggests her alienation from traditional Indian values of place. As the story progresses, she continues to deconstruct her native Puyat identity as she creates a new, white Christian persona for herself.

In an effort to escape the reservation, Pauline coaxes her father into sending her to Argus, where her aunt and uncle live. Pauline's father tells her,

"You'll fade out there. You won't be an Indian once you return" (p.14). His warning suggests that by choosing to define herself within a foreign place, Pauline will alter her fundamental Indian identity. Completely rejecting her Native self, she answers him, "Then maybe I won't come back." By leaving the reservation, Pauline denies the value of physical, communal, and familial places in her life; instead, she relies solely on her internal self as the only dependable place to ground her perceptions of the outside world. In other words, Pauline does not find meaning in the external people and landscape of her heritage; rather, she turns inward and roots herself in an intangible world of psychological brooding. While in a Western model, this personal internal focus would be a progression toward truth, from a Native American perspective Pauline denies the importance of communal place in her life. She finds purpose and value only in her ability to exist as a separate entity above and beyond the realm of traditional places. "Even as a child I saw that to hang back was to perish. I saw through the eyes of the world outside us," Pauline explains in her narrative (p.14). In her own way, she is struggling to survive; yet her refusal to speak her native language, to bead, to prepare hides, to participate in the lifestyle of her family establishes her as an outcast in both Native and white societies. She is a woman without an Indian sense of place, for she has no community, no family, no home, and no happiness. Still, despite her desire to "show her white," Pauline cannot escape her Native self. She is lonely, haunted by dreams, and helplessly drawn to Fleur.

Both Pauline and Fleur are employed by Pete Kozka, the local butcher. In 1913, the town in which they live is "just a grid of six streets on either side of the railroad depot" (p.12). Pauline's description of the town is starkly contrasted to the natural setting Nanapush creates in the opening chapter. Whereas the forest is a place of changing shapes, flickering light, obscurity, liquid density,

Argus is a grid of lines in "raw space" hovering "across the low flat wheat" (p.13) below an endless summer sky. Fleur is surprisingly at ease in this foreign environment, while it is Pauline who hovers on the edge, a non-entity who "blends into the stained brown walls, a skinny big-nosed girl with staring eyes" (p.16). Because Pauline wants to belong to the flat, linear world of Argus, she is highly critical of Fleur, who represents a far more fluid and elusive reality.

There is something almost sinister about Pauline because of her invisibility. She says, "Because I could fade into a corner or squeeze beneath a shelf I knew everything" (p.16). Even moreso than the other characters in Argus, Pauline is attracted to Fleur, for she represents a security and strength that Pauline does not possess herself. It is as though Fleur carries her sense of place within her body and soul; she brings the spirit of her Native land with her when she comes to Argus. "Her glossy braids were like the tails of animals, and swung against her when she moved, deliberately, slowly in her work, held in and half-tamed. But only half," Pauline comments (p.18). Fleur's natural place - the wilderness -- manifests itself in her actions and physical description, while her inner strength comes from a deep self-awareness of her kinship to the land. To Pauline, who is trying to break free from the untamed rawness of the old world, Fleur is as much a figure of evil and deception as she is a fascination.

In Argus, Fleur defies the social structure of the white world. She exhibits both feminine and masculine qualities: Pauline describes the hypnotic effect Fleur has on men and also notes how she takes Pauline's cousin, Russell, under her wing, "even [fussing] about him like a mother, [combing] his hair with her fingers" (p.17). Also hard-working and strong, Fleur not only does rough work, but she joins the nightly poker game in the butcher's meat locker. "Women didn't usually play with men, so the evening that Fleur drew a chair to the men's table there was shock of surprise," Pauline recalls (p.18). Not only

does Fleur join the game, but she wins repeatedly, infuriating the three male players. With calmness and persistence, Fleur thus challenges patriarchal structures by winning a place for herself among the ranks of white men.

However, Fleur's success initiates a battle for superiority which is sexually motivated. When the men cannot beat her at poker, they plot to conquer her physically. In a state of inebriation, the men attack Fleur in the stockyard and rape her. Though Fleur fights powerfully, she is unable to defend herself. As the men attack her, the "moon [falls] behind a curtain of ragged clouds" (p.25) and the men stumble through the muck and mud of the stockyard in their efforts to catch Fleur. The absence of light, the filth, the confusion, the noise of the scene accentuate the horror of the act committed. This is a foreign world, a world in which Fleur is not completely free from harm; her secure identity cannot protect her from a society which does not share her values. Native America tribes highly value personal integrity; many consider rape one of the most severe crimes a person can commit (Axtell, The Invasion Within, p.310). The fact that an Indian woman is raped in a "civilized" white town places a bitter, ironic twist on the stereo-typical image of savage rapists violating white women.

Thus, Erdrich begins to associate certain values with the places in her story by questioning the morality of the characters who "belong" to a particular environment. Pauline, for example, hears Fleur "cry in the old language and [hears her name and Russell's] repeated over and over among the words" (p.26), yet she covers her ears and does not help Russell try to stop the men. She distances herself even further from her past, symbolically refusing to hear the voice of suffering in her people and in herself. It is the town of Argus which forms the spatial context for the actions of Pauline and the other characters; on a figurative level, Argus then becomes a threat to traditional Native values by

violating the spirit of the wilderness as it is manifested in Fleur. As Fleur is raped, so the land itself is forced to give way to the ploughman's blade and woodsman's axe. As a result of the rape scene, it becomes even more evident that the environment and values embodied in Fleur are severely jeopardized by the influx of white culture. Moreover, Fleur's intrinsic relation to the land is further emphasized by the parallel violence committed against both the woman and the wilderness; Fleur is one with the land, she suffers with it, and it suffers with her.

Nanapush comments, "Before the boundaries were set, before the sickness scattered the clans like gambling sticks, an old man never had to live alone and cook for himself, never had to braid his own hair, or listen to his silence" (p.32). The attempt on behalf of white civilization to define precise places for Indian populations (i.e. reservations), coupled with the pioneers' efforts to turn the wilderness into a place which *belongs* to them (as opposed to the Native belief that people belong to the earth) results in a fundamental violation of the Chippewa belief system. Parcelling land into sections not only destroys the tribe's means of subsistence hunting and gathering, but it also scatters families far from one another, leaves old men alone with silent wisdom, and completely disrupts the social patterns of the Chippewa clan. Pauline is the product of this displacement, while Nanapush is a spirit of the old world who, in his last days, has resigned himself to reservation life without forsaking traditional beliefs. Fleur, then, is the spark which challenges stagnation; active, vibrant, fierce, she struggles to break through the boundaries imposed on her Native world.

After the turmoil in Argus, both Pauline and Fleur return to the reservation. "The blood draws us back," says Pauline, "as if it runs through a

vein in the earth" (p.31). Even as a mixed-blood, Pauline cannot deny the Native within herself. There is a hint of the inevitable in her statement, as though Pauline recognizes a personal connection to a larger system which she cannot defy. The earth and the body are equated in her statement as place is linked to a realm of natural, vital life processes; both biological and psychological necessity draw people to the land which gives them life. Writes Joseph Bruchac in his article "Survival Comes This Way," "American Indian people survive through the recognition that they are part of, not apart from, the natural world" (Contemporary Native American Poetry, p.200). Fleur not only recognizes her connection to the natural world, but she constantly reaffirms it by living a traditional lifestyle dependent on the bounty of nature. Rejecting the "civilized" world of Argus, she returns to the woods at Machimanito, where she belongs.

Several new characters are introduced as Nanapush picks up the narrative once again in Chapter 3. Eli Kashpaw visits Nanapush to ask him about Fleur, whom he has met while hunting in the woods. As Fleur's male counterpart, Eli is neither as strong nor as imposing as she; yet the two are initially well matched, for they share traditional ideals, a love of nature, and a mutual passion. Of Eli, Nanapush recalls, "He never applied for a chunk of land or registered himself" (p.39). Like Fleur, Eli is unconcerned with the ownership of reservation property, with money, with getting a white education. He is a hunter and a woodsman, more comfortable "in the company of trees and wind" (p.40) than he is around people, "especially women" -- until he meets Fleur. For a man so ill at ease around members of the opposite sex, Eli falls in love with an extremely intimidating woman. His attraction further attests to Fleur's kinship with the forest; rather than run away from her, Eli is attracted to Fleur because she is so much a part of the wilderness he treasures.

As the romance between Fleur and Eli progresses, he becomes increasingly distant from the reservation. "He looked young, flushed and gleaming, on fire," Nanapush says at one point. "All week he had been on the trapline with Fleur and he might as well have been in the next world, or the one before, for all he cared of this one now" (p.56). Fleur's ability to create a spiritual place above and beyond the tangible world draws Eli to her; he becomes lost in her, in her woods, he lives in her reality, is inflamed and impassioned by her. The fact that Eli has no concern for "this world now," however, foreshadows the difficulties of living in another world -- or tradition, or time -- without realistic defenses against the imposing present reality. Although Fleur and Eli are at peace in the woods, the advancement of white settlers is still plodding onward. Without the words, the knowledge, or the money to stand up against a system which values revenue above nature, quantity above quality, Fleur and Eli will eventually lose the place which affords them such a natural lifestyle. Overcome by the sheer numbers of whites and Indians alike who value land not for its spiritual but for its financial worth, both Fleur and Eli, unlike Nanapush, are vulnerable to the outside world because they choose not to participate in it. While Nanapush does not forsake his traditional respect for the land, he does make an effort to interact with the invading culture, to voice his concerns, to bend with the changing times. Having suffered in the past, he has no illusions and cannot be as deeply hurt by the foreign world as Fleur will be.

Eli's mother, Margaret, expresses both physical and social values of place in her arguments against Eli and Fleur's union. "'No wife of yours will ever live on any land but Kashpaw's,'" Margaret tells Eli (p.56). By leaving her home to live with the family of her husband, a wife would fulfill a social obligation while simultaneously reaffirming the value of the place inhabited by the husband's people. "Margaret wanted a place right here that she could trust

for her old age," Nanapush explains (p.57). She associates a degree of stability with having a physical place to depend on in her old age. However, the place Margaret desires is not simply a plot of land which carries a family name; rather, she wants the security of having family around her to care for her and love her as she grows older. Physical environments have the ability to uphold traditional structures only if the value systems already hold a place in the hearts of people. Because Fleur comes from different people, the Kashpaw land is not a part of her identity. She refuses to leave her own home, making it impossible for Margaret to have a traditional family in an environment which lacks traditional value for its inhabitants.

Thus it is with the birth of Eli and Fleur's child, Lulu, that Margaret grudgingly allows her place of living to shift to the home of her son. Fleur was not meant to adopt someone else's home, to uphold any beliefs but her own: "Ogimaakwe [Fleur's mother] had raised her daughters to boss themselves" (p.57). Margaret cannot compete with Fleur and instead moves into the woods to be with her new granddaughter. Nanapush also spends a great deal of time at the cabin, so that a tiny clan is formed around Fleur's home in the woods, "the new made up of bits of the old, some religious in the old way and some in the new" (p.70). While Margaret insists on taking Lulu to Mass every Sunday, Fleur continues to hunt and fish, love and pray in the old ways. Lulu absorbs and values both worlds as she grows, yet she is Fleur's child at heart. In an interview, Louise Erdrich once commented on the importance of family connection as the core of a Chippewa tribe (Coltelli, p.45). This value is expressed by the group in the woods: when Lulu is born, the family unit becomes a place for the preservation and perpetuation of tribal identity and close personal relationships. It is not the forest which draws Nanapush and Margaret to the Pillager cabin; rather, it is the warmth, the familiarity, the kinship,

the affection, the common values which root them all to Fleur's world. The clan formed in the forest is a melding of the past and the present; a new place, both physical and spiritual, is etched out of the union of these people.

Lulu's birth in the woods is significant not only because it continues Fleur's connection with the place of her family, but it also offers hope for the survival of the entire clan that forms around her. The old man tells his granddaughter, "Nanapush is a name that loses power every time it is written and sorted in a government file" (p.32). Without family, without a future generation, he is thus in danger of extinction. However, he continues, "It was through Fleur Pillager that the name Nanapush was carried on and won't die with me, won't rot in a case of bones and leather" (p.34). The visualization of a name being trapped within a physical place, a foreign place, breathes life into the word "Nanapush" itself. The name represents not just a single person, but a continuum of people, past and future; it is an entity in itself. Fleur, then, allows Nanapush continued life by preserving his name: at Lulu's baptism, the baby's father being absent at the time, Nanapush proffers his own name as that of the child's father. Thus, not only Fleur's identity, but also Eli's, Nanapush's, and Margaret's identities are passed on to a new generation in Lulu Nanapush.

As the clan in the woods is forming, Pauline moves into the household of Bernadette Morissey. "They were well-off people," says Pauline, "mixed-bloods who profited from acquiring allotments that many old Chippewa did not know how to keep" (p.63). Because she has willingly aligned herself with people who have misused land for selfish, anti-tribal purposes, Pauline's moral fiber is again questioned. She becomes increasingly manipulative, vindictive, and conniving as the story progresses. At the core of Pauline's being is a sense of displacement, of insecurity. Even back on the reservation, Pauline exists only

on the edges of other people's lives. "We never knew what to call her, or where she fit or how to thin when she was around," says Nanapush. "So we tried to ignore her, and that worked as long as she was quiet" (p.39). Pauline tries to make a place for herself on the reservation as she does in Argus; but her bitter nature and jealous scheming keep her apart from the community she desires.

Initially, Pauline tries to adjust her social role to become a part of the reservation world. Instead of investing herself in the physical landscape, as Fleur does, Pauline turns to the community for acceptance. "I thought I must get married, must find myself a husband. I thought that the reason I was not wanted was just that I was alone," she explains (p.72). She is jealous of Eli and Fleur's relationship: "I could not pass between the two of them -- the air was busy, filled with sparks and glowing needles, simmering" (p.71). The passion Pauline aches for in her own life is that which Fleur and Eli share; her fruitless first attempt at sex, with Bernadette's brother Napoleon, leaves her dry and discontent. If not as a wife, a lover, a woman, a friend, then Pauline must make a place for herself among these people as a different identity. By "making " that place, Pauline does not want simple acceptance into the social community, as a Western thinker might suppose; rather, she wants to be a part of a larger universal pattern. By her own definition, Pauline would "belong" if she could find a place where her existence was integral to the structure of the universe itself.

Pauline thinks that she has found this "place" when she becomes an apprentice to Bernadette. A no-nonsense woman with a family to support, Bernadette often spends her evenings sitting by sickbeds, watching death take soul after soul. An eager learner, Pauline soon takes over this job. Drawing a deep spiritual elation from her work, Pauline belongs to the "motionless dark" which overwhelms her patients. The first time she watches a person pass away,

she says, "[I was] surprised at how light I felt, as though I'd been cut free as well" (p.68). Pauline thus finds a place for herself within the community and the universe not through nature's perpetual re-birth, but through perpetual death. Her inability to fit into the world of the living becomes increasingly evident as she thrives under Bernadette's training.

While still living with the Morisseys, Pauline becomes infatuated with Eli Kashpaw. Also motivated by her desire to destroy the magic between him and Fleur, Pauline uses Bernadette's daughter, Sophie, to vicariously seduce Eli. Physical realities begin to meld and transform as Pauline puts her plan into motion. Place becomes a metaphysical, spiritual element which weaves through the interaction of the characters. Says Pauline,

I could almost feel what it was like
to be inside Sophie's form, not hunched
in mine not blending into walls, but
careless and fledgling, throwing the
starved glances of men off like the
surface of a pond, reflecting sky so
you could never see the shallow
bottom. p.78

Pauline not only puts herself in Sophie's body, but she also objectifies herself in the natural imagery used to describe the pond. By moving her spirit to another place (another body), Pauline is able to adopt the physicality of a different body; she is no longer "hunched" and plain, but she is attractive and unassuming, young and appealing. Tangibility of form still exists in vivid detail, but it is malleable, inconstant as Pauline's spirit shifts from one place to another, out of one body and into another.

By Pauline's machinations, Eli is given a temporary job at the Morissey's to help with the haying. Though content with Fleur at the cabin, Eli is tempted into betraying her when he leaves the forest. The Morissey's farm forms the context for Eli's abuse, much as Argus is the structure within which Fleur is

violated. Eli becomes a "puppet," trapped into making love to Sophie by Pauline's love potions and sly proddings. Though Eli cannot be completely blameless for his betrayal of Fleur, it is nevertheless crucial that he is away from home when the affair occurs. A man naive and ignorant of the world beyond the forest, Eli is easily victimized by Pauline because he is out of place on the Morissey farm. These people share neither his morals nor his lifestyle. By working among them, Eli jeopardizes not only his relationship with Fleur, but he also threatens his own identity when he loses contact with the values of respect, faith, loyalty, personal integrity, spiritual strength, pride, and a sense of place, all of which Fleur embodies.

Pauline, however, allows herself full credit for the sin she instigates. Sophie and Eli make love in a slough, recalling Pauline's earlier poetic desire to be like a pond; but this time, the man is absorbed beneath the surface, rather than reflected back to the sun. Pauline watches the couple from the woods, hiding among bushes and shadows, enacting the scene with her own spirit. "I turned my thoughts on the girl and entered her and made her do what she could never have dreamed of herself," Pauline says (p.83). The vicarious pleasure Pauline derives from the scene is amplified by the fact that she is the one forcing the action, driving the movement: "I, lost in the wild brush, laughed as they began to rock and move...They were mechanical things, toys, dolls wound past their limits" (p.84). Unable to find sexual fulfillment herself, Pauline resorts to the use of other people's bodies; yet there is something pathetic, almost frightening, in her elation after the crime is committed. Pauline does indeed find a way to participate in the lives of the other Indians, but it is an interaction which leaves her solitary, arrogant, and ultimately unhappy.

After her "triumph" with Sophie and Eli, Pauline becomes increasingly impressed with her own spiritual powers. She is convinced that she sees a

statue of the Virgin Mary cry; interpreting the vision as a personal message from God, she channels her spiritual fervor into Catholicism. Giving an egoistic rather than a communal direction to her religion, she envisions herself a chosen servant of God, a saint who must suffer injustice and hardship before her ultimate heavenly reward. She begins to interpret actions around her as signs, as trials, as encouragement for good work. Earth becomes a temporary space to prepare for death when Pauline shifts her focus from worldly pursuits to heavenly ones. In direct contradiction to Pauline's beliefs, traditional Native religions value the earth, and not God, as the source of all life. Permanence, eternity, meaning are embedded in the land itself; by returning to the earth the body affirms a connection to the eternality of nature. The soul simply "changes worlds," yet it does not lose an attachment to the land and the places respected in life. The more Pauline rejects traditional values -- family, religion, respect for all living things-- the more fanatical, disturbing, and entrenched in a hybrid Catholicism she becomes.

In Chapter 5, Nanapush carries the narrative into a conflict between the Morisseys and Lazarres on the one hand, and the Pillagers, the Kashpaws, and himself on the other. Though the feud is initiated by Eli and Sophie's liaison, the issue of land control hovers at the center of the dispute. It all begins when Sophie's brother, Clarence, aided by Boy Lazarre, decides to avenge his sister's shame by kidnapping and abusing Nanapush and Margaret on their way home from church. For the Pillager clan, the conflict quickly turns into a political as well as a personal battle to restore the old couple's honor while simultaneously preserving the Indians' land. The Morisseys and the Lazarres, as examples of Indians who have lost a sense of place in their lives, jeopardize

the existence of the tribe, of the Chippewa culture, and of the land by which the Pillager clan defines itself.

Clarence Morissey and Boy Lazarre "stuck together lately because their families had signed the new purchase agreement with the Turcott lumber company, and now they spoke in its favor to anyone whom they could collar," explains Nanapush (p.111). Valuing money more than land, the two families are joined by their shared destructive attitudes toward place, while the Pillager clan is united by a respect for traditional places. Not only Fleur, but all of the members of her little clan share a belief in the sanctity of place which is severely threatened by the purchase agreement and by tribal attitudes like the Morisseys'. According to the State and Federal Handbook of Indian Reservations, "the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa entered into a treaty on October 2, 1892, ratified by Congress in 1904, which exchanged their claim to 9 million acres for \$1 million and a reservation of 72,000 acres in North Dakota" (p.210). In addition to this huge initial loss of land, buyers continued to whittle away at reservation territory. Those Indians who still upheld traditional values did not know how to "own", buy, or sell land: a chief of the Northwest Blackfeet once said, "We cannot sell the lives of men and animals; therefore we cannot sell this land. It was put here for us by the Great Spirit and we cannot sell it because it does not belong to us" (McLuhan, p.53). This kind of logic was not convincing enough to deter the pressures of white buyers; Indians who did not make tax payments or who refused to stay put invariably lost their land to outsiders. Moreover, Indians such as the Morisseys and Lazarres intentionally sold their land for monetary gain. By 1989, the Chippewa tribe owned only 35,579 acres of the land it had previously been allotted.

"Land is the only thing that lasts life to life. Money burns like tinder, flows off like water. And as for government promises, the wind is steadier," Nanapush

tells his granddaughter (p.33). Land, as a physical reminder of an individual's personal and collective history, cannot guarantee the survival of the clan; yet it is the only constant around which Nanapush's people can structure their existence. The earth provides a realm for perpetual life; the physical world is to be respected and treasured as a living entity, not bought and sold like a common possession. Nanapush, from his wisened perspective, has "seen too much go by" to be satisfied with words and cash. "This Anishinabe land was nibbled at the edges and surrounded by farmers waiting for it to go underneath the gavel of the auctioneer," remembers Nanapush (p.99). He refuses to be like the many who "wake with no place to put [a] foot down" (p.99); thus, he sides with Fleur in opposing the adopted white values of the Morisseys and Lazarres.

Though Fleur and Nanapush punish Clarence and Lazarre in their own calculating ways, the pressures of the outside world are relentless in the demand for more, more, more land. The Morisseys and Lazarres suffer for abandoning the clan's traditional values; poverty-stricken, drunken, "they lost status as the years went on," says Nanapush. "The will to plant and harvest deserted them. They ceased to keep their books and breed their stock in their rush to breed with each other" (p.182). With the loss of the land the basic social structure of the Indians begins to crumble; the Indians begin to fight among themselves, no one listens to the stories and advice of old men, and Lulu grows up estranged from both her parents and her heritage when Fleur eventually sends her away from the reservation. The Lazarres and Morisseys, who have no appreciation for the land on which they exist, are left to inbreed and deteriorate over the years; destruction is perpetuated by the birth of ignorance and carelessness.

Meanwhile, the group in the forest finds itself at a loss for a means of survival. As lumber companies advance, the forest's supply of game becomes

increasingly limited. Fleur's clan is on the verge of starvation, at first unwilling to accept government rations of food and then under-supplied when they are finally forced to apply for help. Unlike the Morisseys and Lazarres, however, the Pillager clan does not slide into moral degeneration as a result of hard times. They work together, starve together, share and share alike as their resources dwindle. Still, the hardship becomes almost too much to bear as the novel plummets toward a conclusion.

Pauline, in the meantime, is undergoing hardships of her own. She becomes pregnant with Napoleon's child and is caught by Bernadette as she tries to self-inflict abortion. Convinced that the child growing within her body has sprung from the seed of Satan, Pauline's hate for her baby intensifies. She has lost all respect for the physical place of her body; her own flesh and blood is defiled, filthy, evil in her eyes, and only her spirituality saves her from damnation. Bernadette offers to take the child when it is born, yet Pauline continues an internal battle of wills with her daughter. She tries to keep the baby free of the "taint of original sin" by physically resisting giving birth.

The child is born as winter approaches, as "all the living plants dried to stalk and seed [and] the earth hardened" (p.134). The infertile imagery surrounding the birth of her child accentuates the barrenness of Pauline's own soul; the descriptive context is also a stark contrast to the green spring imagery of Lulu's birth in the woods. While a clan is formed around Fleur's child, Pauline abandons her daughter, thereby condemning the baby Marie to a displaced life much like her own. Without family, without guidance, without a recognition of her place in the universe, the child will carry the symbolic stigma of "bastard" with her always. Leaving her child in the hands of the Morisseys,

who have completely lost a respect for place in their own lives, further incriminates Pauline from a traditional Native perspective.

