Folklore, Poetry, and Identity: A Study of the Archetypes in the Poetry of Leslie Silko

Kate Grenier

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/theses
Part of the Folklore Commons, Indigenous Studies Commons, and the Poetry Commons

Recommended Citation
http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/theses/1995

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses & Specialist Projects by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact topscholar@wku.edu.
FOLKLORE, POETRY, AND IDENTITY: A STUDY
OF THE ARCHETYPES IN THE POETRY OF LESLIE SILAD

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of
the Center for Intercultural and Folk Studies
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Kate Parker Grenier
November 1978
FOLKLORE, POETRY, AND IDENTITY: A STUDY
OF THE ARCHETYPES IN THE POETRY OF LESLIE SILKO

Recommended 11-28-78
(Date)

[Signatures]

Approved December 19, 1975
(Date)

[Signature]
Dean of the Graduate College
FOLKLORE, POETRY, AND IDENTITY: A STUDY
OF THE ARCHETYPES IN THE POETRY OF LESLIE SILKO
Kate Parker Grenier
November 1978
Directed by: Jim Wayne Miller, Lynwood Montell, and Robert T. Teske
Center for Intercultural and Folk Studies
Western Kentucky University

This paper is a study of folklore in literature; specifically, it is the study of the folklore in the poetry of Leslie Marmon Silko, a Laguna Pueblo woman, and a half-breed. Her family situation, its place in the community, and its oral tradition are briefly noted, and the basic works of folklore in literature scholars are cited; therefore, the groundwork is established on which to examine the specific elements of folklore in the poems from Silko's books, Laguna Woman and Ceremony.

Taking a Jungian approach to the archetypes in these poems, three subsequent chapters deal with three separate items of folklore: the Coyote figure, the Indian migration legend, and witchery. In the chapter on Coyote it is noted that he is a cultural expression as well as a political symbol of rebellion, and, on a deeper, psychological level, he represents the anarchist in the human psyche.

The chapter on the sea journey explores the legend of Indians crossing the Pacific ocean from Asia to America as it relates to the Jungian notion of "individuation." Here the poet's personal psychological needs are discussed, for example, her need to relate to the racial origins of her Indian half.

Finally, with the chapter on the witches, the paper reveals that Silko uses folklore to satisfy her need for an Indian identity, as opposed
to that of a half-breed or a white. The witches' creation of the white race in a contest of evil indicates Silko's rejection of that part of her which is non-Indian, casting the white race in the role of the Jungian "shadow figure."

In concluding, the paper notes the need for seeing the psychological implications of folklore. It is stated that folklore in Silko's poetry functions on a cultural, political, and psychological level in that it is the tool by which she tries to build her identity as an Indian.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. TRICKSTER</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. THE JOURNEY HOME</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. POETRY, PSYCHE, AND FOLKLORE</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I will tell you something about stories,
(he said).
They aren't just entertainment.
Don't be fooled.
They are all we have, you see, all we have
to fight off illness and death.
You don't have anything if you don't have
the stories.
Their evil is mighty but it can't stand up
to our stories.
So they try to destroy the stories, let the
stories be confused or forgotten.
They would like that
They would be happy
Because we would be defenseless then.
He rubbed his belly.
I keep them here
(he said)
Here, put your hand on it
See, it is moving.
There is life here for the people.

And in the belly of this story the rituals
and the ceremony are still growing.

Leslie Silko, "Ceremony"

The westward ride from Albuquerque to Laguna, New Mexico, in
the heart of the Laguna Reservation, is a testament to the variety of
forms the earth can take unaided by tree or crop. Stoic mountains
stand at ease in the distance. Barren ground spreads out towards
them, polka dotted by round green shrubs. Only an occasional souvenir
shop or a stray billboard snaps one back from the naive notion that
civilization has not been here. Then the flatness bubbles into rolling
hills as if someone had left large piles of dirt under a vast rug.

The only indication of the beginning of the reservation is a
fence and a sign. The quiet empty spaces of rugged, dry land empha-
sizes the isolation, both imposed upon and chosen by this group of
Native Americans.

Several miles into the reservation is the Laguna Pueblo with its
own school, post office, and store. Its once prominent link to the
outside world, the depot for the Sante Fe railroad, has for a long
time forfeited its original function and now serves as the home of
Leslie Marmon Silko.

Silko is a writer and a professor at the University of New
Mexico in Albuquerque. But her identity is unalterably linked with
the culture of the Laguna Pueblo and with her family which has lived
there for five generations.

Maria Anaya, Silko's great grandmother was born in Paguate
Village which is north of Old Laguna. Silko says that "she came to
Laguna when she married my great grandfather who was a white man."¹
This began the history of the Marmon family of the Laguna Pueblo.
Lee Marmon, Silko's father, lives with her now. Her uncle owns the
store next door to them. All around her is the sense of family both
past and present.

The system of kinship is impressed upon the individual largely
through the oral tradition that exists between older and younger
members of the family. Silko says of one aspect of her ancestral
history, "What I know of him [the great grandfather] comes from what

¹Leslie Marmon Silko, interview held at her home, Laguna, New
Mexico, January 20, 1977.
my grandmother mentions or my dad.”

The oral tradition in the Laguna Pueblo does not just provide facts about family history, but also involves an attitude held about the people, as a group or as individuals. This attitude comes from two directions, from within, and from without the family itself. Borrowing from William Hugh Jansen’s work one may label these two branches of lore about the family as esoteric or exoteric. The family members obviously hold the esoteric opinions of their own kin, whereas the rest of the community, which is not related, holds the exoteric view.

Silko discusses the latter of these orally transmitted attitudes about her family and explains how it has shaped her and all the Marmon’s identities:

The white men who came to the Laguna Pueblo Reservation and married Laguna women were the beginning of the half-breed Laguna people like my family, the Marmon family. The Marmons are very controversial even now; but I think that people watch us more closely than they do full bloods or white people.

And she adds:

An identity was being made or evolved in the stories the Laguna told about the people who had gone outside Laguna, but at the same time of the outsiders who had come in. Part of it was that the stories were always about the wild crazy things they did. But the identity was made for our families, and we’re a big bunch of people now.

Therefore, oral tradition has two functions to perform in connection with the stories about the family. It is an educational tool which explains family history and it is a medium through which both the family identity and the identities of its members are

---

Ibid.


Silko, interview.
ascertained. These functions also apply to the community in general. In this larger context, the stories about people are considered by many to be gossip, but Silko explains their importance:

No, I don't look upon them as gossip. The connotation is all wrong. These stories about goings-on, about what people are up to, give identity to a place. But, the whole feeling of the place, the whole identity of it was established for me by the stories I'd heard—the early stories, the goings-on, and the warning stories about the old man who lost a team of horses at a certain point on the river. That's how you know, that's how you belong, that's how you know you belong, if the stories incorporate you into them. There have to be stories. It's the stories that make this a community. People tell these stories about you and your family or about others and they begin to create your identity. In a sense you are told who you are by the stories that are told about you.5

So with the oral tradition as the thread, the individual is vitally linked to the other members of the community and especially to the family. This strong identification with the family is old anthropological news in relation to Native Americans. The Indians themselves recognize it as an important part of their recent efforts to conserve a cultural identity. The fact that they attack whites for disrupting family solidarity is indicative of the importance of kinship unity in the pueblos and other Indian communities. In a recent issue of Akwesasne Notes, a Native American newspaper, is the statement, "It is no accident that activists of the native movements are calling for the strengthening of the family as a way of reversing the process destroying native nations, and native people."6

One of the basic notions of anthropologists who study the Native Americans is that the "process destroying native nations, and native

5Silko, interview.

people" has already been partially successful. Silko addresses herself to this assumption:

Ethnologists talk about the culture dying out in 1920 or 1930 or something like that. That isn't true. That just isn't true. It keeps changing. It's just like what I was saying earlier about the Laguna feast stories. They just go on and on. There's no end to it. The feast changes, but the stories keep right on going with few differences.

More specifically, it is largely the oral tradition that is most often listed among the casualties. At a conference on Indian affairs one Indian writer said, "The tendency is to regard things in the oral tradition as dead, but they are not." 8

Besides the relayer of information of family history and identity, functions already mentioned here, the oral tradition at Laguna Pueblo is a form of amusement, both formally and informally. At the feasts, stories are told, according to Silko, as a regular part of the activities. But, also, stories are narrated daily as a part of the normal communications. Silko says:

In such a small community [telling stories] is the way people relate to each other. You go to the post office and you bump into somebody. You talk to that— you narrate. They say 'What's been going on lately?' And you'll say, 'Well a funny thing happened the other day. Let me tell you...'. People will then commence to really narrate—giving dialogue. People do that constantly. People have the time around here. 9

Having thus pointed out the existence of oral tradition in Indian life, and specifically in the Laguna Pueblo, this paper will emphasize the function it has in literature. Oral tradition provides

---

7 Silko, interview.


9 Silko, interview.
the writer with cultural archetypes. For example, the stories told about Coyote and his flamboyant exploits are available as part of the Laguna oral repertoire. The writer who uses Coyote pulls him from oral tradition and transforms him into a literary device.

