



# ORAL TRADITION

## Festschrift for John Miles Foley

**This article belongs to a special issue of *Oral Tradition* published in honor of John Miles Foley's 65<sup>th</sup> birthday and 2011 retirement. The surprise Festschrift, guest-edited by Lori and Scott Garner entirely without his knowledge, celebrates John's tremendous impact on studies in oral tradition through a series of essays contributed by his students from the University of Missouri-Columbia (1979-present) and from NEH Summer Seminars that he has directed (1987-1996).**

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## **Leslie Marmon Silko and Simon J. Ortiz: Pathways to the Tradition**

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Native American<sup>1</sup> literature in North America has been in a self-declared state of renaissance since 1969. This rebirth is perhaps more aptly described as an attempt to recover traditions, beliefs, and even languages that were lost, suppressed, or marginalized during a centuries-long history of conquest that ended near the close of the nineteenth century, at least in military terms. The object of this recovery is to rediscover and revivify an identity uniquely Indian in its cultural and traditional affiliations (for example, Owens 1992:3-16). Native American writers such as Simon J. Ortiz and Leslie Marmon Silko have been at the forefront of this recovery, and both authors have been instrumental in suggesting how Native American oral traditions can be extended into the realm of a comparatively young literature.<sup>2</sup> Aside from the great inherent differences between oral traditional and literary modes of expression, this undertaking is rendered problematic by the fact that the majority of Native American literature is written in English. Since students of Native oral traditions have focused much of their effort on delineating an ethnopoetics of those traditions,<sup>3</sup> it appears at first blush that scholars of the traditions and the Native American writers who are seeking to extend those traditions may not have much in common even though the traditions are of central concern to both. Certainly their priorities are different. Also, it is clear that a literary tradition, by its very nature, must utilize oral tradition in ways that are convenient to its individualized ends, resulting in an abundance of divergent approaches even within the work of a single writer. Studies in Native American

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<sup>1</sup> Aboriginal residents of North America have been known by any number of designations: Native Americans, Natives, Indigenous Americans, American Indians, Amerindians, Indians, etc. As Roemer (2005a:9-11) explains, a plethora of personal and political reasons for adopting given usages exist, but standardization is, to put it mildly, elusive. Herein the various designations will be used interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> For some representative samples of Ortiz's and Silko's conceptions of Native American oral traditions, see Ortiz's 1985 essay "That's the Place Indians Talk About," Coltelli's interview with Ortiz in her collection *Winged Words* (1990:103-19), and Silko 1996, particularly her essays "Interior and Exterior Landscapes: The Pueblo Migration Stories" (25-47) and "Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective" (48-59).

<sup>3</sup> Two of the most prominent figures in this work have been Dennis Tedlock and Dell Hymes. See Tedlock 1972 and Sherzer and Woodbury 1987, as well as Foley 1995:67-69 for an overview. For a more recent contribution to this line of inquiry see, for example, Cowell 2002. For insights into the fusion of ethnopoetics and studies in oral tradition, see Hymes 1994.

literature are in a creative ferment; the field is very diffuse, and much of the scholarship is exploratory and tentative in nature, as we shall see.

John Miles Foley's recent work provides a convenient model on which to structure an inquiry into the links between Native oral traditions and literature. Foley's Pathways Project (2011-) likens oral tradition to a network whose nodes are "linked topics." This network "*mim[e]s the way we think by processing along pathways . . . . In both media it's pathways—not things—that matter*" (*ibid.*: "Home Page").<sup>4</sup> Silko's (1996:48-49) description of the Pueblo tradition as a spider's web, though placing less elegant emphasis on functionality, is analogous. The literary tradition can also be described as a network if emphasis is placed on the associative processing humans apply to it—the natural perspective to adopt here, where the goal is to link two traditions. Silko's and Ortiz's stories provide vivid examples of how pathways can be drawn. Before turning to these stories I will first briefly—and tentatively—review the conjoining of Native literature and Native oral tradition. In the context of this background, I will then show how Silko's and Ortiz's stories cut pathways from a vibrant literary tradition to an equally vibrant, living oral tradition, and how traversal of these pathways gives rise to a mode of expression that enriches both traditions.

