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Coyote Tracks:

Examining the Trickster in the Works of Leslie Marmon Silko

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of the Humanities Program of Marshall University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Humanities.

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Thesis Advisor: Dr. Arline Thorn



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## Chapter 1

## Existing Scholarship and Trickster Definition

The purpose of the current work is to extrapolate an understanding of the trickster figure as it is used in the literary works of Leslie Marmon Silko, a contemporary Laguna Pueblo author. Trickster analysis in Native American literature is primarily relegated to the study of traditional myths and stories, and only a few scholars approach the topic in contemporary Native American literature. Of those who do, none have chosen Silko's works as the primary focus of their analysis. An examination of this type will contribute to and expand the existing literary criticism of Silko's writings. Leslie Silko utilizes the traditional trickster figure of Native American myths by transferring him into the settings of the modern world with only minor changes to his typical set of characteristics. The most important element of Silko's tricksters is the humor they elicit, which is so often misread by modern Western readers. Trickster tales are not moralistic, but contain a layer of comedy that serves as a relief and a support mechanism. The primary focus here is to explore the variety of trickster manifestations in Silko's poems and stories and extract the core elements of the trickster archetype as Silko uses them in her unique style.

Current literary criticism of the trickster figure, as it

pertains to Native Americans, has set its lens primarily upon traditional myths and legends of various Indian tribes. Paul Radin's The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology (1969) is the seminal work in this field. Radin draws upon the traditional Winnebago trickster tales and relies upon Jungian interpretations of their meanings. Observation of the trickster in contemporary Native American fiction is not so generous and is limited to a handful of scholarly essays. Most of the focus of these essays falls upon the works of Gerald Vizenor, N. Scott Momaday, James Welch, and Louise Erdrich. Scholars have, to date, not specifically singled out Leslie Silko's works as the primary focus of trickster analysis. Therefore, this examination will focus solely upon Silko's writing and will utilize two published sources as examples: Storyteller (1981) and Almanac of the Dead (1991). Storyteller is a collection of poems and short stories, and Almanac of the Dead is an epic novel.

Silko possesses a remarkable ability to weave ancient myths with Indian history and the contemporary world, allowing trickster qualities to manifest in diverse forms. Silko's trickster accompanies her people through times heroic and tragic, maintaining a vital tradition in a modern voice. Silko's tricksterish humor runs through every one of her printed stories and is even the focal point of the short story "Coyote Holds a Full House in His Hand." Similar to Gerald

Vizenor's, Silko's trickster is virtually omnipresent, popping up in situation after situation. Silko does something unique in contemporary Native American fiction by introducing multiple tricksters in Almanac of the Dead. One gets the impression that Trickster is present in nearly every situation and in nearly every place. In this sense, Silko extracts and makes apparent the transcendent and immanent qualities of the trickster archetype. Through her writing, one understands the vital role of the trickster in generating humor and alleviating the tragic history of a people.

#### Trickster Definition

For a general definition of the trickster, Paul Radin's work on the Winnebago trickster cycle is a good point of departure. Radin writes:

Trickster is at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself. He wills nothing consciously. He knows neither good nor evil yet he is responsible for both. He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being (ix).

One would be hard pressed to manage a more precise definition of such an imprecise character. Trickster is paradoxical, and

any real definition should capture the essence of his contrary nature. Leemings similarly describes the trickster as "at once wise and foolish, the perpetrator of tricks and the butt of his own jokes" (163). Satire seems to follow Trickster wherever he roams. Radin notes that humor and irony are inseparable from the trickster (x). Trickster comedy is something that should not be overlooked, as it often is in Western perceptions. In a postmodern perspective, Gerald Vizenor regards trickster narratives as comic discourse, communal signs that pertain not to real individuals, but an interaction between the characters, narrator, and reader (196). Whether as an individual or discourse, the trickster is invariably linked to humor and absurdity.

A list of characteristics aids in identifying the trickster. Some clues are basic to tricksters such as playing tricks on or being tricked by others. Tricksters are typically schemers, good at twisting things to suit their desires and appetites. Tricksters have a strong appetite for food and sex and are frequently at the mercy of their desires, foregoing any serious reflection regarding their actions or behavior. As Velie points out, tricksters are "notoriously footloose," wandering in and out of various communities and situations, lacking any enduring relationship with others (325). Observing the trickster as he has found them in the works of other Native American authors, Velie describes them

as "alienated, not only from white society, but even from their own tribe...they are passive, drifting without job or goal, drinking heavily...and although they have relationships with women, they cannot seem to make these last, or do not want to" (315). Bereft of attachment, trickster floats about with his bag of schemes, his antics sometimes harmful and sometimes beneficial. He "plays a diversity of roles...ranging from creator and savior to obnoxious con man, amoral violator of taboos, and buffoon or clown" (Velie 324). This role-playing is fulfilled in Silko's tricksters as they precariously weave between the role of villain and hero, engaging in both destructive and creative activities.

Andrew Wiget reinforces Velie's descriptions. In his essay "His Life in His Tail: The Native American Trickster and the Literature of Possibility," Wiget describes the negative trickster features:

Trotting, skulking, whining, lurking, ranting, leering, laughing, always hungry, never satisfied, he is an animate principle of disruption, about to precipitate chaos and humor through sacrilege, self-indulgence, and scatology (86).

Although less than complimentary in his description, Wiget lists an important array of traits that one will find in Silko's tricksters. In a similar vein Wiget also remarks on the polarity of roles that trickster can play: "He may



appear, in one instance, to be an absolute fool," and in another story, "the name and mask may be endowed with a high sense of mission and tremendous powers in order to accomplish tasks beneficial to humankind" (87). In the next story "he will appear deceitful, vain, and selfish, and bend all of his talents toward the satisfaction of his own desires" (87).

Trickster maintains a high level of ambiguity that keeps our attention. He repels our sense of morality and at the same time attracts our sense of curiosity, humor, and hope. It is this ambiguity that makes the trickster difficult to extract from the threads of a story, particularly those stories found in contemporary Native American fiction. Yet with these clues in hand, one can begin to identify characters that may be perceived immediately as losers, but in reality have much more depth and are part of a tradition among Indian storytellers.

