John Getz

Healing the Soldier in White
Ceremony *as War Novel*

This essay proposes a new approach to Native American Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Ceremony* (1977) by studying the book in the context of the twentieth-century North American war narrative, a tradition dominated by white male authors. Claiming *Ceremony's* rightful place in this tradition helps us see the full power of Silko's response to some of the same issues and images that inspire other writers of the literature of war even as it affirms her Otherness from them. In *Ceremony* Silko uses an image prominent in our war literature, the "soldier in white," but shows her distinctiveness in telling the story of his healing.

Silko herself seems to invite us to see her work in relation to texts outside the Native American tradition, as well as those within it. In an interview published in 1980, she emphasized her Laguna background above all: "What I know is Laguna. This place I am from is everything I am as a writer and a human being" (Fisher 18). At the same time, however, she mentioned the breadth of her reading interests (Fisher 20) and warned against ghettoizing Native American writing:

> I think what writers, storytellers, and poets have to say necessarily goes beyond such trivial boundaries as origin. There's also the danger of demeaning literature when you label certain books by saying this is black, this is Native American, and then, this is just writing. That's what's going on now, and I don't like it. (Fisher 21)

Placing *Ceremony* in the tradition of war literature in no way minimizes the book's clear and well-documented identity as a Native American novel. Many critics have approached

Ceremony through the myths and customs of the author's Laguna Pueblo culture, especially noting the book's treatment of the conflicts between Pueblo and white American values.[1] Even before the publication of *Ceremony,* critics were seeing connections between Silko's work and that of other Native American authors, such as Scott Momaday.[2] But as Elaine Jahner writes, "Clearly Silko's work carries on the best of the Laguna Pueblo artistic heritage just as it participates simultaneously in other traditions . . ." (387). Studying the participation of *Ceremony* in the tradition of the literature of war provides another way of seeing the book as what Mary Louise Pratt calls a "contact zone," that is, a social space "where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other often in highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (34). In fact, the centrality of Native American culture is what makes *Ceremony* different, allowing Silko to write a path to survival for the soldier in white.

Much of our modern war literature is haunted by the figure of the physically or psychologically wounded soldier whose survival is only a living death. Philosophically this character embodies the questioning of human dignity and identity throughout the modern and postmortem writing; in the context of twentieth-century warfare, he reflects the dramatic leaps in technology for both destroying and preserving life.[3] One powerful contemporary example of this figure is the soldier in white in Joseph Heller's *Catch-22.* He makes his appearance in the first chapter:

> The soldier in white was encased from head to toe in plaster and gauze. He had two useless legs and two useless arms. He had been smuggled into the ward during the night, and the men had no idea he was among them until they awoke in the morning and saw the two strange legs hoisted from the hips, the two strange arms anchored up perpendicularly, all four limbs pinioned strangely in air by lead weights suspended darkly above him that never moved. Sewn into the bandages over the insides of both elbows were zippered lips through which he was fed clear fluid from a clear jar. A silent zinc pipe rose from the cement on

> his groin and was coupled to a slim rubber hose that carried waste from his kidneys and dripped it efficiently into a clear, stoppered jar on the floor. When the jar on the floor was full, the jar feeding his elbow was empty, and the two were simply switched quickly so that stuff could drip back into him. All they ever really saw of the soldier in white was a frayed black hole over his mouth. (10)

The soldier in white makes no sound, is not even known to be male, and is found to be dead only when his temperature is taken. Late in the book he returns. This time he has a name, Lieutenant Schmulker, and is heavier and a few inches shorter but looks the same, and no one can verify that he really is the burn victim Schmulker. When Yossarian's friend Dunbar claims, "'There's no one inside!" and tries to prove it by looking through the soldier's mouth hole, MPs spirit the soldier in white away, and Dunbar is "disappeared," never to be seen again.

The lineage of Heller's soldier in white is complicated. Wayne Miller correctly identifies him as "the direct descendant" of the horribly wounded World War I veterans Donald Mahon in William Faulkner's *Soldier's Pay* and Joe Bonham in Dalton Trumbo's *Johnny Got His Gun* (209). "Left by the war faceless, limbless, without identity," Joe Bonham is, for Miller, "like Mahon . . . the ultimate product of war: the ruined innocent youth" (122). Heller's soldier in white may also have more popular roots, such as horror movies. At one point the narrator compares him to a mummy (173), and his white shell of bandages may well remind us of those worn by Claude Rains in *The Invisible Man* (1933). When Heller's invisible man returns late in the book, the other patients panic and run from one end of the ward to the other in a parody of scenes of mass hysteria in *The Invisible Man* and other horror films.

