

Navajos are Nicer

**- A study of the gaze in Tony Hillerman's
Navajo detective novels as it pertains to the
White Man and pan-Indian-ism**

Introduction

Navajos are nicer. This is the concept that seems brought forward to us by the late Tony Hillerman in his detective fiction novels about police officers Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee. Navajos have a more perfect understanding of nature; they look to each others safety and take good care of their culture and teach and learn their history. Actually it is not that simple, in fact all the statements above are in need of amendment, all four statements need to reflect that Navajos are in fact better at these examples than someone else, more specifically the White Man. The White Man does NOT understand nature, does not seem to care about the safety and wellbeing of his fellow White Man or even his kin, cares not for his culture – or would rather forget it, along with his history.

It does not take much research to discover that Tony Hillerman is lauded far and wide for the way he portrayed not just the Navajos but all the native American groups he ever so much as mentioned in his 18 works about Leaphorn and later Chee and later still Chee and Leaphorn.

It is this project's intent however to show that the gaze which has been so celebrated for its fairness and equality is in fact skewed heavily against the world of the White Man. Navajos are nicer, neater, sympathetic, more agreeable.

Over the course of this project I will raise my points of criticism against the works of Tony Hillerman, not taking into regard my fondness for his works, in regards to gaze and the structuralism of the crime novel. But I will also heap my own praise on Hillerman's books, especially in avoiding what I will refer to as pan-Indian-ism – a narrative which will be explained in more detail further on, but which, to boil it down, is a mode of thinking that unites all of the North American tribes and peoples into one homogenous group. This way of representing the North American Indian narrative can be found in several places in modern culture, also, somewhat disturbingly, in the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington D.C.

For this project I will be working from a foundation of literary structuralist theory, cultural text theory and with the ideas of the philosopher Tzevetan Todorov. Also I will be using further concepts and ideas such as 'gazes' and 'tropes'. All of my academic foundations will be explained in further chapters.

The main structure of this project will be as follows:

- My formal research question comes at the end of this chapter
- Then I will explain key concepts, characters and theories
- Analyses of a selection of the works of Tony Hillerman follow
- Finally I will attempt to come to a conclusion and answer my research question

But what, then, is my research question? With all of the above-mentioned in mind, it becomes clear that what I truly wish to look into is how a gaze can be skewed, but in such a way that it remains seemingly unnoticed, or, if noticed, is seen as preferable to the way the gaze is ‘normally’ skewed. One narrative and a set of tropes are set aside, if just for a while, to be replaced by what is assumed to be, or, at the very least hoped to be, a more ‘real’ narrative and set of tropes. It comes down to:

“In what ways, if any, can we prove that the gaze of the Leaphorn/Chee crime fiction novels are skewed toward representing the dominant culture group (in this case the Caucasian American) as inferior, furthermore, in what ways, if any do these novels avoid homogenizing the North American Indian?”

These are the questions that I will attempt to answer in the following pages.

Tony Hillerman

In this chapter I will expound on the author of my chosen primary texts, Tony Hillerman. I will also comment on his writing style.

Anthony Grove Hillerman was born on the 27th of May 1925 in the small town of Sacred Heart in the state of Oklahoma; he died October 26th 2008 in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

When I write 'small town' in the above, it is an overstatement. In fact, the book "Tony Hillerman – A critical companion" states that the population of Sacred Heart was "about sixty"¹. Growing up in such a small town on the edge of the dustbowl during the end of the Great Depression, Hillerman was a stranger to television and even movie theaters. He did not even use a telephone until his return home from World War II, and then it was to call his mother and tell her he was back in America.

The remoteness of his upbringing brought to Hillerman, as well as to the people around him in Sacred Heart and its environs, a feeling of 'us and them' in regards to 'city-folk'. People from the city had all sorts of distractions and, to Hillerman and his fellow inhabitants of Sacred Heart, innumerable wealth. This 'us and them' mentality was, however, purely geographical and not ethnographical. Those Native Americans that lived in the nearby regions were not excluded from the 'us', they were included and understood as being part of the community. Everyone there identified as outsiders, as opposed to the 'city-folk' and their suavity.

Hillerman was sent to college at Oklahoma State University, a chance at escape from the smallness of the life in his rural county. He studied chemical engineering but did poorly, receiving an 'A' only in English.

And then the War came.

Hillerman enlisted and fought in Europe for two years. He was lucky to come out of the war alive: Of the original 212 men in his company only 8 men finished the war alive. Hillerman received the Bronze and Silver Stars for his service. He was also severely wounded in combat. An explosion threw him into the air and broke both his legs and partly blinded him.

¹ Tony Hillerman – A critical companion p. 1

Upon his return back to America Hillerman became interested in writing. He enrolled first in Oklahoma State and then the University of Oklahoma to get a B.A. in journalism.

Hillerman worked briefly for an ad agency but soon went into journalism. For years he worked for newspapers before he finally got around to writing his first novel.

This first novel inspired Hillerman to write more than 18 others and garnered him immense critical and popular success. These novels also brought financial windfalls to Hillerman; in 1996 he was ranked as the 22nd wealthiest man in New Mexico.

Hillerman also taught writing to aspiring journalists at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque.

Tony Hillerman died at the age of 83.

Writing style

Tony Hillerman has been described as having a very sparse style. He is known for not wanting to waste the readers' time². In the Critical Companion his functionalistic way of writing is summed up in this way:

“Whatever else the writing may accomplish, it must always advance the story”³

As I have written above, Hillerman taught writing to journalism students, it is noted, in the Critical Companion, that he would tell them:

“Remember always, the adjective is the enemy of the noun; the adverb is the enemy of the verb. If you use an adverb it almost inevitably means that you didn't find the right verb. If you have to modify a noun with an adjective, maybe you've got the wrong noun.”⁴

From this we get a clear idea of the way Tony Hillerman felt about language, which is only natural, when one considers the many years he spent working for newspapers.

Words are a currency with which reader interest is bought, but they can also become a fluff, an opulent mass that makes the potential reader balk and move along.

² Tony Hillerman – A critical companion p. 52

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Even though Hillerman often used many a line to describe the scenery he always clearly had intent with such descriptions, he wished to show the way nature touched the main character or to show the passage of time. Always there was a reason.

Subject matter

While Hillerman undoubtedly wrote an impressive amount of articles and even a few non-Navajo novels, his crime novels on precisely the Navajos are what he is primarily remembered for. In these 18 novels Hillerman introduced his readers, who were and remain legion, to Joe Leaphorn – lieutenant, and Jim Chee – sergeant. Through these two – and their superiors and suspects and families – the reader is introduced to life in the hard scratch country of the Navajo Nation and its surroundings and to the culture and religion of the people who inhabit the region. These include Zuni and Pueblo tribes, as well as, of course, the Navajos.

Being in the service of what was then called the Navajo Tribal Police⁵ our two main characters come across the more problematic sides of life on the Reservation. But the reader is not introduced to just drunks and traffic violations and what have you, there is also in Hillerman's work a strong focus on the positive sides of Navajo and indeed Native American life as a whole. In one instance⁶, Leaphorn goes to interview a woman who, it just so happens, is attending a ceremony to celebrate a female family member's coming of age. This gives us, as readers, a chance to steal a glimpse into something that would otherwise be too remote and impossible for us to see firsthand. And also, as mentioned above, Tony Hillerman was very fond of describing the scenery in which his works took place. The nature and weather of the American south-west, around the states of Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado and Utah are given such attention that one almost feels that one might know it upon sight, especially if one reads up on the plant life mentioned.

As with all authors Tony Hillerman's style evolved throughout the 36 years he was active as a writer of crime novels. The first three novels about Joe Leaphorn, before Jim Chee was even thought of, have a more straightforward plot structure than later works. Also, the cultural commentaries, that would so come to be a part of the

⁵ Now the Navajo Nation Police

⁶ The book "Listening Woman"

Hillerman 'experience' that readers would come to expect and cherish, came more to a point with the introduction of the interplay between Chee and Leaphorn.

Leaphorn became almost a skeptic, a Navajo by name and tradition only, not belief.

This is not so clearly the case in the first three books. Here Leaphorn takes a great pride in his Navajo beliefs and, perhaps to a greater degree, the beliefs of his fellow Navajos and Native Americans. From *Skinwalkers* and onward, Joe Leaphorn becomes somewhat distanced from the Navajo experience. He retains his belief that everything is connected, but now it is ascribed to rationality and not faith in the fact that the wind on plains could make a man miles away smile out of turn.

Also, with the introduction of the word 'belagana' a Navajo word meaning something akin to 'white man'. This word, with negative connotations normally associated with it, was not needed in the three original novels, even though negative connotations were associated with the white man in, for example, the book 'Dance Hall of the Dead' where Leaphorn thinks "Why didn't the white man take care of his daughter?". The introduction of 'belagana' makes it clearer than it was in the previous novels that there is a clear distinction between 'us' and 'them', a point I will get to later.

Also, Navajo, the language, is not mentioned in the early books, it is most likely spoken, but no one is there to not know what is being said.

All in all Hillerman's style evolves with his novels, the characters become more complex and so do their lives and the cases they must solve. The vocabulary expands and the culture of the people who are described becomes more and more fleshed out.

Navajos

Geography and early history

In the book “Spider Woman walks this land” it is stated that the word Navajo first appears in Old World writing as *Apaches de Návaju*⁷ meaning basically ‘Apache farmers’, the word Apache being the Spanish catch-all for Native Americans just outside their area of control and Návaju coming from the Pueblo word – the Pueblo Indians were unfortunate enough to be inside Spanish control – for “great cultivated fields”⁸. This was in 1626.

The parts of Navajo history that can be proven scientifically tells us that the Navajos, along with all of the people who are classified as being of the Nadene language group, came to the Southwestern United States fairly recently, as far as human migrations go. No longer than 6000 years ago, and probably closer to 3000. The legends of the Navajos, passed down orally from generation to generation, places them in the southwest quite a bit earlier, but this is possibly due to a sharing of cultures and traditions with the Pueblo Indians, who had been in the southwest so long that they had most likely started as the Anasazi many thousand upon thousand years ago. The Nadene-speaking people, upon having crossed the Behring Strait, split into several directions, those who would become Navajos being the only ones to go to the dry corner of the world that was and is the southwestern part of North America. There they began settling into their newfound world, becoming first hunters and gatherers with superior bows compared to their contemporaries and then nomadic farmers. Slowly they began sharing their world and ideas with the surrounding people of the region, these being the Native Americans that would become known as the Pueblo Indians.

In fact the Navajo clan structure can be traced back to Pueblo traditions and it appears that 15% of all Navajo clans have direct genetic connection with former and existing Pueblo clans.