It is worth asking what traditional features are preserved in Native literature and how students of oral traditions can apply their knowledge to that literature. The answer is simplified by the fact that Native American writers are, to varying degrees, literary conservatives, a quality observed in oral traditions in general, as Walter J. Ong reminds us in his classic study *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982:41-42). This literary conservatism has more than one source; it is to some degree the product of a conservative culture that has survived under duress and to some degree a consequence of the search for an Indian identity rooted in Indian values and practices, especially storytelling. One of Leslie Marmon Silko's goals has been to "translate this sort of feeling or flavor or sense of a story that's told and heard onto the page" (Barnes 1993:50). Similarly, Ortiz, commenting on his own poem "That's the Place Indians Talk About," identifies his desire to "achieve a ritual-chant prayer poem" carefully tailored to accommodate performative imperatives like controlled breathing, "accents on certain words (emphasis), body language in general" (1985:48).

Ong has also pointed out the homeostatic nature of orality: irrelevant elements of the tradition will disappear (1982:46). Silko, who grew up in Laguna Pueblo listening to the stories told there (Barnes 1993:51), has a feel for this phenomenon born of experience. She has said in an interview that "[s]tories stay alive within . . . the Laguna Pueblo community because the stories have a life of their own. . . . The old folks at Laguna would say, 'If it's important, you'll remember it'" (Barnes 1993:51). The importance of the malleability of oral traditions cannot be understated. If traditions could not change, their utility, which is essential for cultural as well as physical survival, would be compromised.

The community of performance, enabled by the metonymic contract elaborated by Foley in his seminal work *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic* (1991), reflects the ideal unity of the larger community. Foley has convincingly demonstrated that metonymy is key to understanding how oral traditions communicate. He writes (1995:7):

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://pathwaysproject.org/pathways/show/HomePage>.

Traditional elements reach out of the immediate instance in which they appear to the fecund totality of the entire tradition, defined synchronically and diachronically, and they bear meanings as wide and deep as the tradition they encode. The “how” of the traditional idiom, while overlapping at some points with the “how” of the literary text, also—and crucially—contains an extratextual dimension uniquely the domain of oral traditional art. This idiom is liberating rather than imprisoning, centrifugal rather than centripetal, explosively connotative rather than claustrophobically clichéd.

Although a literature that seeks to imitate or extend an oral tradition may succeed, that success will be limited because, as Ong suggests, “audience” and “readership” are not equivalent terms (1982:74). The shared immediacy and dynamism of traditional performance is, in literature, transformed more or less into an abstraction. Nevertheless, for more than forty years one of the stated goals of Native American writers has been to conjure up the complexities and connotations of the tradition; they have shown a determination to achieve the unachievable: absorption into the tradition itself, a struggle at once poignant and exciting. If they succeed, they will have built new pathways into shared traditions and played some part in summoning the Indian diaspora.<sup>5</sup>

What has been called the Native American Renaissance dates from 1969, when Kiowa author and poet N. Scott Momaday was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his novel *House Made of Dawn* (1968) and Lakota intellectual Vine Deloria, Jr., published his classic treatise *Custer Died For Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*. Although the assigning of a date to this rebirth may seem arbitrary, 1969 remains a seminal year in studies in Native American literature whether the appellation “Native American Renaissance” is applied or not.<sup>6</sup> According to James Ruppert, in 1969 “the landscape of Native American literature changed. Not only was there increased public interest in writing by Native Americans, but also Native writers felt inspired and encouraged. Suddenly it seemed possible that they could be successful with their writing and still remain true to their unique experience” (2005:173). Perhaps the most significant contribution made by Momaday and Deloria was to focus that experience through the lens of identity. Their influence has been profound, as indicated by Louis Owens (1992:5), who writes, “The recovering or rearticulation of an identity, a process dependent upon a rediscovered sense of place as well as community, [is] . . . a truly enormous undertaking. This attempt is at the center of American Indian fiction.” In *Custer Died For Your Sins* Deloria insists that an Indian identity already exists but must be allowed room to declare and define itself, characterizing Native Americans as “a dynamic people in a social structure of their own, asking only to be freed from cultural oppression” (1969:12). Momaday takes an approach that is less explicitly activist, more meditative. He writes that “the way to Rainy Mountain,” his Kiowa visioning of the Native quest

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<sup>5</sup> Following World War II, relocation policies that transplanted Indians from reservations to urban areas were pursued vigorously and have been blamed for damaging, even breaking, the cultural bonds that have traditionally united Native groups. For an account of the implementation and effects of these policies, see Fixico 1990.

