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TOM LYNCH

What Josiah Said: Uncle Josiah's Role in *Ceremony*

Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Ceremony* is probably the most thoroughly analyzed recent work of Native American literature. Much of that analysis involves the various elements that contribute to the "ceremony" that heals the main character, Tayo, including such aspects as memory, animals, ritual, traditional stories, mythological characters, and both symbolic and literal landscapes. Critics have focused especially on the role of female figures and mythological characters such as Night Swan and Ts'eh. Such an emphasis is warranted since the roles of female and mythological characters in Laguna culture are probably the two important aspects in the story least familiar—and hence most baffling—to Euro-American readers. It is certainly appropriate for critics of a novel concerning the gynocratic[1] Laguna Pueblo culture to pay substantial attention to the various feminine elements in Tayo's environment. Readers of the novel whose culture is patriarchal—which would be most readers—need to have the gynocentric matrix and implications of the novel delineated. But such a focus averts attention from the vital function fulfilled by a male and entirely human character, Tayo's Uncle Josiah, whose contribution to Tayo's "healing ceremony" is at least as important as that of any other figure in Tayo's life.

For example, when Paula Gunn Allen explores the role of the "feminine principle" in *Ceremony*, she explains that "while *Ceremony* is ostensibly a tale about a man, Tayo, it is as much and more a tale of two forces: the feminine life force of the universe and the mechanistic death force of the witchery" ("Feminine"118-19). Such an emphasis on the exclusively "feminine" life force certainly makes it difficult to recognize the important role a male character, Uncle Josiah, plays in Tayo's life-affirming healing, even though she acknowledges in the introduction to *The Sacred Hoop* that "in many tribes, the nurturing male constitutes the ideal adult model for boys . . ." (2).

Allen does seem to be increasingly aware of the importance of Uncle Josiah. For example, in her essay originally titled "The Psychological Landscape of *Ceremony*" she suggests that "Tayo is healed when he understands in magical and loving ways that his being is within and outside him, that it includes his mother, Night Swan, Ts'eh, the spotted cattle, winter, hope, love, and the starry universe of Betonie's ceremony" (7). In a revised version of this article, significantly retitled "The Feminine Landscape of *Ceremony*," she altered this passage to include Uncle Josiah in her list of elements included in Tayo's "being" (120). Though this revision suggests a recognition of the importance of Josiah, the remainder of the essay ignores Josiah's role.

Several other critics have also acknowledged but failed to elaborate on Josiah's role. For example, in her interpretation of the "event experiences" in the novel, Elaine Jahner points out that for Tayo, "One important teacher was his uncle Josiah. The phrase, 'Josiah said,' introduces the many sections of the novel that narrate Tayo's childhood learning about the meaning that event can have" (42). This is a valuable insight into Josiah's role, but Jahner's main interests lie elsewhere.

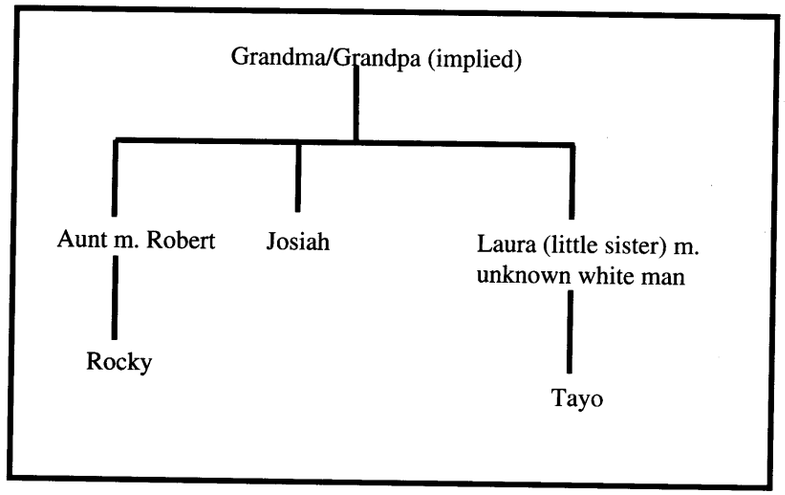
In a consideration of the value to Tayo of remembering stories, Mary Slowik suggests that after Betonie's ceremony, Tayo employs his memory no longer to produce guilt, but to provide a "manual for physical survival" (112). Tayo recalls the morals imbedded in his uncle's tales and applies them to his circumstances. These tales help him orient himself both physically and morally. "Ultimately," Slowik says, "Tayo carries out his uncle's instruction, not simply to remember stories, but to remember them as situations require them. 'Next time,' Josiah had said, 'just remember the story'" (112). Again, this is a valuable comment on the role of Josiah, but like Jahner, Slowik's primary interest lies in a different direction and she fails to elaborate on the observation.

