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"The spirits are writing, not me"

Leslie Marmon Silko and the Powers that Inspired her to Write

Gardens in the Dunes.

by

Sigrun Kuefner

BA Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan, 1998

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

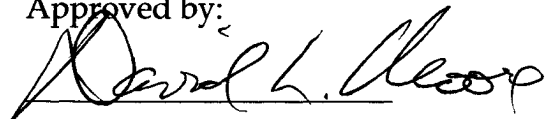
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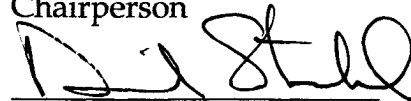
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"The Spirits are Writing, not Me."

Leslie Marmon Silko and the sources that inspired her to write Gardens in the Dunes (139 pp .)

Director: David L. Moore

Leslie Marmon Silko's Gardens in the Dunes marks a departure for the author from the familiar setting of her previous novels. With this book Silko explores not only her Native American heritage, but also her European one.

In many of her interviews and autobiographical writings Silko insists that, what she calls, her ancestor spirits influence her writing. At times she even argues that the spirits tell her the stories.

With this thesis I explore the various "ancestor sprits" that were responsible for the creation of Gardens in the Dunes.

In Chapter I, I sort through the spiritual ancestors, or sources, behind the novel. Silko seems to have been delighted to find pre-Christian spirits, suppressed by the church, in Great Britain, Italy, and Germany. Here she found a common ground for her Native American and European ancestors.

Chapter II is dedicated to women Silko used as role models for one of her characters, Hattie Palmer. Through comparisons of their writing with paragraphs from Gardens in the Dunes, I show the importance of their influence on Silko's characters.

Chapter III includes philosophers and writers from previous centuries, whom Silko admires. Even though Silko does not mention a connection between the Native American child Indigo and the legendary Parzival, as told by Wolfram von Eschenbach, I also explore this connection in this chapter.

The poet James Wright, whose correspondence with Silko, The Delicacy and Strength of Lace, shows a deep connection between these two authors, was an inspiration and comfort to Silko even after his death. Many of Wright's descriptions of his travels and experiences in Italy appear to have helped create the scenes for Indigo's journey. In addition, Silko, with the help of this correspondence, ties together what her Native American and European ancestors and educators had taught her: that perhaps there is hope for humanity after all.

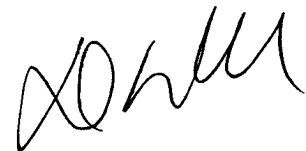


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In the Beginning was the Word – Thought

You must be very quiet and listen respectfully

Otherwise the storyteller might get upset and pout

And not say another word all night.

(Leslie Marmon Silko, Storyteller 254)

If the storyteller gets upset and does not say another word, where would the stories go? Where would the audience, the readers, and the writers get their stories? Silko insists repeatedly in interviews that her ancestor spirits tell her the stories she writes. She tells Laura Coltelli in 1993, "In Almanac, I go farther with my thinking about the influence of spirit beings as well as animal beings" (Arnold 131), and in a conversation with Thomas Irmer and Matthias Schmidt in 1995, Silko states, "when I started writing I began to realize this is not simple, what is going on. I began to lose control of the novel and to feel that all of the old stories came in, and I felt the presence of spirit" (Arnold 154). A few pages later she goes so far as to say, "the spirits are writing Almanac, not me" (Arnold 174).

When speaking about Gardens in the Dunes, Silko expands this theme by saying that she based the character of Hattie Abbott Palmer on both Margaret Fuller and Alice James. She tells Arnold,

I loved Margaret Fuller for years and years. She's a great hero of mine, ever since I was an undergraduate. . . . We studied all the transcendentalists. And of course, I just loved Margaret Fuller. What a woman! What a hero! I walked around in that bookstore, and by golly, there was a copy of a biography of Margaret Fuller's early years. So I have her Italian years and then I have a biography leading up to that, so I started reading them. And then Alice James, that biography. So Hattie's part Alice James too. Alice James was really thwarted, and sort of an invalid. In a sense, Alice James is what Hattie avoids, through her affection and involvement with Indigo, and the firming of her resistance to the way she was railroaded by the culture and the people. (Arnold 179)

So Fuller and James became Fairy Godmothers, as well as ancestors, to Hattie. As role models for Hattie they became her ancestors, the people who gave shape and personality to Hattie. As Fairy Godmothers they supervised Hattie's development and made sure that Hattie avoided James' fate.

Exploring the threads that connect the ancestors responsible for the creation of Gardens in the Dunes, the reader will find that the entities Silko calls ancestor spirits not only include the spirits of her Laguna and European ancestors, but her literary and philosophical teachers and role models as well.

The connection and significance of the different ancestor spirits -- or entities -- to Gardens in the Dunes, open different possibilities of interpreting Silko's work.

With this novel she introduces a unifying rather than a divisive tone and philosophy to her readers. It appears as if, after Almanac, she wants to show her reader that there is hope for a future, for cooperation among people.

The poet, James Wright, calls Silko's Ceremony "a great book, a perfect work of art, and one of the four or five best books I have ever read about America" (The Delicacy and Strength of Lace 3). He did not speak of one of the best books by a Native American writer, but one of the best books about America. I do not intend to diminish or erase the Native part of Silko as an American writer. She is a Native American writer, just as Maya Anjelou is an African American writer or Chaim Potock a Jewish American one. But all three artists are also, if not primarily, American writers, representing the spirit and talents of the diversity of the American artist. Silko, like the other two artists I mentioned, was influenced not only by her Native heritage but by her European and American mentors or heroes, her ancestor spirits -- or minds -- as well.

With this paper I am going to to substantiate the importance of these different influences on the birth of Gardens in the Dunes. Relying on Silko's own statements about her creative process in writing Gardens in the Dunes, I will attempt to show how all these elements helped shape the characters and events of the novel.

Ancestor spirits are an important part of Pueblo, and especially Laguna, mythology. Naming ceremonies for children are held before the shrines of the ancestors, and throughout the Pueblos' lives, whenever they feel the need for assistance, they make an offering to the ancestor spirits and petition for help. "By visiting any shrine and placing an offering of feathers and white cornmeal on it, he (the Pueblo) can enlist the aid of the ancestral souls in his undertaking" (Ortiz 59). The ancestor spirits are ready and willing to help in all of life's struggles. Sometimes they help to solve problems for the Pueblos through stories, and sometimes through direct intervention.

Ancestors are stories (according to Silko) and stories are ancestors, and as such they make appearances in Native American literature. Silko says,

The old folks said the stories themselves had the power to protect us and even to heal us because the stories are alive; the stories are our ancestors. In the very telling of the stories, the spirits of our beloved ancestors and family become present with us. The ancestors love us and care for us though we may not know this. (Yellow Woman and A Beauty of the Spirit 152)

So the ancestors live in the stories, and as the stories are told the ancestors are there to help and care for their descendants.

Even skeptical readers are comfortable with the idea of spirits in Native American novels. They are comfortable because they differentiate between author and implied author. If the implied author -- the literary creation whose views are the views of Silko's previous work -- is Native American, then references to spirit beings are acceptable. According to Wayne C. Booth, "Leslie Marmon Silko is writing from the view point of a traditional Indian. If Silko were having a breakdown I would guess that she would be more likely to visit a psychiatrist than a medicine man" (The Rhetoric of Fiction). Booth may be correct in this assumption; but then again he may not. While one may not wish to argue with the opinion that "the views of the implied author often differ sharply from those of the actual author" (Velie 113), to assume what Silko would do in any given situation, is to assume knowledge of her private life and circumstance and has no relevance in a discussion about her work. Reading the implied author's point of view, implied readers do indeed suspend their normal beliefs. Gardens in the Dunes, however, presents a different story, and the ancestor spirits who, Silko says, encouraged her to write the book, are not only the spirits of her Laguna ancestors but those of her European ancestors as well.

In Gardens in the Dunes Silko explores new territory, both geographically as well as spiritually/intellectually. All her previous books of fiction, Ceremony, Storyteller, and Almanac of the Dead, live and grow out of the indigenous

Ocean. In addition to Brazil, Costa Rica and Mexico, the readers accompany them to England and Italy.

But the readers do not just accompany the characters to unexpected landscapes; as readers of Silko's previous novels, they find themselves in new spiritual and religious environments as well. Especially readers who come from a European Christian background are forced, through Aunt Bronwyn, to look at the pagan pre-Christian part of their own souls. During a conversation about Hattie's thesis, Aunt Bronwyn tells Hattie and Indigo about the suppression of the old religions in the British Isles. They learn how "the Council of Tours decreed excommunication for those who persisted in worshipping trees, and the Council of Nantes instructed bishops and their servants to dig up and hide the stones in remote woody places upon which vows were still made" (Gardens 261). Together with Hattie, readers discover some the rejected parts of the early Christian Church. So the spirits that inhabited pre-Christian Europe, and the ancient Christian philosophers -- rejected and condemned by the church fathers yet loved by their followers -- become ancestors to Gardens.

Analyzing Silko's work presents challenges to many of her critics. To some, she is too Native, to others not Native enough. And then there is the whole issue of what exactly is Native American literature and what is not, or who has a right to interpret it and who does not. In his introduction to Leslie Marmon Silko, Gregory Salyer insists "that much of Silko's writing overflows traditional

categories of criticism and does not lend itself to familiar interpretive strategies.”

Arnold Krupat confirms this difficulty in his introduction to New Voices in Native American Literary Criticism, when he answers his own question concerning research based upon “not only Native experience but Native construction of the category of knowledge (xix)” with these words:

It is an urgent question, in as much as a good number of us are quite clear that we do not wish any longer to “domesticate the savage mind,” (In Jack Goody’s phrase), or (in Eric Cheyfitz’ sense) to engage in imperial acts of translation that simply override indigenous experiential and conceptual understandings. (xix)

But is every interpretation according to western literary standards a domestication of the savage mind, every attempt at translating an imperial act? Could it not just as easily be precisely what it says it is, an attempt at understanding the other? Readers, writers, philosophers, and critics have been translating and interpreting the literature of other cultures for millennia. Is trying to understand Native American literature, for a western educated reader, that much different than trying to understand Japanese literature, or an Egyptian one?

Susan Berry Brill Ramirez attempts to solve the problem of analyzing and interpreting Native American literature by introducing her conversive strategy,

which she bases upon the underlying thesis that literary scholarship must respond to and be

informed by the literary works themselves, and that this process needs to manifest itself in a deliberate and intentional conversation between the scholar and the literary works as the scholar actually enters the storied worlds and comes to be in relationship with the work, the teller-writer, and the persons/characters within the stories. (19)

Both Krupat and Brill de Ramirez imply that not only is it next to impossible to analyze Native American literature by the traditional methods of Western scholarship, but that attempting to do so would be, once again, to marginalize and colonialize the Native mind (Brill de Ramirez 2).

While Brill de Ramirez advises her readers that the conversive strategy of interpretation of literary works will be beneficial for all works, not only Native American literature, Krupat recommends that a new and separate form of literary criticism be applied to Native literature. He says in his introduction to New Voices in Native American Literary Criticism that while he is optimistic that academic work is possible in the field of Native American literature, he also considers himself and the contributors to this volume of critical essays as border intellectuals, persons who “have chosen to situate themselves at the ‘frontiers’ of

knowledge" (xix), writers who, intentionally or by chance, find themselves at the point where two cultures meet (xix).

In order to interpret and analyze Native literature, Wolfgang Hochbruck feels that the reader first has to have a solid understanding of what Native American literature is. He gives an overview of seven types of texts that may represent Native American literature (New Voices in Native American Criticism 215). Silko's novels would best fit into categories three and four.

3. Texts intended for a larger non-Native audience; written on behalf of the writer's own people or about Native issues in general;
4. Texts intended for a general readership of mixed ethnic identity about Native issues, using Native characters, motives, material, etc;

Out of these two categories, really only Number 4 would apply to all of Silko's works. Some readers could argue that Silko does write for a larger non-Native audience on behalf of her people, but I would argue in favor of "written for a general readership of mixed ethnic identity." Hochbruck also attempts to define what is a Native American, or Indian, writer, and he finally settles on Brian Swann's definition, which he paraphrases this way: "if a book by a Native American author is obviously intended as Native American literature, and if its audience (both Native and non-Native) reads and accepts this book as Native American literature and its author as Native American, then it should be accepted as such." While this appears an oversimplification of a complex issue, it

is still a valid point. If Native Americans as well as non-Native Americans accept a work of literature by a Native writer as Native American literature, then perhaps it should be. The argument could be made that there is a parallel situation with tribal enrollment. Who is, indeed, a Native American writer or doctor, or car mechanic or anyone in between?

Finding and establishing a workable strategy of interpretation for Gardens in the Dunes provided an additional challenge because Gardens in the Dunes is a recent work (1999), and in many ways a significant departure from Silko's previous novels. Not many critics have written about Gardens in the Dunes, so most of the critical articles I consulted concern Silko's previous works, and have value only as general references to Silko's writing. Some of the reviews of Gardens in the Dunes say more about the reviewer than about the book reviewed. Suzanne Ruta, in her review in the New York Times Book Review insists that Gardens in the Dunes has agendas -- feminist, anticlerical, millennial -- instead of voices. (NYT Book Review, . . .) And the review by Kirkus Associates (1999, Kirkus Associates, LP.) describes Gardens in the Dunes as "a thoughtful exploration of the incompatibility of dissimilar traditions."

Applying some of Silko's own statements about this book and her interpretation of *what the old people said*, I came to a different conclusion. While Gardens in the Dunes may indeed have an agenda, it is not a divisive one, is not

"an exploration of the incompatibility of dissimilar traditions." To the contrary, Silko paints many pictures in this book that show the compatibility of the dissimilar traditions rather than their incompatibility. As the following passage from Gardens in the Dunes illustrates, people from totally different backgrounds and of varying religious persuasions can share an experience that creates a mutual bond.

The scene Silko describes here is not the Ghost Dance in Needles, California, but is an incident on the trip to Corsica, when Indigo and Hattie accompany their local hosts to a school house, where many pilgrims had seen the Holy Mother appear on one of the walls. While the Corsicans fall on their knees and see the Virgin Mary, and even Hattie sees "a faint glow suffusing the whitewashed wall," and feels her heart beating faster "as the glow grew brighter with a subtle iridescence that steadily intensified into a radiance of pure color that left her breathless, almost dizzy," Indigo experiences the Ghost Dance. (319)

As the light changed, Indigo began to see tiny reflections glitter on the surface of the whitewashed plaster that she recognized as the flakes of snow that swirled around the dancers the last night when the Messiah appeared with his family. She could make out the forms of the dancers wrapped in their white shawls and the Messiah and his Mother standing in the center of the circle -- all were in a beautiful white light reflecting all the colors of the rainbow, lavender, blue red, green, and yellow -- and

in that instant Indigo felt the joy and the love that had filled her that night long ago when she stood with Sister Salt, Mama, and Grandma to welcome the Messiah. In that instant joy swept away all her grief, and she felt their love embrace her. (319)

Here is a clear example of people from three very different cultures, and with very different expectations, sharing in a religious experience. And while they each experience the event according to their own background, they share in the feeling, in the knowledge of something beautiful occurring to each of them.

The two reviews of Gardens in the Dunes in Native American Academic magazines almost totally ignore the non-Native American contents of the book. William Willard, who reviewed Gardens for the Fall 2000 edition of WICAZO SA, does not mention Indigo's travels or her relationship with white people like Hattie or Aunt Bronwyn. He limits his review to the Sand Lizard people, and the Mexican struggle for independence. He does, however, call Gardens a "story of revitalization" (141). And Karenne Wood from George Mason University writes in her review of Gardens,

Through winding, multifaceted plots and intricate historical details, Silko leads us back to what we have always known but have perhaps forgotten: that redemption lies within us, within the wisdom that those who preceded us compiled and lovingly left for us. The voice of this wisdom,

she affirms, is one that will never be silenced and cannot be taken away.

(American Indian Quarterly, Spring 1999, vol. 23.2. p. 72)

With this statement Wood seems to emphasize the inclusiveness of the novel.

The fact that redemption lies within each human being, that individuals have the power to redeem themselves by joining with each other to work for the good of all, is not totally new for Silko in Gardens. Even in Almanac Silko speaks about the fact that all people are welcome in the revolution.

Conflicts and collisions were inevitable, but it was best to start from scratch anyway. Nothing European in the Americas had worked very well anyway except destruction. All the people needed to remember was the twin brothers and the people from the south were coming to stop the destroyers. Converts were always welcome; Mother Earth embraced the souls of all who loved her. No fences or walls, would stop them; guns and bombs would not stop them. They had no fear of death; they were comfortable with their ancestors' spirits. they would come by the millions. (Almanac 735, 36)

These are the old woman's, Lecha's, musings at the big conference on Natural Healing. This is a humorous scene. Lecha figured out how the Barefoot Hopi and the old Mayan woman were taking a lot of young white people for a ride. But she

also knows that this particular message's appeal lies precisely in the fact that it holds the fire of truth. Silko incorporated Marxist and Native American ideas into this scene, and in the end of Almanac the readers are awaiting the revolution.

In Chapter III I will return to the ideas about redemption and renewal, for they, too, connect to various ancestor spirits. Redemption to most readers may have a Christian overtone, but redemption of individuals as well as humanity as a whole is a necessity for the survival of the species. And the ancestor spirits seem to have known that.

Silko may have felt the presence of what she calls spirits all along, but it was not until she wrote Almanac of the Dead that they started to make their presence known in a way she no longer could ignore.

It was with the Almanac where I first realized that there are these spirit entities. Time means nothing to them. And that you can have a kind of relationship with them. They rode me pretty hard in Almanac of the Dead. But then I learned not to be afraid of them. Yeah, I was meant to go there [Germany]. And the spirits were waiting there, probably called around by Almanac. But by then, I was also able to see fully the whole of it, that there was so much positive energy. And the old spirits made me write Almanac, they meant well, even though two-thirds of the way

through, they're about to do every one in, me included, believe me.