When the Spanish in 1540 came to look for gold in the southwest they brought along:

⁷ Spider woman walks this land, p. 11

⁸ Ibid.

“[...] 225 cavalrymen, 60 footmen, 5 Franciscan friars, and nearly 1000 African slaves and Mexican Indian servants [and] 1500 head of livestock including horses, mules, cattle, sheep and swine.”⁹

Although it seems that the Navajos never met this original and ill-fated Spanish expedition, the introduction of sheep to their environment was to have a huge and lasting effect on them. To such an extent that sheepherding and the weaving of wool are some of the primary things associated with current-day Navajos.

This theme of cultural assimilation seems to be core to the longtime survival of the Navajos. Even through the hardships of their more modern history.

Modern history

The relationship between the United States of America and the Navajos began in 1846, in connection with the Mexican American War, when Santa Fe, the original Spanish settlement in the Southwest, was invaded. Consequently the Navajos and the Americans signed a peace treaty in 1846. This treaty was not fully respected, however, as Navajos continued to raid for livestock and the like and the people of what had become New Mexico raided back to capture women and children to sell into slavery. Hostilities continued for many years, with raids from the Navajos and attacks from New Mexican militias, until, in 1861 colonel Kit Carson of the United States Army was ordered to march into Navajo country and obtain their surrender. This attack was mainly unsuccessful until Carson gained the aid of the New Mexican militias and they, together, carried out a scorched earth attack on the Navajos, killing and burning as they went. The last Navajos surrendered on July the 20th 1863.

What follows is known as the Long Walk.

The Navajos, 9000 of them, were forced to march 480km to Fort Sumner in New Mexico. Here they were held captive until 1868, five long years of crop failures and a lack of water and supplies with raids from civilians and other tribes. Furthermore, a small group of Apaches, a group historically at odds with the Navajos, had been relocated to the same area, resulting in further conflicts.

In 1868 they were allowed to return to their native land in the Southwest which then became a reservation. This re-relocation was also not painless as the Navajos and their surrounding white neighbors often came at odds.

⁹ Spider woman walks this land, p. 9

Things cooled down however, and, with a few spats here and there and with some trouble with uranium mining in the late 1960'ies early 1970'ies, the Navajo people now live their lives in the country that was, in tradition and through migration, theirs.

Creation myth

The name the Navajo people were given by their creators was “Ni’hookaa Diyan Dinee”, which translates into “Holy Earth People”. It is from this that we get the word for “The People” – meaning, in fact, The Navajos: Dinee.

The creation myth of the Dinee states that there were three previous worlds, underworlds, before this one, the fourth “glittering world” which the people came to through a magic reed. The people that had inhabited the first three worlds were not humans, but rather insects, animals or spirits.

The two first people – First Man and First Woman were originally from the First World, the Black World, and so was Spider Woman, the teacher of weaving to women.

Upon their arrival in the Fourth World the people sang the Blessing Song and then they made a hogan, a kind of house and still the word used for a Navajo home, that was built to the specifications of Talking God. There the people designated the four sacred mountains (known in English as the San Francisco Peaks, Mt. Blanco, Mt. Taylor and Mt. Hesperus) and the four sacred stones that would be the boundaries of their land. After the people had placed the mountains in their correct place the deities or “Holy People” put the sun, moon and stars into their proper places. Coyote, the trickster, became impatient however, and simply threw the stars unto the sky.

The Holy People then set about creating trees and rain and the like. And then the monsters appeared, killing many of the Dinee, until Ever Changing Woman came. She had two sons with the Sun, whom she had married, twins called “Monster Slayer” and “Child-Born-of-Water”. These twins went to their father, who armed them with lightning bolts with which they killed the monsters. The remains of these monsters can be seen in all the angular rock formations in Dineetah, the land of the people. Finally the clans were created, some by the Holy People and some by Changing Woman. Eventually these clans met up in Dineetah and became the Navajos.

Joe Leaphorn

Lieutenant Joseph Leaphorn is the main character of the books *The Blessing Way* (1970), *Dance Hall of the Dead* (1973) and *Listening Woman* (1978) and becomes Jim Chee's superior and partner in all the Navajo crime novels from *Skinwalkers* (1986) onward.

In the first three books he is somewhat more sympathetically described than he is from *Skinwalkers* and the following eleven novels.

It is mentioned in the original three novels that Leaphorn had a grandfather who was very wise and was given the title of, essentially, 'old man' at a very young age. From him, and from what he taught Leaphorn's father, Leaphorn learned a respect for the wisdom of his people and to think of all things as being interconnected and part of a whole scheme.

In later books this idea is, somewhat reduced. Reduced to being, simply, a dislike of and mistrust in coincidences. Leaphorn's belief in the way of the Navajo, as it were, is also thrown out the window in favor of making him a 'realist' and a 'man of two worlds'. In fact, Leaphorn's primary surviving traits from his trio to the twelve Leaphorn/Chee books are his excellent tracking skills, his methodical approach to detection and his somewhat wry sense of humor. It is true that a wife is mentioned in the first books, but she does not become a true 'loved one' until she is almost dead in the novel *Skinwalkers*.

However, the adventures had in the original books do make some impression on the world Leaphorn inhabits as he is known as the "Legendary Lieutenant" and is held in awe by the younger police officers.

The Wikipedia article on Leaphorn states the following:

"Leaphorn, the older of the two policemen, is a realist. Educated in assimilationist Indian boarding schools operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, he is not as well versed in Navajo tradition as the younger officer Chee. Leaphorn's approach to his cases is informed by some Navajo, or Dine, tradition, but is also influenced by Anglo-European logic. Leaphorn is somewhat untutored in his own culture and is resistant to some Navajo taboos."¹⁰

¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joe_Leaphorn (7th of May, 2013)

All this is true, yes, of the later Leaphorn, but in no way of the earlier portrayals. This Leaphorn is perhaps ‘educated in assimilationist Indian boarding schools’ but he is a believer in the Navajo way and takes huge pleasure in the rituals of his people, as seen clearly in the novel *Listening Woman* where Leaphorn, by chance, comes upon a coming-of-age ritual where a young girl has to run races and then stay up all night before eating a traditional cake. During the long night songs are sung and Leaphorn joins right in, even gaining some trust from another, important, character in the book. It is also in connection with this that we are told that Leaphorn’s mother told him that adapting to the world around them was how Navajos had survived and thrived. There is, in the example, the case of the cake that is to be eaten as part of the ritual as containing raisins and being a ‘shovel handle’ wide – even though there are and were no grapes in Navajo-country and no shovels were made available in the creation-story of the Dinee. This realization could be seen as the beginning of the ‘realist’ Joe Leaphorn, but keep in mind that he is in the middle of celebrating the culture and, in some way, the oddities of his culture when this thought occurs. At the time it seems much more like a realization of the grandness of the culture of his people, not as a put-down.

All in all the man that is and becomes Joseph Leaphorn is a somewhat complicated character, made somewhat more complicated when he suddenly has to be the yin to Jim Chee’s yang, as it were.

Jim Chee

Officer Jim Chee is introduced in the books *People of Darkness* (1980), *The Dark Wind* (1982) and *The Ghostway* (1984).

He was originally created to have a younger, more naïve Navajo police officer than Joe Leaphorn. Also there were geographical differences, Chee being based out of what is known as The Checkerboard Reservation.

Originally, however, there was no big difference to find between Chee and Leaphorn. Hillerman recalls, in an interview, that a fan once came up to him at a book signing and asked him why he had changed the name of his main character. Hillerman, somewhat taken aback, informed the fan that this was, in fact, a new character. To which she simply replied that she could not tell them apart.

Subsequently, the character of Jim Chee became somewhat, as I have previously mentioned, a 'response' to the 'new' Joe Leaphorn. It would be by seeing how much the two differed that one would be able to tell them apart.

Chee is a traditionalist, he believes in ghosts and the power of the songs and in skinwalkers – the Navajo witches. Furthermore he is, himself, in training to become a yataali, a singer – or, in our parlance, a healer, while he is still on the police force. He has some degrees of success with this healing profession throughout the books but ultimately ends with giving it up.

Being the younger of the two main characters, Chee is also the one with the most active love life, being connected to three women throughout the course of the books, Mary Landon – a white schoolteacher, Janet Pete – a half white, half Navajo lawyer and finally Bernadette Manuelito – a Navajo and fellow police officer who Chee ends up marrying.

Little by little the dynamic in the novels ends up with Chee as the impulsive and somewhat brash police officer to Leaphorn's more calm and calculating, older and wiser persona.

They are however both described as very smart and insightful.

Detective Fiction

It has been my personal experience that many bookstores, especially in countries where English is not the primary language, do not quite know where to place Tony Hillerman's works. More often than not, they are placed not with the crime and suspense novels, but instead with the general fiction and literature.

This is an interesting point when we consider what the philosopher Tzvetan Todorov¹¹ writes of the crime novel – or, rather, the detective fiction – in his book 'The Poetics of Prose'. It can be, perhaps, construed as a slight towards the genre of detective fiction, but it becomes quite accurate in Hillerman's case:

"Detective fiction has its norms; to "develop" them is also to disappoint them: to "improve upon" detective fiction is to write "literature," not detective fiction"¹²

Going by Todorov's definitions Tony Hillerman mixes what Todorov calls the classic whodunit from the years between the two World Wars and the post-WWII thriller. This can be claimed as: There is clearly a mystery – or indeed several mysteries – to solve and there is not truly any omnipotence. We may on occasion get the rare glimpse into the mind of one of the 'villains' of the plot, but in these cases we learn very little and it is handled exactly with that in mind, a move to pique interest, not to tell all. Further it should be noted that the narrator, or main character is not writing a book about his exploits in the works of Hillerman nor is the main character immune to danger, death perhaps, but not physical and emotional harm. There is no aloofness about Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee.

The style of the whodunit is followed in as much as there is always a crime, most likely a murder or attempt of same or, indeed, suspicion of same, that sets the plot into motion. In "Skinwalkers" for example, Joe Leaphorn's story arc in some ways starts before the book begins with three unsolved murders, but the plot proper of the book starts, as one might expect, with the first chapter when someone attempts to murder Jim Chee in his own home. Also it is the attempted vehicular homicide of Joe Leaphorn by Goldrim in "Listening Woman" that gets the plot moving, as well as the murders of Hosteen Tso and Anna Atcitty that open the book.