Many critics have commented on the symbolism of Heller's soldier in white. Vance Ramsey observes, "The soldier in white is not only a reminder of the imminence of death; he is also a constant reminder to the men of their status within the system" (109). As one of the other soldiers on the ward asks, "Why can't they hook the jars up to each other and eliminate the middleman? What the hell do they need him for?" (Heller 174).

In other words, whether or not there is a horribly wounded soldier inside the bandages, the most damaging wound the soldier in white represents is to the psyches of the other men on the ward: the recognition that neither the military bureaucracy nor the universe itself cares about or even notices their humanity. As has often been noted about *Catch-22,* Heller's satire extends to the postwar world; in a 1970 interview in *Time* entitled "Some Are More Yossaian Than Others," he said that "the cold war is what I was truly talking about" (66). His soldier in white finally stands not only for soldiers in war but for everyone in the grip of bureaucracy, disease, accident, and death.

The soldier in white also appears in more recent narratives of war. The remainder of this essay will take us back to Silko's *Ceremony* by comparing and contrasting the soldiers in white in her book and two other contemporary North American war narratives, American Philip Caputo's Vietnam memoir *A Rumor of War* and Canadian Timothy Findley's World War I novel *The Wars*. Like *Ceremony*, both of these books were published in 1977, just two years after the fall of Saigon.

Caputo, a Marine lieutenant in Vietnam in 1965 and 1966, self-consciously places his memoir in the tradition of earlier war literature by quoting Wilfred Owen, Ernest Hemingway, and many other authors throughout his book. Among Caputo's allusions is a reference to *Catch-22*. After returning from the field, some members of Caputo's battalion are offered liberty in Da Nang with the stipulation that nobody can go there "except on the regularly scheduled liberty-bus run." When someone asks when the bus is scheduled, the first sergeant replies, "As far as I know, there isn't any" (129). One of the men laughingly comments, "And I thought *Catch-22* was fiction." In response to someone's question, "What's Catch-22?" Caputo explains, "It's a satire about army bureaucracy." Showing the appropriateness of the allusion by missing its point, the first sergeant responds, "Army? What's that got to do with us? We're in the Marine Corps, not the Army" (130). Finally, the men make it to Da Nang without the bus.

The moral issues in *A Rumor of War* are more complex than those faced by Yossarian in *Catch-22*. The key incident occurs late in the book. Driven to the breaking point by the carnage, especially the heavy losses in his own company, and pressure

from superiors for higher body counts, Caputo orders the capture of two Vietnamese that an informant says are Viet Cong. Although Caputo does not order the men killed, his tone and manner make it clear that he would welcome their deaths. By mistake Caputo's soldiers capture and kill the wrong pair of men, two innocent civilians, one of whom turns out to be the informant himself, and all the Marines involved, including Caputo, face a court-martial.

Caputo's portrayal of the soldier in white illustrates the author's complicated feelings about this incident. The soldier in white in *Rumor* is less prominent than in *Catch-22* but still identifiable and powerful in impact on the reader. Here he is a composite of two wounded soldiers in a division field hospital. The first is a Marine with a serious head injury:

> He is heavily bandaged. An intravenous tube is inserted in one of his forearms, a plasma tube in the other, and the tubes hang down from bottles suspended on a metal rack. Another tube is attached to his penis. Various fluids—urine, glucose, blood plasma—course steadily through the plastic tubes . . . . He lies still, and I can tell he is alive only by the rising and falling of his chest and the low, guttural sounds he makes every few minutes. (Caputo 96)

Near him is a South Vietnamese soldier with his bed elevated so that he is almost sitting up:

> Bandages and plaster casts cover every part of his body except one arm, the lower half of his face, and the top of his head. A shock of thick, black hair droops over the battle dressing wrapped around his forehead and eyes. A number of instruments are attached to the soldier's body: tubes, rubber hoses, clamps, pressure gauges. Wrapped in white, with all those devices on him, he reminds me of one of those hideous experiments in a horror movie. (Caputo 97)

With his humanity destroyed by the war, the description of the mechanical devices also makes him seem like a car being worked on at a service station. Soon, we learn that "he has

been wounded in the left arm, both legs, stomach, and head and is expected to die in a day or two. The marine is less fortunate" and will probably live to a normal age as "a vegetable" (97). By splitting the soldier in white into an American and a Vietnamese, Caputo broadens the American reader's sympathy for victims of the war. This strategy is also an expression of the guilt he feels toward the Vietnamese for his country's role in the war and his own, especially in the killing of the civilians.