(Arnold 167)

Once she begins to write, the stories take over. They want to be written, and she needs to write them. Most readers familiar with Silko's works of non-fiction have encountered those ancestor spirits. In Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit, she often refers to the old stories and the ancestor spirits as almost interchangeable. When she speaks of the Maya Zapatistas' uprising, for example, she first tells about the stories. "The old folks said that the stories themselves had the power to protect us and even to heal us because the stories are alive; the stories are our ancestors" (Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit 152).

The idea for Gardens in the Dunes came to her, she says, from her German ancestor spirits while on a book tour for Almanac of the Dead in Germany in 1995.

I have German ancestors. I could just feel that in that realm, those ancestors are not like human beings who differentiate, that my German ancestors were right there for me. I didn't expect it. I guess that's when you're most open to it, when you're not consciously thinking about something. Then those things happen. (Arnold 165)

Not only were those German ancestor spirits there for Silko, but they urged her on to write Gardens, and eventually they accompany the characters of Gardens in the Dunes on every facet of their European journey.

As modern, western-educated readers, we have problems believing in spirits who tell us what to do. This is after all the twenty-first century, and listening to spirits is not necessarily a part of our culture. Or is it? Many intelligent people believe that God speaks to them through the Bible. Others hear *the spirit* during meditation, or walking in nature. Different writers tell us that their stories evolve in mysterious ways, almost as if someone has told them to write a given story.

The Chilean author, Isabel Allende, often speaks of the spirits of her people who tell her stories, or that the characters in her books tell her what to write. Often they speak to her in her dreams. In a recent interview (Writers Digest) she gives an example of these dream instructions. "I dream of babies when I'm writing and only when I'm writing. So I know the book is a baby and what happens to the baby in the dream is what is happening to the book in real life" (No. 6, June 2002). She continues with the example by saying that when the baby cries in the voice of an old man, then she knows that her narrative voice is not working properly and that she was unaware of this while she was awake.

Margaret Fuller, though she does not speak of ancestor spirits who give her inspiration, feels compelled to fulfill her soul's destiny, to be taken into the All.

I saw how long it must be before the soul can learn to act under these limitations, but I saw also that it MUST do it. . . . I saw that there was no self; that I had only to live in the idea of the All, and all was mine. This

truth came to me, and I received it unhesitatingly.

(Fuller, as in Men Women and Margaret Fuller 55)

Fuller, like Silko and Allende, sees herself as driven by forces other than herself to act and write in a certain way. She cannot help but accept these forces and do their bidding.

In addition to the difficulty of defining ancestor spirits -- spiritual or intellectual -- in a factual and logical manner, attempting to write a critical, literary analysis of Silko's Gardens in the Dunes presented me with other paradoxes as well. Could I, a European immigrant American, analyze the Native American storyteller par excellence, the writer who talks about stories as her ancestors? Also, Silko clearly states, in many interviews and essays, that she does not believe in *academic theory*, that she writes her stories because they want to be written, and that she does not consider herself as part of the literary establishment. Silko writes in a letter to James Wright in 1978, "that maybe academic background only runs so far, and then finally it is simple guts and heart" (The Delicacy and Strength of Lace 4). In a later letter to Wright she speaks about being an outsider in the world of writers, and about her feeling that she does not really fit in there. "I have to guard against my tendency to feel like I am an outsider, that I don't belong to the current American writing scene" (8). Yet despite all her protestations to the contrary, she is a part of the academic world,

of the American writing scene. Robert Franklin Gish, in his preface to Leslie Marmon Silko: A Collection of Critical Essays, refers to Silko as

a decidedly major author whose books have come to mean much to many readers, and especially critical readers. . . . Silko's most recent book to date, Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit, offers a somewhat more patient but still passionate insight into the intersection of the personal and the political forces not just in Silko's or in "Native American Life Today," as the subtitle states it, but in all of contemporary society. (vii, x)

Here again, as in Wright's previously quoted statement, the author's emphasis is on the all encompassing "contemporary society," rather than on "Native American." Even though this quote is by a Euro-American writer, it shows his interpretation of Silko's writing as on par with Wright's literary accomplishments. I want to make quite clear, however, that my attempt is not to diminish Silko's significance as a Native American. Rather, I want to demonstrate that in addition, not as a substitution, to being a great Native American writer, Silko is a great American writer who in her novels addresses concerns that affect most of humanity.

Which brings us back to some of the key questions in this thesis. What is a Native American writer, and how can their work be analyzed without doing injustice to the writer and at the same time without compromising the critic. In

his article "Literature in a National Sacrifice Area, Leslie Silko's Ceremony," (New Voices in Native American Criticism, 396-409) Shamoan Zamir says:

"While critical studies of Silko's work have rightly celebrated her commitment to literary and cultural innovation, they have failed too often to delineate in any precise detail the concrete form of her literary practice" (397). He continues his discussion by explaining that he intends to analyze Silko's work, in this case Ceremony, by examining the ways in which Silko uses and changes Pueblo and western narratives, and the manner in which she uses traditional stories in new contexts, and how she alters the stories to conform to western literary forms (397).

While such a description may fit Ceremony, it is my conviction that Silko, in Gardens, neither uses traditional stories in a new context nor alters them to conform to western standard. What she does instead is create new stories, new settings, which include both western and Native American thought and stories. She suggests that the experiences of the oppressed and disenfranchised are similar in most cultures. Even though the protagonist of Ceremony, Tayo, appears very dissimilar to the child, Indigo, in Gardens in the Dunes, (I will return to this in a later part of this paper) I would like to look at the paragraph about the vision on the schoolhouse wall in Gardens in the Dunes from this Zamir perspective.

While the Ghost Dance is not a Pueblo myth, but is a phenomenon that grew out of the desperation of mostly Plains Native people after they had been robbed of their land and moved to reservations (Nabokov 253), Indigo's memory of the Ghost Dance and her vision of it on an old school house wall in Corsia nevertheless qualifies as Zamir's "new context." But judging from the context of the remainder of Gardens in the Dunes, and from some of Silko's own comments concerning the novel, it is far more likely that her intent was of an entirely different nature. Her intent was to write a novel applicable to many cultures and times, and not exclusively to the Native American one. She does not put old stories into a new context, but she creates a new context. According to Arnold, following up on the interview with Coltelli where Silko insists that "while differences are important, she writes to realize the wonder and the power of what we share, Silko made this a primary theme of her third novel, Gardens in the Dunes" (Arnold xi). She emphasizes this statement with another declaration by Silko: "our nature, our human spirit wants no boundaries" (xi).

Silko says of Gardens in the Dunes that she wanted the novel to transcend boundaries, that she did not want it to be a strictly Native American novel. She tells Arnold, in answer to Arnolds's statement that Gardens brings Indians and Europeans together in a way that has never happened in a Native American Novel:

No, I don't think it's happened before. I can foresee the

possibility of the greatest of changes, but they can only happen if the people from the South work at it, and all the people here, including the non-Indian. Everyone would take part. It would be working toward what the continents and the old tribal spirits and people believe. That criticism grows out of more of a non-Indian way of looking at things. That is why the indigenous people welcomed the newcomers. They didn't draw lines like that.

(Arnold 171)

The old people did not draw lines, did not make distinctions between indigenous and European people -- until they learned that the Europeans could not be trusted. They taught their young to learn from and respect the other. With Gardens, Silko emphasizes this inclusiveness, this willingness to accept the other and learn from him/her. She wants to unite people with her writing, show them that there is hope for all, if they take care of their world and each other.

To Arnold's comment that she feels that Gardens shows the artificiality of the lines drawn between peoples and nations, Silko replied: "I am glad that comes through, because that's what I was trying to do, to get rid of this idea of nationality, borderline, and drawing lines in terms of time" (Arnold 170). In her further discussions she gives every indication that she does not like the distinction of Native American novel and Euro-American novel. She even says

that with Gardens in the Dunes she tried to dismantle the division between Native and Euro-American novels. When Arnold says,

Something that disturbs me is that much of the literary criticism that's written about Native American literature perpetuates those divisions. It's always Native American versus Euro-Americans, and it falls out that way even in literary interpretations. People have to make those political distinctions and draw those lines even when they're writing about novels (Arnold 171).

Silko replies: "Right. I really wanted to dismantle that in this novel" (171).

She points out that the old way of the Pueblos was inclusionary, not exclusionary. To Arnold's comment that people in Europe and the indigenous peoples in the Americas have a lot more in common than they have that divides them, Silko answers:

Exactly! And those who would make the boundary lines and try to separate them, those are the manipulators. Those are the Gunadeeyah, the destroyers, the exploiters. That's what I was trying to do, to get rid of nationality, borderlines, and drawing lines in terms of time and saying, oh well, that was back then. (Arnold 170)

Based on these quotes, I would like to offer this different interpretation of the scene at the schoolhouse wall in Corsica. Indigo's, Hattie's, and the townspeople's visions at the wall share in one common truth. The image appearing to them was what they needed to see at that point in their lives. The visions gave each participant a unique experience, an experience only the individual viewer took part in. The same holds true for Indigo's original Ghost Dance experience in Needles, California. The uniting force of the vision in Needles was language. Each person attending the celebration heard the Messiah and his mother speak in his or her own language. Even the Old Mormons heard the Messiah speak in their language, English.

When Grandma Fleet and Mama knelt to pick up blossoms, the Holy Mother blessed them in their Sand Lizard language. When the Mormons approached the Messiah, Sister Salt stayed nearby to listen for herself; she was amazed. As the Messiah gave his blessing to the Mormons, Sister Salt distinctly heard the words he spoke as Sand Lizard, not English yet the Mormons understood his words and murmured their thanks to him. . . . In the presence of the Messiah and the Holy Mother, there was only one language spoken - the language of love - which all people understand, because we are all the children of Mother Earth.

(Gardens 32)

In Corsica, the uniting force did not manifest itself in words, but in the experience itself. While the Corsicans saw the Holy Virgin, Hattie saw the beautiful light, and Indigo saw the Ghost Dance. Each person saw what they needed to see at this time, what gave them comfort and reassurance. The Ghost Dance as a Native American story touched Indigo's heart and gave her hope. The Holy Virgin has been appearing to people who needed her for almost two millennia, and in this little Corsican village she chose again to appear to those who needed her the most. And Hattie, who had become disillusioned with her religious faith as well as her marriage and her own place in this world, needed a sign that she was not insane, that what she saw was the light of truth.

The interweaving threads of the story caught me in their web in an almost magical way. Hattie with her struggle to define herself, Indigo, who absorbs incredible experiences in two worlds, and the plight of the Native Americans in their fight for survival in the changing Southwest, all come together to form a tapestry of events and emotions that Silko says developed out of the stories her ancestor spirits told her to write.

Silko's German ancestor spirits intrigued me because as a child, roaming the forests and mountains surrounding our small town in East Germany, I felt the ancestor spirits. I grew up with Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival, his version of the Grail myth. I spent many Sundays, as well as school fieldtrips, at the Wartburg Castle, where the German Minnesingers held their competitions

and where von Eschenbach performed. And when, on hot summer afternoons, I climbed through the ruins of long abandoned castles and cloisters, I often saw myself as one of the ancient people who had inhabited this land. I was born there, but my ancestors had come from many different parts of Germany, and I often felt different from the other children. I felt isolated. The community was very ingrown, and we were outsiders. As Silko says of her own Laguna childhood, "from the time I was a small child, I was aware that I was different. . . . We didn't look quite like the other Laguna Pueblo children, but we didn't look quite white either" (Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit 60).

Earlier in this book, Silko mentions that riding her horse way up into the mesa as a small child, she was never afraid there, because, "I carried with me the feeling I'd acquired from listening to the old stories, that the land all around me was teeming with creatures that were related to human beings and to me" (42). This same feeling of security, of being surrounded by friendly creatures in the mountains and forests, spoke to me also as a child, made me a part of my environment, protected me. I was never afraid except when I was surrounded by people. I even preferred walking home from school through the cemetery rather than taking the path the other children took. The spirits gave me the roots I did not have and the sense that I belonged to the land.

Even though the key witness in Silko's scene at the Corsican schoolhouse wall is the Native American child, Indigo, the events in the scene themselves are,

and were, experienced by different people all over the world for centuries. In their times of need human beings seek out, and often find, miracles. Silko shows her readers that even though people from different cultural backgrounds see a different image on the same schoolhouse wall, the effect of the image is the same. It gives comfort to the afflicted. Neither the images nor the effects are tied to a Native American or a western European literary tradition. With this scene Silko shows the unity that is possible in people of as diverse backgrounds as Indigo's, Hattie's, and the Corsican peasants'. Silko gives her readers a shared experience that cannot be defined as Native American, Euro-American, or European. Silko says in an interview with Laura Coltelli, that even though Laguna is her home, she has also learned that the Earth is her home, that the "dry air and dusty mountains northwest of Beijing felt like home, just as these lava rock cerros outside Tucson are home" (Arnold 123).

This unifying, healing thread in Gardens in the Dunes weaves through many dimensions, not only through shared experiences. Silko says, "this novel is really about right now. It just so happens that, for other reasons, I chose to set it back in 1900" (Arnold 182). Much of literature, from fairytales and ancient European myths to the oral traditions of indigenous peoples has a similar appeal to readers. The stories may have different characters at different times, appropriate to society at a given moment, but the essence remains the same: the challenges and tragedies of human existence. The Grail Myth, for instance, has many different versions, pre-Christian Celtic ones, Mediaeval Christian ones,

and ones heavily influenced by Gnostic philosophies. But the story continues to change and survive to this day (Goodwin 6). In the storyteller tradition, the story is alive and grows and changes with each telling, as Silko comments to Kim Barnes in an interview.

Every time a story is told, and this is one of the beauties of the oral tradition, each telling is a new and unique story, even if it's repeated word for word by the same teller sitting in the same chair. . . . Nobody saves stories. Writing down a story . . . doesn't save them in the sense of saving their life with a community because the stories have a life of their own. . . .

It's only the western Europeans who have this inflated pompous notion that every word, everything that's said or done is real important, and it's got to live on forever. (Silko to Kim Barnes, "Background to the Story", Graulich 52)

Because with Gardens in the Dunes Silko attempts to create a story to unite rather than separate cultures and traditions, readers are encouraged to apply its message to all times: past, present and future. The same ancestor spirits from the past are still present, and the present ones will become spirits from the past. The future will create its own spirits.

In Chapter I, I will explore those ancestor spirits who, Silko's comments suggest, give her the stories she tells. These I consider the *traditional ancestor*

spirits, and I will try to relate them to the twenty-first century reader. Since Silko refers to *Gardens* as a Gnostic novel, and since she has Hattie write her Master's Thesis at Harvard Divinity School on the Female Creator Spirit in the early church, the spirits behind the Gnostic Gospels also will be a part of Chapter I.

In addition to Margaret Fuller and Alice James -- to whom I dedicate Chapter II -- in Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit and in Arnold's Conversation with Leslie Marmon Silko, Silko also talks about some of the other European authors and philosopher she loved and admired (Yellow Woman and the Spirit 194 and 167, and Arnold 164 - 175), and so the threads connecting Silko's prose and poetry with some of those writers will be the basis for Chapter III. I will devote that chapter to John Stuart Mill, David Hume, and William Blake.

Silko is not always consistent in her analyses of her own writing. For instance, she explains her decision to quit law school and become a writer this way: "The most effective political statement I could make is in my art work. . . The most radical kind of politics is language as plain truth." This is clearly not consistent with her insistence that her stories "just happen, just want to be written." Anger, however, can also be a very potent ancestor spirit. She continues her history of the development of Gardens in the Dunes, explaining how the book grew out of various ideas and stories she had been working on. She tells Arnold,

So I'd been thinking about gardens, but I guess what cinched it is that everyone was complaining - not everyone, but some of the moaners and groaners about my work, who think that Chicano or Native American literature, or African American literature, shouldn't be political. You know, easy for those white guys to say. They've got everything, so their work doesn't have to be political. So, I was like, oh, okay, so you want something that's not political. Okay, I'm going to write a novel about gardens and flowers. And so that's what I thought, though I should have known that even my idea of the gladiolus man, my character who planted flowers instead of food, was very political. (Arnold 163)

Did Silko intend to write a political novel all along? She says she wrote about flowers, but she was angry, although she wanted to give all those people what they had asked for, a non-political novel, it was in reaction to their criticism, and in that was the seed of a protest novel. It gives the literary establishment what it wants, but infused into the beautiful story of a child and gardens and flowers, appear the political messages of colonialism and oppression of others, like the soldiers inside the Trojan horse.

During the greater part of Gardens, it is the child, Indigo, who guides the readers in their exploration of new landscapes and experiences. In the gardens of the *professoressa* Laura, Indigo sees, and shows to the readers, only the beauty of

their over civilized and over cultivated nature. When the blackbirds of her desert home in Arizona appear to her in the splendor of the lush green and opulent Italian gardens, Indigo, in her childish wonder and curiosity, can delight in the beauty, in the perfumed flowers, the total uselessness of the cultivated grounds.

For the reader, this dichotomy between the effect of beauty and its outward uselessness is perhaps best explained through James Wright's dialogue with Silko in The Delicacy and Strength of Lace,

Sometimes I wonder about things like lace . . . things that aren't much help as shelter from the elements or against war and other kinds of brutality.

Lace was obviously no help to the Belgians during two horrifying invasions in this century. Nevertheless, the art continues to survive, the craftsmen weaving away with the finest precision over their woofs and spools. (Wright 45)

The black gladiolas may have been as useless for protection and nourishment as the lace from Brugge was for protection from aggressors. But the gladiola corms and flower seeds Indigo brings back with her from Europe do influence her and her family's life in a concrete and practical way. As we will see in a later chapter of this paper, the corms will provide both nourishment and protection for Indigo, Sister Salt and the twins. And while Indigo's experiences in Europe, in the Indian School, and at the hands of cruel people, have influenced

and changed her, she is still the same person; she did not lose her Indianness.

Only now her ancestor spirits include Hattie, Aunt Bronwyn, and Laura.

Similarly, Silko absorbed many additional ancestor spirits. To her Laguna, German, and Scottish ancestors -- the ones who, she says, tell her to write the stories -- she added the goats from Norwegian fairytales; she added Milton, Shakespeare, William Blake, John Stuart Mill, David Hume, the New England Transcendentalists, Margaret Fuller, Alice James, and James Wright. The imprints of all these ancestors are discernable in Gardens in the Dunes, and the following chapters will take a journey through the thoughts and writing of some of those authors whom Silko credits as having been an influence on her.