¹¹ b. 1939

¹² The Poetics of Prose p. 43

But this is where, according to Todorov, the link to the whodunit ends, for, as he writes:

“The novel contains not one but two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation [...] The first story, that of the crime, ends before the second begins. But what happens in the second? Not much. The characters of the second story, the story of the investigation, do not act, they learn. Nothing can happen to them: a rule of the genre postulates the detective’s immunity. We cannot imagine Hercule Poirot or Philo Vance threatened by some danger, attacked, wounded, even killed”¹³

In fact, Joe Leaphorn spends the last third or fourth of “Listening Woman” under constant attack and in constant danger. He is bitten, shot at, burnt and nearly blown up.

It is important to make this distinction and keep this link to the whodunit in mind as Todorov states on another part of detective fiction, the thriller, that in it the story of the instigating crime is not told before we join our protagonist. Or rather:

“[T]his kind of detective fiction [the thriller] fuses the two stories, or, in other words, suppresses the first and vitalizes the second. We are no longer told about a crime anterior to the moment of the narrative; the narrative coincides with the action”¹⁴

In the thriller the danger to the main character is the driving force, not the mystery to be solved. However, the mystery plays a huge part in the stories of Tony Hillerman, Joe Leaphorn wants to understand that which he does not, wants to create order out of chaos through detection.

Another point where whodunit and thriller meet in the works of Tony Hillerman is in the way chapters end. According to Todorov a thriller “does not reserve its surprises for the last line of the chapter”¹⁵ but the whodunit often does. Hillerman seems to straddle a line here as many of his chapters end on a revelation or on a fact that makes the reader wish to turn the page and pick up the story, but not all of them. Some simply let the story rest for a minute, or tell us that this thread of the plot is now over or that no evidence was found here.

¹³ The Poetics of Prose p. 44-45

¹⁴ The Poetics of Prose p. 47

¹⁵ The Poetics of Prose p. 50

Todorov writes of the suspense novel as being what he sees as the point where whodunit and thriller meet, but they meet in far too few places, in my opinion, to wholly encompass the works of Hillerman. True, the protagonist is at risk, and becomes part of the world of the criminal, and does not simply observe but the main character or characters are never themselves thrown into the ring as suspects. True, in “Skinwalkers” it is assumed that Jim Chee has wronged someone in some way since he has been shot at, but he is never a suspect for the main case at hand. Hence it seems fair to say that Hillerman’s work is some new, fourth, type, if we see things from Tzvetan Todorov’s perspective.

Earlier in the chapter on Detective Fiction in his book *The Poetry of Prose*, Todorov mentions that there exists a way of seeing a narrative as being split into fable and subject, or, instead, story and plot. If we go by this then with Hillerman the Navajo culture and the setting of the Reservation are the fable and the murders and mysteries that go on there are the subject.

Structuralism

In this chapter I will give an explanation of the concept of structuralism as it pertains to literary criticism and understanding texts.

The idea of structuralism is to find the system or order behind human endeavors. In relation to literary theory and criticism structuralism puts an individual text up against the larger structure in which it might be said to exist.

This structure can, for example, be the genre of the text or, to put it more loosely, the things the text shares with other texts, modes of understanding, certain phraseology or plot structure.

Structuralism, as a mode of thought, has its origins in the early 1900's with Ferdinand de Saussure¹⁶ who used structuralism in the field of linguistics. Here he used it to groundbreaking effect, informing the world that there was no intrinsic reason for things to be named as they were, a cat is called a cat because we have called it a cat, not because that is the way it 'must' be. In this way the 'divine' nature of language was challenged, if such divinity existed, then why are there so many languages? Some fifty or so years later, other fields began to work with the same idea, such as psychology, anthropology, economics, literary criticism and so on.

Structuralism is still 'in use', as it were, to this day, both in its original form and in the works of the post-structuralists.

In regards to literary criticism once again, the idea of structuralism is that there is a pattern to be seen in all texts. This is why it is easier for more experienced or voracious readers to see these patterns than those who have read only few works.

There are, says the structuralist, specific rules that govern all texts.

Of course, problems can arise from this, as all texts can then be 'boiled down' to their most basic components, and, from there, begin to look very much alike.

There is a conflict. It must be solved. There are people who have relations to each other, these relations must help or hinder us to solve the conflict. And so on.

In this 'stock' state, any tale akin to, let us say, the 'Merchant of Venice' is exactly, with no diversions, just like the 'Merchant of Venice'. No subtleties are allowed or made room for.

In some ways, what is being looked for in literary structuralism is akin to the

¹⁶ 1857-1913

philosophical notion of the idea of the ideal and the actual; the idea that somewhere metaphysical, there exists an ideal cat, let's say, and all cats we see in the actual world are merely watered down variations on this ideal cat. We are looking for, through structuralism, the most basic things that make up the stories, the myths and the ideas that shape all literature. Thus goes the defense anyway.

However, we may, as readers and interpreters of signs, still enjoy our works of fiction, we may find a happy medium between stripping away all those pesky story elements and becoming lost in precisely the uniqueness of this particular story. As informed readers we may wear many sets of glasses to suit what we wish to garner from a certain text at a certain time. For this project I have read many novels, and I have enjoyed them as such and on their own terms. However I never entirely struck from my mind that I was searching for something while reading these works of fiction. I was, in a way, digging through layers. The outer layer of the story on its own, an inner layer of the text in relation to the other texts in the series, then the other texts in the genre, then the mind of the author and on and on. In her book "The way of the sign", Camelia Elias¹⁷ describes the process in the following manner:

"In approaching a text through the critical school of structuralism, one of the first things we attend to is [...]: attention to detail. We observe that something sounds odd or depicts a strange world, and we want to know what that is and why it is so. In other words we begin to identify what in the text resists us. What is contradictory and full of surprises? We begin to pay attention to language and what it foregrounds, what patterns it establishes between rhymes and rhythms, grammatical constructions, and sounds. Then we may think about the message. Is there an ideology behind? How is it expressed through metaphors? Are there ambiguous words, words that have several meanings? How is this mystery presented?"¹⁸

Elias goes on to tell us that all absorption of texts, be they "verbal or visual"¹⁹, teaches us something new, or, rather, that that which we knew before becomes faded in contrast with that which we know now.

¹⁷ b. 1968

¹⁸ The way of the sign p. 22

¹⁹ Ibid

In my previous chapter on detective fiction I took my departure in Tzvetan Todorov's ideas that he himself had gleaned from several different sources. These ideas can be said to be structuralist to at least some degree.

Gazes and tropes

When we speak of the gaze of a text, we mean the way in which the narrator of the text judges the characters and their deeds. This gaze, this way of regarding what is done in the text, can tell us much about the author, or, in more postmodern cases, the authors intent. Especially it can tell us about the way the author feels about deviations from the perceived norm that he or she has.

We must always, when it comes to gaze, attempt to analyze with the author's own background in direct focus. And not just their background, but also the time in which they live and which feelings there are about certain groups or deviations from said groups. In other words, what tropes exist at the time.

Tropes can be seen as conventions and devices within many things, from literary genres to social groups. If it walks like a duck, and talks like a duck it is most likely a duck, goes the saying; in this, the walking and talking are the tropes, they are what identify this as a duck to us. A trope is something that an author, for example, can count on being something the average reader would know.

So, let us attempt to combine gazes and tropes into an example from literature:

In *The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare²⁰ the Bard's gaze, or view, on the Jews is clearly shown by his use of the tropes of his time. It is true that Shakespeare here may be showing us a more nuanced picture of the Jew, but the followers of Judaism are still represented as greedy, petty and thinking more of money than their family.

All this is not to blame authors throughout history, for, indeed, one writes what one knows, one's gaze comes from it, and what one knows are the tropes of the time, to put it a bit simply.

Of course there are people who break away from the tropes, the ideas that everyone knows to be true about a certain group of people. If the trope is: All Jews are greedy – then there is bound to be someone who disagrees and has a different gaze on the situation, but even such an informed gaze will tell us a lot about the author.

In the example of this project we have a white man writing about the lives of Navajo Indians. He avoids the tropes that are in place, describing the Native Americans as impoverished, drunken, shepherds, while still touching on these exact three things

²⁰ 1564(?) - 1616

when the story calls for it. A very nuanced picture to be sure, but further analysis of the writings of Tony Hillerman tells us that something else is going on, something more.

Pan-Indian-ism

When I write of the narrative – or way of viewing the world – that I refer to as pan-Indian-ism, I am writing of an idea that I personally find reprehensible.

At its core pan-Indian-ism is simply the idea that there exists a huge, cohesive story for all life among all the tribes and peoples of North America, and even beyond. In some ways it seems a way to integrate pre-European history into ‘standard’ American history, to end the idea that all history of the continent to the west of Europe, across the Atlantic started with Christopher Columbus – or, if you are very progressive, the Scandinavian explorers some 500 years before –, and this is, of course, commendable.

The fact that it comes at the expense of the identity and stories and histories of hundreds of different peoples is not. There is also the issue of ‘white guilt’ that cannot be ignored, precisely because the narrative of pan-Indian-ism very neatly creates an ‘us’ and a ‘them’, and in this narrative the ‘us’ is not, for once, the white man, the Anglo. Someone else, the ‘us’ in this question, has been wronged, and through this they have been banded together.

They have, in brief, been given a new narrative to replace that messy old one, or, rather, those messy old ones. Hundreds of them.

And where is this idea present, where can we find it most described? In The National Museum of the Native American in New York City and Washington D.C.

Both of these museums wish to:

“[G]ive visitors from around the world the sense and spirit of Native America.”²¹

And already there, in some innocuous flavor text about the shape and beauty of the museum in Washington D.C., do we face the issue at hand, ‘the sense and spirit of Native America’. ‘Native America’. Hundreds of different ways of living, hundreds of languages and cultures and religions and traditions, boiled down to being a ‘spirit’. The ghost of all these peoples represented somehow in the curvature of a magnificent museum on the Mall in D.C.

In Washington D.C., at the time of this writing, there are several exhibitions going on in the museum, among them three called: Our Lives, Our Peoples and Our

²¹ <http://nmai.si.edu/visit/washington/>

Universes²². From the titles of these exhibitions one could get the idea that they were trying to show a diversity amongst the Native American people in their modern-day lives, but all three seem intent on showing us that there is, in fact, a pan-Indian narrative.