Silko alludes to the oral source of her material saying in one poem, "In the wintertime/ at night/ we tell Coyote stories/ and drink Spanada by the stove." 10 In other words, in her poetry, Silko has found a spot for the marriage of written literature and oral tradition. This union creates a particular character in Silko's writing. She says:

My experience and my perspective is not like very many other people would have unless they grew up in this kind of environment. I articulate a kind of perspective and experience that isn't very ordinary. All that I know about language and about working with narrative and with description I learned when I was just a real little kid listening to people. 11

In two books, Laguna Woman and Ceremony, Silko uses poetry to communicate her experience in the Laguna Pueblo. Traditional stories play a large part in both, the community and the poetry.

Another Native American writer, N. Scott Momaday, author of many books including House Made of Dawn, understands the relationship of the oral tradition to literature as complete and inevitable. He says:

Writing is recorded speech. In order to consider seriously the meaning of language and literature we must consider first the meaning of oral tradition. For indeed, literature is, I believe, the end product of an evolutionary process, and the so-called 'oral tradition' is primarily a stage within that process. . . . 12

11 Silko, interview.
It has been difficult in the past to convince the academic world of the direct connection between folklore and formal literature, not just in the context of Native American culture, but all over the world. Scholars who have recognized the vital contact between the two, however, have made excellent cases for the obliteration of the notion that high art is a world within itself. Among the scholars dealing with this theme in America is Richard Slotkin, the author of *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1800.* He sees the folkloric element as the thematic seed for the artist’s formal work:

True myths are generated on a sub-literary level by the historical experience of a people and thus constitute part of that inner reality which the work of the artist draws on, illuminates and explains.\(^\text{13}\)

One of the most articulate of the students of folklore in American literature is Gene Bluestein. In *The Voice of the Folk* he attacks “the traditional opposition between folk and formal art” that critics have presumed. He says:

The approach that interests me in this study takes another tact. It argues in general that the lower layers of society are not at all devoid of cultural significance. In fact, they are conceived to be the major source of materials which sophisticated society uses to fashion its literary expression; and these original materials are acknowledged to be esthetically valid in their own terms.\(^\text{14}\)

The folklore discipline has included many scholars who have tackled the general subject of folklore in literature. The basic tasks among these persons have been to state the need for such a study


\(^{14}\text{Gene Bluestein, } \text{*The Voice of the Folk* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972), p. xvi.}\)
and then to define the method of study.

Richard Dorson has dealt extensively with the problems and benefits of studying folklore in literature. He particularly expounds upon the idea that printed matter is the context for the survival of folklore that might otherwise be lost with the loss of the culture.15

Dorson has given to the discipline a list of three criteria by which folklore in literature can be identified. The first of these is that "An author may be shown through biographical evidence to have enjoyed direct contact with oral lore."16 Silko's home in the Laguna Pueblo is in the midst of a community in which legends, such as the Coyote stories, are common knowledge. As already stated, she was continuously exposed to the oral tradition as it took place in the post offices, or around the stoves at night. Her Aunt Reyes was a major source of information. "She lived right by us when I was a little girl. She told me all the old stories," says Silko.17

The second criterion will be satisfied as each poem is confronted. It is proof "from internal evidence in the literary composition itself that indicates direct familiarity of the author with folklore." The third criterion—proving that "the saying, tale, song, or custom inside the literary work possesses independent traditional life"—is part of each discussion as the poetry is unraveled.

Of the other scholars that explore the methods of studying


17Silko, interview.
folklore in literature, Alan Dundes gives a broad summary. In "The Study of Folklore in Literature and Culture: Identification and Interpretation," he says, "The first task in studying an item is to show how it is like previously reported items, whereas the second is to show how it differs from previously reported items and hopefully, why it differs."\(^{18}\)

The attempt to answer the question, "Why?" gives any study its real depth. But even Dundes' question of why a piece of folklore differs in the printed source is not enough. There is also the question why does the item persist in its basic original form?

Roger Abrahams has realized the potential of a study of folklore in literature to be a deep analysis of the attraction and strength of a folkloric item. He expresses his disappointment over the fact that, for the most part, this potential has not been exploited Abrahams says, "Though it seems obvious enough, seldom have I seen a lore-in-lit study attempt to show why a writer has been drawn to the use of folklore, and what literary effect he was able to achieve by its use, other than to provide a quaint setting."\(^{19}\)

Psychologist Carl Jung is one of the best sources for insight into the deep psychological importance of an item of folklore. In Paul Radin's The Tricker: A Study in American Indian Mythology, Jung, sounding much like Abrahams, says, "Now if the myth were nothing but an historical remnant one would have to ask why it has not long

---


since vanished into the great heap of the past." He established the link between folklore and the psyche by repeatedly discussing "the strength and vitality of the state of consciousness described in the myth and the secret attraction and fascination this has for the conscious mind." ²⁰

This notion of the flow of an image from the unconscious to the conscious parallels the flow of that image from prehistorical and non-literary societies and circles to printed sources. In a collection of essays edited by John B. Vickery, Myth and Literature, Northrop Frye explains this flow, saying:

Total literary history moves from the primitive to the sophisticated, and here we glimpse the possibility of seeing literature as a complication of a relatively restricted and simple group of formulas that can be studied in primitive culture. If so, then, the search for archetypes is a kind of literary anthropology concerned with the way that literature is informed by pre-literary categories such as ritual myth and folklore.²¹

Returning to a psychological landscape in describing the movement of an item of folklore, Andrew Lytle says in the same volume, "somehow, through a fissure, the unconscious pierces the consciousness, and from below streams the image, or whatever it is that sets the artist to work." ²²

Of all peoples, the American Indians are among the ones that feel most closely connected with their collective past and with their traditional identities. This is echoed in current Native American

---


propaganda that heavily draws on images from the historical past and the legendary pool of each culture. (The use of folklore in politics will be treated later in this work).

So it is easy to project speculations about the psychological impact of folklore in literature onto a study of Native American literature. Thomas E. Sanders in Literature of the American Indian says about this connection:

In the vast body of Indian's religious literature, pre-Columbian poetry, oratory, political documents, autobiographical literature, white forms, and voices of protest, he hears that sum total of spiritual power of his people . . . or that collective awareness William Butler Yeats called 'spiritus mundi', Carl Jung called the collective unconscious, and Sigmund Freud called racial memory.23

On this theme, another writer, Abraham Chapman says:

The American Indians have not only created voluminous traditional literature in their long past, but have produced twentieth century poets and novelists who write in English with roots in the mythical memories and traditions of their respective nations and tribes.24

Leslie Silko is one of these twentieth century poets and novelists. She writes from her own historical past and cultural identity, both of which have been given to her, by her own admission, largely by the oral tradition existing at the Laguna Pueblo.

Interestingly enough, it is her poetry which is the richest in folkloric content. Even in her novel, Ceremony, Silko breaks the stream of prose narrative to include basic legendary items in verse form. These poems and the ones from Laguna Woman, a volume of her poetry, are studied here for the folklore in them.


This paper takes three folkloric images in Silko's poetry and explores them for their impact. The first of the items is Coyote—a very traditional figure among many Indian groups—who has a special Laguna name as indicated by the title of the poem 'Toe'osh: A Laguna Coyote Story.'

The next item is a historical legend—the story of how the Laguna came to this continent as told to Silko by her aunt.

The last item is the witch, who is a motivating force in traditional legends. In Silko's poetry, witches are the creators of the white race.

Together with all the other folkloric elements in Silko's poems, Coyote, legendary origins, and witches assemble to provide the poet and her readers with powerful cultural, political, and psychological spokesmen.
CHAPTER II

TRICKSTER

The man tried to speak
but only a coyote sound was heard,
and the tail moved back and forth ... 

Leslie Silko, "Ceremony."

Scholars studying Indian folklore have attempted to categorize
its elements. Dennis Tedlock in his studies on the Zunis divides
their narratives into two groups: the "chimiky'ana'kowa (origin
story) . . . and the telapnaaswe (tales) . . . . The chimiky'ana'kowa
is regarded as literally true, even by some white-collar Zunis with
Christian leanings, but telapnaaswe are regarded as fiction."¹

These suppositions are generalizations with many exceptions.
For example, in the Laguna Pueblo there are tales about living local
people that fit neither of Tedlock's groups, for they are regarded as
ture, and are nowhere near being origin stories.

Stith Thompson agrees that "chimiky'ana'kowa" is a valid category
saying, "origin myths of a sort are found over a large territory."²
But Thompson includes another group that "concerns the life of human
beings under conditions at least remotely resembling the present."³
Unlike Tedlock, he does not presume belief or disbelief in his

³Ibid., p. xviii.
description of any of his three categories.

One of these categories Thompson devotes entirely to "the tale that is relating the deeds of a trickster." He is in good company in placing such importance on this figure. Paul Radin devoted an entire study to it. In his introduction to The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology he says:

"Few myths have so widespread a distribution as the one known by the name of 'the Trickster,' which we are presenting here. For few can we so confidently assert that they belong to the oldest expressions of mankind. Few other myths have persisted with their fundamental content unchanged. The Trickster myth is found in clearly recognizable form among the simplest aboriginal tribes and among the complex."