Chapter I

Traditional Ancestor Spirits - Native American and European

Do not, therefore, reach for even a hair on our heads
rather, help us attain that which we are always seeking
long life, that our children may grow,
abundant game, the raising of crops
and in all the works of man
ask for these things for all, and do no more
and now you must go, for you are now free.

(Ortiz 54)

Tewa elders offer this prayer to the spirit of a departed after the funeral rites. Its purpose is twofold: to ask the continued blessing of the individual, and to release the soul from the confinement of this world. The spirit will be free, but it will always stay close to give support and reassurance when needed.

While some of the definitions of spirit in the dictionary have a negative meaning, like "a supernatural malevolent being," the more significant definitions speak of "the immaterial intelligent or sentient part of a person," or "the

activating or essential principle influencing a person" (New College Merriam-Webster English Dictionary). The definitions for ancestor state simply that the word derives from the Latin *antecedere*, to go before, and that it describes "one from whom a person is descended and who is usually more remote in the line of descent than a grandparent" (Merriam-Webster).

Ancestor spirits, combining the definitions above, therefore can be described as *the activating or essential principles influencing a person that originate from those who came before*. While the word ancestor generally refers to a physical blood relationship, a spiritual ancestor need only be an activating or essential principle influencing a person. Thus a reader does not have to believe in the supernatural to know that spirits exist. Even thoroughly westernized readers talk about "the spirit of peace," or "the spirit of hope." We speak about the spirit of a book or an essay, and we interpret speeches and the written word "in the spirit of Thomas Jefferson or Abraham Lincoln." The spirit of a being, even a tree or flower for instance, is its essence, its core, its value. This chapter is dedicated to those ancestor spirits who, Silko's comments suggest, give her the stories she tells. In this chapter I explore the concept of ancestor spirits, how they build the text of Gardens, and how they relate to the twenty-first century reader.

When Silko speaks of ancestor spirits, she speaks of both: the physical DNA - related forefathers -- and mothers -- of her Laguna, German, Scottish, and Mexican family, as well as the spirits that live in a place, in almost any place,

since the dawn of time. She calls them *the old time people* when she refers to those of the Laguna tribe. She says in Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit,

In the view of the old-time people, we are all sisters and brothers because the Mother Creator made all of us -- all colors and sizes. We are sisters and brothers, clanspeople of all the living beings around us. The plants, the birds, the fish, clouds, water, even the clay -- they all are related to us. The old-time people believe that all things, even rock and water, have spirit and being. (65, 66)

Through her experiences while reading from Almanac of the Dead in the St. Thomas Church in Leipzig and while watching a *Fasching* parade (the European equivalent of the Mardi Gras) in Zurich, Switzerland, her European ancestor spirits came to her for the first time. She simply refers to them as ancestor spirits.

Silko tells Arnold about the powerful effect the old St. Thomas Church in Leipzig had on her (where, almost five hundred years before, Martin Luther had nailed his thirty theses).

In that very church building where the Democracy movement, [in East Germany] the movement that made the Wall finally fall down, began, I did my first reading. And then Bettina would read in German, and it

was just beautiful -- in English and in German. It was standing room only. So the energy there was. . . .

So not only were my German ancestor spirits really close, but the young East German women were just devastated at that point, by what the change, what unification meant. . . .Capitalism was trampling them and crunching them under its boots. (Arnold 165)

So not only did her German ancestor spirits help her cope in strange new surroundings, but her Laguna spirits helped her empathize with and understand the feelings of the East German women, their feelings of being colonized and marginalized.

When Silko relates stories from her Aunt Susie, or from Grandma A'mooh, those stories had become a part of her, just like a part of her DNA. These stories are the spirits, the essence, of Aunt Susie and Grandma A'mooh. In Gardens in the Dunes the stories of Aunt Susie and Grandma A'Mooh reappear, only this time in the voices of the children, Indigo and Sister Salt and in Grandma Fleet. Comparing Silko's Laguna childhood experiences with those of Indigo -- especially Indigo's relationship with Grandma Fleet and her feelings about the church, to the relationship Silko had with Grandma A'Mooh or Silko's feeling about the church-- the child Indigo resembles the child Leslie, in all but skin color (Indigo is very dark).

I spent a great deal of time with my great-grandmother. Her house was next to our house, and I used to wake up at dawn, hours before my parents or younger sisters, and I'd go wait on the porch swing or on the steps by the kitchen door. . . . I always loved the early mornings when the air was so cool with a hint of rain smell in the breeze. . . . My great-grandmother's yard was planted with lilac bushes and iris; there were four o'clocks, cosmos, morning glories, . . . I helped her water. That's what I came to do early in the morning: to help Grandma water the plants before the day arrived. (Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit 62)

And while Silko and her great-grandmother worked side by side, Grandma A'mooh would tell her stories about the old days. Grandma A'mooh was a strong woman, who still chopped her own wood when she was eighty-five. And from her Silko learned to be proud of her own strength. (62)

Silko describes the way Grandma Fleet instructed Indigo and Sister Salt in a very similar tone. When Grandma Fleet returned from her visit to her Mormon friend, she started to show the girls how to garden the dunes, and how to work with the natural setting. While toiling side by side with the girls, she told them stories.

Grandma Fleet instructed the girls to do as she did: They got up before

dawn and worked until it got too hot; then they rested in the coolness of the dugout house until the sun was low in the sky. . . . Grandma explained each of the dunes and the little valleys between them had different flows of runoff; some of the smaller dunes were too dry along their edges and it was difficult to grow anything there; in marginal areas like these it was better to let the wild plants grow. (Gardens 45, 47)

Grandma Fleet taught the girls everything they needed to know in order to survive in the Dunes. She also taught them about the ancestor spirits, about Sand Lizard ways. She prepared them for her death. Grandma Fleet became a part of Indigo, in the same way as Grandma A'mooh became a part of Silko.

Yet Silko did not internalize everything her Grandma A'mooh taught her. Grandma was a devout Presbyterian, and Silko describes herself as a person who cannot connect with either Christianity, or the Bible. She says in her introduction to Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit that from the start she "had no use for Christianity because the Christians made up such terrible lies about Indian people that it was clear to me they would lie about other matters as well" (17). The child Leslie loved her great-grandmother, but she could never accept her great-grandmother's Bible reading. "I love her with all my heart, but I don't believe in the Bible" (17).

In Gardens Silko extends her ideas about Christianity one step further. She builds a bridge from her Laguna beliefs to the beliefs of pre-Christian Europeans. The old Celts worshipped stones and trees, and the old Romans worshipped snakes and other animals. She says in her interview with Arnold that she wanted to learn more about the ancient European religions, the ones people held sacred before Christianization. Silko uses Aunt Bronwyn and the *professoressa*, Laura, to teach the child, Indigo, and her white American would-be benefactress, Hattie -- and through them her readers -- the old European traditions and myth, the ones the Christian church hopes had been eradicated centuries before. Silko relishes her discoveries of ancient pagan European traditions. She gleefully tells Arnold,

So going into Gardens in the Dunes, I had a tremendous sense of the presence of the oldest spirit beings right there in Europe, and that lots of Europeans, even the ones that don't know it, are still part of that. As hard as Christianity tried to wipe it out, and tried to break that connection between the Europeans and the earth, and the plants and the animals -- even though they've been broken from it longer than the indigenous people of the Americas or Africa -- that connection won't break completely. That experience was so strong that I wanted to acknowledge it a little. (Arnold 167)

The indigenous people of the Americas have been trying to hold on to their ancient beliefs and traditions against the onslaught of Christian missionaries for five hundred years. And in Europe, the same Europe that brought the missionaries to the Americas, Silko finds evidence that the Christianization program had not been a total success either. When she describes her experience in Zurich, Switzerland during the "Fasching" to Arnold, Silko shows the excitement and happiness of an explorer or researcher after a revolutionizing discovery. It is as if Silko took the trip of Christopher Columbus and the Conquistadors in the opposite direction. She, as the explorer, finds the exotic other in Europe.

And I'm so loving it, and I think that's one of the reasons that maybe I could feel the German ancestor spirits out, because even though they consciously don't know why they're doing it the Europeans when they dress up in their masks and go around like that, that's an old rite. And even though consciously they aren't aware of it, they're still doing what they're supposed to be doing. (Arnold 166)

When, immediately after the Fasching's parade, a flock of blackbirds appears, Silko accepts this is another sign connecting the Pagan European spirits with the beings from the Native American spirit world.

Someone who might want to rationalize it might say, oh you just saw another group of people masked, but the whole feeling of it, the

silence, and watching them move through the street, was like kind
of an apparition. . . . When we got to where they had been, we couldn't
find them anywhere. We just found one little black feather. (166)

In another incarnation, the blackbirds will appear to Indigo in Laura's garden. Silko believes, at least from what we gather from this interview, that there were indeed blackbirds after the parade in Zurich. After all, she did find the one little feather. Indigo's blackbirds will be an apparition, the wishful thinking of a homesick child.

The child Indigo, like Silko, delights in the realization that Europeans hold old beliefs too, and that the Church had forbidden the exercise of the old European religions just as it had forbidden the Native American ones. This realization of a bond with the European spirits creates a feeling of understanding for Indigo and Silko. The persona of the enemy is no longer *the European*, but the Christian Church. At one time, Europeans, too, had suffered under the same tyranny of one church, one religion, and one truth only, just as the indigenous people of the Americas had for the last five hundred years. Indigo listens wide-eyed to Aunt Bronwyn's stories of talking stones, and of stones that move themselves during the night back to their right place after Christians had moved them. "Long ago," Aunt Bronwyn tells Indigo, "workmen on the old cloister complained that stones loosened and removed by day were found in their former locations the following day" (Gardens 237). She also shows Indigo that on one of

the stones she can still see the old carvings that were going to help the plants grow better. "Here were the broken pieces of a stone destroyed by an angry mob of Christian converts" (Gardens 251).

The stories Aunt Bronwyn and the *professoressa* Laura tell Indigo and Hattie make perfect sense to Indigo. They are truths she has known all along.

The plants listen, she {Grandma Fleet} told them. Always greet each plant respectfully. Don't argue or fight around the plants -- hard feelings cause the plants to wither. . . . The old gardens had always been there. The old-time people found the gardens already growing, planted by the Sand Lizard, a relative of Grandfather Snake, who invited his niece to settle there and cultivate her seeds. (Gardens 14)

The old-time people who found these gardens and settled there, called themselves the Sand Lizard people in honor of the Sand Lizard, and they shared with the land and the plants and animals, always giving the first of everything back to the land, and the second to the birds and wild animals in gratitude. Indigo knew "about those things" and loved listening to stories about "certain stones that walked to drink water after midnight, . . . or plants and trees that had individual souls" (Gardens 242).

Even the appearance of the Virgin Mary and the infant Jesus on the schoolhouse wall were perfectly natural occurrences to Indigo. To her, the

Messiah and his mother were not only real, but they were able to show themselves anywhere in the world at the same time. After Indigo and the others had seen the Holy Virgin on the schoolhouse wall, Indigo felt at peace because even though she had not seen the Messiah or her own mother, she heard "a voice inside her," that said, "all who are lost will be found; the voice came from the Messiah, Indigo was certain" (Gardens 320).

Hattie, while Aunt Bronwyn's and Laura's stories were as new to her as they were to Indigo, was familiar with other doctrines the Church had repressed, had ruled heretic. Before she ever left the United States, even before she met Indigo, Hattie had read the Gnostic Gospels. By having Hattie write her Masters Thesis on the Gnostic Gospels, Silko played a trump card. For the Gnostic Gospels -- the gospels the Early Church Fathers had discarded as heresies -- tell creation stories very similar to those Silko must have heard in her childhood in Laguna Pueblo. The Gnostic Gospels tell of a female creator spirit (Sophia), and of an early Christian community where women shared equal status with men. Anthony Purley, in "Keres Pueblo Concepts of Deity," translates the story of Thought Woman in the following way:

In the beginning Tse che nako, Thought Woman, finished everything, thoughts, and the names of all things. She finished also all the languages. And then our mothers, Uretsete and Naotsete said they would make names and they would make thoughts. Thus they

said. Thus they did. (American Culture and Research Journal, vol. 1, No. 1, Fall 1974, p.29)

Paula Gunn Allen writes in "Grandmother of the Sun" that in Keres theology Thought Woman existed from the beginning, and she first thought, then sang her sisters into life. The sisters in turn sang all other beings on this earth into life. But there never was a time when Thought Woman did not exist (Gunn Allen 16). Gunn Allen describes the various creation myths of the different Native American tribes, and while they all differ in some ways, the key element of the female Creatrix is the central theme to them all. According to the old – pre-Christian – texts,

Thought Woman is not a passive personage: her potentiality is dynamic and unimaginably powerful. . . .

Thought Woman is not limited to a female role in the total theology of the Keres people. Since she is the supreme Spirit, she is both Mother and Father to all people and to all creatures. She is the only creator of thought, and thought precedes creation. (Gunn Allen 15)

In the book of Genesis it, too, says, "In the beginning there was the word," but it was God the Father who spoke it. The Gnostic Gospels, however, tell the story somewhat differently.

Silko tells Arnold that Elaine Pagel's book, The Gnostic Gospels, had been given to her by the author while Silko was writing Almanac of the Dead. (Arnold 164) When she read the book years later, she was struck by its ideas and decided to incorporate some of them into Gardens in the Dunes. One of the passages quoted by Hattie in her thesis proposal tells about Wisdom (Sophia) and her daughter Zoe (Life, or Eve). Here Wisdom is portrayed as the creator not only of Zoe, but also of Adam and God. And God did not like that and became very angry "and cursed the woman and the snake" (Gardens 100).

In Pagel's chapter "God the Father/ God the Mother" she quotes the Gnostic book of The Thunder: Perfect Mind. This gospel provides valuable insights into another book rejected by the church fathers.

I am the bride and the bridegroom,
and it is my husband who begot me.

I am the mother of my father
and the sister of my husband
and he is my offspring.

... For I am knowledge and ignorance,

... I am strength and I am fear.

I am war and peace.

Give heed to me.

I am the one who is disgraced and the great one.

(Robinson 297, 298)

According to this Gospel, Sophia is in everything and everybody. She was never created, and she is mother and father, sister and brother, bride and bridegroom. In other words, she is God (ess). She is infused in all of life and creation, and yet undefinable and incomprehensible. She is who she is, is as the God who spoke to Moses and said, "I am who I am" (Exodus 3:2). This passage is so similar to the one quoted about Thought Woman that it would almost be possible to exchange the names of the Creatrixes without changing the meaning of the text.

In other chapters of her book Pagels discusses how the early church addressed the issue of women, and that in the very beginning of Christianity women were considered equal to men. This theory is mostly proven by the negative writings of the Church fathers and not by the accounts of the women themselves. Tertullian has this to say about women as equals in the church: "These heretical women -- how audacious they are! They have no modesty; they are bold enough to teach, to engage in argument, to enact exorcism, to undertake cures, and, it may be, even to baptize!" (Pagels 60) And St. Paul says, "man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man" (I Corinthians 11, 7-9).

According to Pagels, by the end of the second century C.E. all semblance of equality between the sexes in the Christian church had vanished. Her explanation for this phenomenon is that the church adopted the attitudes and mores of a male dominated society and the hierarchical structures of a more or

less feudal system of government (63), even though Feudalism itself did not rise in Europe until centuries later.

Not only did the authors of the Gnostic Gospels show a female creator spirit, but they also gave women equal standing as apostles and leaders of the Early Church. So the same Christian church that had tried to rob the Pueblos of their religion, had not only robbed the early Europeans of theirs', but had even robbed their own early Christian followers. The Church had robbed itself of much of its early history and, potentially, of a big part of its essence. By excluding so many of the early accounts of Church history and many of the more diverse traditions of the original Christians, the Church eliminated much of its richness and ancestry. In the beginning there existed a tradition in Christianity that allowed for various versions of the same story, that gave equal status to women, and that did not play into the male-dominated feudal establishment. This tradition was suppressed and wiped out in a similar way as the old traditions of the Laguna people. There was no room for a female creator spirit -- no matter how wise -- in a male-dominated hierarchical church, and no room for independent intelligent women (Pagels 69).

Is Silko telling her readers to go back to the old ways, to abandon Christianity, or is she trying to unite people, to let them see that underneath all the differences, all the fighting and feelings of superiority versus inferiority, they are very much alike? With Gardens in the Dunes Silko is saying, I believe, that

Christianity duped all people, on all continents, and of all races. The early Church Fathers based Christianity on the theories of feudalism and colonialism, rather than on the true teachings of the Messiah.

And then my whole sense that in Europe, there's the corporate church, that kind of Christianity, and then there's this other Jesus. Jesus would have a fit, just like I said in Almanac of the Dead, if he could see what his followers did. (Arnold 168)

Silko states a truth here, which is quite conciliatory in its approach to Christianity and the Western World. The Jesus of the New Testament, of the Sermon on the Mount, would not understand what had become of some of his teachings, this Jesus who appears on schoolhouse walls or at the Ghost Dance rather than in a Cathedral.

A closer look at some of the critical writing concerning Silko's previous novels helps to shed a helpful light on the concept of the unifying philosophy behind Gardens in the Dunes. In Four Native American Masters, Alan F. Velie compares Ceremony to the Grail Story. He says that Silko, in a telephone conversation, had told him that she did not know the Grail story when she wrote Ceremony. But she pointed out to him that there are many similarities between Laguna Myth and medieval European myth (Velie 107).

Velie links Tayo, the half-blood hero of Ceremony, to the Grail story.

According to Velie, Tayo represents both key characters in the Grail story, the ailing king and the knight who goes on the quest to find the Holy Grail. And just like in the Grail story, when Tayo is healed, the rains come back and the land recovers.

The Grail Story, like the Gnostic Gospels, stands outside official church doctrine. But the church never condemned the Grail Story, the way it condemned the Gnostic Gospels. Instead, like the ancient Celtic and Roman stories told by Aunt Bronwyn and Laura, like the Fasching celebration in Zurich, Switzerland -- which had been Christianized from a festival to drive out winter into a celebration of the last day before lent -- and like the traditional Laguna religion, the Grail myth survives to this day, disguised in a Christian costume.