<sup>6</sup> Compare, for example, the entries for 1969 in the chronologies of Lundquist (2004:12), which uses the phrase, and Roemer (2005b:31), which does not. Ruppert (2005:173) notes: “Some scholars hesitate to use the phrase because it might imply that Native American writers were not producing significant work before that time or that these writers sprang up without longstanding community and tribal roots.”

for identity, “is preeminently the history of an idea, man’s idea of himself, and it has old and essential being in language” (1969:4). Thus, tradition is the terrain in which the quest is to be undertaken. Deloria asserts the same thing, although less directly: “Indians have survived for thousands of years in all kinds of conditions. They do not fly from fad to fad seeking novelty. That is what makes them Indian” (1969:16). The aim of recovery is more to retrieve what has been than to invent something new.

Momaday, in particular, pointed the way for later Native American writers such as Silko and Ortiz. He bequeathed to them a reflective depth characterized by a willingness to examine openly the cogs and wheels of his art. Following his lead, a number of figures prominent in contemporary Native literature have worked both as scholars and artists. Ortiz, for example, aside from his steady production as author and poet, has contributed a significant body of critical work and provided forums for the work of others. Likewise, Owens and Gerald Vizenor,<sup>7</sup> well-known for their contributions as writers of fiction, have been equally or perhaps more influential as critics. The critical self-consciousness exhibited by Momaday and others has at times led to charges of insularity by scholars intent on ushering Native literature into academia’s critical fold. In a well-known article, Arnold Krupat has complained that “Native Americanists have ensconced themselves in what amounts to a position of critical Luddism, carrying on their analyses, as it were, at a virtually pretechnological level of sophistication” (1987:113).

In fact, Native American literature has been viewed through a variety of critical lenses, both before and after Krupat’s complaint; however, some Native Americans harbor very real reservations about the larger literary community. Owens claims that there is a “suspicion . . . that critical theory represents little more than a new form of colonial enterprise,” adding, however, that “we do not have the luxury of simply opting out” (1995). Critical approaches to Native American literature are proliferating,<sup>8</sup> but a literature that so self-consciously announces itself as beholden to tradition should certainly be read with tradition in mind. Native American writers utilize their oral traditions, many of which are still living, not because they value tradition as an artifact but because the tradition constitutes a living, dynamic way of knowing; it is an enormous and dynamic web of story that can be added to as well as drawn upon. It is the repository of the knowledge and experiences of a people, a community, constantly changing to fit their needs, constantly changing as new wisdom is added and old is discarded.

One response to Krupat’s complaint is that this comparatively young literature needs self-definition more urgently than a critical perspective; in the present context, at least, the two are not the same. Reflecting the daunting complexity of the definitional task, Owens (1995) suggests that Native American literature is “written almost exclusively in English by predominantly mixedblood authors steeped in Western education.” Not only have the original languages been lost or marginalized, but tribal and cultural affiliations have become diffuse, transformed by personal histories and mediated by the ideology of the conqueror. Owens (1995) presses on toward a more complete definition: “I would define literature by Native American authors about Native American concerns and informed by Native American cultures as undeniably both a deeply politicized literature of resistance and an example of autoethnography.” The literature

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<sup>7</sup> See Lundquist’s (2004) profiles of Owens (134-51) and Vizenor (90-99).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, the cornucopia of critical approaches in the essays collected in Swann and Krupat 1987.

Owens defines it as diverse, reflective, and informed by shared experience, and Suzanne Lundquist confirms his definition in her chapter on the main themes of Native American literature (2004:195-252). Two of Lundquist's "overarching themes" of Indian literature are "Indian identity" and "cultural fragmentation" (*ibid*:195-203). As Owens' work suggests, these themes find expression in a literature in which recovery of a repressed culture enables a drama of self-definition achieved, aborted, or lost. Owens' very astute characterization of Native literature as "an example of autoethnography" suggests that the critical paradigm that may fit best is one that includes the oral traditions that provide raw material for autoethnography; Owens, after all, has made explicit the act of cultural recovery that informs Native writing (1992:5).