Echoing exactly the sentiments of Jung and others who are interested in an image's psychological permanence, Radin also says: "Manifestly we are here in the presence of a figure and a theme or themes which have a special and permanent appeal and an unusual attraction for mankind from the very beginning of civilization." Through the generations, Trickster has often been portrayed by a Coyote. In Radin's study, Karl Kerényi characterizes him as "the prototype of Reynard the Fox, whose equivalent for some tribes was the coyote."

Leslie Silko has chosen Coyote from her Pueblo's oral tradition for the characteristics he traditionally embodies, and for the relationship of these characters to modern political themes.

---

4Ibid., p. xviii.
6Ibid., p. ix.
In her poem, "Toe'osh: A Laguna Coyote Story," Silko begins by pointing out how the main character came to her through oral tradition: "In the wintertime/ at night/ we tell coyote stories/ and drink Spanada by the stove."8

"My great-grandmother had a daughter-in-law who knows a great many of the old stories," says Silko. "Her name is Susie Reyes Marmon and is almost 100 years old now."9 This aunt is the "she" in the next few lines of the poem which say ". . . things like that/ are always happening to him,/ that's what she said, anyway."10

But this is not the first time the cunning animal has been stopped in his orally transmitted tracks to be captured in writing. Aesop used the fox as a symbol for trickster in the fable of Maitre Reynard whose flattery gets the crow to drop the cheese from his beak.

J. Bronowski, who is best known for his brilliant series and book The Ascent of Man, talks about the Trickster and mentions the Aesop fable as one of his many contexts. He goes on to describe this figure as "the picato, the spivvy fox,"11 and alludes to the tricky character in Ben Jonson's "Volpone, or, The Fox of Venice."

The leading character is an old man, Volpone, who is feigning death to trick his friends into bringing him gifts. He is playing on their greed as well, for in bringing fine things, each expects to be included in the wealthy man's will. All the characters are personified

8Silko, Laguna Woman, p. 9.


10Silko, Laguna Woman, p. 9.

animals, a raven, a crow, a gadfly, a vulture, and Volpone himself
is, of course, a fox, whose actions are laced with all the trickery
expected of this traditional figure.\(^\text{12}\)

Stith Thompson records several Native American stories about
the coyote in which the sly characteristics of his European counterpart
are present. The Maidu show him as a liar, the Utes and the
Jicarilla attribute to him the ability to trick other animals and
persons for goods or honors.\(^\text{13}\) In Radin's work, the Winnebago versions
are full of allusions to Trickster's conniving nature.

Silko includes this image of Coyote as a sly, cunning creature.
She repeats, as a part of the poem, a Navajo account of Coyote's
exploits.

But the Navajos say he won a contest once.
It was to see who could sleep out in a
snow storm the longest
and Coyote waited until chipmunk badger and
skunk were all
curled up under the snow
and then he uncovered himself and slept all
night
inside
and before morning he got up and went out again
and waited until the others got up before he
came
in to take the prize.\(^\text{14}\)

But, another characteristic of Coyote, ironically, is his
stupidity. Radin explains it by saying, "Trickster is at one and
the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes

\(^{12}\) Ben Jonson, "Volpone, or the Fox of Venice," in The Literature of
England, ed. George K. Anderson and William E. Buckler (Glenview, Ill.:

\(^{13}\) Thompson, Tales of the North American Indians, pp. 24-70.

\(^{14}\) Silko, Laguna Woman, p. 9.
and who is always daped himself.  

So it happens at the end of Jonson's play that Volpone himself is tricked. He utters forlornly, "This is called the mortifying of a Fox."  

Chaucer picked out of oral tradition a tale about the fox in which there are elements of the Aesop fable, but the fox comes out the loser. In Canterbury Tales, this cunning animal flatters a rooster who subsequently ends up in the fox's mouth. But, Trickster here is fooled by his own methods into opening his mouth and thus freeing his prey.  

Stith Thompson records the American Indian versions in which the Trickster's trickery backfires. In one instance, the Nez Perce show him as the loser in a story similar to the Aesop fable and Chaucer's tale.  

Silko turns to this contradictory aspect of Coyote's character to make a political point about the people of the Laguna Pueblo. Folklore and politics are not strange to one another. They are quite compatible and often even necessary to each other. Betty Wang in "Folksongs as Regulators of Politics" presents orally transmitted protest songs that served as propaganda during the rebellion against the Manchu Dynasty. They helped establish the ruling class as enemy, for they came from the lay-people, passed on from person to person, full of

18Thompson, Tales of the North American Indians, p. 73.
images of the common people's plight. 19

The anti-British sentiments in Ireland spurred many an artist on to rediscover and use the Gaelic language to enhance the native identity. William Butler Yeats was at the front of this movement. Like Silko, he used in his poetry the songs, heroes, and even the language of his folk. James Joyce in Ulysses demonstrates his support of the Irish folk movement in fiction. Ironically, however, in this passage, where a lower class working woman is confronted by an educated Englishman, it is he that tries to teach her her roots:

Haines spoke to her again a longer speech, confidently.   
- Irish, Buck Mulligan said. Is there Gaelic on you?   
- I thought it was Irish, she said, by the sound of it.   
Are you from the west, sir?   
- I am an Englishman, Haines answered.   
- He's English, Buck Mulligan said, and he thinks we ought to speak Irish in Ireland.   
- Sure we ought to, the old woman said, and I'm ashamed I don't speak the language myself. I'm told it's a grand language by them that knows. 20

The point Joyce makes with this turnabout is one that some folklorists do not like to face. The folk are often not as interested in their traditional roots as the folklorist. Often, they are more interested in economic survival. Whereas what Bluestein says is true—the folk are the authors of the stories and language that the elite use in their art forms—they are often the last to know when those items become revitalized. This is a proletarian matter, for the fact is that the working classes simply do not have the time, cannot afford the luxury of studying and using archaic genres. An item of folklore then, for political reasons, often makes a complete circle from folk


to elite and then from elite back to folk.

Sometimes, the empowered have used their ability to study the folk as a means to exploit them. This is true of the Nazi methods of recruiting peasant support. Images and songs from their environment were used as psychological levers to pry the present away from the farm and into the Nazi army.

No matter what the source, any movement to restore items of folklore to the mainstream has some, if not many, positive repercussions. Joseph Campbell in *The Flight of the Wild Gander* describes an instance in which politics started an entire school of folklore.

About the middle of the 19th century, a strong nationalist movement had begun to mature in Finland. Buffeted for five hundred years between Sweden and Russia, the little nation had been annexed in 1809 by Czar Alexander I. Since the close of the 18th century, Swedish had been the official language. A group of young patriots now began to agitate for the restoration of the native spirit and the native tongue.21

This movement involved, among others, Julius Krohn whose research of folklore led to a style of study called the Finnish method which has been invaluable to folklorists.

The underlying force of most of these and other political investigations of folklore is its power to influence the masses. As Alan Dundes says, "One of the most important functions of folklore is its service as a vehicle for social protest."22

Just as in Ireland and Finland there was a culture within a nation trying to reassert its separate identity, the Indians in America


22 Dundes, *The Study of Folklore*, p. 308.
are trying to be recognized as an independent community and they are using folklore to do that. "You might say," says one Native American, "we are the only people in the melting pot who have kept their culture. And we aim to keep it." Some Jewish or Polish groups might disagree with the notion that they and others have not retained a strong separate cultural identity, but the point is, the Indians have a larger task in maintaining theirs since they are a conquered people. Folkways are a major part of their artillery.

An author writing on the contemporary Indian remarks on the efforts "to modernize the old tribal ways so that they will not only survive but will be revitalized." Vine Deloria, a widely publicized spokesperson for the Native American, agrees with this contention. He sees the emphasis on tradition as a part of the Indian political movement, saying, "Among the Indian activists a tremendous interest in the tribal religions manifested itself early in the movement."

Of course, the main thrust of the Indians' protest is aimed at the white people. Deloria connects their oppression with the revitalization. "We have just begun to see the revival of Indian tribal religions at a time when the central value of Indian life—its land—is under incredible attack from all sides."

Tradition is often a tool of radicals who envision an overall victory of the Indians' beliefs and ways. A writer, who calls himself

---

24 Ibid., p. 155.
26 Ibid., p. 258.
Saupauquant writes in the Native American alternative newspaper, Acoesasne Notes:

There is something very important happening in this Creation. There is a Purification coming—and there is a movement of those who value the lives of the unborn enough to want to survive it. A vision is becoming clearer as we talk together and listen to each other, to the teachings of the Old Ones and the Voice of the Great Silence. 27

The revolutionary aspect of the Indians move to revitalize their culture is seen in this statement by Roy Bongartz: "All over the U.S. and Canada, he, Mad Bear, spreads word of an Indian rebirth: as the white man destroys his own world with guns and garbage, the Indians will inhabit the land once again." 28

Silko uses the figure of Coyote as a symbol for the dichotomy that modern Indians feel they embody. They are at once both strong and defeated, just as Trickster is at once clever and victimized. Specifically with "Toe'oh: A Laguna Coyote Story," he is the essence of the people of the Laguna Pueblo and their relationship to whites.