The origins of the Grail story are clearly pagan. Even though the first written account of the story comes from the twelfth-century French Christian poet Chretien de Troyes, the legend originated most likely in pre-Christian Ireland or Wales. (Godwin 15) The pre-Christian version involves the Creator Goddess who supplies men with everything they need; she even provides maidens at the well who give water to strangers, and life is bliss. Then the king and his followers ravish the maidens, the water dries up, and the country suffers.

Wells were sacred places for the old people, places where this world and the Otherworld met. According to Godwin,

to the Celtic mind the everyday world and the Otherworld were the twin universes running parallel to each other. It was at such sacred places as wells and springs that the two worlds were believed to come close to one another that one might bridge the gap and cross over to the other side. (20)

In order to heal the world, an innocent male had to find the Grail and restore fertility. The well in the old gardens in Gardens in the Dunes is a place of great importance to the Sand Lizard people. Not only do they come to the well to get their water, but they share the wealth of their well with the sacred snake and all the other animals. Since the snake is a messenger from God, or the other world, in Gardens, too, the well is a place where this world and the Otherworld meet.

The Grail story in its various forms was alive and told at the campfires by the bards (storytellers) to members of the tribes. The reader can superimpose the oral traditions of the Laguna people over the oral traditions of Ireland and Wales and imagine the campfires and storytelling to be very similar. Godwin says that superficially the Grail story appears to be "all about a male-dominated quest with aggressively competitive knights who delight in nothing more than braining the opposition as frequently as possible" (Godwin 22). Yet careful examination of the legend brings a much bigger conflict to the surface: The conflict is not about competition between aggressive males.

The story is actually about the women and the land. And all these women eventually turn out to be the ancient Earth Goddess in her many disguises, variously appearing throughout the narratives as a maiden a nymph or a crone. (Godwin 22).

"When the newly formed Cistercian monks got a hold of the story, they embellished it with Christian ideas and infused it with monkish bias" (Godwin 22). While the old stories told about the relationship between mortal Man and the immortal Goddess -- which was disrupted and had to be restored by the hero -- the Christian version tells about the loss of innocence and paradise, and about the role of Jesus in the restoration. But the pagan story is the one that stayed with the people. The Goddess is still waiting for the union of the Earth Goddess and the Sky God to be restored.

Gardens in the Dunes could be considered the telling of a female Grail quest. In an odd twist of the story, Hattie would be the ailing queen (king), and Indigo the questing knight. Indigo however, unlike Parzival, always knows what she is searching for; she wants to return home and be reunited with her mother and sister. Even in her dreams she speaks to them, hoping that in their dreams they will hear her. "I'm trying to get back home," she whispers to Mama and Sister Salt, and hopes when they dream they'd see her in this room and hear her message" (Gardens 176). Only when both, Hattie and Indigo, find what they are looking for -- are healed -- does the ancient snake return to the gardens and the

land is healed. Even Grandma Fleet's apricot trees start growing leaves again.

After the ancient, ailing Grail king was healed by Parzival's caring (I will return to this in Chapter III), his kingdom became fruitful again, too, and a peaceful life returned to his citizens.

After Indigo, Sister Salt, and Sister Salt's baby, the little grandfather, return to the gardens, a letter arrives for Indigo. In it she finds a \$50, - - bill and a letter from Hattie. She tells Indigo that she has returned to England, and that she will spend the fall in Italy with the *professoressa*. Hattie did not rejoin her East Coast family, but instead found peace and healing with the people and places she and Indigo had seen and loved together (Gardens in the Dunes 475). Indigo, Sister Salt, and the little grandfather go back to their home in the dunes. Something terrible had happened there, but it was gone now. The old snake even was dead, so they buried her bones next to Grandma Fleet. The apricot trees had been killed together with the snake. But when the sisters returned a few days later, they found that

At the top of the sandy slope Indigo stopped and knelt in the sand by the stumps of the apricot trees, and growing out of the base of one stump were green leafy shoots. . . .

Sister Salt could feel the change. Early the other morning when she came alone to wash at the spring, a big rattlesnake was drinking at the

pool. The snake dipped her mouth daintily into the water, and her throat moved with such delicacy as she swallowed. She stopped drinking briefly to look at Sister, then turned back to the water; then she gracefully turned from the pool across the white sand to a nook of bright shade. Old Snake's beautiful daughter moved back home.

(Gardens 476, 477)

Indigo had returned to her old home, she had helped Hattie to see the world from a new perspective -- and thereby returned her to health -- and so she had accomplished her task.

When the Spanish missionaries Christianized the Pueblos, the people held onto their traditional gods and goddesses and put Christian faces onto them. This is a new twist to the old European story. In Europe, the Christian monks themselves put Christian faces and symbols onto the old myth in order to make Christianity more palatable. The monks turned the Goddess and Sky God story into a Christian story of salvation and redemption. In the Americas, indigenous people put the faces of their own gods and goddesses onto the Christian holy people in order to make them their own. Silko tells Arnold,

The Spaniards hadn't been there giving religious instruction for more than five years before all the people got in tune with the Christian spirits, the Christian saints, and took them right in. That's what the

Voudun religion is about. That's what happens in the Americas, because it's all inclusive, it excludes nothing. . . . You'll be taken in and churned around, and what comes out is American. . . . But here in the Americas, yeah. It was so funny. They weren't here long, and they had to see their Jesus, their Mary, their Joseph, their saints, go native, just like that. And they couldn't stop it. (Arnold 187)

While the missionaries forbade the Native gods and spirits and criminalized the old practices, they were not able to prevent the Native people from taking their Native Gods and Spirits and putting the faces of Christian Saints onto them. By on the surface transforming their own religious symbols to those of the conquerors, the Native Americans made it possible for at least a part of their own religion to survive the onslaught.

Indigo has no difficulty seeing the Messiah in Needles, Arizona, in Christ Church in Bath, England, and then again on the schoolhouse wall in Corsica, just as the Indian followers of Wovoka and the Ghost Dance had no difficulty seeing the Messiah on their territory.

While the others danced with eyes focused on the fire, Indigo watched the weird shadows play on the hillsides, so she was one of the first to see the Messiah and his family as they stepped out of the darkness into the glow of the swirling snowflakes. . . . 'You are hungry and tired

because this dance has been going on for a long time,' the Holy Mother said. Then she opened her shawl, and the Messiah's wife opened her shawl too, and Indigo was amazed to see plump orange squash blossoms tumble to the ground. The Holy Mother motioned for the dancers to step forward to help themselves to the squash flowers.

(Gardens 31)

For the Indians, the Messiah's family brought squash blossoms to eat, instead of the few fishes and loaves of bread he had used to feed five thousand at the Sea of Galilee (Mathew 14: 19 -21)). And to the old Europeans he brought the Holy Grail, transported by Joseph of Arimathea to the British Isles to heal the people, and to restore the balance between Earth and Sky, between mankind and God {dess} (Godwin 88). It is not difficult to see in Indigo and her fight for survival and return to her sister and homeland, the knight in shining armor looking for the Holy Grail. And through Indigo, Hattie is healed of her decadent family, of her criminal husband, and of the oppressive ways her culture imposed on women.

Hattie lived at the beginning of the twentieth century. She had tried to break out of the traditional role imposed upon her by society before. She had insisted on an education, had not wanted to become a wife and worry about cleaning and cooking and socializing (Gardens 79, 80). But it was only after she saw the injustice done to Native Americans in the Southwest and California that

she was able to let go of her old life and values. By setting almost the entire town of Needles on fire, she freed herself.

At the corrals, she let the terrified horses run free, and followed them to a hill east of town, where she watched -- amazed and elated by the beauty of the color of the fire against the twilight sky. . . . the reds as rich as blood, the blues and whites luminous, and the orange flame as bright as Minerva's gemstone. (Gardens 473)

Minerva's gemstone had been one of the few *treasures* she had accepted from Edward on the evening of their separation. The stone was one of the items stolen from Hattie when she had been robbed and beaten. In the fiery image she realized that she did not need the gemstones any more, just like she did not need her old life any more. She felt freed.

In these last two passages Silko brings together most of the ancestor spirits. Readers find the successful completion of a Grail Quest, a Goddess imbedded in a Gemstone, a fire that frees the soul, the return to the land and the old ways (Hattie had been at the Ghost Dance Ceremony before her parents had come with the police), and the resurrection of the snake and the Apricot trees.

The traditional ancestor spirits show their faces and power in the fire, in the Ghost Dance, but above all, in Indigo's and her little family's return to their old home in the dunes. Yet the young women who return are not the same children

who left the gardens. They have incorporated new ancestor spirits into their lives, they have learned from their contact to the outside world. They have made the new influences their own, put their faces onto them. Even Indigo's flower seeds and gladiolus corms have a new life: The spuds are edible, and the flowers bring acceptance within a hostile community. It appears that by going way back to pre-Christian European spirits, Silko found a way for her ancestor spirits from both sides of the Atlantic Ocean live together in the old gardens.

Chapter II

Literary ancestors

Margaret Fuller

Alice James

Perhaps she would return to England
or Italy - she dreamed about the gardens often.

Aunt Bronwyn's old stones danced in one
of her dreams, and in another dream, Laura's figures
of the snake and bird women sang a song
so lovely she woke in tears.

(Gardens 392)

Since Silko gives credit to both Fuller and James as role models for Hattie, I use the term *literary ancestors* for these two women who influenced Silko in her creation of Gardens. I apply the term ancestors because they were a part of Hattie's creation, and literary because both Fuller and James were writers and literary critics. Silko greatly admired Fuller, and she is the primary ancestor for Hattie. Silko appears fascinated by Fuller, not only by her highly-developed mind, but equally by her lifestyle.

We studied all the Transcendentalists. And of course I just loved

Margaret Fuller. What a woman! What a hero! free Love, so brave,

goes to Italy, has a baby out of wedlock, hangs out with all the Freedom Fighters in Italy. And then, just such a mythical death, within sight of home, with her baby and her husband. The boat sinks off of Fire Island, and she's gone . . . oooh. (Arnold 179)

A superficial reading of this quote might give the impression that Silko could identify with Fuller as an advocate of free love. But nothing in the character of Hattie Palmer resembles those traits in Margaret Fuller. Hattie is a woman who believes in equality for the sexes, and in freedom for people different from herself. In Hattie, Silko captures the courage and the strong feeling for justice that were part of Margaret Fuller. When Hattie's parents come to the Ghost Dance to rescue their daughter, Hattie is furious and tries desperately to get her father to stop the police.

Hattie realized the police and soldiers came to break up the Indian gathering because of her -- because they came looking for her there. . . . She did not hide the anger she felt as she told him the authorities might have ignored the gathering one more night if he had not come looking for her there. . . . this fourth night of the dance she hoped to see the Messiah. Don't let the authorities interfere! (Gardens 470)

Hattie did not want all the others to suffer on her account. When she realized that the police had come because of her, she felt betrayed by her parents,

outraged at society, and disappointed because she believed -- like the Indians -- that on this fourth night the Messiah would come. Her parents, even though they had her welfare in mind, did not understand her or her reasons for identifying with the Indians in Needles. Mr. and Mrs. Palmer would not have seen the Messiah at the Ghost Dance, which was a gathering of desperate people to them, not an event they could identify with their daughter. They could not see the injustice done in their name.

When Margaret Fuller was a correspondent for the New York Tribune in Italy during the fight for unification in the early 1840's, she wrote back to her countrymen in the United States

To you, people of America, it may perhaps be given to look on and learn in time for a preventive wisdom. You may learn the real meaning of the words FRATERNITY, EQUALITY; you may, despite the apes of the past who strive to tutor you, learn the needs of a true democracy. You may in time learn to reverence, learn to guard, the true aristocracy of a nation, the only real nobles -- the laboring classes (Men Women and Margaret Fuller 410)

Fuller sees the struggle of the Italians for unification, in part, as a struggle for equality for all Italians. She comes to the realization that without the "laboring classes" the nobility would be useless, that to treat one class of human beings as

inferior to another is not only unjust, but is a hindrance to democracy. What she had been taught about the democratic process had only been a reflection, an aping, of the truth.

The reader can feel these emotions in Fuller reflected in Hattie. Hattie does not want others to suffer on her account -- on account of the wealthy elite who can come in with the police and disturb a peaceful gathering. Fuller tells her compatriots that the real nobles are the "laboring classes," who suffer under the heavy burden of working for those who consider themselves their superiors, and to whom they are not real people but workers whose sole purpose in life is to work for their masters.

The circumstances of Hattie's and Fuller's life were much different. Silko mentions Fuller twice in Gardens in the Dunes, and in both instances the reference is not complimentary. Hattie's mother's main concern for her daughter is that "Hattie was bound to be linked to Margaret Fuller, notorious advocate of free love. More than once, acquaintances of Mrs. Abbott compared Hattie's precocity and ambition to Miss Fuller" (Gardens 101). And Hattie seems as appalled as her mother when young Mr. Hyslop compares her to Margaret Fuller.

Hattie should have been alerted to Mr. Hyslop's intentions when he compared Hatties' ambitious thesis topic to the "lofty and spiritual ambitions" of Margaret Fuller. At the time Hattie politely assumed

Mr. Hyslop's comparison of her to Miss Fuller was strictly limited to intellect and ambition; after all the Fuller woman shocked polite society with her endorsement of free love and her premarital pregnancy. (Gardens 101, 102)

The similarity between the two women lay mostly in their ambitions, in their search for fulfillment in their lives, and in a commitment to truth and justice.

Hattie had an uncomplicated childhood as the only child of a doting father, who insured that his daughter received an education equal to that of any boy. After graduating with honors from Vassar College, Mr. Abbot arranged for Hattie to audit classes at Harvard Divinity School. He also supported his daughter in her defiance of her mother and of Mrs. Abbot's society friends. (Gardens 101, 74)

Hattie was not much interested in marriage, children or in running a household. (Gardens 74) She married a much older man with whom she did not have much in common, but who appeared to be amused by her reputation as a *heretic* and who seemed to enjoy her intellect. He took her to his family estate in Riverside, California, far away from the stifling New England world of her mother, and from the humiliation she suffered when her thesis was rejected (Gardens 72, 73). Slowly her affection for Edward changed Hattie's outlook on marriage and children. Yet the child with whom Hattie shares her love and affection -- and a significant time of her life -- is not the offspring of her marriage

to Edward, but the Sand Lizard child, Indigo, a runaway from the Sherman Indian School in Riverside.

Hattie had not wanted marriage or children, but Edward changed all that. Children - the child! Suddenly she remembered the Indian child in the lilac bushes. What if the child did not find her way back to school? (Gardens 80)

Fuller, on the other hand, wanted marriage and a family, but on her own terms. At an early age, after the death of her father, Fuller had been forced to support her mother and siblings by teaching and writing. In her letter to Eliza Farrar, explaining why she had to cancel a trip to Europe, Fuller wrote,

But I am now but just recovered from bodily illness, and still heartbroken by sorrow and disappointment. I may be renewed again, and feel differently. If I do not soon, I will make up my mind to teach. I can thus get money, which I will use for the benefit of my dear, gentle, suffering mother -- my brothers and sister. This will be the greatest consolation to me, at all events. (Margaret Fuller as quoted in Laurie James 70)

Fuller never had the luxury to be financially independent like Hattie. She had to put her own life on hold while supporting her family. And while she wanted a husband and her own children, the image of her "dear, suffering mother" created

in her a desire for a very different relationship than the one of her parents. Although she became a formidable force in the early fight for the rights of women, she still yearned for a loving relationship, especially with a man whom she considered her intellectual equal.

Unable to realize her dream of a perfect marriage, she settled for *friendship*, a concept that also often proved disappointing. Her dearest friend, Ralph Waldo Emerson, wrote to her that "she should bury her yearnings of the heart and retreat to and accept Celestial Love, and that not to be soothed merely but to be replenished, . . .but to receive the power to make all things new" (Men Women and Margaret Fuller 231). It appears that Emerson rebuked her advances, and instead counseled her to live for platonic, deep friendships, which would give her replenishment and renewal. Fuller continued her intellectual pursuits, but even in those she was never totally accepted as an equal. She complained to her friend Caroline Sturgis

'I believe this true life will never with me take form in art or literature'. . . . She had moments when she felt her constant striving to achieve was useless. She envisioned that instead of being a genius, she would be a mother of a genius -- a son. Cary would understand. (Men Women 376)

Raising a son, in Fuller's mind, would compensate for her failure to achieve her own goals, but even that consolation was long denied her. When she finally did have a son, she had to leave him with a maid while she was out earning money writing about the revolution.

The social conditioning of women was and is so deep, (and since according to Silko, Gardens is a novel beyond time that could just as easily have taken place now) that even highly educated women succumb to the belief that they are only worthwhile if they are loved by a man.

Fuller, in her relationship with Emerson, as well as in some of her other close emotional relationships, had this tremendous need not only to be loved, but to be accepted by men. Fuller subjected herself to the humiliation of subordination to men voluntarily, yet at the same time she wrote in her analysis of Brentano and Guenderode (Fuller was working on a biography of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe),

The relationship in which she stands to Goethe is not a beautiful one. Idolatries are natural to youthful hearts noble enough for a passion beyond the desire for sympathy or the instinct of dependence, and almost all aspiring natures can recall a period when some noble figure, whether in life or literature, stood for them at the gate of heaven, and represented all the possible glories of nature and

art. . . . This figure whom they admire is their St. Peter.

(Fuller, "Bettine Brentano and Guenderode," The Essential Margaret Fuller 60)

And St. Peter is the one who is in charge of the gates to paradise. Here Fuller is counseling young women not to succumb to their love for men, not to allow themselves to stand in awe and gaze at them like at gods. For these men whom they worship are precisely the ones who keep them out of paradise.

Fuller later admonishes the young who are tempted into these relationships, "to observe this young idolaters . . . You will not see it best or revere it best by falling prostrate in the dust, but stand erect, though with upturned brow and face pale with devotion" ("Brentano and Guenderode," The Essential Margaret Fuller 62). No one would have had to warn Hattie of this. In her relationship with Edward she always considered herself an equal, and when it turned out that he had betrayed her, she left him. She never considered him a God, or put him on a pedestal.