Native American oral traditions are immensely varied, both in their content and in the range of genres they utilize; they are characterized by much borrowing and blending (Roemer 2005a:4-5). One source of this variety is the diversity of the traditions' practitioners. Lundquist identifies five hundred Native American nations speaking three hundred languages belonging to eight distinct language families (2004:1-2). Roemer emphasizes the cultural variety of the traditions: "Cultural and regional variety multiplies the genre diversity. . . . And this was (and still is) a dynamic cultural diversity" (2005a:4). One of the consequences of the centuries-long conquest of Native Americans was the suppression of indigenous traditions along with other expressions of cultural distinctness as vital as (and including) language itself.<sup>9</sup> This complicating factor, a perceived prejudice and instinct for suppression on the part of the dominant culture, makes the act of recovery a difficult one fraught with fundamental questions about identity and appropriate ways to live. Owens (1995) laments "the continuing and astonishing invisibility of Native Americans and the silencing of the American Indian voice within the critical and privileged discourse of this country." Silko (1996:30) has written that "the Pueblo people depended upon collective memory through successive generations to maintain and transmit an entire culture, a worldview complete with proven strategies for survival." This collective memory was damaged, its fabric riven by discontinuities born of abortive efforts at assimilation.

The growing body of Native American literature, though microscopic in comparison to the vast corpus of Native oral traditions, reflects the traditions' variety and complexity. As Laguna Pueblo author and critic Paula Gunn Allen notes, when she does her critical work she has "to look specifically at the author's tribe and also at the tribe the author is drawing from" (Coltelli 1990:19), obviously a formidable task. Also, for readers unversed in Native traditions, whether they are of Native American ancestry or not, the concerns of Native literature may seem utterly foreign. For example, William Bevis notes the tendency of the heroes of American literature to leave the known in search of new things while Native literature concerns itself with returns: to the land, to the tradition, to the people (1987:581-93). In fact, this motif of return is at the heart of Native American literary resistance. As Bevis notes, "aspirations toward tribal reintegration . . . constitute a profound and articulate continuing critique of modern European culture, combined with a persistent refusal to let go of tribal identity . . . a refusal . . . to assimilate" (1987:593).

Native oral traditions, then, are a unifying as well as a complicating factor. Although the

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<sup>9</sup> See Deloria 1969 for an exhaustive recounting of ways in which intentions good, bad, and misguided have obscured Indian cultural identity.

traditions differ by varying amounts, they have many things in common, particularly their basic defining traits and their practical uses. A trait fundamental to oral traditions, as Ong reminds us, is their emphasis on community (1982:74-75). Equally fundamental, they are performative, a trait that connects neatly to communality, as Foley's discussion of metonymy evidences. A contract exists between performer and audience; knowledge is renewed, enhanced, and shared. Stories in Native American oral traditions, for instance, are known by those raised in the tradition, and variants on stories are determined pragmatically. A story that is useful and relevant will live on, while one that is not will be modified or, sooner or later, no longer told. As Silko has said, "If it's really important, if it really has a kind of substance that reaches to the heart of the community life and what's gone before and what's gone later, it will be remembered. And if it's not remembered, the people no longer wanted it, or it no longer had its place in the community" (Barnes 1993:51). Stories are useful if they provide cultural continuity and "proven strategies for survival" (Silko 1996:30), among other things. The scope of this definition is, admittedly, sweeping, but so are the utility and influence of the traditions (see, for example, Schneider 2003).

The performative requirements of oral traditions beget a disconnect between tradition and literature and may point to a shortcoming of the latter, at least in the eyes of those trying to cut a pathway from one to the other. The impact strikes at a fundamental level. For instance, although it is possible to reproduce the lineated nature of oral traditional stories in translation as well as in the original, the repetition that characterizes oral traditions, assuring comprehensibility and controlling structure and interpretation, is a feature that most writers are reluctant to introduce into their work.<sup>10</sup> According to Silko, this "repetition of crucial points" is "something that on the printed page looks really crummy and is redundant and useless, but in the actual telling is necessary" (Barnes 1993:50). Silko understands the differences between literary and oral performance. "When I read off the page . . . I think it's more persuasive," she has said. "In a way, that's not fair; because I'm reading it out loud, I've gone back again. But I think there are some instances where I've been successful so that the reader has a sense of how it might sound if I were reading it to him or her" (*ibid.*:50-51). Ortiz has likewise tangled with the problem of performance. In his foreword to *Speaking for the Generations: Native Writers on Writing*, he builds the performance into his text: "Now it is my turn to stand. I'm rising to stand and speak in introduction of the essays in this volume" (1998:xi).