We see these soldiers in white for only a few more paragraphs. Moments after the wounded American's prognosis is spoken, he "begins to thrash around and make a strange noise, a sort of gurgling snarl" (97). It seems "almost as if he were trying to disprove" the prediction. In his spasm he bites the thermometer in his mouth in half and tries to swallow it, but the attendant removes it and sedates him, much as Joe Bonham is sedated after his futile attempts to communicate with the outside world in *Johnny Got His Gun*. While Heller's and Caputo's soldiers in white remain cut off from the living by their wounds, they also reflect the extent to which all the soldiers are cut off from civilian life, probably permanently. Stalked relentlessly by Nately's whore, Yossarian will never be able to relax, as the book leaves him forever fleeing toward safety in Sweden with no promise he will ever get there. The betrayed idealism and moral corruption Caputo experiences isolate him even more from his country as well as from himself.

Whether or not the Marine is conscious enough to intend to destroy the thermometer in either desperate anger or an attempt to kill himself, the action looks forward to the distinction Caputo makes at the end of the book between facts and truth (312). The fact of the Marine's temperature, which might eventually be normal, reveals almost nothing about the truth of his condition. At the court-martial, the carefully constructed, self-protecting testimony given by Caputo and the enlisted men who killed the civilians is factual but fails to get at the true guilt, which Caputo believes is shared by all of them and even more by American military policies and the war itself (313). Awaiting the verdict, Caputo thinks of himself as "a casualty of the war, a moral casualty, and like all serious casualties, I felt detached from everything" (313). He recalls recently seeing among the wounded at a division hospital

another soldier in white, whose physical condition becomes a metaphor for Caputo's alienation: "one young platoon leader wrapped up like a mummy with plastic tubes inserted in his kidneys" (316). This soldier, too, is a victim of the war. "Incompetent staff work" allowed his battalion to be led into a trap during a period of the war when the South Vietnamese were fighting each other, leaving the Americans to deal with the Viet Cong (316).

The outcome of the court-martial holds no cure for Caputo's moral and psychological paralysis. One of the enlisted men is acquitted, and charges against the others are dropped. Caputo's murder charges are also dropped when he agrees to plead guilty to lying to an investigating officer, for which he is only reprimanded and sent home from Vietnam. Caputo had lied to the officer but almost immediately tried to correct his statement, and it's ironic that the only official fact to come out of his court-martial is an admission of untruth. Caputo continues to feel guilty about his role in the killings. Nine years later in his epilogue, he returns as a correspondent covering the final days of South Vietnam but still feels no lightening of his emotional burden. Even writing the book seems to provide no release from his anger at the "missionary idealism" and illusions of national omnipotence that he believes caused the American failure in Vietnam and his own participation in it (xiv). Knowing that the truth he tells about the war is uncorroborated by verdicts of the military justice system or other official statements only adds to Caputo's alienation.

Although *The Wars* contains no explicit reference to *Catch-22* and is set in World War I rather than Heller's World War II, Findley has placed a soldier in white in the spatial and thematic center of his book. In fact, whereas in *Catch-22* and *A Rumor of War* the soldier in white is a third party symbolizing all soldiers, in *The Wars* the main character, Robert Ross, himself becomes a soldier in white.

While on leave and visiting a dying friend at a London hospital, Canadian soldier Robert Ross sees Canadian former athlete and now soldier Eugene Taffler and British socialite Lady Barbara d'Orsey visiting "a man entirely encased in bandages. He was quite unable to move. Robert had already been intrigued by his silence" (Findley 97). Barbara says nothing to the wounded soldier, but Taffler whispers

something to him and touches him on the shoulder as a signal that the visitors are leaving. After their quick departure, "Robert could feel the man in the bandages 'screaming' and the sensation of this silent agony at the other end of the room was finally so strong that Robert had to go and get one of the nurses," who gives the man morphine and tells Robert that he "had been trapped in a fire and his vocal cords destroyed when he'd swallowed the flames" (Findley 98). She also identifies the man as Captain Jamie Villiers. Lady Barbara's younger sister Juliet describes his plight in these words: "Nothing was left of him, you know. Nothing but nerves and pain and his mind. No voice—no flesh. Nothing. Just his *self*" (Findley 104). Late in the book, we are simply told that Villiers has died of his burns (Findley 155).