Edith Swan's "Laguna Prototypes of Manhood in *Ceremony*" makes the most extensive use of Uncle Josiah's role in Tayo's development. She sees him as a social model for Tayo's maturation and explains that "in Tayo's reflections, Josiah's words bespeak the reality of tradition, respect for his people's sayings, responsibility for nature, and adherence to conventional practice" (42-43). These are useful insights into his function, but Swan quickly shifts to larger social and mythic influences.

In learning how to heal himself and how to properly function as a man in gynocentric Laguna culture, Tayo's most valuable guide is his uncle Josiah. In this study I would like to venture further down the trail indicated by Allen, Jahner, Slowik, and Swan and more closely explore the various contributions Uncle Josiah makes to Tayo's growth and subsequent healing.

To better understand the family dynamics in *Ceremony* and the important role of Uncle Josiah, we need to understand the nature of the

matrilineal family in Laguna culture. Many non-Native readers of the novel will tend to assume that the family structure in Laguna culture is similar to their own, that is, patriarchal and patrilineal, and interpret relationships accordingly. But the Laguna family differs in fundamental ways from the standard Euro-American family. The anthropologist Fred Eggan summarizes the Laguna family structure this way: Laguna, he says "is divided into matrilineal, exogamous clans which have totemic names and ceremonial, juridicial, and economic function. . . . The basic economic unit is the extended maternal household" (254).



Maternal Household Family Organization in *Ceremony*

Further elaborating on the nature of the family organization, Eggan explains that the Laguna matrilineal household

> tends to be of the compound family type, consisting of three rather than of two generations. The normal pattern was for the married daughters to continue living at home, and in native theory the house and its furnishings belong to the women of the household. . . . The Laguna household thus consists of a group of related women, [Grandma, Aunt, Laura] . . . their brothers who have not yet married [that is, Uncle Josiah in *Ceremony*], their husbands who have come from other households [Robert], and their children [Rocky and Tayo] and grandchildren. (263)

As indicated by my interpolations, this situation manifests itself clearly in the novel. At one point Tayo reflects on the status of Robert, who had married into this matrilineal household. "Tayo realized then that as long as Josiah and Rocky had been alive, he had never known Robert except as a quiet man in the house that belonged to old Grandma and Auntie. . . . The sheep, the horses, and the fields—everything belonged to them, including the good family name" (32). Robert's minor position in the family stems not from a retiring personality nor from an excessively authoritarian wife but rather from the basic nature of the matrilineal Laguna household. In the typical Euro-American family structure of the 1940s, Robert, as the eldest married male, would at least ostensibly have been the patriarch of the home, with all the authority the term connotes, rather than the minor figure portrayed here. The diminished status of Robert in his wife's household so misleads one critic that she refers to him as Aunt's "hired hand" (Slowik 110).

But, while the husband's status in such a matrilineal family is rather slight, the role of the mother's brother (uncle) is in many respects more important than the role of the biological father. This uncle plays a profound and unique role in the life of his sister's children. "The mother's brother [Uncle Josiah] is thought of as a 'guardian' of his sister's children and has considerable authority over them" (Eggan 264). From the moment Uncle Josiah first embraces the young Tayo until the novel's conclusion, Uncle Josiah exhibits precisely these traits in his relationship to his nephew. Josiah's guardian relationship appears first when Tayo's dissolute mother gives him up; she hands him not to Aunt or Grandma (as traditional Euro-American gender roles might suggest), but to Uncle Josiah. "He was four years old the night his mother left him there. . . . She kissed him on the forehead with whiskey breath, and then pushed him gently into Josiah's arms as she backed out the door" (66). Accepting his obligation as uncle, Josiah comforts Tayo, protects him from Rocky's rebukes, and "showed him the bed that he and Rocky would share for so many years" (66).