In this tradition the trickster frequently manifests as a shape changer. This change often occurs to and from the animal and human world, but can be noticed in a transformation of gender as well. Such attributes give the trickster a vaporous aura that rarely keeps to any particular form; however, some specific traits do occur broadly. As Velie describes him:

Whatever his form, trickster has a familiar set of characteristics: he plays tricks and is the

victim of tricks; he is amoral and has strong appetites, particularly for food and sex; he is footloose, irresponsible and callous, but somehow almost always sympathetic if not lovable. (122)

Magical transformations into animals or the opposite sex are rare in contemporary Native American fiction. This is true in regard to Leslie Silko's works. Even so, Silko utilizes the *familiar set of characteristics* that Velie mentions above, thereby maintaining the spirit of the trickster.

#### Cultural Contexts

A definition of any kind is a relative matter. How we interpret stories depends on a common set of shared assumptions about the way the world works. These are typically derived from the context of one's cultural environment. Universally the trickster is an archetype, a figure that can be observed the world over, possessing an elemental assortment of attributes. While we should certainly attend to the trickster's general archetypal qualities, we cannot ignore the cultural keys necessary to examine this ancient figure within a native American context.

The modern Western mind has much difficulty understanding the trickster because of the moral standards of this culture. The trickster's basic methodology of subterfuge triggers moral

indignation. Radin reports that the Winnebago refer to Trickster as the "tricky one" (132). The name implies slyness and deception, and it is little wonder that trickster is frequently misconstrued morally by Anglo Americans as the "evil one." The typical perception in contemporary Western religion of one of its own tricksters, Satan, is to characterize him as morally corrupt and the ultimate source of evil. To trick or deceive is considered ethically questionable, ultimately leading to the expectation that right behavior must be inferred from the apparent bad behavior of the Trickster. Thus he becomes the prime example of what not to do. The impact of this view on indigenous peoples has, for example, altered traditional perceptions among followers of the Peyote religion. Influenced by early Christian missionaries, the Peyotes, unsurprisingly equate the trickster with evil, fixating upon the negative rather than applying a broad brush to this multifaceted character.

In contrast, Native Americans observe the trickster through an holistic perception, as an interrelated and necessary piece of a greater whole. Masters' essay on Native American world view counterpoises Western rationalism to the Indian "top-down" approach to problem solving. Utilizing a Coyote/trickster story, the author demonstrates the difference in interpretation. The story is about a race between Coyote and Skunk to see which will be the one to eat the food stored

in Coyote's secret cache (Masters 2). Coyote, intending to trick the skunk, is himself tricked as the skunk hides and steals all of Coyote's food. Western interpretation would say that "coyote outsmarted himself" and that "the flaw is one of over confidence" (3). Conversely, the Indian interpretation would be that "the coyote's problem was...a failure to place the problem in the appropriate perspective" (3). The Western rational mind places problems into a basic cause and effect format: Coyote was overconfident; therefore, he was tricked out of his food. Had the coyote placed the problem into a larger, holistic context, asking "the spirits for help" rather than attempting to solve the problem through "individual effort," he would have found resolution (4).

The holistic cognitive approach of native peoples is outlined beautifully in Chief Seattle's speech to the U.S. government in 1855:

What befalls the earth befalls all the sons of the earth. This we know. The earth does not belong to man. Man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web he does to himself. (Campbell 28-29)

This profound response was prompted by the government's offer to buy land of the Duwamish in what is now Washington State.

No problem can be solved out of the context in which it occurs. Chief Seattle and his people were puzzled by such a queer notion of owning and controlling something as vast as the land.

In an essay on the Native American perception of reality, Barre Toelken related some of his experiences living with a Navajo family. He spent some time, unsuccessfully, attempting to explain modern Western society and technology to his adopted Navajo father. Trying numerous examples such as jets, the Empire State Building, and so on, Toelken received the same consistent response: "How many sheep will it hold?" (86-87). Although puzzled at first, Toelken eventually made the following conclusion: "When my adopted father asked, 'How many sheep will it hold?' he was asking, 'What is it doing here, how does it function? Where does it go? Why do such things occur in the world?'" (87). The old man was confused by the presence of these Western inventions because he could not connect with any point of reference in the native world view. Toelken explains that native religion "is viewed as embodying the reciprocal relationships between people and the sacred processes going on in the world" (88). The idea of bombers and huge buildings that crowd large numbers of people together did not make any sense to the Navajo because he could not see how they related to the sacred processes or the overall

picture. As an example, Toelken mentions the Pueblo belief that the earth in spring is like a pregnant woman, and one treats her accordingly (87). The process of the earth/world and the process of the woman/people are seen as interrelated, and thus right behavior is determined by this relationship. The following poem by Smohalla, a Nez Perce, reiterates this point of view:

You ask me to plow the ground. Shall I take a knife  
and tear my mother's breast? Then when I die she  
will not take me to her bosom to rest.

You ask me to dig for stone. Shall I dig under her  
skin for her bones? Then when I die I cannot enter  
her body to be born again.

You ask me to cut grass and make hay and sell it and  
be rich like the white man. But how dare I cut off  
my mother's hair? (80)

In essence, whatever one does with the earth has ramifications on the people. Once again, Chief Seattle's words make the point: "Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web he does to himself" (Campbell 29). This is reciprocation, and it is a cyclical holistic presentation of the way things work. Simply put, it is harmonization with the world. It is when people fail to interact or reciprocate the world's processes that trouble or disaster strikes. This idea will be important in examining

the trickster's actions and role in traditional myth and contemporary literature. Trickster's schemes and scams often fail because trickster fails to put himself or his actions into the "proper" relationships. By trying to circumvent the natural or right processes, trying to bend nature to his own will, Trickster inevitably is thrown on his head.

An essay by Sam D. Gill further elaborates on the importance of right relationship in Native American world views. Also an adopted member of a Navajo family, Gill spent a summer living among the Navajo and observing their ways. In so doing, he was able to extract something of how they see life and the world. Reflecting upon the Navajo sandpainting ritual, Gill writes:

The formal enactment of ritual brings things to their proper place and serves to interconnect them by establishing binding relationships. Ritual acts are understood to be essential to the establishing of proper relationships. (97)

Notice the emphasis on relationships. The manner in which one interacts with others and the world is extremely important. Just as Toelken discussed, proper relationships are derived from the sacred processes occurring in the world.

How do Trickster and his antics fit into the establishment of right relationships? As we will see, Trickster's seeming disregard for ethical boundaries serves to

solidify and perpetuate the establishment of right relationships. Trickster's actions illuminate the consequences of trying to trick or work against the sacred processes of nature. Never is Trickster viewed as morally deficient. Additionally, Trickster's antics stand out against the normal background of tradition and right relationships. To reiterate Master's point, Trickster has failed to interact in the proper way (3). This visibility that Trickster brings helps one recognize the artificiality of all social and cultural convention. This recognition can lead to a respect for traditions that continue to be significant in coping with life and its changes. Constantly transformative, trickster works as a catalyst to adapt people to ever changing situations and experiences. In so doing, he acts as a stabilizer and assists in the people's endurance.