In the description of ‘Our Lives’ it is made clear that there has been some confusion as to who was and who was not a Native American, but it is made clear that this problem has primarily arisen due to lawmaking policies, due to ‘interference from the white man’. ‘Our Peoples’, which is also called ‘Giving Voice to our Histories’, describes itself as an attempt to have Native Americans

“tell their own stories—their own histories—and in this way the exhibition presents new insights into, and different perspectives on, history”²³

A fine goal. But then the description ends with these words:

“The main story of *Our Peoples* focuses on the last 500 years of Native history and shows how the arrival of newcomers in the Western Hemisphere set the stage for one of the most momentous events in human history. In the struggle for survival, nearly every Native community wrestled with the impact of deadly new diseases and weaponry, the weakening of traditional spirituality, and the seizure of homelands by invading governments. But the story of these last five centuries is not entirely a story of destruction. It is also about how Native people intentionally and strategically kept their cultures alive.”

And there, again, is the idea of this huge ‘us’ created by hardship, homogenized by hardship as it were. This ‘us’ that has one history and one understanding and one purpose.

Finally ‘Our Universes’ wishes to inform the museum-goer of the cosmology and religion of several Native American people, but, yet again, it is more to show a connectedness between these people, by focusing on shared days of interest, rather than to tell of the vastness of the belief systems and the many different ways in which they were believed in.

²² <http://nmai.si.edu/explore/exhibitions/washington/> (15/5-13)

²³ <http://nmai.si.edu/explore/exhibitions/item/104/> (15/5-13)

All in all I believe that pan-Indian-ism is very demeaning to the story and history and culture of the peoples that lived west of Europe and east of Asia, the peoples who crossed the Behring Strait and came to inhabit America before such a name was even considered. It defines a whole people through their suffering alone, through their hardships and bad times and forgets, almost completely, all that which was the actual lives and times of the North American Indian.

Analysis

Having now covered all necessary ground, we come to the in depth analysis of the works of Tony Hillerman.

We have covered, in the preceding pages, who Hillerman is and who his characters are. What we can understand by the expression ‘the World of the Navajo’ and what we can say to be pan-Indian-ism. And, finally, what we can say to be symptomatic of detective fiction and crime novels and what we mean when we speak of structuralism, also in a literary critical context.

Over the course of the following pages I will attempt to weave all these threads into a cohesive whole and, hopefully, come out with an answer to my original research question regarding the anti-Anglo gaze and the anti-pan-Indian-ism stance taken by the novels of Tony Hillerman.

For the following analysis I will use all that I have learned through my readings for this project and the thoughts I have had in connection with the writing of the previous chapters, as such I will go from one theory to another within the same sentence but I will always attempt to make clear the thinking behind what is being written.

This analysis will be broken into several parts that will attempt to gel into something more cohesive towards the end. As it stands now, this chapter will be divided up into:

- A runthrough of selected works by Tony Hillerman
- A listing of instances of interest in each work
- A summing up of the themes that are interesting to this project
- A coming-together of all the ideas and themes that have been mentioned

The chapter will begin with a somewhat rigid structure and then evolve into more of an open analysis of the works, with attention given to the points of interest.

First, we should get to the works that will form the basis of this analysis. Having read almost the entirety of the Hillerman Navajo crime-novels I settled in the end on re-reading, and reading with more interested eyes perhaps, four of the earlier novels.

There is in fan circles of Hillerman’s work a clear understanding that the Navajo books become less and less inspired as the series wears on. It was not simply this, however, that was my reason for selecting the ones I ended up with. It was also a case

of the novelty of the subject matter. These days, a Native American detective novel is not a rare or unheard of thing, several authors have taken up the baton and run with it, even while Hillerman himself was still running. But when he started out, Hillerman had basically only his own inspiration – the Australian author Arthur Upfield who wrote detective novels with a half aboriginal detective – as his single competitor in his field. Thus there is basis for stating that the first books on Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee were something almost wholly new. And it is exactly these first books I have taken my departure from. In chronological order the works we will be looking at throughout the coming pages are:

- Dance Hall of the Dead (1973)
- Listening Woman (1978)
- People of Darkness (1980)
- Skinwalkers (1986)

Thus I look at the second and third Leaphorn novels, the first Chee novel and the first novel that the two paired up in.

I decided not to include the very first Leaphorn book as all sources I have seen state that this is not a true Navajo mystery but, rather, the infancy of the series with everything important having not yet fallen into place. Also, time constraints prevented me from looking into more than the one Jim Chee solo-outing as I found it more important to get to the first book where the two worked together.

I will go through these books in chronological order. It is an interesting fact that the pace in which Tony Hillerman wrote his Navajo mysteries increased after the first three. In the first ten years of his career as a novelist Hillerman wrote three books (The Blessing Way in 1970 was the first one) and in the following ten years he wrote six, twice the amount. He found his stride, to be sure, but he also found, in some ways a formula that made the later books somewhat formulaic, as it were, and made the first books the most interesting and diverse.

The pacing, especially, begins to settle into a rhythm with Skinwalkers. If one has read Skinwalkers then one can all but count the pages that ‘have to’ pass before the violent climax, a violent climax that somehow always occurs even though we are, time and again, informed that Navajos are not murderers, especially not premeditated ones. And, indeed, sometimes a Navajo or Native American is not to blame.

This fairness of Hillerman's, this notion that all are treated equally, this is exactly what many will praise in him, even when they pick his later works apart.

Hillerman's last four books especially are not viewed with much respect, but, as one reviewer comments, they are still being bought and read.

Tony Hillerman created fantastic characters and partnered them expertly, leaving people wanting more. This much seems established fact.

But was he fair? Was he fair to the people who, in the pan-Indian narrative, are known only for being unfair? That is precisely what we must begin to discern.

One could ask what shame, again in the pan-Indian narrative, what possible shame there could be in portraying the White Man as evil, stupid, selfish, uncaring? One could ask if this is not, in fact, fair, a fair assessment?

But, if we are going for fairness, true fairness, then it is fairness for all, not just fairness for those who the characters do not like, or do not understand, or do not wish to understand.

For it is, in by far the most cases, the characters that voice their problems or differences with the White Man. This may seem as a natural way to portray Native Americans, but in fact it seems, to me, that it is more akin to perpetuating a narrative of 'them' and 'us'. No one would call it fair if a book with a White Male protagonist began to voice, even inwardly, his distrust or hatred toward a black co-worker or in an Asian man he saw in the street or in the belief system of the Native American. One sided fairness is no fairness at all it would seem.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves, my claims here are as of yet unproven. So, let us begin with the second book of Tony Hillerman's career, *The Dance Hall of the Dead*.

Dance Hall of the Dead**Summary:**

When, on the Zuni reservation, a Zuni boy is apparently killed and a Navajo boy goes missing, it's up to Joe Leaphorn to track down the Navajo boy, half suspected for misdeeds. The Zuni boy was in training for the biggest Zuni celebration of the year, which attracts Zunis from all over America and also other tribes and general onlookers – from anthropologists to Indian-lovers. With this impending celebration as the temporal backdrop – and the danger of the coming winter –, Leaphorn travels between several places that the Navajo boy, George Bowlegs, was known to frequent. These are his home – inhabited by his alcoholic father and his younger brother –, a small hippie commune led by a strong-willed man and populated by weak-willed men and women – among them a young woman named Suzanne who has seen too much and grown up too fast –, the Franciscan church of Saint Michaels and it's priest Father Ingles – who speaks Navajo and is known as Narrowbutt – and, finally, an archeological dig trying to prove the evolution of an early Native American known as Folsom Man.

These four places are visited again and again throughout the book, with increasing results. George Bowlegs father is found killed. It is discovered that Suzanne and a young man working at the archeological site have a relationship going. The FBI has the commune in their sights regarding drug smuggling and the upcoming festival. Father Ingles tells of George Bowleg's wish to become a Zuni and of his near mad levels of dedication.

As the book nears its climax, Leaphorn travels, with the young woman in tow, to a lake that could possibly be construed as being the Zuni Dance Hall of the Dead, a very important place spiritually for the Zuni. Here they track George Bowlegs, but discover that he is also being stalked by someone else who ends up stalking our hero and Suzanne. Leaphorn takes a tranquilizer dart to the stomach and the two must hole up in a cave until he comes to.

Throughout all of this, Leaphorn has been seeing someone or something dressed as a minor Zuni deity of Death near the places he has been looking for George and in the beginning of the book the last we hear of the Zuni boy, Ernesto Cata, is that he sees exactly this deity. When Leaphorn is struck by the dart he begins to dream of this deity and figures out what all the small things he had discovered throughout his

search for George Bowlegs lead up to.

Leaphorn goes to the festival, where he now knows he will find George, but he is too late and the boy is killed by the man behind it all: The leader of the archeological dig who had been ‘salting’ his site – planting fake evidence to support his theory – which could be discovered if someone were to find the small piece of stone stolen by George Bowlegs and Ernesto Cata. Therefore they had to die, and Bowlegs’ father as well.

His murder, at the festival, of Bowlegs is seen by some Zunis, and as the murderer, Dr. Reynolds, is wearing one of their sacred masks – he was the figure seen by Cata and Leaphorn – the otherwise peaceful Zunis ‘dispose’ of him, effectively leaving the case unsolved and no legal justice meted out.

Themes and problems:

At its core, *Dance Hall of the Dead* is very much a book about fitting in and trying to find, if not your own identity, then an identity that you feel fits you.

George Bowlegs is a Navajo removed from the familiar surroundings of the Dinee, from the Dinee themselves. His one link to his people and to knowing what it could mean to be Navajo is his father, Shorty Bowlegs, who is a drunk. A drunk to such an extent that George and his younger brother have learned to take care of themselves. Shorty is not described as a mean drunk, but when one is young a drunk is a drunk, and useless at teaching anything about identity.

On the other side of the ethnic fence we have Suzanne who also is not quite sure what she's doing or who she is. She has settled in the commune of Jason's Fleece, and has stayed even as most of the inhabitants have left, enthralled in some ways by the leader Halsey. She, too, comes from a troubled home, perhaps somehow even worse than that of George and his younger brother.

George's best friend, the first victim Ernesto Cata, knows who he is, however. And thus we have another big theme, the difference between the different Native American peoples that inhabit the region.

We learn about, in great detail, the religion of the Zuni, and in more of a normal way than when we learn about the lives and culture of the Navajo, it is 'fed' to us less discreetly. When I, in my original research question, wanted to look into how Tony Hillerman was not, I claimed, a pan-Indian-ist it was with this book in mind, with this book as primary proof. And as that it stands up quite well, at least in some respects. But we will get into all of this further down in this project.

So, we have the themes in place, but what of my postulate that there are certain issues regarding the gaze toward the White Man?

Well, the white men we are introduced to in *Dance Hall of the Dead* are FBI officers, the remnants of the Jason's Fleece commune and the two people working on the archeological dig.

