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"Too Big to Swallow All at Once": Consumption and Posthuman Healing in Ceremony and House Made of Dawn

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"TOO BIG TO SWALLOW ALL AT ONCE": CONSUMPTION AND POSTHUMAN
HEALING IN CEREMONY AND HOUSE MADE OF DAWN

by

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A Thesis
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and the Department of English
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

"TOO BIG TO SWALLOW ALL AT ONCE": CONSUMPTION AND POSTHUMAN HEALING IN CEREMONY AND HOUSE MADE OF DAWN

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This project examines the roles of animals and animal figures in the Native American novels *House Made of Dawn* (1968) by N. Scott Momaday and *Ceremony* (1977) by Leslie Marmon Silko. Both novelists consistently evoke animal imagery within their respective texts often pairing this imagery alongside symbolic and metaphorical depictions of cannibalistic identity violence. Through the use of posthuman and postcolonial methodologies and ideas, I contend that the pairing of these two distinct types of imagery that both Momaday and Silko intentionally align the animal figures with premodern, indigenous belief systems while the cannibalistic violence is more often envisioned as a consequence of Western modernity. Thus, I conclude that both Momaday and Silko juxtapose the animal imagery within the texts against these depictions of metaphoric cannibal violence to challenge modern perceptions of the human/nonhuman continuum. Both novels postulate that recognition of the premodern continuum is a method to facilitate healing brought about through the imposition of cannibalistic Western ideals on indigenous peoples.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Cindy Craft. Her indefinite support, love, and patience engendered in me an intense passion for learning, reading, and a desire to succeed and have always been my emotional (and financial!) support when I needed it most. A debt I can never dream to repay.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS iii

DEDICATION iv

CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER II - *CEREMONY* AND IDENTITY-CANNIBALISM..... 5

CHAPTER III - *HOUSE MADE OF DAWN* AND DESTRUCTIVE INTEGRATION .. 17

CHAPTER IV – POSTHUMAN HEALING IN *CEREMONY* AND *HOUSE MADE OF DAWN* 23

CHAPTER V – CONCLUSION..... 28

WORKS CITED 30

CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968) and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977) are texts that feature Native American protagonists struggling with the after-effects of World War II and with the intense feeling of isolation and alienation that comes with living in post-World War II America. *House Made of Dawn* features Abel, a young Navajo-Tanoan protagonist who is suffering in partially self-imposed isolation following the end of World War II. *Ceremony* tells the story of Tayo, a young Laguna Pueblo World War II veteran living with severe post-traumatic stress disorder. Each protagonist has family that alleviates some of this isolation, such as Abel's grandfather Francisco and Tayo's uncle Josiah and cousin Rocky; however, both eventually lose these stable relationships and are forced to traverse Westernized America alone. Significantly, in each text, animals such as eagles, snakes, and cattle feature prominently, and their appearance serves to counter the protagonist's postwar alienation in important ways. *House Made of Dawn* most often features the eagle and the snake, whereas in *Ceremony*, cattle, mountain lions, and deer share the text with more abstract depictions of animals such as the poetic figure, Hummingbird. The novels present a mutual balance of power between Native people and animals wherein neither dominates. These relationships provide an alternative structure to the hierarchies of power that precipitated the war and its fallout. The fact that Abel's and Tayo's tribes share a level of respect for their animal companions not commonly seen in Western literature is indicative of both Momaday and Silko's distinctly non-modern understanding of a nonhuman-human continuum.

The overt, distinct appearances of the animal subjects within *House Made of Dawn* and *Ceremony* speak to the work that both Momaday and Silko are undertaking. The animal presences within the novels often evoke imagery of sacrificial systems of violence. These systems of violence often exist to perpetuate hierarchal systems within modern America. Recognition of specific cycles of sacrificial violence is not enough for Silko and Momaday; instead, through their novels they present two distinct methods of addressing and combating these cycles of violence. Silko advocates ceremonial healing through the reconnection with the land and the animals, while Momaday advocates a similar reconnection with the land by overcoming alienation through a deeper understanding with the animal-self. Both authors are working against the Westernized understanding of the human/animal binary, adhering to a more pre-modern concept of a human/animal continuum. Elvira Pulitano helps break down this understanding effectively by stating that crucial to the Native-American worldview, “is the notion of interconnectedness leading towards a holistic conception of the universe. Such a view makes the Western idea of cataloguing/dissecting chunks of information almost meaningless. Envisioned as an on-going story, the web, Silko suggests, becomes an organic whole that human beings inhabit and whose words, thoughts, and actions are inextricably tied together” (Pulitano 157). Pulitano explains that this notion of interconnectedness differs strongly from the more ontological understanding of the world in Western philosophy. Both Silko and Momaday emphasize the importance of interconnectedness in their novels through the depictions of nature and animality. Healing occurs only when these connections are reestablished and explored. By recognizing the

existence of these non-Western understandings of humanity and animality, both authors challenge the politics of animality and achieve a sense of true healing for their characters.