"Her hair was wild as a tree in leaf," Pauline recalls when seeing her daughter years later, "but they had left her that way just to tempt me, I knew" (p.198). Described with natural imagery, Marie still possesses the ability to grow into her environment, to become a part of a larger universe which delights and nurtures her. Yet Pauline views the young girl as a temptation which pulls her back to a realm of sinful earthly pleasures; she has adopted a hierarchy of Christian values in which heaven is always above earth. Faith in the natural world so central to Native religions has been replaced by faith in an intangible Christian heaven. Only the soul which detaches itself from the body and its earthly pleasures can attain the ultimate happiness in heaven. Pauline's new beliefs in a stratified heaven and earth are in direct contradiction to the Native perspective of the universe as a circular, all-encompassing whole.

After her daughter is born, Pauline joins a convent and throws herself into religion with the zeal of a martyr. Unable to find a place for herself on earth, she undermines the pain of isolation by consuming herself in the effort to secure a place in heaven. She has been chosen by God, she believes, to gather souls for Him while she is still living. Watching the Indians around her suffer and dwindle in number, she concludes: "It was clear that Indians were not protected by the thing in the lake or by the other Manituous [spirits] who lived in trees. There would have to come a turning, a gathering, another door" (p.139). Through the door of Christ, Pauline plans to herd her fellow Indians along "a different road, a new road" after death, "when the great shining doors, beaten of air and gold, [will swing] open on soundless oiled fretwork to admit them all" (p.140). With her new mission burning in her pocket, Pauline comments, "Once I had passed to the other side I made my way to the Pillager cabin" (p.141).

Gazing from one extreme to the other, Pauline intends to convert the entire value system of the Pillagers by inspiring them with her own faith in the ultimate heavenly place.

The Christian heaven is especially attractive to Pauline because she has no spiritual connection to the earth and thus would have "no place to go" after death. Catholicism allows her the security of attaining a place, if not on earth, at least in another world. Heaven will accept Pauline regardless of her social and physical status on earth, so long as she is devout in her spiritual endeavors. As an Indian, Pauline instinctively desires a place in her life, yet she lacks the traditional values which would give her life meaning by defining her existence within a cultural landscape. Christ's heaven is thus highly appealing to Pauline because it gives her a place in which to shape her own identity, her own purpose in life; it satisfies a cultural need within her. Whereas Fleur is shaped by the natural landscape of her people, Pauline finds self-definition as the chosen servant of heaven. Interestingly, she still has subconscious Native American desires which propel her actions; by targeting the Pillagers for spiritual salvation, Pauline illustrates a preoccupation with communal place. She still wants to belong to a larger community, to a family; her defiant individualism is undermined by a need for acceptance and definition attainable only by belonging to an intimate social group, so that her subconscious resistance to isolation results in a misinterpretation of the white religion, as well.

Not surprisingly, Pauline's efforts to convert the Pillagers are unsuccessful. Her visits to Fleur's cabin bring embarrassment, humiliation, frustration. At the stillbirth of Fleur's second child, Pauline hovers helpless and useless, watching life fade from the mother's cheeks until Margaret arrives to bring Fleur back. Intruding on a sweat lodge ceremony intended to ease Fleur's pain at the loss of her child, Pauline is again out of place, disrupting the

proceedings by plunging her hands into a pot of boiling water in a fit of religious fervor. With the misery of her blistered hands fresh and pungent in her nostrils, Pauline at last concludes, "Christ was weak, a tame newcomer in this country that has its own devils in the waters of boiling-over kettles. God had no foothold in this land" (p.192).

Driven to the brink of insanity, Pauline has a bout with the devil and purges her soul. Towards the end of the novel, she makes her vows to Christ and abandons the cabin in the woods forever more. She interprets the white invasion of the land as "the work of Christ's hand" (p.204), anticipating the destruction of Fleur's forest as a holy and necessary act. As a final symbol of her complete moral reversal, Pauline adopts a new name as she enters the convent. "I asked for the grace to accept, to leave Pauline behind, to remember that my name, any name, was no more than a crumbling skin," she says (p.205). Pauline's intentional loss of a name opposes Nanapush's intense desire to preserve his. For Nanapush, it is the name which is forever, which ensures an eternal connection to the places, people, and traditions of the past; for Pauline, her name is a "crumbling skin," as meaningless as the land itself will be once she has attained heavenly heights. She sacrifices all that Nanapush deems valuable in life: her history, her family, her Native identity, and her claim to place, both physical and spiritual, which would define her existence within the universal circle of past, present, and future lives.

In the final chapters of Tracks come the leveling of the forest in which the values of place have been established. Toward the end of the story, the forest has become a sanctuary; the spirits it harbors are familiar and welcoming. "The wind in the branches was a shelter of air," says Nanapush. I didn't know why I had ever found them frightful. [Walking through the trees,] I felt my wandering

relatives draw near, felt the rustle of their airy thoughts and complaints" (p.210). The woods represent a place where past and present meld in natural harmony, where peace and security are preserved in the whispering of the wind through leaves. Having found a family, friendship, and happiness in the woods, Nanapush now thinks of this place as comforting, welcoming, home.

The serenity of the forest is fragile, however, in the modern world which advances relentlessly upon the Pillager clan. When the lumber companies haul their equipment through the reservation, the road leading from town to Machimanito becomes "the death road of the trees and all that lived in their shadows" (p.209). When Fleur loses her second child in the winter of 1918, she loses control over her own life; the stillborn baby symbolizes the impossibility of living in an idealistic reality when the invading "civilization" does not value the same elements of existence. In white culture, land has a primarily economic value judged by its natural resources, its arability, its accessibility, etc.; whereas for Indians like Fleur, land is a way of life, a religion, an organism of which people are an integral part. In the struggle of opposing ideals, the Indians lost to the force of words and numbers they do not even understand. Years later, in a letter to President Nixon a delegation of Navajo and Hopi leaders illustrated the price of this white "victory":

The white man, through his insensitivity to the way of Nature, has desecrated the face of Mother Earth. The white man's advanced technological capacity has occurred as a result of his lack of regard for the spiritual path and for the way of all living things. The white man's desire for material possessions and power has blinded him to the pain he has caused Mother Earth by his quest for what he calls natural resources. And the path of the Great Spirit has become difficult to see by almost all men, even by many Indians who have chosen instead to

follow the path of the white man.

McLuhan, p.170

In this letter, as in Erdrich's novel, the definition of "civilization" itself is questioned. What are the sacrifices that are made for "technological capacity," for wealth, for material possessions? Not just the physical world, but also the spiritual well-being of those who live on this earth are threatened by such blatant mistreatment of nature. Fighting in vain for her land, Fleur cannot compete with the economic forces of a culture which does not recognize its own kinship to nature.

The future of the Pillager clan is uprooted by the actions of Margaret and her second son, Nector. There comes a particularly harsh winter when the group struggles to raise money for the taxes required on both Fleur and the Kashpaw's land. When the time comes to make the payments, just enough money has been scraped together to cover the fee for both places; without the combined efforts of all those living together in the forest, it would have been impossible to pay the taxes. However, when Nector and Margaret take the money to town, they pay only for their own allotment. The payment being late, a fee is levied upon it, and the Kashpaws use the Pillager money for themselves. "I know [Nector] paid the money down on Kashpaw land from foresight, shrewdness, greed, all that would make him a good politician. Whereas Eli never lost his tie to the past, the younger brother already looked ahead," Nanapush says (p.209). Even Eli, however, is not entirely free from blame; aware of his brother's transaction, he says nothing. His silence is the final rift which tears him apart from Fleur. Thus, the little clan in the woods is destroyed by a breach of trust among its members. When the interests of the individual are placed above the interests of the community, deception and dishonesty rot the roots of mutual need and affection which held the clan together.

When Fleur finds out that she has lost her land, she tries to drown herself in the lake as Eli and Nanapush watch. "She was nowhere, gone so suddenly that, out of disbelief, we stayed poised in the position we'd assumed," says Nanapush (p.212). With the loss of her place, Fleur loses herself, disappears, sinks into nothingness. When Eli drags her back to land, Nanapush remembers "an emptiness, an awful quiet to [her], the sound inside a drum" (p.212). Brought to lie again, Fleur's venom is turned on Eli, who flees into the trees to escape her wrath, all the while vowing to buy the land back again. His second betrayal of her ultimately destroys their relationship; even more important than her husband is the place from which Fleur has drawn her life.

Fleur has learned from her experience that she is not all-powerful, that she cannot stop the flood of events so much larger than herself. Though she blames herself for her losses, she recognizes that some things are simply beyond her control. And so she sends Lulu, her pride and joy, away to the government school. Her choice is extremely painful; it is one which suggests a selflessness in Fleur herself, reveals an effort to consider the survival of the clan as paramount to her own personal happiness. She is motivated by fear for her daughter's safety, for Fleur has lost the ability to ensure that Lulu will be raised in the proper natural environment; not only the woods, but also the family which had once been the child's community are destroyed with the loss of the land. "There would be no place for you, no safety on this reservation, no hiding from government papers, or from Morisseys or the Turcott Company, leveler of a whole forest. There was also no predicting what would happen to Fleur herself," Nanapush explains to a resentful Lulu years later (p.219). Fleur does not abandon her values when she loses her home; rather, she tries to salvage them by freeing her daughter from the feuds and turmoil that will embroil the

reservation. No longer free to roam and grow in the woods, Lulu would be negatively influenced by the reservation environment; it has become a place of destruction, of anger, of deceit, of pain, of loss for the Pillager clan. Though it is a painful decision to make, Fleur sees more hope of survival for Lulu away from the reservation than she could find in what has become such a hateful, hurtful place.

Rather than crumble from her losses, Fleur takes strength. The value of place ever more clearly manifests itself in her spirit, rather than in the environment, as she prepares to leave her home. As the lumbermen come closer and closer to the cabin, Fleur plans her final dramatic act of defiance. For months, she works alone in the woods, preparing for the fateful day when the loggers finally reach her home. Nanapush describes the confrontation between the men and Fleur as they face one another in tense, oppressive silence. "It was then I felt the wind building on the earth. I heard the waves begin to slap with light insistence against the shore. I knew the shifting of breeze, the turn of weather, was at hand," recalls Nanapush (p.222). Nature aligns itself with Fleur; the earth itself echoes her defiance, comes to her aid, stirs its natural elements into action at her implied command. Nanapush senses this tension mounting on the land, but the loggers, with no understanding of the power of this place, stand oblivious to nature's warnings.

Slowly, the forest around Fleur's cabin begins to collapse in the force of the wind. "The earth jumped and the shudder plucked nerves in the bodies of the men who milled about," says Nanapush (p.223). He realizes, as the trees continue to fall, that Fleur has cut the trunks so that each one is barely suspended: "The powerful throats, the columns of trunks and splayed twigs, all substance was illusion. Nothing was solid" (p.223). Fleur's sense of place

transcends the physical realm of the forest; that she is willing to level her own land suggests that the value of the place is not simply physical, but rather, there is a spiritual element which Fleur still carries within herself. The forest is not entirely lost to her; rather, it changes forms, entrenching itself even more deeply in her memories, her character, her internal values system. Fleur is working with nature, not against it, when she cuts down her own forest to save it from the loggers' axes. Though she cannot technically "own" her land anymore, it is still hers. Her history, her family spirits, her child, her soul have grown from this place and will always belong to it.

Leaving the loggers buried in a mass of trees, Fleur and Nanapush head for the road. Nanapush recalls:

I looked inside the box of the cart [Fleur pulled], expecting her possessions but saw only the weed-wrapped stones from the lake-bottom, bundles of roots, a coil of rages, and the umbrella that shaded her [lost] baby. The grave markers I had scratched [for her family], four crosshatched bears and a marten, were fastened on the side of the cart.

p.224

Fleur carries her place with her, in her cart as well as in her soul, as she leaves her home. The stones, the roots, the grave markers, the umbrella have personal and spiritual significance for Fleur; these are the possessions which she refuses to leave behind to be sacrilegiously destroyed by ignorant hands. Refusing to join Nanapush and return to Kashpaw land, Fleur journeys to the unknown, wandering along an endless path. Having lost her child, her husband, and her land, she still draws strength from a traditional understanding of her own place within the universe as a whole. Biologically and spiritually connected to the land of her people, she continues to affirm a respect for the earth as she travels through its hills and forests and valleys, always with the

memory of her home and her history held firmly in her heart. Eventually, nature will welcome her body back to earth, her soul will move into another world, and she will be in harmony with the universe once again.

At the end of Tracks, Margaret and Nanapush bring Lulu back from boarding school to the reservation. It is in this final scene that some faint hope emerges for the survivors in this novel. Through the years, Nanapush has watched the steady decline of the tribe, has watched it become "a tribe of chicken-scratch that can be scattered by a wind, diminished to ashes by one struck match" (p.225). Without community, without family, without a common physical location, the tribe's traditional identity is fundamentally altered. However, as she steps off the school bus, Lulu is bold and proud as her mother, overwhelmed with love for the old people who have come to meet her; a surge of promise for the future bursts from the words as Lulu runs to Nanapush and Margaret. He says, "Lulu. We gave against your rush like creaking oaks, held on, braced ourselves together in the fierce dry wind" (p.226). These people are rooted to the ground on which they stand. Though they struggle, bend against the wind, crack, they stand strong together, surviving. The losses and the love they have shared create a bond between Lulu, Margaret, and Nanapush; in this bond they find the ability to resist the wind, to brace themselves against the hurt and anger they feel, to bring the clan together again, forgiving, needing one another. Though their lands may be destroyed, their tribes scattered, their values threatened, by holding on to each other and planting themselves to the earth beneath their feet, they will weather the storm, still Indian, not vanishing.

The story Louise Erdrich creates is based on a specific physical world. Yet beyond an interpretation of the immediate physical setting in Tracks, what makes the book so powerful is the use of place in ways which may be

unanticipated by a non-Indian reader. The novel achieves depth and flavor by combining the tactile with the intangible, the carnal with the spiritual to propel the action into a conflict of value systems. Placing her story in the North Dakota landscape, Erdrich does not limit her use of the theme to Fleur's fight for the land; a multitude of place values are expressed by the novel's characters. Throughout the book, Erdrich emphasizes that there is more to a Native sense of place than simply claiming heritage to a specific physical environment. Social, religious, historic, personal places shape the identity of characters as much as the land itself does; place becomes internalized, spiritual, psychological, symbolic. Reality is a flexible and illusory concept in Tracks; people move through dreams, travel on spiritual journeys, pass on to the place of death. Pauline, for example, illustrates a different perception of place when she has her "out of body" experience with Sophie. The act not only initiates a conflict and reveals much about Pauline's character, but it also indicates a strikingly Native perception of the body, of the ability to transcend boundaries only tenuously imposed upon people by the physical world. Writing from a cultural perspective, Erdrich thus augments the intensity and the texture of her novel with unusual or unexpected interpretations of the place theme.

For example, at one point in the novel, Nanapush compounds the meaning of place when he goes on a spiritual journey. Sending Eli to hunt in the woods, Nanapush accompanies the young man in spirit. It is a particularly harsh winter, food is non-existent, and the journey requires extreme physical and spiritual exertion from the two men. Still in his own home, Nanapush prepares himself according to ritual and sings a chant to guide Eli through the forest. The song begins to sing itself, Nanapush becomes a part of it, and he spiritually joins Eli in the woods, able to participate in the hunt by molding Eli's thoughts and actions to match his own instincts, much as Pauline controls

Sophie's behavior. (A fundamental difference, of course, is the moral purpose behind each spiritual experience.) "Now the song gathered," Nanapush says. "I exerted myself. Eli's arms and legs were heavy, and without food he could not think" (p.102). Neither in Eli's body nor physically present, Nanapush is still able to feel Eli's own condition; he shares the sensory perceptions of the experience. He exists in the sphere of the song as he helps Eli track a moose and then speaks to the weakened hunter: "'Do not sour the meat,' I remind him now, 'a strong heart moves slowly'" (p.102). When Eli's bullet is fired at the animal, Nanapush says, "My song directed it to fly true" (p.103). He helps Eli gut the animal and find his way back home; he then comes out of his song to eat with Eli. This kind of spiritual removal occurs a number of times throughout the novel as characters speak to one another, visit one another, and travel to other places in non-physical forms.

Numerous references are also made to the places inhabited by Native spirits after death. Death is described as a journey along a road into another sphere not altogether separate from the earthly world. Spirits continue to dwell in the forest, to communicate with the living, to protect the places where they once lived. Those who have died still share the problems and grievances of the living. "In the heaven of the Chippewa there is gambling with spears of wood and rounded stones," says Pauline. "They play for drunkenness, or sorrow, or loss of mind. They play for ease, they play for penitence, and sometimes they play for living souls" (p.160). Death is not necessarily a world of resolutions and salvation; spirits are active, human, emotional. Fleur and Pauline journey into the world of the dead when Fleur loses her second child; immediately after giving birth to her dead baby, Fleur herself is on the verge of death and travels to the next world till Margaret comes to revive her. This ability to cross between the worlds of death and life is unique to a Native sense of place; Nanapush

comments that in her later years, Fleur travels to the "other place" more and more frequently, less at home in "this place of reservation surveys" than she is "where the dead sit talking, see too much, and regard the living as fools" (p.8). As spirits move from place to place in the Native universe, realities are blended, boundaries blurred.

Another interesting use of place in the novel centers around sexuality. The values and personalities of characters are further developed by the places they use for sexual exploration. When Fleur and Eli first fall in love, they enjoy a certain physical freedom in the woods. Complaining to Nanapush about the rumors of her sons exploits, Margaret says, "They're like animals in their season! No sense of shame! Against the wall of the cabin, down beside it. In grass and up in trees" (p.48). In the wilderness, Fleur and Eli's actions are natural, genuine, spontaneous. The forest frees them from guilt, shame, restraint. Their passion is at home in the woods, where they can live a traditional lifestyle with equal freedom. For many Native groups, "sex was generally regarded as a natural function to be fulfilled, just as hunger had to be satisfied," writes Carolyn Niethammer in Daughters of the Earth (p.207). Fleur and Eli regard sexuality with an openness and innocence unfamiliar to Western cultures. They are married in the "old way," by being exclusively intimate with one another; there is no church, no Christian morality, no imposed sexual restraint in the forest.

When Pauline begins to explore her sexuality, her experience is also dictated by the environment in which she loses her innocence. She chooses Bernadette's brother Napoleon to be her partner; old, thin, bony, he matches Pauline's awkward body with his own. For their first encounter, they use an old house in the woods which is "abandoned now and caving in" (p.73). By choosing to be inside rather than out in the sun, the grass, the leaves, Pauline

interprets sex as something to be ashamed of, something to be hidden like the shape of her own body. "The light through the uncaulked boards streamed too harsh and brilliant," she says (p.73), as though the sunlight which welcomes Fleur and Eli inhibits her. Unmoved by her first experience with Napoleon, Pauline imagines a different scene with him, a night of darkness when "[they] howled like cats in a manger, dove and bucked like horses in their heat" (p.73). Pauline wants the kind of animal freedom that Fleur and Eli share, the kind of wild spontaneity which she later instigates between Eli and Sophie, who also make love in an open outdoor space (the slough). But like the place she has chosen for her sexual awakening, Pauline is abandoned, old before her time, an intrusion in the midst of the forest. "Now I knew that men and women ground their bodies together, shoved their hips in motion and fell quiet. Then they lay there and looked at the wall, listening as the mice scratched insistently behind the boards," Pauline concludes (p.74).

Though she returns to Napoleon for pleasure many times afterward, sex always remains impassionate, silent, and unfulfilling for Pauline. It is yet another wall she cannot scale because she has rejected the love of other people in her personal life philosophy. While Fleur and Eli's child is legitimate, Pauline calls her daughter a bastard because she does not share the Native belief system. She does not love the man she uses for sex, nor does she have any desire to continue her own family history in her child. Because Pauline violently rejects the traditional structures which would lend stability and fullness to her life, and because she is still subconsciously attracted to her Native heritage, she is unable to find happiness in either the Indian or the white world. With eyes raised to heaven, she prepares for an isolated existence in the cloister she has built around herself.

The blending of place with other themes in the novel ultimately gives Tracks its vibrant eloquence, its poignant beauty. This is the story of a people, a place, a woman struggling to hold on to meaning in a world which changes beyond her control. Not only the land, but the values and identities defined by that land are threatened in Fleur Pillager's world. The importance of family is directly linked to the concept of place; families share the same land, draw their livelihood from that land, are connected by their common bond to the land. Thus, when Fleur loses her forest home, she loses the new family begun with Lulu's birth. Love for other people and for the universe which gives us life also stems from a recognition of individual place within a larger sphere of human existence. Even without her land, Fleur is able to maintain an identity, a sense of place, by nurturing a kinship to the spirit of the land; her efforts earn her the respect and friendship of those like Nanapush who share her beliefs. On the other hand, Pauline, without respect for the earth or a recognition of her own place in nature's cycles, must resign herself to a loveless, passionless, lonely life. Spirituality and place are indelibly linked; not only does the land itself possess sacred and religious elements, but the spirit is also able to exist in places above and beyond the physical realm of the universe. As a means of recording and preserving history, the landscape itself is central to the lives of these characters; Fleur gathers her own identity from the heritage of the land on which she lives. She follows the tracks of her ancestors across the earth, leaving a story in her own wandering footprints for others to read and respect. Thus, the theme of survival threads throughout Tracks, not only in Fleur Pillager's story, but also in characters like Pauline or the Morisseys who try to survive by abandoning traditional Native values -- and that of place in particular. Ultimately, place carries a transitory value which becomes increasingly pronounced as the novel closes. The physical world may be damaged, robbed,

altered, invaded; yet the history, the beauty, the spirituality of places are carried in the hearts and minds of the people who recognize and cherish their value. The woods are still home to Fleur, in spirit; this most fundamental connection to the place of her heritage and her happiness can never be destroyed.

Thus, in Louise Erdrich's Tracks the theme of place is central to the voice of the novel. As a means of developing characters, creating scenes, illustrating values, constructing and comparing cultures, and building conflicts, places are incorporated into the basic framework of the story. A close reading such as this one ultimately reaches beyond the bounds of the book itself to explore elements of human existence common to all people. How we interpret ourselves within the universe, how we relate to our surroundings, structure our environment, and give meaning to the world we inhabit are fundamental human concerns. In Tracks, Erdrich skilfully explores what happens when one peoples' places, and all of the values represented by them, are threatened or destroyed by an invading culture. A loss of place as inescapable as that described in Tracks creates tensions and conflicts which cannot always be resolved; though Fleur retains her spiritual sense of place, there is nevertheless a great deal of pain and suffering which comes with survival, with maintaining traditional values in a world which no longer recognizes them as fundamental to human existence.

CHAPTER 2

Making Legends

*I wish all to know that I do not propose
to sell any part of my country, nor
will I have the whites cutting our
timber along the rivers, more especially
the oak. I am particularly fond of the
little groves of oak trees. I love to
look at them, because they endure the
wintry storm and the summer's heat,
and -- not unlike ourselves -- seem
to flourish by them.*

Tatanka Yotanka, or Sitting Bull,
Sioux warrior
McLuhan, Touch the Earth, p.47

Mary Brave Bird Crow Dog was born in 1953 on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota. In 1990 she published her only book, Lakota Woman, written with the help of her friend and fellow Indian, Richard Erdoes. A member of the Brule band of Sioux, Mary grew up in a region alive with the legends of Indians like Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, and Spotted Tail. As the home of Mt. Rushmore and the infamous site of Custer's last stand, the state also boasts its share of white culture heroes like Wild Bill Hickok and Calamity Jane.

Attractive to Indians and whites alike, the Dakota territory was historically a battleground for Western and Native American cultures.