Deloria argues that a schism between native and Western thought exists as a result of a time-oriented understanding versus a place-oriented one (60). Western religion and thought perceives the world in terms of lineal progression. Creation and armageddon are fixed points in time. Conversely, "tribal religions are...complexes of attitudes, beliefs, and practices fine-tuned to harmonize with the lands on which the people live" (Deloria 70). For them creation is an ongoing process in which participation is necessary, a living experience.



On the other hand, the inclination of a temporal perception is to abstract reality into universal and absolute ethical codes applied to all times in all situations. Such an understanding implies a notion of progress from one state of being, usually inferior, to one which is ideal. The result is a mind that perceives the trickster as an inferior state of existence which the "civilized" world has outgrown. Add a moral judgment and the trickster becomes the source of evil and barbaric behavior. Herein lies the central problem for the Western intellect regarding its perception of native American literature and the trickster. It prefers to relate the trickster to abstract ethical standards rather than the processes of the earth and of place. Thus, for Western minds, right behavior follows an organized set of eternal edicts, usually ideal and never fully realized. For the Indian, right behavior depends upon establishing proper relationships determined by the sacred processes in the world. As the world changes, so do the relationships, and concurrently the trickster as well.

While care must be taken when making generalizations regarding whole cultures, some basic observations can be made. Much ancient Western thought corresponds with traditional Native American perceptions, but the same case cannot be made for modern Western thinking. Christianity has had a very large impact upon modern Western culture in both religion and

science. Western eyes base observations about reality in a time-centered frame of reference, while native Americans base their observations along a spatial orientation. Consequently, the Western mind sees things in regard to progress, developing from an inferior state to a superior one. Native Americans see things in a nonlinear way. The West abstracts ethical principles to be applicable in all situations and places. American Indians enmesh their ethical standards into reciprocating the processes of nature. One is not surprised, then, to find a comparable Ten Commandments absent from Native Americans traditions.

The following definition elucidates the Western--typically somber--interpretation of the trickster:

Trickster: A figure whose physical appetites dominate his behavior; he is cruel, cynical, and unfeeling; he may assume the form of an animal, moving from one mischievous exploit to another. The trickster cycle corresponds to the earliest and least developed period of life. (Burrows, Lapidés, and Shawcross 463)

The above definition carries a serious and heavily weighted tone. There are two important points in this description. First is the use of the terms "cruel," "cynical," and "unfeeling." All three carry a connotation that is not amenable to humor and implies a negative valuation of the

trickster's role. Second is the notion of the trickster as being virtually undeveloped. This harkens back to the notion of progress, a time-centered orientation, and once again places a low valuation on the trickster. This example does not imply that all of Western culture views the trickster in dark terms, but much of Anglo-American society has turned an unsympathetic eye upon this figure.

The notion of development, or progress, becomes central in the ideas of Carl Jung, particularly in regard to the trickster archetype. Commenting upon Radin's work with the Winnebago trickster cycle, Jung states:

Radin's trickster cycle preserves the shadow in its pristine mythological form, and thus points back to a very much earlier stage of consciousness which existed before the birth of myth, when the Indian was still groping about in a similar mental darkness. Only when his consciousness reached a higher level could he detach the earlier state from himself and objectify it, that is, say anything about it. So long as his consciousness was itself trickster-like, such a confrontation could obviously not take place. It was possible only when the attainment of a newer and higher level of consciousness enabled him to look back on a *lower*

*and inferior state.* (Jung 202) Emphasis Added

Central to Jung's understanding is the idea of progress from an inferior to advanced state, which is a keystone of modern Western thought. Unfortunately, Jung did not believe that the trickster archetype would survive in the *civilized* world except in ambiguous folk narratives (202). This is an important point on which Vizenor criticizes Jung for presenting "an inert trickster, an erroneous assertion because the narrator imagines the trickster and the characters are active in a narrative discourse" (205). Jung has characterized the trickster as static rather than dynamic. Furthermore, he has interpreted the trickster in regard to a time-oriented epistemology, and not the space-oriented one from which it emerges. Such a view of the native trickster does not "hold any sheep," as Barre Toelken might point out. This means that the trickster is not a state of being at a point in linear time, but is an aspect of a total environment and part of the processes of the world.

#### Paradoxical Nature of the Trickster

As we have seen, the conclusion drawn by modern Westerners typically places the trickster in a devalued position. Consequently, he then becomes the representative of sinister and evil dealings. Unfortunately this view focuses

only on the negative aspect of his character. However, Trickster is much more and eludes simple classification. As stated earlier, Trickster is a paradox, and thus his actions often bring both good and evil. Pitt and Tobert remark:

Coyote has power but is indiscriminate in its use. His actions bring both good and disaster. His exploits make him more of a mythical hero than anything else, but he is often integral to Creation and can use his power to perform good deeds. (31)

Trickster is responsible, therefore, for creative as well as destructive events. In the time-oriented frame of reference, it is difficult to grasp a character who cannot be placed within a fixed moral category. Vizenor, writing about Native American fiction, states that "the best trickster characters shimmer and are not motivated by the tragic or heroic romances of colonial discoveries; tricksters are not heard in moral closures. (223) But the modern Western mind set abstracts its moral principles across time and place, frequently disregarding situation and context. The native spatial understanding keeps actions in context of all other natural processes. There is not a universal abstract, but instead one understands Coyote as being harmonized with an entire web of happenings. Spreading chaos is not inherently a bad thing, but it is an observable and integral part of life.

Dorothy Norman makes an interesting comparison of

trickster activities with the destructive and creative power of the Hindu god Shiva, who "lays waste what is merely static," an act which inevitably brings renewal (156). Good and evil, creation and destruction are aspects that complement one another. The god that does not destroy, cannot create. Whether causing harm to himself or others, Coyote acts as a catalyst, a dynamic force that keeps things moving. Numerous Native American myths abound with trickster taking part in creating or recreating the earth. In a Crow creation myth, Coyote, with the help of two ducks, creates the earth from a small bit of dirt that one of the ducks brings up from the bottom of the ocean (Erdoes and Ortiz 88-89). He then continues by creating people and the rest of the animals. A good clue to the nature of the trickster comes from understanding all of the ways he interacts with the world. As Pitt and Tobert point out, "in Navajo myth he [trickster] is the catalyst forcing people to move from one world to another," and the cycle of world destruction and rebirth continues (31).