How different is Fuller's voice when she speaks of her own experience, when it is her own "idolatry" that comes in the way of "standing erect."

Let no cold breath paralyze my hope that there will be yet a noble and profound understanding between us. We have gone so far, and yet so little way. . . . I feel a conviction that I shall be worthy of this friendship, that I shall be led day by day to

purify, to harmonize my being till after long long patient waiting
 yourself shall claim a thousand years interview at least. (Letters of
 Margaret Fuller 24)

Fuller practically begs Emerson, her "Dear Waldo," to accept her, to allow her to change herself according to his wishes, just to keep up the friendship. She so badly wants to be loved, that she is willing to trade anything for this love. There is no vestige of the strong-willed independent woman's voice in this paragraph. She abdicates all her beliefs in order to gain this love. Would Hattie have written a letter like this? When she found out about Edward's betrayal, she left him. There was no discussion, no weeping, no begging. The character Silko created in Hattie was more fortunate than both Fuller and James, as we shall see when we examine the tragic endings of Fuller's and James' lives and compare them to the positive life Hattie had embarked on at the end of Gardens. Yet the salvation from her destined fate in womanhood came not by the philosophies of John Stuart Mill, as advocated by her father, for instance, or by feminist rhetoric. She was saved by the child, Indigo.

Unlike Hattie, Fuller did not have an Indigo to change her. However, she enjoyed the experience of a voyage of great significance in her development, which altered her understanding of America outside of the narrow environs of New England. In 1843, Fuller embarked on an excursion by boat and carriage to the American West, or what was then considered the West. During this

experience Fuller encountered her first Native Americans, and her visions and comparisons of the Indians and the white settlers show a similar indignation to Hattie's when she returned with Indigo to Needles, California. When visiting Mackinaw Island on her return trip from Wisconsin, Fuller writes,

The Indians were grouped and scattered among the lodges; the women preparing food, in the kettle or frying pans, over the many small fires; the children, wild as little goblins, were playing both in and out of the water. Here and there lounged a young girl, with a baby at her back, whose bright eyes glanced, as if born into a world of courage and of joy, instead of ignominious servitude and decay.

(Summer on the Lakes 107)

Yet when Fuller writes about the women rather than the young girls, she says, "they are almost invariably coarse and ugly, with the exception of their eyes, with a peculiarly awkward gait, and forms bent by burdens" (108). When the young girls grew into womanhood, they lost their world of courage and joy to the servitude and decay of the white man. The changed life, the burdens of labor for strangers, all these seemed to her to have destroyed the spark of spirit in these women.

Fuller deplored the attitude of the white settlers, who did not seem to remember that the Indians were the rightful owners of this land. When their host

in Milwaukee finishes an anecdote about the Indians with, "They cannot be prevented from straggling back here to their old haunts. I wish they could. They ought not to be permitted to drive away *our* game," Fuller's commentary is: "OUR game -- just heavens!" (Summer 72) The immigrants who came on the steamboats gave her a feeling of despair because they had no manners and were very selfish. She worried that this nation would be built by such uncouth people. (Summer 71)

Later, in her book, Women in the Nineteenth Century, Fuller pleads:

Let every man look to himself how far this blood shall be required at his hands. Let the missionary, instead of preaching to the Indian, preach to the trader who ruins him. Let every legislator take the subject to hear, and, if he cannot undo the effects of past sin, try for that clear view and right sense that may save us from sinning still more deeply. (Women in the Nineteenth Cent 97)

Fuller had seen the devastation alcohol had brought to the Indians. The before-quoted passages from Mackinaw Island end with the line: "All seemed happy, and they were happy that day, for they had no firewater to madden them, as it was Sunday, and the shops were shut" (Summer 108). So her warning to the legislators and to the preachers comes from the conviction she developed

through her own, arguably minimal, experiences in the West, substantiated by her reading.

More than fifty years after Fuller's trip -- and thousands of miles further into the West -- Hattie, too, experienced first-hand the kindness and acceptance by the Indians Fuller had experienced on Mackinaw, and the disdain towards them demonstrated by the otherwise nice settler,. She is beaten and robbed by the white people in Needles, California. She is left at the roadside for dead. Indians find her, take care of her, and bring her back to town. Yet the white people blame the Indians for Hattie's problems. From the hotel clerk to the owner of the livery stable, the citizens of Needles remember nothing.

"But that can't be!" she cried as she realized the townspeople protected one another. . . . The woman tried to persuade Hattie people would think her strange if she continued to wear the dress - a squaw dress - much too large for her. . . . 'You and the Indians', she replied. 'People here don't welcome outsiders who meddle. A new Indian encampment started down along the river about a week ago; her attacker was probably one of them, full of green beer'. (Gardens 45)

Hattie realized then that the society of Needles, California was not much different than the society she came from in Oyster Bay, and that she could never return there. She was no longer able to ignore and tolerate the injustices and lies

of her white world. When she set the horses free and the town on fire, she purged herself of her past.

Claiming Alice James as the role model that Hattie avoided becoming, Silko introduced a dimension that I would like to dispute. Hattie was in many of her positive attributes far more similar to James than she was to Fuller. In order to understand the connection, it is necessary to give a short background on James.

Alice was the only daughter and third of five children in the James family. She was born into a family of writers. Her brother Henry later became a novelist, her brother William a renowned psychologist. Henry Sr. had a big enough inheritance that he never had to work to support his family. But he nevertheless always felt the financial strain. The family spent many years living in Europe, and Alice never attended school there. She played with her brothers, but otherwise had no playmates. After their second stay in Europe even her father became concerned about Alice.

Our chief disappointment also on this side of the water has been in regard to Alice, who intellectually, socially, and physically has been at a great disadvantage compared with home. (Diary xiv)

In spite of all these shortcomings in her education, Alice appears to have developed a good sense of humor and distinct feeling for social justice.

Alice James lived her short life (43 years) always in the shadow of her more illustrious brothers. Like Fuller and Hattie, she suffered from various ailments attributed by the doctors to hysteria, mental over-stimulation, or to being female. Unlike Hattie and Fuller, James did not receive the education her brothers received. She lived her life mostly alone and isolated. And yet, her brother Henry said this about Alice's diary in a long letter to his brother in 1894 (Alice died in 1892).

But it also puts before me what I was tremendously conscious of in her lifetime – that the extraordinary intensity of her will and personality really would have made the equal, the reciprocal life of a “well” person – in the usual world -- almost impossible to her -- so that her disastrous, her tragic health was in a manner the only solution for her of the practical problem of life.

(Diary 19)

Alice could not live the life destined for a woman of her social standing, but neither could she find another outlet for her intelligence and drive. So, according to her brother, she had no choice but to become an invalid. Hattie Palmer avoids this fate “through her affection and involvement with Indigo, and the firming of her resistance to the way she was railroaded by the culture and the people” (Silko in conversation with Arnold 179). Had Hattie not met Indigo, she too

would have been sentenced to either frustrated spinsterhood or to the late nineteenth century fate of a New England housewife.

Yet James was not a bitter person. Fuller appears to be much more bitter and disillusioned with her life than James was with hers. Shortly before her ill-fated return trip to the US in 1850, Fuller wrote to her sister Ellen:

The world seems to go so strangely wrong! The bad side triumphs; the blood and tears of the generous flow in vain. . . . A baleful star rose on my birth, and its hostility, I fear, will never be disarmed while I walk below. (Men Women and 424)

James, towards the end of her life, noted in her diary,

How wearing to the substance and exasperating to the nerves is the perpetual bewailing, wondering at and wishing to alter things happened, as if all personal concern didn't vanish as the "happened" crystallizes into history. Of what matter can it be whether pain or pleasure has shaped and stamped the pulp within, as one is absorbed in the supreme interest of watching the outline and the tracery as the lines broaden for eternity. (Diary 232)

James is resigned to her death, but she does not complain or feel sorry for herself. To her "all personal concern" has vanished, and she is ready to die, is absorbed in watching the lines that blur this life and eternity.

In Diary, James demonstrates a good sense of humor, even though it is at times hidden in subtle language. This is an attribute she shares with Silko, who insists in her interview with Arnold that even Almanac of the Dead was meant to be funny. (Arnold 184) She must have picked up on Alice James' sense of humor, something clearly lacking in Fuller. While Fuller was acclaimed for her sarcastic wit, she appears to have taken herself and her suffering far too seriously. Before Ralph Waldo Emerson had met Fuller, he had "heard rumors that Fuller had a dangerous reputation for satire" (Men Women 133), and he confides his own impression of Fuller to his journal:

She had an incredible variety of anecdotes, the readiest wit to give an absurd turn to whatever passed; and the eyes, which were so plain at first, swam with fun and drolleries, and the very tides of joy and superabundant life. (Men Women 135)

But Fuller sees herself as someone cheated out of these "very tides of joy and superabundant life." She writes to her friend Carolyn Sturgis that "I have known some happy hours but they all lead to sorrow; and not only the cups of wine, but of milk, seem drugged with poison for me. It does not seem my fault, this destiny" (Men Women 403).

James, on the other hand, presents an image of a person who always has a sense of the absurd and who is able to laugh at herself. She writes in her diary on July 18th 1890: "How well one has to be, to be Ill! These confidences reveal so much mental debility that I don't want to rehearse herein my physical collapses in detail as well" (Diary 129). And a month later she says, "As they drop off, how we bury ourselves, bit by bit, along the dusty highway to the end!" Nowhere in James' Diary does the reader find any sign of self-pity or self-absorption.

Hattie, too, does not dwell on her physical disabilities, but she does try to understand them. While staying with Aunt Bronwyn in Bath, England, Hattie had one of several of these night-time experiences.

She saw something luminous white move through the foliage of the corn plants and the tall sunflowers. Her heart beat faster as she heard the soft rhythmic sound of breathing approach her. . . . The luminosity of the light was astonishing; was she awake or asleep? How beautiful the light was! It was as if starlight and moonlight converged over her as a warm current of air enveloped her; for an instant Hattie felt such joy she wept. (Gardens 248)

Silko gave Hattie James' financial security (until she lost her dowry to Edward's business venture) as well as total lack of self-absorption. She gave her Margaret Fuller's education and sense of fairness and justice, and her sense of adventure.

She also had Hattie share in the fate of females of the time, and therefore created her prone to hysteria, fainting spells, and strange nightly visions. But Hattie also had determination and fearlessness, qualities that, I maintain, both Fuller and James had to a far lesser degree.

Alice never personally encountered Native Americans, and while Fuller was affected – and changed – by her meeting with the Native American women, only Hattie's story has a happy ending. Hattie is changed by Indigo, who may well be the early nineteenth century female innocent knight who, like Parzival, finds the Holy Grail, and who saves Hattie as well as herself.

Silko incorporated what she had absorbed from John Stuart Mill, Fuller, and James into the intellectual and emotional makeup of Hattie. The child, Indigo, however, is colored only by Silko's life experiences and ideals. She is a creation out of Silko's fantasy. Even her tribe and the riverbed where she lived are Silko's creation. Indigo is perfect, innocent, yet very knowledgeable and intelligent. She is the catalyst whom Hattie needs in order to break out of her predestined mold. Arnold tells Silko that "Indigo seems whole in a way that the other characters aren't. Her conscious and unconscious are not separated in the same way. . . .She's just very much present in her experience all the time." Silko's response is almost mystical. "You're right; she's a little bit different. . . .She's a child. . . . Something else too, yeah. Oh yeah" (Arnold 193).

Indigo appeared to be an almost mythical child, like the children who rescue the almanac in Almanac of the Dead. Hattie, however, was neither mythical nor whole and innocent like Indigo. But Hattie had a tremendous sense of what was right or wrong. Like Fuller, she had this sense of justice. When her husband brings a rope to capture Indigo, Hattie is incensed.

Edward squatted with the rope in his hands and peered intently under the bench into the mess of pots and debris, and Hattie realized the rope was intended for the child. . . .

"Please Edward, she hasn't moved. She can't get away. Let's wait until the school authorities come." . . . Hattie replied; she was concerned about the Indian child. The rope really was beyond the limit! (Gardens 106)

Hattie had thought that Edward brought the rope to catch Linnaeus, the monkey. When she realized that the child was the object to be caught, Hattie was livid. Margaret Fuller describes an incident with an eagle from her childhood, which also indicates her sense of fairness and justice.

Its eye was dull, and its plumage soiled and shabby, yet, in its form and attitude, all the king was visible, though sorrowful and dethroned. ("Autobiographical Romance", The Essential Margaret Fuller 73)

Relying on my definition of literary ancestors, this childhood memory by Fuller illustrates the connection between Fuller and Hattie. Fuller describes a

caged eagle she saw as a child. Her sense of justice filled her with indignation toward the tormentors of this regal bird. Even as a young girl she was able to see the sorrowful dethroned king behind the pitiful facade.

Fuller considered her intelligence and her love of truth among her strongest attributes. According to Laurie James, "Fuller had a theory about truth. If you told your friends the truth, the air would be cleared of social shams and hypocrisies. Friendship would deepen with genuine sincerity and respect on both sides" (Men Women and Margaret Fuller 165). This theory of truthfulness ruined many of her friendships, like the one with Harriet Martineau. Martineau was an abolitionist, and while Fuller believed in this cause, she never got involved in the actual fight for the end to slavery. Fuller wanted Martineau to write a book about the state of American society without making slavery the most important issue. She had been critical of Martineau's book Society in America, and written her: "Why leaven the whole book with it {abolitionism}? . . . It is a great subject, but your book had other purposes to fulfill" (165).

Yet Fuller appears not to have been afraid to change her mind when new experiences showed her that her earlier impressions need to be reevaluated. The first time Fuller wrote about Native Americans, for instance, she described a feeling, a superstition almost, she experienced at Niagara Falls.

I realized the identity of that mood of nature in which these waters were poured down with such absorbing force, with that in which the Indian

was shaped on the same soil. For continually upon my mind came, unsought and unwelcome, images, such as never haunted me before, of naked savages stealing behind me with uplifted tomahawks, again and again this illusion recurred, and even after I had thought it over, and tried to shake it off, I could not help starting and looking behind me.

(Summer on the Lakes, 4)

A few days later, however, when she encountered real Native Americans for the first time, she saw them differently. "They were camped out on the bank. It was twilight, and their blanketed forms, in listless groups, or standing on the bank, with a lounge and stride so different in its wildness from the rudeness of the white settlers" (Summer 12). Fuller writes that she read all the books she could find on this new region of the United States, especially the books about Indians. She calls the books "a paltry collection, yet which furnished material for many thoughts" (Summer 20). After reading the descriptions of the West and Indians by Catlin, Murray, Schoolcraft, and Jameson, she bemoans that, "It is the white man's view of a savage hero, who would be far finer in his natural proportions" (Summer 21). Her assessment of Native Americans ends with a positive comparison of the Natives and the white settlers in Illinois (Summer 29), to which I will refer later.

Silko paints a similar picture of Hattie's changing ideas about Native versus white culture. And while Hattie's experiences occurred in California and Arizona fifty years after Fuller traveled only as far west as Minnesota, the realizations and conclusions she drew from them were very similar. When Hattie came to Riverside, California, she had never met Indians before. Her husband, Edward, even told her that "she had no experience with Indians -- certainly not these wild ones" (Gardens 106). But contrary to Fuller, Hattie had no preconceived ideas about the so-called savages. When she watched Indigo play with the monkey, Linnaeus, after Edward had meant to catch Indigo with a rope, Hattie was appalled and saddened.

A terrible wave of sadness and hopelessness welled up in Hattie, more overwhelming than anything she had felt during the thesis scandal, and her eyes filled with tears. She might not know much about "wild Indians" but she did know they were human beings.

(106)

She learned quickly, however, what most whites thought of Indians; first from the reactions to Indigo by others, as well as from the casual negligence towards Indigo by the school. When Edward informed her that the school was closed, and only the janitors and gardeners were still working during the summer, Hattie became incensed.

Hattie was incredulous that the school personnel so quickly called off their search for the missing child, even if it was the end of the school term. . . . The child was too young to simply abandon! It was outrageous! It was criminal. Anything might happen to a child, especially a girl! (Gardens 107)

When she later, in her determined search to find Indigo's family, encountered the desperate living conditions of the Native people, she was no longer surprised. What did surprise her was the callousness of the white settlers, as well as their total disregard for the laws of the country, whenever Indians were involved.

Fuller did not experience a close, personal relationship with a Native child in the way Hattie experienced it, but she observed that the settlers often acted as savages, while the Natives were dignified. When Fuller wrote about the white settlers in Illinois and compared them to the Indians, she found the Indian ways more compatible to her thinking than she had anticipated, and she worried about the effect the settlers would have on the land in ten or twenty years.

But almost always when you come near, the slovenliness of the dwelling and the rude way in which objects were treated, when so little care would have presented a charming whole, were very repulsive. Seeing the traces of the Indians, who chose the most beautiful sites for their dwellings, and whose habits do not break in on that aspect of nature under which they

were born, we feel as if they were the rightful lords of a beauty they forbore to deform. But most of these settlers do not see it at all; it breathes, it speaks in vain to those who are rushing into its sphere. Their progress is Gothic and not Roman, and their mode of cultivation will, in the course of twenty, perhaps ten, years obliterate the natural expression of the country. (Summer 29)

Fuller was no longer afraid of the Indians as she had been at Niagara Falls. She saw not only the destruction of beauty the white settlers brought to the environment, but she saw also that the Indians had always been the rightful owners of this land, and that they had chosen not to deform its beauty.

Hattie had a similar experience when she traveled with Indigo along the Colorado River to find Sister Salt. As Hattie and Indigo looked at the changes the building of the dam -- to feed water to Los Angeles -- had caused in the landscape Indigo remembered, Hattie, like Fuller, felt the damage done to the beauty of the land.

The river was trapped, and only a narrow stream, muddy red, flowed south. The river was stripped naked; all its willows and tamarisks were gone, its red clay banks scraped; and exposed piles of white skeletons of cottonwood trees dotted the swaths of scraped red earth. . .

As they continued south, Indigo noticed the cottonwoods and willows were dying of thirst because the flow of the river was so meager.