Like Heller's soldier in white, Findley's illustrates the suffering endured by all the soldiers in the book. Specifically, Villiers's condition foreshadows the plights of both Taffler and Robert. Juliet explicitly links the three when she says that "extremely physical men like Robert and Jamie and Taffler are often extremely sensitive men as well" (103). And as John Hulcoop has pointed out, all three eventually become Barbara's lovers (34). After Villiers is burned, Barbara leaves him and becomes involved with Taffler. The couple visits Villiers regularly, but Juliet considers Barbara's refusal to let him hear her voice to be deliberate cruelty (104). The cause of Villiers's attempt to scream witnessed by Robert may be Barbara's silence or his frustration that Taffler and Barbara are now together.

When Robert first met Taffler, the former star football passer had just recovered from a war wound and was keeping his arm in shape by throwing stones at bottles before returning to the war. He quickly became something of a hero to Robert: "He was thinking that perhaps he'd found the model he could emulate—a man to whom killing wasn't killing at all but only throwing . . . . A man to whom war wasn't good enough unless it was bigger than he was" (35). Eventually, Taffler loses both arms in the war and is sent to the d'Orsey country estate, St. Aubyn's, which Barbara's mother has converted to a convalescent hospital for soldiers. Barbara forges Taffler's signature on an invitation to Robert, who is recovering from knee injuries, and there she and Robert become involved. One

day about a half hour after Juliet sees them leaving Taffler's room and embracing, she enters the room and foils his suicide attempt:

> He was kneeling on the floor in a pool of unraveled bandage with his forehead touching the stones. The end of the bandage was in his teeth. One of the walls was covered with great wide swipes of red at shoulder height where he must have been rubbing his wounds to make them bleed. The stumps where his arms had been were raw and one of them was pumping blood in spurts across the floor. (152)

The scene recalls Villiers's silent scream; perhaps Taffler has found out that because of his wounds Barbara has moved on to Robert.

Near the end of the book, Robert himself is severely burned in the second of two heroic but futile attempts to rescue groups of army horses from the horror of the war. In both efforts Robert disobeys orders, and he kills a captain and a private on his own side who try to stop him. Robert's burns are terrible; the captain whose men capture him "was barely able to recognize that Robert had a face" (186), and at the hospital "it was almost impossible for him to speak" (188). But in contrast to Taffler, as Peter Klovan notes (64), Robert's only words are used to decline a nurse's offer to help him commit suicide: "Not yet" (189). Court-martialed in absentia, Robert is allowed to return to St. Aubyn's because "there was virtually no hope that he would ever walk or see or be capable of judgement again" (189). Until his death six years later, Juliet nurses him faithfully there, her sister having moved on to another soldier lover. One of our last views of Robert is a photograph taken a year before his death: "He has no eyebrows—his nose is disfigured and bent and his face is a mass of scar tissue. Juliet is looking up at him—speaking—and Robert is looking directly at the camera. He is holding Juliet's hand. And he is smiling" (190).

Sister M. L. McKenzie suggests that Robert's smile "casts doubt on the validity" of his official prognosis (408), but he dies, apparently from the effects of his burns, before turning 26. Klovan, McKenzie, and Bruce Pirie argue that Robert's

attempts to rescue the horses heroically transcend the brutality around him or at least resist it by affirming his individuality and love of nature. But despite the appeal of Robert's desperate acts, they remain as enigmatic as his smile. Why, for example, did he shoot the innocent, unarmed Private Cassles in the face, killing him, when Cassles tried to grab the reins of Robert's horse? Surely, Robert could have found a less drastic way to ward off Cassles's interference with his plan for the horses.[4] And even if Robert has achieved a kind of serenity by the end, his healing is at best partial, for he lacks the mobility and strength to act on it and the voice to articulate it at least to us.[5] Thus, the end of Findley's novel draws us back to its center and the silent scream of Villiers, the soldier in white whose fate Robert can't completely escape. *The Wars* brilliantly calls our attention to the fragility of people who are the victims and sometimes at once the perpetrators of violence in war and peace and helps us cherish the delicate details of their lives. But to find a soldier in white who is truly healed, we must turn to Leslie Silko's *Ceremony*.