What we might define as the ‘natural order’ of things, or perhaps a Pre-modern order, is not immediately present within both novels. Both *House Made of Dawn* and *Ceremony* depict an unordered, symbolic system rendered ineffective and imprisoning. The relationship between human and animal is strictly coded through the language and imagery of binaries. Yet both authors challenge these binaries and depict the animal/human relationship in terms of a pre-modern continuum by evoking indigenous ideas of the humanity and animality. Scholars of Posthumanism have explicitly ignored this depiction and the significance that indigenous, inter-species belief systems bring to the field of Posthuman studies. Many posthuman scholars are often too focused on animality within the confines of modernity and have mistakenly ignored the work that pre-modern concepts have already accomplished for the field of Posthumanism. The study of animality in Momaday and Silko broadens the application of Posthuman theory, showing the means through which not only animal and human figures are depicted in both the symbolic, sacrificial system associated with urban modernity but also, and more fascinatingly, how characters trapped in these systems can achieve healing through reconnecting with these indigenous structures of the human/animal continuum. Momaday and Silko effectively indicate the tremendous gap that exists currently within the scholarship and the tremendous potential in looking at these pre-modern belief systems.

The novels engage a discourse of animality composed of both colonial and indigenous attitudes toward species, which are registers typically in conflict with one another. The colonialist binary holds the human separate from and superior to other

species (and that marks indigenous persons as subordinate others closer to animals than humans). The Native American understanding views the human on a continuum with other animals, with animals often privileged for exhibiting exemplary qualities. The colonialist sees natives as animalistic, thus subordinate, and ultimately objectifiable. The native sees the human self as an extension of a community that includes members of other species, in which no life can be owned. In the colonial model, predation is justified by human superiority. In the native model, customs encourage humility on the part of the human hunter who kills another animal; the hunter is grateful to his prey for sacrificing itself for another's continued life. The combinations of these incongruous attitudes are graphically depicted in the novels' imagery of sacrifice and cannibalism. This imagery expresses a struggle with identity that this study articulates with the Native American figure of the wendigo.

CHAPTER II - CEREMONY AND IDENTITY-CANNIBALISM

The representations of colonial sacrifice that appear in both *House Made of Dawn* and *Ceremony* are primarily shown through subtle depictions of ‘cannibalism’ as a form of violent reaction to colonialism. By subtly linking modernity’s sacrificial necessity to the topic of cannibalism and consumption, Momaday and Silko effectively work to destabilize the foundation of these modern hierarchies. I invoke the term cannibalism carefully: to avoid misappropriation, I use the term specifically to link it to inherent ritual significance. Consumption implies merely the taking of a resource; cannibalism, however, speaks to a ritual transference of some kind. The act of eating another of the same species, the greatest of taboos, is used in Silko’s novel to effectively deconstruct the modern paradigm of colonial sacrifice. Subject to the threat of physical and ideological violence, the colonized native is in danger of cannibalizing his own culture by adopting mindsets that are contrary to their indigenous ecocentric beliefs. Both Silko and Momaday effectively use this depiction of the self-cannibalizing Native figure to challenge the effects of the colonial system on Native peoples.

In *Ceremony*, Tayo’s former military companion Emo has already been subsumed by ideologies of Western predation. Silko writes, “Tayo could hear it all in his voice when he talked about the killing— how Emo grew from each killing. Emo fed off each man he killed, and the higher the rank of the dead man, the higher it made Emo” (61). As he “feeds” on death, it is not so much the act of killing that invigorates him, as it is the act of taking, a type predatory cannibalism marked by a mindset of conquest. This system of sacrifice remains “fundamental, dominant...so vital to our modernity” (Derrida 247). Emo grows not just through the killing but the metaphysical act of “feeding” on those he kills.

Emo believes that strengthening himself makes him a conquering figure or even a resistant one since Silko explicitly states that Emo's hatred of Tayo stems from his mixed blood (Silko 57). Emo targets Tayo with violence in a misguided attempt to attack the whiteness that he believes Tayo carries inside of him, but this violent attempt at resistance merely feeds into a preconceived colonial narrative. Analia Villagra claims that throughout the colonial occupation of the Americas there have been "allegations and accusations of cannibalism by European explorers" which "constructed the Native peoples as more animal than human, closer in the behavior to the exotic nonhuman fauna that they encountered, and with this construction easing any potential moral qualms about the brutality of conquest" (Villagra 7). Stories such as these provided the Colonial authorities the *casus belli* needed to begin their conquests under the veil of 'civilizing' these now allegedly feral, pseudo-human entities. Of course, the irony is that the colonizing authorities themselves became the consumptive monster-figures they made the Indigenous peoples out to be. Emo is a character trapped in this hastily formed, poorly maintained cyclic prison of violence. Predatory conquest binds Emo in a succession of killing and identity cannibalism: he "eats" the people he kills so that he might alleviate the alienation he feels in his own life brought about by colonialism. This colonial alienation has rendered him ineffective, and the only means available to him are to act within the confines of Western predatory ideals. He takes a piece of his victims to reinforce his own identity, and fills himself with death to feel alive. Silko uses Emo's obsession with killing, consumption, and absorption to draw attention to the colonial system of sacrifice that is responsible for Emo's broken, violent identity.