## Chapter 2

## Silko's Concept of the Trickster

Leslie Silko's works have an obvious presence of the trickster throughout. She finds the trickster as integral to storytelling and a recurring figure in life. In a letter to James Wright, Leslie Silko wrote:

My interest is in what allows us to laugh at stories which are not altogether funny in and of themselves, but become funny when people begin to recall and tell other stories about related incidents. This happens a lot at Laguna with stories about funerals, and I know in other places, humor's link with the most grave and serious moments has always been acknowledged. (Silko and Wright 95)

Silko reminds us of the paradoxical nature of the trickster as simultaneously a tragic and comic character.

While much scholarship has addressed the trickster in Native American literature, very little of it has been applied to the works of Leslie Silko. The most applicable criticism has been Elizabeth Evasdaughter's essay "Ceremony: Healing Ethnic Hatred by Mixed-Breed Laughter." Evasdaughter refers to Silko, her trickster hero Tayo, and the old medicine man Betonie, as ritual or sacred clowns (84). A ritual clown is similar to the trickster, containing definite

elements of humor and irony, but lacks the independence and chaotic nature of the trickster. However, Evasdaughter's primary interest centers on the subtle jokes in Silko's Ceremony and on their implications for our multi cultural American landscape. While this essay certainly extracts the importance of the humor and irony found within the novel, it only indirectly addresses the role of the trickster in Silko's writing. It is worthwhile to examine the trickster as it is found in a variety of Silko's work and to elucidate its importance as a persistent figure in Native American storytelling.

Another essay that briefly touches upon the trickster in Silko's novel Ceremony is Velie's "Indians in Indian Fiction: The Shadow of the Trickster." His thesis is that Anglo readers often misconstrue the trickster figure as a "loser," based upon common, one dimensional portrayals in Hollywood films and some American literature (317-318). Part of the difficulty emerges from Anglo-Saxon culture. Velie points out that Anglos perceive Indians as both warriors and losers and that the "defeated warrior who loses with honor in a fight he could not hope to win is America's favorite sort of warrior" (323). It is a perception that captures only a part of the character, imposing Anglo cultural interpretation on Indian tradition. The cultural clues are missed and the character is misunderstood. In reality, this "loser" is a trickster, with



the same set of characteristics as the tricksters from Anglo tradition. At the end of his essay, Velie compares Tayo to similar characters in works by Native American authors Scott Momaday and James Welch, illuminating the commonalities that define them as tricksters. He notes, however, that

The chief difference between Silko's novel and those of Welch and Momaday is that Welch and Momaday don't call attention to the figure behind their protagonists. Silko prints the myths with her story of Tayo so the parallel can't be missed. (328)

Although Silko's blending of myth and reality is nothing new in literature, as Velie points out, it places her securely in the role of a contemporary Native American storyteller (327).

Leslie Silko follows in the storyteller tradition, weaving tales handed down from her family into modern surroundings and situations. When life seems too dark or too depressing, out pops a trickster.

### Silko's Early Works

A prime place to begin an examination of Silko's tricksters is her short story "Coyote Holds a Full House in His Hands." This story was published both independently and as part of a collection of poems and short stories in Silko's Storyteller. Both versions are identical.

The story is told in third person point of view, but Silko is careful to center the thoughts and perceptions on the main character. The protagonist is an unnamed, middle-aged, male Pueblo Indian. As the story unfolds, the reader becomes aware that this individual is none other than the Coyote named in the story's title. For purposes of discussion, this individual will be referred to as Coyote.

The story is about Coyote responding to an invitation from a Mrs. Sekakaku, a widowed Hopi, to visit her during the annual Bean dance. The tale opens with Coyote sitting in Mrs. Sekakaku's living room while she and her niece converse at the kitchen table, all but ignoring him. This scenario hints at some of the trickster antics that will ensue. For now, the protagonist begins reflecting on the events that brought him to the present moment. The reflection becomes valuable in ascertaining Coyote's character and personal history. This sets the stage for the remainder of the story, and a classic unfolding of the trickster's tale.

At Laguna Pueblo the community perceived Coyote as what Velie has previously described as the "loser." "They thought he was sort of good for nothing," Silko writes (258). Even though he earnestly tried, he failed at numerous tasks and endeavors and was considered to be a burden upon his mother, who provided him with lodging and financial assistance. However, in his own mind he saw himself as a capable

individual and fancied the idea of becoming a lawyer. He believed this because he was "good at making up stories to justify things" (259). Little elaboration is needed to see this as a prime quality of the trickster, not to mention Silko's jab at attorneys. In order to succeed with his antics, the trickster must be a master of deception.

Silko paints a complete portrait of the typical trickster. He lives with his mother and does not work. Mom buys him a nice jacket with her pension check and pays all of his bills, including the bill from the correspondence school of law, which he eventually drops out of. In Indian school he experienced stomach disorders frequently and was required to drop from that as well. He lacerated his foot badly while chopping wood, and when he was younger, he hurt his back diving off an old wooden bridge with some friends. Furthermore, the woman he was "seeing" or interested in married another man: "After Mildred's wedding, people who had seen him and Mildred together started joking about how he had lost out to a Hopi" (259). The fact that the other man was a Hopi becomes significant later in the story. For now, though, we see a picture of a man who seems accident prone and lazy, or a "loser." From a Native American perspective, this is comic relief. It is also classic trickster.

In Coyote's mind, Mrs. Sekakaku had invited him for companionship or a possible intimate relationship. Her

letters stated "that a big house like hers was lonely and that she did not like walking alone in the evenings" (Storyteller 261-262). His inference seems sensible. After arriving, he discovers, however, that she has tricked him and was not at all like she seemed in her letters. She was now very indifferent about his presence.

It is important to comment here that tricksters are known for their voracious sexual appetites. In this story, our trickster's sexual appetite plays a prominent role. He imagines that his visit to Mrs. Sekakaku might include some kind of sexual rendezvous:

He should have seen it all along, but the first time he met her at Laguna feast a gust of wind had shown him the little roll of fat above her garter and left him dreaming of a plunge deep into the crease at the edge of the silk stocking. (262)

With such an image in mind, he continues the pursuit, regardless of her trickery and indifferent attitude toward him. He proceeds by portraying himself as a medicine man, offering to cure Mrs. Sekakaku's aunt Mamie of her dizzy spells. No previous indications had been given to indicate that he was any kind of medicine man. It is a farce, pure and simple, and he begins the grandest and most absurd trickster antic of this tale.