The soldiers in white we have seen so far in *Catch-22*, *A Rumor of War*, and *The Wars* have all been essentially victims, later examples of "the ruined innocent youth," as Miller described Faulkner's Donald Mahon and Trumbo's Joe Bonham. Their humanity is lost to the violence of war and the civilian and military bureaucracies that perpetuate it. The soldiers in white in the three books we have examined share most if not all of the following characteristics: (1) they are immobilized and totally dependent on those around them; (2) they are surrounded by tubes and gadgets that may keep them alive but clearly suggest that their identity has been reduced to that of machines; (3) they are mummified in bandages that imply a living death; and (4) they are trapped in silence, cut off from friends, family, and society. Caputo's guilt for American actions in the war, including his own, adds moral corruption to the plight of his soldiers in white when he identifies with them. Heller and Findley explicitly connect the condition of their soldiers in white to that of civilians, Heller through his satire on the 1950s and his reflections on the absurdity of life and Findley through his revelation of the fragility, ruthlessness, and cruelty in the Ross and d'Orsey families.

None of these soldiers in white is healed. Even when they resist their fate, as perhaps in the spasm of Caputo's Marine and certainly in Villiers's silent scream and Taffler's suicide attempt, their efforts fail and almost always seem to intensify the soldiers' suffering. Only Robert Ross may find even moments of release in trying to save the horses and being cared for later by Juliet, but because he remains silent to us, we can't be sure. Silko tells a very different story.

Like *The Wars*, *Ceremony* looks back to an earlier war, in this case World War II, to tell the story of Tayo, the battle-fatigued Laguna Pueblo Indian who survives the Bataan Death March. It is easy to see that this novel differs in important ways from the works we have studied by Heller, Caputo, and Findley: from the beginning, Silko's protagonist is the soldier in white, and she devotes the main line of narrative to his return from the war and eventual healing; his war experience, centered on his psychological wounding, is revealed only in flashbacks. While it might be argued that it is easier to heal a psychological wound than the terrible physical ones in the other books, we need to remember that none of the other authors limits his scope to the physical horrors of war. Each is also at least as concerned with the psychological effects of war and in some way enlarges his book to analyze the society that makes the war. Healing in any of these books would have to be at least as much psychological as physical and therefore applicable to civilians as well as to soldiers. Only in Silko's book is such healing possible because of the novel's grounding in the Native American belief that the spiritual and physical worlds are equally real and intertwined.[6] Only in *Ceremony* does the soldier in white find genuine peace.

Although, like *The Wars*, *Ceremony* contains no explicit mention of *Catch-22*, the description of Tayo in the veterans hospital in Los Angeles after the war recalls Heller's soldier in white:

> For a long time he had been white smoke. He did not realize that until he left the hospital, because white smoke had no consciousness of itself. It faded into the white world of their bed sheets and walls; it was sucked away by the words of doctors who tried to talk to the invisible scattered smoke. He had seen outlines of gray

> steel tables, outlines of the food they pushed into his mouth, which was only an outline too, like all the outlines he saw. They saw his outline but they did not realize it was hollow inside. (14-15)

While the soldiers in white in the other books are wrapped in bandages, Tayo is engulfed by his war trauma and the white bureaucracy that can't understand or heal him. Throughout the book, references to the veterans hospital stress its whiteness. Tayo tells the Navajo healer Betonie: "They sent me to this place after the war. It was white. Everything in the place was white. Except for me. I was invisible" (123). Betonie's response recalls the living death endured by the soldiers in white in the other books: "In that hospital they don't bury the dead, they keep them in rooms and talk to them" (123). Also like Heller's soldier in white, Tayo is hollow, his identity lost, and this motif is also developed throughout the book. He often feels hollow, but as he is healed and his identity restored, the hollowness is gradually filled in.

To understand Tayo's healing, we must look briefly at the causes of his breakdown. He is pushed toward it by a sergeant's order to shoot a group of Japanese prisoners. He refuses because he believes he sees his beloved Uncle Josiah among them. When the rest of his squad kills the prisoners, Tayo believes he sees Josiah die with them. The event that most haunts Tayo is the death of his cousin Rocky, with whom he has been raised since the age of four and whom he loves as a brother and has promised to protect. With another soldier Tayo carries his mortally wounded cousin on a blanket during the Bataan Death March. When the torrential rain makes the other soldier slip, Tayo curses the rain as he struggles to resume carrying Rocky. But Tayo's Japanese captors are weary of being slowed down by this extra burden. One of them covers Rocky with the blanket and jabs him with his rifle butt, either to finish him off or simply to prove to Tayo that he's dead so the march can continue. When Tayo comes home from the war, he is broken by grief and guilt for his inability to protect Rocky and for the years of drought he believes his curse of the rain has brought his pueblo's land.