The FBI in *Dance Hall of the Dead* are seen as working with a singular purpose, they focus solely on the drugs angle and care little for the lives of either Ernesto Cata or

George Bowlegs, or, rather, care only for George Bowlegs if he can inform them of what is going on in the Jason's Fleece commune as in regards to drug smuggling. As a whole, the FBI comes out looking bad, and the white agents who work for the FBI look just the same. All they see in the Zuni ceremony and feast is a huge gathering of people. A gathering of people that is difficult to control and which could be the perfect cover for illicit dealings. They have no spirituality; only whatever 'sins' they must have committed to be 'cast out' into the world of the Reservations.

The inhabitants of Jason's Fleece, however, have cast themselves out from all society. They have no real connection to the rest of the white man's world, but, on the other hand, they have no real connection with the surrounding Navajos. The house in which they live is a 'death hogan', one that no self-respecting Navajo would live in, Hillerman informs us, due to the possibility of getting Ghost Sickness, a Navajo affliction that can strike those who have too many dealings with the dead. Also the Jason's Fleece inhabitants do not take good care of their sheep, something their Navajo 'neighbors' do not quite understand. The ones from Jason's Fleece that we hear the most about are Halsey and Suzanne. Halsey is the leader of the commune, and, at the very least through Leaphorn's eyes he is not a very sympathetic man. He is controlling and distrusting of outsiders and clearly seems to have something to hide. He does not want to let Suzanne say anything to Leaphorn, even if it could help in locating George Bowlegs. Suzanne on the other hand comes off as a damaged innocent, a lost soul, but not an ignorant one. In some ways she knows her worth and knows that Halsey is, in fact, bossing her around and not good for her. She finally 'escapes' the commune, meeting up with Leaphorn, leading Leaphorn to wonder why the White Man cannot take care of his own children. It should be noted that Leaphorn quickly thereafter turns that same gaze on his fellow Navajos, especially Shorty Bowlegs. Suzanne thought she had an out in the shape of the graduate student working on the archeological dig, Ted Isaacs, but that was not to be.

Isaacs meanwhile, working on the dig, has his own agenda. We learn that he comes from a 'white trash' background and that having gotten as far as he has is something indeed. And with Dr. Reynolds' support he can finally become someone, someone respected, someone who helped change the way that ancient Folsom man is seen. All this has the potential to come to naught however with Joe Leaphorn's discovery of Dr. Reynolds' trickery. In the end Leaphorn leaves it up to Isaacs to decide whether or not

to confess to the ill deeds of Dr. Reynolds. But all this is after Isaacs has shown his true colors, as it were. He decides to let Suzanne, to whom he had promised himself and his future, completely get away from him, actually going so far as to not giving her shelter after she leaves Jason's Fleece and is in desperate need. He will not compromise the integrity of the dig site, especially not after having let George Bowlegs and Ernesto Cata too close one time too many. Isaacs rants at Leaphorn about his upbringing and about getting out of that style of life, all the while with Suzanne listening in.

Although Reynolds is the murderer and antagonist, it is Isaacs who comes off as the 'meanest' person.

The FBI agents are simply reducing the case to their area of expertise, Halsey is simply untrusting of police officers – most likely due to both past experience and present shady dealings – and Reynolds is simply trying to regain some lost honor and face from his community. Isaacs, however, becomes petty, narrow-minded and, ultimately, selfish. Blinded by his ambition and the promise of rising above it all he casts aside the love of a woman wise beyond her years.

Ultimately Isaacs is the White Man that Leaphorn has the hardest time understanding, underlining that this pursuit of 'something more', something intangible when Suzanne is right there, is an intrinsically White pursuit.

Listening Woman

Summary:

The book opens with the murder of an old man called Hosteen Tso – basically translating into ‘Old Man Tso’ – and a teenage girl – Anna Atcitty –, mere meters from where the old man’s blind healer, Listening Woman – also known as Margaret Cigarette –, was kneeling to meditate on his healing.

We pick up the story several months later when Joe Leaphorn decides to, and is allowed to, look into the case as it may have connection to Leaphorn almost being killed by a man with gold rimmed glasses who tried to run him over.

At the same time Leaphorn is looking for a helicopter that was stolen in association with a bank robbery carried out by the ‘Buffalo Society’, a militant Native American group.

Hosteen Tso’s grandson, a Navajo in training to be a catholic priest, is also thrown into the mix, as it was Hosteen Tso’s wish to inform him of something and he felt he had very little time, hence the healer. Following the grandson is a woman who, according to the book, clearly wants only what she cannot have. Leaphorn leads her to the grandson, Benjamin, who is staying at the hogan of his murdered grandfather but finds that the younger Tso is not exactly pleased to see her.

Leaphorn leaves the two to figure it out, and heads out to find Margaret Cigarette. He finds her, finally, at a coming-of-age ceremony of one of her family members.

Leaphorn joins in the celebration and ends up winning the trust of Listening Woman who tells him details that she left out of her FBI interview.

Leaphorn leaves for Flagstaff to get into the FBI files, and after some talking back and forth he does. Here he learns more of the Buffalo Society and their ways, including the fact that they have with them a man called Tull who was kicked in the face by a horse as a child and now thinks he is immortal.

Finally, with the aid of the FBI files and through thinking it over, Leaphorn realizes that Margaret Cigarette would have been visible from the main approach to the hogan and that the murderer must have come from the canyons behind the hogan.

Leaphorn returns to the home of Hosteen Tso to check up on this theory and the younger Tso and his ‘pursuer’ but finds them gone.

This leads to Leaphorn, acting on a myth and a rumor that there exist some ancient sand paintings in a cave that only the Tsos knew about in the canyons, to hunt through

the canyons for whoever killed Tso and took the others.

This evolves into Leaphorn almost being burnt alive, almost being killed by a huge dog the gold-rimmed glasses man had with him, and almost being buried under rocks after an explosion.

It also comes to light that the Buffalo Society have kidnapped more than a dozen boy scouts, along with the younger Tso and the woman, they promise release of hostages upon payment of ransom, but Leaphorn discovers that the whole cave they are in is rigged to blow with a time bomb after a pre-recorded message. Tull was supposed to take the fall for the whole thing, basically not having been told about the impending explosion.

In the end Leaphorn, with the aid of Benjamin Tso who sacrifices himself, shoots one of the Society and tricks Tull into blowing up himself and their leader, Hosteen Tso's son, rescuing everyone.

Themes and problems:

There is a lot of ‘finding oneself’ and ‘fitting in’ in *Listening Woman*, mostly, however the book can be split into two parts: The investigation part and the action part.

The action part is a rip-roaring read, but does not truly introduce us to any themes or even new characters. There is a single member of the Society, whom we meet and whom Leaphorn then kills with his bare hands, but it is in the investigative part of the book that most of the, to this analysis, important things occur.

The investigation introduces us to the FBI in Flagstaff, Margaret Cigarette – the titular *Listening Woman*, John McGinnis – owner of the trading post in relatively close proximity of Hosteen Tso’s hogan and general knower-of-things –, Theodora Adams – a woman on the prowl –, Benjamin Tso – the grandson of Old Man Tso, in training to become a Catholic priest and the subject of Theodora’s affections, and Tull – the man who figures himself immortal. There is, of course, also Goldrims, as he is called in the book, the main antagonist and planner behind it all. He is so weakly defined as a person, however, that it is difficult to say anything about him other than that he is smart, calculated to an extreme, cares little for the lives of others and owns a dog. A big dog.

Of the above list, the characters who are trying to find their place in the universe in which they live are: Theodora Adams, Benjamin Tso and Tull. To a lesser extent one could make the case that being a white man deep in Navajo country McGinnis is also trying to fit in, but I believe that the character is intended to be seen as one who has, if not gone native, then at the very least figured out the way of life on the Reservation. He shows knowledge of the supposed Navajo way of thought when he remarks to Leaphorn that a White Man will steal with no purpose or plan, just to steal, but if a Navajo takes a screwdriver, then somewhere there’s a screw that needs driving. McGinnis is just as critical of the White Man as the Navajos are portrayed as being.

Tull is looking to fit in somewhere, anywhere, looking for real friendship. Due to his disfigurement people have always looked at him in an ‘off’ way and this has fueled his hatred of people. This, and the fact that he believes himself to be immortal, or rather to be able to die several times, makes him the perfect pawn and fall guy for the Buffalo Society. In their robbery he was to simply walk up to some guards to get shot.

This accomplished, and without killing him, he was incarcerated and not bailed out until the Society needed him. He is a tragic figure who believes so fervently in his one true friendship with the leader of the Society that he ends up blowing him and himself up.

The woman who wants what she cannot get, who is described as looking expensive and being desperately out of place on the Reservation however, may know what she wants but she in some ways inverts the idea of finding oneself as she seems intent on bending the world around her to her will. She is not a very pleasantly described character and her ways anger Leaphorn. In the end she serves primarily as being the shrieking woman trapped by the antagonists, helpless to prevent and unable to understand the sacrifice of Benjamin Tso.

The younger Tso is early in *Listening Woman* described as being one who has taken the 'Jesus-way'. In other words, he left the Reservation and all it is to be Navajo behind, to, instead, become a Catholic priest. It is stated that all he truly needs to do before being fully trained is to prostrate himself in front of a superior. Lie on his stomach and declare loyalty. Thus goes the talk around McGinnis' trading post at least. Benjamin is summoned by a letter he believes to be from his grandfather, but which, it turns out, was written by the Buffalo Society to lure him there to take the place of their leader in the blast.

We meet him only briefly but he seems very good natured and interested in helping Leaphorn. Even to the extent that he basically martyrs himself to give Leaphorn a chance to get to a man with a gun.

In actuality one could say that Benjamin Tso had found his place in the world.

That place could possibly have been disrupted by what his grandfather could have told him. The secret guarded by the Tsos was sand paintings designed to help the transition to the next world, as Navajo mythology is split into different worlds. This secret, both of where in the canyons the paintings were and how to maintain them, might have changed Benjamin Tso's life.

The secret paintings raise an important point about a cultural secret being like a chain, no stronger than its weakest link, or links. Hosteen Tso and those who came before him had guarded the paintings and the secrets behind them and, presumably, the songs

that went along with the paintings, since the time of Kit Carson and the whole horrible time of incarceration. But all it took were two links 'led astray' in each their own way, one by the lure of money and, perhaps, a true feeling of wanting revenge for all atrocities committed against Native Americans, and one by the lure of salvation through Jesus Christ.

With both of these Navajos in what could be seen as white pursuits – stealing without a purpose and forgetting cultural and religious heritages – the future is, in essence doomed. The book never explicitly states this, but Tull sets off the bombs, the paintings are at the very least trapped behind tons of rocks and most probably destroyed. And even if the paintings are accessible then all knowledge of the proper songs died with Old Man Tso. If we go by Navajo traditional beliefs then there is no way the next world can be reached.