Ultimately, however, the "shortcoming" that may be most consequential, at least to some Indian writers, is the move from Native tongues to English. Even more intimidating than the perhaps insurmountable difficulties of translating a tradition into a foreign tongue is the fact that English is the language of a conqueror, a bitter irony indeed to writers who are reacting to centuries of imperialistic brutality, displacement, and marginalization. Sherman Alexie, a Coeur-d'Alene/Spokane writer who has created a large and accomplished body of work, has asked, "How can we imagine a new language when the language of the enemy keeps our dismembered tongues tied to his belt?" (1993:152).

Silko differs. "Pueblo expression," she writes, "resembles something like a spider's web

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<sup>10</sup> See Hymes 1994, especially pp. 330-40, for examples of lineation and interpretative devices, as well as Tedlock 1972.

—with many little threads radiating from the center, criss-crossing one another. As with the web, the structure emerges as it is made” (1996:48-49). It is this spider’s web that matters. According to Silko, “the particular language being spoken isn’t as important as what a speaker is trying to say, and this emphasis on the story itself stems, I believe, from a view of narrative particular to the Pueblo and other Native American peoples—that is, that language *is* story” (*ibid.*:49-50). Perhaps in spite of her belief that “the particular language . . . isn’t important,” in her 1981 volume *Storyteller* Silko indulges in a potpourri of genres—fiction, poetry, autobiography, autoethnography—and includes as well a generous sampling of photographs designed to expand and supplement the texts, lending them their performative qualities. Since then she has continued to explore the intercommunication of photograph and text, relentlessly seeking to expand the boundaries of written discourse (1996:180-86). Ortiz (1981) agrees with Silko’s de-emphasizing of language, arguing that by virtue of having been written by Indians the texts are “Indianized” regardless of the language in which they are written.

A third perspective, that of N. Scott Momaday, the dean of Native American writers, places the emphasis on registers.<sup>11</sup> In *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, a collection of stories Momaday originally heard his father tell, each selection consists of three different texts, each in a distinct register: his father’s traditional story, rendered in English; a historical commentary; and a related “personal reminiscence” of Momaday’s. Momaday extends the tradition in a radical way, recovering Indian experience but achieving something else as well, a more comprehensive recounting. He writes that it is “appropriate” that these texts “should be read aloud, that they should remain, as they have always remained, alive at the level of the human voice. At that level their being is whole and essential. In the beginning was the word, and it was spoken” (1969:ix).

Native literature, then, has a highly diversified set of voices, just as Native oral traditions do. Like traditional voices, the literary ones work toward a common end: the conservation of community, tradition, and shared culture. The extension of pathways from literature to tradition will continue to take place, whatever forms those pathways may take and however effective the realizations may be. A pair of stories by Silko and Ortiz provide vivid examples of pathways to the tradition. For students of oral traditions the choice of these two stories has an added attraction because they are separate redactions of the same story. Of course, multiple redactions of a story are a staple of oral traditions; in the world of literature they are far less common and in fact are often avoided in the interest of “originality.” The story is also present in the Pueblo Indian tradition, which it joined soon after the events it describes took place. Both Silko and Ortiz heard the story as youngsters.<sup>12</sup> Silko also mentions the story in her collection *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit*. She asked students at Laguna-Acoma High School about the story (1996:58):

I asked the students how many had heard this story and steeled myself for the possibility that the anthropologists were right, that the old traditions were indeed dying out and the students would be

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<sup>11</sup> For a precise and rigorous explanation of registers, or “special languages,” see Foley 1995:49-53.

<sup>12</sup> Lawrence J. Evers (1985) provides an excellent account of the historical event mediated by the two stories and also discusses Silko’s and Ortiz’s contact with the stories.

ignorant of the story. But instead, all but one or two raised their hands—they had heard the story, just as I had heard it when I was young, some in English, some in Laguna.

All that remains is to take a look at the different pathways these stories take to the tradition.