Traditional Sioux lifestyles demanded freedom to move through the countryside, freedom to track the buffalo the Indians depended on for food, clothing, shelter, and tools. "The Sioux were relatively peaceful as long as they could move freely and hunt," explains historian John Milton (South Dakota, p.104). However, once white travelers began to pass through the region, the buffalo were killed for food, for hides, for money; bison were starved when prairie grass was eaten to dust by pioneer cattle. Both the buffalos and the Indians lost their food supplies, their territory, their freedom. Once the crucial source of Indian livelihood was endangered, the Indians began to rebel by attacking foreign settlers and wagon trains. The United States army responded to these attacks as acts of war, and "the process escalated until at last the Sioux had to choose between surrender and starvation" (Milton, p.104). Overrun by cattle, farmers, and the U.S. army, the Sioux were placed on reservations on the southern border of what became South Dakota. "The Great White Fathers in Washington have made promises which they did not or could not keep, and the Sioux have lived in poverty ever since they were assigned to reservations," asserts Milton (p.131). It is into this world of staggering unemployment, cultural animosities, tribal disagreements, and legendary heroes that Mary Crow Dog was born.

Descended from bands of Tetons living in the Great Lakes region, the Brule Sioux of the Rosebud Reservation once roamed the prairies with a lifestyle based on the bison, horse, and trade for economic survival. In 1980, 5,688 Indians were living on the reservation; the average level of education in 1969, when Mary went to school, was through the ninth grade (Handbook of Indian Reservations, p.256-7). In her autobiography, Mary deals extensively

with issues of prejudice and discrimination encountered in the Rosebud region. John Milton also describes such problems in his history of South Dakota; mixing ethnic groups causes friction and daily confrontation between whites and non-whites. "West River whites tend to see the Sioux as lacking in any kind of motivation to improve their own conditions, which in turn leads to charges of laziness, dirtiness, and lawlessness," writes Milton (p.135). The occasional accusatory tone of Mary's book can be attributed, in part, to growing up in such an environment. "West River residents are tired of being blamed for events which occurred before they were born," Milton continues (p.135). It is this inflexibility between both ethnic groups which creates a strong element of tension in Lakota Woman.

In South Dakota, Milton discusses the appeal which originally brought white settlers to the region. A place historically enmeshed in white cultural images, the Dakota Territory gained a reputation as a fearful yet liberating, brutal yet beautiful land. "The Dakotas are like a foreign country, exotic in the imagination," writes Milton (p.14). Finding a power in the land akin to the Natives' own appreciation of place, many white newcomers planted themselves in the romanticized notion of building a Dakota frontier. Yet while Indian tribes traditionally lived with the land, in balance with nature, pioneers from the east tried to change and control the harsh environment. Newcomers found so much land at their disposal, so much work to be done, such a challenge to survive. "The long look across the open land gives [the plains dweller] a sense of humility (the land is clearly bigger than we are) and a surge of freedom, independence, and pride which both reinforce the humility and build upon it," says Milton (p.xi). Settlers came to the Dakotas expecting to work, to build, to prosper, to make a new country; and as this new white idealism rooted itself in

the soil of South Dakota, the Sioux lost the freedom to draw a unique cultural identity from their own land.

Mary Crow Dog's homeland is "no Garden of Eden" (Milton, p.xi). Battered by unpredictable and dramatic weather changes, the region experiences a range of temperatures from 90 degrees in the summer to a low of -20 degrees in the winter. The land itself is expansive and windswept; "coloring changes with the movement of the sun and clouds, and shadows make abstract patterns on the grasses" (Milton, xi). Plagued by draughts and winter storms, the land is not well suited for heavy agriculture, though farmers have fought with determination to make the earth produce. Not comprised solely of steppe land, the South Dakota landscape shields its trees in valleys, on river banks, on hillsides. "One senses that the conditions of the land, austere at best, have helped develop strong hardy grain and strong hardy men -- no other could survive," says Milton (p.11). For the Indians who belonged to the land long before the farmers came, the "austere conditions" of South Dakota were a way of life, not a challenge. In this place they knew physical, spiritual, and cultural survival; and in this place Mary Crow Dog finds her story.

The theme of place winds throughout Mary Crow Dog's Lakota Woman. As an autobiography, the work presents yet another form for interpreting and defining places in Native American literature. Flowing with the style and tone of a novel, Lakota Woman tells of the contemporary experiences of the Sioux tribes in South Dakota. Like Erdrich, Mary Crow Dog interprets places from an ideological perspective; personal, tribal, and universal values stem from the individual's relationship to particular environments. From the beginning of her

story, Mary emphasizes the difficulty and the necessity of hanging on to a tribal identity; she describes the effects of losing traditional places while simultaneously emphasizing the need to reclaim old value systems with contemporary goals. Ultimately, the people in Mary Crow Dog's world draw their identity from the land they love. While emphasizing this fundamental connection to Place, Mary also illustrates other significant qualities associated with the places in her story. There are places for ritual and worship, places for living, places with stories chalked into the landscape. And there are unfavorable places, foreign places, places of danger and pain. The book itself becomes a place of ritual storytelling, inscribing the modern legends of the Lakota Sioux in the grains of a paper page.

An autobiography written according to Western literary tradition implies that the self is the center of the book; the action of the work revolves around the author, and other people's experiences are secondary to those of the principle character. Unlike the traditional autobiography, Lakota Woman places a distinctly Native American emphasis on community and family as active elements in self-perception. The book focuses as much on the collective experiences of the tribe as it does on the individual life of Mary Crow Dog. Included in the action of the story, the author is an observer and a participant, but not the sole performer. More than a history of Mary Crow Dog's life, the book establishes the author's own relationship to people of the past, present, and future; using language, Mary defines a place for herself within a communal, spiritual, traditional context. She becomes the storyteller of old in contemporary form, mixing songs and poetry, stories and personal experiences, history and memory as she records the modern legends of her people. The autobiography becomes a place where communal voices as much as Mary's individual voice are expressed.

From the first chapter of the book, Mary establishes the value system on which she and her fellow tribespeople base their perceptions of the events to follow: "The fight for our land is at the core of our existence, as it has been for the last two hundred years. Once the land is gone, then we are gone too" (p.11). As in Erdrich's Tracks, land represents more than a piece of property on which to build a house or plow a field; it is the source of life, of history, of identity which holds these people together. "The Sioux used to keep winter counts, picture writings on buffalo skin, which told our people's story from year to year. Well, the whole country is one vast winter count," explains Mary (p.11). The land is scrawled with legends, memories, lessons to be interpreted by those who wander over its plains and hills and valleys. Thus, connected to both physical and metaphysical places are many of the customs and beliefs which define the Sioux people.

As Mary Crow Dog tells her story, she illustrates a great appreciation for or awareness of the various places she describes. A sense of belonging to the land is juxtaposed with the sense of displacement that comes from being uprooted by a dominant white culture; the result is a kind of cultural confusion which leads to the search for secure identity in an ethnically complicated society. Mary herself struggles with these two contradictory concepts which pull her both toward and away from her traditional Native heritage. Balancing the two juxtaposed worlds is especially challenging for her; as a "mixed blood," she does not completely belong to the Native American world, nor can she completely blend in as a white person. Ultimately, she resolves the conflict by "re-placing" herself in the cultural landscape of the Lakota people and reaffirming her personal relationship to the history and religion of the land; she makes a conscious choice between two cultures and finds happiness only by claiming a place for herself in her Native Sioux society.

Mary begins her narrative with a description of her childhood, insinuating as she writes that her experiences are not exceptional among the Lakota. Growing up on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota, Mary spends her early childhood in a disruptive environment. Her mostly white father deserts Mary's family when she is still quite young, leaving her mother with five children to support. Soon, Mary's mother remarries a man "worse than her real father" (p.15); a drunkard who teaches his step-kids to drink when they are still children, the step-father completes the destruction of the home as a place of comfort, love, and support. "After my mother married this man I did not want to be around. So I just kept away from my mother's place," recalls Mary (p.15). On her own in her early teens, Mary is without family, without a home, and without a Native American identity. Calling herself an *iyeska* (or "breed"), she confesses a frequent desire to "purge" the white out of her own blood. "As young girl I used to look at myself in the mirror, trying to find a clue as to who and what I was," she says (p.9). Unlike Erdrich's mixed-blood character Pauline, Mary wants to find the Indian within herself, wants to go back to her roots and reclaim her past. Her home environment, however, is not a constructive place for the learning Mary needs.

The kind of family life that Mary experiences stems from the destruction of the *tiyospaye*, or extended family group, which traditionally held Sioux clans together. It is a "matter of [white] policy" (p.13) which initiates the crumbling of the close-knit clan; in an effort to "civilize" the Indians, the U.S. government unraveled both the physical and the social structure of their customs and traditions. "And so the government forced the Sioux into the kind of relationship now called the 'nuclear family' -- forced upon each couple their individually owned allotment of land, trying to teach them 'the benefits of wholesome

selfishness without which higher civilization is impossible," quotes Mary Drily (p.13). The tiyospaye was the traditional arena for economic, agricultural, political, social, religious, and personal activity; it was "like a warm womb cradling all within it" (p.13). Not confined to any particular place, the tiyospaye could move through the prairies carrying its entire social fabric within the confines of the group itself. Each person had a place within the larger clan, much as each individual had a personal place within the universe itself. Values of sharing, caring for one another, helping with the work of living, respecting the elderly, etc. were reaffirmed in the ancient structure of the tiyospaye. When the Indians were instead confined to nuclear families, they lost the larger social structure which had once been the "nucleus" of tribal life; with that loss came a break down of the values, customs, language, and religion once fundamental to the tiyospaye family.

Thus, when the Sioux were placed on reservations, forced into nuclear families, and required to own land, the entire framework which had preserved their traditions and culture for centuries was shattered. "Now there is neither the tiyospaye nor a whitestyle nuclear family left, just Indian kids without parents," says Mary (p.16). The home is not a place for realizing or appreciating one's Native identity; rather, it is frequently a place of alcoholism and abuse, infidelity and poverty. Children growing up in such environments become hardened to pain at an early age; they lack the constant attention and traditional education once provided by the tiyospaye. Towns built of troubled households become "places without hope where bodies and souls [are] being destroyed bit by bit" (p.15). Learning from her childhood experiences, Mary decides that only by returning to the traditional values of the past can she find peace and fulfillment in her life.

How to reconcile the lifestyles of the past with a contemporary consciousness thus becomes an interesting challenge for those like Mary who try to go back to their roots. Re-learning the old ways becomes the means of moving forward in the present and future; though Mary cannot entirely emulate the ways of her ancestors, she can still learn the stories and the beliefs and the ceremonies and the history which made life meaningful for traditional Sioux. Applying new knowledge to her present life, Mary then re-defines herself not as an Indian of the past, but as an Indian of today. No culture is static, and changes forced by both external and internal elements are constantly shaping a peoples' vision of reality. Responding to a loss of the tiyospaye structure, for example, Mary tries to form a community around herself which, though it may not resemble the traditional tiyospaye entirely, nevertheless provides her with a family and an Indian identity as a member of a larger Native American group.

When the Lakota were placed on reservations, they not only lost the traditional social structure of the tiyospaye, but they also lost the physical form of the tipi which had housed their cultural beliefs. In Native American Architecture, authors Peter Nabokov and Robert Easton cite climate, technology, society, economics, and religion as the determinants of dwelling forms for most Native American populations. The places people build for themselves are inextricably related to the way in which they perceive themselves in relation to the universe. Within the structure of a Sioux tipi would be encoded the rules and roles primal to the culture itself. The circular shape of the tipi is a symbol of Sioux cosmology; the earth, the sky, and the people are brought together in harmony within a sacred hoop of existence mimicked by the tipi.

Some Plains Indians painted their lodges with scenes of battle, exploits, ritual visions, or guardian spirits. "Seating, sleeping, storage, and the placement of holy objects within the home followed social custom. Doorways

almost invariably faced the rising sun, and the oldest male occupant customarily slept at the rear, western side of the lodge" (Easton and Nabokov, p.156).

Women were responsible for sewing the tipi cover together, helping one another with their work in what Nabokov describes as "the Native equivalent of the quilting bee" (lecture, 1/16/92, University of Oregon). "Women held sway over home and hearth, either building or supervising construction of their houses" (Easton and Nabokov, p.30). Thus, social roles were also dictated by the places constructed in a Sioux community.

Lodges were arranged in a circular camp, emphasizing the interconnected relationship between members of a tribe. It is this kind of habitual association to one another and to the land which allowed the Indians to carry their place with them when they moved; everywhere they traveled, the physical lay-out of the community as well as its social structure remained consistent. Wherever they settled, structures were erected for specific religious purposes; Sun Dance lodges or vision tipis, for example, were places of deep spiritual meaning for traditional Sioux. Thus, infinite details of daily, social, political, economic, and religious life were dictated by the places the Lakota built for themselves. When those traditional places were forbidden and replaced with square, wooden houses, the Lakota's highly developed interpretation of living places was denied. The Sioux holy man Hehaka Sapa, or Black Elk, explained,

The wasichus [whites] have put us in these square boxes. Our power is gone and we are dying, for the power is not in us any more. You can look at our boys and see how it is with us. When we were living by the power of the circle in the way we should, boys were men at twelve or thirteen. But now it takes them very much longer to mature.

McLuhan, p.152

The thwarted development of children and the loss of psychological power among the community as a whole are both attributed to the displacement of the Indians from traditional structures to meaningless wooden boxes. Separated from the earth, from each other, and from the circular shape which represents the traditional Sioux vision of the universe, young and old alike are severed from both the physical and spiritual connections needed to sustain a productive, powerful community.

Before Mary wholeheartedly begins to pursue her Lakota identity, she is introduced to the injustices of racism. Her first encounter occurs when, as a child, she is threatened for playing at a white girl's house. Her grandmother has told her, "'Whatever you do, don't go into white people's homes. 'Cause when they come into our homes they make fun of us, because we are poor'" (p.21). At a young age, Mary is taught to distinguish the differences between places, to recognize that Indian homes are not the same as white ones. Still, she goes to the little girl's home, only to be discovered by the white mother, who is on the verge of hysteria as she threatens to whip the frightened Indian child. Panicked and confused, Mary runs home to her grandmother and never plays with the white girl again. Other experiences with discrimination are to follow, and Mary starts learning how to defend herself against racism and injustice, how to recognize places that are unfriendly or threatening to her survival as a Native American.

When Mary is sent away to boarding school, she loses contact with the one place which has offered a kind of security in her young life: her grandparents' cabin. "We kids did not suffer from being poor, because we were not aware of it," Mary writes of the times she lived with her grandparents. "We existed in a vacuum of our own" (p.26). However, once exposed to the outside

world through boarding school, Mary can compare her own experiences with how others live, how others are treated. Like many of her peers, she becomes frustrated, angry, dissatisfied with her own life. The school itself is a place where favoritism, abuse, and racism are ingrained in the walls. Speaking of the manner in which children are taken from the arms of their parents and forced into boarding schools, Mary says, "The only word I can think of for what is done to these children is kidnapping" (p.29). To physically remove young people from their traditional environments is to destroy the place in which cultural roles and values are taught. "In the old days, nature was our people's only school and they needed no other," writes Mary (p.30). The fact that the whites in charge of "civilizing" Indians deemed it necessary to separate children from their homes indicates that the government also recognized the importance of family place in the lives of the Sioux. Some of the first students to be sent to boarding schools were not allowed to return home at all until they had finished up to ten years of schooling. This kind of isolation and forced education creates people who do not fit either in the white dominant culture or the traditional Indian world.

Mary is sent to the mission school of St. Francis to get an education. "Even now, in a good school, there is impersonality instead of close human contact; a sterile, cold atmosphere, an unfamiliar routine, language problems," she writes (p.29). When Mary attends St. Francis in the 1960's, the school is run by nuns who are liberal with punishment and strict with orders. Religious conversion is a central goal at St. Francis; for some, like Mary's mother, the effort is successful. For others, like Mary, the morality of those at St. Francis is hypocritical and repulsive. The girls are beaten, starved, verbally abused, and stripped of all personal dignity in the frightening descriptions related by Mary. Caught comforting one another in bed at night, little girls are accused of sinning.

"We had not the slightest idea what it was all about. At home we slept two and three in a bed for animal warmth and a feeling of security," Mary says (p.35).

The boarding school is a place of unfamiliar values, a place which teaches children to be ashamed of the traditions of their heritage. Practicing Native American religions is forbidden, any contact with members of the opposite sex is dubbed sinful and unchaste, and Indians are taught to adopt a foreign language, foreign foods, a foreign concept of time. As a place which weakens rather than strengthens the characters of its students, the boarding school is highly criticized by Mary Crow Dog. Eventually, she quits school, "ending a situation which had become unendurable for [her]" (p.41). Leaving the place of so much unhappiness, Mary returns to her mother's home as a young and rebellious teenager still looking for her true self in the mirror.

The world of the reservation to which Mary returns is equally unattractive. She spend her days "hanging out" in towns like St. Francis, Parmelee, and Mission; full of poverty and alcoholism, they are "towns that show how a people can be ground under the boot, ground into nothing" (43). Life in these places is a continual cycle of bar-hopping, brawling, and trying "to forget." Herself a heavy drinker, "at age twelve [Mary] could drink a quart of the hard stuff and not show it" (p.44). Eventually she tires of drinking and quits, but not before she has witnessed the violence, the pain, and the death which alcohol brings to those around her. "Life expectancy in some tribes is forty-five years, the leading cause of death is alcoholism, and Indians have the lowest per capita income of any ethnic group in the U.S.," reports a January 1991 article in Time (p.18). This is the reality which Mary experiences as a young teenager, fresh out of school and filled with restless anger.

Physically fighting for survival becomes a standard necessity both on and off the reservation. Writes Mary:

If you are an Indian woman, especially in a ghetto, you have to fight all the time against brutalization and sexual advances. After a while you yourself begin to strike out blindly, anticipating attacks even when none are intended. Many of these brawls are connected with drinking, but many occur just because you are Indian.

p.51

The Indians live in a "corner," Mary asserts; continually backed into threatening situations, they lash out with claws bent on survival. Mary is caught in a "circle of drinking and fighting, drinking and fighting" that feeds on the environment of the reservation. In the old days, this kind of aimless lifestyle would never have existed. Yet with the loss of their land and the crumbling of tribal structures, many Lakota lost the sense of self-worth which stems from belonging to a larger group. Mary Crow Dog argues that the "Indian drinking problem" is as much a "white problem": "White men invented whisky and brought it to America. They manufacture, advertise, and sell it to us. They make profit on it and cause the conditions that make Indians drink in the first place" (p.54). Mary's accusation is not unfounded; one of the "conditions" that induces Indians to drink is the atmosphere of the reservation itself. Clearly, the government's alternative home for the Indians has not been a viable replacement for the traditional places once central to the lifestyle of the Lakota people. Like Mary Crow Dog, many reservation Sioux find themselves without direction or purpose when they lose the traditional tiyospaye structure of their land-based society.

Increasingly at odds with her mother, Mary leaves home in her early teens and joins a band of young Indians wandering all over the country.

Included at the beginning of her chapter entitled "Aimlessness" is a poem by Yellow Bird which captures the sense of helplessness, instability, and insecurity experienced by many people like Mary:

I am roaming
 Roaming,
 Restless,
 Aimless.
 In the snow I see
 My ancestors'
 Bloody footprints,
 Moccasin prints.
 My old boots are worn
 And down at the heels.
 On what road am I?
 The white man's road,
 Or the Indians'?
 There are no signposts.
 The road is uphill,
 And the wind in my face.
 Still I go on.

p.55

In this poem, as in the accounts of Mary's roaming days, there is an emphasis placed on the difficulties and fears of those who try to find the Indian path in a white person's world. While the footprints of the past are visible, the speaker in the poem wears "worn old boots" instead of moccasins, the tracks are bloody, and the wind is fierce in his face. Despite the hardships which confuse the direction of the narrator, he persists in his efforts to find the right road; the last line of the poem suggests an endurance and a determination which underscore the aimless wandering of Indians like the speaker and Mary who have lost their direction in life.

"The Place is really more often the Road, for there is no home to many of these wanderers," writes Rayna Green in That's What She Said (p.7). Mary runs away from her mother's home much for the same reason she leaves the boarding school: "I could not share the values my mother lived by," she says

(p.56). A Christianized, hard-working woman content with accumulating the materialistic symbols of white civilization, Mary's mother cannot offer her the kind of Native American education she craves. Trying to shield her daughter from the Indian ways which would subject her to even more discrimination and hardship, Mary's mother instead incites a curiosity in Mary which is accompanied by confusion as to her real identity. Thus, wandering and stealing, drinking and smoking become the focus of Mary's teenage years. "I had no place to go, but a great restlessness came over me, an urge to get away, no matter where. Nowhere was better than the place I was in," she recalls (p.56). Mary can find no value in the kind of place her mother has to offer, with her home and car, her "TV and curtains at the windows" (p.57), her Puritan morality, and her leering, alcoholic husband.

The Road, however, is equally disappointing. Illustrating the same kind of transitive relation to place which Erdrich describes in Tracks, Mary speaks of the impossibility of escaping the reservation. It is a part of her, internalized and psychological. "If the ghetto Indians brought the city with them to the reservation, so we runaways dragged the res and its problems around with us in our bedrolls. Wherever we went we formed tiny reservations," she writes (p.59). Though the runaways try to leave their unhappy home lives behind them, immersing themselves in the "outside" white world cannot erase their connection to the reservations and places of the past. Like the social structure of the tiyospaye which could be moved from place to place throughout the country, so the pattern of reservation life is carried with these wandering Indians and continues to influence them. However, the culture of the reservations which the wandering Indians perpetuate is largely unproductive and contradicts sharply with the constructive, harmonious patterns of the traditional tiyospaye.

Unlike Erdrich's Fleur, Mary does not have a positive image of place to carry with her. While Fleur draws her identity and moral strength from the place of her birth, Mary is haunted by the problems and memories of the place she is trying to escape. Because she has not yet discovered a valuable place in her own life, Mary keeps running, bitter and angry and restless. "It took me a while to see the emptiness underneath all this frenzied wandering," she confesses (p.58). Yet like Erdrich's character Pauline, Mary is still drawn to the reservation; it is a part of her, she belongs to the tradition of its people, and ultimately she will return. Both Mary and Pauline go back to the reservation in search of a spiritual as well as a personal place which the Native community could define for them. Whereas Pauline becomes increasingly distant from her heritage as she grapples with a Christian identity, Mary develops an Indian identity for herself as she becomes more involved in Native American culture.

In her roaming years, Mary encounters the modern morality of her fellow Indians. Noting the sexism prominent among young Native males, Mary suggests that the values of the past have been warped over time to oppress women and give a sense of superiority to men whose honor has been crushed by white society. While women are still expected to fulfill traditional roles of child-bearing, providing food, etc., men are no longer warriors, nor do they hunt the plains for buffalo. The traditionally honored rite of passage that comes with menstruation is no longer celebrated; "the feast is gone, only the distaste has remained," comments Mary (p.67). Though celebrated in the legends and culture heroes of the old days, women are not so well-treated by modern males. At the age of fourteen or fifteen, Mary is raped by a "good-looking young man who said, 'Come over here, kid, let me buy you a soda'" (p.67). Not only the Indian men, but also the white state troopers who patrol the reservations commit countless rapes and abuses that go virtually unpunished.

Sexual morals are hardly traditional in the wandering bands Mary joins. While still considering sex a natural act, many of the young men Mary encounters are "free, very free and wild. 'If you don't come to bed with me, wincincala, I got somebody else who's willing to.' The boys had that kind of attitude" (p.65). Gone are the sacred overtones to sex, gone the reserve Sioux traditionally maintained in sexual relations, gone the sense of commitment, respect, and responsibility in many relationships. This kind of sexual freedom would have undermined the social fabric of a traditional tribe; the children of unwed mothers were an economic burden on the entire community. Moreover, Indian marriages traditionally were established by the consistent sexual intimacy of a couple; Fleur and Eli are married by Chippewa "common law" in Tracks. Mary herself is troubled by the sexual abandon of her peers: "If [I] got involved [I] always took it seriously," she says (p.65). The environment created within such a group of roving young Indians allows for the distortion of traditional values; eager to be different, to defy the morays of a dominant white culture, to assert the Indian within themselves, the people Mary describes pick and choose the morals that best coincide with their desired lifestyle.