He tells Mrs. Sekakaku and her niece that his cure would

only work if all of Aunt Mamie's clanswomen are present, but there must not be any men around (263). Preparations are made and as a result of his status as a medicine man he is treated much better now. He has the women line up single file in front of him while he sits beside the fireplace. He then lifts each of their skirts, one at a time, and rubs ashes on their thighs. The reader cannot miss the absurd notion that such a process could ever hope to succeed. The entire scenario is clearly a trickster antic. In this we see the title of the story come to full bloom as Coyote really does hold a "Full House in His Hands." The following excerpt elaborates on our trickster's thoughts as he performs this bizarre "healing" ceremony:

Some thighs he gripped as if they were something wild and fleet like antelopes and rabbits, and the women never flinched or hesitated because they believed the recovery of their clansister depended on them. The dimple and pucker at the edge of the garter and silk stocking brought him back, and he gave special attention to Mrs. Sekakaku, the last one before Aunt Mamie. He traced the ledges and slopes with all his fingers pressing in the ashes. He was out of breath and knew he could not stand up to get to Aunt Mamie's bed so he bowed his head and pretended he was praying. (264)

The whole scene reeks of humor and tom-foolery. It is the central scene of the entire story and the reader cringes as he waits for the women to start pounding this Coyote into the ground once they discover what he has done. It is Coyote's biggest trick, but an even bigger one awaits the reader at Silko's hands. This completely crazy scheme, this mockery of common sense actually works! After he finishes with Mrs. Sekakaku and begins his pretend prayer, Aunt Mamie arises from her bed and claims she feels better.

At the climactic moment, it is expected that Coyote will get trounced. Even Coyote expects it. However, by some twist of fate, Aunt Mamie is healed and the wily Coyote emerges unscathed. In real terms, the scene carries a note of seriousness. A dear family member is ill and is in need of aid. Coyote takes advantage of the old woman's illness, utilizing the opportunity to appease his sexual appetite. He is very much in character by doing this. The whole scenario recalls Siiko's interest in situations that are not normally humorous, but become so when recounted some time later. The illness is no laughing matter. However, the moment is extremely poignant by focusing on the paradoxical ground where serious meets funny and tragedy engages comedy. For an instant, opposites meet and dissolve into eternity. A moment later and the day to day, dualistic world returns. There Coyote is the beneficiary of the clanswomen's accolades,

culinary delights, and a bit of admiration and interest from Mrs. Sekakaku. The good achieved by Coyote's antics are but a latent and unintentional effect. Finding the situation with Mrs. Sekakaku hopeless, he decides to get what he can through trickery. As Radin very succinctly states, Coyote "knows neither good nor evil yet he is responsible for both" (xxiii).

Leslie Silko has done a marvelous job of telling a classic trickster tale in a contemporary setting. What would likely pass for an immoral story with a pervert and loser for the main character, is in Native American eyes just another display of the humorous and zany trickster. At the same time, the story serves to make the reader aware of the social conventions that exist and what his or her relation to those values are. The story can then act as a reinforcement of what is valuable, or a catalyst to begin changing that which is undesirable.

The Coyote of this story utilizes a basic trickster repertoire of deceiving others for personal gain. He also reflects something of the footloose trickster with a strong sexual appetite. The title alone prepares the reader for a trickster tale, and so one expects to find a few good trickster cues. In other works by Silko, the trickster is woven into the fabric and one may miss him if one is not careful.

Menardo in Almanac of the Dead

Almanac of the Dead is an epic novel with something of an apocalyptic tension. The setting is the southwestern United States and Mexico. Silko blends several stories in different settings with Tucson, Arizona, as the hub of the activity. The stories merge and separate, connecting to one another like strands of a spider's web. Much of the novel centers around the activities of Lecha and Zeta, twin sisters of Mexican Indian descent.

One of the sisters, Lecha, has been entrusted with an old notebook from her Aunt Yoeme. It contains fragments of the "Almanac of the Dead." The narrative recounts the travels of the Almanac from its traditional place in Mexico into the area now known as the U.S. Children of a dying tribe carry the book north so that others may read it and it will be preserved for future generations. Yoeme has given the notebook to Lecha because of Lecha's gift of prophecy. Lecha spends much of her time trying to get her life in order, recovering from an earlier period of chaos. At one point she becomes a celebrity of talk shows with audiences eager to hear her psychic predictions.

As the novel develops, Lecha finally begins deciphering the Almanac's esoteric and obscure meanings. Meanwhile, Zeta spends her time running the family business of smuggling arms



and Mexicans across the border. Silko has adopted a familiar theme in Native American legend of the twin heroes. The twin heroes in the U.S. are Lecha and Zeta, and on a parallel thread in Mexico are the twins Tacho and El Feo. El Feo works with natives in Mexico, involving a Cuban Marxist to help plan a movement of native peoples to retake their lands.

Tacho is a chauffeur for Menardo, a wealthy Mexican businessman and trickster. Tacho houses and cares for a set of sacred macaws in his servant's hut behind Menardo's home. They talk to him and tell him what he must do, letting him know when the time is right for the people to begin their march north to reclaim their ancestral lands. Thus, with the completion of Lecha's transcription of the Almanac, and the march of native peoples, the two narrative lines converge. The primary theme is the return of things Indian to the Indians, while all things European pass away.

Painting a picture of much dissatisfaction in North America, Silko conveys a time ripe for change and a return to traditional ways. In Tucson, Roy/Rambo, an ex-green beret, and Clinton are organizing an army of the homeless against injustices. Awa Gee, a computer hacker and genius, wants to use his skills to turn out the lights on America. Lecha and Zeta smuggle guns and Mexicans. Tacho, El Feo, and Angelita La'Escapia motivate the people of Mexico to take back their lands. There are many more small stories that interweave with

and connect to this larger theme of disillusionment and transformation. The web of stories that Silko weaves is masterful.

A major character and a particularly good trickster is the character Menardo, a free enterpriser who wants very much to be accepted by the old Mexican/Spanish aristocracy. The story of Menardo is connected with the stories of Tacho, El Feo, and the revolutionaries in Mexico. El Feo and his followers seek to overthrow the existing regime and give the land back to its rightful heirs. Menardo seeks to prevent and eradicate these rebellious and dangerous upstarts. Thus, Menardo is a figure working against the overall movement of the novel.