Emo's identity post-war is entirely based on the man he became during the war. Silko writes, "He was the best, they told him; some men didn't like to feel the quiver of the man they were killing; some men got sick when they smelled the blood. But he was the best; he was one of them. The best. The United States Army" (62). Emo directly associates his worth with his ability to commit violence. The inclusiveness he feels with the colonial system is inexorably connected to Emo's desire to kill and maintain his own twisted sense of honor that the colonial system encouraged in him. The problem, of course, is that these violent acts of cannibalism only serve to bind him even tighter to the colonial system by reinforcing the stereotype of the cannibalistic Native.

Emo's attempts at resistance become instead the means through which Colonial powers may justify their imperialism. His identity-cannibalism fits squarely in the colonial schema as an act of tacit participation in the sacrificial, symbolic order. As Schillmoller explains, "The most haunting presence (absence) of the animal is always...within or with reference to human subjectivity, in consequence of which the animal participates in a 'sacrificial economy' in which it becomes 'spectral', always remembered in absentia" (Schillmoller 22). Yet Silko carefully manages to evoke animal imagery in specific, human-centric scenes such as when Josiah directly associates the condition of the cattle with the native condition by stating, "cattle are like any living thing. If you separate them from the land for too long, keep them in barns and corrals, they lose something" (74). Scenes with Emo, however, are always coded through the lens of sacrifice and cannibalism. During the climactic scene in which Tayo witnesses Emo's torture of Harley, Silko writes, "He watched them drag him into the light from the coals. Pinkie dropped something into the coals and the fire sprang up; it was Harley's red-and-

white Hawaiian print shirt...Harley twisted and rolled on the ground; his hands and feet seemed to be tied. (251). This scene continues on as Harley is stripped of all his clothing and left hanging from a fence while Emo and the others carefully carve chunks of meat from his body. The imagery specifically invokes an animal being prepared for a feast, by the blazing coals of a cook fire. Emo's cannibalism differs from a purely carnivorous act because it becomes an act of sacrifice itself, both to Emo's own sense of identity but also to the system of Western modernity. Emo's torture of Harley, for instance, is worded very carefully by Silko who writes, "There was no way the destroyers could lose: either way they had a victim and a corpse" (251). The act of violence itself, the taking of life, becomes the focus for Emo. Any sense of fulfillment and self-worth comes from the act of killing, which itself becomes the ritual. Sacrifice becomes secondary to bloodlust and the need to consume more victims.

Colonial society is dependent upon the act of sacrifice through the act of predation of the animal subject.¹ This preoccupation with predatory action creates a system of 'predator preeminence' in which the subjects of modernity understand their place in the subject hierarchy exclusively through the language of the carnivore. Modernity then becomes less focused on 'eating' and more focused on 'hunting.' For modernity to exist there must be an understood separation between the human and the animal subject. This reinforced hierarchy allows for the creation of sacrificial systems because "carnivorous sacrifice is essential to the structures of subjectivity" (Derrida 247). The colonists place themselves at the top of the sacrificial hierarchy, and all others are

¹ See Derrida's *Acts of Religion* pg. 247 for a more thorough discussion of the necessity of sacrifice.

designated as “creatures” fit for sacrifice. It is here that Native-Americans serve as prey in the sacrificial system: by designating natives as “animalized-humans” (Wolfe 101), colonizers absolve themselves of misdeed through attribution of animal identity that overwhelms human identity. Any aspect of the human left within the native figure is henceforth read through the lens of animality. With the native human-subject rendered animalized, they become victims of the sacrificial structure. This idea of creature sacrifice goes beyond the metaphysical act of killing, however, and extends into the literal taking of trophies.

Because identity cannibalism becomes the primary means through which Emo constructs his identity, in order to validate himself, he takes trophies. This act of trophy taking, however, becomes merely another means of reinforcing the schema of domination responsible for his alienation. Trophy taking has existed in Native-American culture prior to the arrival of Western colonists and was undoubtedly violent: the act of scalping is perhaps the most famous example of Native-American war trophies. By overtly coding the symbolic act of trophy-taking through the language of predation, however, Silko places this obsession with trophies squarely in the domain of cannibalistic violence. At all times, Emo keeps with him a bag of teeth taken from a Japanese soldier. Silko writes, “He poured the human teeth out on the table. He looked over at Tayo and laughed out loud. He pushed them into circles and rows like unstrung beads; he scooped them up into his hand and shook them like dice. They were his war souvenirs, the teeth he had knocked out of the corpse of a Japanese soldier” (60). These teeth are souvenirs of Emo’s predation: they are proof of his killing and thereby proof of his growth and his power. The teeth become a sort of predatory totem that denotes Emo’s status as an alpha

predator. Yet as predation is coded as a distinctly animal concept, Emo needs some method of maintaining evidence of his own humanity. Emo must present his teeth “as symbolic” so that he can ensure that “the continuity between the animal and the human need not be seriously entertained” (Wolfe 103). The irony of these attempts is that under the colonial structure, Emo cannot be anything more than an animalized human. His acts of predation are understood merely as poor attempts to imitate colonial power by presenting himself as a predatory human. By taking the teeth of the Japanese soldier, Emo has effectively robbed the corpse of its ability to feed; as Emo now associates eating with agency, the teeth-taking becomes a symbolic act. These structures of sacrifice are predicated upon the need for a sacrificial victim. By acting as a governor of sacrifice while always simultaneously being potentially subject to it, Emo becomes completely subject to hierarchies of predation.