This erosion of traditional beliefs stems, in part, from the loss of the Lakota's "core of existence;" when the land is stolen, forgotten, or ceases to have meaning, then the values it once represented are no longer practiced. Forced to become sedentary in nuclear families, the Indians lose the freedom to echo the motions of the land with their own seasonal wandering. The tiyospaye no longer in tact, there is no system which consistently perpetuates the customs and morals of the Lakota. Many children grow up without parental guidance, instruction, control. "Home" is not a place of positive communal interaction where extended families share work, food, stories, history, morals, and a love of the land which gives them life; rather, for people like Mary and the wandering

Indians, "home" becomes a place of conflict and animosity which scatters the family and alienates children while trying unsuccessfully to imitate both the physical and internal structure of a "white" home. The land itself loses meaning for young Indians who are never taught to respect and appreciate it; rather, negative memories are too often associated with childhood places. Said Sioux Chief Luther Standing Bear,

The man who sat on the ground in his tipi
 meditating on life and its meaning,
 accepting the kinship of all creatures
 and acknowledging unity with the universe
 of things was infusing into his being the
 true essence of civilization. And when
 native man left off this form of
 development, his humanization was
 retarded in growth. McLuhan, p.99

Without the family ties or the cultural values which give them a sense of belonging to the land, the young Indians Mary describes lose the "true essence of civilization;" they cannot find meaning in life without being taught to "acknowledge unity with the universe" and "the kinship of all creatures."

Though the roving Indian bands imitate their ancestors by giving themselves freedom to move around the country, their wandering is purposeless and without proper motivation. They are not following the movement of the buffalo, personal visions, the cycles of the seasons, the contours of the land; instead, many are wandering in rebellion, in frustration, out of habit, searching for some direction in life by escaping the reservation world. Without a constructive spiritual relationship to a particular place, they wander without meaning, without the value systems which would give their travels purpose and worth.

When Mary is introduced to the American Indian Movement (AIM) sweeping the country in the 1970's, she begins to find the place of value she

has been looking for in her life. Replacing her internal baggage of reservation problems with the positive goal of expressing the native American within herself, she begins to find a spiritual place within her own soul, a place which leads her back to the traditional culture of the past. "You should know that the movement for Indian rights was first of all a spiritual movement and that our ancient religion was at the heart of it," writes Mary (p.92). With the struggle for Indian rights comes an upsurge in traditional belief systems; the practicing of Indian religions had been forbidden up to the time of Franklin D. Roosevelt. The spiritual revival of many different Indian tribes opened the door to the past, pulling traditional rituals and beliefs from the voices of memory. "It was the real old folks who had spirit and wisdom to give us," remembers Mary (p.79). Joining together in a "pan-Indian" tribe to help one another re-learn the old ways, people like Mary found a place for themselves in the AIM community. The group who initiated AIM formed a social place which gave Indians a sense of belonging to a larger whole, much as the *tiyospaye* once created personal places within the framework of a larger social group. Fighting for cultural survival, those who participated in AIM felt it "defined [their] goals and expressed [their] innermost yearnings" (p.82). By joining the movement, Mary meets the medicine man, Leonard Crow Dog, who eventually becomes her husband; and with Leonard's help, she also finds the spiritual place within herself which gives shape to her Lakota identity.

Sioux religion revolves around a number of spirits, each of which contributes to the creative power of the single Great Spirit, *Wakan Tanka*. Central to Leonard Crow Dog's teaching is the sacred herb, *peyote*, which is used in ceremonial rituals as an inspiration for visions. The process of praying for visions, or "'crying for a dream,' as the Sioux call it" (p.98), is an integral part of most Native religions. Many of these dreams involve what, for lack of a better

phrase, can be called "out of body experiences" in which the soul travels to another place and learns something from the journey. The religion recognizes an inner, spiritual place which hovers at the core of the Sioux identity; from this spiritual place, one is able to transcend the world of present realities and overcome physical boundaries by allowing the inner self to travel to other worlds, other times, other realities.

Recalling her first ceremonial use of peyote, Mary says,

Suddenly I understood the reality
contained in this medicine, understood
that this herb was our heritage, our
tradition, that it spoke our language.
I became part of the earth because
peyote comes from the earth, even
tastes like the earth sometimes.
And so the earth was in me and I
was in it, Indian earth making me
more Indian. p.96

The melding physical realities in Mary's description illustrate the mystical, all-encompassing quality that place adopts in the spiritual consciousness of the Sioux. All life is inter-connected, flesh and dirt mingle in a sacred union, the spirit is in and of the earth itself. From this relationship to the earth Mary draws her own identity; she becomes "more Indian," finding a "remembrance of things long forgotten" (p.96) in the visions created by peyote; she can speak with dead relatives, feel her own heart beat in time with theirs, in time with the beating of the drum and the drumming of the universe. Mary is careful to note that the medicine must be used only within the proper religious context; otherwise, it can be dangerous if the power of Grandfather Peyote is not properly channelled. Thus, finding this spiritual place requires knowledge, skill, and the proper traditional values which form a context for the vision.

In a manner which even more distinctly differentiates the Sioux from the Christian concept of spirituality, the physical senses often accompany the soul

on its visionary journey. While the Christian soul leaves the body and all of its sensations only after death, the Indian spirit can move in and out of the body during life; moreover, the soul still retains its physicality, so that it is possible to hear, smell, see, feel what is happening as though the spirit were still in the body. Describing a dream she once had, Mary illustrates this convolution of physical and spiritual realities. Unable to wake herself up, she finds herself "going back into another life" (p.97), seeing an Indian camp, the tipis, Indians cooking buffalo meat over fires. "Then suddenly I saw the white soldiers riding into camp, killing women and children, raping, cutting throats," she says (p.97). The confusion is vivid, the horror vibrant, and Mary cries as she watches. "It was so real, much more real than a movie - sights and sounds and smells...The screaming of children that I did not want to hear but had to all the same. And the only thing I could do was cry," Mary remembers (p.97). Years later, she is still unsure how to interpret her dream; yet she "truly [believes] that this dream came to [her] through the spiritual power of peyote" (p.97).

It is this ability to spiritually transcend places by crossing back and forth between realities which gives Leonard Crow Dog's followers the knowledge and the teaching necessary to exist as Native Americans in the present world. On a spiritual journey which retains physical properties, a person is able to experience moments in the lives of others, communicate with dead relatives and animals, and gather knowledge which ultimately assists the moral and personal development of the soul. Thus, religion and its ceremonies become a way of holding on to Sioux identities, memories, history, a way of holding on to the earth itself.

In February of 1973, a group of AIM Indians makes a stand at the infamous site of Wounded Knee. Mary Crow Dog is one of hundreds of Native

Americans who are surrounded by U.S. government troopers for a seventy-one-day long siege. Trouble originates on the neighboring Pine Ridge Reservation when the horribly corrupt and violent Dicky Wilson becomes tribal president of the Oglala Sioux. Meeting resistance from the Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organization (OSCRO), Wilson terrorizes his opponents in an "undeclared civil war." People are kidnapped, murdered, beaten. Cars are riddled with bullets, houses firebombed. With his own "goons" to keep things under control, Wilson grows increasingly confident, calling on the FBI and state marshals to help him wage war against his own people. The OSCRO calls on AIM for help, and a caravan prepared for battle travels to the Pine Ridge Reservation. Deciding not to storm the well-barricaded Pine Ridge town, the Indians choose Wounded Knee as the site to make their stand.

The occupation of Wounded Knee by AIM and OSCRO activists is laden with symbolism. To begin with, the fact that the Indians choose a specific physical place to make an ideological stand is significant; the activists define themselves and their cause by the place they take over, physically reaffirming a connection to the land itself. "Wounded Knee -- Cankpe Opi in our language -- has a special meaning for our people," says Mary (p.124). It is the site of a massacre of three-hundred Sioux men, women, and children by Custer's old troops, "out to avenge themselves for their defeat by butchering the helpless ones" (p.124). The grotesquely frozen bodies of those murdered were tossed into a mass grave, which one progressive white businessman tried to turn into a tourist attraction by constructing a museum and several curio shops at Wounded Knee. The spirits of the dead still wander along the creek, speaking to those who come now to fight at the place of their massacre. "Next to the ditch, on a hill, stands the white-painted Catholic church, gleaming in the sunlight, the monument of an alien faith imposed upon the landscape," Mary writes (p.124).

By choosing Wounded Knee for their protest, the Indians are in essence reclaiming the place, joining the spirits of their relatives in a new battle for survival. "We stood on the hill where the fate of the old Sioux nation, Sitting Bull's and Crazy Horse's nation, had been decided, and where we, ourselves, came face to face with our fate," Mary writes (p.125).

In the seventy-one days to follow, the activists create a legend of their own which is etched into the landscape of Wounded Knee. They declare Wounded Knee a sovereign territory of the Oglala Nation, reclaiming the Sioux right to independence one secured by the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 and later unilaterally abrogated by the government. Armed with a list of grievances, the Indians refuse to give up their stronghold until the government agrees to deal with the problems at hand. Their unusual form of protest is significant; these Indians are not violent, over-demanding, irrational people. They simply want the chance to be heard, to argue their concerns, to see some changes made which would guarantee the safety and freedom of the Oglala Sioux -- rights which are accorded to every citizen of the United States. At the little trading post of Wounded Knee, the activists, women and men, old and young form a small community as they sit and wait for government action. As N. Scott Momaday writes in House Made of Dawn, "there is a resistance and an overcoming, a long outwaiting" (p.58) which comes with the patience of non-violent rebellion; with only a handful of weapons, the Indians at Wounded Knee are ill-prepared to do battle. They draw their will to resist from the land itself which welcomes and approves their cause. Food shortages and deaths strain the spirits of the Indians, and eventually they are forced to make agreements with the government; but they never surrender their values during the long siege at Wounded Knee.

Mary is eight months pregnant at the time the siege begins. Refusing to be pampered, she eagerly participates in the work to be done around camp. Dodging bullets and almost starving from the government blockade, the Indians at Wounded Knee hold out against the three hundred marshals and FBI agents surrounding them. Much of the time is spent "just trying to keep warm and finding something to eat," says Mary. "Wounded Knee was a place one got scared in occasionally, a place in which people made love, got married Indian style, gave birth, and died" (p.131). The community created during the siege is one based on traditional values; people stand up for their beliefs, winos and juvenile delinquents and wanderers become warriors with ribbons in their hair, food and clothing and friendship are shared freely. Not only a common goal, but a common history joins these people to each other and to the land on which they stand.

The first day Mary arrives on the hill, she decides, "I [will] have my baby at Wounded Knee, no matter what" (p.126). The place means so much to her, both for its past history and for its history in the making, that she wants her son to bear the story of Wounded Knee as an integral part of his own identity. His birth, like Lulu's birth in Tracks, has symbolic meaning linked to the place in which he is born. In many tribes, when a baby is born it is given a name which "evokes either nature -- the mountains or the hills or the season -- or a ceremony underway at the time of the birth" (Ortiz, National Geographic, Oct., p.7). Born during a legendary protest in a legendary place, Mary's son is "brought in out of the darkness" (Ortiz, p.7) when he is named at the camp; his identity is inextricably related to the unique place and the events of Wounded Knee. The Indian name given to him by Leonard assures this eternal connection of identity and place. Called "Pedro" by Mary, the boy is special because he is a child of "the Knee;" he will be a warrior and a survivor, like

those who make their stand on the hill. His birth is anticipated and celebrated by all of the Indian hold-outs as a symbol that Native America is still not vanishing.

The spiritual life of those living at Wounded Knee is revived in the traditional vein. Numerous ceremonies and peyote meetings are held, and a sweat lodge is constructed in which purification rituals are held. Leonard Crow Dog is the religious leader of the activists. Chosen by the elders of his tribe to be a medicine man, Leonard never attends a white man's school. From boyhood, he is educated according to the old ways so that with maturity, he can help his fellow Indians find the path back to traditional values. During the siege, Crow Dog also acts as the spokesperson for the Indians; respected and admired for his spiritual power, he strongly influences the physical and mental well-being of the besieged Indians. Because of his central role during the protest, he is also the one who is most easily blamed for the event by government authorities.

At Wounded Knee, Leonard revives the Sioux Ghost Dance, which had been outlawed since the 1890's. "He thought that reviving the Ghost Dance would be making a link to our past, to the grandfathers and grandmothers of long ago," explains Mary (p.153). Many who once practiced the dance were brutally killed by a U.S. army fearing rebellion; again facing that army at Wounded Knee, "[Leonard] decided to ghost dance again at the place where this dance had been killed and where now it had to be resurrected," Mary writes (p.153). The dance must be performed in a place made "wakan," or sacred, by a medicine man; a tree stands in the center of a ceremonial circle around which thirty or forty dancers whirl. It is significant that the revival of this dance occurs at Wounded Knee, and also that the dance is held around the first day of spring; it represents a "new spring for the Sioux Nation" (p.154). In the Ghost Dance,

as in many Native American ceremonies, the spirit's connection to the earth is repeatedly affirmed in the attention paid to location, appearance, and sacred or historical meaning of places chosen for the dance.

The Ghost Dance itself is another example of the Sioux ability to spiritually transcend physical boundaries. For hours on end, dancers whirl in a circle, feeling "the power" enter them and carry them beyond the reality to the present world. The image of a circle is primal to the Sioux vision of the universe:

"The sun and sky, the earth and the moon are all round like a shield," an Oglala told the ethnographer James Walker. "The day, the night, and the moon go in a circle above the sky. Therefore the circle is a symbol of these divisions of time and hence of all time. For these reasons the Oglala make their tipis circular, their camp-circle circular, and sit in a circle at all ceremonies.

Easton and Nabokov, p.125

The circular shape of the Ghost Dance thus allows its participants to move across temporal and spatial bounds. The Indians dance "to bring back the buffalo, to bring back the old world of the Indians which the wasicun [whites] had destroyed, the world they had loved so much and for whose return they were praying" (Crow Dog, p.149). Those overcome by the spirit often go into a trance, fall to the ground and "die" a temporary death which allows them to walk in the land of their ancestors. Some dancers "wandered among the stars, spoke with their long-dead relatives, and experienced wonderful things which they described afterwards," says Mary (p.150).

The Ghost Dance provides a means of revitalizing the past, of reuniting souls in the sacred hoop of universal existence. The ceremony requires active involvement of both body and mind, as Leonard illustrates when he tells his

dancers, "'We'll elevate ourselves from this world to another world from where you can see...We'll start physically and go on spiritually and then you'll get the power.'" (p.154). For those who participate in or observe the Ghost Dance at Wounded Knee, the event is an act of celebration, of breathing life back into the Sioux Nation. 'We gathered up the broken pieces of the sacred hoop and put them together again," says Mary (p.155). Thus, the traditional places of the past are gradually recreated through the spiritual efforts of Leonard Crow Dog and his followers.

Eventually, an agreement is reached between the government and the Indians, and the siege, comes to a close. Many, including Mary, are arrested and then released after hours of questioning. Unsatisfied with the twenty-odd rifles surrendered at the end of the siege, the government decides that the Indians are hiding weapons from them and concludes that "'the White House need not fulfill its commitment to AIM because of this violation'" (p.168). The site of Wounded Knee itself is demolished, the church burned down under unexplained circumstances, the museum and stores flattened. "No landmark is left" (p.169). Yet even without its buildings and structures, the place still tells a story. Believing that the government tried to "extinguish all visible reminders that Indians once made their stand there," Mary confirms the value of the place in her own life when she writes, "They cannot extinguish the memory in our hearts, a memory we will pass on to generations still unborn" (p.169). Just as landmarks and places of the past spark stories of recognition in those now living, the places made legendary in the present will also have meaning for those still to come. Mary's son Pedro, for example, will be able to tell his children and his grandchildren how he happened to be born at Wounded Knee; the stories will continue. "Today the perimeter looks very much as it did before the white man came, as it looked to Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, and Big Foot.

Maybe that is as it should be," Mary concludes (p.169). She expresses a belief in the cyclical nature of life; the land itself returns to its natural state, and peace is at last restored to Wounded Knee.

Several months later, Leonard Crow Dog is arrested on "trumped up" charges related to his position of leadership during the Wounded Knee occupation. He cannot understand why the government considers a non-violent, generous, kind-hearted medicine man dangerous. Mary, however, relates their distrust of Crow Dog to his values: "[People] will listen to a medicine man, telling them in their own language: 'Don't sell your land, don't sell Grandmother Earth to the strip-mining outfits and the uranium companies. Don't sell your water'" (p.216). This kind of advice, suggests Mary, is a threat to the white system and "gets you into the penitentiary." Referring to the land as an identity (Grandmother Earth), Leonard again illustrates the overwhelming importance of place in the lives of many Native Americans; places are alive, growing, changing, interacting with the people who inhabit them.

Crow Dog's belief system does not mesh with white values, and for this he is punished and sentenced to twenty-three years in prison by an all white South Dakota jury and judge. The place of Leonard's trial is also significant: "Jesus Christ himself would have been found guilty of inside trading and child molesting had he been an AIM Indian [in South Dakota]," Mary quips (p.223). Those physically closest to the Indians seem to resent them the most; their racism is inspired by guilt, Mary concludes, for the people whose property borders reservation land are those most directly responsible for stealing that land from the Indians themselves. The Crow Dogs find out years later that the FBI actually made a mistake in arresting Leonard; the government was looking for a Leonard Peltier and though he might be hiding out on Crow Dog land.

"Later they tried to justify their assault on Crow Dog's place by pressing phony charges," says Mary (p.221).

While Leonard is in prison, Mary, who is by now Crow Dog's wife, hurriedly begins a campaign for an appeal of the court decision. As lawyers, papers, and laws are shuffled outside the prison walls, Leonard faces miserable and humiliating conditions on the inside. He is transferred from jail to jail repeatedly, often leaving Mary with no clue as to his actual location. sometimes placed in solitary confinement, Leonard is treated as a highly dangerous and contemptible criminal. "It is hard for an outsider to understand what being in jail must have been like for Leonard," writes Mary. "Leonard is part of nature, a man who rides horses, who searches the hills and valleys for healing herbs, who herds cattle, who watches birds for signs, who talks to the clouds and the winds" (p.224). Completely detached from the outside world, Crow Dog suffers tremendously; he is in an utterly foreign place, trapped in an environment which separates him from the physical realities of the home he knows and loves. Never having gone away to school like most Indian children must, he is even more ill-equipped to deal with this sudden and severe displacement from his natural world. Uninterested in the television and games which entertain other prisoners, Leonard keeps himself alive by immersing himself in songs. Literature, or language, then becomes a place in which he can find some degree of freedom; though his body is caged, his spirit is able to escape the walls of his cell through words. As Nanapush also illustrates in Tracks, a song becomes a place in which the spirit can replace itself and move beyond the immediate physical reality. Through song, Leonard goes on a vision quest and communicates with animal spirits who encourage him to endure his confinement.

One of the worst days Leonard has while in prison occurs when he finds out that his home has been burned to the ground. On November 19, 1976, the old Crow Dog place is destroyed "under mysterious, or rather highly suspicious, circumstances" (p.232). All of the sacred relics, ancient costumes, and family treasures Leonard prizes are reduced to ash by the blaze. The home had been a place of many ceremonies, meetings, and rituals, and had housed seven generations of Crow Dogs over the years. Though the physical place is destroyed, Leonard can still feel a spiritual connection to his home; yet he mourns for the loss of "a piece of Indian history and heritage [that] was no more" (p.233).

After several years of battling the courts, Mary finally sees her husband released from jail when the original judge re-sentences him to time served and orders him set free. Crow Dog has a joyous homecoming and is welcomed by the entire tribe. The return to Rosebud Reservation signals a return to the once-familiar lifestyle interrupted by Leonard's prison sentence. Crow Dog land is a place where tradition and old-fashioned values are still practiced, where people come and go at will, living in a communal environment. Several tipis are spread around the ranch and circle the house Mary and Leonard use. Crow Dog land is beautiful, a "paradise" with the Little White River flowing through it, surrounded by pine-covered hills and wilderness. "Everywhere on this land one is close to nature," writes Mary (p.172).

It is significant, then, that in this natural and beautiful environment Leonard is able to reconstruct the ancient beliefs once so central to the lives of his people. "The paradise is not just a one nuclear family place, but rather a settlement for the whole clan, the whole tiyospaye," Mary explains (p.172). Melding the old with the new, those living on Crow Dog land help define for one another what it means to be a Native American. A close relationship to nature,

to the land is fundamental to the process of spiritual development in Leonard's community. With Leonard as their spiritual guide, Indians from all different tribes embrace the past while simultaneously recognizing a need for change; Mary, for example, encourages Leonard to drop his traditional Sioux male chauvinism and regard women on a more equal basis. While old values do not always adapt easily to modern times -- Mary fears that Leonard is "used" too often because of his generosity, and the family constantly struggle to make ends meet -- nevertheless, the Crow Dogs try their best to live life in accordance with the Sioux laws and customs of the past.

Mary confesses that it is difficult for her, as a mixed blood, to be accepted among the Crow Dog clan initially. But with determination, patience, and an undying desire to prove her own Lakota identity, she eventually earns respect for herself from the group. "I now had a place and a man to stay with," Mary writes (p.173). Her sense of place is defined not only by the land, but also she places herself within a social structure; as a wife, a mother, and a member of the clan, Mary now belongs to a meaningful world. Life as a medicine man's wife is sometimes exhausting, frustrating, and trying; people take advantage of Leonard's traditional hospitality, and Mary's job as a hospitable wife is never done as she cooks, cleans, and cares for the many visitors of her husband. Still, Mary concludes that this is the only life she wants to lead. Immersed in the trials of daily existence, she finds security and happiness in the place she and Leonard have created for themselves and their people.

Lakota Woman itself becomes a place for re-telling the history of Mary Crow Dog's people. The stories printed in the South Dakota landscape are transplanted to the paper page; oral tradition expresses itself in the written word, reaffirming Lakota values with tales of Wounded Knee, Crow Dog land, and journeys to the past. Images of a sometimes hostile white world commingle

with descriptions of unhealthy Indian environments to illustrate how different places shape and alter the belief systems of people; places both negatively and positively influence those who are attached to them. Mary Crow Dog's autobiography also narrates her own search for a place of meaning in the contemporary world; her wandering leads her back to the places and ideals of the past, where she finds the roots of her own Native American identity. Her story is a celebration of the Indian within herself; unpretentious yet proud, her words speak with the vehemence of one who has struggled a lifetime to be a Lakota woman.

CHAPTER 3

Spirit of the Land

*"Our children are losing the land.
It doesn't go to work on them anymore.
They don't know the stories about what
happened at these places. That's why
some get into trouble."*

Ronnie Lupe, Apache, 1978
Basso, Text Play and Story, p.21

One of the first contemporary Native American authors to gain widespread exposure for his writing, N. Scott Momaday won the Pulitzer Prize in 1968 for his novel House Made of Dawn. Since then, he has developed a considerable reputation as an autobiographer, a novelist, and a literary scholar. Momaday is the son of a Kiowa father and Cherokee mother; born in Mountain View, Oklahoma, he spent much of his childhood travelling throughout the Southwest with his parents, both of whom were teachers. Between 1936 and 1943, the Momadays lived on Navajo reservations in New Mexico and Arizona. In 1946, the family moved to Jemez Pueblo in New Mexico, which becomes the village of "Walatowa" in House Made of Dawn.

In his book The Names, Momaday describes his life at Jemez. "The account is an idyll of feasts, ceremonies, and trips on horseback through what Momaday believes to be the most beautiful country on earth," writes Alan R.