All this, however, does not, in *Listening Woman*, reflect poorly on the Navajos, it does not make them seem superstitious, for in the very same book we are told quite explicitly that Navajos adapt, through hardship and profit the Navajo rituals remain the same, if changed. Joe Leaphorn goes to the coming-of-age ceremony of one of Margaret Cigarette's relatives and here we hear of the cake that they are to eat on the morning after the young girl has kept herself awake all night. Apparently it is supposed to be as wide as a shovel-handle and one of its ingredients are raisins. All this in spite of the ritual cake being from an age before shovels and there being no grapes in the lands of the Dinee.

From this we can see that the Navajo way is one of adopting and adapting, and perhaps even improving, as it were.

But only so far, only to a point. Take it too far and one becomes lost. And with that loss things can be lost forever.

But what is at risk of being lost? What is, in the book, the Navajo way?

It seems that it is about heavy levels of intermittent social interactions and a deep appreciation of nature.

The social interactions come around only so often but are clearly a high point of life on the Reservation. Even festivities that the White Man would deem to be very personal family affairs have room for strangers. Even strangers who on occasion arrest family members.

The appreciation for nature is seen again and again through Joe Leaphorn's eyes. For

example, as Leaphorn sits and waits for someone to emerge from the Tso hogan he hears a noise, his first instinct is to worry that someone is sneaking up on him, but right on the heels of such worried thoughts come the idea that the sound might simply have been the world growing older. This sort of poetic appreciation for the world around him that Leaphorn has seems inferred to be in all of the Navajos.

Finally a note on the problematic White Man in Listening Woman: Once again the FBI is viewed as a roadblock, rather than an aid. Something to be overcome. It is true that they have the resources and files that help solve everything, but these seem to be as a matter of course, as though the FBI simply watches but never acts.

Also, Theodora Adams shows some of the same traits as the young man at the dig site in Dance Hall of the Dead. She wants more, wants more of what she cannot have. And not only can she not have Benjamin Tso because he is Navajo but he is also nearly a Catholic priest. Nearly at the point where one gives up all things worldly. She will not hear of him resisting her, and as a result he ends up dead.

People of Darkness

Summary:

People of Darkness introduces us to our new protagonist, Jim Chee, without making any formal introductions at the very beginning. We do learn a great deal about him and he is portrayed quite differently from Joe Leaphorn, but in the first moments of the book he is an unknown.

The book opens quite a while before the main events, with a cancer researcher daydreaming out of the window and watching the people come and go. She sees a man leave his pickup truck behind as he walks into the cancer ward, and she sees another man, a blond man near the pickup truck. After a while, a tow truck comes to remove the pickup. This results in a huge explosion. A bomb had been planted in the car.

The next chapter finds Jim Chee in the snow. He has been called to what is probably the most expensive house in New Mexico, the home of the Vines family. B. J. and Mrs. Vines. It is Mrs. Vines who has called Jim Chee to the stately house, he is to find a box full of keepsakes which was stolen from her husband. The box was stolen from B. J. Vines' office, a place full of trophies, where it was hidden away in a wall safe.

Mrs. Vines has a good idea about who stole the box: Most likely a grandson of a now deceased Navajo friend of B. J.'s, Dillon Charley. Mrs. Vines offers Chee five hundred dollars up front and a promise of more to come when the box is returned.

It is Mrs. Vines' belief that the crime was committed by the Charley grandson, Tomas, and a group called the People of Darkness. This translates into Navajo as 'the moles'.

Being on the Checkerboard Reservation part of Navajo Country Chee knows that jurisdiction falls to sheriff Lawrence Sena. Sena is a wealthy man as a result of the uranium mine that made B. J. Vines a very wealthy man. As it turns out, Vines and Sena are not on good terms, due to some political wrangling. Furthermore, Sena and the Charleys are on even worse terms, due to a mysterious oil-drilling accident some thirty years prior. Dillon Charley told his Navajo work crew to stay away from the site on the day of the accident that claimed Lawrence Sena's brother. Dillon claimed it was peyote visions from God that kept him and the crew away, but Sena was suspicious of both Charley and the then illegal peyote church and hunted and harassed them through the years.

Sena tells Chee to basically stay out of the matter, but in doing so piques Chee's

interest. Chee is even further intrigued when he is called back to the Vines place by B. J., who tells him that his wife, in fact, stole the box. He offers Chee too much money 'for his troubles' as it were.

Thus piqued, Chee begins to track down Tomas Charley. He finds him at a rug auction, where he also finds Mary Landon, a local white teacher at the school where the auction is taking place. Chee talks to Tomas and learns that all that was in the box were medals, some photographs and rocks. He also ends up telling Chee where the box can be found, out in the Malpais – the bad country. Before he leaves, Chee sees a blond man talking to Tomas.

The next day, on kind of a date, Chee and Landon drive out to the Malpais to find the box. They find, instead, the corpse of Tomas and the blond man, whom the reader knows to be the assassin Colton Wolf. Wolf shoots Chee, breaking one of his ribs, Landon shoots at Wolf with Chee's rifle, but misses because Chee has the sights set to his personal preference. Wolf sets fire to Chee's car and drives off.

With Mary Landon trekking to find help, the two end up fine.

Sena visits Chee in the hospital, livid that Chee did not take his advice to stay out of the matter. Colton Wolf finds Chee in the hospital, but due to luck and skill Chee manages to survive, a nurse and the other patient in Chee's room are not so lucky.

Thus reminded that the blond man is indeed after them, Chee and Landon begin looking for the original People of Darkness, Dillon Charley's secret peyote congregation. The more they look, the more they find that they all died of cancer. A quick check tells them that this is an unusually high number of cancer deaths. As Chee and Landon set out to find the last 'mole' they have a location on, Colton Wolf is right behind them. On the way the whole case dawns on Chee.

B. J. Vines was once someone else, he was once the geologist on the oil site and he discovered that there was uranium there. Wanting this for himself, he had to get rid of witnesses. Hence the explosion, where his former self could be left for dead and his new self could be born into wealth. The problem of the People of Darkness was solved through giving them all little mole totems to carry, radioactive totems that gave them all cancer. Including Dillon Charley's son, Emerson, who took over the church and thus the totem. Landon and Chee are hunted by Colton Wolf, but end up evading him and sending him towards B. J.

Chee reaches the Vines residence too late and finds B. J. dead and Colton Wolf shot by Mrs. Vines.

Problems and themes:

A main theme of *People of Darkness* seems to be communication, what we tell which people and how we tell them. Another theme of the book is the search for truth in all its forms, even to a more metaphysical truth, the Navajo principle of 'hozho'.

In some ways the book is about how communication may lead us to truth and beauty and balance, and how communication can lead to our downfall.

Also, where other Hillerman books mention witches (Navajo Wolves), *People of Darkness* shows us what a witch really is.

The book, in spite of introducing us to a vast number of characters and names, has only very few that we get to know well in any approximation of the word.

The main figures of interest, besides Jim Chee, are B. J. Vines (formerly Lebeck), Colton Wolf and Mary Landon. In fact the book, which starts out with interplay between Chee and the Vines' and Sheriff Sena, ends up quite quickly being Chee's and Landon's hunt for survivors and Colton Wolf's hunt for Chee and Landon.

Chee and Landon slowly warm to each other, to the point where she begins as a police-hater and ends up providing air support for Chee's final confrontation with Wolf.

When they first meet at the rug auction she initially blows off Chee, but when he tells her that he is only there to help Tomas Charley sell his old car she tells him what he wants to know. This is a lie, of course, but in some way it is very pertinent as it was the potential sale of the old car that led Colton Wolf to Tomas Charley, and therefore leads to Tomas Charley's death and the wounding of Jim Chee.

Chee is fascinated by Landon, so much so that he stays to help her wash dishes and invites her with him into the Malpais to retrieve the keepsake box, a journey that was supposed to be completely non-dangerous. After being attacked by Colton Wolf, and the FBI and Albuquerque Police having a slight clue as to the notoriety and thoroughness of their attacker, Landon and Chee are in some ways forced to team up and get to know each other better and better.

And this is one way in which this book about Jim Chee is different from the two preceding books, most of the information that the reader receives on the Navajo way of life comes from Chee telling Landon about it. Or from Chee's thoughts on how to explain something to Landon. Or from a thought connected to something that was said. And so on.

And exactly this goes back to the theme of communication.

Chee wishes to become a singer, a healer, and he wishes to do this with the aid of his uncle, Old Man Nakai. But Hosteen Nakai has told Chee that before he can become a singer, at least with his aid, he must understand white people. Chee has taken an FBI aptitude test and has been told that if he so wishes he can report for training in two weeks time. This he sees as both a chance to learn more about the White Man and as a dangerous thing that may swallow his Navajo-ness.

The conversations with Mary Landon end up being a kind of interview instead, she even says as much when she expresses her annoyance at having thought that Chee was interested in her romantically but obviously he is going for more of an anthropological angle. As readers, who have 'read ahead' we know that Landon and Chee become an item, until she leaves him somewhere between his last solo outing and Skinwalkers. But it is true that only when they first meet in People of Darkness and only at the very end of that book that Chee seems to show any romantic interest in her.

The characters of People of Darkness are interesting to this project precisely because they seem uninteresting. No one here is truly seen as a White Man in the same way that they are in Dance Hall of the Dead and Listening Woman. This in spite of the fact that the book very much is about Jim Chee trying to figure out what a White Man is, what makes him tick. Colton Wolf, out assassin at large, is of course white, but his motivations are never truly described as being white. He is a tragic figure, looking for his long lost mother and trying to piece together a past for himself that isn't as terrible as the scars and memories would suggest. He spends great amounts of money on detective agencies and lives very simply. He kills and kills and kills, because that is what he knows how to do and that is what will bring his mother closer to him. In fact, his final words and thoughts are of his mother as he lays dying on a polar bearskin rug. The 'more' Colton Wolf wishes for is, in fact, balance and beauty, 'hozho'.

Sheriff Sena may come off as gruff and has, perhaps, been too violent in the past, but he too is looking only for the truth, the balance that knowing what happened to his brother will bring.

Mary Landon has a natural interest in the world around her, the Navajo world. She is headstrong and speaks her mind, and she wants 'more' than the more she wants is knowledge and a source of information on what she can expect from the people she

now has to teach.

Even B. J. Vines, the man behind it all, is not described as being a White Man kind of evil. Rather he is in fact described as being a prototypical Skin Walker, a witch.

He changed himself through an act of evil and then continued to kill.