Menardo embodies the more foolish and self destructive aspects of the trickster. He ultimately becomes the target of his own antics, often as a result of doing things he is ill equipped to do. He seeks to hide and deny his own "Indian" heritage, largely because of the ridicule he received as a child. "Flat Nose...a slang name the Indians were called" is what one of the boys at school called him. When courting his first wife, Iliana, Menardo came up with a story to explain the flatness of his nose to Iliana's family, a family of old money, "among the oldest in Tuxtla Guitierrez" (260). He would tell them it had been broken (260). Because of her family's prestige, Menardo always felt as if he were proving

himself to Iliana: "All he could think of were the years they had been engaged in this ritual to prove he was worthy enough" (270). Menardo even stopped visiting his grandfather, despite his love of the stories he learned from him. Menardo would deny his heritage at whatever cost to succeed and feel important.

In many ways Menardo's behavior resembles Coyote's in the "Bungling Host," a traditional trickster tale in which trickster attempts to reciprocate the hospitality of other animals by mimicking their unique gifts and abilities rather than utilizing his own. Predictably, Trickster fails, and Wiget offers that "the most generous and least painful reciprocity is not to flatter but to give what is truly yours" (92). This is the status of Menardo, willing to deny his heritage and his own gifts to foolishly adopt another's standards. In the Tacho's opinion, "Menardo was a yellow monkey who imitated real white men" (Almanac 339). This establishes Menardo's personal psychology and motivations. Combine this with a man driven by his desires and appetites, willing to run any scam to satisfy them, and a classic trickster is in the making.

Menardo has worked himself into a position of great wealth and status through his business of protection for Mexico's wealthy--Universal Insurance he calls it. Menardo is prime trickster material and engages in some of the most

absurd schemes found anywhere in the novel. The claims he makes for his company reflect the absurdity: "What Menardo offered were special policies that insured against all losses, no matter the cause, including acts of God, mutinies, war, and revolution" (Almanac 261). Only a trickster and con artist would dare to dupe others in such a scandalous fashion. What is even more humorous is that he succeeds in doing just that when he saves a business and community from a disastrous tidal wave.

Menardo's first trick occurs early in the novel, just after founding his business. He receives a phone call from a client who tells him that their warehouse is in danger from a tidal wave. Menardo has less than two hours to save the company from disaster. Miraculously he manages to organize enough people to empty the warehouse and still have time to rescue patients from a nearby hospital: "Newspapers proclaim that Universal Insurance makes good on its promises to protect clients from dangers of all kinds" (263). Similar to Coyote's trick in "Coyote Holds a Full House in His Hands," Menardo's claims seem ridiculous, yet he succeeds in backing them up. Silko has again decided to play trickster herself and pull one over on the reader. This is a writing technique that will appear often in Silko's stories.

Menardo displays unmistakable trickster-like characteristics by engaging both malevolent and benevolent

behavior. He is malevolent in the sense of being deceptive, selfish, and uncaring, but benevolent in his heroic rescue of the hospital. Of course, such heroics are really unintentional and go only so far as to benefit Menardo.

A wonderful illustration of trickster behavior comes from Menardo's obsession with a bullet-proof vest he has procured in order to protect himself from the threat of revolutionary violence. After the death of his first wife, Iliana, a woman to whom he cannot manage to remain faithful. Menardo is convinced that the revolutionaries in Mexico are plotting against him. However, he believes he is gaining the upper hand by wearing a bullet-proof vest. The vest is a gift from the man who is, ironically, having an affair with Menardo's wife.

Menardo had examined the vest again and again, running his fingers along the reinforced nylon stitching that secured the 'wonder fiber' panels in the vest. A modern miracle of high technology, the wonder fiber was neither bulky nor heavy but possessed a unique density that stopped knives and bullets, including .357-magnum slugs, the brochure said. (Almanac 484)

Incredibly, Menardo even slept and had sexual intercourse with the vest on, rarely ever being without it. The brochure was

his regular evening reading. The obsession with the vest is an obvious comedy that becomes even more poignant when Menardo inevitably fools himself. Like Trickster, he is his own worst enemy. Menardo's grand scheme is to play a big joke on his powerful friends. Standing in a field as they drive up, he orders Tacho to shoot him. He couldn't wait to see their stunned faces when they would find him unharmed: "Menardo's heart was pounding with excitement. He could hardly believe what fun he was having with the bulletproof vest" (501). Ironically, the vest fails and the bullet penetrates and kills Menardo.

This story shows a classic trickster at work. The image reminds us of the clown's antics at the local circus. From his early sexual infidelities, to his master prank to cheat death, Menardo dons the trickster's mask. Menardo is a primary example of the tragic and comic tension that Silko mentions in a letter to James Wright. She notes that "humor's link with the most grave and serious moments has always been acknowledged," and that is a quality essential to the trickster (Silko and Wright 95). Menardo's demise is both tragic and comic, and Silko is consistent with traditional trickster stories in keeping with such. She relies on the mythic realm, placing it in modern day to day settings. Velie comments that "combining myth with realistic narrative is hardly new in fiction" (327). Western culture has a tendency

to read Native American literature as realistic narrative only. Vizenor says "that the behavior of the trickster is 'always scandalous,'" prescribing "a neocolonial moral presence in tribal stories" (224). Therefore, Menardo should not be labeled as an evil or morally bankrupt entity, but ought to be recognized for some of his lovable and endearing qualities. In spite of his foolishness, "Alegria realized no man would ever love her or spend his money as freely on her as Menardo had" (Almanac 507). Menardo was heroic, romantic, foolish, and greedy all at once. Very tricksterish, and all too human.

Menardo fulfills the loser image that is often ascribed to tricksters. He is perceived as foolish by other characters in Almanac. Tacho "had learned to follow Menardo's moods and ignore whatever Menardo might say because Menardo was a yellow monkey who imitated real white men" (339). Soon after his accidental death, Alegria arrives and witnesses her husband's lifeless body on the ground:

Alegria approached slowly. Poor silly man!

From the moment Menardo had seen the vest, he had been enraptured. But instead of crying, Alegria wanted to laugh. She had sunk to her knees on the ground next to his body and buried her face in both hands, and she had laughed until tears ran down her face. (Almanac 508)

Even in times that normally appear tragic, Menardo the trickster comes out looking foolish. His antics are helpful enough to save a hospital, but dangerous enough to take his life. Menardo was ultimately more dangerous to himself than any of the revolutionaries or leftists he feared. Instead of cheating them, or cheating death, he cheated himself. With such a high opinion of technology, of progress, it was technology that let him down: "A freak accident! How tragic! Microscopic imperfections in the fabric's quilting; a bare millimeter's difference and the bullet would safely have stopped" (Almanac 509). The irony is unmistakable. Menardo believed that "Indians such as Tacho stayed poor because they feared progress and modern technology" (500). Yet, this poor ignorant Indian became the vehicle of Menardo's folly.