Silko explains that the "white men came to Acoma and Laguna a hundred years ago" and married Indian women. "Some of their descendants are howling in the hills southeast of Laguna." 29 Like the Coyote they emulate, the Laguna people, including Silko's family who were specifically the product of white men mixing with Indian women, can be very tricky. In this passage they exploit the attempts of politicians to win their votes:


29 Silko, Laguna Woman, p. 10.
One year
the politicians got fancy
at Laguna.
They went door to door with hams and turkeys
and they gave them to anyone who promised
to vote for them.
On election day all the people
stayed home and ate turkey
and laughed.30

Later in this poem Coyote, who represents the Laguna people,
once again makes a fool out of a politician. This time it is the
Trans-Western pipeline president who is manipulated into waiting all
day only to be told to come back the next day.

But, unfortunately, Coyote can also be a victim of his own nature
which is often so relaxed that he is taken off guard. Silko draws
from her great aunt's stories to show this in the poem:

They were after picnic food
that the special dancers left
down below the cliff.
And Toe'osh and his cousins hung themselves
down over the cliff
holding each other's tail in their mouth mak-
ing a coyote chain
until someone in the middle farted
and the guy behind him opened his
mouth to say "What stinks?" and they
all went tumbling down, like that.31

References to Coyote's appetite and body functions are common
to stories about him. His lackadaisical nature often causes him to
come "tumbling down" just as the Laguna people, and all Indians, come
tumbling down in the face of the white man's politics because of their
inadequacy to overcome it.

Finally, Silko makes the parallel between her people and Coyote

30Ibid.

31Ibid., p. 11.
even tighter by making him one and the same with Simon Ortiz, a fellow Indian and writer. She addresses the rebellious aspect of Trickster's character, which is perhaps the most important part of him. The last lines of the poem do this, using an incident in Ortiz's travels in Wisconsin:

Howling and roaring
Toe'osh scattered white people
out of bars all over Wisconsin
He bumped into them at the door
until they said
'Excuse me'
And the way Simon meant it
was for 300 or maybe 400 years.52

This poem is Silko's way of replying to the alleged oppression she and her people have suffered at the hands of the white status quo. The rebellious tone is indicative of the fact that although they are defeated, they are still defiant. Without the defiance, there would be a definite imbalance in their psychological make-up. They would simply be defeated.

Silko chose Coyote for the obvious ties he has to her personal past and her entire culture and for the way his legendary nature fits into her purpose. But, the animal figure has had wide appeal in many cultures and her poem has appeal to many audiences because of some deeper implications of this creature's attraction.

Charles Alexander Eastman explains: "The Trickster hero is as much a personification of modern man's aspirations as he is of primitive man's."33

32Ibid.

One of these aspirations according to Radin is for humans to deal with their primeval origins, which some say are still with us in our collective memory. Trickster "represents not only the undifferentiated and distant past, but likewise the undifferentiated present within every individual. This constitutes his universal and persistent attraction."34 To Jung, the attraction involves the collective unconscious where our beastial past exists and taunts us with anarchic and crude impulses. "The trickster is a collective shadow figure," says Jung, "an epitome of all the inferior traits of character in individuals."35

This is a negative way of describing the need for Coyote. His rebellion is seen as a result of interior motivations. In the case of the Indians the rebellion is politically motivated. Radin, in the following passage, describes it as a necessary balance to the facade of an ordered existence:

"The trickster is a figure who is the exponent and personification of the life of the body: never wholly subdued, ruled by lust and hunger, forever running into pain and injury, cunning and stupid in action. Disorder belongs to the totality of life, and the spirit of this disorder is the trickster. His function in archaic society, or rather the function of his mythology, of the tales told about him, is to add disorder to order and so to make a whole, to render possible, within the fixed bounds of what is permitted, an experience of what is not permitted.36

J. Bronowski speaks perfectly to this point and to Silko's use of Coyote in stating that he is the symbol for rebellion against authority. He pulls together all the manifestations of this figure and shows the

---

34Radin, The Trickster, p. 168.
36Kerenyi, "Trickster in Greek Mythology," p. 185.
simple fact of his revolutionary character. He attributes to folklore
the ability to get down to the level of real human psychological
needs:

The nimble heroes of folklore are neither like Shelley
nor like Christ. They are not crusaders. They do not lead
one social order to overthrow another. For they do not
represent a new authority but no authority. From Jack who
climbed the beanstalk to Till Eulenspiegel, and through the
pages of the Grimm Brothers, the mischievous hero is flatly
at odds with all authority. Like Robin Hood, he fights for
the wild forest against the city.37

Silko ties all of these views together in her poem's use of
Coyote. He is clearly a revolutionary, representing the Indian
against the authority of the whites. And so, the poem appeals to an
Indian audience. But, he is also the representative of everyone's
primeval tendency toward anarchy. This is how he appeals to something
in everyone. He is the projection of the desire to disregard all
order for the natural chaos experienced by our animal ancestors and
retained in the collective unconscious. This is by no means neces-
sarily negative. As a matter of fact, Coyote is a welcome image to
the Indians, for they have always prided themselves on their closeness
to their animal roots, and the order they have problems with is that
which is imposed on them by the whites.

CHAPTER III

THE JOURNEY HOME

"My children," he said.
"I have found you!
Come on out.
Come home again.
Your mother, the earth, is crying for you
Come home children, children come home."

Leslie Silko, "Ceremony."

The tension between Anglo and Indian is an important theme in Leslie Silko's work. In a very literal way, she herself embodies that struggle. "I suppose at the core of my writing is the attempt to identify what it is to be a half-breed or mixed blooded person; what it is to grow up neither white nor fully traditional Indian."

But, it is obvious that growing up in the Laguna Pueblo, Silko identifies most with her Indian side. Oral tradition, with its stories about ethnic history, plays a major part in sculpting the poet's ideas about her identity, as has been stated earlier. The stories have taught her and others who they are.

One of the stories in the Laguna Pueblo oral tradition is about the journey made thousands of years ago by the Indians when they crossed what is now the Pacific Ocean from Asia to America. Silko explains that she heard about the migration in all its mythic splendor from her great aunt, Susie Reyes Marmon.

---

1Silko, Laguna Woman, p. 35.
About ten years ago she told a story which she said (from her knowledge of archaeological theories) seemed to corroborate the theory about a Bering Sea route. This was a story she heard from her grandmother as a child and she said she thought of it immediately after an anthropologist mentioned the Bering Sea theory. The story goes that people had been traveling for a long time when they came to the edge of a vast body of water—a great ocean. They sent scouts up and down the water edge to see if there was any land route around it or through it. They realized they could go no further, and they stood on the beach together looking at the ocean, and they saw a giant sea turtle swimming toward them. I suppose they were hungry because some people wanted to kill and eat it, but others stopped them saying that maybe this creature could help them out. He spoke to them and identified himself as their grandfather, and he told them to get on his back and he would carry them across the ocean to another land. He did and that was how they were able to cross the ocean and how they were once again able to continue their journey south.  

In Stith Thompson's system of organization, this fits into the category "origin myths." The Maidu story of creation, which Thompson records, has many of the same elements which are in the account Silko tells, including a vast body of water and a friendly turtle.

Turtle was gone a long time. He was gone six years; and when he came up, he was covered with green slime, he had been down so long. When he reached the top of the water, the only earth he had was the very little under his nails: the rest had all washed away. Earth-Initiate took with his right hand a stone knife ... and carefully scraped the earth out from under Turtle's nails. He put the earth in the palm of his hand, and rolled it about till it was round; it was as large as a small pebble. He laid it on the stern of the raft ... The fourth time he looked, it was as big as the world, the raft was aground, and all around were mountains as far as he could see. The raft came ashore at Ta'dolko, and the place can be seen today.

Although this is more a creation myth, the migration aspect has a great deal in common with Silko's aunt's story. These common elements are included in Silko's poem "Prayer to the Pacific." They are a part

---

2Silko, "Introduction," p. 5.

3Thompson, Tales of the North American Indians, p. xvii.

4Ibid., p. 25.
of a personal sojourn in which the poet confronts her cultural origins.

I travelled to the ocean
distant
from my southwest land of sandrock
to the moving blue water
Big as the myth of origin.5

Abraham Chapman in Literature of the American Indians: Views and Interpretations talks about the Indian writer's debt to these and other myths. He uses Silko's poem as an example.