Velie (Four American Indian Literary Masters, p.14). Though Momaday himself was not a Jemez Indian, he developed a great admiration and love for the land and the people who lived in the region. "Although we have become a mobile people, Americans, Indians and otherwise, still have a very strong sense of place, and we feel our strongest ties to the place where we grew up," writes Velie (p.20). Momaday calls the place which became "Walatowa" in House Made of Dawn "the last, best home of my childhood" (Velie, p.20). To this day, though he lives in California, he considers New Mexico the place that he is from. "A part of my life happened to take place at Jemez," he explains. "I existed in that landscape, and then my existence was indivisible with it" (Velie, p.21). The connection Momaday draws between place and identity surfaces repeatedly in his work, as the House Made of Dawn testifies.

The world in which the novel takes place is a unique blend of cultures. The Anasazi Indians are the original inhabitants of the land who descended from cliff dwellings to the valleys centuries ago. In the 1500's, invading Spanish missionaries imposed Christianity on the Native population, so that in House Made of Dawn a curious mixture of Catholic and Pueblo religions can be found. The difficulty of defining one's own ethnic identity in this culturally mixed region was further compounded by the influx of a variety of Native American tribes to the Southwestern region. For centuries, Navajo, Apache, Zuni, Taos, Isleta, and many other Indian groups have shared the area which is now Arizona and New Mexico. Collectively known as "Pueblo," the Indians traditionally lived in bustling communities which relied primarily on agricultural production for survival. Because the Southwest Indians did not greatly alter their means of subsistence or their location when they were grouped onto reservations, many did not suffer the tremendous cultural upheavals experienced by other displaced tribes. However, as Momaday says, the Pueblo did not escape that

"dislocation of the psyche" caused by "having to deal immediately, not only with the traditional world, but with the other world which was placed over the traditional world so abruptly and with great violence" (Coltelli, p.94). The Indians of the Jemez Pueblo Reservation are "strongly communal," and "the native language and the native religion continue to play a vital role in the total behavior and attitudes of these people" (Handbook of Indian Reservations, p.167-8). However, the Catholic and Protestant churches also have strong sway among the Jemez; this continued intermixing of cultures creates a dichotomy difficult to reconcile, as Momaday's character Abel painfully illustrates.

The land of the Southwest is characterized by a hot, arid climate which makes farming a tenuous means of living. Corn, beans, and squash have been the primary crops raised by the Pueblo Indians since A.D. 500, when villages began to cluster where the land was most arable and water the most accessible. The country's "arid isolation, high desert panoramas, and gorgeous light" struck early explorers as "reminiscent of mythological holy lands and ancient civilizations" (Easton and Nabokov, p.348). While the northern stretch of the region boasts forests and the tail of the Colorado Rocky Mountains, the lower valleys are laced with rivers, deserts, plateaus, and sandstone mesas. "The air is dry and clear, the winters are cold, topsoil is meager, and life-giving rains fall only occasionally in late summer" (Easton and Nabokov, p.348). In the high canyons, valleys, and mountains of central New Mexico, Jemez experiences a climate ranging from a high of ninety-seven degrees to a low of zero degrees; thunderstorms, snowstorms, hailstorms, and windstorms are dramatic and unpredictable elements of the landscape. It is in this world of powerful natural forces, vivid earth tones, adobe villages, corn fields, and panoramic views that Momaday creates House Made of Dawn.

N. Scott Momaday's House Made of Dawn tells the story of Abel, a young American Indian suffering from the loss of a sense of place in his life. Written in the late 1960's, House Made of Dawn capped a decade of racial and political activism in the United States. Central to the civil rights movement as well as to Momaday's novel is the issue of cultural identity, or ethnic consciousness, by which people interpret themselves in relation to the rest of the world. For Momaday's Native Americans, identity and symbolic place are indelibly linked. Drawing on his own personal relationship to Navajo, Kiowa, and Pueblo cultures, Momaday creates a narrative richly textured with multiple points of view, flashbacks, traditional Native tales, and stream of consciousness passages. The novel itself is modeled after traditional oral narratives; it is cyclic in shape, it is intended to teach a moral, and it involves a traditional theme of emergence from discord to harmony. As Momaday's protagonist, Abel is a symbol of disorder and spiritual illness; through the course of the novel, he regains his sense of place and reaffirms his identity in the symbolic landscape of his home. Thus, in the form of a "literary oral narrative," Momaday tells a story of place as a healing power for spiritual and moral sickness.

House Made of Dawn is divided into four major sections which chronicle Abel's spiritual decline and subsequent re-birth. At the beginning of the story, Abel has just been released from duty as a soldier in World War II. He returns to his home at Walatowa, in the Canon de San Diego, where he had spent his entire life before being drafted. The Abel who returns is one far different than the one who left; he feels out of place on the reservation, he cannot communicate with his grandfather, he is helpless and weak where once he was

strong and energetic. Abel's problem is as much a spiritual one as it is physical; his separation from the place of his childhood has produced in him a complete ambivalence to the natural world. "By imagining who and what they are in relation to particular landscapes, cultures and [individuals] form a close relation with those landscapes," writes Lawrence J. Evers in his article "Words and Place in House Made of Dawn" (p.212). When Abel loses his ability to recognize himself in relation to the landscape, he can no longer function as a sentient member of society. Momaday comments, "A Native American is able to define for himself a sense of place, belonging, and to me that is very important" (Coltelli, p.91). Abel's name is ironic, for when he is introduced in the story he is lacking that fundamental ability to distinguish himself as belonging to a place. Having displaced the Native values which once gave him harmony in life, he is adrift in a sea of spiritual stagnation.

Critic Charles Larson calls House Made of Dawn "one of the most depressing" and pessimistic novels ever written by a Native author. "The future offers nothing; the past can be re-captured only in fleeting moments. There appears to be little possibility even for simple endurance; the Indian is a vanishing breed," comments Larson (American Indian Fiction, p.82). However, an interpretation of the theme of place in the novel suggests that Larson's conclusions are inaccurate; there is not only endurance, but also there is hope and happiness for the Native American "breed" which refuses to vanish in Momaday's story. Through the course of the novel, Abel travels on a journey toward spiritual rejuvenation; ultimately, as rediscovers the importance of place as the source of meaning and order in his own life. In his emergence journey, "the landscape plays a crucial role, for cultural landscapes are created by the imaginative interaction of societies of men and particular geographies" (Evers, p.212). The use of language is also central to the development of the place

theme, for words "give origin to all things," according to Momaday's philosophy (Evers, p.213). Thus, it is through the ritual use of language that one recognizes and expresses an intimate relation to place. By the end of the novel, Abel recovers the voice he has lost, which is yet another indication that he is far from vanishing.

Momaday begins and ends his novel with the traditional Jemez Pueblo framing words "dypaloh" and "qtsedaba;" from the start, he places his story in the realm of oral narrative. The importance of symbolic landscape manifests itself in the prologue of the story in a scene repeated at the end of the novel, Momaday describes Abel's race across the land at dawn. The image of the race at the beginning and end of the story not only emphasizes the cyclic structure of the book, but it also focuses attention immediately on the physical environment Momaday creates: "The land was very old and everlasting. There were many colors on the hills, and the plain was bright with different-colored clays and sands...The land was still strong. It was beautiful all around," he writes (p.1). This positive imagery in the beginning and end of the novel suggests a kind of eternal harmony which Abel eventually must achieve. The medicine for his soul sickness is indicated in the paired prologue and ending; Abel must run a race of ritual re-emergence, he must participate in a ceremonial act which ties him directly to the land. "The winter race Abel runs is the first in the Jemez ceremonial season" (Evers, p.214); by running, Abel will reaffirm a connection to his Native religion, to the seasonal order of the universe, and to the cultural landscape on which his spirituality is based.

When Abel returns to the reservation, his grandfather Francisco meets him at the bus stop. An old man who has been raised with both Christian and Native influences, Francisco represents the Indian who is secure with his

identity, who nurtures a sense of place in his own life, whose existence is filled with symbolic order. Abel's only living relative, Francisco is a direct descendant of the Towan-speaking Bahkyush who, on the verge of extinction from invasion and disease, immigrated to Jemez from the Southern Plains in the mid-1800's. The blood of those immigrants "who had made that journey along the edge of oblivion" courses through Abel's blood as he himself struggles along the edge of spiritual oblivion (p.16). The "tragic sense which gave to [the Bahkyush] as a race so much dignity and bearing" will eventually surface in Abel's own character (p.16). Yet Abel's Bahkyush blood comes only from his mother's side; he does not know who his father is. He is "a Navajo, they said, or a Sia, or an Isleta, and outsider anyway, which made him and his mother and [his brother] feel somehow foreign and strange," writes Momaday (p.11). Throughout the story, Abel battles with this feeling of not belonging. While on the one hand his connection to Francisco creates in him a need to belong to some tradition, to some symbolic place, on the other hand his lack of roots on his father's side makes him a foreigner among his own people. From Francisco, Abel can re-learn the values and the words necessary to regain his sense of place in the Native American world.

Francisco's personal connection to place is evidenced in the opening scenes of the novel. He is introduced in context with the river and the valley and the hills and the canyon and the fields which are his home. "The townsmen work all summer in the fields. When the moon is full, they work at night with ancient, handmade plows and hoes, and if the weather is good and the water plentiful they take a good harvest from the fields," writes Momaday (p.5). The survival of these Indians is indelibly linked to the land; from it they draw their subsistence, their sense of community, their daily customs, their history. Ancient and ceaseless, life continues its cycles of seasons and days in the cultivation of

the land itself. Francisco belongs to this landscape; he is tuned to its colors, its sounds, its movement, its meaning.

Driving a horse and wagon to the bus stop, Francisco sings songs to himself and remembers his own life in relation to the land. "When he came to the place called Seytokwa, Francisco remembered the race for good hunting and harvests," writes Momaday. "Once he had played a part; he had rubbed himself with soot, and he ran on the wagon road at dawn" (p.7). Not only is the memory triggered by a place, but the event Francisco recalls is a ritual prayer to the fertility of the land. Like the race Abel will run to reclaim his sense of place, Francisco's race is a personal triumph; he runs for the prosperity and honor the land bestows upon him. Arriving at the crossroads where the bus will stop, Francisco is "glances at the wagon and mares to be sure that everything [is] in order. He [can] feel the beat of his heart, and instinctively he [draws] himself up in the dignity of his age" (p.9). Francisco has an instinctive consciousness of his relationship to the surrounding world; he senses the beating of his own heart as it connects him to the order of his environment. He represents the structure and unity of a Native American world to which Abel no longer belongs.

Abel's return to the reservation is instinctive yet unsuccessful. "In the confusion of the war among soldiers who recognized him only as a 'chief' speaking in 'Sioux or Algonquin or something' (p.108), Abel [loses] both the sense of place which characterized his tribal culture and the very community which supports that sense of place" (Evers, p.215). The foreigner in Abel has made him an outcast in both the white world and on the reservation itself. Still, he is Francisco's grandson; by instinct he turns to the land for help. After sleeping off the drunken stupor in which he greets Francisco, Abel climbs the hill above town and contemplates the landscape. The view pulls memories from him. The images that Abel recalls are all central to the shaping of his

character -- as a boy, a teenager, a young man, he visualizes himself in the places of the past.

Abel's flashbacks tell of his mother and brother's deaths, of Francisco working over "cool, dark furrows of earth" (p.10), of a deer hunt and the ensuing celebration in the grey light of dawn. In a flashback which explicitly connects Abel to the landscape he has ceased to understand, he remembers walking along the rim of the Valle Grande coming home from the mountains one day. "Of all the places that he knew, this valley alone could reflect the great spatial majesty of the sky," writes Momaday (p.16). The valley which captures Abel's awe is "almost too great for the eye to hold, strangely beautiful and full of distance. such vastness makes for illusion, a kind of illusion that comprehends reality, and where it exists there is always wonder and exhilaration" (p.17). It is here, in this valley, that Abel once understood the depth and beauty of the universe; here, where the world was washed clean with brilliant light and "each new sight of it always brought him up short" (p.17), Abel once reaffirmed his spiritual connection to the land.

In Abel's memory, from the rim of the Valle Grande he can see two golden eagles "cavorting, spinning and spiraling on the cold, clear columns of air, and they [are] beautiful" (p.17). On a ceremonial hunt with the Bahkyush Eagle Watchers Society, Abel captures the sacred female bird and carries her down to the valley floor. "The eagle ranges far and wide over the land, farther than any other creature, and all things there are related simply by having existence in the perfect vision of a bird," writes Momaday (p.57). When Abel pulls the eagle from the sky, she becomes "drab and shapeless in the moonlight, too large and ungainly for flight" (p.22). She no longer has the land as her playground, her perspective is narrowed to the inside of a canvas sack, she is helpless and pitiful and weak. With tears in his eyes, Abel twists the birds neck and puts her

out of her misery. He has shared the eagle's view, has known the exhilaration and the freedom of the earth from the rim of the Valle Grande. The entrapment of the eagle foreshadows Abel's own loss of vision, his own confinement in a narrow shell of existence when he returns home from the war. Like the eagle, "man, too, has tenure in the land" (p.58); and like the bird he catches, Abel loses that hold on the landscape when he loses his spatial perspective.

When Abel is drafted into the army, he is taken away from the reservation on a noisy, unfamiliar bus. His grandfather cries when Abel leaves; he is working in the fields where he belongs when the bus comes to take his grandson. As soon as Abel sits down on the bus, he is overcome by a sense of isolation and loneliness, "as if he were already miles and months away, gone long ago from the town and the alley and the hills, from everything he knew and had always known" (p.23). Suddenly without the community, family, landscape, traditions, life-style, and words which had defined his existence up to his point, Abel is tossed into a downward spiral of psychological degeneration. "Only when it was too late did he remember to look back in the direction of the fields," writes Momaday (p.23). The detail and the order of his past thus begin to disintegrate as Abel's memories dissolve into confused and fragmented images of the war.

Still contemplating the valley at dawn, Abel has a final flashback from the war. The scene is colored with confusion, with disorientation. Lying semi-conscious on a wooded hill-side, Abel is surrounded by dead bodies. He has no sense of time, of place, of purpose. He is startled by a tank lumbering toward him "as if it were some upheaval of earth, the eruption of stone and eclipse" (p.25). In this foreign world, Abel envisions the land itself rising up and turning upon him in some unnatural form. The machine and the earth meld in Abel's vision, as though he has lost the ability to distinguish between appearance and

reality. Fumbling on the ground, Abel illustrates the frightening extent of his own displacement: "He reached for something, but he had no notion of what it was; his hand closed upon earth and the cold, wet leaves" (p.24). Completely disoriented, Abel can only huddle on the ground, helpless and shivering as the tank passes by. It is in this position that Abel's spirit still huddles; even in the valley at dawn, he cannot retrieve the sense of place he lost in the war.

One of the ways in which Momaday develops his theme of place from a Native American perspective is by introducing characters who have negative relationships to the environment. Angela Grace St. John, as once such "bad example," comes to the canyon to try the healing powers of the mineral baths. The pregnant wife of a Los Angeles physician, Angela becomes an obstacle in Abel's spiritual regeneration. Ironically, Angela comes to Walatowa for physical as well as psychological healing; yet her romanticized view of the place and its people impedes her recovery. She imposes a foreign ideology on the landscape; for though she respects and even is infatuated with the idea of Native American culture, she does not understand the fundamental value of symbolic place. She turns to Abel, an Indian who cannot properly embody traditional values, as a source of the "Indian-ness" to which she is attracted.

Continually described as "white," "pale," "silver," "light," Angela contrasts sharply with the vivid colors of the valley. She rents a white wooden house at Los Ojos; the house, like Angela, is a visual and symbolic imposition on the cultural landscape. The house defines Angela; it is not a "chance place of visitation," but rather, "it [is] secret like herself, the Benevides house. That [is] its peculiar character, that like a tomb it [holds] the world at bay" (p.54). Though Angela comes to the canyon for healing, though she is inspired and impressed by its beauty, the fact that she secludes herself in the house "to which she had

made claim by virtue of her regard" (p.54) suggests that she will never belong to the Walatowa world.

Angela's distaste of physical realities is manifested in her dislike of her own body: "She could think of nothing more vile and obscene than the raw flesh and blood of her bones" (p.34). As her name implies, Angela belongs to an ephemeral world of translucent realities, a world where essence precedes substance and truth lies beyond the inconsequentiality of the physical world. Watching a corn dance at Cochiti, she marvels at the dancers' concentrated focus on "something away in the distance" (p.36). She decides:

That was the trick, wasn't it? To see nothing
at all, nothing in the absolute. To see beyond
every shape and color, *that* was to see nothing.
That was to be free and finished, complete,
spiritual. To say "beyond the mountain" and
to mean it, simply, beyond everything for
which it signifies the being. p.36-7

Angela's statement in essence devalues the landscape which is so central to the Native belief system. To strip the mountain of any meaning, of any purpose is to deny the Indians any spiritual or psychological connection to the physical environment. Angela's "attitude toward the land is of a piece with her attitude toward her own body" (Evers, p.216). In her desire to reject the flesh of life, she projects on the dancers a kind of metaphysical purpose which denies the physical value of the land they celebrate.

Like Angela, the character of Father Olguin is out of place among the Indians. Though he has lived in the village for years, he is still a foreigner observing a different culture. Like the Father whose journal Olguin consoles himself by reading, the priest is isolated among a people whose beliefs he can neither change nor share. "Now the chanting & the drums & I have no part of it & I am by myself & tired," Father Olguin reads from the journal(p.49). He gains a certain comfort from reading the dead man's words, as though he has found a

friend to empathize with his situation. In his quarters, Father Olguin is in a different place from that of the tribal community. His is in a Christian world, focusing his prayers night and day on a distant heavenly sphere. Interestingly, Father Olguin is able to draw a sense of belonging from the journal of the old priest; he, like the Indians, finds a kind of spiritual strength in words. However, he makes no words of his own; he reads the history of another man without verbally connecting himself to that past. Father Olguin feels he has 'at last begun to sense the rhythm of life in the ancient town, and how it [is] that his own pulse should eventually conform to it" (p.68). Though he may respect the seasonal repetition of life in the town as an ultimate "intrinsic holiness," the priest, like Angela, does not really belong to the land. He responds to it but does not live enmeshed in its legends and stories, its moods and its nuances, as Francisco and others do.

When Angela comes to town, Father Olguin is attracted to her both physically and psychologically; in her white skin and attitude he hopes to find a kindred spirit. Indeed, the two are matched in that both personify a Christian rather than an Indian concept of place. Angela, however, is as unattainable to Olguin as are the Natives in the village; isolated in her big white house, she is more interested in the elusive mysteries of Native sensuality than she is in conversing with a priest. Still, he tries to befriend her; he hires Abel to cut wood for her, and he takes her to the Feast of Santiago in the village. At the feast, both Angela and Father Olguin are "conscious of themselves, [waiting] to be absorbed in the sound and motion of the town" (p.41). Again, they are observers, not participants.

Seen through Angela's eyes, the ceremony has little value: "So unintelligible the sharp sound of voices and hoofs, the odor of animals and sweat, so empty of meaning it all was, and yet so full of appearance," she thinks

(p.43). She does not recognize the importance this ritual re-enactment of fertility holds for the Indians. Even the town Middle, where the celebration is held, is imbued with meaning for the Natives; it is in this ancient place that thousands of rituals have been enacted. Pueblo towns were designed to represent the spatial organization of the universe as it revolves around the sun. "On the horizontal plane, an idealized schema of Pueblo spatial concepts might show zones of sacredness radiating out from such a "center" shrine toward the "houses" of the four cardinal directions" (Easton and Nabokov, p.368). The plaza, or Middle, of the town "seemed to incarnate this idea of a sacred, shared center space" (p.368) and thus became the heart of ceremonial activity for many tribes. In the Jemez Middle, history is ground into the clay, and there are "no edges or angles" but only "the soft contours and depressions of things worn down and away in time" (p.40). The history, the perdurability, the meanings of this sacred place are lost to Angela.

A celebration based on the legend of St. James, the Feast of Santiago involves a game in which a rooster is "planted" in the ground with just his head showing. Ambitious horseback riders then try to grab the rooster's head at a gallop; the man who successfully catches the rooster then singles out person from the crowd and flails him with the bird until the chicken is dead. Killing the animal imitates Santiago's sacrifice of a rooster whose remains grew into enough food for all the Pueblo people. "Just as the sacrifice of the rooster by Santiago produced cultivated plants and domesticated animals for the Pueblo people, so too does the ritual re-enactment of the sacrifice promote fertility at Walatowa" (Evers, p.216). Participating in the game provides Abel with his first chance to re-enter the ceremonial life of the village, with his first chance to regain a communal sense of place.

Abel's inadequate performance at the *corre de gaio* further illustrates his moral degeneration. "He made a poor showing, full of caution and gesture," writes Momaday; moreover, riding one of Francisco's horses, he is "too rigid in the saddle, too careful of the gentle mare" (p.42). When the albino rider succeeds in grabbing the rooster, he chooses Abel to attack. As a symbol of the White Man in Abel himself, the albino is an Indian who represents "a part of [Abel] and his culture which he can no longer recognize and control" (Evers, p.220). Abel interprets the albino as evil incarnate, and his beating with the rooster takes on a malicious, violent overtone which forms the context for Abel's subsequent murder of the albino. "the white man leaned and struck, back and forth, with only the mute malice of the act itself, careless, undetermined," writes Momaday (p.44). And yet Abel, "not used to the game," believes the attack is personal, violent, evil. His inability to participate in the spirit of the game, to play as a member of the community instead of as an individual, suggests that without a sense of place, Abel is an outcast among his own people. Even the "unnatural" albino Indian is more secure among the villagers than he is.

The chapter following the *corre de gaio* occurs on July 28, 1945. "The canyon is the ladder to the plain," the chapter begins, clearly emphasizing the Pueblo theme of emergence as it is connected to the landscape. From the canyon, the Indians came to the valley, filled the valley with corn and melons, emerged from the cliffs and drew life from the heart of the land. "There is a kind of life that is peculiar to the land in summer -- a wariness, a seasonal equation of well-being and alertness," writes Momaday (p.55). Images of order, of growth, of living creatures repeat over and over, insistently illustrating that the canyon is a place where each form of life has its proper space and function. "[The people of the town] have assumed the names and gestures of their

enemies, but have held on to their own, secret souls; and in this there is a resistance and an overcoming, a long outwaiting," Momaday writes (p.58). Because the Indians have "tenure in the land," they survive by "never [changing] their essential way of life" (p.58). The same gods, the same values, the same continual cycles of growth and stagnation, life and death, sun and rain are always within their reach.

Immediately following this description of harmonic natural existence, Momaday narrates Abel's second reflection in the canyon at dawn. "His return to the town had been a failure, for all his looking forward," Abel decides (p.58). Unable to speak with his grandfather, to sing, to pray, to make the sounds of the old language, he has become "not dumb," but "inarticulate." As he leaves the road and walks up a hill, he is "suddenly very much relieved to be alone in the sunlit canyon" (p.59). Instinct again draws him back to a place where "nothing [lies] between the object and the eye" (p.59), where he can see the world and his own identity within it. In the canyon, he begins "almost to be at peace,...for a time no longer centered on himself" (p.59). He wants to sing a creation song, but he cannot seem to put the right words together; the song would have told of "the first world, of fire and flood, and of the emergence of dawn from the hills" (p.59). Abel vaguely recognizes the values he must voice to save himself; "he needs words, ceremonial words, which express his relation to the cultural landscape in which he stands" (Evers, p.217). Yet at this point, Abel's journey is still misdirected. Wandering over the hill, he sees the Benevides house where Angela is staying; his peace and pensiveness vanish as he turns away from the landscape and focuses, instead, on Angela Grace St. John. Rather than turning to his grandfather's wisdom to find the healing powers which will restore his inner peace, Abel seeks some kind of belonging by going to Angela's house. When he comes to her in the pale blue of evening, he dominates the situation,

filling the house with his own calm "sense of dominion and desire" (p.62). Angela, again as a symbol of instability and displacement, is "not herself, her own idea of herself, disseminating and at ease" (p.62). Through Angela's eyes, Abel is "lean and hard and vital," like a "great bear, blue-black and blowing" (p.64). Yet because of her lack of understanding of Native values, Angela is an untrustworthy judge of character. Still, Abel does not talk; still, he does not seek the right cure for his ailment. Rather than help him, Angel confuses him, pulls him farther from the world of his heritage. Instead of finding physical regeneration through a sexual experience, Abel continues to deteriorate. He and Angela do not make love "on a dune by the river" (p.14), as Abel had once with a pretty young girl from the village; rather, they are enclosed in the dark and constrictive environment of the Benevides house.