Emo’s cannibalism is not without context in Native American culture. Various Native mythologies explain how men or women Christopher Schedler coins the term “wiindigo sovereignty” which he defines as systems based primarily on structures of over-consumption and assimilation (37). Schedler’s term, though useful, is too narrowly focused on systems of community instead of systems of discourse; thus, I define wendigo discourse as a system of identity construction coded through the symbolic, sacrificial system of cannibalism. Wendigo discourse permeates throughout much of *Ceremony* and *House Made of Dawn*, frequently accompanied by discussions of transformation and associations with witchcraft. Silko’s description of Emo practically identifies him as a wendigo when she writes,

He talks about their cities and all the machines and food they have. He says the land is no good, and we must go after what they have, and take it from them[...]Well, I don't know how to say this but it seems that way. All you have to do is look around. And so I wonder," he said, feeling the tightness in his throat squeeze out the tears, "I wonder what good Indian ceremonies can do against the sickness which comes from their wars, their bombs, their lies. (132)

The sickness that Tayo speaks of correlates to the curse of the wendigo figure since the monstrous condition is in itself very disease like in that it can only happen to people who commit acts of cannibalism. Emo believes that this monstrous form of identity makes him powerful. He associates his violence and his predation with acceptance into the colonial order based on the praise he received for his brutality during World War II. His association with the wendigo, however, feeds into Silko's overall point: the colonists, in this case the U.S. army, and their system warps native identity. Danette DiMarco specifies that in native myths, the wendigo can actually be associated with colonialism. DiMarco states, "In non-native tales, the Wendigo often emerges during times of imperial assertion, since imperialism relies upon an uncompromising path toward domination and its negative impact on people and the environments" (135). Emo's active participation in the colonial system does not grant him freedom or feed his identity. It only makes him a monster.

According to Tayo, Emo is focused primarily on what he believes should be taken from the white man but this obsession with the act of taking only fuels the sickness of which Tayo speaks. Emo's sickness is his delusion of conquest: he is propelled to consume the Other, yet invariably remains Othered in colonial discourse. Ultimately,

consuming the Other means consuming himself—a model that leads to extinction for those subject to this hierarchy. After all, the “they” to whom Emo refers when he discusses the cities, machines, and food “they” possess are not Othered figures: they are the White men who control the colonial society of which he is a part and they cannot be truly be consumed. They can be resisted and killed perhaps, but Emo cannot cannibalize White identity and achieve the sense of conquest he so desires because he is forced to always act from the position of a conquered figure. As Scheder notes, this system of wendigo discourse “is used not only to characterize exclusion and assimilation models of sovereignty that lead to the consumption of self and ‘other,’ but also to serve as a warning to those members of the tribal collective whose excessive self-identification, lack of vision, and binary view of the world target them as easy prey for such wiindigoo forms of sovereignty” (Schedler 37). Emo’s cannibalism extends to his own selfhood: because his identity is predicated upon the need to kill and devour Others, his own sense of self becomes lost in this cycle of violence. Identity-cannibalism in *Ceremony* is a toxic, corrupting force of separation and alienation, which only serves to reinforce colonial notions of Native animality.

The Western world in which Tayo and Emo find themselves is understood primarily through its need for predatory conquest. Yet Betonie, the old shaman with whom Tayo converses, disagrees with Tayo’s hopeless assessment of the world and the root cause of its suffering. Betonie says to Tayo,

That is the trickery of the witchcraft [...] They want us to believe all evil resides with white people. Then we will look no further to see what is really happening. They want us to separate ourselves from white people, to be ignorant and helpless

as we watch our own destruction. But white people are only the tools that the witchery manipulates; and I tell you, we can deal with white people, with their machines and their beliefs. (Silko 132)

Betonie is less focused on overt depictions of violence such as war and more interested in the underlying cause of the violence, or what he considers to be witchery. I argue that the witchery is the disruption of identity caused by the inherent violence of the colonial, ontological paradigm. The first sacrifices within this structure are the animals viewed as food sources, and one of the most important animals in the development of human society has been cattle. In *Ceremony*, Josiah seems to be aware of a connection between his people and cattle, of which the white ranchers remain ignorant. Josiah's understanding of domestication differs greatly from that of the white depictions of cattle ranching in *Ceremony*. He states, "Cattle are like any living thing. If you separate them from the land for too long, keep them in barns and corrals, they lose something" (Silko 74). The link between Native Americans and cattle in this context is primarily based on this separation from the land; the cattle thus reads as a metaphor for Native Americans and their life in the Western system of dominance. Under the strict, consumptive system of imperial doctrine, Native-Americans are relegated to the status of cattle: herded, corralled, branded, fed, sacrificed, and ultimately consumed. The colonial system only finds value in colonized subjects through their use as sacrificial subjects. This connection is only made more overt later in the text as Silko writes,

They bolted down the ramp nimbly, and as each cow saw the open gate ahead, she lowered her head and snorted, racing out the opening. They kept running, and they didn't stop to look back at the big truck or the corrals until they were a

quarter mile away. They bunched up, wary and skittish; when the last cow had run into the little herd, they stood for a moment, staring at the windmills and corrals and at the men beside the truck. Then they took off, heading south in a steady, traveling gait. Tayo watched them disappear over the horizon, their ivory hides shining, speckled brown like a butterfly's wing. (78)

The cattle never look back at the devices of domestication until they are nearly a mile away in presumed safety, moving as distinct herd, yet they refuse to move on until finally joined by the last member.