(Gardens 394)

What Hattie saw on her way to visit the superintendent of the Parker Indian reservation was the result of the kind of settlement and progress Fuller had bemoaned fifty years before. Progress for white settlers, and the need for water for big cities, had destroyed the natural habitat and robbed the Indians of their way of life. After speaking to the superintendent, Hattie worried about Indigo's fate when she would return to the life awaiting her on the reservation, which bore little resemblance to the way of life Indigo remembered. To Hattie, "the reservation at Parker seemed lifeless, the few Indian women and men she saw had eyes full of misery" (Gardens 396).

Looking at these two passages describing events Fuller and Hattie experienced, we can see a continuation of a growth process from Fuller into Hattie. Out of Fuller's limited experience with Native Americans -- whom she correctly identified not only as the true owners of the land, but also as the stewards of the land's beauty -- grew the character of Hattie, who initially saw in Indigo only a child who needed help and protection, but who learned to see the truth of her own life as well as the life that had been imposed upon the Indians.

With her statement that the character of Hattie was also based on Alice James, and that Hattie avoided a fate like Alice's because of her association with

Indigo, Silko created another puzzle. For, in my view, Hattie avoided both James' and Fuller's fate. At the end of the novel, Hattie is happily alive in Europe, while both of her role models died at a relatively young age. And even though James, more so than Fuller, lived the stereotypical life of a nineteenth century young woman, she did not choose to participate in the pre-ordained role of a wife and mother, and she certainly did not choose to die of breast cancer at age forty-two.

Unlike Fuller, James was not forced to earn a living, but was comfortably provided for. She did not achieve any recognition for her work, did not publish books, and did not have well-known love affairs -- platonic or otherwise -- as Fuller had. She spent the last years of her life in England. Though sick, and often in seclusion, she nevertheless took an interest in the events of the world around her, and she wrote her diary with the intent to have it published and read after her death. Linda Simon writes in her introduction to The Diary of Alice James that "according to her companion, Katharine Loring, she (Alice) intended the diary to be published, and certainly she intended that her brothers would see it" (xii).

James never traveled to the American West, and it is doubtful that she ever had any exposure to Native Americans. But taking a passage from her diary, it is clear that she had a highly developed sense of the injustice so often imposed on the innocent by class structures. She saw the oppression, abuse, and hopelessness the poor suffered under, and was appalled by them. It seems not too far off

course to assume that she would have extended those same feelings to the members of oppressed nations, like Native Americans, for instance

K went the other day to a beautiful old house at Mortlake, Temple Grove. It has been for many years a private school to prepare infants for Eton, etc. and was originally built by Sir William Temple. She described all the luxuries and beauty provided for the pampered young ones and Nurse, a few days after, went to the Wandsworth infirmary where she has a friend of twelve dying of consumption so thin and shriveled that she seemed only five. Her mother was in a mad-house from drink and her father had died the week before in a drunken fit, and there she lay trying to smile over some biscuits just given to her; and a little boy with a crooked spine dying of cancer and so on! (Diary 148)

The little girl dying of consumption was trying to smile over some biscuits, some act of charity that was making the giver feel good! Here is a clear analogy to Blake's poem, "Upon a Holy Thursday," which I will address in Chapter III.

James continues the diary entry with a description of a funeral (also provided by Nurse), where the parson let a poor family wait at the graveside for a long time; and then "pulled a book out of his pocket, read over the service,

turned on his heel and walked away - not only never spoke to the family but did not ever look at them!" (148)

Judging by James' tone, she was livid at such injustice, and Hattie would have shared this sentiment. She wrote quite a bit about the class and social differences in England. However, partially because of her ill health, and partially because of her upbringing, James only commented on situations. She did not take action, unlike Hattie, who took action out of her concern for Indigo, her sister, and their friends.

James was raised to be almost invisible. Her brother, Henry, the novelist, says that he was his father's favorite child, while William, the psychologist, was his mother's, and "only rarely as she was growing up did anybody notice Alice." (xiii). Hattie Abbott, on the other hand, was raised by her father, like Fuller, to believe that she was capable of anything she chose to do, and by her mother to know that her dowry could always fix what she, Hattie, was incapable of fixing. "The doctor blamed her father's 'wild progressivism,' as Mother called it, for Hattie's sensitive nervous system. . . . Her father was so proud of Hattie that he accepted any responsibility he might have even for her illness; knowledge did not come without a price" (Gardens 93).

Like James, Hattie was a strong woman, even when she was sick. When she needed extra strength, as after she and Indigo were arrested in Italy, or after she had been beaten and robbed, she could bring forth her inner strength. Silko

claims that Hattie's will was even stronger than her own will. She claims that she had a different ending in mind for Gardens. She had almost finished the book, and Hattie was just going back East with her parents.

But then I started to feel the novel not want to go. I had to stop and say, well now, what's wrong? What is it that I am not doing right? It's with Hattie's character. Hattie, what is it? There's something you don't like. Hattie didn't want to just leave. Hattie wanted to get even. . . .She wasn't going to go softly or quietly away. So I did it, and it was whoosh, and it was okay. . . .I thought I had this idea about how it would go. what Hattie would do and how she would go out of the novel. And it really was as if the character was saying, no. No, this isn't quite right. This isn't what I did, or what I want to do. (Arnold 192)

Hattie's ending, setting the town of Needles on fire, is an act probably neither Fuller nor James would have been capable of. At the end of her life, Margaret Fuller sat at the foremast of the boat clutching her baby in her arms and waiting for someone else to rescue them instead of taking matters into her own hands. While all the other passengers swam or even walked to shore, Margaret was quoted by the other passengers as saying, "I see nothing but death before me. I shall never reach the shore" (Men, Women, and Margaret Fuller 433). She did not even try to save herself, while most of the other passengers did make it to

shore. Alice James died of cancer rather than succumbing to disaster, and her last thoughts, at least, do not appear to be of despair as were Fuller's, but almost of anticipation. Until a few days before her death, Alice dictated entries for her diary. Those entries show no signs of self-pity, or a bemoaning of her fate. The only clue to the problems she encountered growing up as the only female in a house full of males comes out of a letter she wrote to her brother William on the birth of his daughter. "I feel as if I must hurry home and protect the innocent darling before she is analyzed, labeled and pigeon-holed out of existence" (Diary of xi). Though James never received the recognition Fuller received during her lifetime, in her own way she was more true to herself than Fuller, and therefore more like Hattie.

Both Fuller and James often appear to have been observers of life. Fuller was always hoping and wishing for a positive outcome, and James was resigned to the life that had been allotted to her. Hattie Abbott Palmer was a participant. Through Indigo, Hattie learned to fight, first for Indigo and then for herself. After she received the letter from her father begging her to come home, she said to herself, "No, I'd rather wander naked as Isaiah for years in the wilderness than go back to Oyster Bay to endure the stares and expressions of sympathy" (Gardens 452). She refused to "serve as the living example to frighten young girls judged too fond of studies or books" (Gardens 452).

Though Silko said that she used Fuller and James as role models for Hattie, in Summer on the Lakes, Woman in the Nineteenth Century, the Letters of Margaret Fuller, and finally James' single short Diary, we see the influence is not only felt in the character of Hattie. Silko studied these women, she learned from them -- much as Indigo learned from Aunt Bronwyn and Laura -- and their ideas are to some extent part of the entire Gardens in the Dunes. Perhaps, without the work women like Fuller and James did more than 150 years ago, the sliver of hopefulness for the world found in Gardens would not be there.

Chapter III
Philosophical Ancestors
John Stuart Mill
David Hume
William Blake
Von Eschenbach

Is this a holy thing to see,
 In a rich and fruitful land,
 Babes reduced to misery
 Fed with cold and usurous hand?

("Songs of Experience," Blake's Poetry and Designs 42)

Silko quotes John Stuart Mill in Gardens as a major influence on Mr. Abbott, Hattie's father. As such he would also be influential in Hattie's thinking as well as her actions. David Hume was a philosopher and realist, a man not interested in religion, the afterlife, or anything metaphysical. In many ways he would have been an adversary to Silko, yet she admired him, and called him one of the greatest philosophers of all time. Blake originally fascinated Silko because he was a painter and a writer, and he chose to illustrate his paintings with words rather than the other way around. But he and Silko also share a sense of the absurd; they abhorred authority figures -- especially the church -- and they were on good terms with the spirit world.

Comparing some of John Stuart Mill's philosophies about education with those Silko embedded into the character of Mr. Abbot, the reader can see why Hattie's father admired John Stuart Mill, and why Mrs. Abbott felt threatened by those same ideas. "As an ardent student of John Stuart Mill, he (Mr. Abbott) believed it was his paternal duty to give Hattie the fullest education possible; so he taught her himself" (Gardens 93). Mrs. Abbott, however, did not support her husband in his desires for Hattie's education. She feared no respectable men would ever want to marry their daughter (Gardens 96).

John Stuart Mill was a contemporary of Fuller and James, and the foremost, if not only, male advocate of equal rights for women in the late nineteenth century. Mill was born in 1806 and died in 1873, so his lifetime extends over the lifetimes of both Fuller (1810 - 1850) and James (1848 - 1892). Whether or not either Fuller or James ever met Mill, they shared his ideas about the state of women in contemporary society. Both Fuller and James believed that women were capable of doing the same work and having the same responsibility as men. Fuller especially, in Woman in the Nineteenth Century, encourages women to stand up for their rights. She says to them, "women of my country! -- Have you nothing to do with this? Tell these men that you will not accept the glittering baubles, spacious dwellings, and plentiful service. Tell them that the heart of woman demands nobleness and honor in a man" (98). Thus in Silko's novel, Mr. Abbott educated and treated his daughter, Hattie, as he would have a son.

Mr. Abbott planted a white oak tree in the front yard the day Hattie was born. As an ardent student of John Stuart Mill, he believed it was his parental duty to give Hattie the fullest education possible; so he taught her himself. She was exceptional, he told her, and urged her to look beyond the narrow interests of current feminists -- prohibition of alcohol and the vote for women -- and look to the greater philosophical questions about free will and God. At Vassar she found the other Catholic women timid or dull, but she disdained the suffragists as well. (Gardens 93)

Hattie did not see herself as a feminist, because she did not see the need for feminism and the suffragists. Since her father had educated her at home, always treating her as if she was capable of anything, she thought this the normal state of affairs. It did not occur to her that other women might not have been as fortunate.

Mill wrote The Subjection of Women in 1861, but did not publish it until 1869. Susan M. Orkin, who edited the edition of Subjection I used in my research, considers this treatise

one of Mill's finest pieces of argument, and the only major work of feminist theory written by a man who is generally considered a great

theorist within the western political tradition. Far more typical of the tradition is either a lack of concern for the social and political inequality of women or, more commonly, explicit justification of their subordination to men. (The Subjection of Women v)

Mill's work has been rediscovered by modern feminists, and he now receives the acclaim (according to Okin) he deserved more than hundred and fifty years ago.

In Subjection, Mill argues for equality in education for boys and girls. He equates the marriage laws of his time to slavery, and he insists that woman should have equal rights to men, and that they should be entitled to own and administer properties. He advocates that,

This great accession to the intellectual power of the species, and to the amount of intellect available for the good management of its affairs, would be obtained, partly, through the better and more complete intellectual education of women, which would then improve *pari passu* with that of men. Women in general would be brought up equally capable of understanding business, public affairs, and the higher matters of speculation, with men in the same class of society. (The Subjection of Women 90)

Mill argued that while “the claim of women to be educated as solidly, and in some branches of knowledge, as men, is urged with growing intensity” (The Subjection 14), women were still considered property. According to Mill, the “human nature” of women could not be known until women are raised and educated as equals to men (The Subjection 24).

In his thorough analysis of the legal and societal state of women in Victorian England, Mill traces the status of women back to antiquity, and to the necessity of women in the continuation of the species. In an almost humorous analogy with the conscription of sailors as opposed to giving them decent wages for the honest value of their labor, Mill states,

Those who attempt to force women into marriage by closing all other doors against them, lay themselves open to a similar retort. If they mean what they say, their opinion must evidently be, that men do not render the married condition so desirable to women, as to induce them to accept it for its own recommendations. (The Subjection 29)

If men would make marriage a palatable business deal, if they treated their wives as equals, then they would not have to force women into marriage, and women would have options other than marriage or the nunnery. Fuller writes in Women in the Nineteenth Century,

We would have every arbitrary barrier thrown down. We would have

every path laid open to woman as freely as to man. Were this done and a slight temporary fermentation allowed to subside, we should see crystallization more pure and of more various beauty.

We believe that the divine energy would pervade nature to a degree unknown in the history of former ages, and that no discordant collision, but a ravishing harmony of the spheres would ensue. (200)

Fuller saw as clearly as Mill the necessity for the education of women. Her education enabled her to teach and have her "conversations" for women, and thereby earn money to support her mother and younger siblings. But she also spoke of the divine energy, almost saying that God was on the side of feminism. Mill just spoke of the practical and just ramifications of oppressing one half of the humanity.

In an odd twist of circumstance, however, in Silko's novel it is precisely this subjection of women that enabled Mr. Abbott to give his daughter the education he desired for her. Mrs. Abbott was totally opposed to Hattie's intellectual pursuits. However, having been trained as a good wife, she would have never dared to argue with her husband about the education of Hattie. She did her worrying by herself, or with her society friends, even with Hattie, but never with Mr. Abbott. To her, the only goal for her daughter was a good marriage. She

worried that no man would want a woman like Hattie for a wife. Except, she had this wonderful dowry, which ensured a husband even for a woman who spent her life in libraries reading moldy books. Ms. Abbott feared “that Hattie’s reputation might be compromised. How many respectable gentlemen wanted scholars of heresy for wives?’ But Mrs. Abbott knew when she was outnumbered and graciously accompanied Hattie to the comfortable town house rented near Harvard Square” (Gardens 96).

The matter of the dowry was Mrs. Abbott’s security for a marriage for her daughter, because “despite Mr. Abbott’s disapproval of the practice, Hattie had a sizable dowry that made Mrs. Abbott smile every time she thought about it” (Gardens 79). Mill equates the dowry with a sales price elicited from the father by the groom. He states,

Originally women were taken by force, or regularly sold by their father to the husband. Until a late period in European history, the father had the power to dispose of his daughter in marriage at his own will and pleasure, without any regard to hers. (Subjection 31)

And while Mr. Abbott did not approve of the practice, he did take assurance in the fact that his daughter would have an inheritance (rather than a dowry) that would prevent her from ever having to be in precisely the situation Mill was fighting against. Mill defended his position on the inequality of women with a

comparison to the wife as a bondservant. "She can do no act whatever but by his permission, at least tacit. She can acquire no property but for him; the instant it becomes hers, even if by inheritance, it becomes ipso facto his" (Subjection 33) Women, even if they were from a wealthy family, had no rights. If they were lucky, their fathers married them to a decent man. But regardless of their previous standing in society, all they brought to the marriage became the property of the husband. If he was a scoundrel, then it was too bad for the wife. The husband was always in the right.

Silko, through the characters of Hattie and her husband Edward, has used Mill's arguments to prove as well as disprove them. Hattie received the education Mill advocated. She also received control over her inheritance. She married a man of her own choice, whom she thought she loved and whom she trusted to love her. So far, Mill would approve. Edward, however, turned out to be a smuggler with questionable business ethics. Hattie lost all her money to him, or with him. But even after she realized her mistake, she did not feel defeated. Here Mill's advocacy for education and self-reliance for women is proven to be correct. Hattie took responsibility for her actions, including her mistakes. She did not blame Edward or her parents. She went on with her life. She wired her father to please pay the barber, left all her luggage as collateral with the barber, and went to look for Indigo and the girls at the encampment.

She took her winter coat and all the warm clothes she could layer under

the blue dress but left her luggage and all the rest with the barber as collateral until the money arrived. Her telegram told her parents how much she loved them and please, not to worry. . . . The sun was bright and the air mild and dry the morning she set out on foot from the barbershop for the encampment down along the river. As weak as she still was, she was glad to have nothing more to carry than a thick wool blanket and a sack of hard candy balls. (Gardens 460)

Hattie knew she would be able to work out her life's struggles while in the hands of Indigo and the other Indians. She was not afraid to be a single woman in a hostile world. According to Silko, the hostility was in the white world, not the Native world. If we compare this passage from Gardens with a passage from The Subjection of Women, we find that Mr. Abbott had absorbed Mill's lesson correctly, and had taught his daughter well. Hattie knew how to take care of herself, even given her disastrous finances, because her father had made sure she had received the training Mill envisioned for both men and women.

The claim of women to be educated as solidly, and in the same branches of knowledge, as men, is urged with growing intensity, and with a great prospect of success; while the demand for their admission into professions and occupations hitherto closed against them, becomes every year more urgent. . . . How many more women there are who silently cherish

similar aspirations, no one can possibly know; but there are abundant tokens how many would cherish them, were they not so strenuously taught to repress them as contrary to the proprieties of their sex.

(The Subjection 15)

The proprieties of their sex condemned women to be undereducated and without power. Again, as in my previous Mill quote, why are men afraid to allow women to be educated, to allow them to own property, to make business decisions? It appears that the marriage laws as well as the standards for the education of women were created in the fearful hearts and minds of men.

While Indigo changed Hattie and helped her see the world from a different point of view, it was Mr. Abbott's insistence on educating Hattie, and on encouraging her independence -- all in accordance with Mill's theories -- that enabled her to make decisions about her life, and not to be afraid without a husband around to protect her.

Hattie had not acted as a bondservant. She had given Edward a letter of credit to her bank to buy her freedom from him. But she had trusted him too much. She was certain he would not abuse the credit. By her desire to show him how independent of social constraints she was, Hattie voluntarily turned over her inheritance to her husband, and learned only after his death that he had squandered it all. When Hattie was informed that there were no funds left in her account, she thought back to the time of her wedding to Edward.

At the time of the wedding her parents quarreled over the sum released from the family trust; her mother wanted to retain half of the sum until the birth of a child, but her father's generosity prevailed. The remainder of the trust was just enough to see her parents through. How clearly she recalled her father's pride as he persuaded her mother Hattie was a bright, educated young woman who deserved to dispose of her legacy as she saw fit. Oh misplaced trust! Her father's and hers! (Gardens 450)

In exercising her independence from the social mores of her time, Hattie lost her financial independence and was left without the means to support herself. She would have to depend on her family for support. Yet she accepted responsibility for her actions. She knew that she alone could remedy her circumstance. After the initial shock passed, she started thinking about her options, about the few choices she had left.