Throughout Uncle Josiah's life, and even as he persists in Tayo's memory, he remains Tayo's primary source of emotional support, especially since Aunt spurns him as a symbol of her sister's and hence her family's shame. When Tayo mourns for his mother, it is Uncle Josiah who comforts him. At one point in the novel, Aunt takes from Tayo a picture of his mother—his last token of her. Afterwards, Tayo cries alone in his room until Uncle Josiah enters. "Josiah came to comfort him. . . . So he held onto Josiah tightly, and pressed his face into the flannel shirt and smelled woodsmoke and sheep's wool and sweat" (71). Later, Tayo recalls that following his mother's funeral "Josiah held his hand as they walked away from the graveyard. He lifted him into the front seat of the

truck and gave him a candy cane left over from Christmas. He told him not to cry any more" (93).

To many readers Aunt seems excessively cruel (for a woman) and Uncle Josiah seems unusually gentle (for a man), but this is because the gendering of such roles in the Euro-American culture does not mirror that in Laguna culture. In a matrilineal society, Aunt's responsibility includes maintaining the family honor, and our condemnation of her cruelty to Tayo is somewhat mitigated when we recognize the burden she bears in a family disintegrating from a variety of insidious social forces. On the other hand, masculinity in traditional Laguna society is characterized by a degree of kindness at odds with the image of masculinity in the surrounding Euro-American culture.

Tayo and his cousin Rocky grow up together until a recruiting sergeant entices them into the army at the outbreak of World War II. Tayo and Rocky experience the horrors of modern war together and participate in and are victimized by various brutalities, until Rocky finally dies on the Bataan Death March. Tayo subsequently suffers what psychologists today would term post-traumatic stress disorder, spends time in a veteran's hospital, and returns home a broken man. Tayo faces a dual trauma: the psychic disintegration he experiences in the war is a heightened version of the large scale cultural disintegration occurring at home in Laguna. Young men who were drifting away from their culture before they enlisted in the U.S. Army returned home with a chasm between themselves and their people. The drunken veteran, like Tayo and his buddies, became a tragic metaphor for the condition of his people (hence his near ubiquity in recent Native American literature). To compound Tayo's difficulties, his primary emotional support—Uncle Josiah—had died during his absence.

Yet even though Uncle Josiah is dead when Tayo returns, his persistence in Tayo's memory enables Tayo to recover his health. As Tayo encounters various situations, he recalls the stories and seemingly casual comments Josiah had uttered that now provide him with a moral map for traversing the complex, desolate, and perilous environment of post-war Laguna. Many of the things Josiah had told him but which, like any kid, he had paid little attention to, now become meaningful in the process of Tayo's healing ceremony. Tayo initially mourns Josiah's death, and his first memories of Josiah are painful, but they gradually help raise him out of despair. To a significant extent, Tayo's path to recovery following his war experience includes a process of understanding the significance of the things Josiah had previously said to him. The lessons Tayo learns from Josiah throughout the course of the novel are manifold.

1. Nothing Is All Good or All Evil

After his release from the veteran's hospital, Tayo attempts to tend the family sheep herd. While sitting in the sheep camp outhouse with the door propped open, Tayo searches for clouds in the distance the way he recalls Uncle Josiah having done. Among the Laguna—an agricultural society in a marginal desert—rain is a primary good, and, as with other Pueblo tribes, much of the sacred ceremonial system revolves around the invocation of rain. But Tayo then remembers the oppressive jungle rain of the Pacific war "that fevered men until they dripped sweat the way rubbery jungle leaves dripped the monsoon rain" (11). This contrast between his inherited sense of rain's sacred, nurturing dimension and his experience of it in the jungle, especially after he curses it—"He damned the rain until the words were a chant" (12)— initially strikes Tayo as a spiritual crisis. But a memory of something Uncle Josiah had once told him ameliorates his anxiety. It was in the jungle "that Tayo began to understand what Josiah had said. Nothing was all good or all bad either; it all depended." This jungle rain, which aggravated their suffering and contributed to Rocky's death, "was not the rain he and Josiah had prayed for" (11).