For the American Indian writers' mythic memories are entwined with historical experience of centuries on this continent, and the archetypal pattern of historical movement is not from West to East, from Europe to America, but from East to West, from dim origins in a far past in Asia to a new maturation in America.6

In "Prayer to the Pacific" Silko stands on an isolated beach and contemplates her "dim origins" as she looks "to China/ where ocean herself was born."7 Several specific images from the poem are annotated by Silko herself for Chapman. An examination of these, and of the poem as a total expression shows that "Prayer to the Pacific" is a part of what Carl G. Jung calls "the process of individuation."8

Individuation is a very large concept. Basically it is "the process of psychic growth" and results in "the totality of the psyche."9 There are several parts to this process, all of which take place in the

5Silko, Laguna Woman, p. 23.
6Chapman, Literature of the American Indian, p. 4.
7Silko, Laguna Woman, p. 23.
subconscious at first, and then surface to the conscious mind in certain images called archetypes. At the center of all the psyche's activities is the Self which is the strong inner core and the motivating force of individuation. One of the things the Self must direct is a confrontation with an ancestral and racial past.

Silko confronts her mythic and historical origins with all her senses. In "Prayer to the Pacific" she shows that she invests them thoroughly on her desire to relate to the ancestral experience.

Squat in the wet sand and speak to Ocean
I return to you turquoise, the red coral you sent us
sister spirit of Earth
Four round stones in my pocket
I carry back the Ocean to suck and taste.10

The important role of stones in the poem is a vital sign that the process of individuation is involved, for the "Self is symbolized with special frequency in the form of a stone."11 A disciple of Jung, von Franz, devotes several pages to a discussion of this archetype in an article about individuation. He explains that "crystals and stones are especially apt symbols of the Self because of the just-so-ness of their nature." The solidity and stability of them are qualities one must have access to in order to approach individuation. Von Franz believes that people react to these vital yet sometimes hidden resources within themselves by keeping stones ceremonially and informally. "Many people cannot refrain from picking up stones of a slightly unusual color or shape and keeping them without knowing why they do this."12

10Silko Laguna Woman, p. 23.
11Von Franz, Man and His Symbols, p. 221.
12Ibid., p. 223.
Silko explains that she, as the poem describes, actually did pick up stones from the beach.\textsuperscript{13} "I did," she says, "in fact that day on the beach pick up four round stones and put them in my pocket."\textsuperscript{14} "It is as if the stones hold a living mystery that fascinates them," von Franz says of the people who tend to pick up these psychic symbols. He adds that "men have collected stones since the beginning of time and have apparently assumed that certain ones were the containers of the life-force with all its mystery." Certainly there was a great deal of mystery to the stone that yielded forth the sword which gave King Arthur his chance to realize Britain's ideals. What this and other stones symbolize is, according to von Franz "the simplest and deepest experience—the experience of something eternal that man can have in those moments when he feels immortal and unalterable."\textsuperscript{15}

(Could the people who marketed "pet rocks" have understood this?)

Equally significant is the use of the number four in the poem. Jung explains that it is "a number which was sacred to the ancients; the Pythagorean tetractys and the four directions of the weather vane are examples. Four is also the number of the basic psychological functions: sensation, thinking, feeling, intuition."\textsuperscript{16} As it relates to individuation, four indicates "the totality of the psychic

\textsuperscript{13}Here the writer must interject that after walking out into her Southwest backyard she discovered she had carried in a very ordinary stone that intrigued her because of its smoothness. Several stones adorn the writer's house, and were dismissed as the result of a silly whim until reading the passage by von Franz in which the significance of the action was revealed.

\textsuperscript{14}Silko

\textsuperscript{15}Von Franz, \textit{Man and His Symbols}, p. 227.

\textsuperscript{16}Jung, \textit{The Integration of the Personality}, p. 40.
structure," which is what the process tries to achieve. Van Franz notes "that the symbolic structures that seem to refer to the process of individuation tend to be based on the motif of the number four."\(^17\) So, it is no coincidence that in "Prayer to the Pacific," "Grandfather Turtle rolled in the sand four times" before leaving the people in their new home.\(^18\)

Another indication that this poem describes a psychological journey is that it focuses on a vast body of water. "Water is the commonest symbol for the unconscious."\(^19\) Specifically, a journey involving the sea is a common archetype in Jungian psychology called "the night sea journey." "Jung draws an analogy between the 'way of individuation' and the archetypal image of the night sea journey ... the process of development demands a return to the beginning."\(^20\)

In this sense, sea conjures up the notion of the primeval waters where all life began. But the symbol can be more historically specific.

The civilized beginnings for Silko and others with Indian blood is somewhere in Asia. Therefore, the sea for her is a direct symbol of the corporal tie to distant relatives (ones perhaps a little nearer than the amoeba of the primeval waters). Obviously, this journey back to familial origins implies a physical link as well as a psychological one. According to Jung, water "is also the fluid of the body ruled by impulse, blood and the flowing of blood, the odour


\(^{19}\) Jung, *The Integration of the Personality*, p. 67.

of the beast, and corporeality weighted with emotion." 21 The body and soul, then, are one in this quest for individuation and identity. Silko expresses the physical involvement with the experience in several references to the senses, especially taste. She takes the salty stones "to carry back the ocean/ to suck and taste." And at the end of the poem, the poet is "swallowing raindrops clear from China." 22 It is as though she were trying, consciously and physically, to realize the subconscious tie to her ancestors dormant until this episode in her life.

The Jungian name for the subconscious tie to our earliest ancestors is "the collective unconscious." He says in a lecture on poetry and psychology:

I am assuming that the work of art we propose to analyse, as well as being symbolic has its source not just in the personal unconscious of the poet, but in a sphere of unconscious mythology whose primordial images are the common heritage of mankind. I have called this sphere the collective unconscious to distinguish it from the personal unconscious. 23

Chapman has already explained that many Indian writers use an inherited racial memory in their works that is replete with images from dim origins. The sea not only represents the unconscious, but also is often "the symbol of the collective unconscious." 24 During the process of individuation, the personality must reconcile its uniqueness with its cultural and racial identity. It must listen to the collective memory as well as the other voices that tie the individual to a group.

21 Jung, The Integration of the Personality, p. 68.


24 Jung, The Integration of the Personality, p. 103.
of people. This, in effect, is what "Prayer to the Pacific" is all about.

Silko demonstrates that many of the images she chose for the poem were compulsive choices from an historic store of Pueblo Indian symbols that she was consciously unaware of. The "four round stones" are an example of this.

It has both a personal and a collective significance. I wasn't thinking about it then; but later on, as I wrote the poem I saw that the number of stones was a ceremonial number, and in years since then I have learned about the uses of small round stones gathered from sacred places. I know of only a few uses, although there are a great many. Often I find out about what I have done months or years later, when I discuss those seemingly innocent gestures with those who are more knowledgeable.25

Another Indian writer, N. Scott Momaday, feels that for the Native American the collective psyche is an innate part of the personal psyche. "There is no distinction between the individual and the racial experience," he says, "even as there was none between the mythical and the historical."26

The very existence of this paper is testimony to the amount of folkloric archetypes and images that are in Silko's work. There is a significant amount of proof that both a collective memory and an oral tradition are responsible for the character of her poetry. One scholar insists that all Indian writers include a larger voice than the one belonging to the isolated individual in their works saying, "The purpose of Native American literature is never one of pure self-expression."27

In closing the discussion of "Prayer to the Pacific" Chapman praises Indian literature for its special texture. "The rich and unique mythic memories of the contemporary American Indian writers, and the qualities of enrichment and diversity they add to contemporary American literature cannot be overestimated, but they have not yet received the critical recognition they deserve." 28

This goes hand in hand with the fact that generally folklorists who study literature have slighted the mythic qualities in literature for their deepest significance. Ernest Jones in "Psychoanalysis and Folklore" writes: "I would only point out that the data of folklore are replete with examples of symbolism in the psychoanalytical sense, and that the interpretation of such symbols not only illuminates the inner meaning of the data but can constantly be confirmed by comparative study of allied material." 29 Unfortunately, Roger Abrahams was accurate when he implied that folklore in literature has too often been seen merely as "a quaint setting." 30 Few have applied the notion that "myths are first and foremost psychic manifestations that represent the nature of the psyche." 31 When they are used by contemporary artists they are an indication of the continuity of some basic facts about the human character.

28 Chapman, Literature of the American Indians, p. 6.


31 Jung, The Integration of the Personality, p. 54.
One of these facts is our need to relate to our cultural identity and ancestral past. It is part of the process of individuation to recognize the historical and ethnic parts of our personality. The success of Alex Haley's novel, Roots, and its television version is proof that groups of people, especially minorities who have not been constantly exposed to their background, need to know where they came from.

As a matter of fact, Roots also involves a sea journey, for part of the Black past is forced migration across the Atlantic ocean. Many historically based literary works, even if the history is legendary, center on a sea journey. Of course, the most obvious example is Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*, in which the hero spends many years on a sea voyage to his home. Then there is the well known story of Columbus: "In fourteen hundred and ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue." It is a story all American children hear as an explanation of their presence on this continent, even if the facts do not apply to them. Michael Edward Melody writes in a recent article on Indian mythology:

> As a treaty commissioner once said, 'They (Indian children) will only know the history of their fathers by a tradition and the history of the white man's books.' Tragically these words were prophetic. As a whole the white man's books largely reflect the point of view of a conqueror.  