The fact that Angela is already pregnant with a white man's child illustrates the futility of Abel's symbolic gesture; he is literally planting his seeds in soil which cannot sustain his life. As Abel's physical and mental degeneration increase, he implicates Angela in the loss of his body. Once, Abel "had been hard and quick and beautiful" (p.100). Years after their affair, he thinks:

His mind, like his body, had turned on him;
it was his enemy.

And immediately following this revelation, he remembers:

Angela put her white hands to his body.
Abel put his hands to her white body. p.101

As a source of salvation, Angela can offer Abel no direction in his search for that "something...something" that has eluded him since his return. Her disrespect for the body, or place, which houses her spirit has contributed to the deterioration of Abel's own physicality.

Central to Abel's loss of values is his rejection of the community that would provide him with a sense of place. Rather than deal with his emotional turmoil in a ritual fashion, he takes the weight of the world on his own shoulders, lashing out at the evil he perceives by committing self-condemning acts of violence. The first of these occurs when Abel kills the albino; his confrontation with Officer Martinez in Los Angeles several years later is a parallel example of his inability to deal with evil on a communal level. Francisco's "acknowledgment of the unknown was nothing more than a dull, intrinsic sadness, a vague desire to weep, for evil had long since found him out and knew who he was," Momaday writes (p.66). Sensing the albino's presence in his corn fields, Francisco simply blesses the corn and walks away from evil. Abel, on the other hand, cannot accept evil as a necessary part of cosmic order. Moreover, "the whiteness of the albino suggests something more terrible than evil to Abel. It suggests an emptiness in the universe, a total void of meaning" (Evers, p.220). In the image of the albino, Abel confronts the lack of meaning in his own displaced life; as white military culture has trained him to do, he controls his fears by killing the perceived enemy.

"The very day that Abel kills the albino the community from which he is estranged could have provided him with a way of ritually confronting the white man," writes Evers (p.219). By participating in the Fiesta of Porcingula in Walatowa, Abel could have played the part of the bull in the ceremony, as Francisco had several times in the past. "In the angle and pain of that posture, he could have run away forever from the clowns" (p.80), thereby reclaiming his honor and his spiritual integrity among the community. Instead, Abel deals with the albino in the darkness of night, in the midst of a rainstorm. The gruesome scene is described in images of black and white, stark contrasts, dichotomies as

artificial as the "good" and "evil" Abel hopes to define by killing the albino. Like Angela, Abel judges by appearances rather than truths; he acts upon his internal imbalance, seeing the albino not as an Indian, but as a snake, a symbol of the unnatural, a white witch who threatens his own survival. His equation of the albino to a Christian symbol of evil (a snake) further illustrates his spiritual confusion. Without an identity centered on place, Abel has lost the communal order which would help him deal with his fears. "He could not think; there was nothing left inside him but a cold, instinctive will to wonder and regard," writes Momaday after the murder is committed (p.83). Thus, by killing the albino Abel in essence loses his capacity for sentient thought; he becomes completely alienated from the place of his heritage, both physically and psychological, as is symbolized by the next six years he spends in prison for his crime.

In his summation of a report chronicling the lives of Indians in the early 1900's, Arthur Grinnell comes to the following conclusion:

The association with white people which has taken place where Indians have been induced to go away from the reservation and work for wages, has broadened the Indian viewpoint and tended to reduce drinking, while the effort to supply occupation to the Indians has been one of the most useful agencies in bringing to the Indian health and a measure of contentment. p.359

Describing the conditions of Indians living forty years after Grinnell's report, Momaday paints quite a different picture. Shifting the action from New Mexico to California, Momaday illustrates what happens to Native Americans who are indoctrinated into the world of the whites.

The second section of Momaday's book, entitled "The Priest of the Sun," is set in Los Angeles, where Abel is relocated on probation after serving his term in prison. This portion of the novel progresses through the thoughts and

flashbacks of Abel alternating with scenes of the Reverend John Big Bluff Tosamah. Beginning on January 26, 1952, the section opens with an image of grunion lying helpless on the beach here they come to spawn and die. Abel himself is later likened to these fish as he lies drunk on the shore, his hands broken and his body beaten, his mind passing in and out of consciousness.

By this time, Abel has completely lost his sense of place; he is lying next to the sea, floundering as mindless and helpless as the silver fish. "His mind rattled and shook, wobbling now out of a spin, and he could not place the center of the pain. And he could not see...Something was wrong, terribly wrong...He wanted to die. And hour passed in which he lay still and mindless in the cold," writes Momaday (p.99). On a symbolic as well as physical level, Abel has lost his vision, his ability to interpret the feelings of his own body. He has no desire to live in a world where "there [are] sounds of the city at night, ticking on like a clock toward the dawn" (p.99). Having rejected his place and his community at Walatowa, Abel is still without community or place in L.A. and is even less capable of functioning both physically and mentally. "Native Americans do not believe themselves removed from community merely because they are away from the collection of dwellings which characterize the center of human society" (Ballinger, "Living Sideways," p.20). However, because Abel has so violently rejected his social and familial ties to Walatowa, he cannot carry that sense of place within him which would shield him from the painful isolation which reaches its climax in the scene on the beach. Unlike Erdrich's Fleur, who still maintains her sense of place when she is violated in a foreign world, Abel has no inner strength to hold his tribal identity in place.

A Kiowa Indian who preaches "the Gospel according to John" (p.89), John Big Bluff Tosamah develops themes of emergence, language, and place in his sermons. Through the character of Tosamah, Momaday illustrates the

direct relationship between words and place, for in his sermons Tosamah shapes the outside world into meaningful, valuable, identifiable places which in turn validate his own existence. Though his relationship to Abel is not explicitly defined, Tosamah possesses knowledge which could help the young Indian regain his sense of place. "Shaggy and awful-looking," "big, lithe as a cat, suggesting in the whole of his look and manner both arrogance and agony," Tosamah has "the voice of a great dog" (p.90-1). As the spiritual leader of the urban Indians, he resembles the Native Coyote Trickster figure, for there is an element of buffoonery which hovers behind his religious fervor. "Trickster's violative behavior places him at the margin of or even beyond the social pale; from such a vantage point he liberates humans from conventional social moral boundaries and dramatizes new ways of perceiving and the possibility of new orders," writes Franchot Ballinger (p.15). Both priest and "clown," Tosamah stretches social bounds with his witty and occasionally inappropriate behavior. Wavering back and forth between "conviction, caricature, and callousness" (p.92), it is he who has the ability to spiritually guide Abel toward a re-emergence journey. In sermons which "address the relation of man, land, community, and word" (Evers, p.222), Tosamah's ideology parallels Francisco's values; he is not altogether a Trickster, for he reinforces the importance of community responsibility as opposed to the individual freedom Coyote often tries to achieve. Still, Tosamah is also a bit hypocritical, for he criticizes the "longhairs" like Abel and cannot relate to the difficulties reservation Indians have in adapting to urban life. "He's always showing off and making fun of things," says Abel's friend Ben of Tosamah (p.148). Tosamah's religion, though it teaches traditional values, is practiced in an environment which is far from traditional; in short, Tosamah does not always practice what he preaches.

In Tosamah's sermons, he expresses the ideology which would heal Abel's spiritual sickness. Standing on a platform in a "cold and dreary" basement, he preaches the creative powers of language when he says, "In the Word was the beginning; '*In the beginning was the Word...*'" (p.98). It is by interpreting the land in words that people validate their existences. By defining a personal relationship to the landscape, the individual achieves an identity as a member of both human and cosmic order. "A sense of place derives from the perception of a culturally imposed symbolic order on a particular physical topography," writes Evers (p.212). Thus the Word, suggests Momaday, allows people to create themselves and their cultures within a symbolic physical environment.

Living among words becomes a way of life for Tosamah; he crates images, memories, history, his own cultural identity through re-telling stories. Referring to the stories his grandmother used to tell him, Tosamah says, "[They] represent the oldest and best ideas that man has of himself" (p.97). Abel is without this kind of respect for and recognition of the power of language as a means of expressing the self in relation to the universe. Momaday describes Tosamah after he has given a sermon: "In his mind the earth was spinning and the stars rattled around in the heavens. The sun shone, and the moon. Smiling in a kind of transport, the Priest of the Sun stood silent for a time" (p.98). Unlike Abel, whose mind is empty and numb, "wobbling" and "spinning" without center, Tosamah is transported to a spiritual place through language; he uses words to recreate the universe in his mind with vivid physical imagery.

While lying on the beach after being beaten by police officer Martinez, Abel has a series of flashbacks. He recalls his trial, his affair with Angela, his new white lover Milly, childhood adventures with his brother and Fat Josie, and

his time spent in jail when even the walls became "abstractions beyond the reach of his understanding, not in themselves confinement but symbols of confinement," (p.104-5). To him, the walls become "appearance" rather than "substance;" like Angela, he focuses on metaphysical rather than physical realities, again contradicting his Native culture. He loses himself without a tangible place to ground his perceptions. "He tried to think where the trouble had begun, what the trouble was," writes Momaday (p.105). Subconsciously, Abel's mind returns to the first day he left Walatowa on the bus: "Suddenly he was overcome with a desperate loneliness, and he wanted to cry out. He looked toward the fields, but the town had settled away into the earth" (p.105). When he leaves home, Abel loses the frame of reference by which he had interpreted the world. whereas before, he understood that "the object is beautiful in and of itself, worthy of appreciation as a whole and for its own sake," now he has converted to a judgmental value system. "There were enemies all around, and he knew that he was ridiculous in their eye," writes Momaday (p.106). Rather than interpret himself as part of a holistic universe, Abel sees himself as out of place in a hostile, non-sensical world.

As Abel fades in and out of consciousness on the beach, he gradually begins to recognize his situation. He envisions a race, men running toward him, moving silently and without effort. Like the race that Abel himself will join at the end of the novel, this is a spiritual run, a ritual purging of evil and a celebration of continuity in the universe. "They were whole and indispensable in what they did; everything in creation referred to them. Because of them, perspective, proportion, design in the universe. Meaning because of them," Abel realizes (p.103-4). He longs to be a part of the race, longs to join the group which runs "neither in fear nor hatred nor despair of evil, but simply in recognition and with respect" (p.104). Realizing that his own bouts with evil

have brought him neither peace nor wholeness, Abel senses a harmony in the ritual race of the runners. As the men pass by him, he realizes:

He had lost his place. He had been long
ago at the center, had known where he
was, had lost his way, had wandered
to the end of the earth, was even now
reeling on the edge of the void. p.104

Though Abel begins to comprehend the value of both personal and collective relationships to place, he himself is still "on the edge," not sure how or why he must change to save himself. Surrounded by fog, darkness, blurred shapes, and unfamiliar sounds, Abel wallows broken and powerless in a sea of vivid memories.

Through the character of Milly, Momaday presents another value system shaped by place. Like Abel, Milly has lost her respect for the land; her relationship to her environment is negative, unproductive, unsatisfying. Abel's new lover, Milly initially visits him on a professional basis to observe his progress as a relocated convict. Like Angela, Milly is attracted to Abel's brooding passion; Abel, as with Angela, tries to find security and regeneration in his physical relationship with Milly. Young, white, optimistic, Milly is hypocritical in assuring Abel that he can succeed in the city. She has had a difficult life herself; the values and the qualities she possesses are not enough to pull Abel back from the edge of oblivion. "she had been in Los Angeles four years, and in all that time she had not talked to anyone," writes Momaday (p.121). Milly, like Abel, has come to Los Angeles from a different place; rather than holding the memory of her childhood home as the core of her identity, she instead tries to get away, tries to escape her past. Friendless, without family, without love, she is an island in the heart of the city.

personal and deadly enemy" (p.123). Each day in the fields is a battle which tears the man apart. Watching her father wither and harden, Milly loses her affection for the land which makes him suffer. Finally, he sends her to the city, giving her the money he has saved for seventeen years to help her escape. "Listen," he said, 'you've got to get away,' and his eyes were almost wild with the thought of it," Milly recalls (p.123). He is imbalanced and bitter, unaware of the "good smell like deep, dark earth that has just been turned" that clings to his own gnarled hands (p.123).

Milly's father, as a foil for Abel's grandfather Francisco, illustrates a profoundly negative sense of place. Also described working in the fields, Francisco is peaceful, surrounded by harvest, always conscious of his own relationship to the slope of the earth (p.86). Thus, the characters of Milly's father and Francisco illustrate how belief systems can be perpetuated through generations: Milly adopts her father's disrespect for the land; while Abel, who once learned from Francisco, is suffering because he has lost the values his grandfather represents. In order to regain harmony and balance in his life, Abel must then rediscover the sense of place Francisco taught him when he was a boy. Milly, because she is her father's daughter and shares his negative value of place, cannot help Abel regain balance in his life.

In Tosamah's second sermon, a path is revealed for Abel's recovery. Relating the Kiowa origin myth in which the first Indians emerged from a hollow log, Tosamah suggests the kind of re-birth which Abel himself needs. The concept of a journey is also central to the sermon as Tosamah describes his peoples' migration from the Northern to the Southern Plains. Landscape imagery abounds as Tosamah endows the plains of Oklahoma with deep spiritual and personal meaning. Another ideological comparison is made

between Tosamah and Milly's father, who also comes from the Oklahoma plains. While Milly's father rises to fight the land each dawn, Tosamah develops a strikingly different relationship to place. Looking upon the landscape in the early morning, he says, "your imagination comes to life, and this, you think, is where Creation was begun" (p.28). Emerging from the sunless world of the north, Tosamah's people acquired "a sense of destiny, therefore courage and pride" on their "journey toward the dawn" (p.129). It is the place which gives meaning to existence; the plains give the Kiowa their sun god, their sense of belonging, their identity. Speaking of his grandmother, Tosamah says, "The immense landscape of the continental interior -- all of its seasons and its sounds -- lay like memory in her blood" (p.129). The land is as fundamental an element of existence as breathing; it is the telling and re-telling of stories connected to place which etches the land into the hearts of each new generation.

The specific place chosen by the Kiowa as the end of their journey is also crucial to the evolution of the tribe. Though the woods may be beautiful, "one might have the sense of confinement there," says Tosamah (p.130). The plains give the Indians vision; as Abel marveled at the infinite view from the rim of the Valle Grande, so Tosamah respects the depth of the land where "there is no confusion of objects in the eye....At the slightest elevation you can see to the end of the world" (p.127). The openness of the Oklahoma plains, the extreme climate, the challenge of survival feed the existence of the Indians who call them home. Each day is spent in the center of the world's being, living as part of a perpetual cycle of growing, wearing down, returning to the dust of the earth. "The Kiowas reckoned their stature by the distance they could see, and the were bend and blind in the wilderness," says Tosamah (p.130). For Abel, the city becomes a wilderness that blinds him, that deprives him of stature. He

needs the openness, the endless vision and clarity of the Walatowa landscape to give him his own "small definition made whole and eternal" (p.136). Like the Kiowa who journeyed to find such a place in Oklahoma, Abel must return to the landscape of New Mexico in order to reclaim dignity and meaning in his life.

"The Night Chanter" is the third section of House Made of Dawn in which Abel's friend and roommate, Benally, describes Abel's experiences in L.A. Passages from Abel's consciousness commingle with Ben's narration. A relocated Navajo, "Ben lives in a spiritual vacuum, isolated in a city that has no understanding of or interest in its ethnic minorities" (Larson, p.84-5). If Ben is more successful than Abel with life in Los Angeles, it is only because his idealism and his naivete have convinced him that he is living a fulfilling existence in the city. Though his job is menial, his apartment squalid, his friends drunkards, and his paycheck is at the disposal of the threatening Officer Martinez, Benally believes that this place is better than the reservation world. The trouble with Abel, Ben supposes, is that he cannot let go of his past. "You have to change. That's the only way you can live in a place like this," he says (p.148). It is difficult to adjust, Ben admits: "It's like starting out some place where you've never been before, and you don't know where you're going or why or when you have to get there, and everybody's looking at you,...and they can't help you because you don't know how to talk to them" (p.158). Without the right words, Abel cannot learn how to belong to this foreign place; and without letting go of his memories, he cannot evade the suspicion that he will never belong.

As Ben remembers, Abel becomes increasingly frustrated with his life in L.A. Criticized by Tosamah, verbally and physically abused by Martinez, fired from his job, and increasingly dependent on alcohol, he slides into a quagmire

of silent depression. "Nobody but Milly and me gave a damn what happened to him," says Ben (p.163). Rejected by whites and other Indians alike, Abel has no community, no family, and he is unable to respond to the two people who would love him. "It was getting harder and harder to talk to him," comments Ben (p.175). The more abused Abel feels, the less he cares about saving himself and the more he dwells on the injustices he has suffered. The first time he is beaten by Martinez, he "[can't] forget about it" (p.175). Benally cannot help cure the sickness he detects in his friend until Abel himself is aware of the problem, until he begins to search for the ceremonial words which will restore his sense of place.

"It was like he had something bad on his mind and he had to do something but he didn't know what it was," recalls Ben (p.175). As his condition worsens, Abel makes yet another mistake by trying to "get even" with Martinez. Called "culebra," or snake, by the neighborhood Indians, Martinez resembles the albino in Abel's mind, for the albino is described with snake-like images as Abel kills him in Walatowa (p.82-4). To Abel, both the albino and the police man are figures of evil; they humiliate him, they threaten him, and they are symbols he tries to destroy in an effort to regain order in his life. When he breaks Native moral and social codes by killing the albino, Abel displaces traditional values but still has control over his own body. However, by the time he hunts down Martinez, he is not even capable of immoral, violent, physical revenge. Rather than kill the policeman, he is the one who is left broken and bloodied on the shore of the sea. Finally, stripped of the physical strength which was his last defense against evil, Abel is forced to search his memories for some hope of survival. Having reached the depths of a miserable and purposeless existence, Abel at last senses the need to return to his past, to his grandfather, to his home. Thus, his re-emergence journey begins. Picking

himself up from the beach, Abel follows a maze of streets through the wilderness of the city as he tries to find his apartment and save his own life from tipping over the edge of oblivion.

Abel is rescued from near death by Ben, who finds him lying unconscious at the foot of the apartment stairs. As Abel recovers in the hospital, Ben makes plans with him, tells him stories of the reservation, of him, promises him that "everything [will] be all right again" (p.145) once he returns to Walatowa. The night before Abel leaves, he and Ben go to a party on top of a hill overlooking the city. The importance of vision, of liberating landscapes is reiterated by Ben when he says, "We could see one whole side of the city, all the way to the water" (p.145). And yet, it is not the lights of the city they want to see, for this is not their place. Turning their backs on the city, Ben and Abel move away from the party, and "it [is] like they are way out in the desert some place" and it is "dark and cool and peaceful" (p.145-6). Standing on the hill at night, they think of home. Abel, ready at last to hear the ceremonial words which will heal him, waits for Ben to sing.

"He was going home, and I wanted to pray," says Benally (p.189). It is as though his own spirituality, his own sense of place is revived by Abel's spiritual awakening: "And someday I was going home, too," he says (p.145). Ben sings a Night Chant for Abel. A traditional healing song, it begins with the words from which the novel takes its title: "House made of dawn,/House made of evening light,/House made of dark cloud,/House made of male rain," and so on (p.146). The Night Chant is "both a restorative and an exorcising expression of the very balance and design of the universe Abel perceived in the runners after evil" on the beach (Evers, p.225). From the beginning of the chant the importance of place is manifested in the enumeration of natural forms as "houses" for the human soul. Out of this spiritual relation to the physical world comes a healing,

a happiness, a peace. The restored spirit is immersed in the beauty of a harmonious universe: "May it be beautiful before me,/May it be beautiful behind me,/May it be beautiful below me,/May it be beautiful above me,/May it be beautiful all around me," Ben sings (p.147). The healing power of the chant stems from the singer's connection to his environment; Ben's words indicate respect for the balance of the natural world and for the power nature has over the human body. Images used in the chant are physical, sensual, repetitive. The language suggests that through prayer, song, memory, and active immersion in the landscape the spirit can be cured of both external and internal pain: "Happily I recover.../As it used to be long ago, may I walk.../Happily, with abundant plants, may I walk.../In beauty it is finished," the song prays (p.147). Though Abel is not instantly healed by Ben's chant, the words inspire in him the need for song, for restoration and continuity connected to place. Thus, he goes home to "see how it was, and always was, how the sun came up with a little wind and the light ran out upon the land" (p.189); he goes home to find his place again.

In the last section of House Made of Dawn, Abel becomes "the Dawn Runner." The section begins with yet another description of the landscape to which Abel belongs. It is winter in the canyon; "the fields [are] bare and colorless," and "there [is] no telling of the sun, save for one cold, dim, and even light that [lies] on every corner of the land" (p.193). This chilling imagery corresponds not only to Abel's internal state, but it also reflects Francisco's condition. When Abel returns to Walatowa, his grandfather is dying. On his deathbed, the old man raises his voice in memory; with his delirious ramblings, he re-teaches traditional values to Abel. Every day for a week Francisco falls into a coma at noon, and every day "he revived in the dawn, and he knew who

Abel was, and he talked and sang," writes Momaday (p.195). This timing of Francisco's awakening is symbolic, for it foreshadows Abel's own spiritual revival on the dawn of his grandfather's death. When he dies, Francisco's voice is passed on to Abel, and Abel knows who he is and talks and sings and runs as Francisco once did in the grey of dawn.

By recounting his own memories, before he dies Francisco leads Abel through childhood, symbolic rites of passage, and maturity. The first flashback Momaday describes again illustrates the spiritual connection to physical places for the Native culture. Francisco takes his two young grandsons into the canyon at dawn to instill in them the sense of place which defines their tribal identity from generation to generation. "They must learn the whole contour of the black mesa. They must know it as they knew the shape of their hands, always and by heart," believes Francisco (p.197). Seasons passing across the land, the movement of animals, sun, wind, moon -- all these must be intimately recognized and understood by the boys, "for only then could they reckon where they were, where all things were, in time" (p.197). Harvests, celebrations, dances, planting times, weddings, funerals, births, deaths all have a place in the canyon Francisco calls the "house of the sun;" they are part of a cycle, an "emergency of dawn and dusk, summer and winter" to which Abel and his brother also belong (p.198). Abel has forgotten the sense of place he once knew; Francisco's words show him how to learn the contours of the mesa once again.

Francisco dies in the middle of his seventh night of sickness. In the still before dawn, Abel at last "[knows] what [has] to be done" (p.209). "His own memory healed by Francisco's, for the first time in the novel he correctly performs a ceremonial function as he prepares Francisco for burial and delivers him to Father Olguin" (Evers, p.227). Leaving the old man's body with the

priest, Abel walks to the town Middle where he prepares to join the ceremonial race through the canyon at dawn. As light grows upon the land, he covers his naked chest and arms with ashes from the oven at the center of the village. He joins the other runners, reclaiming his position in the ritual life of the community. Waiting for the dawn, the runners at last burst forth when colors shoot across the "clear pool of eternity" that is the sky (p.211). Thus, in the final pages of his novel, Momaday illustrates that "a person caught between cultures can, despite the deepest of problems, find a way to survive, a road which circles out of the past, 'The House Made of Dawn,' and ends in understanding" (Bruchac, p.200). For Abel, this road emerges where the land and the sun and the people of his village and his own soul converge in the break of dawn.