There are no White Men in the story proper.

That does not, however, mean that there is no wondering about differences between Navajos and Whites.

Especially the idea of what to do with the dead is a major point. Also, when Chee and Landon are getting acquainted to begin with Landon speaks of her own accomplishments and Chee speaks of his family.

And again, there is the introduction of the concept hozho, or 'yo'zho' as it is spelled in the book. It is described as covering the ideas of beauty, harmony, being in tune with the world around you, going with the flow and feeling peaceful. Sort of a catch-all term for inner and outer harmony. And it is clear that it is of special interest in People of Darkness. Wolf obviously is looking for that which can make his life, past and present, make sense and come together. So, too, is Sheriff Sena, forever trying to find out what happened to his brother, forever in the imbalance of suspecting foul play. Chee, too, tries to restore some balance after he has sent Wolf after Vines. Chee sings a song that is meant for hunting, meant to create balance out of the act of killing. The only one seeking to avoid balance is the witch, Vines, he had Wolf out on the job to prevent balance from being restored, he gave out radioactive totems to the congregation to silence them for good. He is looking to bury his past, yet cannot get beyond his love of trophies.

In the end Jim Chee, with the dead Wolf in front of him, the dead Vines in another room near him and the second Mrs. Vines with a hunting shotgun behind him, decides that now understands the White Man. He decides that he is in need of songs to get himself back in harmony, he knows that these songs and rituals will take weeks upon weeks and thus he decides to let the opportunity to join the FBI let him go by.

He also decides, finally, that he will talk his uncle into letting Mary Landon join these songs and, in that way, letting her know his secret name, something she asks about throughout.

Skinwalkers**Summary:**

When someone attempts to murder Jim Chee in his own home, by blasting through his wall with a shotgun, the incident becomes another in a long line of murders – and now this near murder – pinned on Joe Leaphorn’s wall map of the Reservation.

The amounts of killings do not add up and Leaphorn takes Chee along with him to see, and re-see, the places where the murders took place. When it is discovered that the attempted murderer of Chee had put a small bone bead in with the shotgun pellets it becomes clear that the whole case revolves around the belief in witchcraft. Further research shows that other victims also had bone beads put in their bodies when they were murdered.

Our heroes realize that one of the victims, an Irma Onesalt, was investigating into the deaths of several Navajos, but why she was doing this is not, at first, apparent.

Meanwhile, Leaphorn struggles with what seems to be his wife falling into the clutches of Alzheimer’s disease and Chee has been given the brush-off by Mary Landon who now plans to go and study far from the Reservation.

As the two protagonists get closer to discovering what is going on, they revisit a man that Chee and an FBI agent arrested earlier but who was quickly released out of custody by the half-white, half-Navajo lawyer Janet Pete – a woman who is set up as Chee’s next romantic interest. At the man’s hogan they discover that the man is newly dead and follow after his killer. In the process Leaphorn is shot and they have to call in for help. Leaphorn, now in hospital, has time to get his bearings on the case and suddenly something falls into whack. Chee has been called out to his first job as a singer, a healer, outside of the family. This is a huge deal for Chee. However, the job is a hoax, the invitation sent by the woman who is trying to murder Chee. As it turns out, and as the reader already knows, she is doing this to cure her child who is suffering from a rare birth-defect where the brain never develops. Chee is badly injured, but he, too has figured out who the actual culprit is and manages to talk the woman out of delivering the coup de grace and tells her who it is. It is, in fact, the leader of the clinic where Chee wakes up, after having been rescued by an officer sent by Leaphorn. Here he is nearly killed by Dr. Yellowhorse who is, in turn, killed by the woman out to cure the curse put on her child.

Themes and problems:

The reader is introduced to Dr. Yellowhorse very early in the going of the book, and only the one time before the ending, but even with his short introduction, one gets the feeling that he is the villain. At the very least that he has something to do with the whole thing, as his reason for being in Joe Leaphorn's office is to complain about an officer who has been saying that people should not come to his clinic, that people should not believe him when he claims to be a crystal gazer. This officer is Jim Chee. Where I have noted previously that Leaphorn changes much from when we first meet him and Skinwalkers, Chee seems himself. It is true to form for him that a man claiming to be a crystal gazer and spiritual healer but with nothing to back it up, would make Chee irate, even angry. Even if the man was doing very good things in his community, basically for his own money (and some swindling with government funds, as we come to learn).

The whole book seems to be about using superstition to nefarious ends. Yellowhorse basically creates hitmen out of superstitious people, using them to cover up what Irma Onesalt learned, namely that he was billing the government for treatment of patients long after they were dead. This was, inadvertently, discovered by Chee when he brought Irma Onesalt, a social worker and notorious chewer-out of people, the wrong person to a resolution of a family matter. This made Onesalt suspicious and drove her to ask around about autopsies and the like from other clinics and hospitals. But killing just breeds more killing and in the end Yellowhorse's problems show up on his own doorstep. He, himself, becomes the witch that needs hunting.

What constitutes a witch is also brought into question. We learn that Leaphorn will have nothing to do with the concept, but that Chee is more open to it. As Chee lays with his back and head bleeding from a shotgun blast, he thinks upon how witchcraft is, in fact, the opposite of the Navajo way, the opposite of 'going in beauty'. Witchcraft can be seen when whiskey is sold to children, when Navajos think more upon what they own than feeding their relatives, when Navajos get drunk and fight or when Navajos harm their families.

Once again we are also faced with the philosophical differences between the White Man's way and the Navajo way. When Chee and the FBI agent are on their way to

arrest the man who would later end up dead, for murder, Chee thinks about how the person will never be brought back to harmony and how that would be better, to be brought to harmony, then the federal way of simply locking up people, putting them away.

We also learn that Leaphorn sees crimes such as burglary, vandalism and robbery as White Man's crimes, but also that no Navajo police-officer wishes to arrest a family member, even if is not a close relation.

The Navajo word for White Man, 'belagana', is introduced in Skinwalkers as well, as previously mentioned. And it is used quite a bit, the man that Chee and the FBI officer arrest uses it, even Chee uses it to describe a stray cat.

The cat, which had been living outside Jim Chee's trailer home, has its own sort of story arc. It begins with the cat basically rescuing Chee by waking him up and 'warning' him that someone is outside. This business of coming inside is a relatively new thing, as Chee wishes for the belagana cat to 'endure'. To basically become one with nature again and not need Chee for survival. The cat is on Chee's mind throughout the book and he ends up, finally, sending it to Mary Landon at the end of the book, realizing that belagana will remain belagana, whether they are cats or schoolteachers.

In regards to Mary Landon, her letter of dismissal has Chee thinking about all the times she did not understand Navajo ways, one time where she did not understand the preciousness of water comes to his mind especially.

But it is not all philosophical differences. Yellowhorse, in his defense of himself to Chee – as he is about to murder him, mind you – states that he cheated the government because the government lied to the Navajos at Fort Sumner, promising teachers and resources that never materialized.

This all rings a bit hollow, and is not in keeping with what we know of Yellowhorse from our earlier encounter, or what we have heard about the man throughout the book. It is the second time the cause of the Native American has been abused by a villain in the four books that I have looked at, the other being the Buffalo Society in Listening Woman. Both time very strong points are made, but they are not followed up on, they are used instead to further the plans of the antagonist rather than aid in any of the ways they claim to.

In *Skinwalkers* Lieutenant Joe Leaphorn is fleshed out. He gets his map of Indian Country, he gets his dislike of the belief in witches and he gets a more developed relationship with his now ailing wife, Emma.

Throughout the book, Leaphorn is constantly putting aside in his mind that he has to take his traditionalist wife to a White Man's clinic to get the conformation he knows in heart that he will get, to hear that she has Alzheimer's.

We are given glimpses into their home life, and it does indeed seem like a probable diagnosis. However, in the end it turns out to be a tumor of the brain, with relatively good odds of recovery (Emma is dead by the next book, however).

We learn that the new, fleshed-out Leaphorn could probably live anywhere, but that Emma could not. And Leaphorn is as drawn to her as she is to the Reservation.

Navajos are nicer:

Throughout the four books that I have just covered there is an aspect of the writing that I have saved for this chapter, namely the descriptions of Navajo traits.

These traits are basically all positive, even the negative traits – such as alcoholism and nepotism – get put into an at least somewhat positive light.

Also it is understood that doing things that are non-Navajo, not ‘walking in beauty’, basically negates the Navajo traits, makes oneself non-Navajo.

So, what is it to be Navajo?

The biggest thing seems to be patience. We learn in the books that whenever a Navajo visits another Navajo by car then the visitor sits, patiently, in the car until such a time as the person being visited is ready and shows this.

Also, conversations are an area that would require much patience from any non-Navajo as it is customary to be completely silent while the other person speaks – not making any agreeing comments or sounds – and then sit in silence for about a minutes time after the person is done speaking, to make sure that they have nothing more to add.

Another trait, it seems, is excellent memory. In the books we hear again and again that both Leaphorn and Chee have excellently trained memories, they remember faces, names, places, songs, and so on. And it is, most likely, the songs and the frequency with which they are sung, which help aid the development of memory in Navajos from a young age.

A deep-felt connection with nature is also something that every Navajo has. Be it simply listening to the world grow older, as I have mentioned above, or be it trying to teach a cat to be in harmony with the world around it. The Navajo wish for balance and beauty and truth also extends to the relationship with nature, with hunting songs and rituals to show that the killing of a deer was in fact alright and part of the harmony of greater things.

We also learn that Navajos are great lovers of personal space. This is why they settle so relatively far from each other on the Reservation and why pointing at someone can be considered a grave insult.

Navajos are not greedy either, they do not take what they do not need, sure they may still steal, but only what they need, not an ounce more.

All in all, the Navajo way is one of harmony in all things, in all aspects of life. No area of existence is treated with less harmony than any other.

A Navajo must know his songs, respect his elders, respect nature and respect the privacy of those around him, all while keeping a close connection to his clans and remembering to stay in balance.

The White Man:

So what, then, defines the White Man?

Well, if we are to believe the books, then basically the lack and absence of Navajo traits. Basically the White Man is the opposite of a Navajo: Rude, impatient, forgetful, out of balance with himself and the world around him.

On top of that he talks only of himself and has romanticized feelings toward corpses.

He wastes water and other resources to live in luxury.

The White Man steals and robs and kills and maims, all for fun.

Again, he is out of balance.

The gaze here is squarely set against the White Man and His world.

Pan-Indian-ism:

At the start of this project I stated that I would attempt to see whether or not Tony Hillerman's books represented a pan-Indian narrative.