The stories by Silko and Ortiz originally appeared in Kenneth Rosen's 1974 landmark anthology of Indian writing, *The Man to Send Rain Clouds*, near the beginning of the Native American Renaissance. Silko and Ortiz were responsible for, respectively, seven and five of the nineteen contributions to the volume, a not-so-subtle harbinger of their future influence on Native literature. The stories that will be discussed here are based on the murder of a New Mexican state trooper by two brothers from Acoma Pueblo, Willie and Gabriel Felipe. The details of both stories differ from the historical account reconstructed by Lawrence J. Evers (1985). Nevertheless, the kernel of the story—the brothers' conviction that they are being persecuted by the trooper and the subsequent shooting from ambush, followed by the burning of the man's body—is common to both. In both stories the violent hostility of the trooper toward Indians in general and the brothers in particular is established early. Both stories can easily be understood as instructional tales illustrative of behaviors and attitudes familiar to their Native audiences. On the other hand, both stories either modify existing names or concoct new ones for the protagonists, who are brothers in Ortiz's story but not in Silko's. Both authors draw directly on the tradition, molding their sources to their different ends, creating their own emphases and thus contributing to the development of a story remembered from youth. These activities create a link between the authors and the oral storytellers who provide their material, a link that impacts the homeostatic mechanism of the oral tradition.

In Silko's "Tony's Story" the two main characters are friends named Leon and Tony. Leon, like his historical progenitor, has just returned after a tour of duty in the army. The performance of Native Americans in the armed forces during World War II was almost universally regarded as exemplary (Evers 1985:19), but it was also a source of alienation, as indicated in this story as well as in Silko's magnum opus, the novel *Ceremony*. Tony recognizes Leon's estrangement from the tribe but has been encouraged recently by Leon's anticipated performance in the Corn Dance, a Pueblo ritual, although to Leon "it's only the Corn Dance" (1974:69). Tony, however, is optimistic. "I was happy," he reveals, "because I knew that Leon was once more a part of the pueblo" (*idem*).

There is still, however, a great difference between the attitudes of the more traditional Tony and the worldly Leon. During the evening of Leon's violent confrontation with the state trooper, who in a significant omission is not named in this redaction, Tony, disturbed by the fight as well as by "the stories about witches," has a dream in which "the big cop was pointing a long bone at me—they always use human bones, and the whiteness flashed silver in the moonlight where he stood. He didn't have a human face—only little, round, white-rimmed eyes in a ceremonial mask" (*ibid.*:72). The trooper's manifestation to Tony as a witch is a consequence of Tony's immersion in the traditional stories and attitudes—the culture—of the pueblo. Sure of his interpretation, Tony urges Leon to wear an amulet "for protection" (*ibid.*:75). Leon scoffs, "You don't believe in *that*, do you," assuring Tony that a rifle will give him all the protection he needs, to which Tony responds with equal assurance, "But you can't be sure it will kill one of them" (*idem*). Tony laments Leon's insistence on fighting for his rights against the abusive

trooper: “he couldn’t remember the stories that old Teofilo told” (*ibid.*:74). Teofilo, named only one other time in the story, can be understood as a keeper of the traditional values of the pueblo, values codified in the stories he tells. In Tony’s eyes, Leon has completely misunderstood the nature of his foe.

The fissure between Leon’s and Tony’s perceptions is pried open in the final moments of Silko’s story. The trooper, intent on harassing Leon and Tony, trails them in his car. When he finally stops them, Tony importunes his friend: “We’ve got to kill it, Leon. We must burn the body to be sure” (*ibid.*:76). Clear in his intention even then to kill the trooper, Tony wishes “that old Teofilo could have been there to chant the proper words while we did it” (*ibid.*:77). The trooper prepares to beat Leon with his billy club, which is, for Tony, “like the long bone in my dream when he pointed it at me—a human bone painted brown to look like wood, to hide what it really was” (*idem*), and Tony shoots him dead. Silko does not make explicit whether or not the friends haul the body back to the patrol car and burn it together or whether Tony alone does the job, but the rift between them seems permanent. “My God, Tony,” Leon cries. “What’s wrong with you? That’s a state cop you killed” (*idem*). Tony responds, “Don’t worry, everything is O.K. now, Leon. It’s killed. They sometimes take on strange forms” (*ibid.*:78). Communication between them has been effectively sundered; the separate worlds of their perceptions have carried them into mutually exclusive orbits.

In the historical case, the Felipe brothers ascribed their behavior to the activities of witches, according to a psychiatrist speaking on behalf of the defense (Evers 1985:20-22). The psychiatrist judged the brothers to be psychotic based on their “transformations of cultural beliefs about witchcraft into private, personal, and paranoid ideas,” a determination based on the fact that the Felipe brothers reacted to the threat of witchcraft privately rather than publicly, a violation of Acoma norms (*ibid.*:21). Their belief in witchcraft was not questioned, nor should it have been. Rationalist objections to such beliefs offer compelling evidence of the radical differences engendered by different traditions. Silko’s masterful story brings these differences into vivid relief by presenting them in the context of what is either cold-blooded murder or an essential cleansing. Tony’s membership in the community of the pueblo, his participation in its traditions, removes any doubt regarding the course he must follow, just as Leon’s perspective specifies horror at what his friend does. The literary decision to make Tony the first-person narrator of the story emphasizes Tony’s values. By emphasizing Tony’s values Silko endorses traditional values. In fact, she endorses the primacy of the tradition itself, a necessary concession in view of its role in survival. A strong link between Native literary and oral traditions is thus established: shared values create shared meaning.