The comparison between their bodies and butterfly bodies signifies flight: in this way Tayo is just like the cow desiring flight, as colonial discourse coded Native-Americans as cattle to be managed, moved, and sacrificed at will. The language of cannibalism comes into play again here: by specifically associating the Native tribe with herded cattle, the reservation becomes a corral, or a space in which to die. By coding Native-Americans as cattle, Westerners are able to sidestep accusations of uncivilized cannibalism: dehumanized, Natives are rendered animal meat, corralled for sacrifice in the colonial hierarchy. By acknowledging their commonalities with the cattle, who "are like any living thing," Silko challenges the ways in which Natives have been animalized and redefines the human-animal connection in positive terms. Connected by their flight from captivity, Silko portrays humans and animals as creatures who mutually desire freedom for everyone in their community. Yet, as much as Tayo wishes to 'fly', he cannot: Tayo is trapped between two mutually exclusive sacrificial structures: annihilation or assimilation.

The reservations in *Ceremony* specifically echo themes of domestication and death, as they seem to be inherently connected to the overarching theme of cannibalism, consumption, and violence. Under the structures of sacrifice, the Native-American must choose between a life as ‘sacrificial subject’ or as ‘domesticated animal’. The divide between the reservation and the Western urban environment does not necessarily end the association with domestication; instead, the language merely changes from sacrificial animal husbandry (reservation) to the domestication of the animal (urbanization). The reservation on which Tayo lives is inextricably linked to visions of death. Silko describes Tayo’s farm specifically through the image of suffering animals, writing, “One of the gray mules had eaten a poison weed near Acoma, and the other one was blind; it stayed close to the windmill at the ranch, grazing on the yellow rice grass that grew in the blow sand” (10). The landscape of Tayo’s reservation is specifically associated with toxins and sickness. The land is poisoned by what Tayo assumes is his own petty wish for the rains to end, but characters such as Emo also recognize the barren nature of the land as impending death. Emo says, “‘You know,’ he said, slurring his words. ‘us Indians deserve something better than this goddamn dried-up country around here. Blowing away, everyday’” (Silko 55). Emo describes the very land itself as ‘blowing away,’ implying that the land is not only dying, it is disappearing. From Josiah’s earlier description of the cattle, we know that the Native-Americans are linked to the land just like the cattle, so this idea of the land vanishing directly correlates to the state of the tribe as well: the land they on which they live and are dependent is slowly being taken from them and leaving them in a state of flux. To remain on the reservation would result in

death; however, integration into the Westernized, urban landscape is not presented in a better light.

CHAPTER III - *HOUSE MADE OF DAWN* AND DESTRUCTIVE INTEGRATION

Both Tayo and Abel's attempts at integration into colonial society fail due to an inability to escape the colonial association with the sacrificial animal. This predation, however, is not the taking of just life but the taking of identity through symbolic cannibalism. Echoing Gerald Vizenor's idea of an Indian Other, the Native traveler cannot integrate and remain Native culturally (Vizenor 55). Integration becomes coded through the language of animal husbandry and the creation of the companion animal. Indigenous cultural identity is preyed upon and ultimately must be lost to preserve the sense of alienation and separation that undergirds the sacrificial structure. In *House Made of Dawn*, for instance, the white woman, Angela, sees Abel through the language of a domesticated animal. Momaday writes, "And yet, in some way, he was powerless too. She could see that now. There he stood, dumb and docile at her pleasure, not knowing, she supposed, how even to take his leave" (31). Though integration has not yet been attempted, Abel is still seen by Angela as animalistic, as the language that she uses to describe him denotes some level of domesticity. By describing Abel as "docile," she invokes imagery of a subservient beast of burden. The issue becomes one of acceptability: as Paula Gunn Allen writes, "there is no way to be acceptably Indian (with all the pain that implies) and acceptable to whites at the same time" (Allen 136). Abel's interaction with Angela merely demonstrates that she sees him as "acceptable" only because of his association with a pack animal. There is no present danger to Abel because, as far as the Western world is concerned, he is now coded as a non-prey animal but still a subject fit for sacrifice. Thus, the Native subject is rendered through only two seemingly opposing schemas: the savage animal or the domestic animal. The issue

remains the sacrificial position of the animal, and the presence of animality in this case only reinforces predator preeminence. Abel's own struggle with the politics of animality guide much of his journey throughout *House Made of Dawn*.