By having taught Tayo that the world is not polarized between absolute good and absolute evil, Uncle Josiah has enabled Tayo to cope with his traumatic experience of the choking jungle rain and to negotiate his way through a life of complex and shifting realities. (This interpretation also suggests that the frequent analysis that Tayo's cursing of the Philippine rain is a sacrilege that causes the subsequent drought at Laguna may be inaccurate. If in fact "nothing is all good or all evil," and if "this was not the rain he and Josiah had prayed for," then Tayo is free to damn this jungle rain without incurring the displeasure of the rain back at Laguna. Nevertheless—either paradoxically or inconsistently—he does feel responsible for the drought.)

2. Ritual Is a Way to Show Respect for the Sacredness of Life

In Laguna culture the maternal uncle trains his nephew in sacred rituals. Eggan says that maternal uncles "leave ceremonial property to their nephews" and that "ritual information associated with fetishes and offices is transmitted from uncle to nephew" (264-65). Elsie Clews Parsons adds that, "'Uncle' is an important relative . . . his sister's house is also his house. Here he keeps his most sacred things, and among his sister's sons he looks for his apprentice or assistant, for his successor" (59).

After Josiah's death, we realize that he has indeed passed on to Tayo his ritual objects as well as the spiritual attitudes they represent. In one instance of this, while searching for the lost cattle, Tayo encounters a mountain lion. After the lion has passed, Tayo approaches its trail and traces "his finger around the delicate edges of dust the paw prints had made" (196).

He then takes out a tobacco sack inherited from Josiah "and poured yellow pollen . . . into the cup of his hand. He leaned close to the earth and sprinkled pinches of yellow pollen into the four footprints" (196).

In a later instance, while carrying out Ts'eh's request to plant flowers, Tayo gathers yellow pollen "with a small blue feather from Josiah's pouch" (220). In both of these situations, Tayo encounters mythical figures and employs Josiah's ritual paraphernalia in gestures enacting a sacred relationship with those figures and with the natural world they vivify. His ability to employ Josiah's ritual paraphernalia in appropriate ways reinforces his growing bond to the natural and mythic forces in his environment.

3. Maintain Traditional Ways and Distrust the White Man's Science

As these examples show, Josiah maintains the old ways and passes them on to Tayo. At the same time, however, Rocky is assimilating to white society and rejecting the old ways. This situation generates conflicts throughout the novel. Tayo remembers how on a hunting trip he had taken with Josiah, Robert, and Rocky, the two older men used traditional rituals to honor the slain deer. After the deer had died, they propitiated its spirit by taking "pinches of cornmeal from Josiah's leather pouch. They sprinkled the cornmeal on the nose and fed the deer's spirit" (51). Their behavior is in stark contrast to Rocky's school-educated rejection of such superstitions. Rocky merely washes the deer's blood from his hands in an unwittingly ironic but ineffectual ritual cleansing. While doing so, Rocky laments to himself that such foolishness will continue at home where the deer "would be laid out on a Navajo blanket, and Old Grandma would put a string of turquoise around its neck and put silver and turquoise rings around the tips of the antlers. Josiah would prepare a little bowl of cornmeal and place it by the deer's head so that anyone who went near could leave some on the nose" (52). Rocky's disdain for his uncle's efforts to instill in him a Laguna hunter's fundamental code of conduct illustrates his growing alienation from the values of his community and contrasts with Tayo's implicit faith in Uncle Josiah as a guide to proper behavior.