It is the claim to their land and their special relationship to it that rankles the Indians most when they consider what has happened to America since Columbus arrived. Scott Momaday recognizes the Native American's unique interest in the newest onslaught of

---

ecological consciousness. "Ecology is perhaps the most important subject of our time. I can't think of an issue in which the Indian has more authority or a greater state. If there is one thing which truly distinguishes him, it is surely his regard of and for the natural world."33

A rapport with other creatures and with nature in general appears in all Indian mythologies and legends. Silko writes about her great aunt's commitment to this relationship. "She told us that there really was a time long ago when animals and humans talked to each other or at least communicated. I still believe this."34

Silko's on-going faith shows in "Prayer to the Pacific." She tells of the help her people got from "Grandfather Turtle," and of the ocean, who she personifies as "sister spirit of Earth."35 Even today, according to the poem, the ocean still responds to her people.

... from that time
immemorial
as the old people say
rainclouds drift from the west
gift from the ocean.36

This feeling of closeness to the earth is not just a slogan to the Indian. "American Indians hold their lands—places—as having the highest possible meaning, and all their statements are made with this reference point in mind."37 The traditional feelings about nature have, like other themes in Indian folklore, been transferred to the political arena. "The intensity with which the tribal Indian expresses

34Silko, "Introduction," p. 5.
35Silko, Laguna Woman, p. 23.
36Ibid., p. 24.
37Deloria, God is Red, p. 75.
these emotional ties to his land has lately taken on the quality of tribal nationalism. One actively political manifestation of the emotional ties occurred in 1965 when Paul Bernal, a spokesperson for the Taos Indians, led a movement to restore Blue Lake to the Pueblos. In nearly every Native American struggle the desire to keep or regain control of the land is the central issue.

Unfortunately, most of these efforts fail. It is obvious that the claims of the first people have been voided, and converted by technological "progress" into a comparative wasteland. In contrast, whites have shown a limited feeling of responsibility toward the land. But with folklore as one of their few weapons, the Indian's can hope to retain their traditional values and identity.

In "Prayer to the Pacific" there is a strong sense of melancholy. It is as though the poet was slightly weighted under all the losses suffered by the Indian people behind her on this continent. The tone is one of longing, too; one lone person stands on a beach staring toward the distant origins of her Indian half. There is a vague feeling that the poet would like to cross again and go back to the place and time where there were no whites. But the poem's journey is, after all, a psychological one for the poet. So, the experiences of her Indian ancestors are only realized as a part of her mental identity. Just as she swallows the "raindrops/ clear from China," Silko is swallowing the realities of her past and present.

38 Ibid., p. 258.
39 Ibid., p. 9.
CHAPTER IV

POETRY, PSYCHE, AND FOLKLORE

Long time ago
in the beginning
there were no white people in this world
there was nothing European.
And this world would have gone on like that
except for one thing:
witchery.

Leslie Silko, "Ceremony."

In The Singer of Tales, Albert Lord explains that traditional
epic poetry is sculpted by oral tradition, by singers who learn and
recite the tales with the mnemonic aid of such things as rime and
rhythm. "The form of their songs hangs upon their having to learn
and practice their art without reading and writing."¹ This link
between folklore and verse was transferred to the printed page as
demonstrated by the great epic poems that were shaped by such men as
Homer. Lord explains that as the oral tradition proceeds "eventually
someone approached the singer and asked him to tell the songs so
that he could write down the words."² Although the literate poet
separate the text from the performance, he retains the form, the
rime and rhythm. In this way, folklore and literature meet in verse.

One student of poetry and folklore has stated, "The use of
poetic devices—rhyme, alliteration, assonance, parallel construction

¹Albert B. Lord, The Singer of Tales (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard
²Ibid., p. 124.
and rhythm—is to make folklore remembered.\(^3\)

But there is more than just a traditional, structural reason for the connection between folklore and poetry. There is also a psychological reason which the great poet intuitively draws on to make his or her work effective on the deepest levels. Therefore, poetry, psychology, and folklore are interconnected for the skilled artist.

In analyzing this connection one must first recognize the long standing marriage of poetry and folklore as it has continued since the ancient epics. Already, Lord has been mentioned along with his articulation of the link between tale and verse and the subsequent transmission to written literature. Homer is the best example of the earliest "poets" whose epics were written down. But as time moved on, poets assumed less of the role of scribe and more of the role of interpreter and artist.

Geoffrey Chaucer used folklore in poetry to appeal to the human love of humor and romance. The Canterbury Tales relates entertaining verse stories in which the oral tradition is actually a basis, for they concern a group of medieval pilgrims who "were notorious tale-tellers."\(^4\) "Collections of stories linked by such a device were common in the later Middle Ages."\(^5\)

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, David Bidney points out, "myths could be interpreted as moral allegories or purely


\(^5\)Ibid.
poetic ... representations of human emotions and aspirations." The folklore became more than just an end in itself. It provided the poets with a means by which to express their philosophic views on the greater concerns of life such as love and religion. Christopher Marlowe's "Hero and Leander" is a good example of this as it is an epic which uses a well known legend to promote the poet's notions of romantic love. It is "a poem of the mythological-erotic type which was highly popular in the 1590's."  

In the same general time period, Milton wrote "Paradise Lost" which uses the mythology of the Bible to put forth the poet's religious convictions and his very concrete ideas on the interpretation of Christian ethics.

During the Romantic period of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, according to David Bidney "poetic myth became a subject of veneration and was regarded as the mainspring of human culture." Virtually every poet devoted much of his verse to a theme which was either born in or supported by classical mythology. This is true, in both senses, of John Keats' "The Eve of St. Agnes." "St. Agnes, martyred ca. 303 at the age of thirteen, is the patron saint of virgins. Legend has it that if a virtuous young girl performs the proper ritual, she will dream of her future husband on the evening before St. Agnes' Day." Keats takes this folkloric seed, the archetypal experience of first love, and develops it into a

---

poetic exploration of the psyche and its rite of passage from childhood to adulthood.

As Keats' poem indicates, poetry and folklore as a unit was moving away from being the rhythmic presentation of legendary plots. Yet still, the folklore is there, represented by its elements, brief allusions to incidents and characters. With these archetypes touched on, their essence is transmitted leaving more room for the creative pen.

Yeats is one who can represent the poet's use of folklore in a wide and deep sense. His purposes are both political and emotional, for he uses the very language and heroes of the Irish nationals to address himself to their political struggle as well as to the friends and family who were among them. "The Stolen Child" is one of his poems which has "a quiet precision of natural imagery, country place names and themes from folklore." "The heroic legends of old Ireland and the folk traditions of the modern Irish countryside"\textsuperscript{10} were the foundations on which Yeats built his poems.

Thus we see that as poetry evolved, myths in poetry have tended to be reduced to their elements, archetypal images. The poets use the archetypes within their own creations to enhance them as nothing else can.

Why has this occurred in poetry perhaps more than prose fiction? The development of the novel must be considered in answering this question, keeping in mind that poetry developed as a device to transmit folklore:

\textsuperscript{10}Abrams, \textit{The Norton Anthology of English Literature}, 2:1340.
The novel as a genre provides a specifically instructive measure of a culture caught up in the dynamics of its own technological instruments because it is the only major genre that comes into being after the invention of printing, and its own development—structural or thematic as well as economic—is intimately tied up with printing.11

So, perhaps it is not mere whim that in her novel, Ceremony, Silko breaks from the prose to deal with mythical motifs in verse form. These mythical elements are the tools by which she expresses cultural and personal concerns. The psychological implications of these concerns have to do with the formation of the poet's personality through a process called individuation which has already been described in this paper. There are several components which make up the personality and are best explained by Jungian psychology. First, one must recognize the connection Jung makes between poetry and the unconscious.

If one is familiar with Jungian psychology it should be obvious that where poetry is traditionally connected to folklore it must also be connected to the unconscious since Jung held as the basis of his work the definite correlation between the dreams of his patients and mythological archetypes. It takes only one step to arrive at the equation, or theorem that if poetry is related to folklore and folklore is related to the unconscious, then poetry must have an equally direct relationship to the unconscious.

The very nature of dreams and myth is similar. In the dream state, when the ego is subdued, there is no distinction between real and ideal, no dependence on rational time sequence and plot development"; in myth there is no distinction between real and ideal, the

image is the thing."12

As poetry has evolved it has become more and more dependent on the image. Modern poetry is not restricted by sentence structure, and it has never been restricted by realistic plot. The poet uses images and archetypes as a painter uses colors. Jung explains how powerful a dimension these archetypes add to verse in an essay entitled "On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry:"

The impact of an archetype, whether it takes the form of immediate experience, or is expressed through the spoken word, stirs us because it summons up a voice that is stronger than our own. Whoever speaks in primordial images speaks with a thousand voices; he enthralls and overpowers, while at the same time he lifts the idea he is seeking to express out of the occasional and the transitory into the realm of the ever-enduring... That is the secret of great art, and of its effect upon us."13

It is significant to note that Jung's patient, Miss Miller, often expressed herself through poetry which Jung himself could analyze in terms of its mythical content and psychological meaning. In a poem entitled "The Moth to the Sun" the patient reveals, through the traditional image of a moth flying into a flame, her own psychic state. "It expresses an... intense psychic content."14

Many signs point to the fact that poetry is very often a means of self-expression for the individual, and it is fair to assert that folklore is the self-expression of a group. When these two merge, as they so naturally do, it is the combination of a group and an


13Jung, Spirit in Man, pp. 81-82.

individual identity which is achieved. Silko's identity is intensely tied in with the identity of her particular group, which is the Laguna Pueblo community. Therefore in her work there is a particularly strong fusion of collective and personal motifs.