Within *House Made of Dawn* are the presence of animalistic totems specific to two characters: Abel and Juan Reyes. Routinely depicted as being spiritually linked to the eagle and the serpent respectively, Abel's first encounter with the eagle is a telling one. Momaday writes, "he stole away to look at the great bird. He drew the sack open; the bird shivered, he thought, and drew itself up. Bound and helpless, his eagle seemed drab and shapeless in the moonlight, too large and ungainly for flight. The sight of it filled him with shame and disgust. He took hold of its throat in the darkness and cut off its breath" (20). Abel's reason for killing the eagle is not readily apparent. If his intent was merely based in pure pity for the bound creature, then it stands to reason that he would have simply set it free; instead, Abel chooses to kill the bird not out of pity but shame, which comes from his own association with the eagle, to which he is linked by a sort of spiritual totem. He sees the eagle as representative of himself, and he is unable to cope with the sad, pathetic image of his animal mirror. His slaying of the eagle is meant to portray a sacrifice of his self, an act of predator preeminence because it directly coincides with the idea of sacrifice; yet, here it is presented as almost pseudo-cannibalism. Abel is taking the life of the bird, not so that he might devour a part of it; instead, he is sacrificing the eagle so that he might kill a part of himself. The eagle's inability to fly disgusts Abel because it is indicative of his own lack of freedom. Abel, however, does practice the more common form of predator preeminence in his encounter with his counterpart, Reyes the snake.

Unlike the eagle, Abel's encounter with Reyes is understood through symbolic predation. Abel seeks to take *something* from Reyes whether that be his life or his place in the community; his carnivorous desire motivates his predation, but it is not necessarily an overt desire to kill the man that causes him to murder Reyes. His motive is simply predation: because Reyes is presented as the snake, Abel, as the eagle, must kill the snake. Robert Nelson claims that the eagle "holds the land whole and entire in its vision: eagle medicine is about possessing the land from the outset. Snake medicine, however, is about being possessed by the land, and Abel needs a good dose of this medicine to make his spirit whole" (Nelson 2). Like Emo, Abel seeks to take this 'medicine' from Reyes. By devouring the snake, Abel hopes to make himself feel whole and thereby reconnect with the people of his reservation. This desire for reconnection at the cost of Reyes's life echoes Emo's own hunger. The stirrings of Wendigo discourse drive Abel: the loss of identity that he feels can now only be healed through a substitution, and so he must consume Reyes. Thus, Abel engineers a symbolic hunt for Reyes, with the intent to sacrifice his prey. This hunt does not go as Abel intended: after stabbing Reyes, Abel becomes confused when

he closed his hands upon Abel and drew him close. Abel heard the strange excitement of the white man's breath, and the quick, uneven blowing at his ear, and he felt the blue shivering lips upon him, felt even the scales of the lips and the hot slippery point of the tongue, writhing. He was sick with terror and revulsion, and he tried to fling himself away, but the white man held him close. The white immensity of flesh lay over and smothered him. He withdrew the knife and thrust again, lower, deep into the groin...The white hands laid hold of Abel and drew

him close, and the terrible strength of the hands was brought to bear only in proportion as Abel resisted them. (73-74)

The fear and revulsion that Abel feels from this embrace is not due to any threat of violence, at least not physical violence. What threatens Abel is the realization that what he has done is not only utterly meaningless, but that Reyes has also spiritually bested him. Abel has achieved no sense of conquest and gained nothing from the battle except a greater sense of isolation and emptiness. The battle between the two is, at least based on Abel's understanding, a battle between the representative of the Eagle and a representative of the Serpent.

Yet in their spiritual clash, it is Reyes who best exemplifies his totem. The totem, after all, serves as a unifier of people: it is the spiritual link that binds groups, families, and tribes together. Abel's selfish actions break him from his totemic link by severing him from the tribe. His attempt at cannibalism utterly fails because he is acting outside his totemic place; instead, being constricted by Reyes implies a sort of reverse cannibalism taking place. The constricting of Abel by Reyes can be read as an act of totemic violence, but it differs from Abel's attack primarily because it can also be read as an embrace. Reyes only really fights back by constricting Abel. He uses no weapons and strikes no blows; instead, he merely latches onto Abel and squeezes. While this directly invokes the image of a constricting serpent, it also evokes thoughts of familial embrace. Thus, even in violence Reyes acts within his totemic role by embracing Abel: on the one hand constricting and on the other showing Abel that this act of attempted conquest is not the way. Momaday writes that Reyes' had no "expression on his face, neither rage nor pain, only the same translucent pallor and the vague distortion of sorrow and wonder"

(73). The lack of emotion on Reyes' face immediately draws attention. He feels neither rage nor pain at Abel piercing his abdomen with a knife. Reyes' crushing embrace is in itself the embrace of the community and Abel has slain it. Abel's attempt at conquest is utterly lost before the powerful, crushing arms of Reyes. Reyes dies, but it is Abel who loses the most: his totem, the eagle, is effectively crushed and eaten by Reyes in the moment of his death. Reyes snake identity was simply more overpowering than Abel's eagle identity.