By running in the race, Abel reclaims his voice, his body, his spirit, his tribal identity, and above all his sense of place. "He was running and there was no reason to run but the running itself and the land and the dawn appearing," writes Momaday (p.211). Running with the motion of the earth, Abel is released from suffering when he runs beyond exhaustion, beyond pain to a point where "he could see at last without having to think" (p.212). He becomes a part of "the rain and the river and the fields beyond" as the land beneath his feet embraces him. With vision restored, Abel can see "the canyon and the mountains and the sky" and his own place among them. He sings. And though it is a soundless song, though his voice is empty and dry for lack of use, the song is enough to sustain him, to keep him moving forward, to rise with the pounding of his feet. Having reclaimed his place in the house of dawn, of pollen, of sun, of mountains, of valley, of river, of sky, Abel can live in beauty once more.

CHAPTER 4

Digging Roots

*Everything rises
from mere roots
anchored in the brown
bone of the earth.*

Robert Davis
From "Into the Forest"

The theme of place in Native American literature does not confine itself solely to prose writing. Poetry offers yet another form of storytelling in which language is used to express tribal experiences drawn from specific environments. Themes of survival, formation of identity, nature, physical and spiritual relationships, and the importance of language re-occur in connection with place over and over again in Native American prose and poetry alike. As with novels, it is important to read Indian poetry while keeping in mind the cultural context and the oral tradition from which this literature extends. If it is possible to generalize about such a diverse and flexible art form, one could say that contemporary Native American poetry is characterized by an emphasis on visual and tactile imagery. The proximity of word and image in Native American literature is attested to by N. Scott Momaday, who emphasizes how many Indian writers are also painters, carvers, and artists (Coltelli, p.96). Moreover, Momaday argues that the prose poem is the closest literary form to oral tradition

(Coltelli, p.94); like the stories of the old days, many contemporary poems are inspired by physical places and use language to interpret the environment as symbolic and morally instructive.

The genre of poetry lends itself to a study of place, for as a literary medium it relies on structure, shape, form, and spatial arrangement -- all elements which help define our perceptions of places in a physical world. Rhythmic, cyclical, repetitive in its presentation of ideas and imagery, poetry mirrors the patterns many Native Americans associate with the structure of nature itself. Just as old oral stories use words to shape the universe into a meaningful place, so a poem condenses thoughts into a tangible form by creating a place for personal interpretation of the outside world. As a genre, poetry repeats itself by returning to the same places, or "topoi," from generation to generation; there will always be a plethora of love poems in the literary circle, while discussions of beauty, hate, war, death, and truth continue to occupy the poet's pen. Poetry maintains both a consistency and a spontaneity by returning to these age old themes, re-using them, revitalizing them, rewriting them; in this way, the meaning of existence is constructed and explored from generation to generation by culturally influenced poets. Native American authors have adopted Western literary forms in place of traditional oral narratives, yet as Momaday suggests, the old patterns fit well into a poetic structure. Poetry allows the same symbolic relation to place, the same kind of imaginative response to a physical experience that an oral narrative would achieve. From a hilltop, a forest, an island shore, a memory, a dream, the poet finds words in places which inspire the same themes of survival, nature, displacement, loss, etc. over and over again in Native American poetry.

Among the many poets who incorporate a sense of place into their writing, Robert Davis and Ramona Wilson are two who clearly emphasize the

theme. Davis' poem "Soulcatcher," the first to be discussed in this section, deals with ritual as a place for confirming and continuing cultural identity. The poem is developed with imagery which, from a non-Indian perspective, may describe a "vanished" world; yet "Soulcatcher" does not live in the past. This is a poem of the present, a poem in which tradition still has meaning, a poem which uses ritual as a means of defining and retaining a culturally unique place in an ever-changing world. "Leveling Grave Island," another poem by Robert Davis, illustrates the social destruction which necessitates the kind of reclaiming ritual created in "Soulcatcher." In a sense, "Leveling Grave Island" places the other poem in a contemporary context, for it is the leveling of traditional places which creates such an urgent need for the affirmation of places in ritual, in songs, in poems, in memory. "Soulcatcher" describes the reclaiming of order and balance for both the dead and the living through creation of a ceremonial place; while "Leveling Grave Island" describes a place which is disordered and imbalanced to the Indians, both past and present, who struggle to find direction amid a disrupted universe.

Ramona Wilson's poem "Passing Battlefields" continues the tone of violence and violation suggested in Davis' "Leveling Grave Island." Inspired by the landscape where a battle once occurred, the poem is woven around a memory of Indian murders engraved in the contours of the land. In "Passing Battlefields," Wilson explicitly emphasizes the contemporary Native American conflict of displacement touched upon in Davis' poems. Yet while Davis' speakers can reclaim a sense of place through ritual, Wilson's Indians never resolve the paradox of both belonging and not belonging to the present day United States. Though the characters in Wilson's poem recognize a need for place in their lives, they are unable to belong to contemporary America because they are always "passing battlefields," always conscious of their heritage, their

loss of traditional places. In this poem, then, a sense of place can be attained only as a journey, a searching, a memory of the past. In response to this bleak picture of contemporary displacement, the last poem to be discussed in this study attests to the value of the earth itself as the ultimate place which defines Wilson's people. In "Spokane Museum," Wilson confronts the myth of the "vanishing Indian" by celebrating both a physical and a spiritual investment in nature; it is an intimate relationship to the natural world which perpetuates the existence of her people. The source of survival, of strength, or permanence, of hope, the earth gives meaning to life. Thus, despite the loss of traditional places in Native American communities, Davis and Wilson confirm that the value of place is not lost with the land. In poems, in songs, in ritual, in action, in memory, in travel, in voicing their beliefs, Native Americans continue to recognize places for themselves in the contemporary world; yet always the cost and the conflict created by that effort to overcome displacement underscore optimism with a recognition of pain.

A painter, a woodcarver, and a poet, Robert Davis has spent the majority of his life in Kake, Alaska. Affiliated with the Tlingit tribe, he says he uses his art to express "the hopes and despair, the loss of traditional values, the pain of acculturation, and the flavor of the people and history of the place" (Lerner, Dancing on the Rim of the World, p.45). Living in the uppermost region of the Northwest, Davis comes from a world of mountains, forests, rivers, islands, and coastal wildlife. While Alaska has been called "the last American frontier" by adventure-hungry modern pioneers, to the Indians living in the north, Alaska is a homeland centuries old. It is not a fierce untapped wilderness full of potential

natural resources; rather, it is a familiar and respected land which holds the roots of tribal history in its trees, its rocks, its mountains, its ocean, its lakes. The Tlingit culture is dictated by the place which gave it origin; the Indians hunt and fish, pray and dance, live and die in a land where "legends whisper/from way back/behind each tree, each cedar" (Davis, Lerner Ed., p.47). Robert Davis' writing recognizes a fundamental connection to Alaska and is characterized by vivid natural imagery associated with the region of his ancestry.

The Panhandle southeastern region of Alaska where Davis makes his home is unlike the rest of the state in its comparatively mild climate. Mountainous and heavily forested, the rugged Panhandle coast receives a rainfall which "sometimes reaches two hundred inches a year -- higher than that of some rain forests" (Hunt, Alaska, p.8). In this lush environment, the Native Tlingit found an abundant and diverse food supply; the coastal rivers, woods, and sea provided salmon, mollusks, seal, porpoise, whale, deer, bear, wolf, berries, and other fruit and meat for the Indians' diet. Because of the abundance of food, the Tlingit developed a "complex, or 'high' culture -- the highest, in fact, of any American aboriginals north of Mexico" (Hunt, p.18). Writes historian William Hunt, "When a people can gather food easily, they have time to express their energies in other ways" (p.18). With their "free" time, the Tlingit took advantage of the profuse cedar, spruce, and hemlock forests of the region and became highly skilled wood carvers. Out of wood, the Indians shaped canoes, boxes, cooking utensils, dishes, house facings, clothes, totem poles, and many other products used on a daily basis. In his poem "Soulcatcher," Robert Davis makes reference to this cultural tradition still practiced today; in the forest, the Tlingit find not only food and tools, but also the woods are a source of inspiration for the art and the religion by which they define themselves.

When the Indians first encountered Russian explorers in the 1700's, there were about ten thousand Tlingit living in the Panhandle region. While the early intruders respected Tlingit territory, as the years progressed Alaska became an appealing frontier for American and European pioneers, and the issue of land control again became a problem. When the United States purchased Alaska from the Russians in 1867, the entire region became "American." Though the new government recognized Indian groups and allowed them to stay on their "claimed" land as long as they were peaceful, eventually pressures from both Tlingit and whites prompted more specific action. "The great influx of gold-rushers in 1898 somewhat jolted the government's indifference to natives' land claims. The impact of stampeders on the Tlingits was particularly severe, and the Indians there appealed to Territorial Governor John Brady for help" (Hunt, p.154). The Indians did not find a friend in Brady, who ignored their claims of oppression and gave them a choice: the Tlingit could "move to Admiralty Island to live by themselves" or "obey white man's laws and have all his privileges" (Hunt, p.156). Though the Tlingit chose to stay with their land, they did not give up the fight; they continued to appeal to government agencies, and in a 1968 court decision they finally won a settlement of money and land payments. Writes Hunt,

Today, as a result of the land-claim settlement, native corporations are investing in hotels, banks, fisheries, and other concerns. They are determined to provide two sometimes incompatible avenues to their people -- economic self-sufficiency through involvement in industry, and the means of enjoying the traditional subsistence pattern of living for those who prefer it. p.164

In his poetry, Robert Davis deals with this difficulty of reconciling the modern with the traditional world. As Tlingit cultural places are "modernized" and

"Americanized" by events beyond his control, Davis finds a way to restore and reaffirm a Native American sense of place through the words and images of his poetry.

In his poem "Soulcatcher," Davis describes the spiritual experience of a tribal holy man. The poem is divided into four stanzas, the first and last composed of nine lines each, the two in the middle each six lines long. The structure of the poem is balanced, cyclic stylistically in that the poem doubles back on itself and is contained by the longer framing stanzas. The structure of the poem suggests that a story presented in this form will correspond to a balanced order; each image Davis creates contributes harmoniously to the whole scene just as each line contributes to the wholeness of the poem. The page itself is a place on which the balanced structure of the universe is visually represented through verse form. Davis then moves beyond the page and into the imagination with the images he creates.

The central figure of the poem is the medicine man, or soulcatcher. Though other living characters are not specifically mentioned, it is implied by the narrative voice that there are other people participating in the event. From the opening line of the poem, the story is rooted to a physical place which forms the context for the spiritual journey of the old man. As the poem begins, the old man is sitting cross-legged in a ceremonial setting created by the sound of the drum, the crackle of the fire, the songs the old man sings. It is the fire which defines the physical place of the poem; the smells and sounds of burning spruce, the light flickering over the soulcatcher's box of charms limit the scope of the poem to the immediate details of a moment illuminated only by the

Soulcatcher

Far from the scent of crackling spruce,
far from throbbing sealskin drum,
into space, into wind,
wild hair flying,
old man sings
across the endless dark;
the man who leaves himself
cross-legged, hollow, still.
Medicine man. Soulcatcher.

In the short sharp ripples of firelight
painted carvings weave and snap
designs on the bentwood box
that holds the mystical charms,
soulcatcher amulets,
magic rattles.

Animal people, ocean people,
this is how he brings them back.
The air begins to move in them.
Thick men in cedar bark.
Incantation. Song, dance, story.
He could capture your soul if he had to.

The trees know.
They know how easy it is
to disappear forever, to sink
into fire and wind.
How a drifting figure
now wears a mask
of ash and bone
outside the village
that still feels air moving.

Robert Davis

shadows of fire. In this world of tactile imagery, the soulcatcher's body is also grounded to the earthly sphere. Like Nanapush in *Tracks*, the holy man travels through his song and out of his body; he enters the "endless dark" which is not necessarily "up," as a Christian might assume, but which is simply "far" from the place where the ritual begins. Like a fallen log, his body is left "hollow and still" as the soulcatcher moves beyond the place defined by fire and into a world of darkness. Even in this distant place, the man still has a physical form; his "wild hair" flies as he travels through wind and space.

The wooden box described in the second stanza is an example of a place with special value. It is in this box that the soulcatcher keeps the magic which helps him transcend the world of the living and enter the world of the spirits. The magic of the box springs not only from its contents, but also from the light which flickers across its surface; it is a place brought to life by the painted carvings which "weave and snap/designs on the bentwood box," just as the medicine man will bring his own light to the darkened souls of the dead. The box is a link between two worlds: it contains the powers which allow the soulcatcher to work his magic, but it is also firmly grounded in the physical environment of the ceremony. Describing the light of the fire as "short sharp ripples," Davis evokes images of water, or the ocean, which are re-emphasized by the later mention of "ocean people." The box, like the soulcatcher and those participating in the dance, belongs to the natural world defined by the fire and, on a larger scale, by the coastal landscape of the Tlingit homeland. Though the amulets, charms, and rattles of the box can only be used by the soulcatcher, the wooden shape still has a place among the dancers as an active physical element in the ceremony.

A member of the Olympic Peninsula Makah tribe explains, "By both the creatures of the physical world and the creatures of the supernatural, [we] are

shown how to take care of what [we] have been given, how to take care of one another, how to respect the one who has given these things" (Pascua, National Geographic, p.50). In Davis' poem, the soulcatcher interacts with both sorts of "creatures" in order to teach his people how to live socially and morally correct lives. "More valuable than a family's material possessions are its songs," writes Pascua. "Songs are a privilege and must be cared for, honored, and properly sung and danced. Their origin and history must be learned, repeated, and passed down to each generation" (p.50). The function of songs in Native American societies suggests, then, that some kinds of language are more powerful than others and have special purposes in sustaining the culture of a tribe. It is the soulcatcher who remembers and revives the songs for the Tlingit dancers; by singing, he recreates the history and the origins of his people as they relate to both physical and spiritual places. He carries his knowledge of the old spirits to the new generations in a ritual act of honor, of respect, of necessity to ensure the cultural survival of his clan.

In the third stanza, the poem moves beyond the firelight scene and follows the medicine man into the darkness. Through his ritual journey, he brings old and forgotten souls back to life. "The air begins to move in them" as the soulcatcher reclaims the past with memory, song, dance, story, incantation. Again, words actively participate in the shaping of reality; it is the ritual use of story and song which makes the dead dance again in the minds of the living. The soulcatcher not only revives the people of the past, but he brings them back to the present by reminding the living of their history. Boldly addressing the reader with his statement, "He could capture your soul if he had to," Davis also brings the poem itself into the realm of the present. This is not a story of the past, of a vanishing and distant culture; rather, it is a story of reclaiming memory for the present and letting the dead live again. Not only the dead, but those

who forget the past are liable to lose their souls in the endless dark. It is the soulcatcher's responsibility to remind, to recreate, to revitalize, to retrieve those who have lost or forgotten their place in the spiritual community. Because he "has to" capture souls, the holy man has a responsibility to his people; there is an urgency, a necessity implied by Davis' word choice, as though through the course of this ritual a kind of survival could be achieved by the soulcatcher's journey to the dead.

The transitory use of place in "Soulcatcher" is associated with regional symbols. "Spruce," "sealskin drum," "ocean," "cedar," "painted carvings" are specific descriptions which relate the poem to the physical landscape from which the spiritual journey begins. Throughout the poem, human beings are related to images of trees. The old man's form is "hollow" in the first stanza; in the third stanza, he brings the spirits of the dead to life again as "thick men in cedar bark." In the final stanza, the trees, like the souls of the dead, "know how easy it is/to disappear forever." These imagistic parallels create an intimacy between the people and the trees, or people and the landscape; human beings are linked to the natural world in both life and death. Himself a carver, Davis draws not only his carving from the shapes of wood, but also his poetry is inspired by forest imagery. The connection of identity to place is again illustrated in the term "ocean people," which defines a group by the geographic focus of its culture. Such detailed references to Place thus make the poem regionally specific in the imagery and values it expresses.

In his final stanza, Davis develops the climax of his poem. Like the trees, the people and the traditions and the memory of his people are threatened by extinction. This place -- the village, the forest, the land of the dead -- could "disappear forever" if not for the ritual song of the soulcatcher. By leaving the place of his body and embracing another world through song, the medicine

man is able to catch the spirits displaced by forgetfulness and keep them from disappearing. There is a recognition of the limitation of nature in this poem; to exist in a natural world is not enough to keep the soul from being consumed by fire and wind. The cycles of nature continue, with or without the existence of people. Cultural survival thus comes from an active spiritual participation in the universe; through words, memory, and a ritual recognition of place as both immediate and transitory, the Indians can maintain their Native identity.

The final stanza of "Soulcatcher" incorporates more images connected to water. Using words like "sink" and "drifting," Davis further connects his poem and his character to an oceanic region. Throughout the poem, there are allusions to the four basic elements which comprise the earthly environment: air, water, fire, and earth. Wind helps transport the medicine man to a different spiritual place, while it is with air that the souls of the ancient people are instilled with the movement of life which still stirs in the village. While water imagery surfaces in less direct forms, it nevertheless permeates the poem's tactile theme with words like "sink" and "drifting." Fire is a central image not only as a giver of light which contrasts with the "darkness" of the other world; but also, fire and wind are consuming powers which could burn and bury the Indians like trees if they cease to respect the elements' ritual value. The "mask of ash and bone" worn by the soulcatcher as he drifts outside the village evokes images of both life and death; people are forever connected to the earth by their bones, their bodies, which come from the land and inevitably return to the land. The soulcatcher, by wearing such a mask, recognizes and respects this relationship between earth and soul and makes himself welcome among the dead.

Ultimately, the poem is optimistic in tone. There is a certain perseverance suggested by the soulcatcher's ritual. The trees and the people who relate to them have not yet disappeared forever, for the village "still feels air

moving." Describing an event with sensual imagery, Davis shifts his poem beyond the physical world and into a spiritual, universal, psychological realm where a relationship to a less tangible reality can be expressed. This is not a simple narration of a ceremony or description of a medicine man; rather, it is a celebration and an affirmation of the Tlingit values of place, language, ritual, and memory as they are threatened by cultural extinction. The use of "still" in the first stanza has a double meaning when interpreted in conjunction with the "still" in the last stanza; the struggle to retain cultural places, stories, memories, spirits, names has not crushed the power of the soulcatcher, who still sits among his people and guides them through life. In the last two lines of the poem, the focus shifts back from the world of the dead to the world of the living; the souls of living and dead are intertwined in a circular universe. As the final image of the poem, the village is the place where these Indians still belong.

In his poem "Leveling Grave Island," Davis describes the destruction of a highly valued cultural place. The poem deals with issues of invasion, of loss, of chaos, of displacement as Davis illustrates another source of pain instigated by a foreign culture. Set on an island, the story describes the forced and violent upheaval of the dead from their place of burial. This displacement not only throws the spirits of the dead into chaos, but it destroys the harmony and structure of the world for the living, as well. "Leveling Grave Island" makes painful distinctions between white and Indian perceptions of place by relating the body, the landscape, and places of death to culturally explicit values. "Leveling Grave Island" lacks the stanzaic structure of "Soulcatcher," which insinuates from the start that this is a story not of balance and order, but of discord and disorientation. In the first stanza, Davis creates the tone of the poem with images of crushed and distorted bones, "skulls smiling into their own

Leveling Grave Island

Some of the arms flew
up to where legs belong. Some
thighs smashed ribs.
A few skulls smiled into their own pelvis.

Not a hundred years ago
the placement of bones, each particular
stance was the position for entering death country.
Broken knees and elbows to fit to chests,
placed on the platform
that floated back to earth evenly in time.

Bodies churn and roil in the earth.
The giant spruce, the eagle trees
the points of reference go up in smoke.
Nothing is so random.
We lose our direction.
I watch this destruction daily.

Gravemarkers donated to museums.
Trees explode.
The dozer that was ferried across
has leveled the entire island.
The living destroy the dead,
as the dead claim the living.
Like going off into the distance,
growing smaller and vanishing,
like rituals without origins,
like this island that never was and always will be.

Robert Davis

pelvis." Arms are placed where they do not belong, just as the culture of the Indians is being denied its place of belonging. There is a jointed, chaotic force at work in this opening scene. Because it seems strangely inappropriate and gruesome, the image of the "smiling skulls" contributes to this sense of an unnatural destructive action. The word "some" used in conjunction with body parts further suggests the random and senseless force churning through this sacred burial place.

In the second stanza, Davis imbues the grave site with the spiritual meaning; it is not only the violation of the graves, but the violation of the traditions and religion of the Native Americans which makes the destruction so criminal. The imagery of this stanza contrasts sharply to the opening scene of chaos; there is a respectful recognition of the natural order of the universe expressed through Davis' words. Those who buried the dead were conscious of the precise "placement of the bones;" injured parts were carefully re-fitted in natural positions as the living prepared the dead to enter "death country." The realm of the dead is once again viewed as another world which is nonetheless physical; "country" implies geographical form, landscape, substance which are non-existent in a Christian concept of heaven. Moreover, the body must be physically restored to enter this next world; the proper placement of bones reinforces the body's fundamental relationship to the earth. Eventually, the body will return to the earth; the process is unhurried, natural, "even," and ultimately assures the spiritual peace of the deceased.

Beginning the second stanza with the line "Not a hundred years ago," Davis suggests yet another interruption of natural order. While a white person might consider a hundred years ample amount of time for the spirits of the dead to rise to heaven, Davis implies that the exhuming of these graves stops the process of "floating back to earth" along the indefinite and incomprehensible

continuum of "time." Many tribespeople believe that "when hallowed graves are disturbed and their contents exposed, the spirits of the deceased are destined to wander restlessly until the bones are properly reburied" (Peerman, The Christian Century, p.935). The leveling of Grave Island destroys the precision and harmony established in the initial burial process; not only the spirits of the dead, but also the sacred places of the living are buried in the bulldozer's indiscriminate tracks.

Davis returns to the destruction in the third stanza. In the second line, he pulls the action from the immediate grave site to the larger landscape of trees and spruce familiar to animals (i.e. "eagle trees") and people alike. The psychological effect of the loss of this place is more clearly defined in this stanza. "The points of reference go up in smoke," writes Davis. It is the physical world - not only the trees and the hills and the ocean, but also sacred sites of burial or ceremony - which define a sense of place for these Indians. They know themselves by knowing the landscape in which they live. The animals, the plants, the seasons, the shape of the island itself are the frame of reference by which the Tlingit understands his or her own place in the universe. When that physical and symbolic world is leveled, the people "lose [their] direction." It is not open space and unimpeded vision which defines the place of these Indians, as it is for Momaday's Indians; rather, forests and rocks and contained boundaries of islands create the physical context for a sense of place. Without a physical place to ground their cultural identity, the living and the dead alike lose their spiritual direction in the universe; the world becomes a random, non-sensical, violent place where bodies do not evenly return to the earth but rather "churn and roil" in the soil which once gave them life.

By bringing a first person narrator into the poem in the third stanza, Davis again makes his story a contemporary issue. The leveling of Grave Island does

not go unobserved; it affects all who have a cultural investment in the place. The destruction of the island works on a symbolic as well as a literal level; repeated over and over, the transgressions of white culture continue to erode both the physical and psychological places of the Native American people. The narrator watches not only the daily destruction of the forests and the graves, but also he is a witness to the destruction of the "we" in the preceding line. The "we" refers not only to the spirits of the dead who cannot find "death country" without proper graves, but also it is a reference to those still living who lose their traditional perspective in the universe. By devaluing the places of the Indians, white culture devalues the Tlingit cultural identity; eliminating the landscape by which the Indians define themselves, the bulldozers destroy the people, as well.