Inherent in her poetry, by her own admission, is the battle between white and Indian. The group struggle has gone on ever since the white race landed on this continent, and the personal struggle, for Silko exists in her own body and is a result of her individual history. She is a half-breed.

In Ceremony Silko devotes a long passage of verse to a story about the creation of the white race. According to the poem, there was a contest between witches to see who could create the most evil thing. When one witch tells a story about creatures with "white skin . . . like the belly of a fish," the others surrender to this word made flesh, saying, "Okay you win; you take the prize."15 The fact that this poet chooses to create a difference between white and Indian that is tantamount to the difference between good and evil is a significant clue as to the personal feelings she has about those components in her own physiology and psyche.

Jung deals quite a bit with witches and lists them among other personifications of parts of the psyche. "Investigation of the products of the unconscious yields recognizable traces of archetypal structures which coincide with the myth motifs, among them certain types which deserve the name of dominants. These are archetypes like the anima, animus, wise old man, witch, shadow, earth mother,

"What is interesting about them," says Carlos Drake in an article on Jungian psychology and folklore, "is that in the Pueblo tribes, witches are uniformly regarded as harmful; indeed nothing evokes greater anxiety among these people than witches."

In folklore the witch is an extremely common archetype. In southwest folklore, specifically, witchcraft, as Drake points out, is a very important element, although many of the Indians are very reluctant to talk about it.

According to Marc Simmons, author of *Witchcraft in the Southwest*, information about this aspect of Pueblo lore is in smaller supply for the outsider than is the case for most other aspects of the culture. "This is easily understood when it is realized that the Indians are loath to discuss the subject in any detail." The Navajos, who live in close proximity to the Pueblo dwellers are the most intensely involved with witchcraft in the area. This is because they not only have borrowed from the European notion of the witch, but also, "during the past several centuries they appear to have borrowed, elaborated upon, and integrated into their own ritual patterns many elements of supernaturalism belonging to the village Indians." In their community the scope of witchcraft's influence is obvious.

Silko's encounter with Navajo witchcraft occurred when she taught at the Chinle reservation. She quickly realized the effect

---

19 Ibid., p. 135.
this element of folk belief has on the community. "Everyone has stories about witches, both past and present," she explains. "I think they are more obsessed with witches than the Laguna people." Silko explains the impression it made on her. "It had a big impact. Similar terrain to Laguna, but some intense things with witchcraft that come out in the novel." A Navajo man, Elroy Kaye, read the poem in Ceremony and does recognize elements from the folklore of his people. "It's written like a traditional prayer," he says, referring to the part when the witch sends his story about the new race to the cosmic forces. But Kaye says the components are the only things clearly drawn from the folklore of the Indians he is familiar with; the whole, however, seems to be, in his judgment, totally fabricated by the poet. "I've never heard anything exactly like this. There are stories about contests and about witches, but nothing about making white people like this." Silko herself admits, "The creation of whites in this way just went with the whole novel, the evil and the destruction of the hero's world and his values. It's not something I thought about intellectually, it just fit in." She was reluctant to elaborate, perhaps because the interviewer was a member of that maligned race.

On the surface, this treatment of the whites is sound as a political statement. The Indians, as a group, have indeed suffered at

20Silko, interview.
21Ibid.
22Elroy Kaye, interview held at his home, Albuquerque, New Mexico, July 10, 1978.
23Silko, interview.
the hands of the Europeans. But there is an added dimension. The poet, as a half-breed, has white blood in her and is therefore maligning part of herself. The psychic component most often cast in an unsavory, destructive light is "the inferior side of the personality, the 'shadow.'" Often, whole races assume the burden of being the "shadow." "These representatives of the so-called 'lower races' stand for the inferior personality of the man."24

Examining the setting, one realizes the good possibility that this poem takes on a psychic meaning. First, the setting is folkloric—a repetition of motifs used locally and universally. "Way up in the lava rock hills/ north of Canocito/ they got together to fool around in caves ... they circles the fire ... Others untied bundles of disgusting objects ... Whorls of skin."25

"Canocito is a local place that is commonly connected to witch meetings," says Silko.26 But, more generally, Marc Simmons shows how widespread the elements in this setting are. "When witches assemble in their murky caves they sit in a circle ... surrounded by baskets of human flesh."27

One of Jung's students remarks "every cave is a womb and at the same time the site of a mystery."28 What better place for the birth of an entire race? And what better way to confront one's origins than to return to the womb?

---

24Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 183.
26Silko, interview.
27Simmons, Witchcraft in the Southwest, p. 140.
The three witches in Shakespeare's Macbeth meet and in effect create the destructive side of a character. They, too, surround a fire and handle flesh. They "round about the caldron go; In the poison'd entrails throw." Merely by their words, they cause a chain of events which is horrible and violent. They create in Macbeth a part of him which is capable of acting out these events.

It is the witches' words that create evil in Silko's poems as well, a story so devastating that the others say "Take it back. Call that story back." But whereas the main motivation for Macbeth was ambition, the whites are motivated to do the evil the witch mentions by fear. "They fear. They fear the world. They destroy what they fear. They fear themselves."

Perhaps Silko fears herself, or at least her white half, and because of this fear, she is motivated to create this story using the well-tried device of witchery. Jung says, "the more a person shrinks from adapting himself to reality, the greater becomes the fear which increasingly besets his path at every point."

The rampant use of specifically Indian folklore in her poetry is part of the proof that Silko prefers the identity of an Indian and wishes to minimize her white identity. Silko wants to be fully Indian although she really is not. Coyote, the mythical revolutionary, helps her rebel, the legend of origins across the sea helps her rebel, the legend of origins across the sea helps her escape, and the witches

29Macbeth 4. 1. 4-5.
30Silko, Ceremony, p. 136.
31Ibid., p. 135.
explain away the part of her which is not Indian, as Mark Simmons puts it, "by providing a native theory of failure."33 "We are reasonably sure," says Carlos Drake, "that a collective shadow figure is involved, a sort of collective scapegoat upon whom all the individual negativities in the tribe can be projected."34 And for Silko personally, the white race is innately tied up with the shadow; it is the personal shadow created by the collective one.

33 Simmons, Witchcraft in the Southwest, p. 5.

CONCLUSION

Folklore in literature is much more than a spice used by artists to flavor their work. Folklore is a power. It transcends both time and spatial limitations. This power, like any other, can be used negatively, as Christa Kamenetsky demonstrates in her studies of Nazi tactics. "Finally," she says, "the folktale was no longer a true reflection of the common peasant folk, but only a medium for the Nazi ideology, and a mouthpiece of racial propaganda."¹ Or folklore can be used to strengthen a defeated culture, as Thomas Green points out about the Tigua Indians in the Southwest. In this case folklore "provides the self-image necessary for the pursuit of nativistic goals."²

When transferred to literature, folklore often retains its political purpose. Thus, it has already descended to a deeper level than being mere decoration. But there is yet another level, one which Jung is most famous for uncovering: the deep-rooted psychological source and function of folklore.

When a poet chooses a bit of traditional lore for a highly serious poem, he or she is recognizing, perhaps subliminally, the impact Jung speaks of. As a matter fact, it can be argued that the poet has a particularly direct relationship with the realm of mytho-

logical imagery and morphology. As S. J. Sackett writes, "It cannot fail to have been observed that many of the forms of folklore use devices in common with poetry. He goes on to say that "poetry . . . arises from and . . . appeals to some of the basic elements of human nature." Certainly this is true of folklore.

The poetry of Leslie Silko uses folklore in three ways: 1) to provide a cultural identity, 2) to express political themes, and 3) to implement the poet's own process of identifying herself. Many students of folklore in literature see the first of these three functions, and several recognize the second. But often, the deeper, psychologically universal themes that folklore represents are over-looked.

Carlos C. Drake in "Jungian Psychology and Its Uses in Folklore" states:

Some psychologists have been criticized, I think justly, for ignoring oral tradition in their tale analyses; often their explications have been made without apparent awareness of diffusion and variation. On the other hand, there have been elaborate studies made of some tale types without any attempt to analyze the meaning of the tales themselves. It is as if one were to become an expert in art history without ever looking at a painting.\(^4\)

This look at a specific and obvious example of folklore in literature has been an attempt to reveal the connection between folklore and psychology as it is reflected in the medium of poetry.