A similar family dispute arises over how to raise the spotted cattle. Josiah has been reading books on cattle raising but finds them unhelpful. "'I guess we will have to get along without these books,' he said. 'We'll have to do things our own way. Maybe we'll even write our own book, *Cattle Raising on Indian Land*, or how to raise cattle that don't eat grass or drink water'" (75). Tayo and Robert find Josiah's irony humorous, but Rocky, significantly looking up from a book, rebukes them and then berates the whole tribe. "'Those books are written by scientists. They know everything there is to know about beef cattle. That's the trouble with the way the people around here have always done things—they never knew what they were doing'" (76).

This conflict between traditional values and the white man's science is further underscored when Tayo recalls Josiah telling him stories and teaching him values at odds with Tayo's schooling and the sort of life Rocky and Aunt admire. Such lessons occur during even the most seemingly mundane circumstances. Once when Tayo was swatting flies in the kitchen, "Josiah had come in from outside and he asked Tayo what he was doing, and Tayo had pointed proudly to a pile of dead flies on the kitchen floor. Josiah looked at them and shook his head" (101). Tayo's response to Josiah's gentle rebuke exemplifies the contrast between his education in the white schools and the traditional values of Laguna culture: "But our teacher said so. She said they are bad and carry sickness" (101). Josiah seeks to disabuse Tayo of this foreign notion by explaining how in ancient times the green-bottle fly had interceded on behalf of humans who were being punished with drought by the mother of the people: "The fly," he says, "went to her, asking forgiveness for the people. Since that time the people have been grateful for what the fly did for us." Josiah concludes this lesson in traditional values by reminding Tayo next time to "just remember the story" (101-02). In this way Uncle Josiah seeks to shield Tayo from an excessive indoctrination by white society and helps Tayo maintain important links to his own culture upon which Tayo will later depend in time of crisis.

4. Learn to Adapt

In spite of these instances when Josiah invokes tradition, a key element in the novel is the theme of adaptation to changing circumstances. Silko attempts to demonstrate that finding a balance between complete assimilation to modern white ways and strident traditionalism is the best way to cope with the changing world. This view, apparent in many ways in the novel (indeed the novel is itself an example), is most obvious in the syncretic style of the medicine man Betonie but is also transmitted to Tayo in both overt and subtle ways by Uncle Josiah.

Uncle Josiah's scheme to enter the cattle business underscores the value of adaptation. Rather than raise pure-bred Herefords, as the white ranchers do, Josiah plans to raise a mixed breed of cattle combining the best of the meat-laden Herefords with the wily desert-smart survival skills of the Mexican cattle. "'See,' Josiah told Tayo, 'I'm not going to make the mistake other guys made, buying those Hereford, white-face cattle. If it's going to be a drought these next few years, then we need some special breed of cattle'" (75). Later, while rounding up the mixed-breed cattle for branding with Josiah and Robert, Tayo observes that the cattle "still ran like antelope in the big corral, bawling to escape the men with ropes. But Josiah said they would grow up heavy and covered with meat like Herefords, but tough too, like the Mexican cows, able to withstand hard

winters and many dry years. That was the plan" (80). This plan illustrates the value of selective adaptation to changing circumstances. Tayo finds such a lesson especially vital since he is, like the cattle, a mixed-breed himself. A world of absolute tradition or absolute assimilation really has no place for him. With Josiah's help, Tayo transforms the seeming liability of mixed ancestry into an asset by his openness to the best elements of many cultures and his shrewd combination of diverse forces.

5. The Earth Is Where We Come from and Is Worth More Than Any Money

Uncle Josiah encourages Tayo to challenge the Euro-American capitalist ideology that heralds money as the measure of all value. On the contrary, he teaches him, the earth is the measure and origin of all value. For example, on a mule ride with Harley to the bars along Highway 66, Tayo, overcome with psychologically induced nausea, stops at a spring. Observing the profusion of plant life in the canyon, he recalls a previous visit to the same spring with Uncle Josiah. While they had waited for their water barrels to fill, Josiah had explained to Tayo that "'there are some things worth more than money.' He pointed his chin at the springs and around at the narrow canyon. 'This is where we come from, see. This sand, this stone, these trees, the vines, all the wildflowers. This earth keeps us going'" (45). After this recollection, "Tayo knelt on the edge of the pool and let the dampness soak into the knees of his jeans. He closed his eyes and swallowed the water slowly. He tasted the deep heartrock of the earth, where the water came from, and he thought maybe this wasn't the end after all" (46). This memory is one of the most decisive in Tayo's revival. Just as the cool spring quenches his parched throat, so his memory of Josiah and his teachings quenches his parched psyche.