In the first line of the fourth stanza, gravemarkers of violated souls are donated to museums and, as though connected in a causal relationship, "Trees explode." Each transgression of place results in another explosion of the landscape. The land loses its meaning when it is severed from spiritual reference points. With the destruction of the dead comes a loss of origins, of history; rituals cease to have meaning when they are not re-enacted in a symbolic place. The immediacy of an Indian's physical relationship to the land is replaced by "distance" as memory and tribal identity are "growing smaller and vanishing." Instead of being celebrated as part of tribal history, the dead also grow smaller, consumed by the "endless dark" described in "Soulcatcher." Unlike the dead of a Christian heaven, the Tlingit spirits rely on the places and the people of the earth for peace after death; when their graves are destroyed, their souls are brushed aside, invalidated, forgotten. The "dozer," ferried across to the island from another place, has leveled the tribe's traditional perception of the world. Once the island and its people are destroyed, it will "never be;"

without memory, without story, without symbolic place, the Indians' island will not exist for the living any more.

However, Davis makes a final recognition of the perpetual constancy of the universe with his final assertion that the island "always will be." Though the living may have lost a symbolic place, the soul of the land itself will ultimately survive the invasions, the violations, even the loss of the people who once respected it. Davis seems to suggest, moreover, that even the cultural landscape could survive this destruction; the traditions are "vanishing," they have not yet disappeared. And though the "living destroy the dead," the dead still "claim the living" spiritually, through memory and history and stories and songs. The poem itself is a song which honors, celebrates, and remembers a place honored by the Tlingit people. Davis himself becomes a kind of "soulcatcher," reviving the spirit of place in a poem which refuses to let the origins of his people vanish.

Ramona Wilson, a member of the Colville Confederated Tribes, was born in Nespelem, Washington. Currently a Project Director for the American Indian Bilingual Program in Oakland, California, she writes of many places which are valuable to her personal beliefs. Of her writing, she says,

"I have had many things and many events, many people and many other writers, both Indian and non-Indian, influence me and my writing. But always, and more each day, I am influenced by place, the land under and around everything. Always in my mind is the first country and the first people I ever came to know. This is the connection I need to make a poem." Lerner, p.239

That first country Wilson ever knew was the region of central and northeastern Washington. Distinct from its rainforest western coast, the eastern side of the state is characterized by valleys and plateaus, open vistas, volcanic formations. "This is the dry, brown, and sage-toned side of the state, with some parched sections meriting desert designation," writes John Alwin (Between the Mountains, p.5). Also the "bread-basket" of Washington, "the region has a well-developed small town and rural flavor" (Alwin, p.5). Northeastern Washington is not without its share of forests, fields, and rivers, while mining of gold, uranium, and other minerals has long attracted white businesses. Wilson's hometown is located along the Nespelem River in the valley of the same name on the northern edge of the Columbia Plateau. Before the advent of white settlers, the Colville tribes wandered over this Plateau in a semi-nomadic search for game, seeds, berries, fish, and roots. From the grass and brush of the Plateau, the Indians wove baskets, pots, clothing, shelters, and many other products for daily use (Handbook of Indian Reservations, p.271).

In loosely organized bands, Ramona Wilson's ancestors once traveled throughout the uplands of Idaho, eastern Oregon, and eastern Washington; they shared hunting grounds and rivers with many of the other Spokane tribes who also made the region their home. There was mobility between bands, and tribe members frequently intermarried or lived with different groups. In the late 1780's, the Spokane tribes encountered white trappers and soldiers who began to establish trading posts and forts along the eastern rivers. Years of conflict ensued as the Indians struggled to resist the onslaught of invasion. Several battles were fought between white and Indian soldiers, and some peaceful tribes in the Nespelem region were unjustly attacked. This history of violence appears in Wilson's poem "Passing Battlefields," for the eastern Plateau indeed became a large battlefield where guns as well as cultural value systems

clashed in the mid-1800's. The Colville tribes tried not to become too embroiled in the fighting:

One Colville chief, an observer at [the battle at] Four Lakes, carried a message home to his people of soldiers who could march faster and farther in a day than horses, and who had guns whose bullets carried over a mile. He urged his people to stay friendly with them.

Brown and Ruby, The Spokane Indians, p.131

Eventually, however, the Spokane tribes were outnumbered by government troops. Many were placed on the Colville Reservation, first east of the Columbia River, and later moved west to the Nespelem area south of the Canadian border when the claims of white settlers began to conflict with Native communities.

The reservation of today is one which has an unemployment rate of 39% and an underemployment rate of 24%; nevertheless, the tribe strongly supports its young people in education and offers eighteen scholarships annually for tribe members pursuing higher education (Indian Reservations Handbook, p.271). It has been difficult to keep tradition alive on Spokane reservations, "possibly because the Spokanes quite early took to white men's ways, and possibly because many of their half-bloods have not shared a common body of tradition with other Spokanes," write co-authors Brown and Ruby (p.309). They conclude:

At this place in their history, in their house which has suffered many divisions, it would appear that an important remnant of Spokanes-- on whom survival of the Spokanes as a people depends -- are striving to find their place in the modern world, into which they have come through shadows cast by white men standing between them and the sun, under which they once lived in harmony and balance -- and called themselves its children.

Brown and Ruby. p.312

Wilson's work repeatedly addresses this difficulty of trying to belong, trying to hold on to the past while living a meaningful life in the present; ultimately, her poetry affirms her own identity as a child of the earth.

In "Passing Battlefields," Ramona Wilson deals with that curious sense of both belonging and not belonging which is unique to a displaced culture. Throughout the poem, the land becomes a place which both defines and haunts the Indians Wilson describes. This is a world much changed since ancient times, a world which juxtaposes traditional values with modern experiences. The characters in the poem belong to the land, and yet they have nowhere to go; they are wanderers, both spiritually and physically, never lost, yet never at home. Using tactile descriptions and a collective narrative voice, Wilson combines memories of the past with a contemporary reality to develop this paradoxical relation to place.

The poem is divided into four stanzas which vary in length. Lines are rhymeless yet flow smoothly with the internal rhythm of the poem. On a basic level, "Passing Battlefields" describes the experience of several people who, while traveling through the country, come across places which remind them of unmarked yet still remembered battles between Indians and the white army. From the opening line, Wilson creates the tone which foreshadows the story to follow: "It was still winter," she writes, simply prefacing the poem by defining both the physical and the spiritual coldness which afflicts these Indians. Winter itself becomes a place which shapes the reality of this world; winter brings the Indians memory, echoes of history, leads them from place to place much as the land once defined the direction and the identity of their people. Because winter

Passing Battlefields

It was still winter.
We had no place in common
that waited for us, other towns
lay on our shoulders, mirrored
our eyes, as we looked down
over the brown hill and imagined horses
stiff legged, soft dust stopped noses
trembling for the smell of water,
their riders a weight of metal and sweat,
as they half-fell towards the wild rose
and willow scented canyon.

The battles here are not marked.
The few people had little cover,
the far hills were dreams.
They had brown skin and names
whispered into the air
that sounded like earth and birds.
Winds took the cries
that rose like the echoes
they already were,
and swallowed them, a great
and finally merciful thing.

There is no place we can go
nowhere to be a tourist
nowhere we are ever anonymous.
The histories of the creeks,
of ravines that don't go through
welcome us, we visit awhile.

We are the children that were to come
when the world would be changed.
So they said it would happen.

Ramona Wilson

is a season, always moving on, never constant, those who live in perpetual winter must also keep moving around the country "with no place to go."

The collective "we" which begins the second line of the poem refers not only to the speaker and her companion(s), but also to the larger Native American population as a whole. Throughout the poem, words work on an immediate as well as a more figurative level, for eventually the poem transcends the physical realm by addressing existential themes in the last two stanzas. The line "We had no place in common/that waited for us" suggests both a physical and an emotional lack of place for these Indians. Because they do not share the same towns, the same lifestyles, the same experiences, the travelers lack that connection to a common place which would give them "somewhere to go." Place becomes both a communal and a physical structure; not only geographic familiarity, but also the social intimacy of a community is absent in the modern Indian world. These traditional places once "waited for" and welcomed the people who belonged to them, while the places the Indians now experience are "other towns" which "lay on [their] shoulders" and are reflected in their eyes wherever they go. There is a sense of burden (weight on shoulders), of superficial existence ("mirrored" towns), of loneliness ("no place in common") suggested by the opening lines of the poem. It is the lack of common ground which keeps these people in a psychological winter; they live in the towns of "others" and have no place to wait for them, to bring them together, to sustain them.

The poem is directed into a more physical, immediate realm through a memory initiated by the line "as we looked down/over the brown hill." In a way, the characters of the poem find a common place when they remember the history connected to this hill and canyon; yet the memory is destructive, comfortless, and painful. With succinct images, Wilson describes the

destruction of a Native American tribe by a troop of white soldiers who once rode down the hill where the travelers now stand. Though the people of that valley are long gone, the memory of their battle is directly induced by the landscape. The hill interacts with the characters' imagination, bringing history to life in swift tactile visions. Dust "stops" the noses of horses "trembling for the smell of water" -- the imagery suggests heat, dryness, summer, a setting which contrasts sharply with the "winter" of the present. The place the Indians once had, and which is lost when the "riders a weight of metal and sweat" descend on the people, is a place described with positive imagery: it is a "wild rose/and willow scented canyon," full of life, of freedom, of growth, yet fragile beneath the "weight" of the powerful soldiers. All of these details exist once again in the minds of those who stand on the hill and remember.

The sanctity of the valley is shattered when the riders "half-fall" down the steep side of the hill. Wilson develops the scene in a wide open space where the people have "little cover" and the hills are "far, dreams." The words "few people" insinuate that the Indians are outnumbered, helpless, unprotected in a land which had always provided for them in the past. These are people fundamentally connected to the earth; they have "brown skin" like the "brown hill," their voices are carried by the air, the sounds of their names are "like earth and birds." Though the land cannot save them from the soldiers, it soothes their misery by taking "the cries/that rose.../and [swallowing] them, a great/ and finally merciful thing." The "rose" in this stanza echoes the image of "wild rose" in the first stanza; the voices of the people themselves become "roses," once wild and fragrant, now twisted to misery by the soldiers. The wind, as an element of nature, swallows the pain of the Indians; just as the soul returns to earth after death, so the cries of the Indians return to the natural world when the wind mercifully absorbs them. The battles of the dead are not really unmarked; they

are whispered in the howling of the wind, in the sounds of earth and birds, and in the poem itself.

The use of plurals in the second stanza subtly broadens the scope of the poem from a single event to a description of multiple events. Not one, but many "battles" have been fought in willow-scented canyons where the people were "few;" not one, but many "winds" still carry the cries of the dead. The title also implies this multiplicity of events, for everywhere they go the characters in the poem are "passing battlefields" which once were Indian lands. The cries carried by the wind in the valley "rose like the echoes/they already were," writes Wilson. This line further illustrates that the massacre implied is not an isolated incident; the cries of the Indians echo the voices of many others who also suffered innocent and unprotected deaths. The line beginning "Wind took the cries..." could also be interpreted as a transitional point in which history and the present meld in the consciousness of the characters in the poem; in their imagination, the travelers hear the cries of the Indians which are echoed in the winter wind of the present. For the travelers, the fact that the wind swallows the past is merciful because it soothes the pain of remembering such scenes of violence and destruction.

In the third stanza, the poem moves beyond the scene of the battle and shifts back to the world of the speaker. With the first three lines, Wilson illustrates that paradox which makes life so difficult for these Indians. While the Indians have "no place to go," they also can never be "anonymous," can never escape from that ancient emotional and biological connection to the land. Their history, their religion, their culture are imbedded in the landscape itself; there is no place where memory can be erased, yet there is no place where the old world can be reclaimed. This contradiction creates frustration as well as pain for those who remember the way it was and yet cannot find a "common place" in

their own lives. While white towns are foreign and oppressive to the Indians in this poem, the land "welcomes" them, speaks to them, visits with them as in the old days. Yet the travelers visit only "awhile" before moving on again; the ravines "don't go through," and there is something blocking a complete return to the land. That "something" is the inability to find a communal connection to the land which would then define a place for these Indians.

Asserting that the Indians can never be "anonymous" not only stresses their familiarity to the land, but it also suggests a recognition of their ethnic identity by the rest of society. Indians, because of the color of their skin, their eyes, their names cannot always blend in to the larger cultural mesh of European physicalities. Biologically, historically, spiritually they are constantly reminded that they are indeed different from other groups in this country; and though the United States is a nation which prides itself on its ability to blend different cultures into one unified America, in reality "the melting pot never melted" (Hughes, p.44). Negotiations to accommodate different ethnic groups "succeed unevenly and often fail: you need only glance at the history of racial relations to know that" (Hughes, p.44). Even if the Indians in Wilson's poem had wanted to belong to the places of Western civilization, they could never be completely acculturated because they still harbor a traditional Native kinship to the landscape and the places of the past. The European or Asian or Hispanic or Afro-American person who travels around the country is a "tourist;" the Native American is a child of history, a child of the land, a child of ancestral territory.

Thus, the travelers in "Passing Battlefields" belong neither to the places of the past nor the places of the present. "In the Indian the spirit of the land is still vested; it will be until other men are able to divine and meet its rhythm. Men must be born and reborn to belong. Their bodies must be formed of the dust of their forefather's bones," said the Sioux Chief Luther Standing Bear in 1933

(McLuhan, p.107). Though the spirit of the land still pulses through the blood of the people in this poem, the ability to "belong" has somehow been lost over the years. While the connection between people of the past and people of the present is clearly implied, the memory which joins them is one of destruction and violence rather than of positive re-investment in the values of the past. The narrator of this poem sees herself and other Indians as "the children that were to come;" there is a certain bleak comfort in knowing that they are children of an ancient tradition, in knowing that their ancestors worried for them, cared for them, fought for them in the face of a changing world. Yet watching the prophecies of the old ones come true does little to help these contemporary Indians find a new sense of belonging in modern America. The "battlefields" Wilson describes are more than sites of historic violence and destruction; they are places where those still living turn to the land to try to come to terms with the past, with loss, and with their own contradictory feelings of displacement and belonging in the contemporary American landscape.

"Spokane Museum" is yet another piece which deals with the issue of place. In this poem, Ramona Wilson argues that place is not a lost and forgotten value among her people; nor are Native Americans an extinct and historic group to be chronicled and preserved in museum showcases. Though much has changed for Native societies since the advent of Western civilization, there is a fundamental certainty in the land itself which can never be forgotten or lost for the narrator of this poem. A respect for and faith in the consistent productivity of the earth manifests itself through Wilson's words; always the spring returns, always the flowers bloom, always the people draw life from the fertile soil of the earth. Native American culture, like nature itself, is neither

Spokane Museum

These are not relics
from lost people, lost lands.
I know where they are.
Give me that digging tool.
I'll show you where
in the spring we get roots.
The wind will come, as it does,
blowing our dresses and hair
as we bend with certainty,
the pink flowers in our hands,
the earth dropping
through our fingers.

Ramona Wilson

static nor stagnant; it continues to grow, to produce, to affirm its existence in an intrinsic relation to the land.

Only twelve lines long, "Spokane Museum" uses simple yet eloquent language to develop a theme of constancy and fertility which springs from the union of body and earth. As the title suggests, the poem is inspired by a scene in a museum in Spokane, Washington. Herself a native of this region, Wilson (or the narrator) is not a "lost person" from a "lost land." The poem begins with strength and vehemence: this is a forceful voice, a voice which hints at anger, a voice which rebels against the insult and ignorance that label her culture a thing of the past. "I know where they are," asserts the narrator in reference to "lost" people and lands; she turns then to nature, to the earth itself, to the soil which gives meaning and substance to her world.

Moving beyond the walls and glass cases of the museum to the outside world, the poem clearly illustrates that these Indians come to nature for life. Not only existing in a natural world, but actively participating in the cycles of the earth define the being of these people. With her own hands, the narrator takes a museum "relic" and makes it mean something, for with it she finds her place and her people in the soil. There is a certainty of life in the advent of spring, in the roots which always dig into the earth, in the wind which "will come, as it does." As the land has progressed through millions of springs throughout the ages, so the people find permanence and belonging by participating in the annual re-birth of the land in spring; the women, consistent as the land, "bend with certainty" to pull roots from the ground. Spring itself, like winter in "Passing Battlefields," becomes a place which shapes the spiritual and emotional attitudes of people; while winter is chilling and unproductive, spring is a place of growth, of energy, of new life. Writes Wilson, "I'll show you where" -- and immediately following, naming this place "where" -- "*in the spring* we get roots."

Not only the earth, but also the season becomes a place which perpetuates the life of these people.

The digging for roots Wilson describes in her poem is a tradition among the Spokane Indians. When the cold ground of winter warms under spring sun, the women leave their villages and hunt along river banks for camass, balsamroot, bitterroot, wild onion, wild carrot, and parsnip (Brown and Ruby, p.21). A communal, seasonal, ritual gathering, the hunt for roots was traditionally a time for celebration and prayer, a time when food was plentiful and the stagnation of winter became a cold memory. "Early in the season the Spokanes held their first root ceremonies to thank the Great Spirit for adequate food" (Brown and Ruby, p.21). Women baked the roots in earth-pits, pounded the camass to pulp, and then shaped it into small cakes to eat and store for winter use. It is this activity which in part ensures the cultural as well as physical survival of the clan; more than just hunting for food, the women in Wilson's poem are reaffirming both a spiritual and a biological relationship to the earth in this seasonal return to their roots.

As in "Passing Battlefields," there is a collective emphasis in "Spokane Museum." The narrator is not describing a traditional act done alone; rather, it is "we" who get roots, the wind blows "our" dresses, and "our" hands and fingers weave through the earth. The group is further defined by the image of "dresses" and "hair" blowing in the wind, for this is a job which belongs to the women of the tribe. Again, the social group becomes a place to which individuals belong; each woman forms an identity not only in relation to the earth, but also in relation to the other women, to the tribe, to a larger collective community. This identity is further associated with fertility, with beauty, and with color; women's hands and fingers are pink with flowers, their own bodies produce off-spring with the certainty of cyclical growth, their fingers find the food which brings new

life to the winter-starved clan. These women reproduce the earth in their own bodies; their durability and their survival come from the "earth dropping/through [their] fingers."

The second half of the poem is filled with tactile, physical images which contrast to the stillness of a museum. With words like "digging," "blowing," "dropping," "bend," Wilson creates impressions of motion to bring both people and nature to life. The poem works on a metaphoric level as well as a literal one, for Wilson's imagery suggests the active affirmation of a transcendental Native identity. The word "roots," for example, has a double meaning; not only are these women collecting food for the present, but they are digging for the roots of their ancestors by actively participating in the seasons of nature. They become part of a tradition, part of a cycle which is never-ending and always changing. The same pink flowers which spilled over the cupped hands of their ancestors still bloom, the same earth still feeds them, welcomes them, is a part of them. These women need to dig in the earth to find history, meaning, place in their lives.

This is a poem in present tense, not in past; these people and this land still exist. The hands, the fingers, the hair of the women in this poem are living, just as the earth is living. Far from the stale, stagnant halls of a museum, the affirmation of life goes on in the union of nature and human being. The Indians live in a world where wind blows hair, where flowers burst pink, where roots tie them to the ground that is the source of their survival. In her poem, Wilson addresses "you" -- the reader, the tourist, the museum explorer -- and argues the existence of a world too often antiquated or misunderstood by "mainstream" American culture. The "old ways" have not disappeared; the knowledge and the need to exist in and of the land still shape the lives of many Native Americans. At a time when our world is increasingly confronted with

environmental concerns, Wilson's poem demands appreciation, understanding, and ultimately respect for a people who live so faithfully by the laws of the natural world.

CONCLUSION

*"Remember that you are this universe
and this universe is you."*

Joy Harjo

In the works of Louise Erdrich, Mary Crow Dog, N. Scott Momaday, Robert Davis, and Ramona Wilson, words are used to shape the immensity of the physical world into a meaningful human universe. Central to all of this literature is a personal, internal, fundamental connection to the earth itself as the ultimate source of existence. The landscape comes to life with personality, with names, with events; it is a presence which records the stories and the lives of people in its eternal natural cycles. The theme of place as it is presented in these Native works is neither linear nor static; woven into the religious, social, economic, political, and cultural perspectives of these authors, it interacts with and underscores each story told. Shifting physical realities into an "internal landscape," a sense of place is developed which transcends immediate spatial and temporal boundaries; place becomes internal, emotional, captured in the eye of the soul. Thus, the concept of place is shaped by cultural values into a physical as well as a psychological force in contemporary Native American literature.

Ultimately, the use of place in Tracks, Lakota Woman, House Made of Dawn, and the poetry of Davis and Wilson illustrates an awareness of a wider world beyond individual vision. The lives of these characters, the events they experience, are placed in a universal context when the individual story unfolds within a larger sphere of human existence. A recognition of history, of other people both dead and living, of the timeless processes of nature itself contributes to the cumulative formation of individual identity. Characters like Fleur, Francisco, Leonard Crow Dog, the Soulcatcher, the women in "Spokane Museum" do not exist in a vacuum; they are grounded to the stories, the traditions, the beliefs of their people by remembering and celebrating that kinship which ties all people, past, present, and future, to the spirit of the earth. Identity is indelibly interwoven with the environment; people are defined by places, places are defined by people, and words ultimately celebrate that relationship. Through stories, poetry, songs, a sense of place extends the realm of the physical to a level of spiritual and emotional meaning.

While there are similarities between the works discussed in this study, there are also different interpretations of place. Variations in physical environment create different personalities, different lifestyles, different needs. Abel, for example, finds wholeness in his life in the endless vistas of the Valle Grande; whereas the narrator in "Leveling Grave Island" needs the closeness of trees, the density of forest to maintain perspective of his place in the world. Moreover, there are differences in the use of social place. For Fleur, the concept of family is fundamental to her sense of place. She chooses to live in the forest where the spirits of her dead relatives dwell; the clan which forms at her cabin is one connected by familial ties, shaped by familial loyalties. When Fleur loses her land, she also loses the family which had been her source of happiness. Abel, on the other hand, has no family except his grandfather, and

he hardly talks to the old man. Much more crucial in his story is a return to the ritual life of the community; with words and action, Abel regains his sense of place by affirming the value of the land in the race with the other runners at dawn.

The issue of belonging plays a central role in all of these works. These are not only stories of place, but they are stories of displacement. How to reconcile the values and beliefs of tradition with the incompatible ideology of "mainstream" American culture proves to be a difficult question for the characters as well as the authors of this literature. There is, however, an overwhelming sense of perseverance, of celebrating Native identities in these works; this energy springs, in part, from a repeated recognition of the individual's place in a community, in nature, in the larger frame of the universe. "The shared themes of survival, of the aliveness of all creation, of the necessity for balance, and of the making power of words are some of the concepts which are part of what might be called a 'Pan-Indian' consciousness," writes Joseph Bruchac (p.203). From this literary "consciousness" comes a continual reminder of the place of the individual on this larger living planet.

Writes essayist Scott Sanders,

In an age of strip mines, nuclear plants,
urban sprawl, inter-state highways,
factory farms, chemical dumps, mass
extinction of plant and animal species,
oil spills, and 'development' of the few
remaining scraps of wilderness,...the
landscapes that we ourselves have
fashioned often appear 'hideous and
desolate.'
p.657

The survival of humankind, indelibly linked to survival of the earth itself, faces an ecological crisis as we approach the end of the twentieth century. The balance of nature has been disrupted by the advent of civilization; technology,

wealth, growth do not come without a price. The wild beauty of Native America gave way to the farmer's plow, the woodman's axe, the miner's shovel. Yet "no matter how much the land has been neglected or abused, no matter how ignorant of their environment people may have become, nature is the medium in which life transpires, a prime source of values and meaning and purpose" (Sanders, p.658). For these Native American authors, the meaning of nature is still fundamental to human existence; in the literature of Erdrich, Crow Dog, Momaday, Davis, and Wilson, respect for the natural world, for the life of the land, for the individual's relationship to that land is given eloquent voice. There is much to be learned from an ideology which looks beyond the immediate, the material, the competitive American sense of place toward broader cultural landscapes. It is not just an appreciation of place, but a whole system of values connected to place which separate Native American cultures from others. In the voices of these authors, there is hope for survival when the intellect, the emotions, and the soul are all invested in place. Words touch the earth, affirming themselves in the spirit of the land.

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