In the four books I have analyzed there are other Native American peoples mentioned, and they are always mentioned as different from the Navajo.

The Pueblos have their burial customs that put a huge amount of emphasis on the corpse. The Zunis have a totally different origin story, even though they live in relatively close proximity to the Navajos and they have festivals to celebrate things that the Navajos do not.

In his presenting us with these facts it is clear that Hillerman is not an overt pan-Indian-ist at the very least.

However, it should be mentioned that the vilifying of the White Man is a clear trait of

pan-Indian-ism. With that in mind the evidence is still not stacked up against Hillerman as he in fact portrays pan-Indian-ism and the problems connected with it. Colton Wolf shoots a man, basically, because he looks vaguely Native American, he cannot tell one Indian from another, as it were.

The Navajos and other peoples are 'in on the joke' in some ways as well. On the gravestone of Dillon Charley it states that he was a 'good Indian'. An allusion to a joke he himself had told that again alludes back to the proverb: The only good Indian is a dead Indian.

Mary Landon, too, cannot tell the difference between Pueblo and Navajo.

Through all these portrayals it is clear that Hillerman wishes to show the world of the Native American as diversified and 'true' as possible. Hillerman understands that there, at least on some level, is not basically one Native American story and narrative.

Structuralism, gazes and detective fiction:

Structuralism teaches us that there is a pattern to all writing, a structure that is followed. In the case of detective fiction a recurring plot device could be said to be the presence of a protagonist and an antagonist. This, however, is too broad, and omits something integral to the suspense novel, as Todorov calls it. The antagonist must be shrouded in mystery.

In Tony Hillerman's books this is also very true, either we know not who the villain behind it all is, or we know but do not know why he or she is acting in a villainous way. But there is in these works of fiction another antagonist: The way of the White Man. It is to be avoided at all costs and it lies behind whatever lay behind the motive of the villain. It is a set structure of the Hillerman Navajo novel.

We know, from Todorov, that one can speak of fable and subject, or, in other words of story and plot. In Hillerman's works, the Navajo setting is the fable and the murders and action and so forth are the subject.

With this and the teachings of structuralism in mind, we must think that while Hillerman cannot break free from his genre he can inform the reader about something from outside the genre – they can become a kind of guide to Navajo life – and he can thus expound on his fable, his story.

Thus Hillerman is not completely chained by structuralism. But he is not free, either. He was a bestselling author of detective fiction, his works seemingly creating something beyond the whodunits and thrillers, yet still attracting their readership. And with that readership came expectations. Things had to be intricate, the mystery more and more complex, while still staying true to not only the genre, but also the previous books in the ever-growing series.

A balancing act that critics felt that Tony Hillerman was best at until the turn of the millennium and one that he lost touch with thereafter.

As I have mentioned earlier Tony Hillerman's works are often found among the works of literature, rather than detective or suspense fiction. I believe that this is due to the cultural depictions within. Certainly, while Hillerman can truly put together a description of a landscape, he was still very much an author of detective fiction and his books follow the patterns and tropes of the genre.

The gaze, on the other hand, may be said to be a bit different. Here we see the world from the view of the Other, an Other so far removed that it is physically difficult to get to its world. If one could even find a reason to truly get into the world of this

Other. The desert is a foreboding place and the niceties are few and far between. The people native to such a place, people who have been offered more fertile lands to live in, but who remain because the desert is where they come from, or so say their legends, are indeed Others to the gaze of the White Man. Also historically

Conclusion

At the beginning of this project I asked the following question:

“In what ways, if any, can we prove the gaze of the Leaphorn/Chee crime fiction novels are skewed toward representing the dominant culture group (in this case the Caucasian American) as inferior, furthermore, in what ways, if any do these novels avoid homogenizing the North American Indian?”

Over the course of the previous pages I have tried to set up my case for an answer to just that question.

I began by looking into what sort of man Tony Hillerman was.

I found a small-town boy from the middle of nowhere who grew up among Native Americans, always seeing them as part of the local ‘us’ compared to the ‘them’ of the bigger towns and cities. A young man who, on leave from World War II, once saw a procession of Navajos. A man who returned, battle-scarred, from the War and picked up on a career in writing he had inadvertently started while overseas. Writing for newspapers for years before thinking to himself that if he was to become the author he wanted to be then now was the time.

He found almost immediate success with the ‘crime-lit’ crowd but also achieved several breakthroughs into the mainstream, as it were.

Throughout it all his fascination with the Navajos and their way of life seemed to grow, to a point where the Navajo part of the novels became more important than a cohesive narrative that made sense, that is, if one is to believe the critics.

But what then is the Navajo way, who are the Navajo?

According to the legends they came first through three old worlds and are destined to pass onto a fifth world when this one ends. They helped create this world and its boundaries and stars with the aid of the Holy People and with the help of Changing Woman and her children they rid the world of monsters. Then they formed the clans and lived their lives in relative harmony with the peoples around them, even if the Utes would raid and the Zunis would seem strange with their ‘cities’.

Archeological evidence seems to point to the Navajos being late-comers onto the North American scene, as it were, arriving several thousand years after the other peoples of the continent. They settled into the lands that the Reservation is now set on and, with superior bow building skills, they hunted and gathered for some time. Until, for some reason, they turned instead to farming and became a kind of nomadic farming culture. All the while they shared their goods and culture with the surrounding Pueblo Indians, it seems that even their origin story got mixed with the Pueblos as the story puts them much earlier on the continent than any of the evidence can prove.

With the arrival of the Spanish the whole world changed, the Navajos became shepherds and the Pueblos enslaved. Then came the Americans and, in turn, Kit Carson and the Long Walk. Both back and forth.

And now the Navajos live on the Reservation, where they can be said to be part of the North American 'other'. They are an 'other' that is not greatly thought about, away from the lands of the Reservation, but that only adds to the extent in which they are, indeed, an 'other'. They are far away, they are not White, they do not share the beliefs of the White Man, they may be a part of the pan-Indian-narrative, but even that only brings them a little closer to home, it does not make them not the 'other'.

But Hillerman brought them all the way home. All the way to celebrated fiction. All the way to the White bookshelf and library and school.

Suddenly the life on the Reservation was not hard to reach, and while no single Hillerman book told the 'whole story' of the life of the Dinee then it gave a good picture of certain aspects, and with several of the books in mind one could begin to create an idea of a cohesive whole. Luring with knowledge of an 'other' and presenting one with a mystery and action and romance and everything else that one could wish for.

But even though these books take place primarily in the Dineetah, the lands of The People, the Navajos are not the only Native Americans that are mentioned, or even voiced. Several instances tell us that Tony Hillerman did not believe in one true narrative for all the peoples that lived in North America before the arrival of the Europeans. He was not, in this projects opinion a pan-Indian-ist. Different peoples

have different cultures, different ways of thinking, of treating their dead, of telling their stories. This was and remains true, even through hardships and suffering.

At the beginning of this project I also went through chapters that looked into structuralism and the genre of detective fiction.

Structuralism is the quest to find a pattern and a system behind something, be it human history or a certain text.

In a text one looks after patterns, or, as was written earlier, we are looking for the most basic things that make up the stories, the myths and the ideas that shape all literature.

And when it comes to exactly that we have the ideas of fable and subject, story and plot. This notion can be put on the genre of detective fiction as a whole and Hillerman's specific corner of the genre in specific.

Hillerman cannot escape his subject, his plot. He is writing about mysteries and detectives – police officers, but the idea remains the same – and things that need solving through detecting, even if it is in a Navajo way.

But Hillerman can do something to the fable, the story. Here he can introduce those things that are inherently Navajo, those things that put a certain 'spin' on the story. One could be cynical and say that without the Navajo angle then Hillerman would not have been as successful, but that cannot be proven in any way. One writes what one knows, and Hillerman knew the desert and enjoyed its beauty and he had experiences with Native Americans and a fascination with the Navajos in particular.

This was no gimmick, and while it is true that Hillerman took some inspiration from an Australian author with a half-Aborigine detective, he also basically invented a genre with his works. He was the mold.

With all this written we arrive at the subject of the gaze in Hillerman's works.

It is clear that Hillerman views the Navajos as being well balanced, understandable, relatable and all around the ones with the right idea.

And what is the right idea then? Well, even though we are not introduced to the concept until *People of Darkness*, the fourth book in the series, the concept of Hozho seems to be at the core of understanding what is so fantastic about the Navajos. While a Navajo individual may steal or wound or kill, he or she almost always does so remaining in, or to remain in Hozho, in balance and harmony with the world around

him or her.

This balance permeates all things. The imbalance of becoming an adult – in some ways the imbalance of the menarche – can be put back into balance, through song. The imbalance of killing a creature for food can be put back into balance, through song. The imbalance of being sick can be put back into balance, through song. And so on.

These are songs that bring people together, we are told, people who might otherwise not be happy with each other. Or they are songs of great mystery, which show the mystical ways of the Navajo and teach their legendary history, through the lyrics and through the sand paintings.

The balance also creeps into crime, nothing is taken that is not needed in some specific way and no one will arrest a family member, both strongly balanced ideas. The notion of what might be construed as nepotism here is in fact simply a wish to avoid imbalance and disorder in ones home, extended though it may be.

Hozho, the balance, the understanding of nature, the going with the flow, comes to define what a Navajo is in Tony Hillerman's works. Anyone not in Hozho, anyone not 'going in beauty' is regarded as a Navajo by looks and association only.

Which leads us to the White Man. In the books the White Man has no Hozho, he does not even, in fact, have a word that perfectly describes it.

The White Man in Hillerman's works is usually represented by the FBI, but not solely. There are also doctors, boy scouts, schoolteachers, tourists, hippies and so on.

Very few of these White Men, no matter their gender, have any Hozho. In fact, it is so rare that rather the norm is that the White Man has only some balance, never full on Hozho.

Actually, as I have written previously, the White Man is primarily understood as being the opposite of the Navajo, or having, rather, the opposite traits of a Navajo.

There is no understanding of nature.

There is no deep-seated feeling of family.

There is no sense of history or having to adapt to a larger world.

And there is little to no care about the well being of your fellow man.

Sure the White Man has hospitals and medicines and agents and jails, but do these bring balance to His life. No, say the books.

Rather these things hide away the true nature, they are the wool the White Man places over His eyes.

The proof of the skewed gaze in the works of Tony Hillerman lies within each of his works, at the very least in each of the works I have analyzed for this project.

Again and again we see the White Man as ignorant and unwilling to learn about the true nature of things. Even if he or she asks, then comprehension is still not established.

In the end, Navajos are nicer and there is nothing the White Man can do to become just as nice, no matter how hard He tries.

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