The sanctity of the ritualistic clash between snake and eagle is destroyed by Abel's inclusion of the knife. The use of the knife itself is not inherently wrong; after all, nearly all cultures have used knives and bladed weapons for centuries. The issue occurs in how the knife is used: Momaday writes that Abel "withdrew the knife and thrust again, lower, deep into the groin. The whole strength of his arm and back lay into the slant of the blade across the bowls, and the flesh split open and the steaming gore fell out upon his hand" (73). Abel is held fast and strong by the crushing, yet not damaging, grip of Reyes. Abel's attempts to escape the grasp are based solely on his use of the knife. Abel does not grapple with Reyes to escape because their physical contest becomes deeply associated with discourse. Reyes holds Abel to him and does not fight back because his crushing hug is representative of the hold of the community. Reyes acts as the agent of community and meets violence with acceptance. The knife, however, is Abel's answer. He is unable to balance the image of Reyes, the accepted white man, with his own desire to be accepted within the community. The knife becomes a ritual weapon that Abel will use to excise this white man from the community; instead, it only serves to sever Abel from the community. Nothing can be settled because Abel has turned a pursuit for snake

medicine and understanding into predatory violence, but ultimately this act of violence fails to fulfill him. Abel gains nothing from Reyes and seems only weakened and terrified by the experience. By bringing the knife, Abel symbolically severs his connection to the eagle, and thus further alienates himself from the land and the people. Reyes dies as a snake, coiling around his opponent and squeezing like a constrictor; only Reyes upholds his totem in their clash, as Abel has lost any semblance of eagle medicine to the predatory totem of colonial conquest. What almost occurs is indicative of a step forward for what both Abel and Tayo truly need: ceremonial healing.

CHAPTER IV – POSTHUMAN HEALING IN *CEREMONY*
AND *HOUSE MADE OF DAWN*

While the rituals of colonial dominance are rooted in predation, cannibalism, and over-consumption, the rituals of *House Made of Dawn* and *Ceremony* are both based upon a non-Western understanding of ceremonial healing that works to counteract the destructive results of the rituals of domination. The forms of healing presented in the novels are primarily based on interactions with animality: for Abel, animals are physical representations of spiritual identities, and for Tayo, animals serve as guides and messengers. One of the most important instances of healing in *Ceremony* can be seen through Tayo's interaction with the mountain lion. Though far from the only example, Tayo's handling of the mountain lion remains an extremely important first step in healing of colonial predation. A connection is formed when Tayo begins to speak to the animal. Silko writes, "Mountain lion,' he whispered, 'mountain lion, becoming what you are with each breath, your substance changing with the earth and sky.' The mountain lion blinked his eyes; there was no fear. He gazed at him for another instance and then sniffed the southeast wind before he crossed the stream and disappeared into the trees" (196). The interaction with the mountain lion represents a cross-species communication, a true discourse of animality. Whispering to the mountain lion, Tayo communicates with the lion directly while the lion "gazes at him," listening intently. The text makes it evident that the mountain lion is not violent even prior to choosing to leave. Mountain lions are ambush predators, so the mountain lion's purpose for approaching Tayo is not based on a need to hunt and the act of predation does not factor into their meeting; instead, what

seems to happen is a form of deeper communication.² The lack of fear in the mountain lion's eyes implies an understanding: it did not approach with harmful intentions and it does not leave due to fright. Predators such as mountains lions are often made uneasy by eye contact, as this implies that what they are facing may not be prey. The fact that the lion and Tayo share this intimate moment without fear means that a lesson was being imparted. Tayo's interaction with the mountain lion is a crucial step in his reconnection with nature. What is particularly interesting, however, is that the mountain lion does not actually leave until it is alerted by the southeast wind. .

Tayo's reconnection with nature is completed by his understanding of wind speaking. The wind plays an extremely important role in that it also seems to speak to Tayo, in its own way, in very crucial moments. It is the wind that seemingly ends the discursive moment between Tayo and the mountain lion. The wind in *Ceremony* is a natural subject existing totally outside the purview of predator preeminence and is thus one of the only forces within the text specifically able to counter the witchery. In fact, Tayo's success in the final test in the ceremonial healing is wholly dependent upon the wind. When Tayo discovers Emo, Leroy, and Pinkie torturing his friend Harley in an effort to draw out Tayo, the threat of violence builds rapidly. Silko writes, "He visualized the contours of Emo's skull; the GI haircut exposed thin bone at the temples, bone that would flex slightly before it gave way under the thrust of the steel edge" and yet Tayo is not stopped from becoming caught up with the witchery by his own power (252). Finally,

² See "Mountain lions prey selectively on prion-infected mule deer" by Caroline E. Krumm, Mary M. Conner, N. Thomas Hobbs, Don O. Hunter, and Michael W. Miller for more information.

“The wind came suddenly and fanned the coals into yellow flames; Leroy jumped back and stumbled hard against Pinkie. Pinkie pushed him away and Leroy fell” (252). For Tayo, the wind effectively defuses the situation, while the land itself stops him from ruining the ceremony and becoming lost to the witchery of predator preeminence once more.