Critics such as Edith Swan and B. A. St. Andrews have traced Tayo's healing throughout the book, detailing Silko's

use of Native American myth and ritual. The turning point is Tayo's healing ceremony conducted by the Navajo medicine man Betonie midway through the book. To complete the ceremony, Tayo must undertake the quest that occupies much of the rest of the novel: recovering a herd of stolen cattle. These are special Mexican cattle, able to survive in the desert; Josiah bought them before Tayo left for the war. For our purposes, the key moment in Tayo's quest occurs after he has freed the cattle and been let go by the fence riders because they don't realize what he's just done and they are distracted by the tracks of a mountain lion they want to hunt: the first snow of the winter begins. In symbolism of death and rebirth, Tayo sleeps, awakens, and walks toward home as the snow increases:

> The snow was covering everything, burying the mountain lion's tracks and obliterating his scent. The white men and their lion hounds could never track the lion now. . . . It would cover all signs of the cattle too; the wet flakes would cling to the fence wire and freeze into a white crust; and the wire he had cut away and the gaping hole in the fence would be lost in the whiteout, hidden in snow on snow. . . . [T]he ranch roads would be impassable with sticky mud, and it would be days before the cowboys could patrol the fences again. (Silko 205)

This passage deserves a close look. As Tayo is regenerated, so is the color white, for in this passage Tayo's identity as the soldier in white has become positive. Instead of being wrapped in the whiteness of the hospital, he is now cloaked by snow, which protects both him and the mountain lion whose presence saved him. Although she does not discuss this passage, Kathleen Manley notes the shifting symbolism of white, "the most frequently-appearing color" in the book, and sees the same multivalence in the use of white in Pueblo and Navajo myth and ritual (136-7). The falling snow shows the regeneration of nature itself, since snow in the mountains means the end of the drought in the valley below. The unfolding ceremony is healing both Tayo and nature by restoring their bond.

It is significant that the color white is not eliminated but redefined; we now see its positive side. This strategy grows out of Native American spirituality's stress on balance instead of the absolute destruction of evil and is crucial for the healing of Tayo, whose appearance betrays the fact that his father was white (Silko 57). Tayo must come to terms with this side of his heritage even as he draws primary sustenance from his maternal Native American roots.

Part of Silko's redefinition of whiteness in the book also involves broadening the definition of evil to a "witchery" that is larger than white people and victimizes them even as they victimize the Indians:

> Only a few people knew that the lie was destroying the white people faster than it was destroying Indian people. But the effects were hidden, evident only in the sterility of their art, which continued to feed off the vitality of other cultures, and in the dissolution of their consciousness into dead objects: the plastic and neon, the concrete and steel. Hollow and lifeless as a witchery clay figure. (204)

Betonie laid the groundwork for this more complex view of whiteness when he cautioned Tayo not to "believe all evil resides with white people" (Silko 132) or to "write off all the white people" or "trust all the Indians" (Silko 128).

If Tayo's problems are related to those of other Indians and whites, his healing offers possibilities for them, too, as the setting of the final test in his ceremony suggests. Having shown his power to take action in recovering the cattle, Tayo faces a challenge to his wisdom and forbearance when he comes down from the mountains. A group of alcoholic, despondent fellow veterans, formerly his friends, cruelly kill one of their number in an attempt to lure Tayo out of hiding and into a futile violent response, but he defeats the witchery by refusing to intervene and meet his own death as yet another drunken, violent Indian. By setting this encounter near the uranium mine that produced the material for the bombs made in the Manhattan Project, Silko underlines the connection between Tayo's struggles and those of people everywhere in the nuclear age. And with his cure, she offers them hope.

Tayo's two defining moments of recovering the cattle and refusing to kill and be killed stand in sharp contrast to Robert Ross's desperate acts toward the end of *The Wars*. Unlike Robert, Tayo succeeds in liberating the animals he loves and helping them reach a range where they settle freely, and he doesn't kill anyone to do it. He also survives to be reintegrated with his people and tell his story to the old men in the kiva in a kind of late autumn ritual. Alone among the soldiers in white we have studied, Tayo is able to express himself, and by the end he seems destined to become a storyteller/holy man for his pueblo.