Mill would concur, but only in the outward appearance. It is not women's inborn weakness that makes them prone to weeping, but their upbringing: Women are raised to be weak, to cry and beg for mercy and forgiveness rather than to demand respect and to take action.

All women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men; not

self-will, and government by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others. . . . it would be a miracle if the object of being attractive to men had not become the polar star of feminine education and formation of character. (The Subjection of Women 16)

How could women become independent if they were raised to be submissive, and if the most important aspect of their education was to be attractive to men?

Fuller tells the women of America,

It is more especially my business to address myself on this subject, and my advice may be classed under three heads: Clear your thoughts from the taint of vanity. Do not rejoice in conquest, either that your power to allure may be seen by other women, or for the pleasure of rousing passionate feelings that gratify your love of excitement. . . . The love of truth, the love of excellence will save you. (Woman in the Nineteenth 83)

But will women heed the advice of either Mill or Fuller? Will they want to give up vanity or the desire to please men? Silko never says whether Hattie was good looking or not; it must have seemed unimportant to her. Even Indigo is not described in any way as far as her appearance is concerned. We know that her skin is dark, but nothing else about her outward self warranted many words. Perhaps here is another connection between Mill and Fuller and Silko: Outward appearance only matters to people who have nothing else to occupy their minds.

Mill's ideas concerning the education of the female part of humanity met with resistance from various sides of the establishment. As with the ideas of most reformers, the strongest resistance came from the sides that had the most to lose. Both the political and the religious leadership had nothing to gain by educating females. Even Sigmund Freud, who translated The Subjection of Women into German, disagreed with its message. (v) And self-proclaimed enlightened males, like Margaret Fuller's father Timothy, who wanted to educate their daughters, never failed to indoctrinate them also in the art of being female. Timothy Fuller, who taught his daughter Latin, Greek, and German, thereby giving her an education unparalleled for a girl of her time, nevertheless wanted Margaret to be like the women he revered, like the woman he married. He wanted her to be modest and unassuming. (Men Women and Margaret Fuller 36) Here Hattie's father differs sharply from Mr. Fuller. He certainly did not want his Hattie to turn out like her mother. He wanted her to be an educated woman, not timid or submissive in any way.

Silko found Mill's theories on education substantial enough that she molded them into the story of Gardens. But finding the connection between Hume and Silko was a fascinating journey through eighteenth century secular philosophy. David Hume was born in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1711, and he died in 1776, in the century before John Stuart Mill, Margaret Fuller, and Alice James. Silko has admitted that she admires Hume, especially his theories on cause and effect. She wrote James Wright:

I have always wondered about Western views of cause and effect vs. Pueblo views of the same. Hume is refreshing. How brave and free of his times he was! How I admire his thinking. He died 200 years ago and even now, most people don't think as freely about cause and effect as he did. (The Delicacy and Strength of Lace 30)

It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze Hume's entire works. His philosophy of cause and effect was not really so revolutionary. Most of his ideas were grounded in the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers. Martin Bell says in his introduction to Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion,

Following Cicero's model, each character represents a different position on the central questions of natural theology. Can reason establish the existence of God? What can be known by reason of the nature and attributes of God? Can there be a reasoned solution to the conflict between divine goodness and divine power, given the existence of moral evil and natural suffering? (Dialogues 10)

To Hume the existence of God could not be proven, and neither could the concept of rewards for good deeds in Heaven. As to cause and effect, Hume believed in the scientific method:

I much doubt whether it be possible for a cause to be known only

by its effect (as you have all along supposed) or to be of so singular and particular a nature as to have no parallel and no similarity with any other cause or object, that has ever fallen under our observation.

("Providence and a Future State," An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding 133)

He continues to explain that only multiple effects of the same species (causes) may lead to the conclusion that they had the same cause. To Hume an effect did not automatically prove the existence of a cause. The fact that the world existed, for instance, did not prove to him that there was a creator (God). And applying his theory of having to see a multitude of effects, through experiments like those of scientific method of today, it would have been very unlikely to prove the existence of God.

To Hume the effect proved the cause, but only if the effect could be recreated over and over again. This idea of the backwards-proof of reality appears as well in Silko's writing. The effects of colonialism and forced conversion to Christianity are apparent on almost every page of Gardens, whether in Needles, California, or on Edward's voyage to Costa Rica, or in the New England of Oyster Bay. It is interesting that Silko chose Corsica as the destination for Edward's stealing and smuggling of citrus clippings. The Corsicans, too, were always an oppressed people, oppressed either by Italy or by France. The oppression of Natives, in all parts of the world, is an underlying

persuasive "cause" in the course of events of Gardens in the Dunes. One does not have to artificially create the effects, as in the scientific method, to see that the events occurring in Silko's novel are the results of the oppression and exploitation of Natives

Hume's writing was not widely accepted during his lifetime. Among other aspects, it was his use of the cause and effect theory to counteract the Religious philosophers who attempted to prove the existence of God by linking the existence and perfect functioning of the Universe to the functioning of a complicated piece of machinery or technology, that caused him to be rejected. The political as well as the religious establishment of his time needed the masses to believe in God and in his plan for them. The Enlightenment and the advances of science were a threat to the controlling forces in the world. They needed a God who had planned everything in advance, including a person's station in life. Hume's ideas would have made the ruling classes very uncomfortable.

While he prided himself on being a philosopher, he, like Silko, did not care for organized religion. When, shortly before his death, Hume revised his work, he still stood by the statement made forty years before that "generally speaking, the errors in religion are dangerous; those in philosophy only ridiculous" (Treaties 319).

One of those errors in religion, according to Hume, was the idea of an all-knowing and punishing God, who gave rewards or punishments in the afterlife,

and that this threat of punishment was a necessity for living a moral life. Hume's principle was that if the rewards for good moral behavior were positive in this lifetime, people would continue living their lives in a moral way. He argued that the necessity for religious beliefs comes for men when

they are dejected with grief or depressed with sickness. . . . that their religious spirit is not so nearly allied to joy as to sorrow?

But it is natural to imagine, that they will form a notion of those unknown beings, suitable to the present gloom and melancholy of their temper, when they betake themselves to the contemplation of them. (Dialogues 136)

When people are desperate, when they are suffering and cannot make sense out of their lives, that is when men need religion, need a God to comfort them and make sense of their suffering.

From this paragraph the reader can imagine the rising of the Ghost Dance in Needles, the Holy Mother on the schoolhouse wall in Corsica, and Hattie's and Fuller's visions of light. Perhaps it is here where Silko and Hume meet, because Silko, too, saw that religion arises out of the desperate need of the destitute for solace and comfort. As she says in the Arnold interview,

I started to realize that there are lots of different Jesus Christs, and the Jesus or the Messiah of the Ghost Dance and some of the other

sightings of the Holy Family in the Americas were just as valid and powerful as other sightings and versions of Jesus. . . . There's always been the Messiah and the Holy Family that belong to the people.

(Arnold 164)

Silko sees the many faces of the Messiah and the Holy Family. She sees both the validity and the necessity of many different Jesus Christs. How else could the different people all over the world identify with the Messiah, if he did not appear to them in ways they could understand?

Hume would not have seen the Holy Mother on the Schoolhouse wall, because he did not believe this to be possible. Edward did not see her either, because he was busy with his camera. But Hume's theory on cause and effect, as well as his moral teachings, do have parallels in Gardens in the Dunes.

Of course, the idea of beliefs growing out of the desperate need of the masses can be interpreted in the opposite way, too, thereby defeating Hume's claim. Is it not equally possible that the deity, the Christ, the Holy Mother, or whatever name men find for this concept, will show him/herself only to the people who are desperate and thereby receptive to the divine presence? Perhaps this is what Silko means by "there's always been the Messiah and the Holy Family that belong to the people." According to Hume, the desperate people imagine the Messiah, but according to Silko, the Messiah seeks out the desperate

people. Perhaps the Messiah, Silko's Messiah, was an ancestor spirit, like Hume, who helped write Gardens.

In Roads End, where Indigo and Sister Salt lived for a while with the Chemehuevi twins, was a settlement of Christian Indians along the river, with an Indian preacher. They were poor but hardworking farmers, and had better land than the parcel the twins bought from their auntie. When the dam had been built, the government officials did not tell the inhabitants of this little community that their land would be flooded. In fact, they told them the water would not reach as high as their village. The preacher did not understand. He trusted the government agents, especially since he was a Christian like they were. So he looked in his Christian dogmas for a scapegoat, and found it in Indigo, her sister, and the twins. He thought the four girls and their evil ways brought on the flood as a punishment from God.

They turned and suddenly were face-to-face with a short fat Chemehuevi gentleman in a black preacher's suit and white shirt. The exertion of hurrying after them left him breathless and sweaty across his brow. While he mopped at his forehead and caught his breath he glared at them; they were not really Chemehuevis but Laguna and didn't belong there. They were damned, contaminated -- a risk to all others. . . . The backwaters from the dam were going to make a giant lake and everything, even the land

here, would be flooded. The Chemehuevi reservation superintendent was going to send the flooded-out families to live on the reservation in Parker.

(Gardens 435)

Even the converted Indians, to whom the government had promised this land, were not told that they had to move away, that their homes, their little church with the white steeple, would all drown in this new lake. The Indians did not matter to the officials because they were Indians. It was acceptable behavior to lie to them. When Hattie comes back to visit, Indigo shrugs off her comment.

Hattie was saddened at the sight of the church steeple rising out of the water. Didn't anyone ever tell the people here about the lake made by the dam? Indigo shrugged; they told the people the water would not come that high. (439)

This is precisely the lack of moral integrity Hume spoke about. And perhaps it is for this reason that desperate people look for rewards and punishments in heaven. The superintendent, judging from the way he treated Hattie at her earlier visit to the reservation, was a decent person (394). He did not mean any harm to the Indians, Hattie thought, he just followed the law. Yet the law did not say to lie to the Indians about the flooding of their little village. The law did not say not to warn people, prepare them for a possible move to the reservation in Parker. But the superintendent as well as his subordinates did not bother to tell the

people they were going to be flooded out of house and home. The superintendent knew he should have told the villagers about the flooding. He knew what the law said. But whether out of laziness, pride, or indifference, he choose to go against his convictions, against his conscience.

Another artist and philosopher who could qualify as one of Silko's philosophical ancestors is William Blake. Though their lifetimes overlap for the first twenty years of Blake's life, his philosophies, art, and writing had very little commonality with those of Hume. Hume considered himself an atheist and philosophy a science (An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding 17). Blake considered himself a mystic and religious visionary. His wife is quoted as saying, "I have very little of Mr. Blake's company, he is always in Paradise" (Stranger in Paradise xxii). Both, however, were considered heretics, and in Blake's case even a lunatic, by their contemporaries. Both also pursued new paths in their work. Hume used the scientific method in his dialogues and treaties on religion, morals, and philosophy to prove his theories, and Blake used his written words to "illustrate" his pictures.

Hume was a rationalist. What he could not prove by the scientific method did not exist. But he did believe in the capabilities of the human spirit. His scientific studies of "subjects" of cause and effect convinced him, for instance, that humans would behave and act in a civilized and moral manner if their behavior would result in positive physical and emotional rewards.

Blake, on the other hand, was a dreamer. He believed that the human imagination was God, and that churches and priests were stifling the imagination. Blake was a poet as well as a painter and engraver. In his artwork he was a perfectionist and had no patience with people who did not perform in the right way. From early childhood Blake had been sketching and writing. As an adult he started to illustrate his paintings with words. He wrote poems about his paintings, rather than painting to enhance the understanding of a poem.

When Silko began to put together Storyteller, she, too, used her words to illustrate her pictures. While Blake illustrated his etchings with his poetry, Silko wrote stories about the old photographs in her grandmother's Hopi basket. The words of the English language are like the sand in a sand painting to Silko.

In sand paintings the little geometric forms are said to designate mountains, planets, rainbows -- in one sand painting or another all things in creation are traced out in sand. What I learned for myself was that words can function like the sand. I say "learned for myself" because I think most poets and writers understand this, but it is the kind of lesson that must be found on one's own. (The Delicacy and Strength of Lace 28)

The sand in the painting creates the geometric forms, creates the whole universe. Yet as individual grains of sand they are just that, grains of sand. Only when put

together with millions of other grains of sand will they become this beautiful universe. And to Silko her words perform this function. She creates with her words a painting every bit as beautiful as those made from sand. With her words she tries to enhance the images of the photographs, combine them to make a new story, a story that would not be whole without the pictures or the words.

To Blake his words are the illustrations to his paintings (The Stranger from Paradise 9). In some of his works it would be impossible to imagine the paintings without the words or the words without the paintings. Silko and Blake also share a sense of humor and a feeling for the bizarre, as well as a sense of irreverence towards authority, especially as it relates to the church and to government agencies. Blake enjoyed making fun of people and institutions that did not share in his vision. He ridiculed the church as well as the king or parliament. It would have been natural for Blake to find fault with Hume's rational and scientific approaches. He was familiar with Hume's teachings, and he did not agree with them. While Hume died comfortably knowing that he had lived a good life and that there was nothing else after it ended, Blake died comfortably knowing that he would be in Paradise after his death. He even ridiculed Hume in Island on the Moon, when he said "'An Easy of Huming Understanding' by John Lookey Gent" (Blake's Poetry and Designs 385). Mary Lynn Johnson, editor of Blake's Poetry and Design, says, Blake's character, Scoopprell, "blunders into a pun on David Hume, another rationalist and empiricist philosopher whom Blake detested, like Locke, . . . for their denunciation of 'enthusiasm.'"

Silko, however, admires the rationality of Hume's ideas, build on logic and science, on what is knowable. Blake, too, builds on what is knowable, only his understanding of the idea is much different than Hume's. Blake 'knows' that the human imagination -- enthusiasm -- is God. He 'knows' he will be in Paradise after he dies, just as Hume knows that death is the end. Silko says she has no use for Christianity, in which instance she would agree with Hume. But she also claims that she hears the voices of her ancestor spirits, and that spirits exist in certain places -- like Gettysburg -- and that she can feel them.

I'll never try to go to bed and sleep at Gettysburg. Those dead souls and spirits, they were just overwhelming. And that's where the part of

Almanac of the Dead came from, where some character says that the

Civil War was the blood payment for slavery in the U.S. (Arnold 170)

One could make the argument that what Silko calls spirits, and what Blake calls God, are both synonyms for their imaginations. In addition, their cultural preparation also influenced their imagination. If Silko did not think of herself as Pueblo, for instance, would she invite "ancestral spirits" into her imagination and her writing? Would she, if she did not know about the civil war battle in Gettysburg, still feel the dead souls and spirits there? This imagination, at some point, brought both to describe and analyze a situation in very similar light. While Silko's "Blue Ball" in Gardens is more opulent and outwardly decadent than the salon in Island, the inner make-up of the participants is very similar.

Blake was twenty-seven years old when wrote the play Island in the Moon. In this satirical piece of prose fiction Blake takes issue with the excesses and spiritual emptiness of his time. Mary Lynn Johnson says that in "Island in the Moon the reader senses the emptiness."

Underneath the preoccupations with fashionable literature, philosophy, religion, and mythology, one senses the emptiness of this salon style of life -- the constant drifting from house to house in search of diversion, the isolation amid continual chit-chat, the pseudo-intellectual arguments that go nowhere. (Blake's Poetry and Design 374)

The people were bored. They may have pretended to be interested in lofty topics, but underneath their facade their souls were empty. The participants in Susan's party at Oyster Bay were not much different.

In Gardens, Silko describes this party, given by Edward's sister Susan and her husband. It is the 'social event of the season', the ball of "The Masque of the Blue Garden." Not only were the guests all expected to dress in blue "Renaissance" attire, the entire garden was planted in different shades of blue, with other colors only designed to bring out the blue even more. No expense was too great for Susan, if it helped to make her party perfect. Her gardener had found two sixty-foot copper beech trees to be planted on a newly created hill.

The route of the two giant beech trees on their wagons took them

through downtown Oyster Bay and necessitated workmen to temporarily take down electrical and telephone lines to allow the huge trees to pass. . . . People lined the street to stare at the odd procession. Indigo stood on the back of the buggy to get a better view. . . . Indigo was shocked at the sight: wrapped in canvas and big chains on the flat wagon was a great tree lying helpless, its leaves shocked limp, followed by its companion; the stain of damp earth like dark blood seeped through the canvas. (Gardens 183)

The population came and stared, amused and entertained by the ridiculousness of the rich. Only the child Indigo heard the groans of the abused tree.

Blake's islanders, too, were bored and always looking for something new and exciting to entertain them. The latest fashions, like Balloon hats, the latest philosophers, like Locke and Hume, all were called upon to amuse the complacent and affluent participants. The characters of Island in the Moon met at each other's homes to discuss the affairs of the world and the latest intellectual developments. Yet Blake described the scene as "the three Philosophers sat together thinking of nothing" (Blake's Poetry and Design 375), and when they did speak, it appeared as if each participant lived in his own island.

She seemed to listen with great attention while the Antiquarian seemed to be talking of virtuous cats. But it was not so; she was thinking of the shape of her eyes & mouth, & he was thinking of his eternal fame. The three

Philosophers at this time were each endeavouring to conceal his
laughter, not at them, but at his own imaginations. (376)

The visitors to Blake's salon, even though they were in one room, were in separate spaces of their souls. They did not hear what was said, or said what was on their own minds. The participants, as well as the onlookers, at Susan's party in Oyster Bay each lived in their own spheres as well. While Susan wanted to show off her wealth and status, and the bishop wanted to collect money for his own purposes, the guests and townspeople watched in bemusement and disbelief. Like the participants in Blake's salons, they tried to fill the empty spaces of their lives.

In chapter eleven of Island, Blake, however, introduced a new theme, though only briefly. While up to this point in the play the tone was sarcastic, funny, ridiculous, the tone in chapter eleven abruptly changes. Blake had one of his participants, Mr. Obtuse Angle, sing a song that would later reappear in his Songs of Experience.