Tayo’s salvation from the cycles of violence and cannibalism is only made possible due to his deeper understanding of pre-modern subject relationships. The healing that Tayo strives for is definitively posthuman in that goes against accepted social schemas of Western modernity. The relationship between animal subjects, human subjects, and nature is not a one-dimensional system of sacrifice, hunting, and death; instead, the relationship is a far more nuanced one that includes give and take. A more stable form of coexistence with the natural world remains possible in pre-colonial structures: finding this stability and centering himself within it is necessary in Tayo’s escaping the cycle of violence. The last line of dialogue in *Ceremony* echoes this fact when Tayo’s grandmother states, “‘I guess I must be getting old,’ she said, ‘because these goings-on around Laguna don’t get me excited any more.’ She sighed, and laid her head back on the chair. ‘It seems like I already heard these stories before...only thing is, the names sound different’” (260). Though Tayo has escaped the cycle of predatory violence, the cycle of sacrifice remains. One instance of healing is not enough to break an age-old hegemonic system of repression, alienation, and death. Yet there is still hopefulness to the ending of *Ceremony*, a brief reprieve from the vicious predatory cycle, as the final poem of the novel reads, “it is dead for now” (261). The ‘it’ is the Wendigo figure that has been haunting *Ceremony*: the novel makes it no secret that if not for the intervention

of the wind, Tayo would have murdered Emo, and this act would have only served to continue the cyclical violence and transform Tayo into a Wendigo figure. Silko ends her novel on a hopeful note, yet one cannot help but read the “for now” as an ominous warning, alerting the reader that Tayo’s wholeness is not yet the salvation of his people’s alienation and misery. Like Tayo, Abel must also reconnect with the land in some way to achieve healing.

As the eagle, Abel’s healing is represented by achieving flight. During the final lines of the novel, Abel takes part in the running of the dead and it is here that he finally achieves a greater sense of unity with the eagle he represents. Momaday writes,

He was running and there was no reason to run but the running itself and the land and the dawn appearing. The sun rose up in the saddle and shone in shafts upon the road across the snow-covered valley and the hills...Pure exhaustion laid hold of his mind of his mind, and he could see at last without having to think. He could see the canyon and the mountains and the sky. He could see the rain and the river and the fields beyond. He could see dark hills at dawn. He was running, and under his breath he began to sing. There was no sound, and he had no voice; he had only the words of a song. And he went running on the rise of the song (185).

The running in which Abel is taking part becomes symbolically coded as flight. As Abel runs, the whole of the land becomes visible to him. Clarity overtakes him and drives out the clutter, the cloudiness, and the burdens of his mind. Abel’s lack of voice is presented in a positive light, and the lack of sound and voice implies a deeper overall connection to the world around him. In a soundless world, there is no need for voice: the voicelessness that has haunted Abel throughout the text and stood as a symbol of his alienation now

represents a greater unity with the natural world. All there is in this moment is the running. Momaday's prose, however, pulls back to show the landscape as almost sweeping underneath Abel as he runs; the inner eye of the reader becomes fixated on the language of the hill and sky as Abel begins to sing. The song specifically "rises" as Abel sings it, almost lifting him as he runs. This symbolic flight is indicative of Abel's growth and healing. The alienation that he has felt from those around him has always been traceable back to the eagle he killed as a boy. The shame he felt at the eagle's impotence—its inability to fly drove him to murder the bird. Now Abel, as eagle, is flying. He has reconnected with his totem and achieved spiritual balance.

CHAPTER V – CONCLUSION

Both *House Made of Dawn* and *Ceremony* attempt to reckon with the anthropocentric concept of sacrifice. Modernity exists upon a hegemonic concept that demands the metaphoric ‘meat’ of people, animals, cultures, and landscapes to sustain a colonial system. The relationship between indigeneity and animality has long been manipulated for the service of empire.³ This relationship between indigeneity and animality though also offers a powerful method of healing, and it is this healing that Momaday and Silko attempt to harness in their efforts to address the damage dealt by the colonial sacrificial structure. In need of sacrificial subjects, colonizers employed selective species discourse to create hierarchies among humans as well as a hierarchy between humans and animals: distinguishing civilized humans from animalized humans facilitates the selection for sacrifice. Re-coding indigenous people through the language of animality, they are then made palatable for colonial sacrifice. Both authors demonstrate the effectiveness of a pre-modern understanding of the human/nonhuman continuum in resisting these sacrificial structures within their novels. It is this relationship between the human and the nonhuman that allows characters like Abel and Tayo to better navigate their damaged lives and homes. Work must be done to undo the destruction of continuity and forced establishing of binary. Abel and Tayo traverse modernity and reestablish pre-modern understands of human and nonhuman. By restoring pre-modern continuities between human and animal subjects, Momaday and Silko each reject the contemporary narrative of anthropocentrism that persists as a legacy of colonialism. Invoking pre-

³ See John Miller’s *Empire and the Animal Body* for a more thorough discussion of empire’s manipulation of evolutionary concepts to justify imperialism.

modern concepts of Human/Animal relations, Native storytelling, and ceremonial healing, Momaday and Silko effectively deny their colonial inheritance, achieve a sense of cultural restoration and ecological continuity, and work towards healing the pervasive sense of alienation brought about through Western imposition.

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