#### Gender Difference: Alegria in Almanac

Menardo is not the only trickster; there are also female tricksters, such as Menardo's wife Alegria or Leah Blue. Most of the literary criticism has invariably ascribed a male-only gender to trickster. In his book on mythology, David Leemings describes the trickster as "always male" (163). But this is not necessarily the case. Wiget briefly discusses the female form of the trickster as being a "commonly understood" character that is typically juxtaposed to the male variant



(89). Interestingly, he points out that the occurrence of a female trickster does not depend upon gender of the teller or audience, and the female trickster's roles can vary depending upon the tribal tradition in which they originate (89). One of the trickster's talents enables him to transform himself into either gender, so the existence of a female trickster should not surprise us. The flexibility in gender only adds to the ambiguity of the trickster, which is a central aspect of the trickster. Also, female characters in the role of Trickster tend to be portrayed as independent and determined individuals. It gives them a primary role that puts them, at the very least, on equal footing with the male characters. And in Silko's works, female tricksters tend to be strong survivors.

With that in mind, we can find some examples of this gender difference in mythology. In his essay "Dangerous Definitions: Female Tricksters in Contemporary Native American Fiction," Cox comments that one can find "a number of Hopi stories which show a female Coyote 'going along,'" (18). Among the cliffs of the western United States one can find numerous petroglyphs of the mysterious Kokopelli, who is depicted as a trickster in numerous myths. Interestingly, Kokopelli has a female counterpart: Kokopelmana. In Hopi ritual her role is "played by strong runners who chase male spectators and simulate copulation with those who are caught"

(Duffield and Sliffer 126). Cox posits this sexual licentiousness as a part of the trickster that is not necessarily limited to males only (18). The Hopi ceremonial enactment shows that after Kokopelmana copulated and released her first catch, "she ran far and wide in quest of 'lovers,' pretended to lure men out of their houses, and argued in vigorous gestures with all women and girls who tried to keep men away from her" (Duffield and Sliffer 127). Like any trickster, Kokopelmana wanders near and far to satisfy her sexual appetite. Her arguing with the other women is undoubtedly a comic moment prompted by her onerous behavior. In the Winnebago myth, Trickster transforms himself into a female in order to marry the chief's son and eventually gives birth to three children (Radin 22-23). This clearly illustrates that there is no defined gender specification to the trickster, though gender may be used as another aspect of Trickster's absurdity and transcendence of boundary.

In contemporary literature, Cox illustrates numerous examples of female tricksters: Kochininako in Silko's Storyteller, Fleur in Erdrich's Tracks, and Grey in Momaday's The Ancient Child. He points out their similarities:

All of these male and female  
tricksters...have access to liminal space, such  
as the water's edge, the bedroom, the front  
porch, and the barstool, the same as trickster.

The most remarkable feature of Coyote is this ability to move freely from the margin to the center of the community, and is perhaps female trickster's best advantage. (19)

In essence, a liminal boundary can be a physical area that divides the realms of the community from that which is outside. It can also denote a social boundary defined by community ethical standards. That which is outside the social mores represents the margins while that which does not violate ethical boundaries is within the community. Liminal space is an area that the female tricksters in Almanac of the Dead have access to.

Menardo's wife Alegria, a major character, is a good female example of the trickster's coming into and going out of boundaries. Alegria is a very independent woman, having a successful career of her own, unattached and mobile. She is a trickster with the wanderlust typical of most tricksters. She is also a survivor. Menardo meets Alegria when he contracts with an architect to design a new home for him and his first wife, Iliana. During the process of design and construction, Alegria and Menardo indulge in an affair that everyone but Iliana seems to know about: "Alegria had glanced up and to her horror saw the Indian was smiling as if he knew she was going to seduce his boss later that afternoon" (Almanac 278). Even the ladies at the club see the obvious deception by Alegria

and Menardo: "The other women could tell by the way Iliana talked about the female architect that she suspected nothing between that woman and her husband" (287). Alegria floats freely into liminal space, then back to the center of the community when she becomes Menardo's wife. First she is the professional associate who indulges in an extramarital affair with Menardo, then she marries Menardo. During this time she is also involved in a sexual affair with the Cuban Bartolomeo. This man's revolutionary cohorts "had collected volumes of detailed surveillance of Menardo's sexual liaisons with the little lady architect from Mexico City," plus "they enjoyed watching the architect because she slept with comrade Bartolomeo" (291). Here she is back out into liminal space, crossing the bounds of marital fidelity again. Interpretation does not require applying a moral taboo, but there is humor in this wandering in and out of liminal boundaries. We might remember the tale of Kokopelmana in which the women of the tribe chased her away for copulating with their husbands.

Not satisfied with Menardo and Bartelomeo, Alegria goes even further: "Tacho had seen her look at the boss with the same attention the last year the 'old Señora' was alive; now that Alegria had the boss, she was already looking for another man" (472). She soon begins another affair with an American named Sonny Blue, the son of the crime lord Max Blue. Ironically, it is Sonny Blue who gives the bulletproof vest to

Menardo as a gift, thus ascribing to Sonny some trickster characteristics. Alegria possesses the basic trickster repertoire of a strong sexual appetite and deceptiveness. Tacho is careful around her because "Alegria was far more clever than the first Señora had been" (472). Alegria holds even more classic trickster traits than Menardo. She has been able to trick Iliana out of both her husband and the new house. She has tricked Menardo into giving her whatever she desired: "Sex with Menardo used to get Alegria almost anything" (485). In addition to the tricks, Alegria bears the trickster image of a wanderer. She has wandered from being the architect in Mexico, drawn by a sexual affair, to Menardo in Tuxtla Gutierrez. From there she is drawn to the U.S. by her affair with Sonny Blue and desire to escape from Menardo's establishment friends.

After Menardo's death, Alegria, who seems to slip from one lover to another quite easily, finds herself the target of someone else's scheme, tricked into investing in a service that sneaks wealthy Mexicans into the United States. With no other options but to escape Mexico and Menardo's business partners, who suspected her of ties to the revolutionaries, Alegria buys into a travel agency that will take her across the U.S. border. From there she can seek out Sonny Blue and cash in on Menardo's bank accounts in Tucson. The journey will cost \$2000, but the group is guaranteed to cross into the

U.S. without any passports or questions. Alegria watches Mario, the travel agent, size up her and the other passengers' luggage (666). It is amazing that she never suspects a thing as Mario proceeds to provide an seemingly endless supply of champagne to the guests while they wait on the coaches.