Upon a holy Thursday, their innocent faces clean,
The children walking two & two in grey & blue & green,
Grey headed beadles walk'd before, with wands as white as snow,
Till into the high dome of Paul's they like Thames' waters flow.
. . . Then like a mighty wind, they raise to heavn the voice of song

Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of heavn among.

Beneath them sit the revrend men, the guardians of the poor;

Then cherish pity lest you drive an angel from your door. (392)

The guests listened attentively to this recitation. And "after this," Blake told us, "they all sat silently for an hour" (392). While this account of London's poor children being led to St. Paul's Cathedral like cattle shows the smugness of society as well as the plight of the children, the inclusion of this poem in Islands, and the reaction of the audience Blake described, also suggests that perhaps all humanity is not lost in this society of the bored and the rich. But like the townspeople of Oyster Bay in Gardens who -- after watching the spectacle of the tree-moving ceremony -- returned to their same old routines, the circle of friends in Island returned to their own comfort level. The remainder of the songs and poems they recited were once again light and funny, even nonsensical. "Great A, little A, / Bouncing B. / Play away, Play away, / You're out of the key" (393).

Alice James had written about similar concerns in her diary (as discussed in Chapter II) as Blake has in the above quoted poem. She, too, saw the injustice of the British and American class system, and the irony of the clergyman's ignoring the plight of the poor. And Silko, through the child Indigo, speaks of the abuse of power by the wealthy -- who think nothing of transplanting majestic trees simply because they want to and are able to -- and the silent abdication of the clergy to the God of money (again, see Chapter II). Indigo sees the tears of the

trees, feels their humiliation, but the adults do not. They are entertained. Blake saw the humiliation of the poor children being marched like a circus parade into the church and, again, the abdication of the clergy. His listeners also were only entertained.

Each of the philosophers I considered as ancestors to Gardens, addressed the need in human beings for guidelines towards moral behavior. While they had different outlooks and methods to achieve this goal, the goal itself, moral behavior, was never in question. Equating moral behavior with redemption, a concept that differs with that of conventional Christianity, I want to introduce the story of Parzival, and the connection of this myth to Indigo.

In Indigo, Silko created an almost perfect child. She was innocent, loving, and always observing and learning. She witnessed Evil, but was not contaminated by it. She knew what she must do -- find her family -- and never strayed from her path. In his version of Parzival, Wolfram von Eschenbach addressed the redemption not only of the Grail King, but also of Parzival himself. The possibility of finding in Indigo a Native American female Parzival appears simultaneously absurd and possible. Even though Silko insisted, as mentioned in my introduction, that she had not heard of the Grail Myth prior to writing Ceremony -- when a connection between Tayo and the Grail Quest had been suggested to her -- she obviously was aware of it after that. In some ways Indigo is a better candidate for a Parzival-type hero than Tayo had been. Indigo,

until she is captured and separated from her family, had lived her life in an innocence similar to Parzival's, while Tayo had been immersed in a harsh and hostile world all his life.

Grandma Fleet talked about their dear ancestors, the rain clouds, until her words came slower and slower and she was snoring softly. Sister Salt felt her heart suddenly so full of love for Grandma Fleet, who always loved them who always was there to care for them no matter what happened. (Gardens 52)

Grandma Fleet died, but her love lived on for Indigo and Sister. The stories she told them would always be with them, and the stories were the spirit of Grandma Fleet. So even after she died her love would always surround them. Even when they were exposed to the outside world, it was always with the guidance, and under the protection of, a loving mother or grandmother. Like Parzival's mother they had tried to protect Indigo and Sister Salt from the cruelties of the world, but unlike Parzival's mother -- who made him dress and act like a fool -- they had taught Indigo what to do in case of danger, had given them survival skills.

Indigo did not make the same mistakes Parzival made because she never allowed herself to absorb the untruths she was taught. While Goodwin presents nine different versions of the Grail Myth in his book The Holy Grail, von

Eschenbach's Parzival is the best one, in my opinion, to show a relationship between the Grail Knight and Indigo. Goodwin gives his reader a thorough, though perhaps too idealistic, understanding of the different versions, as well as reasons for the differences. After all, each country, each author, each religious community, wanted to point out their own special relationship to the Holy Grail!

Parzival had learned the laws of chivalry. He no longer was the innocent bumbling fool his mother had sent out into the world. This became his tragedy. He had been told not to ask questions, not to appear inquisitive. He wanted to know what ailed the Fisher King, but his training prevented him from asking what his heart and instinct told him to ask. He was condemned to wander the earth in search of a second chance to find the king and ask his compassionate question. During his travels he encountered his unknown half-brother Feirefitz, whose mother was a Moorish princess. It is Feirefitz, not Parzival, who shows compassion and refused to fight after Parzival lost his sword. And it was Feirefitz, the heathen, who eventually led Parzival to his redemption.

Der unerschrockne Heide sprach

In adeliger Hoeflichkeit

Franzoesisch, das er wohl verstund;

"Ich sehe wohl, wehrhafter Mann,

Du muetest streiten ohne Schwert

Was koent' ich Ruhms an dir gewinnen?

Halt nun ein und sage mir,

Wer du bist, preiswerter Held

Fuerwahr, dein waere jetzt mein Preis,

Der mir so lang' beschieden war,

Waer dir zerbrochen nicht dein Schwert.

Nun sei uns beiden Fried gegoennt;

Bis unser Glieder ausgeruht!

The unconcerned heathen spoke

With the politeness of a prince

In French, which he understood so well

"I see, oh honored knight

That you would have to fight without your sword

What honor would that bring to me?

Stop and tell me

Who you are, precious hero

Surely, yours would be the prize

Which for so long was my honor

If your sword had not been broken.

Now let peace be granted to us

Until our bodies are refreshed

(Parzival 353)

Feirefitz told Parzival that since his sword had been broken the fight would no longer be a fair one, and that they should rest in a peaceful manner for a while. He could have slain him, but he did not. He, the heathen, behaved in a "so-called Christian" manner. When they realized that they were half-brothers, Parzival took Feirefitz to King Arthur's court. There they received the good news that Parzival was destined to become the new Grail King, and that he would be given a second chance to ask the compassionate question and heal the old king.

By inviting Feirefitz to King Arthur's court and proclaiming to the company of the round table that this 'mixed breed' knight -- who is described by von Eschenbach as having the coloring of a Magpie -- is his brother, Parzival redeemed himself and was given another opportunity to fulfill his destiny. Feirefitz, who was described as a Muslim (Muselmann), and yet thanked all the Roman Gods for his good fortune, became a revered older brother to the new Grail King and married the most important of the Grail maidens, the one who carried the Grail during the procession.

According to Goodwin, "Parzival has remained loyal to his love, true to his quest to find something bigger than himself, and has become humble and therefore worthy to receive it" (Goodwin 241). His fight with his black brother, which neither of them won, technically, was the last one he had to fight. When Parzival stopped behaving in the way he was taught, and instead followed the dictates of his heart, his instincts and his feelings, he found what he had been looking for all along.

Indigo never absorbed the teachings of the Indian School. And she chose what she wanted to learn from the people Hattie exposed her to. Therefore, unlike Parzival, Indigo did not have to retrace her steps to undo the damage she had done. By staying true to herself, she was able to change not only Hattie's, but her own and her sister's lives as well. Hattie learned from Indigo that she had to follow her own feelings and abandon the life she would have to return to after Edward's death. She had to internalize the other, and thereby set herself free. She returned to Aunt Bronwyn and her stories of pre-Christian religions, far away from both her Catholic mother and the Harvard divinity school that had rejected her thesis.

Silko, too, internalized the other by integrating what she chose to from the philosophies of Mill, Hume, and Blake. This did not make her any less a Native American, but it enriched her understanding of Europeans and their outlook on life. She saw that many Europeans had been oppressed, had their religion taken

away from them, and were suffering the ravages of poverty. In Gardens she addresses not only the suffering and injustice done to Native Americans, but to many others as well. Even if Silko never read von Eschenbach, the story of Parzival and Grail King is perhaps an archetypal one. The story of a search for redemption and healing is not limited to any one culture or hemisphere. As Silko would say, "the story stays the same, even though it changes with each telling."

Conclusion

In the End there is -- Thought

I understand now that human communities are living beings that continue to change; while there may be a concept of the "traditional Indian" or "traditional Laguna Pueblo person," no such being has ever existed. All along there have been changes. (Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit 200)

Silko tells her readers with this short statement that a typical Indian or a Pueblo person is really a creation of others. Except for statistical purposes there is no typical human being. As there are no typical Indians, there cannot be typical Europeans. In this thesis I discussed many similarities between the characters Silko created for Gardens and characters, or at least philosophies, created by Europeans. I tried to weave a thread connecting all these "ancestor spirits" to the creation of Gardens. One influence on Silko and Gardens I have so far omitted is the poet James Wright

James Wright died in 1980, nineteen years before the publication of Gardens. Yet his influence can be found within many of the pages in this book. At the time of Wright's death, his and Silko's friendship had encompassed not even two years and only two personal meetings -- one just a month before his death. But their connection with, and their genuine love for each other is so well

demonstrated in The Delicacy and Strength of Lace that readers are often tempted to feel like voyeurs, or at least as if they are eavesdropping on very private conversations. Reading the following two passages puts the reader right into the middle of the relationship.

After Wright had written Silko about his cancer and its seriousness, she answers him,

Perhaps I am seeing your crisis too much like a child, and perhaps this confidence that you will be here for quite some time is my way of protecting myself from pain, but I think not. I know such things immediately; the feeling hits me and I'm never able to think fast enough to create a rationalization. (Delicacy and Strength 98)

And a few pages later Silko writes,

You are a dear friend, Jim. In so many ways it was you who helped me through those difficult times last year. At times like these I often wish I had more to say, but somehow it comes out in a story. I hope all this does not strike you as too strange, I seem not to react like most people do at times like these. (98)

Silko does not openly show her sorrow. She writes in a hopeful manner, yet between her simple phrases the reader sees her sadness. She wants to help, be positive, and it may come out as a story.

It is in part from this record of the correspondence between Silko and Wright that I gleaned my first connection between Silko and her European intellectual ancestors. In addition, the letters flying back and forth across the Atlantic at times appear like a blueprint for Gardens. Silko writes about the desert, about the old stories, about roosters and coyotes, and Wright tells about Italian villages, lush green gardens, and the politics of Southern Italy. In her letters to Wright, Silko also speaks freely of her admiration for Hume, Blake, Spinoza, Dante and even older Mediterranean poets. It seems evident that some of Wright's descriptions of Italy found their way into Silko's travel plans for Indigo, especially the scenes with Laura in Italy, or her description of Hattie's, Indigo's and Edward's dealings with the Italian police. But more important for the birth of Gardens are the spiritual, the barely touched upon, connections between the old Romans and the Laguna people, and between Silko and Wright. Without their discussions of Catullus' ghost, of the rooster stories, and of the Cliffhouse, perhaps the vision on the schoolhouse wall in Corsica would not have come either.

Before I left Tucson I found Moments of the Italian Summer

Moments falls open to page 11, "The Language of the Present

Moment," and once again I seem to have eyes especially for two lines:

"Limone, wreath of the Garda mountains, the stone villa of

Catullus still stands down at the far southern end of the lake.

I hope you are in blossom when his ghost comes home."

(The Delicacy and Strength of Lace 48)

Moments of the Italian Summer is a collection of Wright's poems. Silko wrote these lines to Wright after he had sent her his itinerary, and she realized that he and his wife, Annie, would stay in Sirmione, where the Roman poet Catullus had his summer home more than fifteen hundred years ago. Silko continues in her letter to describe her feelings about death, and about never having said good-bye to anyone she loved. In Laguna the dead are not gone, they go to the Cliff-House, and the Cliff-House is as real to them as the house they inhabit in this world (48). The Limone will be in flower when Catullus' ghost comes home. Silko knows, she tells Wright in one of her last letters. She knows Catullus' poetry, and she knows that wherever his ghost is, will be where James Wright will be, as well as her Aunt Susie, who, at age 106, talks of going to the Cliff-House, will be.

In her final letter to Wright, which arrived in New York after his death, Silko writes:

I have been trusting another sort of communication between you and

me -- a sort of message from the heart . . . and you and I, Jim, we *trust* in

these messages that move between us. . . . Aunt Susie has taught me this much and my Grandpa Hank and Great-Grandma have too -- that knowing and loving someone has no end, and that we are together always, over at The Cliff-House or walking along the lake edge not far from the home Catullus keeps. (104)

Not only does Silko affirm her eternal connection to Wright with these words, but she connects herself and Wright to her ancestors, to her Laguna Great-Grandmother and to Aunt Susie as well as to her white Grandfather from Ohio, to Catullus and all the other ancestors who came before. By doing this she also finds the bridge over the ocean to Catullus walking along the shores of Lake Garda when the Limones are in bloom.

On the End Coverpiece of The Delicacy and Strength of Lace is a quote from the New York Times about Wright, which the publishers at Gray Wolf Press apply to both Silko and Wright;

Our age desperately needs his vision of brotherly love,
his transcendent sense of nature, the clarity of his
courageous voice.

The exchange of letters in The Delicacy and Strength of Lace shows these qualities in both writers. But the letters tell about more than a vision of love, a transcendent sense of nature, and a courageous voice. In the pages of this book

the readers find the thread that connects not only Silko and Wright, but also the one that reaches across the abyss between Native American literature, Euro-American literature, and other ethnic American literature. Though these letters were written long before Gardens in the Dunes, even before Almanac of the Dead, they contain the seeds of Silko's inclusionist worldview, a view she had learned from her Laguna old-time people. She says in Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit,

And as the elders point out, the Europeans have hardly been on the continent of the Americas five hundred years. Still, they say, the longer Europeans or others live on these continents, the more they will become part of the Americas. The gravity of the continent under their feet begins this connection, which grows slowly in each generation. The process requires not hundreds but thousands of years. (Yellow Woman and a Beauty 124)

The important point here is that Silko says, with the old people, to be patient, that in the end people will come around, will be able to live together.

The old prophecies do not say that the European people themselves will disappear, only their customs. The old people say that this has already begun to happen, and that it is a spiritual process that no armies will be

able to stop. (125)

In the child Indigo, Silko created one of the facilitators of this change; an innocent participant, a person not afraid to experience new things and situations and incorporate them into her own life, but also to reject them when necessary. For instance, Indigo had brought gladiola corms back to Arizona from Italy. She and the twins had been concerned about the acceptance of these flowers in a climate where every little piece of fertile ground was needed to grow food. But the twins found a beautiful way to use their abundance of flowers to reconnect with their neighbors who had blamed the twins, Indigo, and Sister Salt for their own misfortunes.

When no one was around the twins took an old bucket full of freshly cut flowers to the brush-covered shelter the flooded Christians used as a church. At first the twins weren't sure if their peace offering would be accepted by their neighbors. But the next week, they found the old bucket at their gate, so they refilled it with flowers. Their neighbors received all sorts of food donations from other churches each month; but no one up or down the river had such tall amazing flowers for their church. So those flowers turned out to be quite valuable after all.

(Gardens 475)

In addition to the gladiola corms, Indigo had brought a large collection of seeds back from Europe. She had been fascinated with plants and flowers, and her European friends had not only given her seeds, but a notebook into which she had written descriptions, instructions, and drawn beautiful pictures.

Moments before, she (Aunt Bronwyn) gave Indigo a package that held a small silk-bound notebook where Aunt Bronwyn hand-painted the names (in English and Latin) of medicinal plants and the best conditions and methods to grow them. All the other pages in the green silk notebook were blank, ready for Indigo to draw or write anything she wanted. Bundled on top of the notebook with white ribbons were dozens of waxed paper packets of seeds wrapped in white tissue paper. (Gardens 267)

The child wanted to take these treasures home, show her family and friends. But, she never intended her acquisitions to be something to show off, or to show the superiority of Europe. For Indigo knew without a doubt, that Grandma Fleet and Sister Salt would be as excited about the seeds as she was.

Even before she embarked on her European excursion, Indigo loved plants and flowers and was eager to learn all about them. When she was with Hattie at Oyster Bay, she collected seeds and tried to remember the new plants she had discovered in this place so different from her desert home.

Susan took notes as Edward called out the flowers' names, and Indigo examined them carefully. She wanted to remember each detail of the leaf and the stalk for all these plants and flowers so she could tell Sister Salt and Mama. She picked up seeds and saved them in scraps of paper with her nightgown and clothes in the valise so she could grow them when she went home.

(Gardens 185)

It is my conviction that in these passages Silko used Indigo's seeds as a symbol for change, the exchange of the positive of cultures across the ocean. Indigo did not want to prove anything with her flowers. Indigo had seen plants in Europe she recognized as from her desert home, so her bringing European seeds to the Americas could be seen as one more symbol of unity, of Silko's desire to show the commonality of people rather than their differences. There is no conflict in this for Indigo. After all, the Sand Lizard people had always accepted strangers, and even the children fathered by strangers had turned into Sand Lizards in the womb.

The old-time Sand Lizard people believed sex with strangers was advantageous because it created a happy atmosphere to benefit commerce and exchange with strangers. Grandma Fleet said it was simply good manners. Any babies born from this union would

turn into Sand Lizards in the womb. (Gardens 219)

Silko has said that the old people at Laguna had been an inclusive people. She refers to herself as totally Laguna, despite her mixed ancestry. "My parents and the old people of the Laguna Pueblo community who raised me taught me that we are all one family -- all the offspring of Mother Earth -- and no one is better or worse according to skin color or origin." (Yellow Woman 101)

Indigo returned to the desert with gifts of flowers and a new understanding about Europeans. She was, however, still Indigo, still the Sand Lizard girl. But she transformed herself, healed Hattie, and when she returned with her sister to the old gardens, the apricot trees were sprouting and the snake had returned. Just like the Limone that forever blooms in Catullus' garden, and like the rebirth of the land of the ancient Grail King, redemption came at the hand of an innocent yet unafraid young person. If Almanac of the Dead was Silko's attempt to paint the picture of the apocalypse that will happen if humanity continues on its present course, Gardens in the Dunes is the picture of what could happen if humanity changes its course.

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