Tayo and Harley's mule ride to the bars exemplifies Tayo's plight. He abandons the socially responsible and life-affirming task of sheep herding to indulge in a self-destructive drinking binge. On the way, however, the landscape he rides through has been marked by Uncle Josiah with tales of cultural significance.[2] Drinking from the cool waters of Dripping Springs illustrates the vital bond between humans and the natural order. This spring can also be interpreted as the Emergence Place of the Laguna people, an interpretation reinforced by Josiah's statement "this is where we come from." As the Emergence Place, the spring has the power to heal and to reorder Tayo's relationship with the world.[3] Drinking from it reminds Tayo of who he is at a time when he desperately needs such knowledge. Later in the novel Tayo will encounter Ts'eh at this same location and actualize a more vivid bond with the natural world in his sexual union with her (221-27).

6. Life Persists amid Desolation

Despair haunts Tayo, with good reason: His beloved uncle and cousin are dead, his war experiences have traumatized him, his people and community seem to be disintegrating, his buddies are all drunks, he is trapped between assimilation and tradition, the cattle he promised to tend have scattered, and a drought plagues the territory. Amid the desolation of the drought-stricken landscape and of his own damaged psyche, Tayo must find some basis for hope that life can flourish anew.

When Tayo was young, Uncle Josiah planted the seeds for such a psychic renewal in his consciousness. The summer before he went away to the war, Tayo headed to Dripping Springs to pray. He wasn't sure exactly how to pray because "Josiah never told him about praying, except that it should be something he felt inside himself" (93). At the spring Tayo watched frogs emerge from the shadows to swim in a pool and remembered a symbolic lesson in biology he had learned from Josiah: "He had seen it happen many times after a rainstorm. In dried up ponds and in the dry arroyo sands, even as the rain was still falling, they came popping up through the ground, with wet sand still on their backs. Josiah said they could stay buried in the dry sand for many years, waiting for the rain to come again" (95). Josiah's statement that prayer should be something Tayo "felt inside himself" prepares Tayo to transform his witnessing of such a biological event into a type of prayer and to recognize its significance for himself.

These estivating frogs actualize in the physical world and symbolize in Tayo's psychic world the sustaining life force breathing quietly beneath the ravaged landscape. In his brief comments, Josiah illustrates for Tayo the virtue of faithful persistence and belief in the renewability of life, lessons essential if Tayo is to resist the allure of despair that has seduced his fellow veterans and is to persist in his quest for renewal.

7. Tales Contribute to Our Sense of Belonging to a Place

One of the more important aspects of Laguna philosophy (as well as the philosophy of many other tribes) is the idea that through the remembrance and telling of traditional tales one achieves an intimate relation to the landscape. The stories that incorporate elements of the local landscape make one at home in that landscape, regardless of who claims legal title. Tales about the land confer "ownership" in a more fundamental way than any legal documentation can. While climbing the slopes of Mount Taylor in search of the lost cattle, Tayo recalls a tale Josiah told him that gives Tayo a sense of entitlement to be "trespassing" on the land now claimed by white ranchers. "The white ranchers called this place North Top, but he remembered it by the story Josiah had told him about a hunter who walked into a grassy meadow up here and found a mountain-

lion cub chasing butterflies. . . . The Laguna people had always hunted up there . . . [but now] all but a small part of the mountain had been taken" (185).