\(^4\)Drake, "Jungian Psychology", p. 131.
APPENDIX
TOE'OSH: A LAGUNA COYOTE STORY
for Simon Ortiz, July, 1973

In the wintertime
at night
we tell coyote stories
and drink Spanada by the stove.
Now coyote got his
ratty old fur coat
bits of old fur
the sparrows stuck on him
with dabs of pitch.
That was after he lost his proud original one in a poker game.
anyhow, things like that
are always happening to him,
that's what she said, anyway.
And it happened to him at Laguna
and Chinle
and at Lukachukai too, because coyote got too smart for his own good.

But the Navajos say he won a contest once.
It was to see who could sleep out in a
snow storm the longest
and coyote waited until chipmunk badger and skunk were all
curled up under the snow
and then he uncovered himself and slept all night inside
and before morning he got up and went out again
and waited until the others got up before he came in to take the prize.

Some white men came to Acoma and Laguna a hundred years ago
and they fought over Acoma land and Laguna women, and even now
some of their descendants are howling in
the hills southeast of Laguna.

Charlie Coyote wanted to be governor
and he said that when he got elected
he would run the other men off
the reservation
and keep all the women for himself

One year
the politicians got fancy
at Laguna.
They went door to door with hams and turkeys
and they gave them to anyone who promised
to vote for them.
On election day all the people
stayed home and ate turkey
and laughed.

The Trans-Western pipeline vice president came
to discuss right-of-way.
The Laguna let him wait all day long
because he is a busy and important man.
And late in the afternoon they told him
to come back again tomorrow.

They were after the picnic food
that the special dancers left
down below the cliff.
And Toe'osh and his cousins hung themselves
down over the cliff
holding each other's tail in their mouth making a coyote chain
until someone in the middle farted
and the guy behind him opened his
mouth to say "What stinks?" and they
all went tumbling down, like that.

Howling and roaring
Toe'osh scattered white people
out of bars all over Wisconsin.
He bumped into them at the door
until they said,
'Excuse me'
And the way Simon meant it
was for 300 or maybe 400 years.
PRAYER TO THE PACIFIC

1

I traveled to the ocean
distant
from my southwest land of sandrock
to the moving blue water
Big as the myth of origin.

2

Pale
pale water in the yellow-white light of
sun floating west
to China
where ocean herself was born

Clouds that blow across the sand are wet.

3

Squat in the wet sand and speak to Ocean:
   I return to you turquoise the red coral you sent us,
sister spirit of Earth.
Four round stones in my pocket I carry back the ocean
to suck and to taste.

4

Thirty thousand years ago
   Indians came riding across the ocean
carried by giant sea-turtles.
Waves were high that day
great sea-turtles waded slowly out
from the grey sundown sea.
Grandfather Turtle rolled in the sand four times
   and disappeared
swimming into the sun.

5

And so from that time
   immemorial
as the old people say
rainclouds drift from the west
gift from the ocean.
Green leaves in the wind
Wet earth on my feet
swallowing raindrops
clear from China.
from CEREMONY

Long time ago
in the beginning
there were no white people in this world
there was nothing European.
And this world might have gone on like that
except for one thing:
witchery.
This world was already complete
even without white people.
There was everything
including witchery.

Then it happened.
These witch people got together.
Some came from far far away
across the oceans
across mountains.
Some had slanty eyes
others had black skin.
They all got together for a contest
the way people have baseball tournaments nowadays
except this was a contest in dark things.

So anyway
they all got together
witch people from all directions
witches from all the Pueblos
and all the tribes.
They had Navajo witches there,
some from Hopi, and a few from Zuni.
They were having a witches’ conference,
that’s what it was
Way up in the lava rock hills
north of Canoncito
they got together
to fool around in caves
with their animal skins.
Fox, badger, bobcat, and wolf
they circled the fire
and on the fourth time
they jumped into that animal’s skin.

But this time it wasn’t enough
and one of them
maybe a Sioux or some Eskimos
started showing off.
"That wasn’t anything, watch this."

The contest started like that. Then some of them lifted the lids on their big cooking pots, calling the rest of them over to take a look: dead babies simmering in blood circles of skull cut away all the brains sucked out. With medicine to dry and grind into powder for new victims.

Others untied bundles of disgusting objects: dark flints, cinders from burned hogan where the dead lay Whorls of skin cut from fingertips sliced from the penis and clitoris tip.

Finally there was only one who hadn’t shown off charms or powers. The witch stood in the shadows beyond the fire and no one ever knew where this witch came from which tribe or if it was a woman or a man But the important thing was this witch didn’t show off any dark thunder charcoal or red ant-hill beads. This one just told them to listen: "What I have is a story."

At first they all laughed but the witch said OKAY GO AHEAD LAUGH IF YOU WANT TO BUT AS I TELL THIS STORY IT WILL BEGIN TO HAPPEN.

SET IN MOTION NOW SET IN MOTION BY OUR WITCHERY TO WORK FOR US.

CAVES ACROSS THE OCEAN IN CAVES OF DARK HILLS WHITE SKIN PEOPLE LIKE THE BELLY OF A FISH COVERED WITH HAIR.

THEN THEY GROW AWAY FROM THE EARTH
THEN THEY GROW AWAY FROM THE SUN
THEN THEY GROW AWAY FROM THE PLANTS AND ANIMALS.
THEM SEE NO LIFE
WHEN THEY LOOK
THEM SEE ONLY OBJECTS.

THE WORLD IS A DEAD THING FOR THEM
THE TREES AND RIVERS ARE NOT ALIVE
THE MOUNTAINS AND STONES ARE NOT ALIVE.
THE DEER AND BEAR ARE OBJECTS
THEM SEE NO LIFE.

THEM FEAR. THEY FEAR THE WORLD.
THEM DESTROY WHAT THEY FEAR.
THEM FEAR THEMSELVES.
THE WIND WILL BLOW THEM ACROSS THE OCEAN
THOUSANDS OF THEM IN GIANT BOATS
SWARMING LIKE LARVA
OUT OF A CRUSHED ANT HILL.

THEM WILL CARRY OBJECTS
WHICH CAN SHOOT DEATH
FASTER THAN THE EYE CAN SEE.

THEM WILL KILL THE THINGS THEY FEAR
ALL THE ANIMALS
THE PEOPLE WILL STARVE.

THEM WILL POISON THE WATER
THEM WILL SPIN THE WATER AWAY
AND THERE WILL BE DROUGHT
THE PEOPLE WILL STARVE.

THEM WILL FEAR WHAT THEY FIND
THEM WILL FEAR THE PEOPLE
THEM KILL WHAT THEY FEAR.

ENTIRE VILLAGES WILL BE WIPE OUT
THEM WILL SLAUGHTER WHOLE TRIBES.

CORPSES FOR US
BLOOD FOR US
KILLING KILLING KILLING.

AND THEM THEY DO NOT KILL
WILL DIE ANYWAY
AT THE DESTRUCTION THEY SEE
AT THE LOSS
AT THE LOSS OF THE CHILDREN
THE LOSS WILL DESTROY THE REST.

STOLEN RIVERS AND MOUNTAINS
THE STOLEN LAND WILL EAT THEIR HEARTS
AND JERK THEIR MOUTHS FROM THE MOTHER.
THE PEOPLE WILL STARVE.
THEY WILL BRING TERRIBLE DISEASES
THE PEOPLE HAVE NEVER KNOWN.
ENTIRE TRIBES WILL DIE OUT
COVERED WITH FESTERED SORES
SHITTING BLOOD
VOMITING BLOOD.
CORPSES FOR OUR WORK
SET IN MOTION NOW
SET IN MOTION BY OUR WITCHERY
SET IN MOTION
FOR US TO WORK.
THEY WILL TAKE THIS WORLD FROM OCEAN TO OCEAN
THEY WILL TURN ON EACH OTHER
THEY WILL DESTROY EACH OTHER
UP HERE
IN THESE HILLS
THEY WILL FIND THE ROCKS.
ROCKS WITH VEINS OF YELLOW AND BLACK.
THEY WILL LAY THE FINAL PATTERN WITH THESE ROCKS
THEY WILL LAY IT ACROSS THE WORLD
AND EXPLODE EVERYTHING.
SET IN MOTION NOW
SET IN MOTION
TO DESTROY
TO KILL
OBJECTS TO WORK FOR US
OBJECTS TO ACT FOR US
PERFORMING IN THE WITCHERY
FOR SUFFERING
FOR TORMENT
FOR THE STILL-BORN
THE DEFORMED
THE STERILE
THE DEAD.
WHIRLING
WHIRLING
WHIRLING
WHIRLING
SET INTO MOTION NOW
SET INTO MOTION.

So the other witches said
"Okay you win; you take the prize,
but what you said just now--
it isn't so funny
It doesn't sound so good
We are doing okay without it
we can get along without that kind of thing.
Take it back.
Call that story back."
But the witch just shook its head
at the others in their stinking animal skins, furs, and feathers.
IT'S ALREADY TURNED LOOSE
IT'S ALREADY COMING
IT CAN'T BE CALLED BACK.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abrahams, Roger D. "Folklore and Literature as Performance." Journal of the Folklore Institute 9 (December 1972): 75-94.


Steisowah. "Editorial Notes." Akwesasne Notes, Early Spring, p. 16.