The importance of storytelling throughout *Ceremony* points up another key contrast between Silko's work and Caputo's. In *A Rumor of War,* the author's distinction between facts and truth deepens his despair because the complex truth is so different from the superficial facts of his experience in Vietnam and because he believes he must tell that truth alone, without support from any other person or institution. Silko sees a similar distinction between scientific fact and the truth of Native American storytelling but, in contrast to Caputo, suggests that this breach can be healed:

> He [Tayo] knew what the white people thought about the stories. In school the science teacher had explained what superstition was, and then held the science book up for the class to see the true source of explanations. He had studied those books, and he had no reasons to believe the stories any more. The science books explained the causes and effects. But old Grandma always used to say, "Back in time immemorial, things were different, the animals could talk to human beings and many magical things still happened." He never lost the feeling he had in his chest when she spoke those words, as she did each time she told them stories; and he still felt it was true, despite all they had taught him in school. . . . (94-95)

Of course, in *Ceremony* the Native American myths throughout the book are shown to be true, especially through the success of Tayo's healing ritual. But the truth of the stories does not come at the expense of scientific fact; the dichotomy between

them is shown to be false, another example of white witchery. When Josiah buys the Mexican cattle, he disregards the scientific books on cattle raising "written by white people who did not think about drought or winter blizzards or dry thistles, which the cattle had to live with" (Silko 75), but his own principles in selecting the cattle are scientifically sound. Perhaps, like the color white, science too can become positive if transformed by the Pueblo vision, as Josiah jokes: "Maybe we'll even write our own books, *Cattle Raising on Indian Land,* or how to raise cattle that don't eat grass or drink water" (Silko 75). After the cattle are established at Tayo's family ranch and accept a bull into the herd for breeding, "he could see Josiah's vision emerging, he could see the story taking form in bone and muscle" (Silko 226). Silko implies that science is not so objective as white society thinks and that Pueblo stories imaginatively portray truths white society often overlooks.

Tayo has access to the healing power of Pueblo rituals and stories because a community survives to preserve and renew them. This is what makes his reintegration into that community by the end so important and so different from the fates of the other soldiers in white. Again, his contrast with the isolated Caputo is striking. Tayo's audience at the kiva wants to hear his story and incorporate it into Pueblo mythology, while Caputo, like other soldiers in white, tries to scream but doesn't know if anyone will hear or understand.

Whether or not Silko views the gloom of the North American war narrative as an example of the "sterility" of the art of white society, *Ceremony* definitely adds a note of Otherness to that tradition. Grounded in Native American spirituality, it is an Otherness that is meant to heal. Silko reaches back to World War II for Tayo and the Manhattan Project, which links his fate to ours. And she offers more than Heller's best antidote—Yossarian's final escape—for Tayo returns to his past and his people to be healed. This healing should surely be added to Pratt's list of "the joys of the contact zone" (39).

I think that *Ceremony*, like *The Wars*, is also a response to the Vietnam War so recently ended when these books were published. In their guilt, suffering, and isolation, Tayo and Robert Ross have a great deal in common with Caputo. *A Rumor of War* explicitly and *The Wars* implicitly make eloquent pleas for sympathy and understanding for the Vietnam veteran.

But only Silko offers a prescription for healing both veterans and civilians scarred by the war and for creating a culture that might not repeat the mistakes of the war. Even whites who cannot embrace Native American spirituality may be able to learn from it and adopt some of its values. As Betonie said when explaining why he felt free to change traditional rituals, "things which don't shift and grow are dead things" (Silko 126). For Silko, healing the soldier in white is just the beginning. ■

Notes

1. See Swan, for example.
2. Roemer (181-89) compares poems by Momaday and Silko, and McAllister (155-58) contrasts *House Made of Dawn* and *Ceremony*.
3. For a brief account of advances in military medicine from the Civil War to Vietnam, see Colihan and Joy.
4. Klovan attempts to explain what he calls this "terrible contradiction" but acknowledges that Robert's action is difficult to accept (67-68).
5. For a useful discussion of silence and silenced voices in *The Wars,* see Brydon.
6. As B.A. St. Andrews writes, "Amerindian thought . . . obliterates the linear divisions between the natural and the supernatural. In turn, its characters seem both real and mythic: able to transform themselves into animals, to mingle freely with the spirit world, and to commune with all presences" (86).

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