Tayo's recollection of Josiah's story familiarizes the environment and comforts him as he ventures onto the dangerous territory claimed by the white ranchers. Josiah's tale sanctions Tayo's "trespass," a sanction reinforced by the fact that the tale also foreshadows his later encounter with Mountain Lion farther up the slope. It is also clear that Josiah had anticipated Tayo's eventual need to trespass on the white-claimed slopes of Mt. Taylor, for while Tayo is snipping his way through the barbed wire fence he recalls Josiah's training him in the use of fencing pliers:

> Josiah taught him to watch for loose strands of wire and breaks in the fence; he taught Tayo how to mend them before any livestock strayed off reservation land. He helped Tayo stitch a leather holster for the pliers one evening after supper, and he reminded him that you never knew when you might be traveling some place and a fence might get in your way. Josiah had nodded toward Mount Taylor when he said it. (188-89)

In the seemingly mundane acts of mending fences and stitching leather holsters, Uncle Josiah embeds messages later decoded by Tayo. Josiah and his tales encourage Tayo to continue his journey past the barbed wire barrier erected by the white ranchers and to complete a crucial element in his ceremony.

8. Avoid Violence and Anger

The dramatic climax of the novel's action is a deflection away from an act of violence, an act that most readers no doubt anticipate and are prepared to applaud. Angered beyond endurance by Emo, Leroy, and Pinkie's brutal ritual torture and slaying of Harley, Tayo contemplates leaping from his hiding place and plunging his screwdriver into Emo's skull. All of the dramatic energy of the story leads up to this moment, and the reader waits for the inevitable climax of violence, only to be disappointed and then chastened by the statement,

> He moved back into the boulders. It had been a close call. The witchery had almost ended the story according to its plan; Tayo had almost jammed the screwdriver into Emo's skull the way the witchery [and the reader?] had wanted. (253)

In a subtle and seemingly unrelated scene, Tayo remembers a lesson in non-violence from Uncle Josiah. Searching Mount Taylor for the lost cattle, Tayo finds himself provoked by his horse to a violent response but controls himself when he recalls a time when as boys he and Rocky had been outsmarted by a gelding. In response they had pelted the animal

with rocks until Josiah scolded them (193). Now, similarly angered by a horse, Tayo recalls Josiah's teaching and responds firmly but without violence. "He reined the mare in tight and kept his heels hard against her sides to let her know he meant business. Josiah had always shown them how ridiculous violence and anger were" (193-94).

When Emo's gang goads Tayo towards confrontation, Josiah's teaching on the futility of violence restrains Tayo from the commission of the violent act that will seemingly condemn him forever to serve as a pawn of the witchery. The allure is strong, the justification seems overwhelming, but Josiah's lesson stays his clenched hand.

9. All Humans Belong to the Same Clan

Closely linked to the restraint from violence in this scene is the phenomenon of Tayo's vision of a dying Japanese soldier as his Uncle Josiah. When ordered to slaughter Japanese POWs, Tayo cannot participate in this commonplace brutality of war:

> When the sergeant told them to kill all the Japanese soldiers lined up in front of the cave with their hands on their heads, Tayo could not pull the trigger. . . . So Tayo stood there, stiff with nausea, while they fired at the soldiers, and he watched his uncle fall, and he knew it was Josiah; and even after Rocky started shaking him by the shoulders and telling him to stop crying, it was still Josiah lying there. . . . And then he rolled the body over with his boot and said, "Look, Tayo, look at the face," and that was when Tayo started screaming because it wasn't a Jap, it was Josiah, eyes shrinking back into the skull and all their shining black light glazed over by death. (7-8)

Tayo's vision of a dying Uncle Josiah in the tortured physiognomy of a dying Japanese soldier is Uncle Josiah's last lesson to Tayo: all human beings belong to one clan.

It seems plausible to infer that Josiah's spirit had journeyed to visit Tayo, appearing in the guise of a Japanese soldier, although the precise timing of Josiah's death in relation to Tayo's vision in the Philippines is uncertain. On a more metaphysical level, however, such questions of chronology and distance are rendered irrelevant because the permeability of the western distinctions regarding time and space is itself both a theme and an ordering principle of the novel (Coltelli 138).