After a long journey, the buses halt at dawn and the passengers exit. Mario tells them that due to some unforeseen difficulties with the motor homes, they must walk a "short distance where they would find the motor homes and drivers waiting for them on the U.S. side of the border" (670). But as Alegria finds, after this short walk, she has been duped and "there were no motor homes and drivers waiting for them; there never had been; the Indian guides had been instructed to abandon them" (672). She has been swindled of the money she paid to get into the United States plus all of her nonmonetary belongings. All she has left are the clothes she is wearing and the money belt full of cash, gems, and gold. Sizing up the luggage, the champagne, the partying, and the short trek in the desert were all a part of a scam: "All along Mario had been setting them up for this big one" (673). And in this case, it is the trickster that gets duped. But that is not the end of the scenario. Silko, true to form, must inevitably pull one over on the reader.

Alegria is faced with a hopeless situation. She and the other passengers are dumped in the middle of nowhere,

surrounded by miles of dry sand and sun, with nothing other than what they are wearing. As time wears on, all of the passengers except Alegria die of thirst. She walks and walks, passing each of the corpses in turn. Up to the end, Silko renders the situation so that the reader expects Alegria will also die of thirst, and even Alegria begins to believe that she will not make it: "She could feel the blood in her veins begin to thicken, to dry up gradually in her veins. Her eyes no longer opened because the eyelids had swollen shut, Alegria had always known life meant nothing, so dying was nothing at all either" (677). At this point she is rescued by Catholic nuns and priests. Alegria has unwittingly cheated fate, and Silko has pulled a trick on the reader. Among the nuns are the Indian twin sisters, Zeta and Lecha. Though Alegria disdains Indians, seeing them as shifty and lazy, it is Indians who save her life.

Irony is piled on irony in multiple layers. Alegria deceives and is deceived in a series of relationships and interactions that are almost too bizarre to be real. Gerald Vizenor refers to this as "comic atavism, or the communal pleasures of chance and ironies in stories" (223). The fact that she was married to another trickster, Menardo, only adds to the humor of the situation. Trickster fooling trickster is, without question, the pinnacle of irony.

Alegria and Menardo, while both tricksters, serve

different purposes in furthering the novel's movement and direction. Silko has laid her stories in various geographic locales with Tucson, Arizona, marking the central point. The introduction of Almanac of the Dead includes a map which delineates the location and path of each character's movement. All movement steers toward Tucson, where the story began and where it will reach its climax.

Menardo is a trickster who works against the movement toward Tucson. He is a member of the entrenched Mexican power elite and seeks only furtherance of status quo and his own personal greed. He has used trickery and deception to work his way to the esteemed social position he holds. Tacho, Menardo's chauffeur, is the brother of El Feo, who leads the natives of Mexico in a revolution to take back their land. The movement of El Feo's revolutionaries is north, toward Tucson. It is the revolutionaries who have Menardo worried and are the primary source of his obsession with the bullet proof vest. Seeking to eradicate the revolutionaries, Menardo thus serves as a barrier to the movement of the novel. In mythological terms, Menardo represents the aspect of that which is dying away in order for something new to come into being.

The character Alegria serves to keep the movement of the novel headed toward its inevitable destination in Tucson. She too begins as a member of the Mexican wealthy elite, but also



has ties to a Cuban named Bartelomeo, a member of the revolutionaries. At no time in the novel does Alegria seek to satisfy any needs other than her own. In that, she does prove to be of strong will and a survivor. Alegria inadvertently helps to move the story toward Tucson, seeking only to escape Menardo's friends and to get out with as much for herself as she can. She has no allegiance to either the Mexicans or the revolutionaries. Instead, she is swept along with the movement north and with change.

Both Menardo and Alegria engage in trickster antics, yet each meets a very different fate. They thwart moralistic interpretations because one survives while the other is destroyed. There is no single consistency in logic--Western logic--that could successfully interpret these two in ethical terms. Ethics would demand the same outcome for both, so no moralizing is possible. But each carries elements of the human condition and each is a role that we play at one time or another. Again the trickster has slipped out from under the linear microscope to laugh at us once more.

## Chapter 3

## Significance of the Trickster

In today's world the written word has taken precedence over oral traditions. Yet the trickster remains a vital and necessary part of Native American storytelling in both its written and oral forms. Leslie Silko is a major contributor who keeps the trickster in the foreground. Her versions of the trickster have changed from those of ancient legend. Gone is the trickster who is also a god, who transforms himself into fantastical creatures or animals or recreates the world from a piece of mud. Such specifics are not the necessary elements of the trickster; the basic characteristics of Trickster's actions and mind set endure today. In a letter to James Wright, Silko discusses this point regarding her book Storyteller:

In the new book I have included some very old stories which I wrote from memory, the way I heard them a long time ago. Memory is tricky--memory for certain facts or details is probably more imaginative than anything, but the important thing is to keep *the feeling* the story has. (Silko and Wright)

Silko has certainly succeeded in maintaining the feeling of the Trickster. The clownish humor and absurd situations are

an important and integral part of the trickster, and Silko has managed to transform those characteristics into a modern idiom. Only the most enduring stories will undergo transformation into the mental framework of the contemporary mind. When they no longer speak in terms that can be understood, it is the duty of the storyteller to recast them in the present light. This is nothing new, for any contemporary authors worth their salt utilizes the archetypes that are timeless capsules of the human condition. Otherwise, their works would be soon forgotten. This sentiment comes across very clearly in Silko's

Ceremony:

Old Grandma shook her head slowly, and closed her cloudy eyes again. "I guess I must be getting old," she said, "because these goings-on around Laguna don't get me excited any more." She sighed, and laid her head back on the chair. "It seems like I already heard these stories before...only thing is, the names sound different." (260)

It seems like something we heard before when we read a story by Leslie Silko. Trickster is someone we have heard from before, only the names and places have changed. His humor and foolish antics are still there for us to laugh at and to ponder.

Leslie Silko has carried forward a timeless figure, providing laughter and insight into aspects of the human condition. From Coyote to Menardo, Alegria, and Judge Arne, Silko has shown us the face of Trickster in his modern form. Trickster is not a figure that will simply fade because of uncomfortable feelings, but remains a reflection of ourselves that we carry with us everywhere.

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