Although Silko’s approach is a smoothly literary one, the materials of the tradition are her primary source; her story’s meaning is unavailable without them. Ortiz, on the other hand, manages his story, “The Killing of a State Cop,” in a way that highlights tone and storytelling technique. The story’s narrator, for instance, is told of the killing by Felipe, one of the brothers. Like so many Indian veterans who had served in the military, the Felipe who returned was different, separate: “He had been in the marines and he could have gotten kicked out if he had wanted to” (1974:101). Throughout the story, the narrator’s account is interwoven with comments, reflections, and details drawn verbatim from Felipe’s account; the story conducts a dialogue with its source. This interlacing structure is a commonplace of oral traditions and

reflects the meshes of Foley's network and Silko's spider's web, which Ortiz effectively re-creates. For instance, as the narrator describes the chase that will end in the death of the trooper, Felipe's voice breaks in with commentary and elaboration (*ibid.*:106):

Aiee, I can see stupidity in a man. Sometimes even my own. I can see a man's drunkenness making him do crazy things. And [state trooper] Luis Baca, a very stupid son-of-a-bitch, was more than I could see. He wanted to die. And I, because I was drunken and *muy loco* like a Mexican friend I had from Nogales used to say when we would play with the whores in Korea and Tokyo, wanted to make him die. I did not care for anything else except that Luis Baca who I hated was going to die.

Ortiz's narrative approach is different, and so are his aims. The very title of the story, "The Killing of a State Cop," makes his thrust clear; its stark bluntness has a palpable chilling effect, far removed from the comparative coziness of Silko's "Tony's Story." Felipe's distaste for outsiders is equally palpable. "He was always thinking about what other people could do to you. Not the people around our place, the Indians, but other people" (*ibid.*:101). Ortiz reveals how Felipe, still in the Marines and in uniform, is refused service in a bar because he is an Indian, an experience recorded in Felipe's own words. After being kicked out of the bar, says Felipe, "I went around the back and peed on the back door. I don't know why, just because I hated him, I guess" (*ibid.*:102). A plentiful portion of Felipe's hatred is reserved for the state trooper. These hostile feelings are shared by his brother, Antonio. When the trooper follows the brothers as they drive home, Antonio runs the trooper off the road in a fit of rage. The brothers drive ahead and lay a trap for the trooper, shooting into his car as he approaches, then finishing him off with multiple shots as he pleads for mercy, thus emphasizing the brutality of the act, which is motivated by the brothers' anger.

It is worthwhile to recall here Owens' definition of Indian writing as "a deeply politicized literature of resistance" (1995), as well as Bevis' notions regarding Native Americans' sweeping refusal to assimilate (1987:593). In his redaction of the story Ortiz focuses on the distrust expressed by Felipe not just for the state trooper but for non-Indians in general, a distrust that explodes into fury and hatred as a consequence of the acts of discrimination directed against him, both by the trooper (1974:103) and when he is refused service at the bar (*ibid.*:102). The anger provoked in the latter instance is exacerbated by the fact that he is in his Marine uniform, an emblem of honorable service that argues for the leveling of ethnic differences through mutual respect. Likewise, a furious Antonio runs the trooper off the road when he pursues the brothers.

The twin concerns of discrimination and resistance are a main theme in Ortiz's work, and he employs a deftness of touch that allows him to explore them without tiresome repetition.<sup>13</sup> In a similar vein, Silko remarks that "[c]ertainly for me the most effective political statement I could make is in my art work. I believe in subversion rather than straight-out confrontation" (Coltelli 1990:147). Ortiz's story mines a long history of Indian resistance, which has found its main focus in the refusal to assimilate. This resistance has long been a part of the

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<sup>13</sup> See the stories collected in *Men on the Moon* (1999), especially "You Were Real, the White Radical Said to Me" (123-27).



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