This apparition becomes a puzzle—a koan, as it were—that Tayo must decipher. Late in the novel, Tayo begins to find answers when he realizes that the creation of the atomic bomb—the ultimate manifestation of the witchery of western technology—ironically binds all humans into a single fate and hence into a single clan. In this sense the dying Japanese soldier was indeed Uncle Josiah. Such distinctions in identity—Laguna, Japanese, us, them, me, you—become meaningless in the face of the new

reality of the atomic age. Appropriately enough, Tayo comes to this realization at the Cebolleta uranium mine, source of the uranium used in the first atomic bombs, where he recalls his grandmother's story about witnessing the first atomic blast detonated 300 miles away: "'It happened while you were gone,' she told him. 'I had to get up, the way I do, to use the chamber pot. It was still dark; everyone else was still sleeping. But as I walked back from the kitchen to my bed there was a flash of light through the window. So big, so bright even my old clouded-up eyes could see it'" (245).

Standing amid the denuded landscape of the abandoned uranium mine with this story in mind, Tayo has a sudden insight:

> he had arrived at the point of convergence where the fate of all living things, and even the earth, had been laid. From the jungles of his dreaming he recognized why the Japanese voices had merged with Laguna voices, with Josiah's voice and Rocky's voice; the lines of cultures and worlds were drawn in flat dark lines on fine light sand, converging in the middle of witchery's final ceremonial sand painting. From that time on, human beings were one clan again, united by the fate the destroyers planned for all of them. . . . (246)

In an interview Silko has emphasized this point. After the first nuclear detonation, she explains, "all human beings, whether you were a Hopi who believed in traditional ways or whether you were a Madison Avenue Lutheran, all human beings faced the same possible destruction" (qtd. in Nelson 309).

The atomic bomb exponentially heightens the human sense of shared mortality. Our fates are woven into one common destiny, like members of a single clan. This is Uncle Josiah's final lesson for Tayo. Josiah has transformed his own death into a tableau of the human condition, a condition that has perhaps always existed in at least a metaphorical sense but that the glow of the atomic fire suddenly demonstrates in actuality at the same time that it sears it into our conscious awareness.

Ceremony ends, as do so many other Native American novels, with an image of homecoming (see Bevis). After Tayo restrains himself from killing Emo at the uranium mine and is walking home from this traumatic experience, he stumbles along through the high desert in a waking dream. "He dreamed with his eyes open that he was wrapped in a blanket in the back of Josiah's wagon, crossing the sandy flat below Paguate Hill. The cholla and juniper shivered in the wind, and the rumps of the two gray mules were twin moons in front of him. Josiah was driving the wagon, old Grandma was holding him, and Rocky whispered 'my brother.' They were taking him home" (254). Having evaded Emo and his gang and escaped the forces of witchery, Tayo seeks comfort one last time in the presence of Uncle Josiah, and Uncle

Josiah—alive in Tayo's dreamy remembrance of him—once again responds to Tayo's need, as he had the day Tayo was first deposited in his arms.

Notes

[1] I adopt the use of the terms "gynocratic" and "gynocentric" from Paula Gunn Allen's employment of them in the introduction to *The Sacred Hoop* where she applies them to the Pueblo tribes. Such cultures, she says, are characterized by "free and easy sexuality and wide latitude in personal style," a social system "focused on social responsibility rather than on privilege," "even distribution of goods among all members of the society," and "the absence of punitiveness as a means of social control." She concludes, "among gynocratic and gynocentric tribal peoples the welfare of the young is paramount, the complementary nature of all life forms is stressed, and the centrality of powerful women to social well-being is unquestioned" (2-3). Such a definition may be more sanguine than the actual practice, but it makes clear some of the distinctions between patriarchal and gynocratic societies.

[2] For a detailed application of this principle to the Western Apaches see Keith Basso's "'Stalking with Stories': Names, Places, and Moral Narratives among the Western Apache."

[3] See Nelson, "Place and Vision: The Function of Landscape in *Ceremony*" (304n) for an analysis of Dripping Springs as the Emergence Place. Also see Silko's "Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination."

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